TEACHER CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF CREATIVITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

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Department of Child Development
Abstract

of

TEACHER CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF CREATIVITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

by

Julie Bloomquist

This qualitative study explored teacher conceptualizations of creativity. Specifically, teachers’ general beliefs about creativity and regarding their own creative abilities as well as how those beliefs relate to their instructional practice in the classroom. Sixteen teachers enrolled in a Masters in Education program with a focus on either arts or English as well as one professor from each cohort participated in semi-structured interviews with the researcher. Data analysis revealed two themes throughout teachers’ beliefs of creativity. First was a focus on the individual in the creative process, and second was a focus on the interactions between individuals within a social context as having an influence on the creative process; an orientation to the self was also revealed throughout both themes. These two themes will be presented within teachers’ beliefs of the origins of creativity, how the context is related to creativity, sources of motivation for creativity, and sources of creative stifling. Teachers’ beliefs will be discussed in relation to past research and Western culture as well as in terms of the implications these beliefs have for educational practice.

__________________________, Committee Chair
Lynda Stone, Ph.D.

_______________________
Date

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Due to the dynamic changes taking place in technology, medicine, and ways of thinking in today’s society it is important that individuals are prepared to adapt to and incorporate such changes in order to thrive in our fast paced world. The educational system, particularly teachers, has a pivotal role in preparing students for the future. However, Cropley (2001) proposed that education’s continual focus on traditional content may become dated and useless in the future. Further, Vygotsky (2004) argued that reproduction of past information and experiences orients an individual to the past, but the creative ability of humans allows an individual to construct his future. Therefore, in order to prepare students to face and address the issues and challenges of the future, it is important that educators inspire and foster creativity in students which will give them the tools to respond to an ever-changing society. Having an understanding of how classroom teachers conceptualize creativity will allow administrators and educators to determine how and to what extent teachers are addressing and incorporating the concept into their classroom. This thesis will explore teachers’ conceptualizations of creativity through the use of in-depth interviews in order to extend prior research and further our understanding of teacher beliefs for educators and administrators.
Significance of the Study

Past research regarding teacher beliefs of creativity has explored the concept using a variety of methodologies from surveys, to interviews, to ethnographic case studies. The findings of these studies have provided valuable understandings of teacher beliefs of creativity, however, further study is needed into such beliefs due to the limitations of past research methodologies, as well as the lack of research into teachers’ beliefs of their own creativity which may influence how they conceptualize the concept or address it in their instructional practices.

The frequent use of surveys or questionnaires in past research on teacher beliefs of creativity has provided researchers the opportunity to explore the beliefs of a large number of participants; however, the use of these surveys and questionnaires has constrained participants to respond using pre-determined lists in reporting the characteristics or adjectives thought to represent creativity, thus resulting in unnatural responses (Diakidoy & Kanari, 1999; Fryer & Collings, 1991; Runco & Johnson, 2002; Runco, Johnson, & Bear, 1993). These methodologies have also limited the ability for researchers to fully understand teacher responses to open-ended questions in surveys or questionnaires (Aljughaiman & Mowrer-Reynolds, 2005; Diakidoy & Kanari, 1999; Diakidoy & Phtiaka, 2002) and the contradictions found within and between research reports in terms of the universality of creativity in all individuals (Aljughaiman & Mowrer-Reynolds, 2005; Diakidoy & Kanari, 1999; Diakidoy & Phtiaka, 2002; Fryer & Collings, 1991; Kampylis, Berki, & Saariluoma, 2009) and teacher responsibility for
fostering student creativity in the classroom (Aljughaiman & Mowrer-Reynolds, 2005; Kampylis et al., 2009).

Interview and case study research into teacher beliefs and classroom practices regarding creativity has allowed researchers to overcome some of the limitations posed by the use of surveys and questionnaires mentioned above. Interview research has provided opportunities for participants to offer their own responses to questions and allowed researchers the ability to ask follow-up questions for misunderstandings of responses (Craft, 1998; Fleith, 2000). In addition, case study research has explored individual teachers in greater detail providing valuable understandings of how they understand and address the concept in their classroom (Cole, Sugioka, & Yamagata-Lynch, 1999; Lilly & Bramwell-Rejskind, 2004; Sak, 2004). Although qualitative methodologies have presented detailed understandings of teacher beliefs and practices surrounding creativity in the classroom, there has been a lack of research exploring teachers’ personal beliefs about their own creative abilities and how those beliefs may relate to their understandings and approaches to creativity in their instructional practices.

The beliefs regarding one’s ability to produce the necessary actions in order to achieve a desired outcome have been defined by Bandura (1997) as self-efficacy and such beliefs can be held in a variety of domains. Individual’s beliefs regarding his or her ability to perform creatively on a task have been referred to in research as creative self-efficacy beliefs (Tierney & Farmer, 2002) and have been shown in research to relate to actual creative performance (Choi, 2004; Jaassi, Randel, & Dionne, 2007; Tierney & Farmer, 2002; Tierney & Farmer, 2004). However, past studies on creative self-efficacy
have been limited to the business world context to the exclusion of the educational domain, particularly classroom teacher beliefs.

The limitations of past research on teacher beliefs of creativity in terms of fully understanding responses and the lack of research into teachers’ personal beliefs of their own creativity supports the need for further research into these topics. Having a better understanding of teachers’ beliefs regarding creativity in their personal lives and in general will aid educators and administrators in determining how creativity is being addressed in the classroom. With this understanding, training or enrichment programs in creativity can be designed if necessary to help teachers incorporate and foster creativity in students in the classroom.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to expand the literature on teacher beliefs of creativity by using in-depth interviews to explore teacher conceptualizations of creativity which will provide a detailed understanding of their beliefs. In addition to teachers’ general beliefs of creativity, this study explored teachers’ personal beliefs about their own creative abilities proving a background understanding of each of the participants. Finally, the teachers’ beliefs will be reviewed in relation to their descriptions of their teaching approaches to understand how and whether they are addressing the concept in the classroom. The following research questions were explored in this study, (1) what are
teacher beliefs about creativity in general and about their own creative abilities? And (2) how are those beliefs related to their instructional practices in the classroom?

**Methodology**

Two academic cohorts within the Masters in Education program at a large four-year metropolitan university in Northern California were selected for participation in this study. A mixed-methods approach to data collection was employed, including a six-item creative self-efficacy questionnaire and individual semi-structured interviews with participants. Due to the limited number to total questionnaires completed ($n = 62$) and the imbalance of completed questionnaires from each group (art cohort, $n = 50$; English cohort, $n = 12$), it was assumed that the statistical power to predict a difference between groups, if one existed, would be too low to determine significant results. Therefore, data analysis for this study focused on interview responses.

The researcher visited one class within each cohort wherein all students and the professors were invited to participate in the study. The creative self-efficacy questionnaire was distributed to all students as well as a request for individual interviews at a later time. Semi-structured interviews consisted of open-ended questions regarding the participant’s beliefs on creativity in general and of their own creative abilities, teaching experience and approach in the classroom, views on children’s learning and development, and experience in the Masters program. All interviews averaged approximately 45-minutes in length and were transcribed verbatim for analysis. Each
interview was subsequently analyzed individually through line-by-line readings where
the researcher coded segments of talk using both in-vivo and descriptive codes. In
addition, multiple theoretical memos were written throughout the analysis process for
each interview transcript to note and describe connections between interviews and
literature as well as discuss emergent themes across interviews to determine focal themes.
Upon selection of focal themes, each transcript was coded again and individual responses
surrounding each theme were compared among other interview responses wherein similar
responses were grouped together. Focal theme groupings were reviewed line-by-line for
patterns or contradictions which ultimately revealed two large patterns found within
teachers’ conceptualizations of creativity.

Organization of the Thesis

This chapter has presented an introduction to the study, its purpose, and
methodology used for data collection. Chapter Two will review prior research on teacher
beliefs of creativity and creative self-efficacy. Vygotsky’s theory of creativity will also
be discussed and set forth as the theoretical framework guiding this study. The study’s
methodology will be detailed in Chapter Three including a description of a pilot study
conducted, the current study participants, data collection procedures, measures employed,
and data analysis conducted. Chapter Four will present the data from participant
interviews in the following four areas: (1) origins of creativity, (2) how the context is
related to creativity, (3) sources of motivation for creativity, and (4) sources of creative
stifling. Data findings will be discussed and supported by past research in Chapter Five. Additionally, the implications for educational practice of the study findings will be discussed as well as the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order for today’s societies to meet the future demands of an ever expanding population in so far as the need for economic resources, jobs, education, and medical care, it is essential that methods of thinking and problem solving continually evolve and improve to meet those demands. For the individual to prosper in such an ever changing future, Cropley (2001) argued that schools cannot simply rely on the traditional teaching practices of relaying information to students because such content will become obsolete in the near future. Rather, Cropley (2001) suggested that teachers need to help students to be flexible, adaptable, and be open and courageous to the unknown. Vygotsky (2004) proposed that if individuals continue to reproduce past information they remain oriented to the past, however, the human creative ability to manipulate past experiences into new elements allows an individual to adjust his present actions and adapt to the future. Given the prominent role schools have in preparing children for the future, it is vital for children’s creativity to be fostered and incorporated in the classroom so that they are equipped to face the many advances and challenges of a rapidly changing world.

