

Cottle, M., (2020). 'Creative pedagogy in the primary school: making space for agency in a highly controlled environment', ECRC Webinar Series 2020 - Paying attention: Babies, Young Children and Environments. University of Roehampton, 14 July 2020. Froebel College, University of Roehampton: Early Childhood Research Centre (ECRC).

Abstract

There is an enduring public interest in the perceived social benefits of creativity and the role of education in developing it, and creativity has become a focus for education policy makers in recent years, both nationally and internationally (Spielman, 2020; OECD, 2019). Due to the long and complex history of cross-disciplinary creativity research, it is not easy to define 'creativity' or associated terms such as 'creative pedagogy' but the latter tends to involve open-ended, imaginative approaches, focusing on innovation, flexibility and autonomy. However, these elements do not sit comfortably with the managerialist strategies and technicist models of curriculum that have been imposed on English schools for the past four decades, requiring teachers and children to conform and perform in specific, measured ways.

This paper draws on findings from an in-depth case study of an English primary school which examined how teachers defined and enacted creativity over the course of an entire academic year and the tensions and dilemmas they experienced as part of this process. The research combines an ethnographic design with a Bourdieusian theoretical framework. In this paper, I present the concept of 'pedagogical habitus' to describe the sets of 'embodied cognitive, dispositional, and corporeal pedagogical practices' that are added to a teacher's primary habitus over time (Feldman, 2016: 71). I consider the value and nature of some of the teachers' 'creative dispositions' within this frame. Although dispositions varied, they were often generative, providing opportunities for teachers to engage with their own sense of transformational possibility and to support learners to do the same. However, they had to balance their creative aspirations with the performative dispositions that they were required to adopt. In this school, the performative aspects tended to dominate, constraining collective efforts to embed 'creative curriculum' and shaping creative dispositions in different ways. The research findings demonstrate that creative pedagogy is possible within a constrained context such as this, but it should not be the sole responsibility of individual teachers or even individual schools. Without a more consistent and concerted policy focus, there is the danger that creative practices may become 'islands of innovation...in a surrounding sea of traditional practices' (Tubin et al., 2003: 140).

Video available on request to m.cottle@roehampton.ac.uk