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PERSPECTIVES IN STUDYING CREATIVITY AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

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The association of creativity and culturally divergent populations is a fairly recent phenomenon in the United States. For example, only since the beginning of this century have many in our nation moved from thinking that all Blacks have rhythm to acknowledging the contributions made by individual African Americans in developing jazz. Even more recent has been the move from viewing Indians as savages to recognizing lifestyles among many Native Americans that create harmony with the environment.

Although progress has been made in the 20th century regarding our views on the association of cultural diversity and creativity, there remains much room for growth. This is particularly so in research dealing with creativity in youth. Research concerning creativity and culturally divergent youth often has been focused on conceptually limited aspects of culture, as is seen in discussions of cultural diversity as status. Thus, this chapter serves, not as a review of static studies of cultural diversity and creativity, but as a call to move beyond those

aspects and to entertain a fuller understanding of culture to comprehend more completely creative potential among culturally diverse youth.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AS STATUS

In most studies of culturally diverse youth and creativity, status variables prevail. Status variables are characteristics of children or their families over which they have relatively little control. Generally, studies concentrate on three status conditions: (a) linguistic and ethnic difference—people whose primary language is other than English or whose ethnicity is other than European, (b) economic deprivation—people whose socioeconomic status (SES) is less than middle class, and (c) geographic isolation—people who live in inner-city or rural locations (Baldwin, 1985).

Rationale for Study of Status Variables

There have been at least three interrelated reasons for the research focus on status categories. First, there is a strong belief that we are losing talent from these populations. The talent loss has had enormous consequences. Renzulli (1975) and Gallagher (1988) decried the talent waste in our educational system that has not equitably applied its resources to developing potential in children from poor families. This waste has been blamed, in part, for unprecedented urban turmoil, unemployment and underemployment, rising crime and delinquency rates, and human despair (Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990; Renzulli, 1975).

A second reason for using status variables is the desire to compensate for the opportunities children have not had, given the deprivations of their status. Through discrimination, poverty, or isolation, it is believed these children have not had chances to engage in worthwhile educational experiences outside the school setting. We want to make up for that by providing experiences for those children who can best benefit from them. However, Passow (1972) indicated that sometimes in the efforts to compensate for experiences the students have not had, we overlook evidence of excellence within these students and do not consider them for services that could develop the gifts they do have.

Third, we believe that the strengths exhibited by children from various status categories may be different from those of mainstream children. There is the hope that problem solving can be more effective if we include talented individuals from diverse groups. That is, a White, middle-class cognitive model of linear logic may effectively be supplemented by cultural models of reasoning and creativity that are different. For example, Feldhusen and Treffinger (1980) suggested that

"disadvantaged students can use their positive strengths and abilities in oral expression, movement, and acting as well as in discussion, writing, and creative art to tackle the problems of the future" (p. 25).

An extension of this is the production of lists of strengths that are believed to be found in greater abundance among diverse populations. The most famous list is perhaps Torrance's (1977) creative positives that include items such as (a) ability to express feelings and emotion in communication, (b) ability to improvise with commonplace materials, (c) enjoyment of and ability in the visual and performing arts, (d) fluency and flexibility in nonverbal media, and (e) originality of ideas in problem solving.

Focus of Static Studies

Studies of creativity and youth in culturally divergent populations in which culture is defined as status have been directed to comparisons with mainstream children and descriptions of manifestation of creativity within status groups. As an illustration, in the Rothenberg and Greenberg (1976) *Index of Scientific Writings on Creativity*, the section on creativity and culture contains 60 citations (out of 121) that are either comparative studies of different status groups or are descriptions of a specific status group's characteristics. Since Rothenberg and Greenberg's compilation, such studies have continued. The status variables represent an intriguing range of comparisons, including single-parent families versus intact families (Jenkins, 1987); rural, White schools versus urban, Black schools (Lehman, Kahle, & Norland, 1981); and bilinguals versus monolinguals (Kessler & Quinn, 1987).

Critique of Status-Based Cultural Diversity Research

Research on creativity among culturally diverse populations that is based exclusively on status variables is often flawed for at least two important reasons. First, the operational definitions employed in the research are often insufficient. This applies to both creativity and status variable definitions.

