

〈論文〉

Embracing Creativity in Teaching and Learning

Haruno Ogasawara

The place of arts and creative activities through arts in higher education is increasingly recognized, as there is high demand to cultivate creativity and develop creative thinking and mindsets. In higher education, including arts and creative activities based on arts is beneficial to alter an excessively narrow focus on intellectual training in literacy and social sciences. In the midst of multiple arguments and proposals, however, there are few honest and compassionate engagements with the questions of how educators and teachers might more effectively create and incorporate creative environments for students at higher education. Artistic and creative environments are not only a continuation of art education in primary and secondary schools, but are also a longstanding characteristic of human cultural experience. As I teach at the university, I have met students who represent a challenge to the dominant stories of the education—certain form of knowledge or the conventional studies based on archives of knowledge that are marked by exams. Conventional pedagogy at the university setting often rests on participating in lectures or seminars, reading course materials, and writing a response paper based on the theme of the course or what teachers taught in the class. But some students have difficulty coping with normative habits of doing what they are told to do. They may be able to create and produce something very unique that does not have a place of its own. They may have interesting perspectives and amazing ideas that may not be recognized in the conventional academic scheme. Sometimes those students are recognized as a failure in educational fields. They are, however, perhaps the most important presence in education, challenging us, signaling the possibility of a radical, creative form of knowledge.

In this paper, I examine how we get in touch with our own creative possibility

and abilities and explore the possibilities of creative education as a tool to cultivate creativity and develop one's transformation. What is the way in which we address creative attitude acquisitions, facilitate the creative learning processes of students, students who have difficulty coping with conventional studies and ways of thinking? Are there any strategies for us to promote and maintain personal and creative diversity in education and in our society? These questions are urgent, as educational environments, community, and society need to be transformed to guarantee and appreciate the creativity and diversity for people who are participating in these places. Bridging the gap between the reality of teaching in conventional ways and possibilities of the creative education is not easily accomplished but recognizing the importance of incorporating creative education would be beneficial for educators who try to promote creative learning and for students who try to be creative. Students and teachers are mutually dependent and not only are students emerging as diversified, teaching and teachers are also in a process of diversified, as creators of new knowledge. Learning alongside students, educators open themselves up to the experiences and world perspectives of students and expand their pedagogy and methods of understanding students.

This paper attempts to analyze two different materials on understanding creativity and creative education : *Free Play—Improvisation in life and arts* and *the Artist's Way—A spiritual path to higher creativity*. Both books explore the creative process through arts and each author passionately discusses questions of how we promote creativity. They show us actual examples and deep investigation while leaving central questions open for us to work on using our own experience. As I read them, I learn and grow tenderly and treat these materials as opportunities for further engagement and rigorous questioning of creativity. Putting into practice a creative education and pedagogy as educator, I believe these materials give us a point of reference, a self-reflection, an inner-dialogue such as “what is better practice in our own context?” and the ways in which we can nurture our own and students' creativity.

1. Observations on creativity and improvisation: *Free Play*

In *Free Play*, the author Stephen Nachmanovitch explores the source of a creative

idea, the link between art and life, and the joy in the creative process and unleashes the full potential of our imagination. He states that the getting deep into the well of creativity is, in a way, improvisation in life and arts, surrendering oneself to the free play, contacting one's own creative power and strengthen it. Drawing, writing, painting and playing, one must wait and see what will be there while working with the raw material, just as Michelangelo believed that the statue already existed and that his job was simply to carve away the excess stone.

Nachmanovitch stresses that the improvisation is not a "formless vacuum," but something more organic, a natural structure. Drawing on personal observation of his art-making processes as well as those of a wide range of artists, he sees improvisation as a master key to creativity, a way to attain spiritual connectedness and to dissolve the artificial boundary between art and life. To be artistic or creative does not mean that you create arts and call them as artistic. Any activities can be practiced as an art and the creative process itself is a path to fully and originally oneself. He states,

Knowledge of the creative process cannot substitute for creativity, but it can save us from giving up on creativity when the challengers seem too intimidating and free play seems blocked. If we know that our inevitable setbacks and frustrations are phases of the natural cycle of creative processes, if we know that our obstacles can become our ornaments, we can persevere and bring our desires to fruition. Such perseverance can be a real test, but there are ways through, there are guideposts. And the struggle, which is guaranteed to take a lifetime, is worth it. It is a struggle that generates incredible pleasure and joy. Every attempt we make is imperfect; yet each one of those imperfect attempts is an occasion for a delight unlike anything else on earth (p.12–13) .

