Abstract

The fostering of creativity is currently seen as a primary goal of education, but the view of creativity which underlies this emphasis dictates that creativity must sometimes be purchased at the expense of the quality of the work produced. It is maintained here that this dichotomy between creativity and quality which is assumed in this view as a false one, based on an erroneous theory of creative process. It is argued that the notions of creativity and quality are intimately connected, and that, thus, the question of the choice between the two does not really arise.

Résumé

C'est, pense-t-on actuellement, l'un des buts premiers de l'éducation que de développer la créativité. Cependant, il y a, semble-t-il, une opinion voulant que la créativité ne peut s'obtenir parfois qu'au dépens de la qualité du produit. L'auteur soutient ici que cette dichotomie entre créativité et qualité est fausse et qu'elle est basée sur une théorie erronée du "processus créateur". Elle affirme que les notions de créativité et de qualité sont intimement liées et, qu'ainsi, la question d'un choix entre les deux ne se posent même pas.

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CREATIVITY OR QUALITY: A DECEPTIVE CHOICE

In directing the school play, you are forced to make a choice between enhancing the quality of the play or the creativity of the students involved. Which would you choose? This was a question which was actually posed to a prospective dramatic arts teacher in an interview for a teaching position. This was the dilemma: choose between creativity and quality. And the teacher was clearly expected to opt for the former.

I do not think that this question represents an isolated example of pedagogical thinking, but believe that it is, rather, indicative of an entire perspective which pervades theory and practice in arts education and in education in general. Interest in and research on the subject of creativity has been great in recent years[1], and this trend has been accompanied by the view that the fostering of creativity is a primary educational goal[2]. Contemporary education has come to see as one of its central purposes to make students more creative, and if the quality of work produced must suffer in the process, then this is accepted as an unavoidable consequence. A strict separation is thus established between the creativity of the person and the quality of the product, a dichotomy which, in some circumstances at least, involves a conflict and necessitates a choice.

It will be maintained in this paper, however, that the question posed at the outset is misleading, and that the dichotomy between creativity and quality is a false one. I shall argue that the notions of creativity and quality are intimately and inextricably connected and that, thus, the question of the choice between the two does not arise.

In order to make this case, it is necessary, first, to understand this view of creativity in which the notions of creativity and quality are severed, and to examine its assumptions. It is a view which centers around the idea of process rather than of product. It is assumed that there is a specific

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process which is characteristic of all instances of creating, regardless of subject matter. Being creative, then, is seen as the ability to engage in this process, and this ability is seen to be associated with certain cognitive and personality traits. Considerations of the nature of the product produced become irrelevant to the assessment of creativity, as personality and process become the focus.

I believe, however, that the very notion of a distinctive creative process can be questioned. There have been numerous attempts to characterize such a putative process, the accounts of Arthur Koestler and of Edward De Bono, for example[3], and although there are considerable differences in detail amongst the views, nonetheless there emerge certain common assumptions about the nature of the process. It is assumed that most thinking is marked by rigidity and habit and that the creative process involves breaking out of such habitual ways of thinking and disrupting habitual patterns of thought. It is seen, further, to involve making new connections between previously unrelated entities by performing a leap of some sort. It is held that this process is not strictly rational, but involves elements of chance and unconscious processes which loosen the hold of conventional logic. Finally, the process is seen as non-evaluative and involving a suspension of judgment.

Let us begin to examine this basic view by looking at the idea that creativity is characterized by a specific way of thinking which is different from our usual logical way of thinking. I would object that this view draws an artificial distinction between creative and non-creative thinking and that the two are, in fact, not clearly distinct or easily separable. This view distinguishes between two such ways of thinking on the grounds that logical thinking is selective, is confined to established patterns, and involves judgment whereas creative thinking is purely generative and involves the disruption of established patterns and the suspension of judgment. I would maintain, however, that thinking of all kinds involves a combination of both types of processes, and that, in fact, they are not easily separated.

The 'creative process' model seems to be along the following lines: one is faced with a problem, one suspends judgment and generates new possibilities by the use of disruptive elements (one thinks creatively), and finally, one reinstitutes judgment and evaluates the products thus produced. I would argue, however, that judgment is intimately involved throughout the process of creating. The initial perception of the problem as a problem and the determining of the general direction for solution are very much products of judgment. It is because one has considerable expertise in an area and is immersed in its intricacies that one develops the judgment that enables one to see a certain concatenation of phenomena as in need of exploration, to see it as a problem.

