Schools must promote creativity

Promoting the most human aspect of education: divergent thinking, reflection and critical spirit in a collaborative environment

by Coral Regí Rodríguez

The video 'School Kills Creativity' by Ken Robinson opened the debate on the role of the school in the educating creativity. This issue has been addressed from different perspectives and different sectors. Let's look at the issue positively: Can the school not only not kill creativity but also enhance it? To focus the question, we would first have to specify what creativity is.

Surely after watching Ken Robinson's video and without further reflection, we would answer: creativity is letting the students' imagination flow, not cutting off their ideas and proposals, not imposing our vision of reality on them. Is that creativity? Is this the creativity we should be educating? Let's reflect on this point (as reflection is a basic and, as we shall see, very important part of creative processes).
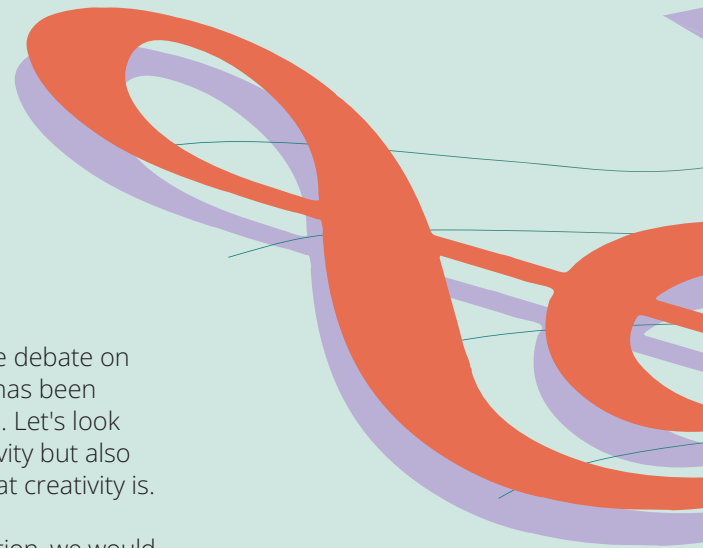
I have worked at the Escola Virolai in Barcelona for 40 years, and since it was founded more than 60 years ago, we have considered the need to educate creativity and in creativity. This was the value that the alumni said was the most unique to Virolai on the school's fiftieth anniversary.

For us, educating in creativity has been and is a cross-curricular way of educating people with an open, reflective and critical view of reality and the environment, with the ability to consider solutions beyond the norm and above all with a mindset that accepts mistakes as opportunities to learn and move forward in the quest for better solutions.

As expressed by Carme Vituri, the school's first teacher, in the article published in the school's fiftieth anniversary book:

'The person who has been educated in imagination and creativity has a potential that surpasses everything he or she undertakes, both professionally and personally. We are all creative; we just need to discover where our potential lies.

In the 1960s it was believed that, to be will prepared for the future, creativity and innovation were desirable for both boys and girls. In 2010, we are certain that they are essential to survive and to develop satisfactorily in society, to be and to make those around us happy.'

BUT HERE AND NOW, WHY SHOULD WE EDUCATE CREATIVITY?
In a society in which artificial intelligence and robotics will be and already are crucial, we have to reinforce our human side, what distinguishes us from machines, because what machines can do, they will do better. A robot will always be better at a repetitive task, and artificial intelligence methods will even be able to solve highly complex problems, especially in the processing of large amounts of information, which are beyond human possibilities. But probably their limitation, at least in the medium term, lies in their inability to come up with new questions and new challenges, or to question reality from a critical and creative perspective, a daring one. For this reason, we have to promote the most human part of education: divergent thinking, reflection and critical spirit in a collaborative environment.

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EDUCATING CREATIVITY

But let's get to the point: How do we educate creativity? How do we educate creative people?

We often have erroneous or incomplete vision when educating creativity and other cross-curricular values and attitudes. It seems that educating creativity means letting children's spontaneity flow, but it's not that, or at least not only that. Nor is it a question of educating via the educator's example and cross-curricular education, where there are no specific proposals or defined responsibilities. In this sense, we have to overcome excessively naïve versions of this issue.

As in many other formative processes, educating creativity requires intentionality, strategy and perseverance. It requires moving from the dream to the project, to the plan shared and worked on by all the teachers, starting from a clear conception of what we want to educate.

