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Introduction

This article, which is speculative in outlook and emerges from an extended review of academic, practitioner and policy literature on this subject (Banaji and Burn 2006), takes as its basic premise the notion that the idea of 'creativity' – whether in relation to literacy and the arts, schooling or the economy – is constructed as a series of rhetorical claims. These rhetorics of creativity emerge from the contexts of research, theory, policy and practice. In a more general sense, within the whole review and future applications of it, the purposes of such an approach are to identify how such constructions work, what claims are being made, and how different rhetorical constructions of creativity might have differing impacts on pedagogic strategies in relation to literacy, arts projects and media education. More narrowly, this article aims to summarise the rhetorics and their major concerns, while considering how selected ones might apply to an instance of media literacy. This is an exemplary instance only, using the work of two Year 8 students (12 years of age) from an English/Media course on comicbook superheroes.

We situate our discussion in contexts ranging from the affordances of technology, play, games, politics and popular culture to value judgements made in formal and informal educational settings. Initially we distinguish ten rhetorics, which are summarised in relation to the philosophical or political traditions from which they spring. Our list is neither exhaustive nor fully representative of historical interest in this subject but has in general been gleaned from the contemporary work of those with some interest in 'learning', broadly conceived. We have left out, for instance, rhetorics of creativity that cover global political processes and economic critiques, as well as a rich literature on religion and creation. The discussion then returns to a number of key rhetorics – play, technology, the creative classroom and social critique – which have most relevance for

understandings of literacies and the way in which these are nurtured, encouraged and expressed in different social settings.

The Rhetorics of Creativity

We begin with the rhetoric which could be said to have the oldest provenance and to have remained resilient, albeit in more subtle guises, within educational practices relating to literacy in the 20th and 21st century: **Creative Genius**. This is a romantic and post-romantic rhetoric that dismisses modernity and popular culture as vulgar, and argues for creativity as a special quality of a few highly educated and disciplined individuals (who possess genius) and of a few cultural products (Simonton, 1999; Scruton, 2000). Culture in this rhetoric is defined by a particular discourse about aesthetic judgment and value, manners, civilization and the attempt to establish literary, artistic and musical canons. It can be traced back through certain aspects of the Romantic period to aspects of European Enlightenment thought, in particular Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790), sections of which explore themes relating to aesthetic judgment, notions of genius and question the necessity that objects of 'beauty' should have actual 'purpose'.

In contrast, providing an explicitly anti-elitist conceptualisation of creativity as inherent in the everyday cultural and symbolic practices of all human beings, is a rhetoric relating to **Democratic Creativity and Cultural Re/Production.** This rhetoric, most familiar in the academic discipline of Cultural Studies, sees everyday cultural practices in relation to the cultural politics of identity construction. It focuses particularly on the meanings made from and with popular cultural products. This rhetoric provides a theory derived from the Gramscian perspective on youth sub-cultures developed by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. It constitutes practices of cultural consumption (especially of films, magazines and popular music) as forms of production through activities such as music sampling and fan activity; and thus belongs to an influential strand of cultural studies which attributes considerable creative agency to those social groups traditionally perceived as audiences and consumers (Willis, 1990).

Similarly democratic, but without the basis in cultural politics, is a rhetoric of **Ubiquitous Creativity.** Here, creativity is not just about the consumption and production of artistic

products, whether popular or elite, but involves a skill in terms of responding to the demands of everyday life. To be more creative, in this discourse, involves individuals having the flexibility to respond to problems and changes in the modern world and their personal life (Craft, 1999). While much of the writing in this rhetoric is targeted at early years education with the aim of giving young children the ability to deal reflexively and ethically with problems encountered during learning and family life, examples used to illustrate 'everyday creativity' include attempts by working-class individuals or immigrants to find jobs against the odds without becoming discouraged.