Moreover, the need for a disruption of established patterns is connected with judgment, as well. Theories of creative process base much of their speculation on the single fact that, during the process of creating, we do sometimes suspend one or more of the presuppositions with which we began. Extrapolating from this fact, they emphasize the shaking up of established patterns as the prime characteristic of the creative process, and claim that such a disruption cannot be governed by judgment since its effects would be inhibiting. I would claim, however, that such a departure from established patterns, when it does occur, is not totally free and generated by random external stimuli, but is governed by many parameters. When presuppositions are questioned in real situations, it is not normally as a result of a random shake up of ideas, but is, rather, because one is led to do this as a result of the stage reached in the exploration of a problem. One's thinking to this point indicates the necessity to question a presupposition in order to arrive at a solution.

The idea that judgment must be suspended during the creative process derives support from the view that one cannot be engaged in a process which is creative if one can foresee the outcome of one's activity. According to this view, such foresight would imply a complete plan and would thus rule out the possibility of creativity which is thought to come about spontaneously.[4] This view is characterized by Vernon Howard as the "Unforeseen Theory of Creativity."[5] Since judgment is viewed according to this theory as applicable only within the context of an activity where there is a plan and an end in view, it is concluded that judgment cannot enter into the creative process.

Howard argues, however, that this view is based on a confusion about what it means to foresee an outcome. It is probably true that one does not know exactly what the end product will be like when one begins to create. Nonetheless, it does seem that one can have at least some general or vague idea of the form which this end product will take. According to Howard:

> For even if it be argued that one never *knows* what one will do in advance of doing it, one may yet *intend* in greater or lesser detail to do this or that and know one's intention perfectly well. Only that is required to 'foresee' what one undertakes to create; not a prediction, or clairvoyance, still less full knowledge of results.[6]

One begins with some sort of intention — to solve a problem, to try to execute a work, or simply to experiment in a medium, and one must know when a solution has been achieved or a work completed. Not just any combinations will be generated, but only those which might contribute to the work. Poincare gives a good statement of this point with reference to mathematical invention.

> To create consists precisely in not making useless combinations and in making those which are useful and which are only a small minority. Invention is discernment, choice.[7]

This idea that judgment is suspended during the process of creating seems to be based on a particular view of the role of judgment in thought. The assumption appears to be that judgment can be applied only within a specified framework, but that in creative thought, the presuppositions of a framework are abandoned, and so there can no longer be any criteria according to which one can judge. There seem to be problems with this conception however.

Old presuppositions are never all abandoned, nor could they be. It is sometimes the case that one or more assumptions must be rejected in the process of arriving at a creation. Some elements of the previous framework must remain, however, elements in light of which the new structure will make sense and be fruitful. If all presuppositions were abandoned, the result would not be creation but chaos. David Perkins makes this point well:

> the fact remains that no one can depart from much of the preselection at once and expect to make progress. The mathematician cannot discard the familiar axioms *and* conventional notation *and* traditions about which sorts of questions are worthwhile *and* the usual format for proofs . . . . What we perceive as revolutionary innovation in a field always challenges only a little of the preselection. Only because we focus on the contrast rather than the continuity does innovation seem so much of a departure.[8]

Moreover, the staunch adherence to an idea and the refusal to abandon it may, in some instances lead to discovery or creation rather than inhibiting them. Einstein's theory of relativity, for example, is frequently cited as a prime instance of the destruction of an existing framework and the overturning of presuppositions. Yet it was Einstein's commitment to the presupposition that the

laws of physics are invariant which necessitated his ultimate abandonment of the presupposition of absolute time. Some presuppositions must remain, some elements of the existing structure which give meaning to the enterprise and according to which judgments can be made.

This view also makes certain assumptions about the nature of frameworks and the ways they function in thinking which bear examination. It seems to assume that frameworks are narrow and clearly defined patterns of relationships with rigid boundaries — a kind of closed system — and that we are constrained by force of habit to a specific framework when working out a problem. This highly rigid, habitual way of thinking is considered to be the natural mode, and going beyond the limits of a framework is seen as a leap, as exceptional, as creative. The model of the way we normally think which this view provides seems to be rather inaccurate, however. Instances of going beyond a framework, of breaking away from habitual modes of thinking, are much more common than this view implies. One source of this inaccuracy might be the construal of the notion of framework as clearly defined and rigidly bounded. Certainly some of the enterprises in which we engage do seem to fit this image of a closed system, the game of chess, for example. Here the information relevant to the enterprise is strictly delimited, and any other knowledge or information is outside the framework. Even in this case, however, there is scope for creativity in terms of the specific strategies undertaken. Although, in one sense, the game is totally circumscribed by rules in terms of the specifications for legitimate moves, the possibilities for actual manoeuvres in a dynamic game are wide open.