The insights offered in his statement are honest and helpful, not only to artists but to educators and all of us who seek to open our own or students' creativity. When in the context of education, we are immersed with lots of training, the mastery of subjects. We certainly use our training and are ground ourselves in it, but we cannot blind ourselves to the actual person in front of us, or the actual situation at that particular moment. To be artistic, while we need to acquire technique, disciplines, and methods, we create

things through technique and not with technic. Nachmanovitch includes the example of a jazz musician to portray the spirit of improvisation as a tale of provisional experience.

To be an improviser you have to leave these tricks behind, go out on a limb and take risks, perhaps occasionally fall flat on your face. In fact, what audiences love most is for you to go ahead and fall. Then they get to see how you manage to pick yourself up and put the world back together again (p.22).

What Nachmanovitch discusses is specific and has a critical reference to the education—finding the heart's voice, learning to listen and to speak with our own voice. Perhaps, in any field of knowledge, we seek this ability. Mastery, as he writes, means responsibility, ability to respond in real time to the need of the moment. This is a very thoughtful interpretation of mastery. Living freely—improvising—means not just passively hearing the voice, but acting on it. Being able to respond the call, one can liberate oneself and attain whatever possible.

When I see proliferation of disciplines and certain methodologies in educational environments, I fear that they maybe against the richness and freedom inherent in the living body of knowledge. Educators or certain community can easily destroy the curiosity and sense of adventure of students instead of nurturing their creativity. What we need to reconsider is our stereotypical belief—practice makes perfect, preparation makes perfect, studying produces good results. Within the field of education, sometimes there is a split between practice and the real thing. What we need to reconsider, states Nachmanovitch, is that not only practice is necessary to art, it *is* art.

The most frustrating, agonizing part of creative work, and the one we grapple with every day in practice, is our encounter with the gap between what we feel and what we can express (p.67).

When I see myself as an educator, I easily fall in this dichotomy between practice and perfect. When I lead and create class activities with tools or ideas that I know well, I have the solid technique for expressing myself, safely interacting with students. But when the technique and methods can get too fixed, when I become used to knowing

how the class should be done and expects how the students respond, it is easy to lose freshness of the moment, forget to see what's really there in front of me, and miss the golden opportunity of learning from something unexpected. It is quite dangerous that the very competence that I acquire in practice and through experiences generates the loss of the sense of playfulness. The rigid forms of professionalism, the strong will to the perfection will easily affect the class environment and mindsets of students.

Practice, as recognized by Nachmanovitch, is not to acquire skills, to endure struggle or boredom now in return for future rewards. It is to “create the person, or rather to actualize or reveal the complete person who is already there” (p.68). “If the art is created with the complete, the whole person, then the work will come out whole. Education must teach, reach, and vibrate the whole person rather than merely transfer knowledge” (p.177).

On the pressure to be accessible, Nachmanovitch points that when artists or students alter their work to be more x-ish in order to please some imagined market or someone out there, the integrity of things one does is at risk.

Paradoxically, the more you are yourself, the more universal your message. As you develop and individuate more deeply, you break through into deeper layers of the collective consciousness and the collective unconsciousness. There is no need to alter your voice in order to please others, and no need to alter it in order to differentiate yourself from others. Quality arises from, and is recognized by, resonance with inner truth (p.179).

In higher education and in area of life, an explosion of creativity is limited. Being in the politics, economics or ecological issues, it is well observed that conventional logic and ideas do not solve the problems. What is needed, according to Nachmanovitch, is a whole series of creative inspiration, letting playful improvisation take place, liberating ourselves from outmoded categories and frames of reference. Indeed, it is difficult to do as we mature through our life experience. At the beginning of the book, Nachmanovitch emphasizes this by quoting the following story transcribed from Japanese folk tales.

A new flute was invented in China. A Japanese master musician discovered the subtle

beauties of its tone and brought it back home, where he gave concerts all around the country. One evening he played with a community of musicians and music lovers who lived in a certain town. At the end of the concert, his name was called. He took out the new flute and played one piece. When he was finished, there was silence in the room for a long moment. Then the voice of the oldest man was heard from the back of the room: "Like a god!"

