Moving Away From Sometimes, Some of Us, Somewhere: A Sociocultural Approach to Creativity

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Abstract

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Creativity has long been misunderstood as the result of individual difference – associated with genius, the arts and personality traits. Scientific inquiry, in fields such as expertise-based research, cognitive research, evolutionary research and psychometric research, has disproven some of these long held "everyday understandings" about the creative process, as well as given us avenues to identify creative traits and processes. However, since these are all individual based theories, they have also reinforced our "everyday understanding" of the creative genius. Sociocultural theory offers a different unit of analysis that includes the dynamic interplay of the social, cultural and historical aspects of development. From this viewpoint, creativity is the foundation of all human development, as it takes into account who people are and who they are becoming. As researchers, practitioners and, simply humans who are committed to change and growth, a shift in our conceptions of creativity is necessary for further development. The arts have long held creativity the standard, but instead of assuming that creative people are attracted to the arts, this paper identifies ways of being, knowing and doing that the arts promote - creating individuals who have particular dispositions deemed to be "creative" as a result of their participation in these practices.

In his book, Explaining Creativity: The Science of Human Innovation, R. Keith Sawyer (2006) states a few commonly held American beliefs about artists: "We think artists work alone. They're blessed with a special gift or genius. They have a uniquely valuable message to communicate, and generally have a relatively high social status. We believe that artworks should be signed by their creators; knowing who created a work is important to us," (p. 12). He goes on to call these commonly held beliefs, and others, "myths" (p. 18). Some of these myths include: creativity comes from the unconscious, children are more creative than adults, creativity represents the inner spirit of the individual, creativity is a form of therapeutic self discovery and creativity is spontaneous inspiration.

Scientific research on creativity has found these myths to be misleading, and in many instances, wrong (Sawyer, 2006). In this paper I first introduce literature from four theories that have sought to explain creativity in relation to individuals who are creative. These theories include psychometric, evolutionary, expertise-based, and cognitive, which includes the relationship between mental illness and creativity. These four theories have helped define creative traits, creative trajectories, assessment of creativity, and the natural development of individual creativity.

While these theories have contributed greatly to our scientific understanding of creativity, I suggest that there has been an overemphasis placed on the individual that has reinforced our attachment to these myths, whether or not these theories have disproved them.

By focusing on an individual approach to creativity both in practice and in theory, we perpetuate the belief that certain people, at certain times hold the key to innovation[1].

Shifting the unit of analysis from the individual to the dynamic interaction between the social and the individual, such as in sociocultural theory, we understand creativity as an essential component to all development – individual and social (John-Steiner, Connery, & Marjanovic-Shane 2010; Moran, 2010; Moran & John-Steiner, 2003). When focusing on the individual or the products of the individual, the researcher ignores the "unified and integral nature of the process being studied" – a form of analysis that "leads to profound delusion" (Vygotsky, p. 46). A sociocultural approach to creativity allows for the study of the complex whole. In this case, development is an ongoing, dynamic process of becoming that is situated in a cultural-historical context (Holzman, 2010; John-Steiner, 2010; Wertsch, 1998) In the final part of the literature review, I will discuss sociocultural theory's understanding of creativity as a psychological and social construct that is a process, not a trait, in which all humans are engaged.

Traditionally, creativity research has been split into two camps: "little c" creativity and "big C" Creativity (Kozbelt, Beghetto & Runco, 2010; Sawyer, 2006). "Little c" creativity includes activities that people engage in every day, while "big C" refers to solutions to "extremely difficult problems, or significant works of genius" (Sawyer, 2006, p. 27). By focusing on only "big C" creative products and people, we run the risk of reinforcing myths and misconceptions about the very nature of creativity (Kozbelt et al., 2010; Beghetto,

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[1] Innovation is *sometimes* a result of the creative process. It is the creation that is taken up by a culture or community and is "worth making a fuss about" (Csiksentmihalyi, 1996, p. 41). Novel works of art, great scientific breakthroughs, extraordinary business plans are all a part of that which is deemed "innovative."

2007). Sociocultural theory, as laid out by the work of L.S. Vygotksy, focuses on the creative process and its relation to development, neither of which belong solely to either "big C" creativity or "little c" creativity. [2]

When we use sociocultural theory as a conceptual framework for understanding creativity, we can explore different kinds of questions namely, how people free themselves from the constraints of the environment through the transformation of social interaction, and use of cultural tools and signs (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003). In other words, we are not limited by the idea that particular individuals have full ownership over creativity – creation instead becomes the means by which we create our worlds and ourselves. The difficulty of developing an appreciation for a more socially and culturally oriented definition of creativity rests in our *everyday understanding* that creativity is an individual trait. "According to everyday understanding, creativity is the realm of a few selected individuals, geniuses, talented people, who produce great works of art, are responsible for major scientific discoveries or invent some technological advances" (Vygotsky, 2004, p .10).

When creativity is viewed as an individual trait, outside of the arts, associations between creativity and deviance, rebelliousness, daring, and independence manifest (Moran, 2010a; Moran, 2010b). Western cultures have continually separated out "them" (who are creative) from "us" (who are not), creating a dichotomy that does little to illuminate what the practice of creativity does and can do for human development. Sociocultural theory is founded on the belief that the historical change of culture impacts the way that people think

[2] Sawyer (2006) makes the claim that the sociocultural definition of creativity is a part of "big C" creativity, this does not coincide with Vygotsky's *scientific definition* of the creative process however, and so this paper will not make the distinction between "big C" and "little c" creativity.

