

## Book Review

Review of John Baer's *Creative Teachers, Creative Students* (Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1997, 173 + xii pages)

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I plan to use this book in my undergraduate seminar on Children's Creativity. Baer shares many of my assumptions about creativity, and his presentation is appropriate for students like mine. If readers of this review also have students who have little background in creative studies, they too may seriously consider this book.

*Creative Teachers, Creative Students* contains five chapters. The first is of course an introduction. The last is titled "Summing Up." That leaves three chapters: One on divergent thinking, one on motivation, and one on "creative problem solving" (CPS). The last of these emphasizes the classic CPS model (cf. Treffinger, Isaksen, & Dorval, 1994), with mess-finding, data-finding, problem finding, idea-finding, solution-finding, and action-planning each defined. The book shows its potential value for undergraduates in that Baer provides opportunities to practice each of these stages of CPS. Significantly, Baer notes that the steps may be used in different sequences, depending on the specific task or problem. This may seem like a minor point, but there are descriptions of creative problem solving which posit that the stages of the process occur in a fixed sequence. Baer's allowance for varied sequences represents the more realistic view.

The most important assumption of this volume is implied by its title. The assumption is that the creativity of teachers is related to the creativity of their students. Some research supports the association (e.g., Milgram & Feingold, 1977), and I doubt that many educators will question this assumption. Still, it is worth emphasizing — I do so in my seminar — that parents or teachers who want creative children should themselves value and model creativity.

What really took me in was Baer's argument that creativity can be entirely personal. He defines creativity as "anything someone does in a way that is original to the creator and that is appropriate to the purpose or goal of the creator" (p. 4). Obviously this fits nicely with the recent research on *everyday creativity* (e.g., Runco & Richards, in press). Baer mentions the creativity that may be used when working in a garden, for example, or teaching, or planning a vacation. Most important is that his definition is very applicable to children's creativity. That is not true of many current definitions! Sternberg and Zhang (1995), for instance, included *productivity* as one of the five criteria in their pentagonal theory of giftedness. Delcourt (1993) similarly emphasized productivity in her work with gifted secondary school students, and Baum, Renzulli, and Hebert (1995) focused on creative productivity in their intervention to "reverse" underachievement among gifted students. Getz and Lubart (in press) recently proposed that "creativity, as a social phenomenon, can be viewed as existing at the interface between an audience and a creator's work," and Helson (1996) suggested that "a creative product is one that has impact, that impresses us with its originality and convincingness" (p. 300). I have recently explored the problems that follow from the confounding of creativity *per se* with productivity and impact (Runco, 1995, 1996b), and with that in mind Baer's definition, with its emphasis on everyday creative acts, strikes me as an attractive one.

THE OTHER SIDE  
OF THE COIN:  
MILD CONCERNS

As much as I like this book, there are a few specific omissions and mild concerns. Most of these will make no difference to the target readership, but to round out this review, I will mention them.

First is the description of Guilford's (1968) structure of intellect. Baer describes Guilford's model with 120 cells or skills, but actually Guilford (1983) added to the model on a number of occasions, and when he died he believed he had identified 180 cells or skills (see Bachelor & Michael, 1991). This is a minor historical point, and more critical may be Guilford's suggestion that transformation skills may be at least as important for creativity as divergent production. Runco (1996c) reviewed the research associating transformational skills with creativity.

I was more disappointed that evaluative skills were given such brief treatment by Baer. These are listed in the Table of Contents and have a section heading in Chapter 4 – but that

section does not even account for one full page. Granted I am sensitive about evaluative skills because of my own work, but I am far from alone in describing the importance of evaluation for creative thinking (e.g., Mumford, Baughman, & Sager, in press; Necka, in press; Runco, in press). I would have preferred that Baer give more weight to (a) the *interplay* between evaluation and divergence, and (b) the unique kind of evaluations that is most important for creative thinking. Evaluative thinking is not equivalent to convergent thinking. Convergent thinking focuses on one correct or conventional response or idea. Evaluative thinking, on the other hand, may be involved when the individual judges many ideas for their originality rather than for their conventionality.

FINAL COMMENTS

I have digressed a bit to discuss theory and research; and as mentioned earlier Baer's book was not intended as a research volume, nor as a comprehensive overview. It is essentially an introduction and survey of some of the creativity research, and it is explicitly intended for teachers, prospective teachers, and students.

If it is used as a text, it would no doubt be one of several required texts. *Creative Teachers, Creative Students* is relatively short, and it might be used with Fishkin, Cramond, and Olszewski-Kubilius' (in press) or Smutny's (in press) volumes on the creativity of youth. If Baer's book is used in graduate seminar, a more theoretically comprehensive volume might be assigned (e.g., Runco, 1996a; Runco & Albert, in press; Runco & Richards, in press). Baer's volume could be used for that section of the course where practical applications are explored.

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Reviewed by Mark A. Runco, Child & Adolescent Studies, California State University, Fullerton.