Teachers have an important role in fostering creativity in students as they are responsible in determining the degree to which creativity is allowed and encouraged in the classroom. However, researchers have argued that in order for teachers to facilitate creativity in their students, they need to be aware of the meaning and importance of
creativity, and to be able to recognize not only creative outcomes but the creative potential in students and to encourage those abilities that relate to creativity (Diakidoy & Kanari, 1999; Diakidoy & Phtiaka, 2002; Sak, 2004). Having an understanding of how teachers conceptualize creativity will allow educators to determine whether and how creativity is being addressed in the classroom as well as develop enrichment training that may be needed to help teachers foster creativity in their students. The present study serves to expand the research on teachers’ creativity beliefs using in-depth interviews to explore how their beliefs about creativity in general and regarding their own creative abilities relates to their instructional practices used in the classroom.

Theoretical Framework

Vygotsky’s theory of creativity is grounded in the basic tenants of his socio-cultural theory in that development of mental functions are first socially experienced on an interpersonal plane and internalized, mediated through tools or signs, into an intrapersonal plane within an individual (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003; Wertsch, 1985). Vygotsky conceived creative activity as being based on imagination which as a higher mental function emerges from one’s culture and develops overtime (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003; Vygotsky, 2004). The process of utilizing one’s imagination is dependent upon multiple elements including personal experiences, ability to combine elements taken from one’s experiences, individual and societal needs, individual interests, and one’s environment including those traditions and creative models within it (Vygotsky,
Individual experiences were described by Vygotsky (2004) as essential to the imaginative process because such experiences provide the elements an individual utilizes in constructing his imagination.

The process by which an individual engages in imaginative thinking and results in creative activity resembles a loop which begins and ends in a social realm. Initially, an individual engages in social interactions and experiences which are internalized for later use in imaginative thinking (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003; Vygotsky, 2004). It is important to note, however, that the internalization process does not result with an exact replication of the social experience. Instead, the individual reconstructs his experiences internally based on his own personal characteristics, prior knowledge, needs, and desires (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003; Vygotsky, 2004). Vygotsky further described the process of imaginative thinking as involving “dissociation” and “association” of the social experiences. First, an individual mentally breaks the experiences down into individual elements within dissociation. Next, the elements are reconstructed based on individual personal characteristics in association and then combined into a system. The imaginative thinking loop is complete when imagination is expressed in an external way and thus re-enters the social realm. Using Vygotsky’s theory, Moran and John-Steiner (2003) describe this last process as externalization which represents Western understanding of creativity. Externalization involves the formation of meanings and symbols into a creative product (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003). These external materializations are then re-introduced into the society which may influence its culture and can be used for later creative production by others (Vygotsky, 2004).
Vygotsky proposed that creative ability was available to everyone, even in the simplest forms when an individual, “imagines, combines, alters, and creates something new, no matter how small a drop in the bucket this new thing appears compared to the works of geniuses” (2004, p. 10-11). However, one’s environment also plays an important role in the materialization of creative ideas. Specifically, the environment presents the societal needs that can initiate creative production as well as providing the materials and conditions necessary to materialize one’s ideas. Therefore, Vygotsky (2004) argued that creative production has a social history because each creative expression is dependent upon a previous one already materialized.

Vygotsky’s theory of creativity and his proposed definition of creative production as an individual’s creation of something new will be utilized in the present study to analyze teacher beliefs about creativity. The importance Vygotsky placed on experiences in imaginative thinking provides support for the need to explore how teachers’ personal experiences with creativity may influence how they conceptualize it. Further, the present study will explore how these conceptualizations of creativity relate to teachers’ descriptions of their instructional practices in the classroom, or specifically the environment in which Vygotsky (2004) proposed can influence creative production.

**Teacher Beliefs on Creativity**

Researchers examining teacher beliefs on creativity have utilized both quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches. Each research design has
revealed valuable insights into understanding teacher beliefs in terms of definitions and attitudes of creativity, in addition to ways of fostering it in the classroom, however, each methodology is limited in its scope. The surveys and questionnaires distributed by quantitative researchers did not provide participant explanations needed to fully understand some responses. Further, due to the specific nature of the case study approaches employed by qualitative researchers, the findings of these studies have limited scope for application by educators and administrators in different contexts from those examined by researchers. This section of the literature review will discuss previous research findings regarding teacher beliefs on creativity as well as the limitations of different methodological approaches, thus supporting the use of in-depth interviews with a large sample of teachers to explore their beliefs as employed in the current study.

**Quantitative Approaches**

The majority of quantitative researchers examining teacher definitions of creativity have focused on the use of personal characteristics or adjectives as parameters or guidelines to define creativity or are considered necessary in order for individuals to be creative (Aljughaiman & Mowrer-Reynolds, 2005; Diakidoy & Kanari, 1999; Fryer & Collings, 1991; Runco & Johnson, 2002; Runco, et al., 1993). Some of the most common responses from teachers using characteristics to define creativity included: imagination, produces aesthetic products or has aesthetic tendencies, the ability to express oneself, has original ideas, and divergent thinking abilities (Aljughaiman & Mowrer-Reynolds, 2005; Diakidoy & Kanari, 1999; Fryer & Collings, 1991; Runco &
Johnson 2002; Runco et al., 1993). However, because these characteristics were not
defined by the researchers nor the participants themselves it is unknown how the
participants perceived the terms while using them or how these characteristics may
manifest themselves in context. For example, it is unknown how the participants
perceived the term “aesthetic,” what domain was considered conducive to these types of
products, or how and why those products were described as being aesthetically pleasing.

Teachers’ responses on such surveys and questionnaires were also elicited either
by checking or rating pre-established lists of characteristics or adjectives thought to
represent creativity (Diakidoy & Kanari, 1999; Fryer & Collings, 1991; Runco &
Johnson, 2002; Runco et al., 1993), or through open-ended response questions
(Aljughaiman & Mowrer-Reynolds, 2005; Diakidoy & Phtiaka, 2002). The use of pre-
established lists of characteristics or adjectives constrains participants’ responses to those
selected by the researcher. Further, the participants may have been prompted to consider
responses not previously thought of, therefore, the validity of these surveys as being the
participants’ natural responses is in question. The open-ended questions requiring
participants to describe characteristics of creative individuals (Aljughaiman & Mowrer-
Reynolds, 2005; Diakidoy & Phtiaka, 2002) did allow for a variety of responses,
however, without the ability to follow-up on the responses it may be unknown how these
characteristics may manifest themselves in a context such as the classroom or daily life.

Due to the limitations of using surveys in understanding how teachers define and
characterize creativity, the present study will employ an interview methodology which
will allow participants to describe creativity in their own words in an open forum.
Follow-up and probing questions will also be used as needed to get a better understanding of participants’ vague or confusing answers as well as how creativity is manifested in contexts such as the classroom. The contradictions found between and within research studies on teacher beliefs of creativity in terms of their attitudes regarding the universality of creativity in all individuals, and teacher responsibility for fostering student creativity in the classroom supports the need for further research into teachers’ beliefs of creativity.

Whether all individuals possess creative abilities is one area of research with contradictory findings between various research studies, and is in need of further research to more fully understand the topic and explore how teachers’ beliefs and attitudes may influence instructional practice in the classroom. In an exploration of teacher conceptions of creativity, Fryer and Collings (1991) found that the near majority of British teachers surveyed believed that creativity was rare among individuals. The researchers supported this finding through their contention that the education systems emphasize gifted students in creativity programs (Fryer & Collings, 1991). In contrast to these findings, the majority of elementary teachers surveyed in Cyprus believed creativity was a universal characteristic of all individuals (Diakidoy & Phtiaka, 2002). Similarly, Aljughaiman and Mowrer-Reynolds (2005) found that the majority of elementary teachers surveyed felt that more than 50% of their students exhibited creativity and 25% of teachers felt that most of their students exhibited creative characteristics. However, it is important to point out that these findings are limited in their generalizability due to the small sample size ($n = 36$) (Aljughaiman & Mowrer-Reynolds, 2005).
Conflicting teacher beliefs regarding the universality of creative abilities have also been reported within research studies. For example, Kampylis et al. (2009) reported contradictory beliefs among prospective and in-service teachers in Greece. Specifically, nearly half (48.4%) of prospective teachers believed creativity was characteristic in all students, whereas approximately three-fifths (57.9%) of in-service teachers believed creativity was a rare characteristic. Furthermore, the majority of student teachers surveyed in Cyprus did not believe creativity was characteristic of all individuals, however, interestingly, a majority also believed creative children can often be found by educators (Diakidoy & Kanari, 1999).

The contradictory findings regarding whether teachers believe all individuals are creative or not support the need for further examination of the topic. In addition, the studies reported here did not discuss how these beliefs may relate to instructional practice in the classroom. The current study extends the research on teacher beliefs of creativity by exploring the beliefs as well as some of the factors that may influence those beliefs, specifically one’s past experience with and beliefs regarding his or her own creative abilities. Having an understanding of some of the factors that may influence one’s beliefs may help to explain the contradictory findings past research has reported. Further, the current study will examine and discuss how these beliefs may relate to instructional practice which will provide an initial understanding of how these beliefs are manifested in the context of the classroom.

The discrepancy in beliefs regarding the role of the teacher in fostering student creativity also supports the need for further research into teachers’ beliefs of creativity.
For example, the majority of the teachers surveyed by Aljughaiman and Mowrer-Reynolds (2005) believed creativity was important to student academic learning and could be developed in the classroom, however, only approximately one-third of the teachers felt it was their responsibility to develop it in students. These beliefs were supported by the teachers’ greater focus on “academic responsibilities” (Aljughaiman & Mowrer-Reynolds, 2005, p. 30). In addition, the researchers proposed that these teachers may have viewed creative development as the art teacher’s responsibility because many of the surveyed teachers associated creativity with “art products” (Aljughaiman & Mowrer-Reynolds, 2005, p. 31).

