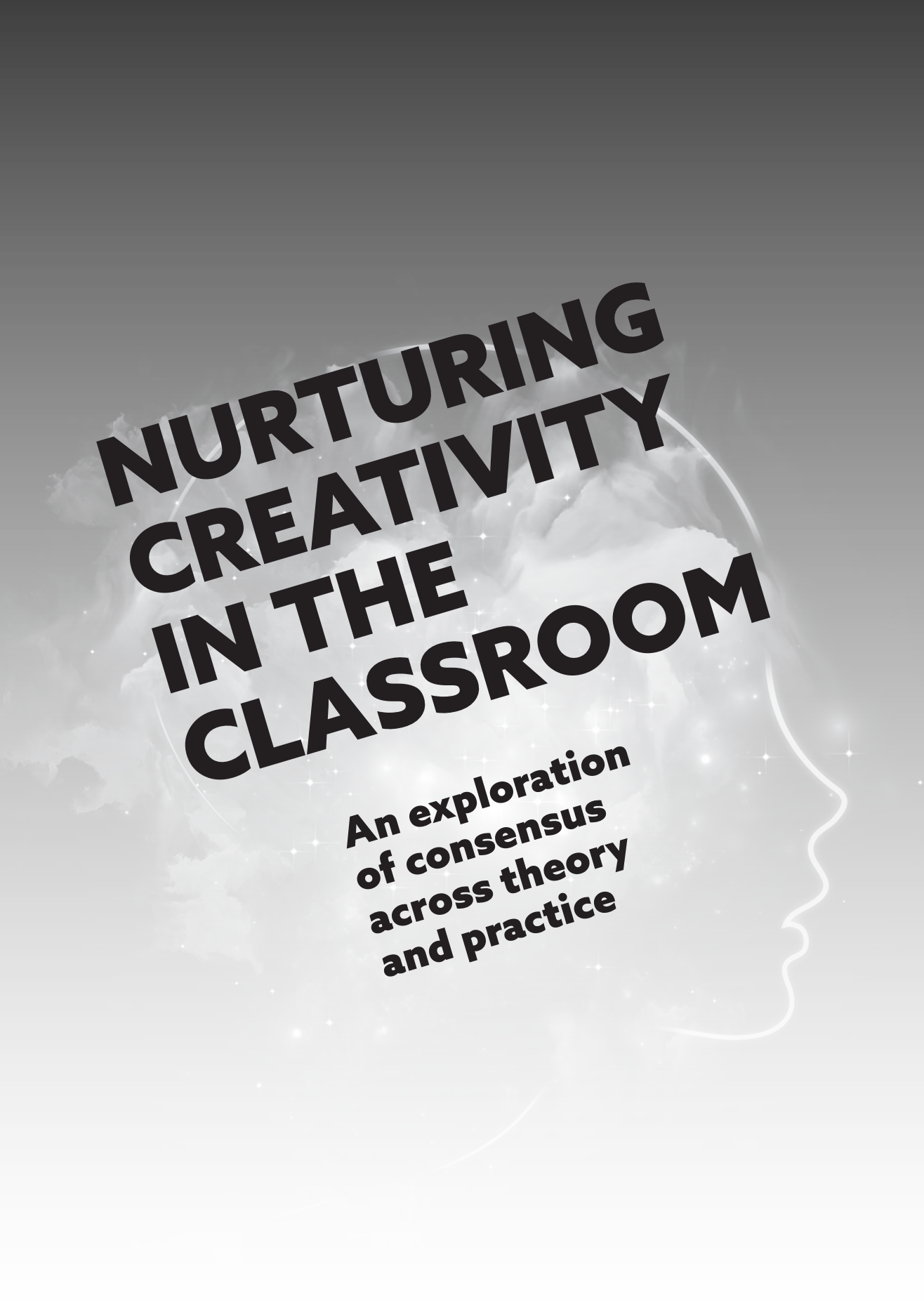
NURTURING CREATIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM

An exploration of consensus across theory and practice



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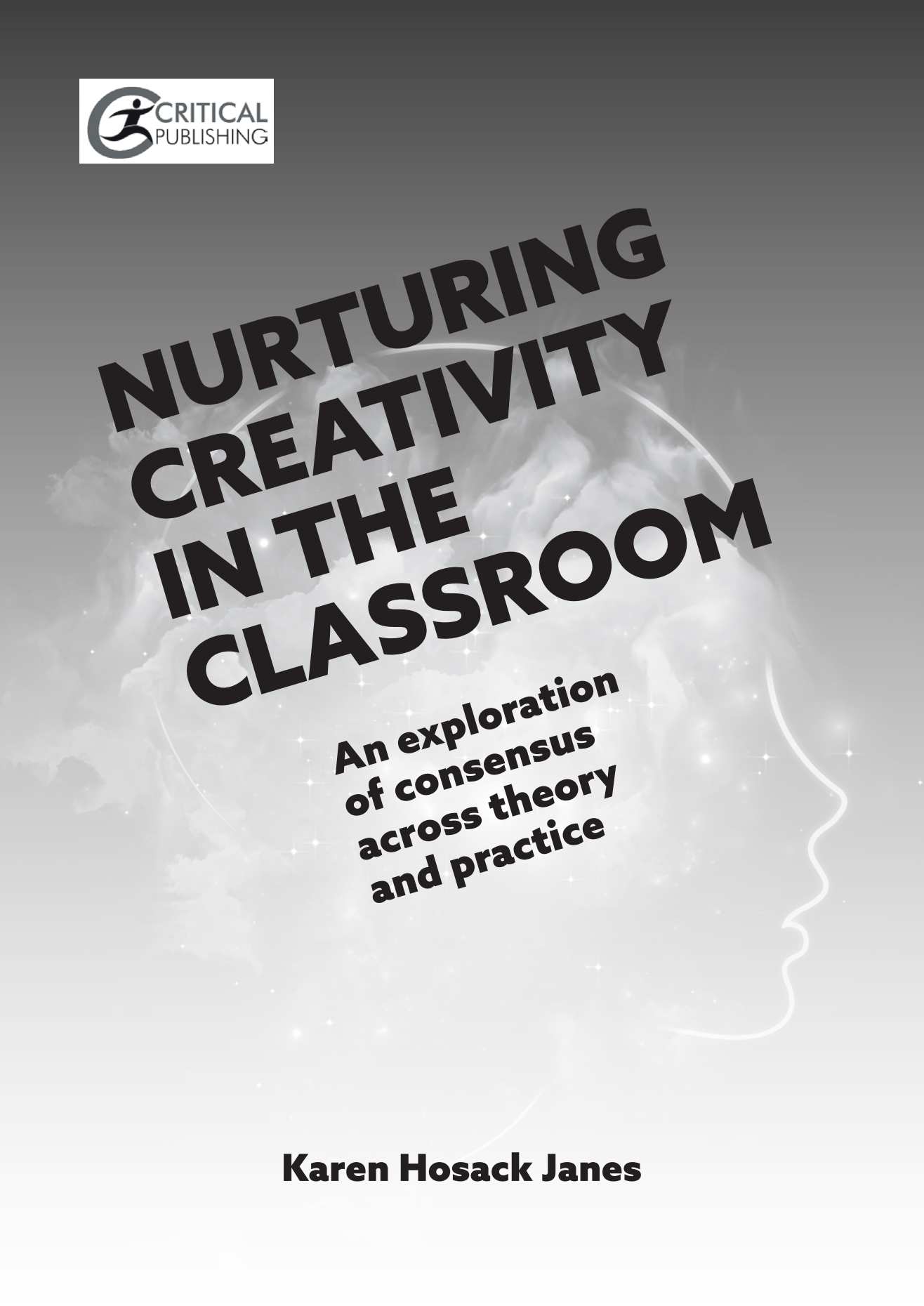

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Also, throughout my life I have been extremely fortunate to be surrounded by nurturing, creative people. Therefore, I would like to extend my gratitude and love to all my family, friends and colleagues who have made valuing the arts and playing with ideas an everyday collaborative reality for me.