The next day, as this master was packing to leave, the musicians approached him and asked how long it would take a skilled player to learn the new flute. "Years," he said. They asked if he would take a pupil, and he agreed. After he left, they decided among themselves to send a young man, a brilliantly talented flautist, sensitive to beauty, diligent and trustworthy. They gave him money for his living expenses and for the master's tuition, and sent him on his way to the capital, where the master lived.

The student arrived and was accepted by his teacher, who assigned him a single, simple tune. At first he received systematic instruction, but he easily mastered all the technical problems. Now he arrived for his daily lesson, sat down, and played his tune – and all the master could say was, "Something lacking." The student exerted himself in every possible way; he practiced for endless hours; yet day after day, week after week, all the master said was, "Something lacking." He begged the master to change the tune, but the master said no. The daily playing, the daily "something lacking" continued for months on end. The student's hope of success and fear of failure became ever magnified, and swung from agitation to despondency.

Finally the frustration became too much for him. One night he packed his bag and slinked out. He continued to live in the capital city for some time longer, until his money ran dry. He began drinking. Finally, impoverished, he drifted back to his own part of the country. Ashamed to show his face to former colleagues, he found a hut far out in the countryside. He still possessed his flutes, still played but found no new inspiration in music. Passing farmers heard him play and sent their children to him for beginner's lessons. He lived this way for years.

One morning there was a knock at his door. It was the oldest past-master from his town, along with the youngest student. They told him that tonight they were going to have a concert, and they had all decided it would not take place without him. With some effort they overcame his feelings of fear and shame, and almost in a trance he picked up a flute and went with them. The concert began. As he waited behind the stage, no one intruded on his inner silence. Finally, at the end of the concert, his name was called. He stepped out onto the stage in his

rag. He looked down at his hands, and realized that he had chosen the new flute.

Now he realized that he had nothing to gain and nothing to lose. He sat down and played the same tune he had played so many times for his teacher in the past. When he finished, there was silence for a long moment. Then the voice of the oldest man was heard, speaking softly from the back of the room: "Like a god!" (p.1-3).

This episode tells us how important to go deep inside us to know who we really are and how long it takes to be finally liberated. Natalie Goldberg, Kenny Werner, and Victor Wooten all share the process: a never-ending search for something lacking when one engages in creation.

2. Toward creativity: *The Artist's Way*

Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way* is a classic self-help book well known for its simple message on nurturing creativity. Arts, according to Cameron, is not a professional creative activity but as a form of seeing oneself. She urges us to find our inner, negative thoughts and learn to accept or dismiss them. Her view is that all of us can be creative, and that if we are not, it is because something is blocking or denying our creativity. As I often observe the ways fear gets in the way when creating something new, I see why it's necessary for her to teach people to let people be creative.

This book is a guide for blocked people and presents a 12-step program for people to rediscover their creativity and sense of purpose of life. Cameron is a writer and a filmmaker herself and draws upon her own experiences to explain creative exercises.

The core of the creative process is "morning pages," the ritual of writing out three pages each morning, unclogging one's spiritual channels of the things that get way to the creative activities. The idea is simple but this approach is often forgotten in educational environments. Generally speaking, we will not set up a time for writing freely, whatever comes to mind, or writing about not wanting to write if that's what comes out.

I had some students who have difficulty writing a response paper at the end of each class and producing research paper at the end of the semester, but they were

good at writing freely. I was no stranger to the practice of free writing, but as a teacher, to do so in the class setting was a challenge. Having those students in mind, I started to think, plan and envision ways that I could more fully incorporate creativity into my teaching. Writing and telling stories and being understood is a crucial element of shared human experience. The affirmation and the recognition that results from sharing stories and experiences is the most rewarding moment.

Exercises given in *the Artist's Way* are specific and useful when it comes to doing creative practice. Most of the time, one needs a simple encouragement to move and cope with limitation that might exist in one's life. Cameron's approach can be helpful as they liberate, touch on all kinds of fears that were stopping us from actually doing it.