In contrast, both the prospective and in-service teachers surveyed by Kampylis et al. (2009) believed fostering student creativity was a part of the teacher’s role in the classroom. However, approximately half of each group of teachers did not feel well trained to facilitate student creativity. The use of questionnaires to collect teacher beliefs in the study by Kampylis et al. (2009) limited the ability to explore the reasons why the teachers may have felt ill-prepared to foster student creativity; the researchers suggested further exploration is needed to understand the reasons why.

Due to the contradictory findings regarding teachers’ beliefs of their role in fostering student creativity and the need to further explore the reasons why some teachers may not feel well-prepared to foster it in students, the current study will further explore these topics by examining teachers’ personal beliefs regarding their own creativity and how those beliefs relate to their instructional practice in the classroom. More specifically, the group of teachers interviewed in this research study were furthering their
education in a Master’s program which may have influenced how prepared they feel in
the classroom.

Classroom teachers participating in prior research on teacher beliefs of creativity
have primarily associated the concept with the art and literacy domains. Interestingly,
many teachers believed creativity could be exhibited in various ways, domains, and
contexts, however, when asked to provide examples of specific domains, teachers tended
to focus on the art and literacy contexts (Diakidoy & Kanari, 1999; Diakidoy & Phtiaka,
2002; Kampylis et al., 2009). Aljughaiman and Mowrer-Reynolds (2005) also found
teachers to describe creativity in terms of “artistic production” and “linguistic product[s]”
(p. 25). It is important to point out that the teachers participating in these studies were
either general classroom teachers (Aljughaiman & Mowrer-Reynolds, 2005; Diakidoy &
Phtiaka, 2002) or unspecified (Diakidoy & Kanari, 1999; Kampylis et al., 2009).

Therefore, these beliefs need to be compared with various populations including
specialized teachers. The present study explores these beliefs with a variety of teachers,
both classroom teachers and those teachers specialized in a specific subject, enrolled in a
Masters program in either art or English.

The use of quantitative research methodologies in the collection of teachers’
beliefs and attitudes regarding creativity has revealed limited and contradictory findings.
Further, the studies discussed above did not explore how teachers’ personal backgrounds
and experiences may have influenced their beliefs about creativity. The current study
will extend prior quantitative research on teachers’ beliefs of creativity by using in-depth
interviews with a large sample of teachers to not only understand their general beliefs and
attitudes about creativity but to understand their prior experience with and beliefs about their own creative abilities and how those beliefs relate to their instructional practice in the classroom.

**Qualitative Approaches**

Qualitative research methodologies have presented a detailed account of teachers’ beliefs regarding creativity and in turn have overcome some of the limitations posed by the use of surveys and questionnaires previously discussed. However, the qualitative research continues to be limited in understanding the personal backgrounds and foundations for teachers’ beliefs. This portion of the literature review will discuss the findings from research studies using case study and interview approaches to explore teacher beliefs and practices regarding creativity, as well as the limitations each of these studies have which support the need for further research by the present study.

A case study presented by Sak (2004) described the beliefs regarding creativity and the classroom practices employed to develop student creativity by a retired teacher who had 20 years experience teaching both average and gifted students. During the study, the participant teacher taught gifted third and fourth grade students in an “Advanced Educational Placement (AEP)” program on a part-time basis (Sak, 2004, p. 218). The participant teacher described creativity in terms of perceiving the world, acting with a purpose, and developing something for impact. She viewed creativity as an aptitude one is born with or without, and in the case of the latter, it was something that could be developed. Creativity was fostered in her classroom through the incorporation
of imagination and fantasy into lessons. For example, her class read fantasy books, discussed their ideas related to fantasies, and extended ideas through creative writing. Her ideal classroom was described as including “freedom, discovery, independence, and higher levels of thinking” (Sak, 2004, p. 221).

The interviews and classroom observations Sak (2004) utilized provided a detailed account of the participant teacher’s beliefs and practices regarding creativity that could not have been gathered through surveys or questionnaires. However, the specific context in which this teacher was investigated, that is, a part-time teacher of gifted students in an AEP course, may limit the ability for other general classroom teachers to adopt such strategies or for educators and administrators to promote these strategies in training programs for general classroom teachers. In addition, Sak (2004) did not explore the participant teacher’s personal beliefs regarding her own creativity or how those beliefs relate to her general beliefs and classroom practices regarding creativity.

Lilly and Bramwell-Rejskind (2004) extended the research by Sak (2004) by providing an in-depth understanding of a university teacher’s creative teaching process and personal beliefs regarding her own creative teaching abilities. The participant teacher’s creative teaching process was described as including three macro-processes: preparation for the course work, connection with students, and reflective teaching. Multiple micro-processes were described under each macro-process in which the participant teacher engaged in, including the constraints in preparation and reflective teaching, awareness of self and students while preparing for the course and connecting with students, values and goals as influencing each of the three macro-elements, student
and colleague feedback in the connection and reflective teaching process, and selection of
problems for reflective teaching. The participant teacher described herself as
“responsible” in that she continually renews her classroom practices and content, models
confidence in herself and students, accepts diversity, acts with flexibility and as a
passionate learner. Lilly and Bramwell-Rejskind (2004) argued that these descriptions
were representative of creativity.

Although Lilly and Bramwell-Rejskind (2004) furthered the research by Sak
(2004) by describing the participant teacher’s beliefs regarding her own creative teaching,
the specific context of the case study approach, that is a university course, may limit its
use in other contexts with different constraints such as elementary through high school
settings. In addition, the participant teacher’s general beliefs about creativity, for
example how she defines it, was not discussed by Lilly and Bramwell-Rejskind (2004).
Having an understanding of how the participant teacher conceptualized creativity would
have created a foundation as to how she approaches and defines creative teaching in the
classroom.

Teacher beliefs about creativity including their definitions and approaches to
foster it in students have also been explored through interviews; however, there continues
to be a limited focus on teachers’ personal backgrounds. For example, Fleith (2000)
examined teacher, student, and expert beliefs regarding the classroom elements that
promote or inhibit creativity. All groups discussed their definitions of creativity and a
separate but similar interview protocol was used for each group. Individual interviews
with teachers focused on their descriptions of classroom environments which promote or
inhibit creativity, personal strategies used to promote creativity in students as well as their evaluation criteria used in identifying creative students. Third and Fourth grade students participated in focus group interviews discussing their classroom, opportunities wherein one could or could not be creative in the classroom, creative students they know, and things they enjoy or would change in the class. Experts included individuals holding PhDs in educational psychology as well as having experience as a classroom teacher. The experts participated in individual interviews (three experts completed questionnaires with the interview protocol due to proximity) discussing the environments that promote or inhibit creativity in the classroom, the assessment of those environment in relation to fostering student creativity, and the relation between creativity and domain-specificity (Fleith, 2000).

It is important to note that the understanding of personal beliefs of one’s own creativity was limited to student perceptions in the study by Fleith (2000), therefore, it is unknown how the teachers perceived their own abilities or how those perceptions related to their general beliefs about creativity. Interestingly, some student participants in the study by Fleith (2000) nominated teachers as being creative, however, because students participated in focus group interviews, the validity of their responses is in question due to the tendency for an individual to agree with the group.

Teacher perceptions of promoting student creativity were explored by Craft (1998) with 18 teachers enrolled in a postgraduate course in London aimed at fostering and enriching teachers’ abilities to promote creativity in the classroom. The use of participant observations in the course, formal and informal interviews, as well as
questionnaire distributions allowed the researcher to understand the facets of creativity in general and regarding teaching that were valued by the teachers. In regards to teaching, the researcher found that the teachers believed educators needed to be nourished themselves through personal development in order to foster creativity in students. The present study will extend the research by Craft (1998) by further exploring how a teacher’s personal development in a higher-education course and their past personal experiences with creativity may influence beliefs about their instructional practices in the classroom. In addition, because the context of the research by Craft (1998) was limited to teachers in London, the current study will present the beliefs of teachers in the United States enrolled in a Master’s program.

**Creative Self-Efficacy**

Beliefs about one’s abilities to complete tasks has been referred to in research as self-efficacy and is one of the fundamental underlying constructs that influences individual chosen actions, degree of effort and persistence in the face of difficulties (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as the beliefs one has about one’s abilities to produce the necessary actions in order to achieve a desired outcome. These beliefs can be held in a variety of domains and activities (Bandura, 1997), such as the ability to write an essay, present a speech, or create a novel approach to a problem. Bandura (1997) proposed that self-efficacy beliefs are influenced by and formed through (1) enactive mastery experience, (2) physiological and affective states, (3) vicarious
experiences, and (4) verbal persuasion. Successful mastery experiences were explained by Bandura (1997) to increase self-efficacy whereas failed attempts lower them. It is important to note that it is an individual’s perception of how a previous successful or failed task reflects on one’s capabilities that will influence self-efficacy beliefs. Physiological states such as panic and stress as well as affective mood states may influence the evaluation of one’s abilities during a task and thus one’s self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997). Other individuals in society also influence one’s self-efficacy beliefs through vicarious experiences such as modeling or observational learning and verbal persuasion in an effort to strengthen or improve self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997).

Research examining self-efficacy has shown a relationship between these beliefs in terms of teaching abilities and instructional practices. For example, Czerniak and Schriver (1994) found that pre-service science teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs regarding their ability to directly influence student learning affected the strategies used in the classroom, the reasons for choosing the strategies, and the basis of their perception of the success or failure of the lesson. In addition, Deemer (2004) concluded that high school teachers with high self-efficacy beliefs regarding their teaching abilities created a more mastery oriented classroom environment characterized by an emphasis on learning and effort which Deemer (2004) suggested promotes understanding and creativity.