(Moran & John-Steiner, 2003). Creativity produces artifacts that are taken up and interacted with by members of a society. When these tools and symbols do not serve the needs, new ones can be (and are) created. The creation of tools is critical for social and individual development but when the "focus of society privileges cultural and social stability over cultural transformation and progress… cultural possibilities are often inhibited" (Moran, 2010).

Finally, sociocultural theory takes into account that we become particular people as we participate in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). We come to be, know and do in relation to our participation in those communities (Herrenkohl & Mertl, 2010). While creative experiences do not reside solely in the arts, the arts have traditionally held creativity the standard instead of the exception (Moran, 2010; Moran & John-Steiner, 2003; Eisner, 2000; Egan, 1997; Gardner, 1982).

What we understand about the arts – education and philosophy – is that they provide different kinds of environments that foster creative practices (Eisner, 2002; Eisner, 2004). Traditionally, and accordingly with individualist approaches, arts studios are for artists; if people are born with creative dispositions, they end up in arts classrooms, it is the "creative people" that foster creativity in studios. A sociocultural approach that takes being, knowing and doing into account argues that arts studios ask students to participate in ways that are not valued or available in other classrooms therefore, those students become particular kinds of people as a result of their particular kind of participation.

This paper recommends that other disciplines learn from the experiences and perspectives of the arts, utilizing a deeper understanding of the relationship between creativity and development to inform their own theory and practices. Finally, implications

will be discussed with reference to educational opportunities, experiences, and avenues for future research.

Individual – Inspired Approaches to Creativity:

Expertise-Based, Evolutionary, Psychometric and Cognitive Theories of Creativity

The emphasis on originality in Western conceptions of creativity (Runco & Albert, 2010; Kozbelt & Durmysheva, 2009) has grown and been enforced through a long tradition of equating creativity with madness, genius, and the arts. The intersection between scientific inquiry and philosophies of creativity came into being only after the accumulation of several intellectual transformations (Runco & Albert, 2010).

In exploring the creativity research, I looked at research that explains how creativity is manifested and developed, as well as how it is conceptualized. Expertise-based and evolutionary theories, psychometric theories, and cognitive theories have all furthered our understanding of creativity in unique ways. On occasion, they have tried to break apart our cultural understanding and myths of creativity (Sawyer, 2006). While these theories differ in many ways, they often overlap across concepts, methodologies, and purposes. Evolutionary, cognitive and expertise-based theories seek to understand how creativity is developed over time. Psychometric theories aim to measure creativity reliably and validly. The other theories often use quantitative means to generate a measure of creativity at a particular time (Kozbelt, 2001; Simonton, 2007; Kozbelt, 2010).

It should be stated that these are not the only ways that creativity has been researched, but they have each been incredibly influential in the way that we talk about "creative

people." For example, the popular conception that each side of the brain – "right brain" and "left brain" – represents particular personality traits that make people more dominant in those traits has no scientific evidence to back it up (Sawyer, 2006). Other theories that exist go so far as to establish creativity in part as the result of genetically-determined personality (Feist, 2010). Personality, however, is addressed by all of these theories in one way or another and so, at the risk of over-simplification, I will focus on the four that seem the most relevant to a sociocultural understanding of creativity.

Modern creativity research began with J.P. Guilford in the 1950s (Sawyer, 2006). Guilford was the father of psychometric creativity testing, a discipline of research that continues to be a popular measure of creativity and its potential (Plucker & Makel, 2010). Psychometric theories argue that creativity can be measured reliably and validly, and are concerned with core characteristics and personality traits. (John-Steiner, 1992). They are similar to IQ tests in that they claim to measure the existence and amount of an individual psychological construct.

In response to the Cold War when "productive, inventive thinking would be most helpful" (Guilford, 1958, p. 5), Guilford asked the question: Can creativity be developed? Believing that creativity is something that lies behind behavior that is imaginative and inventive, Guilford found creative behavior to be most evident in certain types of people, including "scientists who make new discoveries and construct new theories; artists, designers, writers and composers; and architects, designers and builders" (p. 6).

Guilford's work (1958; 1968) on divergent thinking continues to hold weight in the evaluation of the presence and depth of creativity today. Divergent thinking includes the ability to come up with many potential answers. Fluency, originality, flexibility, and

elaboration of ideas are often seen as reliable phenomena to test, measure, and evaluate. An example of creativity psychometric testing are the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking [TTCT], which are designed to identify children with high creative potential, and are still used in practice today (Plucker & Makel, 2010). The TTCT assesses creativity verbally and nonverbally and can be administered to individuals or groups. The TTCT identifies both "big C" creativity and "little c" creativity, however, it is now more widely accepted that creativity should be measured within the domain.

Similar to psychometric theory's focus on the domain, research founded on expertise-based creativity (Hass, Weisberg & Choi, 2010; Kozbelt, 2001, 2005) or a systematic view of creativity (Weisberg & Hass, 2007), also measures creativity in relation to the domain and posits that creativity is the result of the normal cognitive processes of individuals with a high level of expertise within a particular domain (Hass et al., 2010). This research claims that creativity is influenced by learning and practice, and that over the course of time individuals are able to solve increasingly complex problems in their fields (Hass et al, 2010; Weisberg & Hass, 2007; Ericsson, 1996). "High level performance in any domain is made possible by the deliberate and intensive practice of highly complicated, domain-specific skill sets over an extended period of time" (Hass et al., 2010, p. 464).