Operational definitions of creativity are given scant attention in much of this research. Comparisons of creative performance among different groups are often based on divergent function scores, even when richer comparisons are possible. These comparisons of performance among groups have largely been derived from widely held conceptions wherein the creative person, process, or product is emphasized (Getzels, 1987). Little attention, if any, is given to variables such as language proficiency, degree of acculturation, or contextual differences among

cultures in their responses to changing conditions in the environment. Research results could vary considerably depending on whether highly assimilated children or children who have maintained a separate cultural identity are studied. Furthermore, children who speak one language well and another poorly are sometimes grouped as bilingual in the same way as children who speak two languages fluently. The influence of language on creativity is likely to be different in these two cases.

A second concern with the culture-as-status research involves the categorical thinking about individuals classified into the various status groups. The most obvious outcome of such thinking is the formulation of stereotypes. Categorical thinking becomes a problem when educational planning for a specific child from an ethnic group is based more on the child's anticipated performance as a member of that ethnic group than on the assessed pattern of strengths and weaknesses exhibited by the child. Stereotyping often results in thinking about individuals in terms associated with a larger group to which we have assigned certain characteristics, regardless of the unique characteristics individuals may show. This ignores the fact that a person's cultural heritage is received and internalized within a framework of a unique, individual experiential background (Lindberg, 1974). Tonemah (1984) explained some of the difficulties of ignoring individual backgrounds when he pointed out that among Native Americans there are 177 recognized tribes, each with its own culture, along with varying degrees of traditionalism, acculturation, and educational levels within tribal groups.

Categorical thinking is also closely associated with the deficit perspective on cultural differences (i.e., that nonmainstream cultures are inferior). Sometimes the search for the creative strengths of a particular group is really an effort, intentionally or not, to compensate for the weaknesses perceived in that group. For example, in acknowledging the role of low SES as a factor acting against the identification of high intelligence, Gowan (1979) stated that "most disadvantaged children have very high creative potential. Another way of saying the same thing is that creativity tests offer another route for identifying disadvantaged talent besides the usual verbal IQ" (p. 331).

However, as Piirto (1994) pointed out, using creativity tests as an alternative path for the identification of gifted individuals has implicit racist and classist overtones. She stated, "It was hoped that poor people would be included in a category called creatively talented if they couldn't be included in a category called academically talented" (p. 148).

Finally, categorical thinking about culturally diverse groups may reflect a patronizing utilitarianism wherein one group, perceiving that another group has not been able to solve its problems from within, offers assistance as a way to help the group members realize their strengths and

to use them to their own benefit. Hilliard (1994) pointed out that discussion about culturally diverse individuals' needs has focused on status variables and has failed to distinguish between those issues that are political and those that are pedagogical. Discussions about ethnicity, for example, are really about who has decision-making privilege and who does not. By extension, the dominant group is then privileged to define who the culturally diverse groups are. Lindberg's (1974) insight that to the culturally diverse, the dominant group is culturally different; that, in fact, everyone is culturally different, is conveniently ignored.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AS DYNAMISM

An alternative to the use of status variables to define culture in the study of creativity is the more dynamic view of culture rooted in the social sciences. In this perspective, culture is defined as a bound group with a common core of shared knowledge, meaningful behaviors, and symbolic artifacts that develop over time and place. Membership in a cultural group is not achieved merely through racial, ethnic, or class membership, but through embracing the knowledge, behaviors, and artifacts of the culture. Such a view of culture as a basis for examining creativity in diverse contexts could lead to the creation of new research and instructional paradigms that accommodate differences rather than make invidious comparisons.

Rationale for Dynamic Studies

Conducting research in which culture is considered as dynamic is important for three reasons. First, an enhanced understanding of the impact of culture on the creative person, place, product, or process could be realized. Efforts would be focused on describing what the culture is like and its impact on creativity, without attaching value judgments to the culture's sufficiency or utility. It would not be that this type of research is value-free; rather the goal would be to increase understanding so that differences can be valued. A focus on understanding culture was justified by Teicher (1963) in his discussion of culture as the matrix and context for all human behavior, including creativity. According to Teicher, culture provides the foundation on which creativity is built.

Second, the focus on creativity in these research studies would not be to find an alternative to the intellectual weaknesses perceived in the culture, but to develop individual talents to benefit people, the group to which they identify themselves as members, and society. Coupled with the valuing of differences, it would be recognized that developing talent in individuals and in diverse cultural groups would be worthwhile for the richness it could bring to society as a whole, and not because it

may potentially advance any particular group over another. For example, in a study of reservation and urban American Indians, Shutiva (1991) interpreted her findings in the context of understanding American Indian culture as it is expressed differently in two settings. Although the study was comparative, she did not use the statistical differences found to discuss group deficiencies or strengths, but to make suggestions for how the creativity of both groups may be enhanced.

