

Millicent Poole, *Creativity Across the Curriculum* (Sydney, Australia: George Allen and Unwin, 1979, pp. 237, \$9.95, pbk.).

Throughout her book, *Creativity Across the Curriculum*, Millicent Poole attempts to effect a balance between theory and practice in her discussions of and suggestions for creative enhancement of classroom activity. This sense of balance emerges from her format which treats a variety of curricular areas: the traditional ones such as mathematics, language and science and the more recently evolved areas of dance and psychodrama.

In advance of offering many concrete practical ideas for more creative activities within these selected curricular areas, Poole presents short discussions as to the creative possibilities that each area holds for student growth and learning. At these points she also highlights current theories on child development and related studies that pertain to specific subject areas. For example, relying heavily on the formulations of Jean Piaget, Poole integrates aspects of his theory into her description of the process of pattern-painting as it unfolds in young children (p. 117).

The suggestions for activities which follow Poole's introductory theoretical remarks arise directly from them in that they are tailored to theories and knowledge of child growth. These suggested creative activities range all the way from preferred book lists compiled by classroom teachers who have rated particular readings as high student-interest items, to the steps the teacher follows in the initiation of a programme of psychodrama. Psychodrama, as Poole defines it, is essentially a group exercise wherein students engage in roleplaying for the purposes of behaviour modification and/or the development of imagination and sensitivity to the behaviour of other individuals.

The value of building the structure of curriculum upon a sound theoretical foundation is that with knowledge guiding practice "scientific" rationales could exist as ultimate justifications for the teacher's choice of certain classroom activities over others. Through such structuring the educative process is given aim, direction and internal logic.

In Poole's words:

It is the contention of the authors of this book that ... in the first six years of schooling it is possible for the informed and responsive teacher to so structure teaching and learning situations that creativity is constantly emerging in the products of children's behaviour - cognitive, affective, social-emotional (p. 15).

Poole has collected the ideas of Australian school teachers, ideas which, in her opinion, "can be used across the curriculum in imaginative and exploratory ways to enhance the social experiences of children" (p. 15). The central practical concerns which spring from her research are then: (1) Can teachers fulfill their mandate as creative innovators? (2) Do children truly benefit from Poole's proposed creative approaches?

To assist this critical discussion, the writer cites Poole's definition of the term creativity as meaning, "any activity in which relative to the child the outcome is distinctly new and different in some significant way from the materials, ideas or experiences from which the activity developed". She adds that, "in this view, creativity is not an absolute but rather a very specific, person-related phenomenon" (p. 9).

This "person-relatedness" quality of creativity causes theoretical problems for at least two of the three major assumptions upon which the book is based. These are that: (1) "each student is innately curious, imaginative and creative", (2) "it is the role of the teacher to devise curricular experiences which will nurture and extend the child's potential for creative behaviour", and (3) "each curricular area can contribute to the personal development of the individual" (p. 16).

The theoretical issue at stake involves difficulties linked to evaluation of the degree of creativity that is inherent in the activities of education as these are performed in the classroom. If the first assumption can be accepted on the grounds of what Piaget and others have asserted about the nature of children in their development, the question still remains, "Can the teacher know when her student is acting imaginatively and creatively as opposed to when the student is not acting in this way?" It might be the case that the student is repeating an imaginative act which the teacher has not previously detected. Or, the student may be doing something truly new. From Poole's discussion, it seems that in order for an activity to be construed as being a creative one, it must occur as a novel event practically simultaneously for both teacher and student. In the case where the teacher cannot identify creative elements in the behaviour of the student, the student probably will be evaluated as having made an uncreative response to a particular activity situation. In such a case Poole's "person-relatedness" would suffer violation at the reification of the concept of creativity.

The teacher's avoidance of this error in judgement depends on a number of variables, the most fundamental of these being her intimate knowledge of the student. By utilizing what is known of the child, the teacher can more appropriately structure activities for and more accurately evaluate the creative performance of him. Such an approach to structuring would avoid the teacher's total imposition of a definition of creative behaviour on the child, thus allowing the child to develop his own definitions of the creative act. Poole does not deal with the important factor of knowledge of the student and the exclusion of this consideration tends to make the teacher's evaluation of student creativity a somewhat willy-nilly affair.

Poole's second assumption is that it is the teacher's role to provide experiences which are conducive to creative growth. She states, however, that, "probably teachers are no more or less creative than any other category of professional occupations. It seems realistic to assume that some teachers are creative and that probably many are not." She adds that, "even the teacher who is not especially creative ... can so structure children's experiences that creativity can emerge ..." (p. 13).

The above statements, which very generally describe teacher ability vis à vis creativity, appear contradictory when viewed in light of the expectation that teachers teach that for which they are competent. Apparently it is not a pre-condition for the structuring of a creative programme that the teacher possess an understanding of the creative process itself. Conversely, in her discussion about the role of movement in education Poole asserts that, "first, the teachers themselves must have an understanding of movement and how children learn. They need a framework as a guide to the fundamentals of movement, which should not be seen in terms of skills or activities, but of the elements that make up movement, the underlying principles that give structure to that subject" (p. 55). Here, she is arguing for the teacher's understanding of principles basic to the discipline area. Why should not this approach apply to the area of creativity?

