Should early childhood practitioners be prioritising children's creativity?

Creativity: What is it?

Creativity has a unique meaning to every individual and therefore it can be difficult to define. Creativity also has many different modes such as; dance, music, singing and any forms of imagination. Faulkner and Coates (2011) state that '…creativity can be expressed through multiple narrative forms such as 'socio-dramatic play, music, art and dance.' and through the 'use of the imagination.' (p7). Bruce, (2011:p12) defines creativity as 'doing something different, new and original…' which reflects my own definition of "a way an individual expresses themselves through different experiences, and having the freedom of choice to make something new and unique". Azad, (2020). On the other hand, Sir Ken Robinson, defines creativity as 'the process of having original ideas that have value', (2004:TEDtalk) thus implying that for creativity to be present, the original ideas must be valuable to an individual rather than just presenting a way of expressing themselves and/or creating something new. For example, a drawing which has no value beyond the process of its manufacture would not be considered to be creative in the view of Robinson. However, based on an individual's experiences and own perspectives, definitions of creativity can be fluid and changed regularly to reflect new knowledge.

Is creativity important?

Robinson (2004:TEDtalk) suggests that 'creativity now, is as important in education as literacy, and we should treat it with the same status.' Child, (2018) asserts that 'It is now widely recognised that creativity is as important as literacy or numeracy, and that allowing ourselves the time, space and freedom to be creative is essential…'. Suggesting that creativity is seen as highly important in education, both in the past and present. This statement, aligns within the Characteristics of Effective Learning (CoEL) (Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, Department for Education, 2017). An element of the characteristics of effective

learning, is 'playing and exploring' – (finding out and exploring). Within this element, it states the need for children to be able to explore and find new ways of doing things. Bruce (2011) suggests that 'doing something different, new and original is central to creativity.'(p12). This suggestion is evident within the characteristics of effective learning and therefore allowing children the time and space to create something new and original, will support with promoting creativity within childhood.

Robinson, states that 'we don't grow into creativity, we grow out of it. Or rather we get educated out of it.' (2004:TEDtalk). This statement, can be directly related to our current education system. Which from my perspective, instead of promoting creativity, focuses primarily on the subjects which are perceived to be "more important" such as Mathematics and English. In relation to this, Mohammed (2018) states that 'Education has become so test-driven... that creativity is being extinguished in children and adults alike.' (p16). In regards to early years, children are expected to achieve their early learning goals before transitioning to the National Curriculum in England (2013:DfE). Although, it is primarily expected that children reach and achieve their early learning goals in their prime areas of learning and development – which involves literacy and mathematics.

As children progress from the Early Years Foundation Stage (2017:DfE) to the National Curriculum in England (2013: Department for Education) , they are often told that there is only one right answer – does this then impact on them throughout the rest of their study? I would suggest that it does in-fact have a negative impact on any future study they choose to undertake. How does this relate to creativity? It relates directly to creativity because children who are encouraged to be creative, come up with something new and unique and therefore prove that there is not always one right answer or one right way of completing a task. Mohammed (2018) states that 'when children do not have the opportunity to engage with and experience creativity early on, it will be an impossible task to get them to do so in later schooling years, further education, higher education and...in the world of work.' (p18).

In addition, it could be argued that creativity is being lost in transition. By this, I mean that the technology available in the 21st century is causing creativity to be forgotten and under-prioritised in childhood. Mohammed (2018), suggests that living '...on the brink

of a technological revolution…will fundamentally alter the way we live, work and relate to one another'. (p14). Arguably, it could be said that technology has the potential to increase the need for creativity, by needing individuals to create and publish new applications. Sing Lee *et al* (2012) assert that this by stating that 'creatvity and cognition can be supported by technology.' (p131). However, ultimately, Mohammed implies that technology will change the way that individuals view their creative minds. For example, children are given tablets to watch videos and play games. Instead, we should be giving children resources to use their imaginations and create their own games. The same can be said within education, IPads are now used as part of education. From experience, I've identified that children are given IPads to play educational games which support their phonics. However, in my view, children could benefit more from practical tasks to engage with phonics, rather than having "screen time".

What about policy?

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework (2017:Department for Education) involves creativity through the development area of 'expressive arts and design'. However, more recently, the consultation changes for the EYFS (2019:DfE) provides small changes to the early learning goals for this area of learning and development. The EYFS (2017:DfE), puts emphasis on the importance of targeting the prime areas of development. This means, that often specific areas such as expressive arts and design, are often deemed "less important" – this can then result in professionals having a negative view/attitude in relation to creativity and its importance. Craft, A (2003) suggests that regardless of the 'growth in emphasis and value placed on encouraging creativity [it is in] stark contrast with the government policy prevalent from the late 1980's onward.' (p113-127). After examining the EYFS (2017:DfE), it is observed that 'expressive arts and design' is listed as the last area of learning and development within the document. Suggesting that this area of development is not as important as the other areas. Reflecting on the definitions of Bruce (2011) and Robinson (2004), it is evident that in order for creativity to be present in learning, children need to have the freedom to make their own choices and use their own initiative.