Creativity research in the expertise-based field has namely focused on the products of "big C" creativity and quantifiable data, while resting on a belief that creative individuals produce works of which ordinary individuals are not capable of (Weisberg, 1994). For example, Kozbelt (2005) conducted a quantitative study of Mozart's music and found that Mozart's creativity and musical perspicacity continually improved over time – a consistent correlation with a problem solving and expertise view of creativity. Sawyer (2006)

recognizes that experts have an almost aesthetic ability that allows them to find problems in their domain but in order to do so, "it takes a lot of experience, knowledge, and training to identify good problems" (p. 47).

In response to the expertise-based view of creativity, evolutionary or Darwinian theory argues that it is not the amount of time, effort or quality that individuals put into becoming experts, but posits instead that a creator can increase the chance of producing a successful product only by increasing the quantity of the output (Simonton, 2003). Productivity theory is also supported by quantitative data.

What Simonton (2007) calls chance-configuration theory, which is "unpredictable and chaotic" (p. 330), is simply a way of saying that the more you produce, the more likely you are to produce a creative product. This view of creativity is based on Darwin's theories of evolution and natural selection (Weisberg & Hass, 2007). Simonton (2010) found creativity to be a quantifiable construct that can be measured in part through creative products:

> Creators of the highest order tend to be extremely prolific, producing work after work after work. Besides maintaining an exceptional rate of output, they tend to initiate output at an unusually young age and not end their output until quite advanced years (p. 181).

Lastly, cognitivist theories explore the development of creativity over time, as well as the link between creativity and mental illness – a relationship that has existed since the time of Aristotle (Runco & Albert, 2010). Cognitivists seek to examine the structures of the

mind therefore, instead of focusing on the personality of "creative people", like the previous theories, cognitivists center their work on the creative process.

Sawyer (2006) breaks the cognitivist understanding of creative process into four stages: preparation, incubation, insight, and verification. The stages are defined as follows:

> *Preparation*: the initial phase of preliminary work: collecting data and information, searching for related ideas, listening to suggestions.
>
> *Incubation*: the delay between preparation and the moment of insight; during this time, the prepared material is internally elaborated and organized.
>
> *Insight*: the subjective experience of having the idea – the "aha" or "eureka" moment.
>
> *Verification*: this stage includes two sub-stages – the evaluation of the worth of the insight, and elaboration in its complete form.

Most psychologists agree that the creative process contains these stages (Sawyer, 2006). Cognitive theorists hypothesize that a handful of basic mental processes are used in creativity and that these cognitive processes can be mapped onto the stages. These cognitive processes include:

> Generative processes that produce ideas, filtering processes that select among these ideas, and exploratory processes that expand on the potential of each idea. Generative processes include information retrieval, association, and combination. The mind then uses various properties of these ideas – novelty, surprisingness, aesthetic appeal – to evaluate which of them should be retained and explored. Exploratory processes then

> modify and elaborate the idea, consider its implications, assess its limitations and even transform the idea. (Sawyer, 2006, p. 65).

In order to understand how the creative process manifests over the lifetime, Howard Gardner (1990, 1982) has been seminal in influencing our Western understanding of creativity by focusing on the relationship between creativity, experts, and children. Gardner takes a developmental approach as he researches the link between children and their adult artist counterparts.

> Our romantic tradition remolded in terms of a modernist ethos, has made us responsive to the notion of the child as artist, and the child in every artist. The question is no longer when does an individual become an artist but rather, what are the similarities – and differences – between the artistry of children and the artistry of adults. (Gardner, 1982, p. 92)

Gardner's work (1982) identifies shared traits between young children and adult artists including: a willingness to explore their medium, to try various alternatives, to permit unconscious processes of play, to suspend their knowledge of what others do, to transcend practices and boundaries, and to express feelings, ideas and concepts known only to them. He uses a U-shaped model to explain the development of creativity, showing creativity dwindling during the middle years of development. This model emphasizes how Gardner's understanding of creativity is not equally weighted, with most adults remaining at the low

point of the U and only young children and those who are considered to be "artists" in the upper echelons.

The belief that creative individuals have some access to ideas that are beyond the ordinary people, fortifies the relationship between creativity and mental illness – a relationship that has been speculated about for centuries (Albert & Runco, 2010). Exemplified by Kraepelin's (1921) classic study of manic-depressive insanity, mania was hypothesized to bring about changes in thought processes that would result in increased creativity (Weisberg, 1994).

These four views of creativity all share an individualist assumption. They have contributed to our understanding of creativity in meaningful ways particularly by: identifying creative traits, exploring the relationship between time and creative products, identifying ways to measure creativity, and forming the language and concepts that we use when we discuss creativity. These theories have attempted to debunk some of our everyday myths including creative people being tortured, lone geniuses, and creative ideas simply springing to mind fully formed (Sawyer, 2006).

> Research has discovered that creativity is largely the result of hard work. There is no magic, no secret. People who are willing to work hard tend to have certain personality traits, but not those we typically associate with creative types (Sawyer, 2006, p. 53).

