



"Can Creativity be measured?"

A Report by Margareta Van Raemdonck, on behalf of ECSWE



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As part of the '2009 European Year of Creativity and Innovation', the Centre for Research on Lifelong Learning and the Directorate General of Education and Culture of the European Commission held two conferences, to which ECSWE was invited, addressing the issues 'Can Creativity be measured?' and 'Creativity, Innovation, People'

The programme of the first Conference on 28th and 29th May, included presentations from scientists and researchers in the field of creativity and reports from officials of the European Commission on the question: "Can creativity be measured?".

On the first day the focus was on how to measure creativity in the sense of generating economically important innovations at the national and regional level. On the one hand many seemed to be certain that they could find indicators that measure creativity. They also considered it very important to be able to do so in order to influence policy makers. On the other hand more than one commented that one can't measure what really counts and that it is the people behind the indicators who count. The concept of 'measuring' was put into perspective by stressing the point that measuring is not the same as explaining.

Towards the end of the day the reactions from the participants of the conference shifted the focus away from measuring. Creativity as a talent connected to the individual human being became the centre of attention. It was a common understanding that creativity can only thrive in a context of trust, freedom and acceptance of failure. Values are equally important since it's possible to imagine creative behaviour with bad or even criminal

effects. "Didn't creativity create the economic crisis?" was a question that arose. Ethics must accompany creativity and this brought the individual more and more into the picture.

On the second day the speakers explored the question of how to measure creativity at the individual level. It very quickly became clear that traditional testing isn't very useful for measuring creativity. How can you learn to think out of the box by ticking boxes? The PISA tests raise question marks in this respect. Especially since most often simple rankings are used instead of the whole

of the data and conclusions of PISA. Now plans are being made to include creativity in the PISA tests. It will demand a lot of creativity to do this! When divergent thinking tests were first introduced they didn't work because of the atmosphere of pressure in which they were executed. But as soon as the tests were carried out as if they were games, the results changed. Then they showed that creativity is independent of IQ and general ability. In fact young children have the highest creativity. As a Steiner Waldorf teacher I wasn't surprised at all to hear that scientific research shows that many children lose a lot of this creative capacity after the age of 9. The speakers throughout the day all explored the question of how to measure something so elusive and diverse as the quality we call creativity. Warnings were given such as that the result of measuring is only one point in time and that schools train children to think convergent, or that creativity is often used to cheat the tests. Many policies that are implemented today are serious barriers for creativity, especially competition, standardization and accountability. How can children and teachers use their creativity if they

aren't allowed to take risks and learn from mistakes? At the end of the day the discussions among the participants and the panel of speakers led to very interesting remarks that put some things in perspective. For creativity to blossom you need diversity, tolerance, trust, mistakes, play and especially connectedness. If we manage to get these conditions and we still feel the need to measure, then using observations may be more fruitful than tests. Scales with descriptions, describing a certain point in time and a direction towards an aim, could favour the development of creativity more than ranking.



'Creativity, Innovation, People - The Regional Dimension of Creativity and Innovation'

8th and 9th of July 2009. In this conference there were fewer speakers with an academic or research background and many practitioners who presented the good work they've done in their region.

One researcher, Charlotta Mellander, from the Prosperity Institute of Scandinavia showed some interesting research results. She noted that in the early 20th century agriculture was still the most important factor in the world economy but it has declined ever since. The manufacturing economy was at its height in the middle of the 20th century and slowly diminished in respect to the service economy. But she proposed that since the 1990's we are

shifting towards a more creative economy. In this creative economy happiness is more important. Interestingly enough, she therefore stressed the importance of beauty and fun as well as tolerance in such an economy.