However, section 1.8 and of the EYFS (2017:DfE) states that 'as children grow older…it is expected that the balance will gradually shift towards more activities led by adults' (p9). This implies, that as children begin to grow older and progress in their learning and development, they will be given less opportunities to unique learning experiences. In addition, it is suggested that as children transition into the National Curriculum in England (2013:DfE) from the EYFS (2017:DfE) they need to begin preparing for 'more formal learning in year 1' (p9). Unfortunately, this means that creativity is lost, as children begin to follow more structured lessons with a unanimous end goal. Within the consultation changes, it states that the 'depth of their [children's] experiences are fundamental to their progress.' (p22). Implying that creativity is now being identified as having a positive impact upon progress holistically.

Shade and Garrett Shade, state that schools have 'a long way to go as far as acknowledging, fostering, and encouraging creativity in students' (2016). I propose that this is as a result of the policies, framework and legislations which professionals have a responsibility to abide to. In comparison, Loris Malaguzzi the founder of the Reggio Emilia Approach (1946) in New Zealand, viewed teachers and students to be equal partners. Implying that professionals and children are equal and can both provide the other with learning opportunities. Macblain (2018) explains that within the Reggio Emilia Approach 'questioning is used as a technique for developing the children's understanding' (p89). From my perspective, this suggests that children are asked questions to develop their thinking, but it is also beneficial to the adult, who is learning from the child as their thinking develops. In addition, I suggest that the Reggio Emilia Approach (1946) works in a way which is fully supportive of children, and acts to promote the child's interests in order to aid their learning and development. From this, I propose that the Reggio Emilia Approach (1946) supports creativity in a way that the EYFS (2017:DfE) does not. This is because; it allows children the opportunity to experiment with their own childhood experiences – through child-initiated activities which therefore empowers children in taking control of their own learning and gaining the confidence in themselves for further development. However, it is clear that many practitioners using the EYFS (2017:DfE) also take steps to ensure that they are empowering children and therefore their

practice would correspond with the Reggio Emilia Approach. This approach also gives adults the opportunity to learn from children and support with the understanding and developing of their thinking and the modes of creativity are much more appealing to children than formal lessons. Which results, in creativity being supported throughout the EYFS (2017:DfE) and into the National Curriculum in England (2013:DfE) rather than withdrawing this for formal lesson preparation. Whilst acknowledging that this approach may not be beneficial for all children, another approach could be taken to address the individual needs of children in the setting – as these will always need to be taken into account as a priority.

It is important to consider, that by following strict curricula, professionals may not often get the opportunity to give attention to creativity as an important area of learning and development. resulting in creativity not being sufficiently promoted in early childhood. However, I argue that professionals could easily implement creativity into the curriculum and within the prime/core areas of learning which would therefore, enable children to take control of their own learning by choosing the way in which they learn.

Should we be prioritising creativity?

Finding evidence to support what early childhood practitioners should be doing in their practice is hard to provide. Therefore, the question of if we should prioritise creativity is one with various answers. Every individual, will have their own perspective of what best practice is, and what is most important for children in their care. From my perspective, and the research provided throughout this article, I suggest that prioritising creativity is imperative to supporting children in their learning. However, it is important to acknowledge that in some cases, professionals do not have the time, nor feel that they have the funding to be able to provide creative activities for children regularly.

I argue, that funding should not cause any issues in allowing children the opportunity to be creative. Children are able to use their imaginations and therefore providing ample time to "role play" would be supporting their creative minds. Duffy, (2006) states that 'by encouraging creativity and imagination we are promoting

children's ability to explore and comprehend their world and increasing their opportunities to make new connections and reach new understandings.' (p9). In addition, resources to be creative do not require funding. For example, children are able to use resources found outside (leaves, sticks, rocks) to create a piece in the style of artist Andy Goldsworthy. Also known as the "loose part theory" proposed by Simon Nicholson (1971). This, would not only support children's creativity, but would provide children with the choice of resources that they would like to use (subject to sufficient risk assessments of resources found). Duffy (2006) further asserts that 'pre-printed, adult directed and mass-produced artwork does not lead to creativity' (p11). Doing art-work in the style of Andy Goldsworthy, allows children the opportunity to create, and re-create something original using a variety of resources which can be re-used multiple times to change their designs. This type of activity, would be promoting creativity as children can use both their imagination to create an original design, as well as choosing their own resources to use making it different to other children.

In conclusion, it is evident that creativity is important in supporting children in their learning and development. Should early years practitioners be prioritising children's creativity? Based upon perspectives discussed throughout this article, yes it should. Not only does creativity support children's learning and development, it also enables them to be able to be open-minded, expand their thinking and explore new opportunities. 'Creative thinking is dependent upon imagination and in turn imagination will extend and develop creative thinking.' Johnson and Watts (2018:p6). Adults are able to support and prioritise creativity by making simple changes and/or adaptations to their practice and the environment. Johnson and Watts (2018) state that 'children need to be in the right environment to be creative…' (p16). Early childhood practitioners will be able to support this element of creativity, by providing a safe and secure environment for children to be creative and therefore will be prioritising creativity. However, I argue that in order for creativity to be prioritised, early childhood practitioners need to identify what their perspective is on the importance of creativity, and then implement this within their practice accordingly.

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