Although personal beliefs about one’s teaching abilities has been identified as influencing teachers’ classroom practices, it is unknown to what extent self-efficacy
beliefs in other domains such as creativity relate to teachers’ beliefs regarding their instructional practices in the classroom and their conceptualizations of creativity.

Beliefs regarding one’s ability to perform creatively on a task has been referred to in research as creative self-efficacy (Tierney & Farmer, 2002), and can range from high, characterized by individuals who have confidence in their ability to perform creatively, to low, characterized by individuals who do not believe they can perform creatively during task completion (Jaussi et al., 2007). The range in creative self-efficacy beliefs, from high to low, has been shown in research to influence creative performance. For example, Tierney and Farmer (2002) found that individuals in both manufacturing and office professions that held positive creative self-efficacy beliefs were evaluated by their supervisors as performing creatively at their job. In support of this, Jaussi et al. (2007) also found that creative self-efficacy beliefs held by senior managers in an insurance firm were positively related to work creativity as evaluated by co-workers. Further explaining the influence creative self-efficacy has on creative performance, Choi (2004) found that such beliefs held by college students mediated the influence of individual factors such as motivation, creative and cautious personality, and creative ability, and contextual factors in the form of supportive leadership and open group climate had on creative performance in the classroom as evaluated by instructors. Creative self-efficacy has also been shown to mediate the influence of employees’ perceived creative expectations by supervisors on creative work performance in a research and development department of a chemical company (Tierney & Farmer, 2004).
Research examining the relationship between creative self-efficacy and creative performance has focused primarily on college students, management, and business professionals in specific contexts to the exclusion of classroom teachers. Therefore, it is unknown how teachers, working within the daily constraints of the prescribed curriculum they must adhere to, perceive their own creative abilities and how these beliefs may relate to their instructional practice in the classroom.

This study serves to extend the research on teachers’ beliefs about creativity through the use of in-depth interviews with teachers enrolled in a Master’s program. Specifically, teacher conceptualizations of creativity and their personal experience with and beliefs regarding their own creative abilities will be explored and how those beliefs relate to their perceptions of their instructional practice in the classroom.
Chapter 3

METHODS

Research Questions

In order to expand upon the literature of teacher beliefs of creativity, the current study utilized in-depth interviews to further explore teacher conceptualizations of creativity. More specifically, the following research questions were addressed: (1) what are teacher beliefs about creativity in general and about their own creative abilities? And (2) how are those beliefs related to their instructional practices in the classroom?

Research Design

A mixed-methods approach for data collection was employed to explore classroom teacher beliefs about creativity. A pilot study was conducted at an urban elementary school (Kindergarten through sixth grade) in Northern California. Requests for participation in questionnaire completion and interviews were given to all classroom teachers and the Principal at the elementary school. Due to the limited number of participants (explained below in the Procedure) a new population was sought. A portion of the pilot study interview questions regarding administration support for creativity were omitted in order to reflect the new population, i.e., classroom teachers in a Masters
program in Education. In place of the omitted questions, participants were asked to describe their experience in the Masters program.

A purposeful sampling procedure was utilized to select two separate academic cohorts within the Masters in Education program at a large four-year metropolitan university in Northern California. The art and English cohorts were selected due to their diverse focus on creativity which allowed for greater comparison of beliefs. The students and professors in two graduate level courses (one course within each cohort) were invited to participate in both elements of the current study. First, a six-item questionnaire measuring individual creative self-efficacy and creative teaching self-efficacy beliefs was distributed to all students and the professors in each classroom. A portion of this questionnaire regarding personal creative self-efficacy beliefs has shown reliability due to its use in prior research (Beghetto, 2006; Jaussi et al., 2007; Tierney & Farmer, 2002; Tierney & Farmer, 2004) and was used in the current study to gain an understanding of the overall creative self-efficacy beliefs of the students in each cohort course. Next, all students and professors were invited to participate in audio-recorded semi-structured interviews with the researcher. These interviews were used to explore further the participants’ beliefs on creativity in general and of their own creative abilities, teaching experience and approach in the classroom, views on children’s learning and development, and experience in the Masters program.

All audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed through a series of coding stages in order to discover patterns and themes throughout the data. Due to the limited number to total questionnaires completed ($n = 62$) and the imbalance of
completed questionnaires from each group (art cohort, \( n = 50 \); English cohort, \( n =12 \)), it was assumed that the statistical power to predict a difference between groups, if one existed, would be too low to determine significant results. Therefore, data analysis for this study focused on interview responses.

**Participants**

Two graduate courses in separate academic cohorts (art and English) within the Education Department of a large four-year metropolitan university in Northern California were recruited for participation in the current study. Designed as a two year program for Kindergarten through sixth grade teachers as well as specialized teachers, the participating art cohort professor, Sandra, explained that one of the purposes of the program was to provide opportunities for the arts to children through training and educating teachers. She hoped that her students would feel comfortable incorporating various forms of art related activities such as, “dance, music, theatre, and visual art” into their classroom curriculum. With an understanding of both theory and research Sandra explained that her students can be both researchers and advocates which she felt was important for educators to strive for. The participant English cohort professor, Robin, described the three year English cohort as preparing Kindergarten through adult level teachers to address the many aspects of English curriculum including, “listening, speaking, reading, and writing.” Robin explained that her students have the opportunity to expand their knowledge of effective classroom strategies through research as well as
real-world practical applications that they can utilize in their own classrooms which she hopes help students feel prepared not only in the classroom but to become leaders in literacy.

Fifty-four creativity questionnaires were distributed to the students in the art cohort class, and 49 art cohort students completed the questionnaire (91% response rate). Twelve creativity questionnaires were distributed to the students in the English cohort class, and 11 English cohort students completed the questionnaire (92% response rate). In total sixty students and two professors (one art cohort professor, one English cohort professor) completed creativity questionnaires (n =62).

Twenty-four art cohort students indicated they were interested in participating in an interview; thirteen students agreed and completed interviews (54% response rate) along with the art cohort professor (n =14 art cohort participants). Three English cohort students were interested in participating in an interview and all completed interviews (100% response rate), as well as the English cohort professor (n = 4 English cohort participants). A total of 18 interviews were completed (n = 14 art cohort participants; n = 4 English cohort participants). Among all participating interviewees, six interview participants were traditional classroom teachers, five participants were either music or art teachers, five participants were either taking time off teaching or taught in a non-traditional classroom, and two of the participants were the professors of the participating graduate courses.
**Procedure**

**Pilot Study Procedure**

Classroom teachers and the principal at an urban elementary school (Kindergarten through sixth grade) in Northern California to which the researcher had entre were recruited for participation in the current study. After discussion with the principal, a letter of approval for the research materials (e.g., invitation letter to teachers, creativity questionnaire, and interview questions) and their distribution to all teachers on campus was received, and submitted with the Human Subjects Application for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.

Upon approval of the IRB, a short paragraph introducing the researcher, the current study, and request for voluntary participation by classroom teachers was sent via e-mail to the principal of the elementary school who in turn added it to the weekly school staff e-mail newsletter. Packets of research materials including an invitation letter, consent form, creativity questionnaire, and a return envelope for completed consent forms and questionnaires were distributed to all teachers via their school mailboxes by the researcher. A large manila folder was set up next to the teacher mailboxes for the collection of completed consent forms and questionnaires which the researcher checked twice a week for completed submissions. Approximately one week after distribution, a follow up notice, approved by the principal, was distributed in the teacher mailboxes which reminded teachers of the packet of materials they received and instructions on how to complete or contact the researcher with questions. One completed questionnaire was
returned before the two week deadline. The participant was contacted via phone and with a face meeting on campus to set up a time for the interview at the participant’s convenience.

Before the interview began, the participant was given a copy of the interview questions to follow along with, and was reminded that the conversation would be audio-recorded and the ability to decline answering any questions which she did not feel comfortable with. The approximate 45-minute semi-structured interview consisted of open-ended questions regarding her views on creativity, teaching approach, and administration support for creativity. Follow-up and probing questions were used as needed to encourage elaboration or clarification. After completion of the interview, the participant was thanked for her participation and offered a five dollar coffee gift card. She was also given the opportunity to ask any questions she had regarding the research.

The same interview procedure was followed for the principal’s 45-minute interview. At the two week deadline for completed questionnaires, it was determined that recruitment of teachers at the elementary school would be insufficient to complete data analysis. For this reason all completed questionnaires (n = 3; one questionnaire was returned after the deadline) and interviews (n = 2) collected from the elementary school were destroyed to protect participants’ privacy and not included in the current analysis.

**Current Study Procedure**

Upon notification and approval of the IRB for the recruitment of a new population, classroom teachers enrolled in the Masters in Education program at a large
metropolitan university in Northern California were selected for further recruitment. These students were required to hold a teaching credential or simultaneously work to obtain a teaching credential thus satisfying the criteria for participant selection, i.e., a classroom teacher.

A purposeful sampling method was employed to select two separate academic cohorts within the Masters program. First, the arts cohort was selected for recruitment because it is often equated with producing and demonstrating creativity as well as its role as an enrichment program beyond traditional curriculum for young children in schools. Next, the English cohort was selected for recruitment due to its focus on fundamental language curriculum and the traditional rudimentary role it plays in school curriculums. These two cohorts were selected because it was thought that the differing focus of each cohort would aid in providing a broader perspective of creativity and allow for potential comparison of beliefs. In addition, past researchers have found that many teachers provided examples of creativity in the art or literacy domains (Diakidoy & Kanari, 1999; Diakidoy & Phtiaka, 2002; Kampylis et al., 2009) or described the concept in terms of artistic or linguistic products (Aljughaiman & Mowrer-Reynolds, 2005). Due to these findings, the researcher also chose to explore the beliefs of teachers specializing their education in either art or English to aid in furthering our understanding of how or whether creativity is conceptualized differently by each group.