There are, however, limitations to these theories that need to be addressed. Psychometric theories are not able to identify the personality traits that *distinguish* creative people from ordinary people (Sawyer, 2006) and it is nearly impossible to measure creativity

with a test and be certain that you are measuring creativity and not another trait. For example, tests that measure divergent thinking such as TTCT, ignore the fact that the creative process contains a delicate balance of divergent and convergent thinking – it does not favor one over the other (Sawyer, 2006). Also, those who create the test already have some idea of what they believe is creative, and that belief can only come from their previous experiences. What is creative to one person, may not be creative to another.

Gardner's U-shaped model of creativity identifies our aesthetic awareness of a creative product more than it does to explain the creative process. When a product is more abstract, we are more likely to label it is "creative," and children and artists are known to create more abstract pieces. Cognitive theory may give us a way to understand the mind's mechanisms, but a focus on stage processes limits our understanding of a more cyclical creative process. The link between the mentally ill and creativity, as well as the expertise-based and evolutionary views of creativity are founded on the belief that only particular people are creative – those who are mentally ill, experts, or those who produce many products.

Above all, these theories cannot adequately address inquiries concerning the role of creativity in development, nor with their focus on the individual, can they fully explain away our cultural myths and everyday understandings. These kinds of Western-centric [3]perspectives limit the utility of research in creativity by focusing on the individual and particular audiences such as artists, children and the mentally ill – those who we typically

[3] There has been some research done on the difference between a Western view of creativity and an Eastern view. The general idea is that a Western view values the idea of creating something from nothing, while an Eastern view of creativity is much more cyclical, often not even focusing on the creation aspect.

associate with being creative. Sociocultural theory offers conceptual tools that begin to chip away at some of these long-help assumptions by viewing creativity as a process, not a product that is key to all human development, and is culturally and historically situated (John-Steiner, 2010).

A Response to the Individual Inspired Approach:
Sociocultural Theory and Creativity

> Most psychological approaches are shaped by the individual-centered work of Freud, Erikson, and Piaget. In cognitive psychology the focus is similar; for instance, information processing is concerned with activity in the brain. The same is true of evolutionary psychology, which has attracted great popular attention. These theories emphasize biologically driven development […] I present a different theoretical framework. It is a life-span approach. Social, cultural, historical and biological conditions together contribute to the realization of human possibility. Central to such an approach is the principle that *humans come into being and mature in relation to others*. (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 187).

Sociocultural theory, derived from the work of Lev Semonovich Vygotsky, places learning and development at the intersection of social, historical, and cultural processes, understanding humans as irrevocably interdependent (Herrenkohl & Mertl, 2010; John-Steiner et al., 2010; Wertsch, 1986). Vygotsky, a Marxist theorist, understood the human developmental process as dialectical, ongoing, and continuously emergent collective activity

(Holzman, 2006). When John-Steiner refers to this theoretical framework as "a life-span approach" (p. 187), she acknowledges the limitations of viewing development as solely a process of children. Unlike Piaget's stage view of development, for Vygotsky, higher mental functions are never completed, but they continue to develop and interact with other higher mental functions (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003).

As a result of the interdependence of the individual and the social, there is a continuous reformation of complex relationships. "What develops then, are not just the functions themselves, but the relationship between them. This development leads to increased flexibility and complexity of thought," (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003, p. 66). We must be capable of doing what we do not yet know how to do, either individually or collectively, Vygotsky recognized this in early childhood, but the same holds true for development across the lifespan (Holzman, 2010). Finally, for sociocultural theory, human mental processes can be understood only by considering how and where they occur – emphasis is placed on process, not on product (Wertsch, 1986).

Vygotsky's work on creativity is incomplete and has also been largely ignored by both creativity theorists and sociocultural theorists (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003), but when placed in his broader theoretical framework creativity becomes a transformative activity where emotion, meaning and cognitive symbols are synthesized (John-Steiner et al., 2010). "Through his examination of aesthetics, history, and criticism of human creation, Vygotsky developed some methods of analysis which led him to transform existing approaches and develop the dialectical syntheses of intellect/emotion; thought/sign; and individual/society," (Connery, 2010, p. 17). Vygotsky's early work on art placed creativity and emotion as the cornerstones of his later thinking providing contemporary theorists, researchers, and

practitioners, who follow in his tradition, with the foundational concepts upon which a more articulated theory can be developed (Connery, 2010).

Vygotsky's Understanding of the Creative Process:

The Imagination and Creation Dialectic

Vygotsky (2004) explores the dynamic interplay between social/individual and reality/imagination. His understanding of the dialectic between internalization (imagination) and externalization (creation) creates the perfect tension for the creative process to exist (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003). According to sociocultural theory, mental functions are first experienced socially (Vygotsky) and then internalized. Those internalizations shape the way we think about, participate in, and view the world. Internalization is not just copying what is on the outside, but rather it is a transformation and reorganization of incoming information and mental structures (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003). Externalization includes the construction and synthesis of emotion-based meanings and cognitive symbols that once expressed are embodied in cultural artifacts (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003) that are then taken up in the world. The internalization/externalization dialectic is where the entire creative process exists.