Although sharing similar concepts, unlike *Free Play* by Nachmanovitch, Cameron is specific in proposing "ways" of doing it. It is this doing, not just thinking or worrying, that help get one's creativity flowing. Perhaps, writing morning pages, and connecting with one's creative side by hand writing regularly is fresh and new at the age of typing texts online. After all, it is a form of meditation, as Cameron thinks, just sitting down and letting one's thoughts wander or focus on what one's doing right at that moment. In educational setting, the students always use the critical, logical part of brain, worrying about mistakes or the pressure to write something brilliant.

Scheduling "an artist date" with oneself is another way to focus on one's inner artist. It is a block of time, set aside and committed to nurturing one's creative consciousness. Cameron's approach may be quite useful in rigid education where the schedule is often all set and has no room for the extra or new activities. The more we explore ourselves and the world around us, the more we connect with our own creativities. It is when I take more time with students, go and watch movie, just go for a walk or see sunset together, or just talk without worrying about time, we can learn as much as we can about ourselves and our surroundings.

To be creative, students often have to face and overcome difficult circumstances. For example, many parents discourage their talented children from pursuing the arts or any kind of creative activity as they get older because they think arts or creative action will not support them financially. Sometimes teachers and other people make fun of one's attempt to be creative, to have one's own artistic expression. As a result, those who experienced the negative response or criticism develop thoughts like shame or

fear, less confident than they were.

Making a piece of art may feel a lot like telling a family secret. Secret telling, by its very nature, involves shame and fear. It asks questions “What will they think of me once they know this?” This is a frightening question, particularly if we have ever been made to feel ashamed for our curiosities and explorations—social, sexual, spiritual (p.67).

It is not always easy to recover creative and artistic side. One needs to start uncovering these feelings and thoughts where the educational environment is safe enough for students to understand that not all criticism is shaming and that discovering new strength and weakness is important for personal transformation.

Creativity cannot be comfortably quantified in intellectual terms. By its very nature, creativity eschews such containment. In a university where the intellectual life is built upon the art of criticizing—on deconstructing a creative work—the art of creating itself, the art of creative construction, meets with scanty support, understanding, or approval. To be blunt, most academics know how to take something apart, but not how to assemble it (p.132).

This is a strong statement to inform the academics how much we need to develop an “altered appreciation for the authenticity of growth for the sake of growth” (p.132). I have seen many college students who try to be creative and engage in creative activities, but when the graduation approaches, they decided to quit creating by saying that they are not good enough to meet the social demand or standard. The social and educational environment must recognize students’ creative impulse and support their attempt to grow from seeds.

3. On liberating creativity and education

Central to creativity is the belief that one is and can be creative. It is a self-statement that resolves around—yes, I can be creative. To embraces creativity and

curiosity, it needs educational environments that tolerate ambiguity, support when students are confronted with skepticism and rejection, and appreciate imagination and sense of wonder.

The creative education discussed in this paper provides perspectives at a crucial moment for students when they are otherwise understood as being un-intellectual and under-developed, with their strength and individuality not so visible. Approaches toward creative education highlighted in both books—*Free Play* and *The Artist's Way* open an important intersection between the creative education and education for diversity. Many ideas of students, because they seem strange, odd and repulsive, only later do they become obviously great or accepted by others. It is important for educators and educational environments to be able to not only to suspend judgment when ideas are arriving or expressions are unclear but to have a supportive attitude toward creativity in action. Improvisation, in this context, can be used to re-write narratives and expressions that contain, marginalize and erase particular experiences of those who want to be creative. The creative education has playfulness and the artist's way can help build new communities of connectedness and empathy. To have a creative mindset to grow, flourish and feel accomplished with learning, both educators and learners in any educational setting need to challenge the conventional myths that undermine creativity and formulate and share a time and space for creativity.

References

- Goldberg, N. (1986) *Writing down the bones*. Boston : Shambhala Publications
Hart, M. (1990) *Drumming at the edge of magic*. San Francisco: HarperCollins
Nachmanovitch, S. (1990) *Free play : Improvisation in life and art*. New York : Penguin Putnam
Ostrander, S. and Schroeder L. (1979) *Superlearning*. New York : Delta Publishing
Peck, S. (1978) *The road less traveled*. New York : Simon and Schuster
Werner, K. (1996) *Effortless mastery : Liberating the master musician within*. New Albany :
 Jamey Aebersold Jazz
Wooten, V. (2006) *The music lesson: A spiritual search for growth through music*. New York :
 Penguin Group