

Informational text, Item #8: “Creativity”

Creativity

Schools must build the conditions for creativity to flourish. To simply have an atmosphere where students are encouraged to express themselves freely and then hope for the best is not enough. What else is needed? How can schools unleash imagination and curiosity? They can do it by making an effort to teach in a better way: instead of teaching for imitation, they can do it by teaching for meaning. Children come to school relying upon their ability to imitate. They have done so since infancy. How else do children learn to walk, to talk, to play? They learn everything by imitating! But in schools we continue to ask children to imitate because we tend to teach by example. So, when we ask children to be *creative* in school, they continue to imitate. It is only when students are led to be dissatisfied with imitating that they will be likely to become creative.

The thing is that to do this one must engage the child’s imagination. Strategies can be chosen to overcome imitation; those strategies must engage students’ imagination. Graham Wallas describes the developmental stages of creative thinking as: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. For example, students might engage in *preparation* in ecology by “mess-finding” in a small pile of garbage that they brought to school. While students catalogue their findings they would pose questions about what they were seeing: what materials are thrown away and, in what percentage? What happens in the decomposition process? And how does the container relate to the contents? By mulling over what they have seen, students are *incubating* their ideas. The students would choose their groups based on the problems they formulate or *illuminate*: how could we package products so that everything would decompose? If we changed the packaging, would garbage then take up less room? Or could we recycle garbage into useful products? What kind of products? As students engage their imaginations in solution finding and as they verify their ideas as workable, students will certainly have moved beyond imitation. They will have moved to creativity.

The implication seems clear; creativity must be fostered in all students by all those who influence our students’ development. All must take responsibility for understanding the complexity of creativity and for knowing how classroom environments and teaching for meaning combine to allow imaginations to be engaged and creativity to thrive. After all, “All of us want to know how our world works: why a piece of music is beautiful to one person and cacophonous to another, how engines are able to make cars move, why green leaves turn brown and helium balloons stay aloft, or how new languages develop. Living means perpetually searching for meaning. Schools need to be places that keep this search alive.” (Brooks)