

Michael Hanchett Hanson
Teachers College, Columbia University

Creative Education: A Systems Perspective



Educational Perspective

Education as a complex, dynamic, and socially and materially distributed system....

....within, about, and through complex, dynamic distributed systems

Not as much as about changing practices as taking a different mentality about what we (students and teachers) are doing and what it means.

1. Distribution of thought in the classroom



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Distribution of thought in the classroom

5th Graders, Guggenheim Museum Learning Through Art program, Brooklyn, New York

- Woodblock print making project: Designing brownstone houses
- Students walked around neighborhood and took notes on architecture
- Design their own brownstones, make the woodcuts and print them on long sheets of butcher paper to form a neighborhood

Distribution of thought in the classroom

- Teaching artist concerned that the students were openly copying from one another – they were not « being creative »
- But that is how historical style developed in architecture (and art, and music and literature...)
 - The issues are about distributions of creativity in relation to style and the movement of field norms
 - Teaching moment: making conscious and facilitating reflection on the processes
 - Intentional approach: Makerspace biography of the idea (see Clapp, 2017).



2. Experience, identity, and creativity

Experience, identity, and creativity

- The Possibility Project: full school year, intensive (all day Saturday) theater-based program
- 60 high school students from across New York City
 - About half of the young women and 1/3 of the young men had been victims of sexual abuse; over half had engaged in dangerous self-destructive behaviors; 20% knew someone seriously injured or killed by gun violence
 - Others there for social connection or to learn about theater
- Produce a full-scale musical based on themes of the personal experiences of the cast – abuse, incest, gang violence, depression, addiction, cutting plus more everyday love, heartbreak...

Experience, identity, and creativity

- Participants find TPP transformative
- Mixed methods: pre- / post measures of test / comparison group design, plus structured interviews and observations
- Significant treatment effects on:
 - Providing emotional support ($\beta = .21, p < .05$)
 - Self-disclosure ($\beta = .23, p < .01$)
 - Conflict resolution ($\beta = .19, p < .10$)
- No significant effects on general self-efficacy or sense of purpose

Experience, identity, and creativity

- Original hypothesis: self-authoring
- Finding: key is recontextualizing experience and identity as shared within a community
- Program somewhat accidentally but brilliantly set up to do this
 - First session sharing of experiences
 - Workshopping solutions to each other's challenges through script development
 - Inevitable opportunities for people to rehearse different characters of each story
 - Presentation to their families and friends as the problems of our community – speaking for their generation, time, and place to some of the people causing the problems



A closing haiku

Thinking groups learning

Your weirdness in our meaning

New styles emerging



Related Reading

Clapp, E.P. (2016). *Participatory creativity: Introducing access and equity to the creative classroom* (1st ed.). Routledge.
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