Dedication

For Lawrence,
whose creativity brings us huge joy

About the author

Karen Hosack Janes

Karen Hosack Janes is an education consultant, specialising in pedagogy that nurtures creative development. She has worked at a senior level in the education and museums and galleries sectors, and now supports teachers and teacher training students in designing activities that maximise learners' creative agency. Formerly head of schools at the National Gallery, London, she has run education programmes and visited numerous schools across the UK, enabling her to see first-hand how creativity is taught and the challenges teachers encounter. This book contains a wealth of practical advice, from Karen and many others, to help in the development of your own and your pupils' personal creativity.

Introduction

Why creativity is difficult to define, and why it's important to try

Do you consider yourself to be creative? Whether you do or not, to answer the question you will need to have a perception of what being creative means. Do you, for example, associate it with certain activities or particular subject areas? If so, which? Do you think being creative is something positive or negative?

If you are a teacher, like me, you might find the last question a little strange because, as educators, we are regularly told that creativity is a '*good thing*' (Coate and Boulos, 2012, p 129). Indeed, the national curriculum for England (DfE, 2014) aims to '*engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement*' (p 6). However, agreement on what creativity looks like in the classroom is contested. For instance, a study looking at teachers' perceptions of creativity (Kettler et al, 2018) found that behaviours such as '*taking chances*' or being '*impulsive*' and '*autonomous*' were thought by some teachers to be '*undesirable*' (p 167). Yet, opportunities encouraging these behaviours, like giving pupils the freedom to take risks and to have the space and time to explore and experiment with ideas, are recognised by many to be essential for imaginations to open and innovation to take place (for example, Boden, 1990; Craft, 2000; NACCCE, 1999).

Perhaps being creative, and enabling creativity to flourish, therefore, is to do with our personal perspective on what it means to learn and to teach. An apprentice model prevalent in many professions, including the arts, where the apprentice perfects their own skills by copying the techniques and style of a master craftsperson – such as in the artisan workshops of Western Europe dating back before the Renaissance, or in the creative traditions of China and Japan – is some people's idea of a creative education. For others, a more expressive and freer environment is thought to be conducive to developing creative skills. Or, depending on what is being taught, somewhere in-between these two

descriptions is believed by others to provide the most effective conditions for nurturing creativity.

Finding a common language for creativity

So, clarifying what creativity looks like is tricky, which makes finding a common language to talk about it difficult. Its complex nature means that the word 'creative' can be referred to as a noun, where it can take the form of creative products, or as a verb in terms of cause, effect and interaction, also as a cluster of psychological factors within individual people, or as a congenial environment in which a degree of risk-taking may be tolerated (Cropley, 2001). When the Cambridge Primary Review (an enquiry into the English education system in 2010) put out a call for views on educational practice, submissions from individuals and organisations included the word 'creativity' to refer to '*individual qualities, aims, processes or outcomes*'. The final report comments that '*creativity … appeared to mean taking risks or just doing things differently*' and '*referred variously to the child's creativity, teacher creativity and the "creative" subjects like art, music or drama*' (Alexander, 2010, p 226).

The absence of a commonly held idea about what creativity looks like is similarly demonstrated in a national schools' survey undertaken by Arts Council England (ACE, 2020) at the start of the global coronavirus pandemic. In order '*to gather indicative information from schools about the potential needs and creative aspirations for their pupils from autumn 2020 onwards*' (p 2) teachers were asked to rank from a list of six approaches to home learning which they thought '*worked best during Lockdown*' (p 4). The list included: '*Creative activities*', '*project-based activities*', '*research/enquiry-based activities*', '*challenge-based activities*', '*normal timetable delivered virtually*' and '*revision based activities*'. However, by presenting the approaches as distinct from one another, the impression given is that '*project-based*', '*research/enquiry-based*' and '*challenge-based*' activities are to be considered discrete activities, and also that these are not '*creative activities*'. The separation implies no overlap. Perhaps, in this case, the term '*creative activities*' is intended to refer to 'creative' subjects like art, music and drama, as mentioned in the *Cambridge Primary Review*? If so, this could be considered a narrow view of creativity endorsed by Arts Council England.

