Creativity Education in the UK : Past, Present and Future

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Thank you for inviting me, and special thanks to Dr. Yumino for all his help and insights over the years.

As a fellow psychologist and teacher with a passion for creativity education, I am really looking forward to sharing with you what we are doing in the UK and learning more about Japanese approaches to creativity and its role in education. I am particularly keen to learn more about Japanese thinking methods. My presentation today focuses on my views on creativity education, some UK creativity education initiatives, and creativity education in the future.

My view of creativity education

I see creativity as the ultimate achievement of which people are capable. An example of a comprehensive definition of creativity is : “Creativity is a process that results in novelty which is accepted as useful, tenable or satisfying by a significant group of others at some point in time” (Stein, 1984, p. 1).

Creativity education can help students imagine future possibilities, visualise current tasks better, tackle new problems, shape their own futures, cope with extremes of rapid change and stagnation, survive in challenging situations, live more fulfilling lives, realise their potential, and go beyond apparent limitations. An education that helps young people in all these aspects of their lives is quite demanding. It is not a soft option.

There is evidence that just about everyone can learn to be more creative. Becoming highly creative in an area of work normally takes about ten years. Various studies have focused on the characteristics of highly creative people, including their curiosity, in-

dependence in thinking, achievement orientation, and high levels of motivation with regard to topics that they find fascinating (Stein, 1984). Motivation is especially important, because if we are motivated to achieve something, we can acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for success. But highly creative children can feel isolated, believe they are not clever because they frequently see things differently from others, or drop out of school because they feel that they do not belong (Torrance, 1962, 1965). So it is important to help them realise what they are capable of achieving without overwhelming them. Many creativity programmes focus on idea generation, but some highly creative people have so many ideas that they find it difficult to focus and need help in coping with this. Furthermore, highly creative students are not always liked by their teachers (e.g., Bjerstedt, 1976). Williams (1964) found that American teachers could not consistently identify their most creative students ; educational psychologists may be able to help teachers in this regard.

To become more creative, learners need to acquire a good knowledge base, practical skills, thinking skills, other transferable skills, motivation, self-confidence, independence in thinking, and willingness to take intellectual risks. They also need to be given tasks that require creativity because, just as children learn to read by reading, so they learn to create by creating. Whilst it is important to allow for individual work early on in projects, team creativity is also increasingly needed (especially at work) in the later stages of projects.

In school, young people can play manageable interlocking roles in order to achieve creative outcomes.

It is not necessary to develop a special creativity curriculum, because good teachers can find ways of introducing creative tasks and helping students to develop the knowledge and skills they need to be more creative within the normal curriculum (Fryer, in press).

There is no evidence that creative thinking is mysterious. Instead the normal cognitive apparatus is used in the course of various attention-directing strategies. These may include generative and analytical strategies, using metaphor and analogy to achieve fresh insights or fresh perspectives, and insight learning (looking at the same situation as everyone else but seeing something nobody else sees). Various formal (sometimes formulaic) creativity development programmes have been devised to encourage the systematic and deliberate use of one or more of these natural attention-directing strategies (Fryer, 1996).

At another level of analysis, imagination is involved. This may comprise mental scenario building (Johnson-Laird, 1983, 1987, 1988), or it may simply comprise daydreaming, that is, letting one's mind wander to allow in new ideas. Indeed, there is quite a strong correlation between time spent in solitude or working alone (which allows contemplation) and creativity (M. I. Stein, personal communication, 2002), but this is not to suggest that such solitude should be enforced. We also have much to learn from the Japanese Kawakita and Nakayama methods.

Many young children do have a well-developed imagination, but they also need certain building blocks to help them develop their creativity-building blocks like learning to read, write, and do maths, for example. A key issue for teachers is how to teach basic skills and help the students develop a useful body of knowledge (or at least information-gathering skills) without killing off their wonderful imagination (Fryer, 1996). Creativity education is not the same as permissive or laissez-faire education; instead, it requires the most skilled kind of teaching, which involves knowing when to intervene and when to stand back and let children discover for themselves (Fryer, 1996; Torrance & Myers, 1970). Learning environments that support creativity development are those that stimulate curiosity

and offer creative challenges and real world experiences, plus a chance to experiment, explore, and invent. They encourage imagination, reflect and celebrate diversity, question assumptions, and develop confidence and self esteem (Fryer, 1996, 2004, in press).

So, in order to support the development of young people's creativity, it is important to value learners and to avoid excessive testing which can lead to unimaginative work when students fear failure. The UK government is moving away from excessive evaluation and towards ensuring that assessment is designed to enable young people to make progress. Also, in art and design education especially, young people are encouraged to generate suitable criteria and evaluate one another's work. In the best examples of this practice, young people are encouraged to make only positive comments.

