



Fostering creativity in school aged children through perspective taking and visual media based short term intervention program



Eyal Doron*

Emili Sagol CAT Research Center Graduate School of Creative Arts Therapies, Haifa University, Haifa 31905, Israel

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ABSTRACT

Creativity is known today as an ability that can be developed and improved. The substantial research in the field of creative studies showed that creative thinking abilities can be enhanced through intervention and training. In a previous study, we presented the effectiveness of a unique and innovative short-term intervention program for enhancing creative thinking, focusing on divergent thinking skills (Doron, 2016). The present study samples 286 school children, ranging in age from 10 to 14, who participated in an intervention program that had taken place over a period of ten weeks. The intervention included a series of assignments, inspired by theoretical and practical concepts such as perspective taking and the use of media in education. Uniquely, we allowed creativity training to diffuse into children's everyday life by tasking children with practicing elements of the program in their free time, while watching television or other media for their enjoyment. The aim of the study was to assess the effectiveness of the program, in enhancing divergent thinking skills, which were measured by fluency and uniqueness scores according to Tel Aviv Creativity Test (TACT). Results showed that children who participated in the program activities scored significantly higher in the creativity tests at the end of the program and indicated that creative thinking, and divergent thinking abilities in particular, can be enhanced through the kind of intervention that was proposed in the study.

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1. Introduction

Throughout history, creativity has been viewed as a manifestation of mystical inspiration. It is only in modern times that creativity has become a subject of methodological study (Schooler & Melcher, 1995). Today there is scholarly consensus that creativity involves producing something that is novel, different and innovative, yet at the same time useful, relevant, and appropriate to the task at hand (Amabile, 1983, 1988; Runco & Albert, 1990; Sternberg, 1999; Sternberg, Kaufman, & Pertz, 2002; Sternberg & Lubart, 1995; Runco & Jaeger, 2012). Most current researchers tend to agree that creative potential can be fulfilled and maximized (Craft, Dugal, Dyer, Jeffrey, & Lyon, 1997; Craft, 2001; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Gardner, 1983; Kaufman and Beghetto, 2009; Nickerson, 1999; Plucker, Runco, & Hegarty, 2011; Richards, 2007). Moreover, it is widely accepted nowadays that creativity can be enhanced specifically through training (Amabile, 1996; Scott, Leritz, and Mumford, 2004a; Scott, Leritz, & Mumford, 2004b), with most creativity training programs focusing on divergent thinking (Lubart &

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: eyaldoronphd@gmail.com

Guignard, 2004). Within the creative cognition framework, the ability to be creative is considered part of normative human cognitive functioning, rather than an out of the ordinary talent available to only a select few (e.g., Ward, 2007; Ward, Smith, & Finke, 1999; Finke, Ward, & Smith, 1992). The ability to manipulate objects in our mind, as well as the ability to create and use new mental categories, are two instances of abilities which are ubiquitous among humans and provide support to the creative cognition approach. The creative cognition framework emphasizes the dependence of creative thinking on fundamental cognitive processes such as working memory and executive control (Sowden, Pringle, & Gabora, 2014; Nijstad, De Dreu, Rietzschel, & Baas, 2010). According to this approach, creativity develops with training and age (Karbach & Schubert, 2013; Klingberg, 2010) and individual differences in creativity can be understood in terms of variations in the efficiency of ordinary cognitive processes (e.g., Ward et al., 1999).

Reviewing more than one hundred intervention studies conducted among school-aged children, few comprehensive meta-analyses reviewed creativity training techniques and programs. All found most creativity training, and in particular divergent thinking training, useful and effective (Scott et al., 2004a; Scott et al., 2004b; Tsai, 2014). A great number of interventions have been designed in an attempt to specifically enhance creativity among elementary school children (e.g., Garaigordobil, 2006; Moore & Russ, 2008), bilingual elementary school children (Fleith, Renzulli, & Westberg, 2002), gifted children (Castillo, 1998), kindergarten children (Garaigordobil & Berruenco, 2011) and junior high teens (Baer, 1996).

