



Children artist hands painting multi color with her fingers

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Creative Awakenings: Enabling Transformation and Enchantment

By Christopher Clouder

CEO, European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education

And Director, Botin Platform for Innovation in Education

The arts are quite simply a magic key for some children and within the hands of committed teachers of the arts they are the key to ALL children. Not only do they open the mind of the learner, they then reveal a vast cornucopia of endless delight, challenge and opportunity."

(Sir Tim Brighouse, Visiting Professor at the Institute of Education. London)

It is, of course, stating the obvious and a truism that being creative lies at the roots of our human nature. But it is such a familiar part of our inner and outer lives we can easily overlook this. As a young girl Helga Weiz witnessed the insidious progress of the holocaust in Prague. Her family were incarcerated in the transit camp of Terezin before being dispatched to the extermination camp of Auschwitz in 1944. On arrival there, pretending to be older than she was, she lied about her age and was sent to the forced labour barracks and not the gas chambers. This enabled her to survive the war and become a successful Polish artist. She still remembers her father's words before he was parted from them and perished in the camp "Whatever happens, we must remain human so that we do not die like cattle." which led her to say in a recent interview "And I think that the will to create was an expression of the will to live, and survive, as human beings."ⁱ

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Conductor of the Simon Bolivar orchestra

When we speak of "creativity" we are touching on an essential aspect of human nature that can reveal itself even in the most unpropitious of situations. It is creativity that is the foundation of our languages and our capacity to communicate, it evolves through our cultures and the richness that they bring to our daily lives, it underlies our relationships to

each other and the social structure we inhabit, it enables us to develop the utensils and tools that give us mastery over the material world. Human creativity surrounds us in our perspectives of the world, in art and science, in the narratives by which we understand our changing identities and ourselves, and in the fabric of everyday objects that are all originally sourced from collective or individual creativity. Museums are salutary reminders of this Promethean gift without which being human is impossible. They exhibit the infinite variety of societies and cultures across the globe from which we can learn and be inspired. Simultaneously they reveal the spiritual nature that we all share which can, potentially, build bridges between our differences *"Attending there let us absorb the cultures of nations, and dissolve into our judgment all their codes."*ⁱⁱ Our creative ability as a source of our living together and social structures shines through in the ancient stone tools from Kenya 2.6 million years ago, or the 42,000 year old cave paintings of Cantabria, or the positive changes wrought on disadvantaged and excluded children's lives by participating in the Simón Bolívar Orchestra. As Gustava Dudamel, the youthful conductor of the Simón Bolívar Orchestra, enthusiastically declared recently *"It has not just changed the lives of the individuals involved– but also of their families, the communities around the children. And it changed because they have access to beauty, because they have access to sensitivity, because they have access to creativity, they have access to discipline. We are talking here about the elements of a good citizen."*ⁱⁱⁱ

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Creativity is about change and innovation, fashioning the world anew, and each generation contributes its own insights and gifts to this process. It is incumbent on every older generation to respect, support and elicit these gifts for and from the young, and our educational systems can be geared to do just that if insights into human development and human nature lie at their core. Children are co-creators of our world, not just small bystanders whose involvement we at best just tolerate. The learning sciences, that have become a new field of enquiry over the last decade, have shown that without the recognition of this fact, we are doing both them and ourselves a disservice. Ready traditional answers to pedagogical questions that fail to respect the fundamental need for freedom of enquiry only propagate the mistakes of the past.

Creativity can lie in our small actions as well as larger ones and being socially creative is not such an enormous challenge as it might at first appear. At one point Gandhi was about to hurriedly board a train and in so doing one of his sandals fell off his foot onto the tracks. He responded in a split second by throwing his second sandal to join the first, rather than scrabbling around trying to recover it. Somebody else would benefit by having a pair of sandals rather than just one. This is a creative mind in action, spontaneous, wise and socially aware, and of the type that the world is increasingly in need. Our task as educators is to uncover and celebrate such examples be they great or small, so that we can all be

enhanced and encouraged by them. Creativity and art are not just elitist enterprises either. Everybody is innately creative even if that is not given external recognition. We can all create worlds in our imagination. *"My mother was a poor woman, who had nothing to give me but poetry – that was all she owned, all she knew, her inheritance from countless forgotten foremothers, from forgotten valleys and fjords: verses and cadences which seemed to have been woven by the wind... And the children absorbed them, and the cadences merged with their playthings, and they might be found by chance in a seashell when everyone thought they were lost; and then they had finally become objects"*^{iv}

Childhood is evolving faster than ever before and how we work with children must evolve too. The key concepts of resilience, personalised learning, life-long learning, social capital and cohesion, social and emotional education, creativity, responsible citizenship, health-promoting education, peace education and sustainability all need addressing in any 21st century educational organisation that is worthy of that name.

