

Creativity Expressed through Drawings in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

In our research we formulated the hypothesis that children create different meanings at their drawings through pictures of art and that these meanings are more original when the stimulus is a picture of art that belongs to the abstract art. The research was conducted with 28 children aged 4.5 to 6.5 attending two early childhood classes in Volos, Greece. Our study involved asking children to study paintings and create opportunities for them to express their ideas through drawings. In their drawings, children in a way try to imitate the way that the picture of art is designed, but at the same time they are creative by thinking of new ideas and ways of doing things. The tools used were three pictures of art. The purpose of the study was to use these particular works of art as an opportunity for each young child to express his creativity within the school setting.

Keywords: creativity, art, pictures, drawings, early childhood

1. Introduction

1.1 Towards a definition of creativity

Creativity, a complex and slippery concept, has multiple meanings but an established, precise and universally accepted definition does not exist (Prentice, 2000). Creativity is an attribute possessed only by man, and is ranked at the highest level on the scale of behaviour. Numerous definitions have been offered of the concept of creativity, some of which we refer to below: Creativity is the capacity to keep producing new, original and useful ideas. It is not solely a matter of imagination, rather it is a form of imagination inextricably linked with our intentions and endeavours. Creativity is the original solution of various problems, and real artistic and scientific creation. Torrance (1966) defines creativity as a process of becoming sensitive to problems, deficiencies, gaps in knowledge, missing elements, disharmonies, and so on, as an activity of the mind which generates a new idea or discovers a new way of understanding. Moreover, Osborn (1965) believes that creativity is an achievement characterised by originality, adaptability and fullness or completion. Prentice (2000) considers that creativity involves imaginative and inventive ways of thinking and doing, as a result of which something new comes into being. Creativity is that form of imagination which looks forward, foresees, feeds, supplements, plans, covers, resolves, advances, does something new.

Sillamy (1991) defines creativity as the natural tendency to create which exists, potentially, in all persons and at all ages; it requires favourable conditions to manifest itself, and is highly dependent on the socio-cultural level of the individual. In the view of A. Beaudot (1976), creativity is not the mere juxtaposition of dissimilar elements but their dynamic organization in new combinations, some precise and defined, some more indefinite, but all bearing the personal stamp of the creator. According to Guilford (1967), each creation is the 'product' of the bringing together, transformation and reorganization of pre-existing components. No one can create without prior experience. No discovery is ever made in a void, or from a void.

The French pedagogue Debesse (1974) claims that the pre-school child express his creativity through drawing, modelling, dance, speech. The same term is used by the same pedagogue to indicate the activity of the young child when he creates something and expresses himself. The deictic definition of creativity consists in the identification of specific cases, i.e. individuals who are generally regarded as being creative, and from whom we can construct a general concept of creativity (The Open University, 1987). We might confine ourselves, then, to the adjective 'creative'. Alberti (1986) believed a creative individual is a person who organizes his experiences, his cognitive development and his expressive manifestations of various kinds (verbal, practical, visual, etc.) using forms, methods, rhythms which cannot be reconciled with or do not converge with conventional or predetermined, 'ordinary' models, yet for all that are still satisfactory. Thus when we speak of a 'creative' individual, we are referring to someone completely opposite to the individual who confirms and converges, in that he remains faithful to the ordinary model.

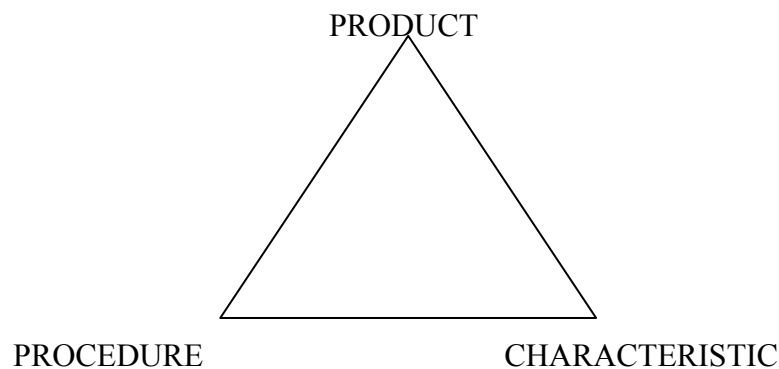
2. The Nature of Creativity

A person must be able to resolve various problems in a creative way, in order to develop his creative thought, an intellectual capacity using which he generates a large number of new ideas and possible solutions to a problem. Creative thought is the kind of thought which leads to new approaches, original ideas and perspectives, alternative ways of understanding and conceiving things. Because this kind of thought combines both intuition and reason, it leads to the finding of innovative and original ways of managing problems – problems that at first sight may seem inseparable (Harris, 2000).