Finally, studies of creativity and cultural diversity are based in a knowledge that a culture is always changing. New knowledge, behaviors, and objects are introduced into a culture within and across generations. For many years, theorists investigated how culture determines individual behavior (Teicher, 1963). More recently, Bruner (1993) pointed out that culture is continuously being constituted and reconstituted and is in constant movement, being shaped by the individuals within the culture. The shaping of culture should be particularly interesting to creativity researchers.

Recent discussions in cross-cultural psychology speak to the need to broaden the research focus in creativity to consider "the diversity of human behavior in the world and the link between individual behavior and the cultural context in which it occurs" (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 1992, p. 1). The traditional focus in cross-cultural psychology has been on cause-and-effect relations between culture and behavior, the generalizability of current psychological knowledge, the kinds of cultural experiences that promote human behavioral diversity and cultural change, and their relation to individual behavior. Cultural psychologists currently recommend an expanded focus that would include studies of uniformity (i.e., psychologically common or universal behaviors in the human species) and of contextual variables that relate to the processes of adaptation engaged in by humans (Berry et al., 1992).

Furthermore, discussions among scholars who are debating the merits of cultural literacy speak to the need to consider degrees of acculturation and its impact on creativity. Avizu and Saravia-Shore (1990) suggested that cultural literacy advocates accentuate incorrect perceptions regarding conflict and unity as they relate to bilingualism and multiculturalism, and by extension to creativity. They maintain that although multiple linguistic and cultural proficiencies should be seen as representing an advantage in the current international and domestic marketplace, diplomatic relations, strategic defense operations, and cross-cultural mediation and problem solving, they often are not. Instead, monolingual and monocultural views, as represented by the comparative studies previously discussed, may have contributed to limited recognition and use of the cultural-creating capacity of significant segments of the population in our country and throughout the world.

Focus of Dynamic Studies

There are at least three foci on which scholars who study culture-as-dynamism might concentrate. First, they could study creativity in context, asking questions such as: "How is creativity expressed in a certain cultural group, or do these people see themselves as being creative?" Their goal would not be to determine if the people are creative or not, but to discover the ways they are creative. Rejskind (1988) suggested that two kinds of creativity may be operating in any cultural group. One is accommodative creativity by which an individual attempts to restructure culture to solve problems; the other is assimilative creativity by which an individual attempts to conserve social structure to provide continuity with the past and support for tradition and accepted values. For example, a researcher interested in accommodative creativity might study how cultural groups in developing countries apply the introduction of new and unfamiliar technologies to restructuring schooling practices. On the other hand, a scholar interested in assimilative creativity may investigate how a unique cultural activity such as storytelling is maintained through that same technology.

A second focus might be on the study of cultural transmission via creative development. Within this focus, researchers might ask themselves about the role of tradition in the creativity of youth. They might investigate the ways in which youth in a particular cultural group are taught to be creative. Raina (1993) suggested that a good starting point for this research would be the study of unique creative persons in their cultural context, considering their personal developmental history as a whole.

One particularly interesting anthropological study was done that combined both these foci (i.e., creativity in context, cultural transmission via creative development). The study investigated an Appalachian chair-maker and his development in the tradition of chair-making. Traditional knowledge gained through his training as a youth and young adult eventually led to a style considered by many to be the mostly highly creative among the chair-makers (Jones, 1989). As another example, Tonemah (1984) studied the importance of knowing tribal songs, stories, and dances to the creativity of American Indian youth.

Finally, dynamic studies of creativity might also focus on cultural transformation, studying how cultures change. Earlier discussion alluded to the fact the individuals are not only influenced by their culture, but that they also are actively involved in shaping what the culture is becoming. Based on this idea, it is apparent that cultures change in ways that cannot be explained only through entropy (i.e., the natural tendency of things to change toward disorganization). Individuals, especially youth,

exert pressure on a culture that transforms it in intentional ways. Often these changes lead to improvements of the culture. The question of cultural transformation is particularly interesting when we investigate the diverse population within the United States, given the differences in beliefs and behaviors of groups often categorized under the same culturally different label, such as African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. Teicher (1963) pointed out that various groups differ in the rates and magnitudes of cultural change. Furthermore, change may be exerted from internal creative forces or from borrowing from other cultural groups.