Creativity as a single concept

A definition that attempts to comprehend creativity as a single concept was developed in 1999 in the UK by the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE):

> *Imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value.*
>
> (NACCCE, 1999, p 30)

The committee was set up by the UK government:

> *To make recommendations to the Secretaries of State on the creative and cultural development of young people through formal and informal education: to take stock of current provision and to make proposals for principles, policies and practice.*
>
> (p 2)

The findings of the commission were published in a report titled All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education (NACCCE, 1999). Claims include that creativity promotes '*the freedom to innovate and take risks*' (p 10), that '*creativity always involves originality*' and that '*historic originality*' (which the report defines as work that is original in terms of anyone's previous output in a particular field) is '*more likely to emerge from a system which encourages the creative capacities of everyone*' (p 32). Although the enquiry had an arts focus, the report emphasises that dichotomies between curriculum subjects are unhelpful, and that '*creative and cultural education are not just subjects in the curriculum, they are the general function of education*' (p 6). In the US, a corresponding commission with similar conclusions was conducted by the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (PCAH, 2011). This report was published under the title Reinvesting in Arts Education: Winning America's Future through Creative Schools. Recommendations from both the UK and US commissions led to substantial funding being made available to arts education initiatives at the beginning of the millennium; a level of funding that has since continued to fall.

The NACCCE definition of creativity has been cited in the rationales of a wide number of UK government initiatives, policies and reports (for example, CCE, 2007, 2009, 2012; DfES, 2003; MLA, 2005; Ofsted, 2010; QCA, 2004). One of these includes guidance notes for teachers published by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) titled *Creativity: Find It, Promote It* (2004). The NACCCE definition is acknowledged and echoed in the publication by the labelling of the '*Characteristics of creativity*' as '*Imagination and purpose*', '*Originality*' and '*Value*' (p 7). The resource goes on to state that '*creativity improves pupils' self-esteem, motivation and achievement*' by making pupils

> *more interested in discovering things for themselves; more open to new ideas; keen to work with others; and willing to work beyond lesson time when pursuing an idea or vision.*
>
> (p 9)

It asserts that teachers are

> *likely to see pupils being creative if they see them questioning and challenging; making connections and seeking relationships; envisioning what might be; exploring ideas; and reflecting critically on ideas, actions and outcomes.*
>
> (p 10)

But, despite the fact that there is obvious merit in trying to summarise creativity as a generic single concept, there has been some criticism about 'creative skills' being a

'*catch-all*' expression (Sefton-Green et al, 2011, p 2) and '*something of a cliché*' (Alexander, 2010, p 226). Coupled with this, the positive impact of creativity advocated in these, and similar, documents tend not to be supported with high-quality empirical evidence. Let us look at this issue now.

Research into creativity

There is a difference between measuring and assessing educational impact. Measurement is to do with descriptions of quantity, with things being measured against something else. Assessment is to do with appraising the value of something, sometimes of something that has been measured (Eisner, 2002). Common problems when attempting to measure creativity include establishing specific objectives to evaluate. This is especially tricky for qualities that might be elusive, or for evaluating objectives that evolve over time, or for outcomes that are unexpected. Because of this, quantitative methodologies making causal links between creativity and subjects easier to test (such as those scored in standardised tests) are often adopted by researchers looking to 'prove' the impact of 'creative' activities. But this approach is even knottier. For example, the academic attainment results of young people known to have attended workshops run as part of the Creative Partnerships programme (a UK government scheme from 2002 to 2011) were compared to similar young people nationally that did not attend a Creative Partnership project (Durbin et al, 2010; Kendall, 2008). The methodology, however, is problematic for several reasons. First, the Creative Partnerships projects tended to be short-term, and therefore isolating the impact of sometimes one-off experiences on test results from other influential factors is impossible. Second, as pointed out by Sefton-Green (2007) in a think piece considering evidence gathered by the Creative Partnerships programme, the methodology does not reflect the primary aim of the programme: '*to foster creativity in schools with a view to creating long-term structural change across the education system as a whole*' (ACE, 2007, p 3). And finally, the design of the research does not enable an analysis of the experiences of the participants. Consequently, the data has very limited value for informing further projects and advancing an understanding of the nature of creativity. In any case, the findings of these studies showed very little difference between the two groups.