Guilford (1967) maintains that the act of thought can be divided into two basic categories: ‘memory factors’ and ‘thought factors’. When using our thought factors, we can distinguish between convergent thinking and divergent thinking. Memory factors cover the generation of new ideas and events from known information, while the thought factors refers to new ideas or data, with minimal connection to known information. Convergent thinking is a different process from divergent thinking. It results in just one confirmed correct answer, and leads along a formal path of ratification and confirmation of knowledge, whereas divergent thinking allows for a variety of answers to a problem, with no single prescribed method of use.

The term ‘creativity’ is used to convey a number of different meanings. It may refer to a specific product, a special procedure, a mental process which generates the above products, or a personal trait, an aspect of the individual’s personality. These three different perspectives are linked in a relationship of interdependence (Rouquette, 1973). Thus: We infer the existence of the mental process, using the product itself as our point of reference and to explain the generation of the product, we refer back to a personal characteristic. Conversely, we identify this specific characteristic with the description of the products themselves.

Rouquette (1973) concludes, then, that the core of the concept ‘creativity’ lies in a complex of interactions between three defining factors – produce, procedure and characteristic. These components are connected with one another through patterns of communication and assume the following form:



2.1 Creativity as product

Creativity is manifested on two levels: one level of higher quality, in which the product introduces something new, and an inferior level, where the product is an extension or adaptation of something already existing (Beaudot, 1973). We can conclude, then, that there are two types of creation: the creation of new forms or patterns, and the modification of already familiar, existing forms or patterns. But how can we evaluate a product or work? How can a work of art, an invention and an everyday construction be differentiated, in terms of the degree of creativity? According to Guilford (1967), we can say that an answer is the more original based on the following three ideas: 1. the more rarely it appears in a specific sample; 2. the more original it is deemed to be as an invention, by a panel of judges; And, 3. the more remote are the areas of knowledge or experience it manages to connect. These measurement techniques, particularly the first two, have been used very frequently in research. We can, however, identify certain negative points: on the one hand, it is not clear that creativity and originality are necessarily co-existent concepts.

Creativity has frequently been identified with originality, or, at least, the two words have been and are used synonymously. A creative work must be unusual, must transcend the boundaries of the everyday, so that on a first contact with it we will have feelings of surprise (Craft, 2002). Original responses are often regarded as those which are unique, across the whole sample. 'In other cases, and depending on the size of the sample, original responses are deemed to be those given by 5%, 10% or even 20% of the sample'(Rouquette, 1973). However, it is not the case that whatever is strange is necessarily creative. Rarity in the sample is not a sufficient criterion. For example, it does not allow us to exclude inappropriate responses. Moreover, the evaluation of a response by the judges may be subjective. And therefore the reasons why a response is deemed original need to be documented.

3. Criteria for Evaluation of Creativity

Pedagogic research provides scientific and objective criteria for evaluating creativity, which can serve as pedagogical objectives at all levels (Wunenburger, 1991); these include the quantity of the product, its variety, its complexity, and its originality. In light of these criteria, we can claim that a child is creative if his ideas and the products of his work are numerous, if these ideas and the products of his activities can be subsumed under different category headings, if each idea and creation consists of numerous details, i.e. if they are highly elaborate and processed, and finally, if what he creates is rare and the frequency of its appearance is low in relation to what others, or the child himself, have previously made. The definition of creativity based on the above criteria allows us to evaluate the creations (or responses, or solutions) of the subject in terms of both quantity and quality. In terms of quantity, performance will be judged on the basis of the entire set of creations or plausible responses to each question. Obviously quantity does not necessarily entail high performance in terms of quality, but it does increase the likelihood of quality appearing. 'Underlying all creativity is an abundance in terms of the generation of ideas, forms, colours and, above all, combinations'. 'In order to examine the originality of a work or reaction, we need to compare

it with other creations, products, reactions, etc., belonging to the same category, and established values will be used as criteria' (Beaudot, 1973).