In most instances of problem-solving and of creation, however, the notion of framework is even less clear-cut. What precisely would be the framework which is involved in the writing of a poem about the poet's experience of war, or in attempts to solve the unemployment problem? There are factors which would be relevant in each case, for example the conventions of poetry in the former case or the prevailing economic models in the latter. But there are many additional sorts of factors which might be relevant, as well. The poet's anger at the belligerence of a colleague might, for example, be relevant to how he frames his poem, or an individual's sense of compassion might be part of the framework determining her approach to an economic problem. In most problem-solving or creative situations, it would be difficult to strictly circumscribe the domain of those factors which are relevant, which constitute the framework. In actual cases, frameworks overlap, shift, and have indefinite boundaries so that the idea of information or ideas being outside a framework is not very helpful.

Tied in with the idea of rigid frameworks is the idea of creative leaps, but this notion is problematic as well. If frameworks were rigid and clearly defined, then some sort of extraordinary leap would be required in order to get beyond a framework. If we construe frameworks in a more fluid manner, however, then the case for leaps is weakened. Creation and discovery can frequently be seen to involve a more gradual process than is often believed. Although it often involves moments of insight and overturning presuppositions to see things differently, these can be understood as features of a reasonable process, rather than as manifestations of an irrational, inexplicable leap.

This phenomenon of seeing things in a broader context, of getting an overall picture, of overcoming blocks to solve a problem, is not a rare occurrence, but is a feature of thinking well in general. As Jerome Bruner suggests, going beyond the information given is an important aspect of how we think, and is not limited to instances of creation.[9] Rather than postulating some extraordinary process to account for creativity, then, it can, perhaps, be seen in terms of the processes which

allow us to 'go beyond the information given' in all of our intelligent thought and behavior.[10] Any difference between creative and everyday thinking is not one of kind but merely of degree. It seems, then, that extraordinary means are not necessary in order to attain extraordinary ends, but rather, it is the skill with which ordinary thinking processes are used and the purposes to which they are put which enable outstanding results to be achieved. This is not to deny that moments of creation are special, but to maintain, rather, that their special nature lies in what is achieved rather than in how it is achieved, that it concerns product more than process. It is when our thinking processes are directed toward exceptionally difficult tasks, when unreasonable demands are placed upon them, that exceptional results occur.

The argument to this point suggests that there is not one unique process which characterizes creating. Rather, we employ a variety of processes, processes which are not specific to creative activity but which are intrinsic to all our thinking. Moreover different types of creative activities may call forth to various extents different processes and so the nature of the individual endeavor is important in determining how creating happens. The specific discipline and the characteristics of the particular work impose constraints and we develop skills and judgment which relate to these constraints. I believe that these findings belie the notion of a creative process which is independent of subject matter.

If instances of creativity do not share a common process, then creativity cannot be seen essentially as the ability to engage in a specific psychological process. The question then arises as to what exactly instances of creativity do have in common. To this I would reply that they involve significant achievement. To be creative is to create — be it a valued work of art, a fruitful scientific theory, an important new economic model, or a viable political system. It is to create a product of quality. This involves satisfying to a high degree the criteria of excellence in the discipline in question and solving its problems in an effective and far-reaching manner.[11]

The idea of originality is one which is frequently connected to the notion of creativity and one may wonder where it fits into this analysis with its emphasis on excellence. I think that our recognition of originality implicitly involves an ascription of value and so is related to the idea of quality. In seeking originality in a product, it is generally not mere novelty which is valued, but rather novelty which is to an end, which meets a need, which solves a problem. A new solution or new sort of solution seems to be considered of particular value, frequently of greater value than a conventional solution, not merely because it is new, but because of the possibility that it will provide a better solution to current problems. It might solve a problem more effectively, solve surrounding problems in the area in addition to the original problem, avoid undesirable consequences of present solutions, or provide a new direction in which the discipline can develop. In the process of accomplishing this, an original production may transcend the limits of the discipline as it exists and contravene some of its rules. This is not, however, a case of arbitrary novelty or random invention, but involves, rather, change which is effective, useful, and significant. This grows out of a profound understanding of the discipline and the problems inherent in it, and is an extension of attempting to solve them in ever better ways.[12]

In questioning the notion of creative process, then, I am attempting to break down the distinction between creative thinking and excellent thinking in general. I am arguing that the creative process is just the process of outstanding thinking in a discipline, of achieving extraordinary ends. Creativity and quality are, then, inextricably linked.