The rhetoric of **Creativity for Social Good** sees individual creativity as linked to social structures. This rhetoric is characterised by its emphasis on the importance for educational policy of the arts as tools for personal empowerment and ultimately for social regeneration (NACCCE, 1999). It stresses the integration of communities and individuals who have become 'socially excluded' (for example by virtue of race, location or poverty) and generally invokes educational and tangentially economic concerns as the basis for generating policy interest in creativity. This rhetoric emerges largely from contemporary social democratic discourses of inclusion and multiculturalism. Similarly, the future of a competitive national economy is seen to depend, in the rhetoric of **Creativity as Economic Imperative**, on the knowledge, flexibility, personal responsibility and problem solving skills of workers and their managers (cf. Scholtz and Livingstone, 2005). These are, apparently, fostered and encouraged by creative methods in business, education and industry (Seltzer and Bentley, 1999). There is a particular focus here on the contribution of the 'creative industries', broadly defined, although the argument is often applied to the commercial world more generally. Again, this rhetoric annexes the concept of creativity in the service of a neo-liberal economic programme and discourse (Landry, 2000).

A persistent strand in writing about creativity, the rhetoric of **Play and Creativity** turns on the notion that childhood play models, and perhaps scaffolds, adult problem solving and creative thought. It explores the functions of play in relation to both creative production and cultural consumption. A related rhetoric of **Creativity and Cognition** can be seen as two quite different traditions. One includes theories of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993) and the testing of mental creativity levels (cf. Cropley 2001), and explorations of the potential of artificial intelligence to demonstrate creative thought and

production. Its emphasis is on the internal production of creativity by the mind, rather than on external contexts and cultures; although Gardner's position is, of course, more complexly situated than this. The other consists of more culturally situated notions of creative learning expounded by Vygotsky (1998); we return to these ideas in coming sections.

If creativity is not inherent in human mental powers and is, in fact, social and situational, then technological developments may well be linked to advances in the creativity of individual users. The rhetoric constructed around **The Creative Affordances of Technology** covers a range of positions from those who applaud all technology as inherently improving to those that welcome it cautiously and see creativity as residing in an as yet under-theorised relationship between users and applications. This rhetoric is characteristic of contemporary constructivist discourse in the field of education. Pertinently for those interested in literacy teaching, placing itself squarely at the heart of educational practice, **The Creative Classroom** rhetoric focuses on pedagogy, investigating questions about the connections between knowledge, skills, literacy, teaching and learning and the place of creativity in an increasingly regulated and monitored curriculum. The focal point of this rhetoric is frequently practical advice to educators in both formal and informal settings about ways of encouraging and improving the learning of young people. This rhetoric locates itself in pragmatic accounts of 'the craft of the classroom', rather than in academic theories of mind or culture. Setting a challenge to aspects of foregoing rhetorics, **Creative Arts and Political Challenge** sees art and participation in arts education as politically challenging, and potentially transformative of the consciousness of those who engage in it; and it describes the processes of institutional pressure that militate against positive and challenging experiences of creativity by young people, regardless of the efforts of teachers and practitioners.

Scanning across the rhetorics outlined, while the idea of creativity may be seen to be as complex, varied and contradictory as its current use in education at least in the UK is widespread, it is possible to see both connections and contradictions between different rhetorics. Creative Genius and Democratic Creativity and Cultural Reproduction, for instance, share a focus on the appreciation, aesthetics and production of cultural artefacts and art, broadly defined; while rhetorics of Ubiquitous Creativity, Social Good

and the Economic Imperative all place the supposedly creative power of individuals (whether, as learners, workers or citizens) at the centre of attempts to overcome personal and social problems. Rhetorics addressing cognitive, social and play theories as well the creative potentials of technology share an emphasis on questions about the relationship between users and tools, prior knowledge or skills and innovation. Aspects of the Creative Classroom, meanwhile, share with Creative Arts and Political Challenge, an interest in pedagogic and political critique, destabilising and questioning not the principles of democratic views of creativity but the institutional and social contexts within which creative literacies (verbal, visual or mediated) are acquired and transformed.