When Vygotsky wrote "Imagination and Creativity in Childhood," his focus was on the individual, psychological plane where he spends much of this time explaining the role of imagination in the creative process. For Vygotsky, creativity begins with a perception of the external and internal, which is the basis of all experience. What a child experiences provides the support on which all future creations will be based. After the perceptions have been

internalized, every impression becomes a complex whole consisting of a number of separate parts or elements that can be exaggerated, diminished, forgotten and altered. Creative process then is "nothing other than a new combination of elements that have ultimately been extracted from reality and have simply undergone the transformational or distorting action of our imagination." (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 13).

The focus on imagination situates much of Vygotsky's understanding of the creative process on the individual, however this does not diminish the necessity of the social.

> The capacity to construct imaginary worlds proves the centrality of person in any social setting. The person is both part of the here-and- now setting (as it exists) and outside of that setting (as it is re-thought through importing imaginary scenarios, daydreams, new meanings). Creativity becomes possible thanks to such duality of contrast between the "as-is" and "as-if" fields that the person lives through in each setting. (Valsiner, 2006, p. 13)

The social and cultural nature of development is dependent on engagement with the minds of others. An individual's capacity to make connections between objects, events and tools in he life is directly defined by how much that person can imagine someone else's experiences. Imagination, "becomes the means by which a person's experience is broadened, because he can imagine what he has not seen, can conceptualize something from another person's narration and description of what he himself has never directly experienced," (p. 17).

Once impressions and perceptions have been internalized, they undergo various other processes including: disassociation, alteration, association and finally crystallization. Dissociation is the isolation of individual traits and neglect of others – which Vygotsky considers the foundation of abstract thinking, the basis of concept formation. After dissociation occurs, the material is altered or distorted under the influence of internal understandings and emotions. Association is the process by which dissociated and altered elements are unified. The combination of these individual images creates a complex picture.[4]

The last piece of Vygotsky's creative process is what he calls crystallized imagination, or the external embodiment of what has been created – in other words, the creation. It is the crystallization of imagination that culminates and fuels the ongoing creative process.

Once it [the creative product] has been externally embodied, that is, has been given material form, this crystallized imagination that has become an object begins to actually exist in the real world, to affect other things" (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 20). The crystallization process, which is what Vygotsky later calls externalization, creates the cultural artifacts "that endure over time to be used by future generations. The dynamic constructions that result from externalization are materialized meanings, composed of shared ideas, beliefs, knowledge, emotions, and culture," (Moran & John-Steiner, p.63).

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[4] There are striking similarities between Vygotsky's understanding of imagination and the cognitive processes described by Sawyer (2006) however, the capacity for development is greater when understanding these processes from a sociocultural perspective. Information and knowledge is not simply arranged into preexisting schema (Piaget), or preexisting mental functions, but is actively created, influenced and understood.

This brief overview of Vygotsky's understanding of creativity is enough to begin to address the limitations of the individual inspired theories. The notion that creative endeavors are more than just the result of personal cognition has been taken for granted in popular creativity research (John-Steiner, 1992). When we apply a sociocultural lens, we begin to see that each creation is a product of the social-cultural-historical conditions in which it exists (John-Steiner, 2010). Vygotsky's emphasis on the interplay between interpersonal and intrapersonal processes clarified the limitations of an exclusively individual approach (John-Steiner, 1992). Sociocultural theory's emphasis on dialectics creates the imperfect tension of interaction needed for creativity and creation to exist (Moran, 2010). Creative acts are *emergent*, they are not bound to individual dispositions – they have emerged from the collective contributions of individuals (Sawyer, 2010).

> Every inventor, even a genius, is also a product of his time and his environment. His creations arise from needs that were created before him and rest on capacities that also exist outside of him. This is why we emphasize that there is a strict sequence in the historical development of science and technology. No invention or scientific discovery can occur before the material and psychological conditions necessary for it to occur have appeared. Creation is a historical, cumulative process where every succeeding manifestation was determined by the preceding one. (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 30)

The Nexus of Individual, Domain, and Field:

Csikszentmihalyi's Social Model of Creativity

In recent years, social and dynamic models of creativity research have become increasingly prominent (John-Steiner, 1992). Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, a renowned creativity theorist, developed a systems approach to creativity that divides creativity into three separate, interacting components (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; 1988): the individual, the domain and the field.

The theory demonstrates how creativity is defined by context and postulates that for an act, idea or product to be deemed creative, the three interacting components must meet. Those components include: the *domain* or body of knowledge that exists in a particular discipline at a particular time; the *individual*, who acquired domain knowledge and produces variation on the existing knowledge; and finally, the *field* which is comprised of over experts and members of the discipline who decide which novelties produced by all the individuals working in that discipline are worth preserving for the next generation.

> Creativity occurs when a person, using the symbols of a given domain [...] has a new idea or sees a new pattern, and when this novelty is selected by the appropriate field for inclusion into the relevant domain [...] So the definition that follows from this perspective is: Creativity is any act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain, or that transforms an existing domain into a new one. And the definition of a creative person is: someone whose thoughts or actions change a domain, or establish a new domain. It is important to remember, however, that a domain cannot be changed without the explicit or implicit consent of a field responsible for it. (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006, p. 28).

Vygotsky's theory provides the dynamic mechanism for how Csikszentmihalyi's three components affect each other (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003). For a deeper understanding of the creative process, we are required to develop explanations at individual, social and cultural levels, or individual, domain and field levels. What seems to be the most important aspect of this systems model in relation to sociocultural theory, is that the amount of creativity is not dependent on the individual, but also on how well suited the domain and fields are to accept new ideas.