Let us now return to the pedagogical dilemma which provided the impetus for this discussion and examine it more closely in the light of the preceding analysis. It must be asked now what precisely is seen to be at issue in the choice between creativity and quality. Why are creativity and quality seen to be conflicting goals in the case of the school play? As we have seen, creativity is equated with engaging in a certain psychological process and this process is thought to involve, among other things, divergent thinking, self-expression, and independence of thought. Fostering these qualities might, however, be totally unconnected with creating a production of high calibre. It might be claimed, for example, that while helping the students to solve acting problems might result in a superior production, nonetheless allowing them to experiment on their own, in many cases unsuccessfully, might involve more creativity.

Now it is doubtless the case that such experimentation might be valuable in some circumstances, for fostering enthusiasm, independence, or self-concept, for example. This is not, however, necessarily connected with creativity, as has been demonstrated previously. Moreover, this type of experimentation might be a meaningful and effective way to develop skills and thus would contribute to both creativity and quality.

There seems to be a presupposition in the psychological process account that creativity is necessarily free and unconstrained and that, thus, any sort of teaching, coaching, or directing will hamper creativity. Being creative does not, however, involve creation out of nothing, having no antecedents, nor being untaught. Nor is it thrashing about in ineffectual attempts at self-expression. The teacher/director may, through images, cues, and suggestions, help the students to find characters in themselves and their experience.[13] S/he may also help the students to acquire the skills which will allow them to portray and express effectively, and this will give them the freedom to go on.[14]

In connecting creativity with quality, I am taking a stand which runs contrary to the prevalent view of creativity. This latter view has had considerable influence on educational practice, however. An emphasis on process rather than product has resulted in a great deal of educational activity being devoted to the fostering of certain traits of personality, and has transformed arts education into primarily a means to foster psychological well-being. In the process, attempting to foster creativity in terms of encouraging significant achievements has too often been ignored. Now certainly good mental health is a worthwhile goal. The danger, however, is in pursuing this in the name of creativity and thereby neglecting the teaching of the skills of a discipline and the developing and advancing of the traditions in which high levels of achievement are made. It is vital to the continuity of human creating that the idea of quality not be severed from that of creativity.[15]

NOTES

[1] The impetus for this proliferation of research was provided by J.P. Guilford in his address to the American Psychological Association in 1950. Guilford, J.P. (1950). Creativity. *American Psychologist, 5*, 444-454.

[2] See, for example, Torrance, E. Paul. (1963). *Education and the creative potential.* Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press; De Bono, Edward. (1970). *Lateral thinking.* London: Ward Lock Educational.

[3] Koestler, Arthur. (1964). *The act of creation.* New York: Macmillan; De Bono. *Lateral thinking.* Although De Bono himself proposes his theory in the context of creativity in problem-solving and not the arts, it is frequently used as an account of the creative process in the arts as well.

[4] See, for example, Thomas, Vincent. (1964). Creativity in art. In Kennick, W.E. (Ed.). *Art and philosophy.* New York: St. Martin's Press, pp. 283-294.

[5] Howard, Vernon. (1982). *Artistry, the work of artists.* Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, p. 110 ff.

[6] Ibid., p. 120.

[7] Poincare, H. (1970). The foundations of science. In Vernon, P.E. (Ed.). *Creativity.* New York: Penguin Books, p. 80.

[8] Perkins, David. (1981). *The mind's best work.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 279.

[9] Bruner, Jerome. (1973). *Beyond the information given.* New York: Norton.

[10] This account of creativity is substantiated by the work of David Perkins. Through the use of first person accounts of individuals engaged in creative endeavors, as well as by making use of the psychological literature on the subject, he demonstrates how phenomena such as noticing, recognizing, searching, remembering, and evaluating can, together, contribute to a creative result. Perkins, *Mind's best work.*

[11] For a more complete account of this idea of creativity as creating, see Bailin, S. (1984). Can there be creativity without creation? *Interchange, 15*(2), 13-22. See, also White, J.P. (1968). Creativity and education: A philosophical analysis. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 16,* 123-137; Glickman, J. (1970). On creating. In Kiefer, H.E. & Munitz, M.K. (Eds.). *Perspectives in education, religion, and the arts.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

[12] For a further exploration of the notion of originality, see Bailin, S. (1985). On originality, creativity, education, and thought. *Interchange, 16,*(1) 6-13.

[13] Cf. Howard's account of the role that such coaching plays in teaching singing. In *Artistry.*

[14] The role of skills in creativity is examined in detail in Bailin, S. (in press), *Creativity and skill.* In Bishop, J., Lochhead, J. & Perkins, D.N. (Eds.). *Thinking: progress in research and teaching.*

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