A total of four professors teaching in the Masters in Education program (one art cohort professor to which the researcher had entre and three English cohort professors) were contacted via school e-mail to introduce the researcher and the current study. A
request was made for permission to visit to their classrooms to recruit student participants and invite the professors’ participation in the study. Two professors (one art cohort professor and one English cohort professor) agreed to allow the researcher to visit their classrooms for recruitment purposes. The researcher met with the art cohort professor prior to visiting the class to further explain the study, share the creativity questionnaire, and gain additional information about the cohort.

Each course was visited once at the beginning of a class session. After class announcements, the professor introduced the researcher and purpose for the visit (i.e., recruit participants for current study). The researcher then introduced herself to the class, the purpose of her study and invited students to voluntarily participate in two portions of the study. First, the creativity questionnaire was explained to cover individual beliefs about creativity and creative teaching. Participants were reminded that the questionnaire was anonymous and thus not write their name on it. They were also reminded of the ability to leave any question blank with which they were not comfortable answering. Questionnaire completion served as the participants’ consent to participate in the questionnaire portion of the study.

Second, the researcher invited students to participate in an interview at a later day at their convenience which was described as covering participants’ beliefs on creativity in general and about their own creative abilities, teaching experience and approaches in the classroom, views on children’s learning and development, and experience in the Masters program. Participants were informed that the interview would be audio-recorded, last approximately 45-minutes, and that they would be offered a five dollar coffee gift card
upon completion of the interview. The researcher also provided the opportunity for interested participants to receive an e-mail copy of the interview questions prior to final agreement to participate.

A half sheet of paper form was created for individuals to indicate whether they were interested in participating in an interview. Those that were interested provided their name and either an e-mail or phone number where they could be contacted by the researcher to arrange a time and place convenient and comfortable to the participant to complete the interview.

Creativity questionnaires and interview interest forms were distributed to all the students in each class ($n = 54$ art cohort students; $n = 12$ English cohort students) along with a pencil to use and keep afterwards as a thank you gift. Upon completion of the questionnaires and interest forms, the researcher collected both forms separately ensuring anonymity of individuals who agreed or disagreed to participate in either portion of the study. Small chocolate candies were distributed as a thank you to all students regardless of their participation.

Individuals interested in participating in an interview were contacted via the e-mail or phone number they provided to set up a time and location convenient to the participant to complete the interview. Before the interview began the participant was given a consent form to review and sign. They were reminded that their anonymity would be maintained through the assignment of a pseudo-name during analysis and study write-up, that the conversation would be audio-recorded, and their right to decline answering any question which they did not feel comfortable with. The semi-structured
interview consisted of open-ended questions regarding the participant’s beliefs on creativity in general and of their own creative abilities, teaching experience and approach in the classroom, views on children’s learning and development, and experience in the Masters program. Follow-up and probing questions were used as needed to encourage elaboration and/or clarification. All interviews averaged approximately 45-minutes in length. Upon completion of the interview the participant was thanked and offered a five dollar coffee gift card as well as given the opportunity to ask any questions regarding the research.

**Data Sources**

**Quantitative Data Sources**

Personal creative self-efficacy beliefs will be measured using a three-item self-reported questionnaire developed by Tierney and Farmer (2002) in the analysis of various factors that influence an individual’s creative self-efficacy. This questionnaire showed strong reliability with two different samples surveyed by Tierney and Farmer (2002): individuals working in manufacturing ($\alpha = .83$) and individuals working in the operations of a business company ($\alpha = .87$). The questionnaire continued to measure good reliability ($\alpha = .76$) in further research by Tierney and Farmer (2004) in the analysis of the influence supervisor expectations for creativity have on employee creativity through various mediating variables, including creative self-efficacy. Jaussi et al. (2007) also reported good reliability ($\alpha = .62$) for the creative self-efficacy questionnaire in the analysis of
creative self-efficacy, creative identity, and creative work performance. Beghetto (2006) applied aspects of this questionnaire in the analysis of the relationship between young adolescent’s creative self-efficacy beliefs and multiple academic variables, and reported strong reliability ($\alpha = .86$). Three additional items assessing participant beliefs regarding personal creative teaching abilities were added to the questionnaire used in the current study. All items are measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from (1) “very strongly disagree” to (7) “very strongly agree.”

**Qualitative Data Sources**

The semi-structured interview with each student participant consisted of open-ended questions aimed at eliciting general and personal views on creativity, teaching experience and approach in the classroom, views on children’s learning and development, and experience in the Masters program. The same question format was used for both professor interviews with the omission of those questions regarding student experience in the Masters program. Additional questions asked of the professors included a description of the background of their cohort, how their cohort addresses creativity, and the value of obtaining a Masters degree. Follow-up and probing queries were introduced during all interviews as needed to explore further participant’s responses, clarify misunderstandings, and encourage elaboration. Interviews were scheduled at a time and place convenient and comfortable to the participant and audio-recorded upon participant approval. Interviews ranged from 31 minutes to one hour and 48 minutes with the average interview approximately 45-minutes in length.
Data Analysis

Due to the limited number to total questionnaires completed \((n = 62)\) and the imbalance of completed questionnaires from each group (art cohort, \(n = 50\); English cohort, \(n = 12\)), it was assumed that the statistical power to predict a difference between groups, if one existed, would be too low to determine significant results. Therefore, data analysis for this study focused on interview responses. All 18 interviews were first transcribed verbatim using the data analysis program Transana. This program allows for the transcription and analysis (e.g., coding) of qualitative video and audio data.

During the transcription process, separate initial theoretical memos were kept for each interview transcript (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) in which interesting or important segments of the interview were noted and explained, connections to other interviews or research were explained, and ideas or initial patterns explored. After each interview was transcribed, the open coding process was begun. Each interview transcript was read line-by-line to identify segments of data that captured important insights, interpretations, and experiences of the individuals regarding creativity. Throughout this careful reading, the researcher coded with both descriptive codes (i.e., codes with low inference) and in-vivo codes which were created from conversational keywords, phrases, or themes used by the participants. Three additional codes were used to identify talk surrounding creativity, beliefs regarding personal creativity, and teaching approaches in the classroom.
Upon completion of open coding for each transcript a second theoretical memo was written. This memo allowed the researcher to summarize each interviewee’s beliefs and thoughts in order to get an overall view of the participant. More detailed connections to other interviews were also noted which aided in developing patterns and identify focal themes across the data.

Three focal themes were chosen for a more detailed analysis. First, individual definitions of creativity were chosen for further analysis due to the significance it has to the current study. A detailed understanding of each participants’ definition of creativity is imperative to interpreting their beliefs about their own and others creativity as well as their classroom practices surrounding it. The second focal theme analyzed teacher descriptions of creative teaching in order to better understand their views and definitions of teaching creatively. Finally, during the open coding process many of the participants believed all individuals have creative capacity, however, they often added a condition that influenced this capacity. Therefore, the third focal theme concentrated on the conditions participants gave that influenced individual creative capacity.

Each interview transcript was re-read in order to select the relevant text that applied to each focal theme (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Participant descriptions of creativity, creative teaching and conditions influencing creative capacity were broken down line-by-line in order to aid in comparison to other participant’s descriptions. The focal themes were compared separately. Using methods as described by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), the researcher started with the first line of one participant’s creativity definition and compared this statement with all other creativity definitions given by the
remaining participants. Similar statements were grouped together. Next, the second line of the first participant’s creativity definition was chosen and again compared to the lines of all other participant’s creativity definitions to find similar statements. This procedure continued for each of the focal themes until the statements from all participants for each theme were combined in similar groups. Those statements that could not be grouped were put into a separate category. Each group was given a title to describe the statements within it, often interjecting the words from the participants as titles. Fourteen groups were made for creativity definitions; eight groups were made for creative teaching; and three groups were formed for conditions influencing creative teaching.

Bi-weekly meetings with Dr. Lynda Stone, sponsor of this thesis, began after the focus coding process was complete. These meetings allowed the researcher and sponsor to collaboratively analyze the focal themes further. Participant responses within the various groups under the focal themes were reviewed line-by-line so that patterns and contradictions could be noted and discussed in relation to relevant empirical research. Two main themes emerged from this data analysis. First was a focus on the individual in the creative process. The individual represents a person who has the power (agency) over his or her environment and actions to engage creatively. Second was a focus on the interactions between an individual and others in a social context as having an influence on the creative process. These interactions represent dialogic events with present or non-present participants which can influence an individual’s engagement in creative actions or thoughts. In addition, an orientation to the self was revealed within both larger
patterns. These themes will be presented in Chapter 4 in further detail throughout teachers’ conceptualizations of creativity.
Chapter 4

RESULTS

Analysis of classroom teachers’ qualitative interviews revealed two distinct patterns in their conceptualization of creativity. The first pattern of beliefs emphasized the role of the individual in the creative process, whereas the second set of beliefs identified the interaction between the individual and others in a social context as having an influence on the creative process. These two patterns of beliefs will be presented in this chapter through an examination of teachers’ beliefs regarding creativity, how the context is related to the creative process, what motivates creativity, and how creativity can be stifled. Data analysis will also reveal the single pattern of emphasizing an orientation to the self within both the individual and social context pattern of beliefs.