Csikszentmihalyi may not be a sociocultural theorist, but his work has deeply informed those who are and provided a framework in which Vygotsky's notions of creative process can be developed.

Sociocultural Approaches to Creativity Conclusion

Above all, Vygotsky's understanding of creativity depends directly upon a person's experiences – the richer the experiences, the richer the potential for creation. It is because of this that Vygotsky (2004) believes adults to have more capacity for creation than children, debunking another one of our long held myths.

> The child can imagine vastly less than the adult, but he has greater faith in the products of his imagination and controls them less, and thus imagination, in the everyday, vulgar sense of this word, that is, what is unreal and made up, is of course greater in the child than in the adult. (p. 34).

For Vygotsky (2004), even though adults get lost in life and bury the dreams of their youth, creativity does not disappear, it only becomes subsidiary. Past experiences and new cultural symbolic capacities fuel future growth, not only in children, but in adults as well.

While Vygotsky's views of creativity have given us a framework with which to understand the act of creation, there is at least one major discrepancy between his creativity theories and his later theories of development. Vygotsky (2004) begins by separating what he calls "reproduction" from the "creative act." He suggests that when he copies someone's drawing, he has not been creative but simply reproduced what had already existed.

Based on his later work and the work of scholars who furthered his ideas, it is paramount to recognize that the process of internalization/externalization remains the same in both reproduction and creative act – we do not internalize the world and its tools exactly as we see them, those impressions are reflected and refracted differently for each individual – no amount of reproduction could ever be exactly the same (Cole & Wertsch, 2011; Moran, 2010). In this light, reproduction is the creative act of producing a product that is very close to the already accepted, socially agreed upon meaning. If we, as Cole and Wertsch (2011) hypothesize, "observe simple movements at a sufficiently fine-grained level, we can always see some variation; no two finger taps on a keyboard and no two pronunciations of the same phoneme are ever completely identical, even if we are trying for identical repetition" (p.8). When our actions match conventional wisdom and therefore are traditionally considered "not creative." This is juxtaposed with originality, which is conceived of as the spawning of new possibilities that emerge from existing materials (Moran, 2010). It is in the nooks of this inconsistency that we find the greatest link between the creative process and development – so long as we are participating, we are always creating and therefore, always developing.

Similar again to Vygotsky's notions of development, Csikszentmihalyi (2009) believes that there are two goals of the evolution of consciousness: freeing ourselves from the control of genetic instructions, and freeing ourselves from social conditioning without denying, trying to repress or avoid the reality of these instructions. Participation in creative practices, in this case internalizing and transforming cultural tools through our own understandings and then affecting the world with our creations – be them words, art, ideas – allow us to engage more deeply and focus our development. "Creativity arises when the culturally agreed upon meaning, or conventional wisdom, or central tendency of those in power, changes because of a new externalization" (Moran, 2010, p. 143). This new externalization affects the world, is taken up by other contexts in particular ways and the cycle continues.

The individual based theories depict the life span as having a developmental endpoint, akin to physical capacity, which is then followed by decline (John-Steiner, 2000). A more holistic, integrated and dynamic model of creativity lends us the chance to talk about who we are becoming, why we are becoming those kinds of people and who we *want* to become. A reconceptualization of creative human activity "makes a mockery of any notion of individual authorship, if that means a kind of independent or autonomous creativity. But it fills personal authorship with social efficacy, for identities take us back and forth from intimate to public spaces" (Holland et al. p. 272). The point of understanding creativity through this lens is to then understand creativity as a *methodology of becoming* (Holzman, 2010).

The Case for Creative Practice:

Zone of Proximal Development and Being & Becoming

For the majority of this paper I have concentrated on how creativity has been traditionally understood, the limitations of those theories, and sociocultural theory's response. In this section, I will focus on why reconceptualizing creativity using sociocultural theory is a necessary step in order to talk about human development. For sociocultural theory, the very nature of learning and development is creative (Marjanovic-Shane, Connery & John-Steiner, 2010). Scholars who study creativity want to explain the "emergence of new things from human activity" (Sawyer, 2010, p. 367). This work assumes that the creative process has a meaningful cultural value that can lead to productive social and intellectual change.

> Cultural change always involves creativity. But this kind of creativity is very different from fine art painting or musical performance because it's a creativity of everyday life. In cultural creativity, novelty is the transformation of cultural practices and appropriateness is the value to a community. (Sawyer, 2006, p. 139)

Vygotsky can be seen as a forerunner to a psychology of becoming in which people experience both the social nature of their existence, as well as the collective creative activity that results in the making of new tools for individual and social growth (Holzman, 2006).

The nature of creativity is featured through collective activities that can forge social bonds while supporting identity formation and cultural transmission. The combined effort of the group transcends the sum of individual efforts creating powerful sources of change

(Ishaq, 2006). Creation and response to creation allow us to personalize the universal and universalize the personal, inspiring us to organize our future behavior by positioning us to take personal responsibility into account (Connery, 2010). This is the ultimate goal of reconceptualizing creativity. When it is no longer bound to particular individuals but instead exists as a psychological construct that is always engaged no matter the context, the creative process becomes a powerful tool that allows humans to develop more fully toward (or away from) particular cultural practices.

