



## Creativity in education as a question of cultivating sensuous forces



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### ABSTRACT

Creativity has proven to be highly resistant to conceptualization, which poses a fundamental problem for creativity in education: Without knowledge of what drives the process, it is difficult to foster creativity. This difficulty is reflected in the tendencies of current research. Creativity is often defined in terms of a set of separate qualities that make it difficult to distinguish creativity from processes of learning and problem solving. The aim of the article is to contribute to the understanding of the creative process and to develop a strategy for fostering creativity. To this end, the article draws on the social-analytical theory of creativity understood as *Bildung*, the German concept of formation of the personality. According to this theory, creativity is the interplay of the sensuous forces of imagination, transcendence, and judgment. Thus, fostering creativity is a matter of cultivating these forces and their interplay. The article builds on this idea to develop a strategy for fostering creativity that involves an educational journey inspired by Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Finally the article attempts to identify the dominant processes of creativity at different levels of the educational system and suggests that these are “imaginary play” in kindergarten, “produce play” in primary school, “positioning humour” in secondary school, and “personal expression” in upper secondary.

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## 1. Introduction

Few concepts have proven to be as resistant to conceptualization as creativity. This is, however, not due to a lack of research or consensus on the subject. In the literature there is consensus on how to define the creative product, on which traits and abilities are characteristic of creative persons, on where creative processes usually occur, and even on how to nurture creativity: The creative product is commonly defined as being both novel and appropriate or useful (Boden, 2004; Robinson, 2011; Sternberg, 1999); typical personality traits and abilities described include sensitivity to problems, playfulness, willingness to shift course, and synthesizing ability (Gardner, 1994; Guilford, 1950); places where creativity often occur may be in bed or the bath or on a trip (Boden, 2004; Poincaré, 1908); and ways to nurture creativity include encouraging imaginative activity, curiosity, risk-taking, and conveying the importance of time and space (Craft, 2005; Cropley, 2001; De Bono, 1985; NACCCE, 1999). But a consensus on how to define and conceptualize the *process of creativity* remains elusive. Questions such as, what processes result in the creative product, why certain traits or abilities are useful in the process, why

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creativity occurs in these places, or why certain ways of nurturing creativity actually work remain open to debate. Several competing theories of the creative process have been put forward. These include the incubation process (Poincaré, 1908), the bisociative act (Koestler, 1964), the state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), and the transformation of conceptual spaces (Boden, 2004). Meanwhile other approaches, such as the prevailing psychometrical approach to creativity, simply reject the task of theorizing beyond what can be observed and measured (Guilford, 1950).

### 1.1. Basic assumption and problems

The basic assumption of this article is that the conceptualization of the processes of creativity is of vital importance for creativity in education. An understanding of what drives the creative processes at which stages and how the parts of the process interact can shed light on why particular ways of nurturing creativity actually work. The conceptualization of creativity can thus contribute both to the improvement of existing pedagogical strategies for nurturing creativity and to the development of new ones.

Attempts to improve and nurture strategies for creativity in education have historically faced two challenges: On the one hand, the lack of consensus on the question of conceptualization of the creative processes has resulted in a tendency to ignore this question. As Kaufmann and Beghetto (2009: 1) observe: “The exact question *what is creativity* is often ignored or answered in too many different ways [...] Further, basic questions about creativity’s nature remain under debate”. On the other hand, there is a historic tendency for those pursuing educational approaches to creativity not to communicate with those who carry out research into creativity. As Feldman and Benjamin (2006: 320) also observe: “The task of studying the topic [fostering creativity in schools] has fallen instead to academics whose aims have been more often scholarly than educational, resulting in an ironic state of affairs”.

In recent years, however, attempts have been made to bridge the gap between creativity research and creativity in education. This is not least true of the research movement that formed in the wake of the report *All our futures: Creativity, culture, and education* for the British government (NACCCE, 1999), and in particular the study of the notion of *possibility thinking*. This research movement is notable for its attempts to develop pedagogical strategies based on the concept of creativity as a form of possibility thinking (Burnard et al., 2006; Craft, 2005; Craft, Cremin, Burnard, Dragovic, & Chappell, 2012; Craft, Jefferey, & Leibling, 2001). But even this attempt does not avoid a number of problems which are typical of approaches to creativity in education: First, the conceptualization of creativity in terms of possibility thinking consists of a series of relatively separate qualities associated with creative behavior, without an explanation of how these qualities interact and drive the process at each stage. Second, the processes of creativity are often not distinguished from processes of learning or problem solving, and in the attempts to distinguish between extraordinary big C creativity and ordinary little c or mini c creativity there is a tendency to overlook genuine creativity as an everyday phenomenon, for example in the case of children playing or telling jokes. Third, the lack of conceptualization of creative processes and thereby of possible differences in such processes in different age groups results in the tendency for some processes typical of particular age groups not to be recognized as creativity or to be confused with other processes. These problems will be discussed in detail later in the article.

### 1.2. Aims and theoretical approach

This article aims to contribute to the conceptualization of the processes of creativity in different age groups and so provide a framework for pedagogical strategies that can be used to nurture creativity. In its conceptualization of creativity the article draws on the social-analytical theory of creativity – *a question of Bildung* (Hammershøj, 2009). This theory connects Bildung, which is the special German concept for formation of the personality (Gadamer, 1960; Schmidt, 1999) and the classic notions of the four stages of the creative process (Poincaré, 1908; Wallas, 1926), along with the concept of the act of bisociation (Koestler, 1964). According to this theory, a hidden similarity exists between creativity and formation, which makes it possible to understand the creative process as driven and formed by the same types of *sensuous forces* as the formation process. Thus, the creative process is driven and formed by the forces of transcendence, judgment, and imagination (Hammershøj, 2012).

With this in mind, the article attempts to develop a theory of fostering creativity based on the cultivation of interplay between the sensuous forces. According to Bildung, cultivation occurs through the processes of developing one’s taste and of broadening one’s horizon, both being associated with the “educational journey” (*Bildungsreise*) in both the literal and figural sense. The article takes inspiration from Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (Dante, 1321) for its description of an educational journey that may be used in a general pedagogical strategy for fostering creativity. Through a discussion of the distinctions of extraordinary and everyday creativity, the article attempts to identify the dominant processes of formation and creativity at different levels of the educational system. From this understanding, the aim is to develop a framework of specific pedagogical strategies that facilitate the cultivation of creativity in kindergarten, primary, secondary and upper secondary schools.

## 2. Creativity as a question of Bildung

The creative process has historically been depicted as divine inspiration, intuition of the genius, and unconscious processes, that is, as a mystical process whose workings are unknown. As mentioned, even today no consensus exists regarding

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