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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14748460.2012.691286>

Structure and improvisation in creative teaching, by Keith Sawyer, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, 320 pp., £21.99 (paperback), ISBN-13: 9780-5217-4632-8

The creativity agenda puts risk-taking and improvisation processes at the core of any creative teaching and learning group experiences within educational contexts. However, the increasingly normative and accountable educational systems seem to constrain such creative approaches as they do not allow room for failure, experimentation, imagination and improvisation within classrooms.

Over the last 10 years, Keith Sawyer has developed a strong interest in the relationship between creativity, group collaboration and improvisation processes. To Sawyer, creativity emerges throughout collaborative processes that find the right work balance between structure and improvisation.

His earlier book – *Group creativity* (2003) – previously explored the emergence of creativity within performing improvisational group ensembles, such as jazz and theatre. Such performances are concrete examples of collaborative places in which the right balance is struck between structure and improvisation, enabling the emergence of creativity. A subsequent book called *Group genius* (2007) deepened the exploration of creativity within collaborative settings, in an analysis that can be applied to educational group contexts such as classrooms.

Throughout his new book *Structure and improvisation in creative teaching* (2011), Sawyer takes a step further as he develops concrete examples and techniques of how improvisation processes used within performance arts settings – whether jazz, theatre or dance can be used to improve creative teaching within the educational context. As Sawyer states, the ultimate aim of the book is to ‘develop a new theory of professional pedagogical practice’ and ‘this volume is a step in that direction’ (2011, 13).

The title of the introductory chapter raises one fundamental question: ‘What makes good teachers great?’ (2011, 1). In his opinion, the solution lies in the ‘Artful balance between structure and improvisation’ (2011, 1). He sees teaching as an ‘improvisational activity’ (2011, 2) in which the teacher has to find the right balance between teaching improvisation and structure in order to enable creativity within his classroom. Sawyer uses once more the metaphor he developed of ‘disciplined improvisation’ (2004) in order to describe creative teaching that ‘occurs within broad structures and frameworks’ (2004, 13) and where the teacher is able to apply his or her expertise in an improvisational practice (2011, 9). In other words, the teacher is able to use routines activities, structures, lessons plans, curriculum in a flexible manner according to the classroom context.

Along these lines, grounded in a constructivist stance, the book is divided in three parts around three themes: teacher paradox, learning paradox and curriculum paradox. They represent the paradoxes that teachers must constantly negotiate within every educational setting to develop their creative teaching. To address the teacher paradox, the teacher has

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Along these lines, grounded in a constructivist stance, the book is divided in three parts around three themes: teacher paradox, learning paradox and curriculum paradox. They represent the paradoxes that teachers must constantly negotiate within every educational setting to develop their creative teaching. To address the teacher paradox, the teacher has

to find the right balance between a scripted and improvised practice. To address the learning paradox, the teacher has to provide students with a structure loose enough structure to enable them to participate in the co-construction of knowledge with the teacher. Finally, to address the curriculum paradox, the teacher has to develop a curriculum flexible enough to give students the possibility to engage in such classroom improvisation.

Each chapter in this edited collection explores specific forms of improvisation and provides examples and techniques to help teachers to foster their creative teaching and nurture creativity within students. Pamela Burnard's chapter on the important UK government initiatives called 'Creative partnerships' caught my attention. These initiatives support teacher-artist partnerships that encourage improvisational teaching practices within classrooms. Such partnerships represent an example of how to resolve the teacher paradox. Professional artists visit classrooms and collaborate with teachers to deliver education. The meeting of the two teaching identities involves a clash of culture that will encourage artists and teachers to construct a shared space. This space is a conveyor of new teaching norms and beliefs that will enable the artist and the teacher to engage in a collaborative teaching practice. As the artist's teaching relies on a more improvisational approach than the teacher, this latter will be encouraged to explore a less scripted teaching pedagogy. The artist helps the teachers to explore unfamiliar roads and to try new teaching methods based on improvisation. In that sense, the artist plays a role of mentor and guide in order to unlock the teacher's creativity. Burnard quotes one of the teacher involved in that type of partnership: 'What I've learnt from Dorothy [the professional artist] is how best to liberate myself, balance my scripted and unscripted teaching' (2011, 63).