Origins of Creativity

Participant classroom teachers expressed two divergent views regarding the development of creativity which purported the two larger patterns found in this study. First, demonstrating the individual’s role in the creative process, some teachers believed creativity was an innate characteristic that an individual is born with. A second group of teachers expressed the importance of nurturing children’s creativity, thus demonstrating the role of the social context and the interactions with others have on the development of
creativity. A third group of teachers believed that creativity was inherent by nature but also needed to be nurtured by others. It is important to note that a small group of teachers (n=3) did not express either of the two larger patterns.

**Creativity as an Innate Characteristic**

Three teachers expressed an underlying belief that creativity is an innate characteristic in all individuals and also that everyone has the ability to be creative. When discussing her definition of creativity, Laura, who had approximately 10 years teaching experience, including upper level elementary and looping (i.e., following a group of students through multiple grades), explained that creativity is, “…part of who they are as a being and this innate sort of need to produce something that's their own.” As shown here, Laura believed creativity was a part of each individual and that its expression is a result of an intrinsic need to fabricate something that is uniquely each person’s own creation. She goes on to explain that this expression can take different forms such as art, music, or writing, but she felt that it is the expression itself which will represent oneself in society forever. Consistent across her interview, Laura marked intrinsic activity as the source of creativity and the individual as the sole owner of the process. These elements of Laura’s definition of creativity revealed a common way in which teachers’ beliefs about individuality were articulated. Laura’s focus on individuality, as with other participants, was evident in her belief that the ability to be creative is part of each individual and the expression of that ability produces something that is unique to each individual and represents the enduring role of the self in society.
Similar to Laura, Brooke, a middle school art teacher, expressed her belief in creativity as being an inherent quality in individuals when explaining the relationship between her teaching approach and the development of creativity in her students. She explains,

I love middle school...they have...some ability at that point...they're just so creative, they've got it in them, just I feel it’s just natural...so I feel yeah that my...curriculum tries to inspire what's already inherent in them.

Brooke illustrates her belief in the innate nature of creativity when she mentions that her students, “got it in them” as well as affirming its, “natural” existence. It is important to note that although Brooke felt creativity is an inborn trait in some individuals, she also believed individuals can learn a visual art, a domain which she associated with creativity. The view that one can learn a visual art may be due to the position Brooke has as an art teacher and the instructional role she plays in the classroom. Brooke’s beliefs exhibit an emphasis on the individual’s role in creativity because she believes all individuals are born with the ability to not only produce creatively but also to learn a visual art for themselves.

Another middle school art teacher, Erin, also expressed her belief in the innate nature of creativity when discussing her views on the topic,

I think some people are more innately creative than others ya know and they have a hard time following a set …of rules but I think everybody…has a creative element within them ya know and…I think it comes out in different ways sometimes.

Erin supports the ideal of the innate quality of creativity in everyone, however, her statement above reveals that not everyone has the same creative capacity because
some individuals, “are more innately creative than others.” The difference in the quality of creative capacity, whether one possesses it or it is more innate, demonstrates Erin’s belief in the individuality in creative abilities.

_Nurturing Creativity_

Although the second group of teachers did not emphasize the innate quality of creativity, they did express the belief that everyone has creative capacities and that these capacities needed to be nurtured by others. The degree to which creativity needed to be nurtured ranged from providing encouragement and opportunities for creativity, to nurturing early in life and throughout the schooling years, each of which supports the role interactions with other individuals in a social context have on the development of creativity.

Olivia, a first year teacher in upper level elementary, felt that everyone has creative capacities but those that are encouraged or had an interest in a specific area will be more creative. Further, Olivia explained that children’s creativity, “…depends on how much they're exposed to, how much they’re allowed to be creative…and then how much they’re encouraged.” When asked how someone can encourage creativity in a specific area, Olivia focused on the schooling domain and suggested not looking for specific answers from students, allowing there to be multiple view points in the classroom, and allowing students to share ideas with others so that in turn, others can learn and add onto the idea thus being creative themselves. Olivia’s suggestions for nurturing students’ creativity exhibits both the individual’s role and the role interactions with others have in
the creative process. Exposing children to the world and giving them opportunities to be creative allows the individual child to interact with her environment thus influencing her own creative process. Encouraging students’ creativity by allowing there to be multiple viewpoints in the classroom and the sharing of ideas creates interactions between individuals in the classroom which Olivia believes nurtures students’ creativity.

Paige, who had one year teaching experience at the primary level, also felt it was important to give children opportunities to be creative because, “it really allows them to take pride in themselves and acknowledge that what their thoughts [were] are worth valuing.” Providing students the opportunities to be creative allows the student to see that other individuals in their social context, the classroom, validate and affirm their creativity, thus nurturing a sense of pride in themselves from what they create.

Incorporating opportunities for students to be creative was important to Heather, an early elementary Montessori teacher. She felt everyone has creative capacities but it was essential to nurture these capacities early on with young children and continue to do so throughout their education so that the capacities can grow. Heather’s strong belief in providing continued opportunities to be creative starting with young children stems from her great appreciation and background in Waldorf curriculum which incorporates art into academic lessons so that, “children build on their artistic knowledge while they’re building on their academic knowledge.” Nurturing students’ creativity, for Heather, meant continually incorporating artistic opportunities throughout schooling as the Waldorf curriculum does. In turn this creates opportunities in which students are able to interact with various art forms and build their individual creative capacities.
Creativity as Innate and Needing Nurturing

In support of the role of both the individual and social context on creativity, a third group of teachers expressed the importance of nurturing creativity’s natural origins. Kathy, a classroom teacher with 10 years experience in upper level primary and looping, believed that all individuals were inherently creative, however, she emphasized, “…it’s whether you are allowed to express yourself or not and…also not just allowed but supported in your expression.” She supports creativity in the classroom by providing different opportunities for creativity and creating a “respectful environment” in the classroom. According to Kathy, “you need to create an environment that is accepting and specifically…one that they're not afraid…to…express their views and make mistakes because mistakes are learning tools.”

One of the ways that Kathy created this type of supportive environment in her classroom was through class meetings in which children could solve their problems in “…an open, respectful forum, [and] horizontal forum.” She emphasized the importance of not only students treating each other with respect during such meetings, but that she as the teacher also needed to model respect for her students. Furthermore, Kathy believed it was important to view children as individuals, and to “honor” their work through displays, discussions, and documentation. She believed that without such recognition, the teacher undermines the creative process for herself and her students.

Kathy’s belief that all individuals are inherently creative demonstrates the role the individual has in the creative process because the individual has the ability within themselves to produce as they desire. Her approaches to nurturing creativity in the
classroom support both the individual’s role and the role interactions with others have on creativity. First, the different opportunities to experience and engage in creative projects that Kathy provides illustrates the role the individual has in creativity because the individual child herself is interacting with her environment (i.e., the projects and opportunities the teacher presents), not necessarily other individuals, and creating from those experiences. Second, the respectful interactions Kathy promotes in her classroom, as well as the acknowledgement and validation she provides children through “honoring” their work, supports the role interactions with others in a social context has on children’s creativity. It is important to point out that even though Kathy believed the interactions with others in the social context had a role in nurturing children’s creativity, she also mentioned viewing the child as an individual within the classroom which in turn individualizes the child in the social context of the classroom.

Creating a positive social context was also important for other teachers who believed all individuals are born with creativity. John, a Masters student in the art cohort with substitute teaching experience, felt that all individuals were born with some aspect of creativity, and that it is in children’s nature to create, but he also emphasized that everyone’s creative capacity could be nurtured. Using his own personal experience as an example, John believed his own creativity was, “something that… I know I was born with but also our mother nurtured us…and it’s just part of the family, always has been.” John felt the creativity nurturing he received would help him promote creativity in the classroom. Referring to his own experience, he explains,
...I see the result ...of that nurture and so my willingness to open the doors wide open to children...and to really announce the fact that they can do it and then create an activity that allows them to do it would instill then the knowledge...that they are creative and they'll move forward

In this statement, John discussed two ways in which he can nurture creativity in the classroom, each having a different role in the creative process. First, John explains that he will, “announce the fact that they can do it” thus creating a positive, encouraging interaction between the teacher and student. This type of feedback can be classified as a form of social persuasion that can positively influence an individual’s self-efficacy beliefs about their creative abilities (Bandura, 1997). Next, John discussed developing an activity that provides students the opportunity to be creative which would promote a belief in the children that they have creative abilities. The student’s participation in the activity supports the role of the individual in the creative process because it is the individual who interacts with her environment (i.e., the given project) and creates from that experience. The project also serves as a mastery experience for the students in which they have the opportunity to engage in creative acts and then use that experience to develop their personal self-efficacy beliefs regarding their creative abilities (Bandura, 1997).

Another way that John suggested teachers can nurture student’s creativity was to expose children to various creative domains and allow everyone to participate in a non-judgmental climate in the classroom. He felt that, “when there is no judgment or evaluation but sure participation, the joy then...becomes part of process of creativity.” Creating a non-judgmental environment allows individuals to interact with each other
without the fear of evaluation which John felt allows individuals to enjoy the creative process more. This type of environment also affirms the positive role interactions with others can have on the development of creativity.

Robin, the English cohort professor, believed everyone was born with a “spark of creativity in them,” but that its materialization was dependent on how the individual perceives it and how it is nurtured by others. Therefore, although the individual has a role in the creative process by possessing the ability from birth, its development and actualization depends not only on the individual’s perception of the ability, but its being nurtured by others. Robin felt in order to nurture children’s creativity in the classroom, one needed to create a safe environment by having discussions with students about the various levels of individual creative abilities on different artistic projects and, “…making sure that people are accepting each other's strengths and weaknesses.” The supportive environment that Robin described creates a social context that has a role in nurturing students’ creativity because students can freely express themselves and interact with others without the fear of being negatively scrutinized. It is interesting to point out that although Robin worked to create a social environment in the classroom where students felt safe, she believed it was important to discuss the differences in individual creative abilities which individualizes a child within the social context of the classroom.