So where does this leave us as literacy educators and researchers? While this article attempts to categorise the discourses associated with 'creativity' in different contexts, and in so doing acknowledges that both the contexts and discourses are sometimes overlapping, the term is still often used in a vague, ill-defined way, either because users consider it to be self-explanatory or because it is invoked to add lustre and a 'feel-good factor' to processes or aspects of pedagogy at risk of sounding dry and technological. This is particularly the case with the whole subject of literacy. On the one hand, instead of acknowledging that literacy is itself not singular and monolithic but diverse, culturally situated and mediated, it has sometimes been taken for granted at a policy level that 'creative' or 'playful' activities cannot improve children's literacy to the extent that decontextualised cognitive tasks and daily drills can. On the other hand, academic commentators on creativity do not necessarily take up distinct and defined positions with regard to pedagogy and literacy. Indeed, arguments in favour of the testing of creativity overlap with those against such evaluation. And those arguing against skills based approaches in the English classroom may argue the virtues of technical literacy in Media Studies or ICT. In these circumstances, it is important to show the contexts within which rhetorical claims about creativity are being made and the purposes served by their use. It is similarly important to outline the alliances between sometimes apparently antithetical rhetorics and to identify the ones that are generally missing from educational debates. This is what we try to do in our section on creativity and learning.

Creativity and Learning

While a number of current approaches to play and creative learning come from the perspective of cognitive science with a concomitant emphasis on the rigour of psychometric scales and inter-cognitive tests (Cropley, 2001; Carruthers, 2002) some cognitivist approaches to play do share the emphasis of the 'Creative Classroom' rhetoric on the importance of divergent thinking. Sandra Russ, for instance, argues that '[p]lay has been found to facilitate insight ability and divergent thinking' (2003: 291), and that 'theoretically play fosters the development of cognitive and affective processes that are important in the creative act' (2003: 291). Challenging a mainstay of the economistic conceptualisation of creativity, she sees children as being excluded by definitions of creative products as effective, novel and valuable.

Russ argues that the ways in which children use language, toys, role plays and objects to represent different things in play are habitual ways of practising divergent thinking skills. Accounts such as these raise questions for those interested in creativity, literacy or the links between them. For example, there is widespread concern (cf. Brennan, 2005; Maisuria, 2005) about the way in which childhood pretence and play are being squeezed out of the school curriculum to be replaced by the learning of rules and appropriate roles, rote literacy tasks and an approximation of 'adult'-type problem solving tasks. Alpesh Maisuria argues powerfully that the interventions of recent governments in education have created a culture of 'vocationalisation', 'standardization' and 'rubber stamp' testing which has all but killed the space for creative pedagogy, playful exploration and creative work in the classroom.

In intra-cognitive perspective
Many cognitive accounts of play and creative learning tend, however, to overlook the cultural and social contexts of learning. By contrast, the developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky's essay on play (in Vygotsky, 1978) proposes essentially the same framework for play as he does for learning in general, and learning about language in particular: that play, like any form of symbolic action, involves the social use of tools for making meaning: resources endowed with meaning by the imaginative work of the user, such as a broomstick which in play might become a horse. The emphasis here is less on the internal mental mechanisms of play, imagination and learning, and more on how imaginative and playful processes are negotiated with others through external resources. In his essay on creativity in adolescents (1998), Vygotsky presents play as a necessary

pre-cursor to creativity proper, arguing that in early adolescence, the imaginative work of play is complemented by processes of rational thought. Creativity in its mature form consists of both imaginative and intellectual effort. In our own research, this framework has been used to consider what kind of creativity might be at work in teenagers' design of computer games, where the cultural experiences of games are transformed by the design of a playful experience, involving both rule-governed systems of conditionality and imaginative constructions of narrative space (Burn and Durran, 2007).

For us, this has helped to clarify how games can be used in education in relation to media literacy, and helped us to move away from simplistic notions of play and creativity apparent in contemporary debates about the educational value of new technologies such as computer games. A persistent contradiction that runs through these debates is between the desire by educators to recuperate games as a form of safe, socially progressive activity, conducive to learning and development; and play as a more chaotic, subversive, even dangerous activity (cf. Sutton-Smith, 2001). Indeed, the creative potential of computers, the internet and new multimedia visual authoring software packages are sometimes taken for granted and at others challenged by those who view the increased use of technology as a threat to literacy and creativity, and as embodying a variety of risks for children. But just how are notions of creativity linked to technological change in this rhetoric?