The chapter by Janice E. Fournier draws lessons from dance performance improvisation to help resolve the learning paradox. Fournier examines how improvisation between a choreographer and dancers can be used as an effective pedagogical tool to implement improvisation within classrooms settings. She sees dance choreography not as a scripted product but as the result of an improvisational work that involves dancers as much as the choreographer. The choreographer starts with a loose scripted dance framework that evolves according to the practice with the dancers. Ultimately, the choreography becomes the co-composition of the choreographer and the dancers. As she mentions: 'working together, choreographers and dancers accomplish the tasks of both *composing* a dance and *learning* a dance' (2011, 204). In her opinion, such improvisation process should be used as a 'form of pedagogy' (2011, 204) within classrooms to engage students in the co-construction of knowledge and curriculum with their teachers.

Consequently, as Sawyer explains, this book extends previous research on the tradition of 'teaching as performance' as it no longer considers the teacher as a solo performer managing a scripted and rigid curriculum but as a performer collaborating with other performers – the students – in order to create knowledge. This volume also extends the tradition of 'teaching expertise', or in other words the knowledge of teaching, as this expertise no longer involves a teacher that follows rigid teaching plans but rather a teacher able to adapt expertise according to the practical context of each class. Last but not least, the book goes beyond the tradition of 'creative teaching and learning' as it provides concrete examples of what creative classrooms can be when they are based on improvisational performance approaches.

In my opinion, this volume also brings hope to researchers and practitioners interested in the topic of creative teaching within educational environments. In a context of increasingly constrained educational settings that mitigate against creative teaching, this book demonstrates that creative classroom practices can emerge despite such constraints. Further, constraints are not seen as obstacles to creativity but necessary elements to it. Creativity does

not occur within totally autonomous and unstructured contexts. Rather, as Sawyer points out, creativity comes from the tension between structure and improvisation that are present in any arts performance practices but that can also occur in real-world classroom practice.

This book should be recommended to teachers who are willing to develop creative teaching practices and to take a constructivist teaching approach within their classrooms. It should also be recommended as a useful teachers' training handbook since it provides a key to successful creative teaching approaches that make the fixed structures of expertise productive within the everyday improvisation of classroom practices.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14748460.2012.691287>

The Routledge international handbook of creative learning, edited by Julian Sefton-Green, Pat Thomson, Ken Jones and Liora Bresler, London and New York, Routledge, 2011, 478 pp., \$220.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-415-54889-2

The *International handbook of creative learning* claims to be the first single text to draw together the many dimensions and disciplines of creative learning into a single volume for students of education, academic researchers and policy specialists. The 59 contributors to this volume address a diverse range of topics including: the varied field of creative learning and teaching; evaluative case studies of educational practice and reform; arts learning traditions, including drama, music and visual art; the challenges of changing practices to support a creative learning agenda particularly assessment practice, and accomplishing change ranging from individual schools to national systems.

Chapters are informative, well signposted and punchy – most are under 10 pages long. The 44 contributions, together with editorial commentary, are organised in four parts. Part 1 examines conceptions and definitions of creativity, and contexts for creativity and creative learning. It provides a conceptual and theoretical foundation for later sections and introduces the place and nature of the arts in conceptualising creativity. Part 2 provides more concrete investigation of the concepts and principles elaborated in Part 1. Authors address more directly the concerns of schools and learning, focusing on arts subjects and arts more generally, early childhood education and policy frameworks to support creative learning. Part 3 adopts a more case study-based approach to creative pedagogy and curriculum, and considers how subjects, policies and assessment influence the creative development of children. Part 4 examines the ideas of creative schools and accomplishing small and large-scale change.