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Introduction to the Special Issue: 'Collaborative Creativity: Socio-cultural Perspectives'

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As readers of *Thinking Skills and Creativity* will be aware, the fostering of creative thinking and practice is currently a major educational, social and economic priority (e.g. Craft, in press) and debates about creativity in education proceed in the context of broader discussions concerning the necessity of innovation for wealth creation and the economic significance of the creative and cultural industries (see Taylor & Littleton, 2008). In education important questions and debates proliferate, concerning for example, 'what is creativity?' 'who is creative?' and 'where does creativity flourish?'. Further discussions concern the: 'purposes of using our imagination and creative capabilities, and how they contribute to our sense of self as individuals in relationship with others and the wider world' (Loveless, 2007, p.6).

Whilst research on creativity has frequently emphasized the individual as producer, contemporary work has afforded a characterization of creative processes as dynamic, fundamentally social and necessarily collective and collaborative (for a discussion see Sawyer, 2006). This suggests that research is needed to further our understanding of collaborations as important sites for creativity. This special issue is therefore particularly concerned with exploring how we conceptualise, study and promote collaborative creativity in diverse educational settings with children and adults.

United by a socio-cultural view of creativity, the multi-disciplinary papers that make up the issue apply the ideas inherent in socio-cultural approaches to the study of collaborative creativity to a range of knowledge domains and educational contexts. The papers also consider the implications of this research for our understanding of (inter-)thinking, educational dialogues and educational practices more broadly. Emerging from the issue is the notion that if researchers are to understand and characterise collaborative creativity they need to examine the nature and significance of the interactions, relationships and cultures which constitute and sustain such activity, as well as the mediational role of cultural artefacts, including tools, sign systems and technologies.

Approaching the analysis of collaborative creativity through socio-cultural lenses, the contributors to the special issue examine questions such as: 'how can the processes of creative collaboration be characterised and analysed?'; 'how can learners be encouraged and resourced to work together creatively?' 'what is the significance of context?'; 'what is the role of new technology in mediating creative collaborations?' and 'how is identity work implicated in collaborative creativity?'.

The special issue comprises five empirically-based research papers from academics in the UK, Mexico, Finland, and the USA and opens with a paper by Rojas-Drummond, Albarrán and Littleton. Drawing on analyses of primary-school children's joint creation of digital stories to explicate the processes of collaborative creativity, the work reported emphasises the importance of children having an exploratory orientation towards their joint activities and the need to analyze these processes at a micro-level, as well as considering a more macro-level of analysis which takes account of the cultural and institutional contexts that frame these activities. The authors also highlight the significance of the emotional aspects of creative and dialogic collaborations. This emphasis on affect is taken up in the second contribution by Vass, Littleton, Miell and Jones, who explore the significance of emotions throughout young children's shared creative writing episodes and 'collaborative floor' as an indicator of joint focus and intense sharing. The third contribution by Fernández-Cárdenas construes collaborative creativity as a situated, interactional accomplishment, constituted in and through participation in particular learning communities – a stance that is echoed in the fourth contribution by Wix and John Steiner. Wix and John Steiner's paper also draws attention to the identity work implicated in collaborative creativity, suggesting that higher education students emerge from experiences of facilitating and participating in creative collaborations richer for having practiced a variety of ways of knowing and *being* in classes. The fifth and final paper by Eteläpelto and Lahti focuses on trainee-teachers and particularly emphasises the negative consequences of conflict and unequal power

relations which they suggest are particularly harmful from the perspective of creative collaboration.

The issue ends with two commissioned thematic commentaries written by Anna Craft and Michele Grossen. The two commentaries explore the implications of research for the understanding and promotion of collaborative creativity in education. In doing so, they offer full and engaging critiques of the work presented as well as suggestions for how work on collaborative creativity needs to develop in the future.

Taken together, the papers and commentaries in this issue offer a contemporary and provocative analysis of the complex field of collaborative creativity in educational settings – an analysis which we hope will engage the readers of *Thinking Skills and Creativity* and stimulate further research and debate within this academic community.

References

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