The creative affordances of technology?
In their trenchant critique of the use of information and communication technology by children, Cordes and Miller assert that 'a heavy diet of ready-made computer images and programmed toys appear to stunt imaginative thinking […] children in our electronic society are becoming alarmingly deficient in generating their own images and ideas' (2000: 4). In contrast, supporting Avril Loveless's socially situated view of the potentially creative uses of new technologies (1999, 2003) in their riposte to Cordes and Miller, Douglas Clements and Julie Sarama (2001) cite studies that document what they call 'increases in creativity' and as well as better peer relations following interactive experiences with certain computer programmes. However, like Scanlon et al (2005), they also note that many computer programmes designed to increase children's knowledge and skills are not in the least bit creative, relying on rote learning, repetition and drill exercises. Thus they argue that computers can, but do not necessarily, support

the expression and development of creativity. As Sefton-Green (1999) argues, ultimately the social contexts of digital technology's use may help or hinder its creative potential.

In a similar vein, but with different conclusions, the largest study to date of the use of digital video in the classroom (Reid et al, 2002) found that while teachers generally perceived creativity (and the benefits of digital technology) as a liberation from constraint, convention and teacher-directed work, the most media literate work developed from close attention to the language of the moving image, and carefully-structured tasks. It concluded that creative work in this medium proceeds not from the technology itself but from awareness of the cultural properties of the medium, and from specific pedagogic practice. More generally, educational practice is very often situated between the extremes of 'elite' and 'democratic' views of creativity and the aims, rhetorics and practices of individual schools, or educators may be positioned at various points on the spectrum. They are then pulled in different directions by a number of factors which might include *policy imperatives* such as social inclusion or provision for the 'gifted and talented' as well as the need for a school to bid for funding and *compete* for pupils. These issues are often related to forms of cultural politics, either explicitly or implicitly. Depending on the motives of policy makers or educators, the creative work of young people may be planned as, or retrospectively interpreted as, a form of political intervention, or, conversely, as an aesthetic exercise, a means for jazzing up a 'dull' literacy driven curriculum.

No room for critique?: learning, creativity and institutional settings
The *National Curriculum in Action* website for promoting creativity (published by QCA), for example, defines creativity as it is put forward in the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education report (NACCCE 1999): creativity is *imaginative* and *purposeful,* and produces *original* and *valuable outcomes*. Unfortunately, much of the policy literature on this subject begs a number of crucial questions: would teachers need a 'creativity make-over' if not constrained by imperatives relating to assessment, timetabling and school management? Do the products of either formal or informal creative projects for youth have to be pro-social in their outcomes and abide by institutional constraints? And what happens to them when they do not? What then of formal contexts within which creativity is invited to play a part in improving literacy and

learning – do these discussions take on board the necessity for contextual learning, for discussion, debate and challenge?

In its most positive incarnation, the 'Creative Classroom' rhetoric may be seen to promote forms of learning that are generally held to improve the experience of children in education – holistic learning, active learning, expanded notions of intelligence, attention to social and cultural contexts, social learning and ethical human development (Beetlestone, 1998; Starko, 2005). By the same token, though, it runs the risk of losing what is distinctive about 'creativity' itself – if it cannot be distinguished from all these other things, where is its explanatory power? Additionally, in some formulations, process and product are set up as being in opposition to each other, rather than as in dialogue and this in turn leads to a seriously problematic relationship between creativity and evaluation, and creativity and critical literacy practice.

From David Buckingham's point of view (2003), rhetoric about creative classrooms takes on a different character when consideration is given the actual contexts of teaching where there is an increasing pressure to 'deliver' manageable chunks of literacy in the curriculum and to the construction of the 'teacher' as someone who has yet to acquire the skill of creativity via contact with practitioners from the arts or media. In this context, the critique by Patricia Thomson and her colleagues of the conduct, experience and outcomes of one arts project and its various implications for the everyday life of an ordinary primary school makes worthwhile reading (Thomson, Hall and Russell, 2005). In the instance examined, the thought-provoking writing and performance of the children which take place via contact with a dramatist in a Midlands primary school are effectively censored by the head teacher for fear that their sardonic, satirical or dark ideas about a modern educational community will undermine parents' faith in the school, offend various members of the school community and cause a scandal in the press. The bits of the children's work with the artist/writer in residence that are most creative and challenging are those that cause the most conflict.