"We must relate to each other whenever possible, equally we need to help students proceed from recognition to admiration, and from admiration to the enduring desire to pursue truth, beauty and goodness."^v This passage from Howard Gardner's ground-breaking book on multiple intelligences highlights what is necessary if the educational challenges of the future are to be met. Childhood is evolving faster than ever before and how we work with children must evolve too. The key concepts of resilience, personalised learning, life-long learning, social capital and cohesion, social and emotional education, creativity, responsible citizenship, health-promoting education, peace education and sustainability all need addressing in any 21st century educational organisation that is worthy of that name. It might sound a tall order but it is perfectly feasible given the will. The encouraging factor is that these questions cross all cultural and political borders and learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to work with others is now, at least, part of the universal education vocabulary. In an age of insecurity we need our creative capacities but a common reaction is to standardise or flee back to, an often invented, past. We need to have courage to move into the new and to find ways that meet the needs of this time.

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Creativity is about risk and entering new territories, yet for most children being cared for and secure is an essential condition for them to embark on their own imaginative journeys. Children whose parents provided psychological safety and freedom developed creative potential in adolescence more fully than other children. When children's physical health, wellbeing and safety are at stake such considerations must naturally come foremost. But when these sentiments are used as an inappropriate excuse for denying cultural activities, innovation and change within a school curriculum the child's imaginative faculties can be

stultified. According to some researchers we are in fact facing a creativity crisis. *"The significant decrease in (physical) strengths scores since 1990 indicates that over the last 20 years children have become less emotionally expressive, less energetic, less talkative and verbally expressive, less humorous, less imaginative, less unconventional, less lively and passionate, less perceptive, less apt to connect seemingly irrelevant things, less synthesizing and less likely to see things from a different angle."*^{vi} This was one of the conclusions of a creative measure analysis done by Kyung Hee Kim on data from almost 300,000 American adults and children. Although such research from the USA is not necessarily replicable everywhere else the USA has served as a bellwether for future trends for most of the western world and beyond. In her comments on her work Kim has pointed out that the USA *"has served as a beacon for creative hearts and adventurous spirits from before its inception to the present.... To strengthen children's creativity, parents and teachers must not only find or develop programmes or activities with new techniques, but must first change environments that inhibit creativity. The best creative techniques, or the strongest creative programmes, cannot compensate for a culture that crushes creativity."*^{vii}

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Our contention in this volume is that the arts enrich life and by giving children an arts-rich curriculum and good quality art experiences they are better able to fulfil their potential, enjoy mental and physical well being and bring these benefits to many others. This is not a new insight but one that is increasingly relevant especially with the advent over the last few decades of a more conscious application of the rights of each child and their entitlement. Among the many recent studies and research projects that support this hypothesis is *The Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth (2012)* which uses data from four large-scale longitudinal studies running from 1988 to 2008. The conclusion, among others, of the report was that overall young people with low socio-economic status who received an arts-rich education demonstrated better academic achievement than their low-arts-engaged peers. Eighteen year olds who had intensive arts experiences were more likely to show greater levels of civic-minded behaviour than 18 year olds who did not. Students who had intensive arts experiences in high school were three times more likely than students who lacked those experiences to earn a bachelor's degree.^{viii} Cultural poverty holds people back from making their just contribution to society and prevents them from becoming what they could be. Early years settings, schools and cultural institutions all have a role to play in redressing this imbalance and these injustices and are better able to do this when learning from each other and actively cooperating.

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All art institutions have a role to play in supporting the development and flowering of the creative activity of children and many have programmes that are enlightened, energetic and well thought through. The enthusiasm and joy engendered by these among children are familiar to all educators. Arts institution facilitators can employ a different teaching style than that practiced in a school through the use of objects and images. A different set of relationships between pupils and between pupils and adults can be developed than the relationships within schools and they can be places where children feel they can take risks within a secure environment. Arts institutions can nurture a sense of community, shared history and cultural values. Whether museum, concert hall, art gallery, cinema, theatre, sports facilities, cultural spaces or well constructed play areas creativity can find its sources of inspiration and renewal there. A work of art should introduce something that did not exist before and to accomplish that is everybody's birthright. As Goethe said *"Artists have to see spirits, then afterwards everyone sees them."* And all human beings are artists in the art of being human and can thereby give purpose to their lives.

The art of play is the spring from which the other arts flow and so to build on this arts education in schools should have equal weight, status, value and importance as all the other subjects within the curriculum and also requires equal resources and provision.