Roy Van Dam, chairman of Design Platform Arnhem, and researcher in the field of creative economy, argued that to foster creativity one has to apply the ideas of gardening. You need to prepare for the right growing conditions in which creativity can flower: confidence, trust and openness are necessary and community helps because mutual goals are better than individual goals. After the first morning the conference was split up into three: 1) Innovation and Employment, 2) Innovation and Well-being 3) Innovation and

Education. Some interesting thoughts from the Innovation and Education session: Using your creativity is a behaviour and behaviour is taught by imitation, so teachers need the freedom to be creative. However, this is often perceived as high-risk behaviour by teachers. So the "growing conditions" have to be improved for the teachers in order for them to improve conditions in which they can foster the creativity of the children.

Art is important in teaching because it enables the children to use their senses and to keep their natural creativity alive.

Learners need to become co-creators of their own learning to reach the necessary connectedness that fosters creativity.

Creativity has to be unveiled rather than created.

The combination of thorough knowledge and creativity and openness in one person is rather rare. It is however crucial for the future challenges in our society that more people are able to combine the three. To foster creativity in schools the children themselves have to be put at the centre. Curriculum and evaluation are key issues to look at for change. Moreover flexible rules are necessary in education.

At the end of the conference some recommendations were formulated to present to policymakers. To sum them up one could say that the principle of gardening to create the right conditions for creativity was at the centre of the recommendations.

Margareta Van Raemdonck

Agreement by Member States to intensify their cooperation in education and training

The EU Council of Ministers met on May the 12th 2009 to prepare and agree the strategic framework for European cooperation in education in training for the period 2010 to 2020. They decided on four strategic objectives in which national education authorities will cooperate and in which other stakeholders will have more involvement. These are:

1. Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality;
2. Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training;
3. Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship;
4. Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.

Under point 4 they also stated "Broader learning communities, involving representatives of civil society and other stakeholders, should be promoted with a view to creating a climate conducive to creativity and better reconciling professional and social needs, as well as individual well-being."

This echoes previous statements in the EU Commission Staff Working Document of 2008 where it was asserted that the involvement of stakeholders in policy making is an important factor for securing ownership and promoting effective policy development. These stakeholders were considered to be education and training providers, students, parents, economic actors and civil society in a broader sense. In looking at PISA results this document also pointed out that "the results have made it abundantly clear that certain problems in schools are common to many countries." This Commission paper, which formed the

basis for the Council decisions, was prepared after consultation with stakeholders. One event was held in Brussels in May 2008, in which ECSWE participated and ECSWE was one of the 13 European stakeholders that sent in a written response. There is also a call for closer work on the open method of coordination (OMC) between countries and improved implementation although "No harmonization is sought but a gradual convergence may continue."

In this light the May Council meeting is significant in that it not only adopted the objectives listed above, but also made commitments to strengthen OMC by basing that work on cycles of three years each, designating priority areas for cooperation, initiating more mutual learning through peer learning activities, conferences, seminars, expert groups, panels studies and analysis "with the involvement of relevant stakeholders" where appropriate. Furthermore there will be a dissemination of trends, progress reporting and a monitoring of the process of OMC.

Another paper of conclusions emanated from this meeting on "Culture as a Catalyst for Creativity and Innovation" that potentially shifts the emphasis in EU educational systems. The significant point is that is a new emphasis and removes the more business-like approach in favour of a more cultural one. "Creativity is the source of culture which in turn creates an environment that enables creativity to flourish..... Because of the creativity it generates and stimulates, culture can be an important actor in tackling the challenges the EU is now facing."

So the intention is that from a life long learning perspective creativity in formal, informal and non-formal education and training will be fostered.

Previous to this the Commission had asked a consultancy agency to prepare a research document on creativity and for the section on education I was asked to give them a briefing in Brussels. This led to Waldorf education being used as a case study and the Commission then returned to the agency asking for research that explained why Waldorf schools worked so well in this area. This we were able to provide and we now await the final publication. All in all this gives ECSWE an important and relevant role to play in the ensuing years to ensure that the educational debate on an European level works seriously towards the ends it has set itself and that as an European level stakeholder we involve ourselves seriously in the new opportunities that will hopefully present themselves.

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