For Thomson and Hall (2005, 2006), in current educational policy around creativity, the transformative potential of involvement in creative work is marginalised in favour of 'a relatively weak form of social inclusion'. To them, it is divergence and challenge, rather than the ability to successfully negotiate everyday life that is at the heart of creative

endeavour. But how viable is such a definition for most educators in formal settings, and especially for children, whose work is most vulnerable to censorship? And how does this notion of challenge and transformation relate to aspects of the curriculum that involve both the 'consumption' and the 'production' of mass media cultural artefacts? We attempt to address these questions at least tangentially in our following section via an exploration of the subversive media work of two twelve year old students set within the context of a broader overview of current discussions of media literacy and creativity.

Creativity and Media Literacy

Attention to creativity within the related domains of media education and media literacy has grown as the emphasis has shifted from the analysis of media texts to the production of media texts, made possible by the advent of digital authoring tools for moving image media, website production (Abbott, 2001), and even computer games (Burn, 2007a and b). While a concern with representation and identity and the ways in which these are embedded or creatively inflected in textual practices has long been a concern of those writing about Critical Literacy (cf. Janks 1993), recent models of media literacy have included references to creativity: for instance, the UK regulator OFCOM, which has a remit to promote media literacy, has adapted an earlier notion (Aufderheide, 1997) in their model of 'Access, Understand, Create'. A rather different emphasis is suggested by a model currently being explored among European media literacy specialists, which sees media literacy as cultural, critical and creative. However, the exact nature of the ideas of creativity invoked in these models has often remained vague. At its most reductive, it may simply mean that children and young people are making or producing content. Elsewhere, the creative process is defined in terms of other functions it may serve, such as developing a conceptual understanding of how media texts are structured, or simulating the production processes of media industries.

However, media education research which draws on the tradition of Cultural Studies offers more useful accounts which relate creative production work to identity construction. Buckingham and Sefton-Green (1994), for example, present an account of young people's creative media work in school in which such work provides opportunities for the exploration, negotiation and transformation of identity. This kind of argument,

especially when rooted, as it is here, in empirical study, is close to the 'grounded aesthetic' of the young people studies in Willis (1990); to Vygotsky's notion of the way creative work transforms the creator; and to Bruner's notion of identity as distributed and negotiated through the use of cultural resources. All three of these theoretical perspectives allow literacy researchers and practitioners to relate young people's production of their own media texts to notions of identity. From Willis's perspective, such work is grounded in aesthetic tastes and productive work using the resources of popular culture. From the Vygotskyan perspective, media production work both uses cultural resources and semiotic tools, and, like any creative work, transforms the user in some way. Meanwhile, Bruner's conception of distributed identity allows us to see how creative work externalizes aspects of human identity, making them visible in the form of media texts and events to other members of the community, and inviting response and engagement.

Playful syntheses, critical play: children making comics
For the purposes of teasing out some relationships between media literacy and creativity, then, the most productive approaches to invoke are likely to be the culturalist and cultural psychology approaches. These have the advantages of emphasising cultural contexts and resources, of theorising the social development of identity, and of providing a dialectical account of how imaginative work, play, and intellectual development together make up the creative process. In addition, this combination of approaches offers ways to think about dissident and creative literacies, ways in which children's and young people's interpretation and production of meaning in their own and other media texts might engage with forms of cultural politics, and construct imaginative critiques of aspects of their social world.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

We will briefly discuss two examples. Figures 1 and 2 show two comic strips made by Year 8 children (12-13 years old) in a comprehensive school in Cambridge, UK. They were made as part of a media course about comic strip superheroes, which analysed superheroes past and present, in print, animation and live action film; and then asked

students to invent their own. In terms of media education and literacy, this kind of production by school students can be seen in the context of current debates about multimodality and the literacy curriculum (eg, Bearne, 2004; Burn and Durran, 2007).