Originality will need to be defined in respect of what is usual. The degree of originality can be assessed statistically, calculating the frequency of appearance of a response or reaction in the sample. Thus the primary criterion for definition of an original response is the element of surprise it triggers. It will need to be characterized, to some extent, as unexpected, in relation to the whole set of responses in the sample. However, originality is examined in the context of the relative, not the absolute. When we compare two works for originality, we will first look at what they have in common, their shared field of reference, and then are able to identify their differences. Thus creativity is not confined to just one field; it is multiple and takes many forms. 'Divergent creativity is not characterized by just one ability or function'. Let us offer the following example: a student writes the phrase 'night has fallen, the moon is shining...' (Beaudot, 1976), while a classmate has written 'night has fallen, the moon is dancing...'. In the first case, the student has produced a cliché. By contrast, if we analyse the mental process through which the second student arrived at the phrase 'the moon is dancing', we see he was able to export a word from its usual semantic field and employ it in a different and unusual way. This is one step away from metaphor, which is the logical progression from narrative divergence. It cannot be the teacher's job to deter the child from employing such a mode of expression (Wunenburger, 1991). Another evaluation criterion is the appropriateness of the response. This criterion allows us to exclude from the sample random responses, responses grounded in ignorance or which are mistaken.

4. Creativity Tests

According to Beaudot (1973) Lowenfeld distinguish between 'active' and 'potential' creativity. We appreciate, that individual differences in terms of creativity are quantitative rather than qualitative. It is not only genius which produces creative results. Every one of us is creative, but some of us to a greater degree than others. In other words, it is a capacity which, to manifest itself, will require propitious conditions.

The logic behind most creativity tests is the formulation of the questions in such a way as to stimulate in the individual the potential to generate original responses. Creativity tests are also known as tests of creative thought, or open-question tests. As their name suggests, their characteristic feature is that the problems they pose are susceptible of not just one right answer, but a range of different answers. Furthermore, they allow divergent reactions, in contrast to intelligence tests, which are framed in such a way as to allow only one correct solution, or a limited number of correct solutions. Thus the individual is not asked to opt for one specific response, as in the convergent-thinking tests, where the grading is objective.

In short, the individual does not choose from among specific responses offered by the researcher, nor is there only one answer. There is considerable scope for personal expression, with the subject being invited to offer his own interpretation. Moreover, a variety of means of expression is offered, because creativity is explored in different areas: in verbal expression,

visual perception, mental understanding. Most tests which have been used to measure creativity relate to divergent thinking and are based on the Guilford and Torrance tests (Torrance, 1988). They usually employ word association, word combination, uses of various objects, hidden patterns, ink blots, stories or myths, and problem design. Torrance recommended the creation of a game-like, thinking, or problem-solving atmosphere, inviting the examinees to enjoy the activities (Kim, 2006).

5. The Research

For the purposes of this study we took as our starting point the idea of creativity tests using hidden shapes, adapting them to the level of pre-school children (Jeffrey & Craft, 2001). The tests require that the subject find geometrical shapes concealed in a more complex composition of other geometrical designs, discern shapes formed by a combination of lines, complete fully, and in the subject's own individual view, shapes and figures missing from a picture. The research was conducted at two early childhood classes in Volos, Greece. Our study involved asking children to study paintings as we created opportunities for them to express their ideas through drawings.

5.1 The hypothesis. The sample

The hypothesis we formulated is that children create different meanings through their drawings and that these meanings are more original when the stimulus is a picture of art that belongs to the abstract art. Children's drawings are used to access young children's views and experiences by listening to children as they draw and paying attention to their narratives and interpretations (Einarsdottir et al., 2009). The research was conducted with 28 children aged 4.5 to 6.5 attending two early childhood classes in Volos, Greece. All children come from a middle-class socioeconomic level.

5.2 Research tools

The tools used were three pictures of art. Two of them belong in the field of abstract art, because we took the view that each child would see each work and its theme in his own individual way, regardless of the title given by the painter. The purpose of the study was to use these particular works of art as an opportunity for each young child to express his creativity within the school setting. The pictures of art we used are Van Gogh's "Sunflowers" (figure 1), Joan Miro's "People in the night" (figure 2) and Popova Liubov's "Painterly Architectonics" (figure 3).



Figure 1. “Sunflowers” (Van Gogh)



Figure 2. “People in the night” (Joan Miro)



Figure 3. “Painterly Architectonics” (Popova Liubov)

5.3 Results

In their drawings, children in a way try to imitate the way that the picture of art is designed, but at the same time they are creative by thinking of new ideas and ways of doing things. For example, having as starting point the picture of art “Sunflowers” children drew sunflowers, but thirteen children drew sunflowers not in a vase, as they are represented at Van Gogh’s picture of art, but near the sea, next to some children, as shown in figure 4, on the beach, next to the water, where children are swimming, as shown in figure 5, at a mountain, near a bull and a wolf, as shown in figure 6, in a garden, as shown in figure 7.



Figure 4.



Figure 5.



Figure 6.



Figure 7.

