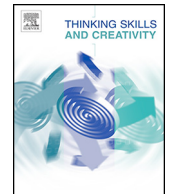




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Examining teacher perceptions of creativity: A systematic review of the literature

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ABSTRACT

As an increasingly globalized society creates knowledge-based economies, the need for schools to foster creativity in students intensifies. Teachers have much to gain by fostering creativity in the classroom, but are teachers' conceptions of creativity accurate or misguided? There is a need to investigate perceptions of creativity held by teachers to better understand how to actualize classroom environments rich in creative thinking and practice. The current study explores K-12 teachers' perceptions of creativity through a systematic review and thematic analysis of the current literature. Selected studies included empirical quantitative and qualitative investigations published in high quality journals from 1999 to 2015. The thematic findings of this review afford a deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions of creativity both for research and for practice. Our analysis revealed that although teachers value creativity, their conceptions of creativity are uninformed by theory and research on creativity. Teachers feel unprepared to foster or identify creativity in their classrooms; they equate creativity with the arts; and personal and cultural beliefs affect their perceptions of creativity and creative students. Implications for future research indicate a need for qualitative research that seeks to understand teacher perceptions of creativity in depth as they relates to both the classroom context, teachers' backgrounds in education and training, and the overall discourse of creativity in education.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, interest in creativity has expanded into the educational realm. The development of creativity is increasingly regarded as an educational imperative (Skiba, Tan, Sternberg, & Grigorenko, 2010). Two forces that drive the growing emphasis on creativity in schools are students' individual fulfillment and their future success as participants in a knowledge-based economy (Craft, 2003). Creativity enhances life success, healthy psychological functioning, positive conflict resolution, and amplifies the construction of knowledge (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Plucker et al., 2004; Plucker, Beghetto, & Dow, 2004).

Educational strategies for developing creativity have failed to keep pace with advancements in the understanding of creativity (Plucker et al., 2004). Narrow standards of accountability for teachers and schools diminish the value of creative approaches to learning and problem solving (Sternberg, 2006). The prominence of standardized assessment encourages

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teachers to promote student conformity (Kim, 2008). What is more, research has produced few practical approaches for fostering creativity or for incorporating theory into educational practice (Makel, 2009). Some educators view creativity as a distraction to be deferred, or even view it as a behavior problem (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2010).

In an educational system that assigns priority to traditional teaching approaches, understanding teachers' perceptions of creativity must precede attempts to develop a pedagogy of creativity (Skiba et al., 2010). Developing an accurate understanding of teacher perceptions of creativity is necessary to inform practice on how to incorporate creativity effectively in the classroom (Skiba et al., 2010). The purpose of the current study is to explore teacher perceptions of creativity by means of a systematic literature review. The following research questions guided our review:

1. How do teachers perceive creativity?
2. What are teachers' implicit theories of creativity?
3. How do teachers believe that creativity manifests in students?
4. How are teacher perceptions of creativity related to teachers own characteristics?

2. Background

One factor limiting the educational implementation of creativity is the lack of a widely agreed-upon and coherent definition of creativity (Plucker et al., 2004). Creativity is a complex construct and scholars have yet to achieve consensus on how to define creativity. Explicit definitions of creativity vary among researchers, and while definitions may be clear, they are rarely consistent (Plucker et al., 2004). Scholars' definitions of creativity generally fall into one of four major categories: personal creativity, creative product, creative process, and environments that foster creativity (Runco, 2004). Beyond those four categories, some scholars conceive of creativity as a complex system that includes sociocultural and historical components (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). These varied models and definitions of creativity precipitate confusion among both educators and educational researchers (Skiba et al., 2010).

Teachers are influential in mitigating the effects of standardization on creative thinking and learning in the classroom (Beghetto, 2005). Regrettably, teachers may believe they are fostering creativity when in fact they are suppressing it (Skiba et al., 2010). Without proper training, teachers who value creativity are left to rely on instructional approaches of their own design (Skiba et al., 2010). Some teachers opt out of creativity development entirely and leave that charge to teachers of the fine arts and creative writing (Skiba et al., 2010). When teachers understand the nature of creativity, they are better equipped to avoid negative myths and stereotypes surrounding creativity (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2010). Teachers need an awareness of the variety of theories and definitions of creativity when selecting teaching and assessment tools (Fishkin & Johnson, 1998). Teachers who misperceive creativity could unwittingly suppress creative expression in the classroom; negative or erroneous perceptions of creativity may prevent teachers from recognizing opportunities for developing creative potential in students (Beghetto, 2009).

Prior research indicates that teachers' perceptions of creativity and creative behaviors often run counter to the theories that guide creativity research (Dawson, Andrea, Affinito, & Westby, 1999; Skiba et al., 2010; Westby & Dawson, 1995). Contrary to researchers' explicit theories that require novelty and appropriateness (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010), teachers perceived creative products as novel, but not necessarily appropriate (Diakidoy & Kanari, 1999). Regardless of content area, judging creative ability by products confuses potential with accomplishment (Sternberg & Lubart, 1996). A heavily product-oriented focus neglects the developmental aspect of creativity and may prevent teachers from seeing opportunities to develop students' everyday insights into more comprehensive creative products (Cohen, 1989). Some teachers preferred less creative students in the classroom because they associate creativity with problem behaviors such as impulsivity and disruptive behavior (Dawson, 1997). Similarly, teachers incorrectly associated socially desirable personality characteristics with creativity (Runco, Johnson, & Bear, 1993). When teachers rated their most and least favorite students on personality characteristics, judgments for favorite students were negatively associated with prototypical creativity characteristics, while least favorite students were positively associated with creativity (Westby & Dawson, 1995). Even teachers who valued creativity often had unclear conceptions of what creativity meant; students identified as creative by teachers scored high on a verbal creativity task, low on a figural creativity task, and did not display personality traits traditionally associated with creativity (Dawson et al., 1999).

3. Methods

3.1. Search parameters

Our search for literature on teacher perceptions of creativity encompassed the domains of education, educational psychology, psychology, the arts, and linguistics. Electronic databases searched in this review included Academic Search Complete, Education Source, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Google Scholar, JSTOR, Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts (LLBA), Professional Development Collection, Project MUSE, and PsycINFO. Each search was limited to empirical studies in peer-reviewed journals, published in English from 1999 to 2015. All searches were performed against the article abstracts, with the exception of the Google Scholar search, which was performed against article titles. In addition, supple-

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