In addition to creating a supportive atmosphere in the classroom, Robin also felt creating an environment where students have the choice of doing different activities and the materials to do so was important to nurturing children’s creativity in the classroom. Offering children choices was important to Robin because she believed each child had
different talents, thus exhibiting her belief in the individuality of each child. However, she also felt she needed set requirements for the projects so that students would participate in a variety of projects rather than always choosing the same type of project.

Jaime, a classroom teacher with 14 years experience in various elementary school levels who believed creativity was a part of each person’s “soul,” also believed it was important to give students the materials and time needed to be creative. She felt her classroom environment was conducive to students’ creativity because not only did she provide a “kids’ corner” in which lots of materials were available with which to create, but she stayed in the classroom during recess to give her students more time to create. Providing students the choice, materials, and time to be creative allows students to interact with the environment, thus nurturing their own creative abilities as they create.

Jaime also believed teachers needed to give students the opportunity to be creative because she felt that, “…students have the ability to be creative in ways they have no clue is there until they actually begin to experience it, and…opportunity has to be given for them to use their…creativity.” In addition to providing opportunities, Jaime felt that sometimes students need guidance, approval, and/or positive reinforcements in their pursuits. Such feedback between student and teacher creates an interaction that she believed aided in nurturing a student’s creativity.

Nicole, who had two years teaching experience at the primary level, believed that creativity was a “natural gift” an individual has that motivates one to, “…want to make things more interesting, or you want to shed your own light on something.” However, Nicole also explained that children can develop their creativity if a teacher encourages
and fosters this capacity. One way she believed this could be done is through teacher modeling of creative behavior. Nicole explains the importance of teacher creative modeling in the following excerpt:

…that way kids get a modeling of what can be done out there, [be]cause…some things they do come up with on their own or they pull from other resources but in the classroom their biggest resource is their teacher.

Nicole believed that students could utilize their teacher as a learning resource in developing their own creative abilities, thus emphasizing the role individuals have in cultivating their creativity.

Michelle, who had experience teaching a variety of grades from preschool to primary level, used the terms “natural curiosity” and “natural creativity” interchangeably when discussing creativity which supports her belief in the innate nature of creativity. She also felt it was important to encourage children’s creativity by giving them an opportunity to explore their environment. Michelle explained that she felt she was encouraging her daughter’s creativity as a child by allowing her to play in the kitchen cupboards with Tupperware as she cooked. In this way, Michelle allowed her daughter to explore and interact with her environment thus supporting the role individuals have in nurturing their own creativity abilities.

How the Context is Related to Creativity

Creativity occurs within a particular environment and time in an individual’s development and a society’s progression (Ivcevic, 2009). In order to fully understand the
creative process by which creativity develops one must examine the context in which the individual creates and is embedded in. The teachers in this study conceptualized the creative context and the individual’s action within it in two ways, each demonstrating one of the larger patterns in the data. One group of teachers implicitly described the context as an individual cognitive process thus representing the agentive role, or the capacity to make choices within one’s environment, the individual has in the creative process. Another group of teachers discussed the individual in transaction with others, thereby creating a social context together in which creativity emerges.

**Context as a Cognitive Process**

The first perception of context expressed by a group of teachers encompasses an individual’s cognitive process. Mercer (1993) proposed the mental construction of a learning context as including the personal information, knowledge, and prior experiences the individual applies in understanding and completing a task. Similarly, a group of teachers in the current study discussed the creative context as the cognitive formulation of experiences, knowledge, and problems an individual utilizes in the creative process. In this way, the individual acts with agency within the context because she has the capacity to mentally construct the context by incorporating the elements she perceives as necessary to produce creatively or engage in the creative process. The understanding of the context as a cognitive process will be detailed below in teacher discussions of the appropriation of one’s environment, utilization of prior knowledge, and perception of problems and assignments.
**Appropriation of one’s environment.** Analysis of teacher interviews revealed an emergent pattern of beliefs which asserted that an individual acts with agency in the creative context by applying the perceived necessary elements appropriated from her environment in the creative process. The cognitive process of appropriation and utilization of such information for creative purposes develops the context within which the individual works.

Referring to the classroom environment, Rose, an elementary school music teacher, felt children produce creatively when they “absorb” lessons and “…rework it in…[their] own way.” She expounds on this belief when describing creative children in the following excerpt,

…children who…hear what I'm saying…they listen…they see and…it sparks them, it inspires them, they think on their own, they think…independently and critically and they take what we're doing and then they'll…go beyond it

Rose makes reference to the process of appropriation in the quote above when describing children who “hear” and “see” her. These children then act with agency by, “…think[ing] on their own…independently and critically” and creating a context by mentally organizing what Rose’s class has done together; from this cognitive process, children then produce creatively. Rose demonstrates how this process can occur in her classroom when describing a first grade child who created her own verse to a song that Rose’s class had been working on. She explains,

…I taught a song called “what can one little person do” for the Civil Rights program… and it was, had verses about Harriet Tubman and Rosa Parks…King, Sojourner Truth and a bunch of people, this one first grader she went home and she wrote her own verse about Ruby Bridges and she…figured it out, she made it rhyme she…used the rhythm and…all the stuff…that we had been doing in the
song and she went off and again she stepped outside this...box...I didn't ask her to do that...but her mind just didn't stop there...because she was interested in it and...she went further and of course...so then...she sang it as a solo in the concert...I always welcome that and then I immediately want them to...put it in.

In this excerpt, Rose first describes the lesson her class had been working on, learning a song for the Civil Rights program. Next, she singles out a young girl who created her own verse from the song by utilizing the rhyme and other elements found in the original song. Rose explained that she did not require the child to do this, but because the child was interested in the topic, she “went further” and added to the song. Interestingly, Rose then validated the girl’s creation by adding it to the concert as a solo. The first grader in this example appropriated the elements from the Civil Rights song and utilized them in developing a new verse. She acted as an individual with agency in using what she had learned to cognitively create a context that allowed her to create something new. Her desire to create without assignment or requirements from the teacher also displays her agentive role in the creative process. It is important to point out that Rose validated the girl’s work by individualizing the child in the whole group concert by allowing her to perform her creation as a solo.

Having multiple experiences in the world, ranging from exploring the playground to going on fieldtrips, was important to Kathy because she felt children acquire their creativity from those experiences. Kathy describes the process by which one’s experiences translates into the creative process by explaining,

…it’s very important that people experience things for themselves, have real experiences and then be able to...interpersonally work that out, look at that, and then produce something...whatever it is, if they’d like, if they were so moved and that's where the creative process comes in so whatever it is that you formulate for
more…that would be being creative, and whether that comes out in a work of art or it comes out in…a way that you think out of the box and solve a problem…it doesn't matter it’s all creativity

In this excerpt, Kathy first emphasizes the importance of an individual having experiences. She then alludes to the process of appropriating one’s experiences when she refers to the reflective process as, “interpersonally work[ing] that out, look[ing] at that.” She describes the creative process as beginning next if one, “were so moved” and could result in a variety of domains from cognitive thinking to the physical production of a product. This process allows an individual to take her experiences, reflect up on them, and create something from the experience if inspired to do so, which demonstrates the role individuals have in the creative process by formulating the cognitive context within which she creates.

Kathy’s discussion of her preparation of classroom activities is evidence of her belief in the value experiences have for students in the creative process. She described reflecting on her own daily experiences when simply walking or talking by, “…constantly trolling for ideas and…keep[ing] journals…[to] see how it fits into my broader interest.” She felt her teaching in the classroom was enriched by such reflective processing of her daily experiences. Kathy also described her desire to take what she appropriated from trips and create ways to share it with her students: “…I mean when we went on…trips or whatever it was always 'how can I fit this into, how can I bring my part of…this great part of, that I'm seeing in the world back to my kids.” Kathy’s intention to share her experiences with her students displays her agentive role in developing a
creative context in which she formulates classroom lessons thereby allowing her students to experience a portion of what she has experienced.

Brooke’s belief regarding the creative process paralleled Kathy’s description in that she also believed individuals create from their experiences. She describes how this process occurs in the following way, “…seeing the world around you, the environment around you and ingesting that in a sense and then creating something from that experience.” Brooke first describes one’s experience as, “seeing the world around you.” Next, she refers to appropriating one’s experience when describing the process of “ingesting.” Finally, the individual then creates from the experience. In this way, the individual appropriates her environment and utilizes this cognitive knowledge to create the context within which she creates. Brooke’s description of a creative child she knows demonstrates how life experiences can influence the creative process. When describing this child, Brooke explains,

…I think she had a lot of outside art classes or experiences, I think she had family experiences just in the world like active experiences, I don't think she was a big ya know sit in front of the TV and play games kinda kid, she was very interested in the world around her…and so…her art reflected all that

In the excerpt above, Brooke describes a child who had multiple life experiences, including art classes as well as family and active experiences. Brooke also describes the child as interested in the world around her which may have motivated further exploration of her environment. Finally, Brooke believed the child’s art reflected her experiences. This may be because the child appropriated her experiences and brought them with her to cognitively creative the context wherein she creates.
The creative process can also be initiated from appropriating other individual’s ideas. Paige believed creativity involved, “doing things that came from you,” however, the initial idea may have come from another person. She felt this process did not involve “copying” or “regurgitating” but rather adjusting the idea to reflect oneself. Paige describes this process saying,

…you're not copying, you're not just regurgitating exactly and…doing exactly what someone else did, but maybe you take what they did but twist it…you add your own personal touch to something, I kinda feel like that's your creative side.