The first image shows Sophie's super-heroine, Tigerwoman. Sophie's written commentary shows that Tigerwoman is a consciously feminist construction. It also reveals that her alter ego is a disabled girl in a wheelchair, who dreams Tigerwoman in her sleep at night. While Sophie herself was not disabled, she was very shy, and our reading of the disability was, we believe plausibly, as a metaphor for her shyness. While it is possible that this image could be read as irony or humour, the plausibility of this interpretation is supported by both the teacher's close knowledge of her as a pupil and by her own discussion of her comicstrip. Her visual design shows both Tigerwoman and her mortal enemy as visibly sexualised female figures, with body-hugging costumes, pronounced curves, elaborate make-up (nail varnish, lipstick, eye-shadow), and, in Wolf's case, an exposed navel.

The social purpose of this seems to be an exploration of aspects of sexual identity expressed in dress and makeup codes in ways not open to Sophie in her own life, a projection of, or at least experimentation with, more risky attributes than she can adopt in her own body. This kind of aspirational play with gendered identity may be a familiar idea (Willett, 2006), but the question here is: what does it mean to describe it as creative? To stay with our notion of media literacy, it is first of all culturally creative, in that it gathers signifiers from media sources (superhero comics) and from tween girl-culture (makeup, dress codes, nails), and combines them. This operates as an imaginative act but also as an intellectual act, which proposes a form of identity, but also an emphasis on female power not common in this genre.

The other comic strip shows Claude's superhero, the Toaster. Again, creativity consists of an imaginative inventiveness which takes cultural resources from conventional elements of superhero design – the hyper-delineated musculature and dynamic panels – and combines them with signifiers from a quite different provenance – the domestic toaster – to represent a new idea. In this case, however, another set of cultural resources is employed – visual signifiers from a different comicstrip tradition best represented by the scatological British comic *Viz*, and present in Claude's design in

elements such as comically bulging eyes and puffs of smoke shooting from the ears of characters in distress.

In these respects, Claude's design exemplifies Vygotsky's model of imaginative work: cultural resources pulled from the memory, and transformed through recombination, a process of meaning-making in which the tools are both the reworked images and the material tools of inscription (in this case, pencil crayons). However, as in Sophie's design, this work is also intellectual. It does not represent directly aspects of identity, as does Sophie's Tigerwoman; rather it represents forms of cultural taste, in a sophisticated critique of conventional comicbook superheroes. The dullness of Superman is lampooned in Toaster's enemy, Really Quite Strong Man, whose name and visual attributes (ludicrously square jaw) transform the conventional signifiers of the DC comics for parodic purpose. In this combination of rational thought and imaginative recreation, Claude's work, like Sophie's, exemplifies the criterial features of mature creativity as Vygotsky sees it in early adolescence (1998).

In the media literacy work of both students, then, creativity can be seen in terms of the imaginative transformation of (popular) cultural resources coupled with intellectual purpose. At the same time, this kind of work can be viewed from the perspective of Cultural Studies, as an example of the kind of 'grounded aesthetic' conceived by Paul Willis. The link between these two perspectives is provided by Vygotsky, whose model of creativity emphasises the centrality of cultural resources. To make a connection of this kind is problematic for Cultural Studies, which is traditionally hostile to accommodations with psychological research and theory. However, there are useful precedents, for instance in the work of Buckingham (2003), which uses Vygotsky to provide a theory of concept formation linked to the kinds of cultural pleasures and social motivations typical of Cultural Studies perspectives.

From this point of view, then, it is significant that the cultural context and provenance of these students' comicstrips is the landscape of popular culture, part of the cultural capital of these students. In relation to media literacy, this work is, then, cultural and creative in its context and its resources; but also in its social function, which is to project aspects of identity: in Sophie's case, an exploration of risky but appealing constructions of femininity; in Claude's case, an expression of cultural taste and judgment. Both pieces

are also critical: they critique the representations of gender in comicstrip superhero texts, in Sophie's case by creating a powerful superheroine and villainess; in Claude's, by sending up the square-jawed, muscle-bound masculinity of the male superhero.

