Miller, D.L. (2015). Cultivating Creativity. *The English Journal*, *Vol.104*(No. 6), Pages From 25 To 30.doi:<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24484423>

Review of the Article “Cultivating Creativity”

In this article, the author discusses the necessity of creativity in a child’s education, and addresses the various ways that this can be integrated into a classroom environment. When it comes to originality, we can honestly say that this topic is very rarely discussed in modern education settings, and has the potential to counteract certain negative outcomes we are discovering within public education.

According to Miller, the extreme structure and standardization of the modern education model is in violation of how we know that humans develop, thus it “undermines innovation and bleaches out diversity” (Miller 2015, 26). As she cites John Taylor Gatto’s work on contemporary schooling, she points out as an example that bells and timed tests are teaching our children that work does not need to be finished if it takes longer than the designated time to complete. In building such a model that sits children in seats for hours on end and expects them to move from one subject to the next in hour blocks, we are strangling child creativity, and damaging their potential as they become adults and enter the workforce.

Miller uses multiple studies and scrutinizes models in order to prove that if we hope to engage children and combat such things as drop-out rates, we must encourage creativity. “Society’s focus has shifted since the Renaissance, from creativity to productivity,” she states, honing in on the problem. If we look at the examples of famous artists, she continues, we can see a tragic story of people unappreciated for their gifts, who took their own lives or died miserable. This should not be the case. Something should be done about it, and childhood education is the place to start.

This article casts a valid vision for creativity in the classroom, and looks to encourage imagination in the young that will continue with them into their adult years. It also argues that we should be introducing imagination in an attempt to cultivate a sense of normalcy around the arts and intellect. Miller focuses briefly on explaining why creativity is vital, then settles down to discuss how this can be enacted in the classroom. She is thorough in her assessment of options that teachers can put to use, even going so far as to create labels for the principle features of the creating mind (Miller 2015, 29). Some other suggestions she makes include mixed age classes, interactive workshops, and outside sources for training. Miller does not suggest a model she has pioneered, but instead looks at the models of others in the hopes of encouraging action.

While a wonderful idea in theory, Miller admits that cultivating creativity will take time. Not only will effects not be quickly evident, but teachers will have to address long-held beliefs about creativity, and trade what they deem as productive for a less structured model. If play is education, then students certainly can’t stay in their chairs all day, and sadly, this is what they have grown into.

Overall, I enjoyed reading this article, however I found Miller’s use of examples somewhat scattered, and would have preferred to have all examples laid out under one heading. There are a variety of examples used, from studies to children’s books, and this was somewhat confusing and led to a sense of incoherency.

A major point in this article that I would take issue with is Miller’s suggested method for assessing creativity. EdSteps, a system developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers, proposes to offer a way for teachers to evaluate the creativity of student work. This is to make the teacher’s job easier, and encourage the child, but seems to be more a halfway step then an actual resolution. The EdSteps offer analysis on two axes; originality and impact. Student works are judged based on how far along each axis they fall. While no doubt convenient for the teacher, in promoting this sort of judgment, the EdSteps appear to be still trapped in a structured way of thinking, as any creative mind will tell you that imagination cannot be judged as good, better or best.

Despite this, the article is still excellent, and vital in a day of stagnating student performance. It raises valid points, and is clearly well-researched. It invites to action and gives practical opportunities to begin implementing in the classroom. It is highly executable, and also an easy, brief read, making it approachable and manageable for the busy teacher.