A great deal of short-term interventions prove the potential of enhancing creativity among children in a relatively short period of time, at times within weeks (e.g. Baer, 1996; Fleith et al., 2002; Moore & Russ, 2008). These programs were on the most part designed to enhance divergent thinking, which is now established as associated with the ability to solve problems in everyday life (Shimonaka and Nakazato, 2007), an ability that Richards (1990) defined as “Everyday Creativity”. This collection of studies, conducting short term intervention training programs which aim to enhance creativity among children, using a selection of tests that focus on divergent thinking, also served as a model for us in a previous study we conducted (Doron, 2016), in which the effectiveness of these programs among school children was demonstrated.

For the purpose of the current study a two-stage ten-week creativity intervention program was designed. The program included different exercises that were developed based on knowledge from two theoretical frameworks: perspective taking and everyday creativity. These frameworks and their relation to creativity, and specifically to divergent thinking, is described below.

2. Perspective taking

Perspective Taking (sometimes defined more specifically as social perspective taking), refers to one of the most important factors in facilitating social cognition in children: The growing ability to understand others’ feelings and perspectives (Shaffer, 2008). This is the act of physically and/or mentally viewing a situation or understanding of a concept from an alternate point-of-view as defined by Galinsky, Maddux, Gilin, and White (2008). It is the complex process of adopting an overall mindset that differs from one’s default mindset, and using other’s perspective (Hodges, 2008). This ability can be used, for example to foresee others’ behavior (Barnes-Holmes, McHugh, & Barnes-Holmes, 2004), to understand other’s emotional state (Ford, 1979; Shantz, 1975), to adopt the viewpoint of a physical state (for instance: that of a taller individual), or reflect upon another’s cognitive state (like one’s point-of-view on a particular concept) (Epley & Caruso, 2008). Perspective-taking can directly enhance creativity by providing access to new ideas (Galinsky et al., 2008), as well as increases the usefulness of ideas (Mohrman, Gibson & Mohrman, 2001). Grant and Berry (2011) showed that focusing on others and adopting others’ viewpoints, leads people to come up with ideas that are both useful and novel. In addition, performances on false belief tasks which require the ability to take other’s perspectives to be completed successfully (e.g., Barnes-Holmes et al., 2004) have positively predicted creativity scores among children in past studies (Suddendorf & Fletcher-Flinn, 1997; Suddendorf & Corballis, 1999). From the perspective of neuroscience, it has been observed that understanding others and self-reflection have overlapping neural bases in the brain’s “default mode” network (Saxe, Moran, Scholz, & Gabrieli, 2006; Dimaggio, Lysaker, Carcione, Nicolò, & Semerari., 2008). Moreover, creative cognition and divergent thinking have been associated to the neural mechanisms of the default mode network (e.g., Fink et al., 2010, 2012; Takeuchi et al., 2014a), suggesting perspective taking and creativity may have overlapping neural bases (Takeuchi et al., 2014b).

3. Everyday creativity – “little-c”

Everyday Creativity, also called “little –c”, is the capacity of people to adapt to new situations and include creative actions in their daily life. In different from eminent creativity, also called “Big-C”, which is rare and refers to geniuses (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009), little-c refers to “regular” everyday activities such as drawing, writing, adapting food recipes, as well as activities done for the purpose of being creative (Silvia et al., 2014).

Richards (1990) stressed the importance of everyday creativity in solving daily problems, which she later defined as the “Originality of everyday life . . . Vital for our flexible adaptation to life, and sense of personal well being” (Richards, 1999, p.683). In her writings, Richards (2007, 2010a) called attention to everyday creativity and its role in psychological development. One of her themes is that everyday creativity is both a cause and a consequence of positive development, this was supported by Corpley’s research that demonstrated that it is possible to emphasize creativity in everyday settings (Corpley, 1990). In his research, Corpley encouraged people to approach everyday situations in a creative way, for personal development.

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