One of the problems with fuzzy concepts like creativity is that there will always be some subjectivity involved in assessment, but there are useful objective criteria as well (e.g., Besemer & Treffinger, 1981; Jackson & Messick 1965).

Some UK creativity initiatives

Project 1000, a large scale qualitative and quantitative survey of 1028 UK teachers' views on creativity, teaching, and learning, was my first research investigation. The aim was to explore how teachers envisage creativity and its effect on teaching, assessment, and attitudes to student creativity (Fryer, 1996; Fryer & Collings, 1991a, 1991b). That survey was conducted when interest in creativity education in the UK was minimal except in some management, arts, and engineering courses in higher education. Some teachers, especially in primary schools, sought to develop their students' creativity informally. Very few studies had previously focused on teachers' views on creativity in education.

Following the completion of that research, I introduced the following courses into my university: "Creativity and Learning", "Developing Children's Creativity", "Developing Young People's and Adults' Creativity", "Creative Management", and "Creativity

as Therapy". Several thousand students took these courses successfully over the course of fifteen years. We also formed a staff group, the Centre for Innovation and Creativity, across the university. I then left the university to set up the Creativity Centre, which is an independent organisation (Fryer, in press).

All Our Futures : Creative and Cultural Education. This report, produced by the National Advisory Committee for Creative and Cultural Education, led by Sir Ken Robinson, has been really popular with arts educators in the UK, because it justified the role of the arts in the school curriculum and put creativity firmly on the British educational map. The Creativity Centre undertook consultancy on creativity education for this Committee (National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, 1999).

Creativity : Find it, promote it !.

The Creativity Centre was then asked to provide consultation to the UK Qualifications and Curriculum Authority on guidelines for teachers on creativity across the school curriculum. Schools also contributed examples of creative teaching and learning. This resulted in an online resource for teachers titled, "Creativity : Find it ! Promote it !"

Creative Partnerships is another government-backed initiative involving artists in schools undertaking projects with teachers and pupils under the guidance of a mentor. The Creativity Centre mentored two educational-drama projects, finding that these projects helped children see things from different perspectives, develop their self esteem and self-confidence, and improve their vocabulary. These projects acted as a catalyst for related work across the curriculum.

Science Alliance is a Creativity Centre project aimed at encouraging children to consider science as a career, to develop their creativity and media skills, and to enable them to learn more about the achievements of ethnic minority scientists, a topic that has been much neglected in the UK. The Science Alliance project involves whole classes of children of different ethnic backgrounds and their teachers. The

children's main task is to create a Science Alliance website for other children to use. The teachers retain responsibility for science, and staff from the Creativity Centre help the children develop their creative thinking abilities, self-confidence, and media skills. The teachers also take workshops on creativity and the achievements of ethnic minority scientists.

Science Alliance has proved very popular with both teachers and students. The children love this project, and their standard achievement test results have also improved. The pilot version of this project was supported by the National Endowment for Science and Technology (NESTA) ; the next phase was supported by a local education authority (Bolingbroke & Fryer, 2009).

National Teaching Fellows are academics who have received an award to undertake an educational project. We at the Creativity Centre were asked to discover the fellows' views about creativity education. The results showed that their views were remarkably similar to those of the Project 1000 teachers, except that the fellows did not regard creativity as a rare gift, possibly because of increased government support and increased interest in creativity education since 1989 (Fryer, 2006).

A new National Curriculum for secondary (high) schools has been launched in which creativity education is required. The overall aims are to enable young people to be successful learners, confident individuals, and responsible citizens, and to raise standards, enable students to meet future challenges, and ensure that assessment is geared towards enabling students to be more successful in their learning. A regular review of the primary school curriculum is now taking place, but creativity is already well embedded in the current primary school curriculum (Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency, 2009).

The future of creativity education

UK schools were mostly designed for the industrial era. The world is very different today. One possibility would be to establish Creative Learning Centres that would retain all the good aspects of traditional

education establishments but offer a wider curriculum in a more flexible way both on and off site, according to students' age and other factors. The intention is that such centres would be exciting places for 21st-century learning. People of all ages could access a creative learning centre's facilities and share their expertise with one another (Fryer & Fryer, 2005).

This year, 2009, has been designated the European Year of Creativity and Innovation. The European Commission recognises how vital creativity is. The European Year of Creativity and Innovation has been dominated by a programme of conferences, but the intention is that to have more tangible outcomes as well. In August, I met with the Commissioner responsible for the European Year of Creativity and Innovation, and told him of the present conference in Japan. I asked him if he had a message for you. He stressed how important it is to look beyond the economic advantages of creativity education and to focus on personal fulfillment and benefit to the community. This, I think, is very much in keeping with Japanese views on creativity.

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