A final question might be: what are the implications for teachers of the kinds of creativity and media literacy described here? Firstly, it is clear that this kind of literacy work needs to be closely attentive to the cultural resources children might draw on – to make opportunities for these to be recalled, presented, manipulated and played with. Secondly, the intellectual and critical aspects of this literacy has involved the explicit teaching and learning of conceptual ideas – the representation of gender in comicstrips, for instance – and the visual grammar of this genre. Thus the young people's media productions can be viewed contextually as interpretive and transformative, culturally 'scaffolded' by pre-existing forms and ideas but creating specific critical vocabularies or images.

The use of popular cultural genres and texts is important, then – to make the most of students' experience in developing critical attitudes and protocols, teachers need to use the expertise of students in the cultures which surround them. At the same time, educators and researchers need to think hard about what creativity means here, and what kinds of transformations are possible, achievable, desirable or indeed are in the interests of developing critical understanding but also in the interest of making new representations which students find pleasurable, culturally authentic, and challenging.

Conclusion

Creativity itself has been subject to a range of competing definitions in recent years. Such definitions are, however, insufficiently precise to avoid familiar binary oppositions and contradictions in this area which construct creativity as, respectively elite or democratic; originating from nothing or generic and transformative; spontaneous or taught and learnt; universal or culture-specific; imaginative and intuitive or knowledge and skills-based; ineffable and instinctive or quantifiable and testable. These seeming oppositions are linked to a number of critical questions that cut across the rhetorics outlined at the opening of this article, which we have posed but not answered. For

instance: how can cultural consumption be connected to 'creative' production? How significant is play as a component of creativity? What counts as *evidence* of creativity in broadly educational settings? And what is the difference between 'good' pedagogy and 'creative' pedagogy?

This article has raised questions about how creativity that is seen to be potentially disruptive and anti-social, politically challenging or problematic can retain these important aspects in highly controlled institutional settings. It has argued that rhetorics about Creativity and Play and the Creative Classroom can contribute substantially to debates about literacies and learning, especially where lessons about the cost of divorcing knowledge and skills from social contexts, processes from products and rational thought from fantasy play are heeded. Educational work with young people – even that which acknowledges literacies as multiply sited – may well wish to build in beside the more formal learning objectives, significant amounts of time for playful exploration of and engagement with – and by corollary enjoyment of – language, media, ideas, artefacts and materials. Additionally, it becomes apparent through a closer look at discourses of creativity which appeal to the potentials of technology that wider social concerns are never far from the minds of those who work with children and technology and that these concerns can lead in several directions. This leads for some to uniform approval and enthusiasm about information and communication technology's innate creativity; for others to a wholesale rejection of the notion that any technology can be creative; and for yet others to the need for an understanding of technological potential in given social, cultural and psychological circumstances. In our own sphere of work, we hope to have demonstrated that media literacy as evidenced in the production work of children can be viewed as creative and also culturally challenging in quite specific ways.

Exemplifying the necessity for a sharp and consistent categorisation of the rhetorics of creativity and the connections and tensions between them, it seems clear, from the examples used in this article, that media literacy researchers and educators are likely to find certain rhetorics of creativity more useful than others. They are unlikely to find narrowly congnitivist perspectives which focus on the internal mechanisms of the brain useful, especially where these are divorced from considerations of cultural context. Elitist and economistic constructions, of 'creative genius' and 'creative imperative' respectively, are equally unlikely to provide insight into the playful and critical appropriation by

children of popular cultural artefacts. By contrast, researchers and practitioners are likely to find culturalist perspectives valuable. However, as indicated above, the use of aspects of cultural psychology, in particular, Vygotsky's dialectic between intellectual activity and fantasy play, allows a quite specific understanding of how cultural resources such as popular media products may be transformed in the creative act by adults or by children.

Acknowledgements

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