One fundamental factor is that we have to work with students on their ability to observe the environment and reality, to see beyond using divergent thinking. It is teaching them to see and listen with rigour and effort. A creative and reflective person analyses reality, delves deeper, looks beyond the first impression and weighs opportunities for change and improvement. And this is taught from the earliest stages of infancy and never ends.

And from this point on, the ability to ask good questions, to wonder how to improve, to share as a group, to dig deeper, should be a natural and inherent process in the school's activities. And this requires educating

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students through the systematic experience of always approaching a challenge or a problem by questioning it and thinking beyond the norm.

THE EDUCATION OF ERROR

But we won't stop here. The most important part of rising to the challenge, based on the analysis of the reality, is to search for the best solution. This should allow us to work systematically on the education of error. Being afraid of being wrong is something that needs to be educated. Students must learn to reflect on their mistakes, to continue learning, to persevere in coming up with a better solution. Incorporating error as an opportunity is one of the best educational lessons for our students. Unfortunately, we find it difficult to incorporate and integrate it into educational practice. Students have to learn and unlearn throughout their lives, and in this dynamic, in which the most difficult thing is to unlearn, it is essential to reflect on the error and learn from it in order to tackle the problem again. In this sense, educating in creativity also means educating in

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self-improvement and perseverance, key values in the process of educational transformation.

In this quest for new solutions, it is very important to incorporate teamwork or cooperative work, where different opinions are contributed based on the uniqueness of the team members. Hence the importance of heterogeneous groups with students with different talents, where everyone builds together based on debate and joint reflection, learning that the best solution is always the one that they have come up with all together. This is also a great learning experience for a key competency: knowing how to collaborate in different work environments.

TOWARDS A TRANSFORMATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL MODEL

Creativity can be worked on through art, the different artistic languages, which are essential to enhance the students' different talents so they can express their feelings and emotions and communicate better, while attending to others' feelings. But we also have to work on creative thinking in the different scientific fields, from biology to mathematics, and, of course, in the technological fields, because we have to ensure this transversal, holistic vision of the analysis of reality, especially when proposing new challenges.

And by working on creativity, we work on self-improvement and perseverance, but also on agility and the ability to take risks. I like the simile of educating people with flexibility and resilience so they become like riverside trees.

In a school model that prioritises marks, but often also in schools with good formative assessment practices, there is a persistent oversight: values education is not assessed. I am not talking about marks but about formative assessment, assessment that provides information for improvement. This assessment must include both the student's progress and the effectiveness of the processes and actions carried out to educate these values. We cannot forget the premise that what is not assessed is undervalued; we are stripping it of its value. We can tell students how important the values of self-improvement, perseverance or in this case creativity are, but if we do not assess their progress, if we do not give them feedback to improve and advance, we are stripping them of all their formative value. If we cannot find out if the actions we are doing are making students more creative, we will not be able to make decisions on how to improve these processes, and we will not be able to make headway towards an education that makes education in creativity more and better.

As with everything that happens at school, the key factor is the role of educators. We need effective leadership of the management team that prioritises in the process of educational transformation and the education of key values, while also ensuring the teachers' work so that based on an open, creative position they rethink their criteria, reflect, design and jointly implement

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educational models that ensure that they are moving forward in an education that prioritises creativity. The proposals should go beyond uniformity and instead lead to divergent answers, boldness and coherence, reflection on error, and this requires that educators themselves be creative and disruptive, capable of generating learning environments that generate more questions than answers, that encourage observation and experimentation.

We will also need to work coherently with families because creative positions are educated inside and outside the school by observing the field, reading a book, engaging in family dialogue or answering children's questions, spreading enthusiasm for learning because when a child asks 'Why?', we can never answer 'just because', because it stamps out curiosity.

And this education requires environments, schools, and institutions that are themselves creative, growth-minded, open-minded, that reflexively question what they do with perspective, that make us tackle transformation processes with a positive mindset. We need schools that rise to challenges with open, creative answers, beyond the norm: that instead the complacent 'we've always done it this way' counters with a courageous 'why not?'.

Coral Regí Rodríguez is a biologist and educator by vocation. She is a member of several educational associations and the School Council of Catalonia. She is also a member of Educació Demà of the Bofill Foundation. She has been principal of the Virolai school. She is an expert in leadership, professional assessment and pedagogical and educational quality processes.

TEAM