It is conceivable that a creative programme could result from the limited creative abilities of teacher planning, but Poole does not really want to leave such critical structuring to the fates of chance. The progressively positive tone of her writing strongly suggests that creative planning equals greater student involvement and creative production. It seems crucial, then, that the teacher have an understanding of and appreciation for the nature of the creative process as it exists within her little charges.

In this sense, the second assumption requires qualification. Teacher guides, manuals and learning kits can creatively direct children through meaningful experiences. But critics of the school system need to feel confident about the teacher's ability to function creatively while she searches for the lost manual or waits for the "on order" language lab to arrive. To summarize this section, it is more than tempting to agree to Poole's assumptions: kids can be and are creative; teachers can develop a creative curriculum. The big question is "How do teachers institute creative structure in a consistent, thorough, and justified manner?"

Poole discusses some interesting activities which, in terms of their potential for creativity, should be included as parts of the school curriculum. Such activities are those of play and psychodrama. Poole states that, "the teacher ... is wise to use play within the classroom context so that the functions that play fulfills in the total development of the child can be channelled into productive and creative learning experiences in the classroom" (p. 171). She cautions, though, that, "teachers must learn to distinguish between educational play and ordinary play" (p. 166). Poole does not make this distinction clear in suggesting that all play be prioritized in terms of curriculum design and one wonders about the teacher's ability to make the distinction at all.

Within the setting of daily classroom life, it would be difficult indeed to ascertain how much learning was occurring as the students "played". The question also arises, "When does play stop being play and begin to look like work to children?" Poole mentions the "false dichotomy between work and play" in her plea that the teacher should blend these two elements into an enjoyably homogeneous educational experience (p. 181). The fact is children *do* have their own separate criteria for what constitutes "work" as well as "play" and consequently, the dichotomy between the two is very clear. Furthermore, student behaviour is probably influenced in large part by the student's perception of a given activity as being "work" or "play".

The practical problem which Poole's conception of play presents to the teacher is that she must somehow integrate spontaneous, pleasurable activity into the structured, goal-directed curriculum. As a "powerful learning energizer," (p. 165) one expects that this play will lead students to "desirable learning" (p. 166) and ultimately to the fulfillment of curriculum objectives. It would have been interesting and conceptually more complete if Poole had elaborated on the nature of "play" and its place in the educational system.

The activity of psychodrama is intriguing chiefly for the way Poole discusses its use by classroom teachers. She states that "when children are acting out situations in which they have some personal, emotional involvement, they are engaged in psychodrama" (p. 185). Further, "psychodrama [is] a ready instrument for building a child's sense of worth and competence".

While psychodrama has been established as a valuable aid for the expression of anxieties and the playing-out of troubling experiences, the reviewer fears that such techniques could have undesirable effects on some children. This apprehension is accentuated by Poole's comment that "it is not uncommon now to find psychodramatic techniques in use in schools and preschools, by teachers who claim no competence as "therapists" but who nevertheless find psychodrama a valuable means of assisting the learning and emotional growth of their children" (p. 184). Again, in the cases where teachers do not know the techniques, how are they in the position to judge the growth of children through psychodrama?

Poole justifies her advocacy of psychodrama by saying that even though it "is a powerful and potentially dangerous instrument, ... so are very many of the other activities which teachers engage in day after day without giving them a thought" (p. 189). While the truth of this statement is evident, its validity as an argument is not. Sound reasonings and justifications must substantiate every educational activity, all the more so in the acts of psychodrama wherein there lies the probability that the individual will expose to the group personal aspects of his private self.

Poole has undertaken the difficult task of defining creativity and then applying this definition to the classroom setting with the ultimate goal of improving what goes on there in terms of student development. This she has done in her practical suggestions as to specific activities teachers can actually set up within selected curricular areas. In order to understand the concept more fully and appreciate the issues involved in its application more completely, much more needs to be explained about creativity. For example, Poole's third assumption is that, "each curricular area can contribute to the personal development of the individual" (p. 16). Her separate treatment of these curricular areas leads to the question, "Do different subjects present their unique creative experiences, or, do the mechanisms of creativity (and the resulting sensations to

students) represent constants across the curriculum?" An overall theory of creativity would help to explain the answer to this as well as other questions.

Essentially Poole has given a limited definition and has not developed the concept "across the curriculum". The many theories from which she draws seem like isolated bits of thought which serve to guide the structuring of isolated activities. Conceptually, this material would be more effectively integrated through its demonstrated relevance to an overall theory which would include the many components of creativity.

Another result of the failure to explore the concept is that Poole's creativity appears to mean the use of a special kind of activity that will forge a closer alignment of practice to current popular theory on child development and related matters. In this sense, creativity seems to describe the dynamics of an effective meeting of theory and practice; two old partners in a newly-aware educational environment. A feeling, perhaps, but it is suspected that Poole does not intend this description at all. Creativity does have rightful claim to a position in the educational scheme of things, but, theory is one thing, practice another, and creativity - still, a kind of "magic"?

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