

Cognitive Seeds Talk Outline- 9 September 2017

- (A) My presentation is split into three parts: (1) Why creative thinking? What's the value?
 (2) Scholarship on creative thinking, and (3) What can we do in the FYC classroom?

(B) My argument: Creative thinking is not something that is instilled within our brains at birth, but rather is a collection of skills, habits and proficiencies that can be cultivated, refined and developed through instruction and habit-building in the composition classroom.

(C) Why creative thinking? What's the value?

- A surge in recent years in creativity as a foundational aspect of human cognition and intelligence.
- Value of creative thinking: ***SHOW QUOTATIONS (Runco).***
 - “The importance of creativity has never been greater.”
 - “Creativity is required for the innovation that provides a competitive advantage”
 - “The economy in general depends more and more on jobs that require creativity.”
 - Jeffrey Nealon?

Runco:

- (a) Current school system:
- (i) Discrepancy between the creativity students display inside school and what they display when they are not in school.
 - (ii) Runco concludes that the current educational system setup, patterns, habits, customs, routines, persuasions and inclinations fail to encourage/nurture creative thinking to the extent that outside environments do.
- “Several lines of research imply that schools are not fulfilling the creative potentials of students.”
 - Why? Not teachers, Runco says. Instead, it's **administration/economics/financial value-placing**/limited resources/education system not allowing for autonomy, more advantageous teacher-student ratio, time, etc.
 - Academic and creative achievement are not significantly correlated with one another (Holland and Richards, 1965; Wallach and Wing, 1969). Students have creative potentials that are not displayed on campus. Ex- most of our students demonstrate an excellent rhetorical grasp of audience on their Instagram, Tumblr and Facebook accounts.

- **Groups vs. alone** (possible explanation, as schools rarely able to support as much individual work as they might like to):
 - Students believe they are involved in more creative activities when they are alone rather than with others (248).
 - Creativity is related and correlated to **autonomy**, **independence**, and **intrinsic motivation** (Amabile, 1988; Ng, 2003; Runco, 2014; Lim and Smith; 2008).
 - Originality: poor student-teacher ratio possible in most schools and college classrooms. **Little autonomy can be provided because of logistical concerns.**
 - **Is there any room for intrinsic motivators in public schools? Should there be in the FYC classroom?**

- “Research has suggested that students may now express [their] creativity in **technology**” (243).

- Sullivan and Lynch quotations.

- The *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* produced collectively by the *Council of Writing Program Administrators*, the *National Council of Teachers of English* and the *National Writing Project* positions creativity as essential to college-level literacy.

(2) **Scholarship on creative thinking**

- “Research has suggested that students may now express [their] creativity in **technology**” (243).

- Ken Robinson: “Creativity is the greatest gift of human intelligence. The more complex the world becomes, the more creative we need to be to meet its challenges” (*Out* xiii).
 - Robinson: Everyone has the capacity to be creative, and creativity is a thinking process that can be nurtured and learned.
 - Creativity has been educated out of us. There’s no consideration of intrinsic motivation within current educational standards.
 - My question: How do we reaffirm the value of **entrepreneurship, innovation** and **creativity** in the composition classroom?
- Creativity: Not just for creative writing and art classes. Instead, creative thinking involves problem solving, remix, synthesis, questioning, even finding new and valuable problems.

Valuable questions for composition to answer: How do we nurture the ability problem solve, to remix, to synthesize, to question, to locate productive problems and gray areas?

- Creativity = “nurtured” = neuroplasticity?

Robert Sternberg: Defines creativity as (1) New idea generation (2) Evaluation and critical thinking (3) Practical ability- products and practice (Sternberg *Wisdom*).

- American Association of Colleges and Universities’ “*How Should Colleges Assess and Improve Student Learning?*”-- Employers overwhelmingly reject multiple-choice tests and other traditional instruments of assessment. The competencies these tests measure are not the ones employers value.

Sternberg’s response? WICS model of liberal education.

WICS model for liberal education: *Wisdom, Intelligence and Creativity Synthesized*.

- “The basic idea is that citizens of the world need creativity to form a vision of where they want to go and to cope with change in the environment, analytical intelligence to ascertain whether their creative ideas are good ones, practical intelligence to implement their ideas and to persuade others of the value of those ideas, and wisdom in order to ensure that the ideas will help achieve some ethically based common good” (Sternberg *Wisdom*).

(3) What can we do in the FYC classroom? Composition Pedagogy.

- Runco: How can we change the values and attitudes expressed toward creativity and creative thinking within our FYC environments? Many of our students don't seem to want to be creative.
 - Technology. Independent projects within new media.
 - -----> Make these no longer niche, fun, weird composition professor assignments, but standard components of a full, wholesome composition curriculum.
- Encourage risk taking. Reward productive “failures.” Find the hidden value in gray areas. Encourage reflection.
- Alfredo Lujan: Encourage students to write often in multiple genres: stories, personal essays, critical essays, parodies, poems, freewrites, letters to teachers, journals, jingles, reader responses, lists, etc. (Lujan 56).
- Sullivan’s “UnEssay” unit on creativity: Designed to treat creativity as a serious academic subject, to nurture and cultivate productive creative thinking habits, abilities, competencies.
 - Reading material directly centered on considerations of creative thinking, including Ken Robinson’s *Out Of Our Minds*.
 - UnEssay: Argumentative, expository, persuasive assignment that can’t take the form of a five-paragraph essay. Students are encouraged to invent a new form; to include multimedia, links, graphs, data, citations, images, videos, links, etc.

They’re encouraged to “write” the essay they’ve always wanted to write in an English class.

- -----> I encourage my students to create a social media profile and then reflect on their considerations of audience, purpose, exigency, evidence, etc. in a “statement of goals and choices,” a la Jodi Shipka.

Some questions for them to consider in their project:

- (1) How do fine artists look at the world?
- (2) What are writers and artists most interested in?
- (3) What is valued in the discipline you’ve chosen to “write” on? What counts as knowledge in this discipline?
- (4) What is studying arts and literature good for?
- (6) What is creativity?

- UnEssays took the form of websites, social media accounts and YouTube videos;

- Visions:

- Kathleen Blake Yancey: “Literacy today is in the midst of a tectonic change. Even inside of school, never before have writing and composing generated such diversity in definition” (298).
- Is composition going to be a single, elementary skill, or is it going to be a complex rhetorical activity within academic discourse communities?

SUMMARY slide

- Creative thinking is not something that is instilled within our brains at birth, but rather is a collection of skills, habits and proficiencies that can be *cultivated*, *refined* and *developed* through instruction and habit-building in the composition classroom.
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- Write in diverse genres.
- Compose within new media and the social web.
- Habit building and neuroplasticity.
- Change attitudes toward creativity.
- Examine why creativity is a valuable aspect of human cognition.
- Connect creativity with intrinsic motivation.

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References