



Child-initiated play and professional creativity: Enabling four-year-olds' possibility thinking[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Given enormous global challenges, alongside nurturing children's creativity, professional creativity has perhaps never been more vital (Craft, 2011a; Moss, 2010). This paper considers how a small, qualitative, co-participative study in an inner city children's centre, explored practitioner perspectives and practice related to creativity understood as possibility thinking. This research builds on previous studies that have documented possibility thinking and analyses the nature of possibility thinking manifest in child-initiated immersive play triggered by practitioner-placed provocations, and pedagogical strategies which foster this.

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1. Introduction

Influenced by liberal philosophers, for over 200 years Western policies have valued children's curiosity, imagination, and creativity (Craft, 2010). In England, policy on creativity was cemented with the National Advisory Committee for Creative and Cultural Education (NACCE, 1999) advocating 'democratic' creativity and cultural education. In the early years, children's creativity was codified in the Early Years Foundation Stage (DCSF, 2008a, 2008b), and in earlier versions of the early years curriculum (e.g. QCA, 1999, 2000; SCAA, 1996). The double-stranding of creativity, a pervasive strand of 'creative and critical thinking' and defined area of 'creative development', enabled imaginative provision, much of it involving the cultural sector (e.g. Bancroft, Fawcett, & Hay, 2008). By 2011, following a change of government, creativity had maintained its place as an important dimension of the early years curriculum. For the Tickell Review of the Early Years Foundation Stage reinforced a role for creativity as imagination with an inherent role in 'Expressive Arts and Design' and acknowledged critical and creative thinking together with active learning and play, as characteristics of young children's engagement with the world around them (Tickell, 2011a, 2011b).

1.1. Creativity as possibility thinking

So – what is creativity in the early years? The current study has drawn on one strand of qualitative research undertaken in England over the last fourteen years, which has developed the notion of children's creativity as driven by 'possibility

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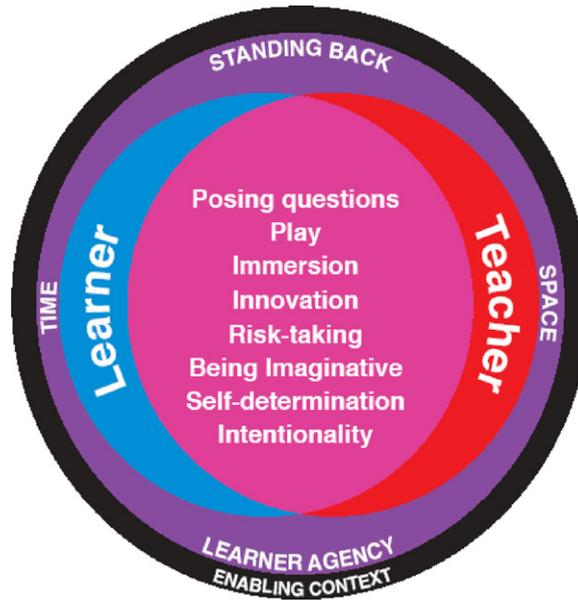


Fig. 1. Pedagogy nurturing Possibility thinking (Cremin et al., 2006, p. 116).

thinking’ (PT) (Craft, 2002, 2011a), exploratory transitions from ‘what is’ to ‘what might be’. PT involves children making the transition ‘what is this?’ to ‘what can I or we do with this?’ as well as imagining ‘as if’ they were in a different role (Craft, 2011b). This next section offers an account of possibility thinking from conceptual roots to empirical outcomes to date as summarised in Figs. 1 and 2.

Initially a conceptual study (Craft, 1997, 1999, 2001) rooted in earlier work on imagination (Craft, 1988), this work moved into an empirical phase investigating the nature of PT in young children (Burnard et al., 2006) and pedagogy facilitating this (Cremin, Burnard & Craft, 2006) through two stages of qualitative work using observations, interviews and video analysis. The studies were undertaken in collaboration with teachers thus were co-participative. Core elements of PT were revealed, and key pedagogical strategies.

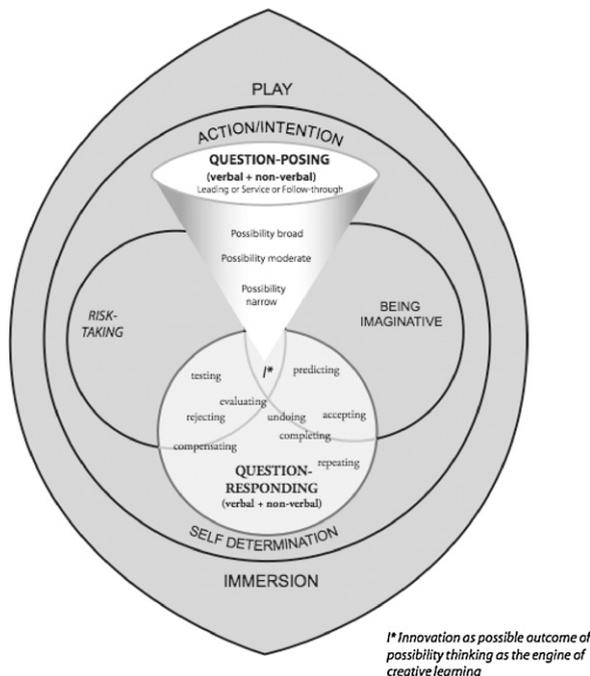


Fig. 2. Question-posing and question-responding and original PT framework (Chappell et al., 2008, p. 19).

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