However there are prerequisites. The design and management of such spaces needs to have the children in mind and nature of the child has to be respected with its particular needs. One of those needs is the freedom to move because children's creativity is not just a matter of imaginative thoughts but is also bound up with movement and play. In addition children also have the right to be self-directed learners. In a study where children were fitted with accelerometers for the school day it was found that children aged 7-8 spent a higher proportion of their time in activity of moderate-vigorous intensity in play sessions with toys and boxes (61%) than they did in Physical Education (38%), school break (47%) or lunch time (36%).^{ix} This has implications for classroom practice in primary education in that children can learn more effectively when they can also be active and creative. Play is not something to be just relegated to the playground or free time but is rather an activity that allows children to become immersed and enthusiastically engaged in what they are learning, find the sources of their own self-direction, enjoy and have zest for their school time and develop their individual mental, emotional and physical capacities in a healthy fashion. The art of play is the spring from which the other arts flow and so to build on this

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Children do best in an aesthetically pleasing environment. The spaces in which children are taught can add to the value of learning by sensitive, child-conscious and aesthetic design. An emphasis on colour, light and close interaction with nature are integral in nurturing children's creative energies. Lessons can have an aesthetic potential in themselves and just like a fascinating narrative they can elicit wonder, explore the sensuous pleasures of language, and thrill to the unexpected twists and surprises fashioned around a plot. Then teaching, like art, is imbued with passion and meaning. Every child and young person has the right to equality of access to the arts and to experience diverse practice, a wide range of settings, a sense of self-fulfilment and bringing pleasure to others.

Children, when creative, can be challenging but also bring new perspectives to the adults around them. We must expect divergent and other thinking skills, and allow for experimentation, trial and error, playfulness and humour. A colleague who was a kindergarten teacher related that she had a little girl in her group who would come up to her everyday bringing a large piece of paper with her energetic scribbles on it, scramble up onto her lap and ask her to read her "story", which she did for some days until at one point the teacher asked her to read the "story" for herself. "I cannot read French" was the reply as the girl skipped gaily away. Parents and teachers need to understand creativity in order to help their children preserve their natural creativity, which is where the roots of creativity in our societies lie. Creativity is where imagination and reality meet and it is the gate to both our emotions and understanding. This should be one of our most prized attributes and when we are awake to this we can better serve our children, our societies and our globe.

This chapter has been written by the international focus group "Creativity in Education" of the *Botin Platform for Innovation in Education* that met for the first time in October of 2009 and has produced a report on Creativity in society and especially in education which can be read at <http://www.fundacionbotin.org/innovation-education-platform-good-morning-creativity.htm>. The main focus of the Platform's work is on ideas that could form an all-round education that underpins healthy growth from early childhood onwards. What we mean by all-round education is that the process of intellectual and academic training should go hand in hand with physical, psychological and social development in order to achieve an optimal level of well-being, balance, and personal and social contentment. Here the creative arts play a vital role, including creative approaches to teaching science. This work is dialogical in nature and our findings suggest that there is no ready-made transferable recipe for this all-around approach to creative teaching and learning in schools and schooling. Hence the many perspectives covered in this book that nevertheless cohere as a picture of our human potential towards creating a better world.

In the process of these studies we found that 'creativity' was a core issue in every case

study and was essential in any initiative towards renewal of practice and new thinking in education. In order to be effective, each institution and learning community has to produce its own methods, collaborative structures and forms of practical implementation that are relevant to its children, families, locality and culture. In other words, creativity comes from within. Changing educational perspectives and bringing these insights into practical application has never been an easy task. The teaching profession has a propensity to hold on to what is known, predictable and secure and being creative involves an element of risk. However the enthusiastic and widespread positive reception we have received for our work so far is heartening, and as we progress further we will be monitoring closely its effects, encouraging further responses and looking for other forms of educational renaissance that we can embrace. All this in the hope that we can bring something worthwhile to the world's children and in so doing improve ourselves as educators and creative human beings. Our task is to discover and celebrate examples from across the world, be they great or small, so that we can all be enhanced and encouraged by them. There is no effective creativity without communication and so our mission is to serve as best we can in this endeavor.

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Christopher Clouder

Christopher Clouder FRSA is the founding Director of the Botin Platform for Innovation in Education, based in Santander in Spain, which promotes social and emotional education and creative learning in schools across the world. He has had a long teaching career working with adolescents and in teacher education. In 1997 he co-founded the Alliance for Childhood, a global network of advocates for the quality of childhood. From 1990 to 2012 he was CEO of the European Council for Steiner Waldorf Education, speaking for 680 European Steiner schools in 27 countries. He gives keynote lectures at conferences, universities and teacher education courses internationally on educational matters, play and imagination in childhood, challenging contemporary issues around childhood, creativity and social-emotional education. He has published numerous books and writes articles on education and childhood and works with policy makers.