The fact that the pictures belong to the abstract art encouraged children to create very different meanings. For example, having as starting point the picture of art “People in the night”, the interpretations that children gave at their drawings were diverse and different between them, such as: people, birds, animals and balls, as shown in figure 8, the sun and a rocket, as shown in figure 9, an ice cream machine, as shown in figure 10, a boat with shapes and colours, as shown in figure 11, books, sunglasses and a phone, as shown in figure 12.



Figure 8.



Figure 9.



Figure 10.



Figure 11.

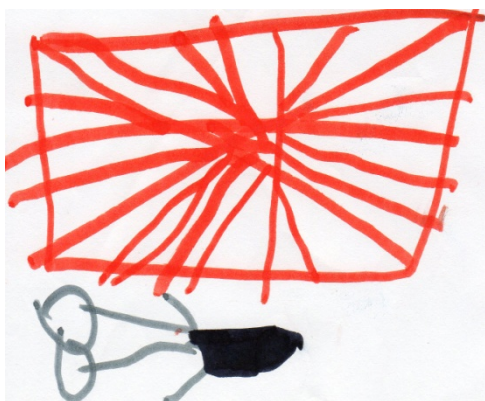


Figure 12.

On the parallel, having as starting point the picture of art “Painterly Architectonics”, their interpretations were also diverse, like mountains, as shown in figure 13, rocks, as shown in figure 14, lines, as shown in figures 15 and 16, but also some personalized figures, such as a

man with a hat, as shown in figure 17, a butterfly, as shown in figure 18, a submarine in the sea with a man inside, as shown in figure 19.



Figure 13.

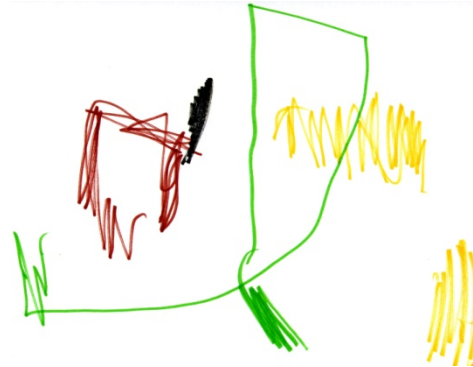


Figure 14.



Figure 15.



Figure 16.



Figure 17.



Figure 18.



Figure 19.

6. Conclusion

To ensure that there is enough time for children to express their thoughts, ideas and feelings in a variety of ways, and that children enjoy and maximize opportunities in art, teachers should consider carefully the time they allow for art, how they structure that time and what kind of experience they are offering. Making time for art in a way that offers a valuable experience involves knowledge of children's development and what motivates them (Robinson, 2002). Art provides a stimulating environment in which creativity, originality and expressiveness are valued, and encourages young people to develop and demonstrate creativity and innovation (Einarsdottir, Dockett and Perry, 2009). To give all children the best opportunity for effective development and learning in creative development, the teacher gives opportunities for children to work alongside artists so that they see at first hand different ways of expressing and communicating ideas and materials. Further, the teacher values what children can do and children's own ideas rather than expecting them to reproduce someone else's picture. Creativity takes place when teachers cannot predict results and are surprised by their student outcomes (Zimmerman, 2006).

7. Discussion

There is often little creativity in the traditional classroom, which is a place of silence, where the discourse of the teacher is mimicked and its authenticity accepted without question. Within this setting the creative child is often seen as a threat to discipline. He asks too many questions, and is critical of the teacher (Craft, 2002).

Development of the child's creative thinking requires awareness of the existence of creative abilities in the students, diagnosing and encouraging the students' creative thinking, creating an environment which will be a source of stimuli and experiences, encouraging the child to explore, creative methods of teaching and learning, creation of thinking situations, offering opportunities for self-activation, development of critical thought (Duborgel, 1992). According

to Torrance (1988), the educator need to respect the students' questions and guide them to a solution, respect original and unusual ideas, show the students that their ideas are of value, adopt whichever of their ideas are practical and introduce them to the classroom, sometimes set work without grading or criticizing it, never judge the conduct of children without explaining his position and backing it up with arguments.

These principles cannot be applied on an occasional basis; they must be adhered to systematically and consistently if they are to be effective. According to Zimmerman (2009), holistic art programs support developing skills, understandings, knowledge, and self-expression. In such programmes teachers should focus on student processes and outcomes that are creative and not predictable. Lowenfeld viewed the role of art education ultimately as a means for development of students' creative self-expression and not necessarily as an end. Children's creativity must be extended by the provision of support for their curiosity, exploration and expression. They must be provided with opportunities to explore and share their thoughts, ideas and feelings, through a variety of art activities. An early childhood educator stimulate and support creative thinking across the curriculum in a variety of ways, encouraging the expression of possibilities across contexts.

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