"Development, from this perspective, is the practice of a *methodology of becoming* in which people shape and reshape their relationships to themselves, each other, and to the material and psychological tools and objects in their world" (Holzman, 2010, p. 31). Central to the idea of development in sociocultural theory is the notion of the Zone of Proximal Development [ZPD], which Holzman (2006) refers to as "the ever-emergent and continuously changing 'distance' between being and becoming" (p. 114). The capacity of people to do things ahead of themselves is human development. ZPD has long been understood as a scaffolding process that aids in enculturation, but as Holzman (2006) suggests, "a more radical interpretation of the ZPD is that it is expressive of the dialectic of human life – that we are always who we are and simultaneously who we are becoming" (p. 114).

Herrenkohl and Mertl (2010) theorize a framework that includes ways of being, knowing, and doing. They contend that we become certain kinds of people as a result of our participation in cultural practices.

> Our central argument is that to fully understand human learning both in and out of school, we must go beyond ways of knowing and doing to identify the ways of being a person in the world emerge and guide human activity (p. 2).

Ways of being, knowing and doing are not separate from one another, but a way of being emerges from and is reliant on what an individual knows and does. It is "negotiated in social interaction using culturally available tools, including ways of knowing and doing" (p. 8). In this sense, we create our development.

Development cannot be separated from identities. The people that we develop as is founded on what we tell ourselves and others about who we are. Holland et al. (2010) contend that:

> We are interested in identities, the imaginings of self in worlds of action, as social products; indeed, we begin with the premise that identities are lived in and through activity and so must be conceptualized as they develop in social practice. But we are also interested in identities as psychohistorical formations that develop over a person's lifetime, populating intimate terrain and motivating social life. Identities are a key means through which people care about and care for what is going on around them. They are important bases from which people create new activities, new worlds, and new ways of being. (p.5)

When we consider that experience facilitates human adaptation to the world, we understand that it creates and fosters habits that are repeated under a particular set of

conditions (Vygtosky, 2004). Humans, cultural tools and the irrevocable tension between them have a particular past and are continually in the process of undergoing change (Wertsch, 1998). Who a person comes to be emerges from an individual's participation with the cultural tools available to them. Development is not preordained, but shaped by events (Wertsch, 1998) and the tendency to make meaning is inseparable from the creative construction of original artifacts and innovative solutions (Marjanovic-Shane et al., 2010).

The arts are one of the few fields where creativity is held the standard, not the exception (Moran, 2010). From this theoretical standpoint, the arts do not attract "creative people" but rather, provide particular ways of being, knowing and doing that foster creativity. Divorcing creativity as a sole attribute that belongs to the arts, allows us to inquire into what the arts are doing well that would further our understanding of development as a whole. Grierson (2011) suggests that artists and art have a particular role and a "language of being and knowing" that is concerned with breaking down "rationalized assumptions and normalized constructions" – in other words, a role that includes pushing development.

Being, Knowing and Doing in the Arts:
How Participation in the Arts Leads to Deepened Creative Practice

> The idea that culture influences cognition is crucial because the child's entire social world shapes not just what he knows but how he thinks. The kind of logic we use and the methods we use to solve problems are influenced by our cultural experience. Unlike many Western theorists, Vygotsky did not believe that there are many logical processes that are universal or culture-free. A child does not just become a thinker

> and a problem solver; she becomes a special kind of thinker, rememberer, listener and communicator, which is a reflection of the social context. (Bodrova & Leong, 2007, p. 1)

In explaining their research in science classrooms, Herrenkohl & Mertl (2010) say, "Their [the students] development as people who practice school science was happening alongside and in conjunction with their new ways of knowing and doing science" (p. 6). The acknowledgement that students do and know differently in relation to their practices than simply exist provides a powerful framework with which to understand how knowing and doing in the arts is reflected in the sort of people that are created as a result.

In the quotation above, Bodrova and Leong discuss how children become particular kinds of thinkers, rememberers, listeners and communicators, as a result of the social context that they are embedded in. It has for too long been misunderstood that creative people are attracted to creative classrooms, or arts studios. Based on sociocultural theory however, we can say that those who participate in the arts become particular kinds of people – who may, by Western society's understanding seem "creative" – in relation to the context and their participation. For this section, I will explore the ways in which people do and know in the arts and how, as a result of their knowing and doing, they emerge as particular kinds of people.

The arts place "greater focus on becoming [rather] than on being, places more value on the imaginative than on the factual, assign[s] greater priority to valuing than measuring, and regards the quality of the journey as more educationally significant than the speed at which the destination is reached," (Eisner, 2005, p. 10). They provide fertile ground for

exploration of the meaning of quality in arts more generally, as well as learning experiences that are rich and complex for all learners, engaging them on many levels and helping them learning and grow in a variety of ways (Qualities of Quality, 2010). "Accordingly, these forms of thinking are far more appropriate for the real world we live in than the tidy right angled boxes we employ in our schools in the name of school improvement" (Eisner, 2004, p. 10)

Ways of Being, Knowing and Doing

Eisner (2004) defines six distinctive forms of thinking – ways of knowing – that the arts evoke and foster including: the ability to compose and understand qualitative relationships that satisfy some purpose; the ability to capitalize on emergent relationships and shift aims while at work; the ability to see connections between form and content which are most often inextricable – how something is said is part and parcel of what is said; the ability to articulate what one knows in forms other than propositional, expanding ways of knowing; an ability to understand that materials – psychological and physical – offer certain constraints and affordances; lastly, a sustained motivation and focus on a project or idea.