Two large international meta-analyses examining data across a wide number of arts education studies found no causal links could be claimed between arts education and standardised test results (including specially devised tests) (Winner and Hetland, 2000; See and Kokotsaki, 2017). Another meta-analysis, this time looking at the relationship between creative self-efficacy and different creativity measurements (Haase et al, 2018), found little agreement on what creativity is beyond aspects of '*novelty and usefulness*' (p 2), concluding this leads to inconsistencies when attempting to measure creativity. Similarly, a meta-analysis examining 35 research papers on creativity in education (Cremin and Chappell, 2019) concludes there is '*a lack of coherent research into what creative pedagogies are and what they do*' (p 3). Nevertheless, the authors of this study uncover in their analysis what they describe as '*seven interrelating features of creative pedagogy*':

'*Risk-taking*', '*encouraging autonomy and agency*', '*generating and exploring ideas*', '*playfulness*', '*problem-solving*', '*co-constructing and collaborating*' and '*teacher creativity*' (p 13). Although what is meant by some of these terms is not always defined in the papers examined, and inconsistencies in definitions are apparent, these words and phrases, like others used to describe creative behaviours previously referred to in this introduction, while not evidence of impact are nonetheless helpful in pinpointing what conditions are generally considered important for creativity to flourish. This book assists in unpicking some of these words and phrases and adds to the conversation about which conditions are effective in nurturing creative development by gathering viewpoints across theory and practice and trying to find consensus.

Teaching for creativity

In the UK, 20 years after the publication of the NACCCE (1999) report All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education (as previously mentioned), another large UK enquiry was undertaken into creativity and education, known as the Durham Commission (2019). The report, which is a collaboration between Durham University and Arts Council England, clarifies what the commission perceives as *'creativity'* and *'creative thinking'*. Both definitions include an expectation for originality, consistent with the NACCCE definition of creativity. In addition, the Durham Commission defines '*teaching for creativity*':

> *Creativity: The capacity to imagine, conceive, express, or make something that was not there before.*
>
> *Creative thinking: A process through which knowledge, intuition and skills are applied to imagine, express or make something novel or individual in its contexts. Creative thinking is present in all areas of life. It may appear spontaneous, but it can be underpinned by perseverance, experimentation, critical thinking and collaboration*.
>
> *Teaching for creativity: Explicitly using pedagogies and practices that cultivate creativity in young people.*
>
> (Durham Commission, 2019, p 96)

The definition of '*teaching for creativity'* is provided to distinguish between:

- a teacher teaching in what could be described as a novel, engaging way; and
- a teacher who is specifically aiming to nurture the individual creative development of pupils.

A clear distinction between these two is crucial because it is not necessarily the case that a teacher teaching in a creative manner, using their own creative skills, leads to pupils individually developing their own creativity. We will discuss this point at length throughout this book as we explore consensus around creativity and how to nurture it. But, before we continue that journey, let us take a look for a moment at why it is an important one to go on.

Why are creative skills important?