Studies of acculturation provide one perspective for studying cultural transformation and creativity. Various views on acculturation (Berry, 1980; Berry, Trimble, & Olmedo, 1986; Mendoza & Martínez, 1981), as well as multiculturism (Banks, 1993), cultural context and talent development (Mistry & Rogoff, 1985), and cultural frames of reference (Ogbu, 1993) suggest important reasons for researchers to consider the impact of culture on the development of creativity. Five themes are common across the various views. First, both cultural transformations and creativity are multidimensional. The variety of dimensions of creativity have been discussed earlier in the chapter (also see Fishkin, chap. 1; Piirto, chap. 2; Keller-Mathers & Murdock, chap. 3; Rogers, chap. 10, this volume). Cultural transformations occur across the dimensions of at least time and space. Second, great variation exists regarding reasons for cultural transformation. For some the reason may be daily survival; for others it may be dissatisfaction with the status quo; and for still others it may be aggrandizement of the culture. Differences in degrees of cultural transformation also exist, ranging from minute changes such as the introduction of a new writing tool to grandiose changes such as major shifts in methods of industrial production. Third, investigations should focus on the development of everyday processes within the daily context of the cultural groups. Such processes could include basic need fulfillment (e.g., finding shelter, food, affiliation with others) or societal improvement. The fourth theme is the importance of the discovery of psychological meanings and variations that are not present in the culture of the observer. This relates back to the first focus of studies (i.e., creativity in context). The basic question, again, is how these people see themselves as creative, not if the observer thinks they are creative. The final theme states that the ultimate goal of cross-cultural studies should be to assemble and integrate results into a more nearly universal meaning of creativity that could be valid across cultures, rather than a meaning that favors any one culture over others.

Critique of Dynamic Studies

A major problem with culture-as-dynamism research of creativity and youth is the general lack of studies, particularly with relation to diverse groups in the United States. The call by Berry et al. (1992) for studies of "various cultural groups within a single nation-state" (p. 2) is valid for research into creativity and cultural diversity. In the United States it is particularly important to study groups such as Native Americans, African Americans, Asian Americans, and individuals of Hispanic origin who have lived together with Whites in differing states of coexistence for several generations, yet have maintained various remnants of once distinctly different cultures. Continuing to engage in research emphasizing "them versus us" comparisons of creative outputs will forever hinder the development and testing of creativity theories that may have applicability in different human groups.

Another potential problem in studying creativity from a culturally dynamic perspective would be the temptation to ignore deficits that do exist in various groups. When it is said that differences are not deficits (Torrance, 1974), it does not necessarily mean that problems do not exist. Problems (e.g., lack of housing or access to educational opportunity) should be identified and dealt with. It is not necessary, however, to assume that situations needing to be addressed result from the knowledge and behaviors that tie members of a cultural group together. Problems may be related more to educational or political ideologies and practices that contribute to unevenness in experience.

A final concern in studying creativity from a dynamic perspective may be the difficulty in transferring the knowledge gained to school settings. The creative processes discovered in such research may be idiosyncratic, informal, and subject to change as a culture transforms. Any attempt to codify and formalize these processes essentially freezes them in time and could potentially result in alienation between the school and the cultural group it may serve. Torrance (1977) stated that, given the many different facets of a culture, it would be impossible to specify the ways programs for culturally diverse youth could be adapted. Thus, the temptation to develop culture specific instruments for the assessment of creativity should probably be avoided. What is needed is shared sensitivity between the schools and the communities they serve. In this way, schools will be aware of changes taking place and be able to modify their educational approaches to take those cultural shifts into account.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have described two views of how creativity and cultural diversity are studied. In the past, studying creativity and youth

from a static perspective has dominated the research. This research has resulted in interesting comparisons that have provided some basis for searching for differing creative strengths in diverse populations. More importantly, it has raised our awareness of the need to look at different groups in different ways. However, culture-as-status studies, which have often been based on theories of cultural difference, deficit, and deprivation are no longer appropriate as a basis for the study of creativity and youth (Frasier, 1993).

Such studies ignore the dynamic nature of culture and the diversity of individuals within a group. It is our belief that a focus on culture as defined by social scientists will give a better picture of how individuals operate in creative ways to teach, to learn, and to shape their culture. As Hilliard (1994) pointed out, "scientists who study culture . . . have ways of talking about culture that should inform the professional dialogue in education" (p. 114).

A focus on culture as dynamic follows Spradley's (1980) advice that research on culture be used to increase knowledge in ways that serve the needs of humanity, rather than for mere curiosity. According to Hunsaker (1992), such research on creativity and culture would increase our understanding of human difficulties and the resources available to confront them. Through shared ownership of human problems and possibilities, individuals and groups can combine creative efforts to improve their abilities to face and instigate change within and across cultures.

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part IV

RESEARCH METHODOLGIES