The first three of these forms of thinking relate directly to Vygotsky's (2004) theories about creativity. Internalization leading to disassociation into elements, followed by the manipulation of those elements, and lastly, the recombination, or association of the new elements supports: composition and understanding of qualitative relationships, the ability to capitalize on emergent relationships and the ability to see connections.

Eisner's fourth form of thinking, the ability to articulate what one knows in forms other than propositional, is critical to knowledge construction, understanding and

communication. The arts are integrally and uniquely involved with symbol systems – with the manipulations and understanding of various sounds, lines, colors, shapes, objects, forms, patterns – all of which have the potential to refer, to exemplify, or to express some aspect of the world (Gardner, 1982).

This understanding of the arts can be applied to a general understanding of creativity: when we are aware of the symbol systems and cultural tools that we use, we are able to willingly participate with them in unique and powerful ways. Particular types of thought are the result of the kinds of activities and cultures that people participate in (John-Steiner, 1997). When it comes to the arts, Zakaras and Lowell (2008), find it "reasonable to assume that the influence of arts learning on participation is especially important. If, as we suggested earlier, the arts serve as a form of communication, one that is often subtle and complex, arts learning provides the dictionary, or decoder, for understanding and responding to the language of a particular art form" (p. 17). Learning to express and interpret in various symbol systems opens avenues to greater understanding, and greater possibility.

Generally held in studio classes, the arts provide various experiences that allow for increased engagement with different kinds of materials and tools. Designed using studio-based pedagogies which promote students to "think through creative practice, take conceptual risks by engaging with materials, imagine and speculate with ideas and processes, and seek solutions through visual or material means," (Grierson, 2011, p. 337), the arts offer opportunities to do things differently. In this setting, "the arts teach students to act and to judge in the absence of rule, to rely on feel, to pay attention to nuance, to act and appraise the consequences of one's choices and to revise and then to make other choices" (Eisner, 2004,

p. 5). The arts value mistake making, exploration and hands on experiences and make available opportunities for play, which is far from our socially accepted ways of doing.

If we are concerned with the creation of identities and the way that individuals become certain people, the aim of education, from this perspective ought to be the preparation of artists in the general sense (Eisner, 2010; Read, 1944). More technically, artists are "individuals who have developed the ideas, the sensibilities, the skills, and the imagination to create work that is well proportioned, skillfully executed, and imaginative, regardless of the domain in which an individual works," (Eisner, 2004, p. 4). By combining what an artist *technically* does with what an artist *theoretically* does, we begin to see the sort of individual that is oriented positively toward the future; powerfully creating their world from the world that already exists.

The purpose of this paper is not to say that in order to be an artist, one must strive to be Monet or Beethoven – quite the opposite. For Vygotsky, the artist is a social person collectively engaged in the cognitive-affective processes of creation with other community members (Connery, 2010) – combined with the sociocultural view of the creative process, in this sense, everyone is an artist of themselves as we create our identities and worlds.

Conclusion

In his seminal work Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience, Csikszentmihalyi (1990), states that: "A joyful life is an individual creation that cannot be copied from a recipe" (p. 79). Perhaps it seems counterintuitive to say that an increase in experiences with other people and cultural tools will lead to a more personalized and "joyful" life, however,

when we understand creativity as a process that fuels development and is dependent upon experience, we see that this is very much the case.

> Creativity transforms both the creator, through the personal experience of the process, and others, through the impact of new knowledge and innovative artifacts disseminated through culture. By engaging in creativity activity, people weave together the transformation of the known and the new into social forms. What makes this activity particularly salient is the sharing of emotions and the transformative power of jointly negotiated meaning making (p.72)

Long held myths about creativity have been disproven when scrutinized and studied using a variety of different theoretical lenses (Sawyer, 2006). Theories such as psychometric, cognitive, evolutionary and expertise-based have added to the literature in unique and valuable ways, such as defining creative traits, defining creative practices and critically considering what it means to assess creativity. These individual-based perspectives have done little however, to explain the relationship between creativity and development and therefore, they have not been able to address the overarching question of: Why should we care about creativity?

In response, sociocultural theory places creativity as an irrevocable part of the developmental process. We understand humans who are always in a process of being who they are, and becoming who they will be, creating and redefining themselves in relation to social-cultural-historical context in which they are embedded. This framework allows us to understand creativity as a process that is always engaged – we are always internalizing and

making sense of our experiences, no matter how irrelevant they may seem. In turn, the process of internalization/externalization shapes not only ourselves, but affects the world as well – it is in this space where creation occurs.

In his work on imagination and creativity, Vygotsky (2004) believed that there should be a particular emphasis placed on cultivating creativity in school-age children.

> The entire future of humanity will be attained through the creative imagination; orientation to the future, behavior based on the future and derived from this future, is the most important function of the imagination. To the extent that the main educational objective of teaching is guidance of school children's behavior so as to prepare them for the future, development and exercise of the imagination should be one of the main forces enlisted for the attainment of this goal. (p.88)

This research suggests that while there are many avenues for further exploration, first and foremost much more work is needed to understand how fostering creative dispositions in the elementary, and particularly the middle school years affects the way students develop as particular people in the world. Research that further inquires into the ways of being, knowing and doing that the arts promote is also necessary, so long that it does not further the divide between the arts and the rest of the world.

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