During the Covid-19 pandemic the need for education to equip young people for the world of work that they will become part of was brought into sharp focus. The World Economic Forum (an international non-governmental organisation) reported in 2020 that the Covid-19 recession and an accelerated increase in automation created a '*double-disruption*' (WEF, 2020a, p 5) for workers, necessitating innovative ways to think about the future. They predict that by 2025 a shift in the balance of tasks done by machines at work, as opposed to being done by humans, will mean globally 85 million jobs being displaced. Reassuringly, however, simultaneously it has been modelled that '*97 million new roles may emerge that are more adapted to the new division of labour*' (p 5).

An analysis of occupations considered to be resistant to automation was conducted by the University of Oxford and the UK-based policy and research foundation Nesta in 2015 (Bakhshi et al, 2015). The findings show that the most likely jobs to continue to be needed to be done by humans are those requiring working towards end goals, sometimes with others, that are not fully specified in advance. Published under the title *Creativity Vs Robots*, the report suggests professions considered more future-proof than others, including, for example, doctor, scientist, IT/media specialist, journalist, lawyer, designer, artist, novelist and (happily) teacher. The report tells us that machines '*struggle when tasks are highly interpretative*' (p 19), this is because computers find it hard to emulate natural human emotion.

Marcus du Sautoy, professor of mathematics at the University of Oxford, explains in his bestseller *The Creativity Code: How AI Is Learning to Write, Paint and Think* (2019) how algorithms are now being coded to 'learn' about human behaviour from the mountain of digital data we produce every day, including 'learning' from their own failures. He tells us that it is a bottom-up process, rather than the top-down one that Ada Lovelace in the mid-nineteenth century believed analytical machines were only capable of, where you cannot get more out than you put in. As a result, nowadays algorithms are capable of being our serious opponents in strategy games like chess, thinking several moves ahead. They can drive cars in busy traffic, and pick out clothes, music and TV programmes that customers might like. We sometimes even 'chat' to them when making online enquiries without always knowing we are conversing with a machine. Even so, according to Marcus du Sautoy, it is our innate capacity for compassion that stops algorithms managing to convincingly pass themselves off as human.

So, it seems that occupations and other human endeavours that require imagining what it is like to be someone else cannot (for now) be fully automated. But, to ensure that future generations have the skills with which to cope and indeed make the most of the transformations that mass computerisation will inevitably and increasingly bring to all of our lives, we need to harness the power of our children's imaginations.

Bakhshi et al (2015) say in *Creativity Vs Robots* that the jobs resistant to automation are the ones which require honed social and emotional skills, particularly in communication,

persuasion, motivation and negotiation, as well as other skills needed to make non-routine decisions. They make the case for the role of the educator in this landscape to assist pupils in developing their own sense of individuality so they can think independently, including in collaboration with others. The World Economic Forum argues in an article on its website, titled 'Our education system is losing relevance: Here's how to unleash its potential' (2020b), that we need to update how we view education so we can compete with smart machines. It states, '*the definition of quality and success has to move beyond standardized test scores to more holistic measurements tied to life improvements and societal impact*'. A similar message was conveyed by an international audience at the WISE and Salzburg Global Seminar online conference *Education Disrupted* in April 2020 where debates focused on the future needs of children across the world. 1173 delegates answered a poll asking '*What should your schools and systems be putting in the center of their planning for rebuilding education?*' 75.6 per cent of respondents voted that the 'well-being of students and teachers' should be pivotal; 13.3 per cent chose 'the whole child' as centrally important; 10.6 per cent voted for 'curriculum'; with just 0.5 per cent voting for 'testing'.

This book considers whether an education (in and out of the classroom) that focuses on nurturing creative skills (understood as those where there is an expectation for originality and independent thought) would provide children with the quality of education that could serve them well and span their lifetimes. For this reason, the next chapter gathers the thoughts of professional people well known for their creativity to gain insight into what they believe encourages creative development.

REFLECTIVE POINTS

- Do you consider yourself to be creative?
- Do you associate creativity with certain activities or particular subject areas?
- Do you think is it possible to define creativity as a single concept, or is it many?
- Is framing creativity in terms of social and emotional skills useful?
- Do you think a school curriculum that focuses on nurturing the creativity of individuals would serve pupils well?

Further reading

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