Although Paige does not directly refer to the process of appropriation in her explanation of the creative process above, it is necessary for an individual to appropriate other’s ideas in order to make it their own. An individual cognitively creates a context in which she can engage in the creative process by applying the elements, for example, other individual’s ideas, that she has appropriated from her environment. Paige’s discussion of her teaching approach in the classroom illustrates how an individual can take an idea from others and rework it to make it their own. In the example below, Paige explains how she takes the given classroom curriculum and adds her students’ interest to it.

…I often will try to intertwine what they're into into what I'm teaching so example if everyone's into…Hannah Montana or something when I do math I'll make up word problems and…make it sound like it was like “okay Hannah Montana wants to go shopping, she has so much money”…and for me that's being creative like you're taking their interests and making learning relevant to them because the curriculum that is given doesn't really do that.

In the excerpt above, Paige discussed how she takes the assigned math curriculum and tries to make it relevant to her students by incorporating their interest in Hannah
Montana. Not only did Paige need to appropriate the necessary curriculum and interests of her students but she acted with agency by making choices to adjust the curriculum which is often mandated to be executed as written. In this way, Paige took an idea from others, i.e., the curriculum, appropriated it along with the students’ interests, and created a new way to present the lesson to the children; it was this process that she viewed as creative.

**Prior knowledge.** Individuals act with agency by utilizing prior knowledge to develop a cognitive context in which they can engage in the creative process. The role of prior knowledge in the creative process was evident from a group of teachers’ discussions of creativity as a cognitive process, or way of thinking. Some of the most common descriptions of this concept included, “looking for those different possibilities”; the “ability to look at things from different points of view”; and “thinking outside the box.” Sandra, the art cohort professor, describes creativity as a cognitive process in the following excerpt, “it’s seeing the multiple options or solutions or…networking of ideas that can respond to a situation, a problem or a…provocation.”

It can be argued that one needs to have an understanding of what exists in the world before one can see different possibilities, different points of view, think outside the box, or think of different options or ideas. In support of this, Boden (1991) proposed that in order to achieve everyday creativity one must break the rules of a domain in systematic ways. However, she also argued that one cannot change or alter the rules of a domain if one does not know what the rules are (Boden, 1991). Therefore, it can be inferred that before an individual is able to diverge from the standard way of thinking about a topic,
she must appropriate the existing knowledge surrounding the topic, which serves as a prior knowledge she uses in further expanding upon the topic. The teachers referred to three types of existing prior knowledge individuals utilize in the creative process: academic knowledge, cultural knowledge, and discipline knowledge. Each of these areas will be discussed further below.

**Academic knowledge.** A child employs previously learned academic knowledge to create a cognitive context that allows her to connect what she is currently learning to what she has learned in the past. The ability to make these types of connections between academic areas was viewed by some of the teachers as being creative. For example, in the excerpt below, Nicole, describes creative students as those who are able to make connections between different areas:

…how they’re breaking things [down], even on the…smallest level of just turning the view of something around and noticing, ya know, patterns or…just different things that they're relating cross curriculum and they sit there and they go, “oh yeah, that's like in science we were doing this”

Nicole describes the ability to examine subject material closer, notice patterns, and connect topics between academic subjects as being creative. Noticing patterns and connecting topics involved a cognitive process where a student refers to prior knowledge of a previously learned concept. It is this cognitive process by which the child acts with agency to incorporate prior knowledge with current learning that Nicole viewed as creative.

Some teachers also believed creating lessons that combine two areas of study, such as art and literature, was a creative endeavor on their part. Paige provided an
example of a lesson she developed that she thought was creative which incorporated elements of art into her history lesson. Her fourth grade class was studying California history, specifically the ranchos and the need for cattle owners to brand their stock. Paige decided to give her students the opportunity to create their own brands by bending craft wire into whatever shape or symbol they chose. In reflection on her lesson below, Paige discusses how her students learned the history curriculum while simultaneously engaging in an art lesson:

…I just remember sitting back and going, they just totally understood the curriculum…they're gonna remember what I taught them because this one little project they're gonna always have this connection to “oh the ranchos” which were…in California and then they had the Native Americans and so it’s like having that one…little project that connects to the curriculum, I just feel it will stick

Paige’s lesson demonstrates how she acted with agency by adding her own ideas to the assigned curriculum. Her knowledge of two academic areas, art and history, created a cognitive context that allowed her to create a lesson that incorporated both academic areas. In turn, she then provided an opportunity for her students to also combine their art knowledge with the history lesson to learn about the ranchos. She felt that helping her students make this connection between the two academic areas helped her students better understand the curriculum.

Utilizing one’s prior academic knowledge to make connections between lessons, as Nicole and Paige described, was viewed as creative, and ultimately focuses on the importance individuals have in the creative process by developing a cognitive context in which such connections can be made.
Cultural knowledge. Through the use of language, young children are socialized into appropriate behavior within their community (Miller & Goodnow, 1995). Children then carry this cultural knowledge with them as they grow. Miller and Goodnow (1995) described one aspect of this knowledge as cultural practices which are purposeful actions repeated by a group of individuals and embedded with values or meanings, that when performed, allow an individual to identify with a group. Alison believed diverging from such social norms and routines was a creative act. She details her views of creativity in the following excerpt:

…being open to thinking outside of norms…questioning…what you’re told and what is kind of your daily routine and accepted as normal and taking risks to go beyond that

In the example above, Alison refers to cultural practices when describing, “norms” and “routines” that are “accepted as normal.” When asked further what type of norms she was referring to, Alison explained “societal norms.” Her specification of “societal norms” infers that a large group of individuals in a society abide by those norms. Alison felt that thinking beyond these norms or questioning accepted routines was a creative endeavor, however, it can be argued that it is essential that an individual have a previous understanding of such cultural knowledge. Because of the prominent role cultural practices have in one’s sense of belonging to a group, diverging from them requires an individual to act with agency. The agentive act allows the individual to reflect on these cultural practices, thus creating a cognitive context that allows one to decide whether she wishes to question or diverge from such practices. It is this act of questioning and diverging that Alison saw as a creative.
It is interesting to note that Alison believed this type of creative act allowed an individual to explore who she is as an individual. In the following excerpt, Alison explains how without creative thinking, an individual may be defined by others rather than by themselves:

…you can discover who you are on your own terms more with creative thinking…like I was saying thinking outside of the norm…if that’s my definition of creativity then…if you're not given the opportunity to be creative, you maybe become this person that wasn't necessarily shaped by your own terms and just kinda shaped by societal expectations or how things have been in the past and not much room for growth into…what could be

Using her own definition of creativity, discussed previously, Alison believed without an opportunity to exercise that ability, an individual may be defined only by societal norms and it does not allow for one’s personal growth. Alison’s beliefs reflect an emphasis on the importance of individualizing the self within one’s society and the means by which one does this is through creative thinking.

**Discipline knowledge.** Amabile (1983) suggested a framework for creativity that included three necessary elements in order for one to produce creatively. Specifically, in addition to creativity-relevant skills and task motivation, domain-relevant skills or “factual knowledge, technical skills, and special talents” (p. 67) were described as a foundation for creative production. Similarly, one group of teachers believed that in order to creatively engage in an area of study, or discipline, it is important to understand the intricacies of that area. Individuals then use this knowledge in forming a cognitive context that aids in the engagement in the creative process. Sandra, the art cohort
professor, exemplifies her belief in the necessity of domain knowledge for the creative process in the following excerpt:

…I see that the arts involve creative thinking, they also involve discipline, you don't develop, if you're really looking at being an artist you do not develop…the skills you need to be expressive or be creative in any of the art forms without the discipline and practice and developing of knowledge and skills

In the example above, Sandra explains that engagement in an artistic form not only requires creative thinking, but one also needs an understanding of the area and skills needed as well as the time to practice.

Using a personal example, Gail, who had 15 years teaching experience with middle school and upper grade levels, demonstrated the need for an individual to more fully understand a domain in order to creatively engage in it. She described herself as always enjoying art, but became fearful of drawing for many years after having a negative experience in high school. Her fear of drawing prevented her from taking advanced drawing classes or even trying to learn on her own, which she felt ultimately affected her painting abilities. Gail describes how her drawing skills are related to her painting in the following excerpt:

…when I paint…for some reason…it’s more 95 percent of the time it’s…bliss and five percent of the time it’s painful, the five percent of the time when if I had better drawing skills it would be, ya know if I had a problem I can't solve it in my painting it’s usually because of my lack of drawing skills

In the example above, Gail explained that for the majority of the time she enjoys painting, however, her lack of drawing skills does have a negative effect on her painting. It can be argued that the cognitive context in which she engaged in painting was hampered by inadequate drawing skills (domain knowledge) which in turn she felt had a
negative effect on her painting abilities. Therefore, it is evident that individuals need an understanding of a domain in order to create a cognitive context where one can then engage in the creative processes.

Having background knowledge in a specific domain in order to be creative in such domain places a focus on the individual in the creative process because it is the individual’s own knowledge of the domain which allows her to create the cognitive context in which she engages.

**Problems and assignments.** Analysis of teacher beliefs revealed the importance problems or assignments can have in an individual’s engagement in the creative process. Specifically, problems and assignments can initiate creativity because an individual’s perception of the problems in her environment or assignments given by others establishes a cognitive context that allows the individual to engage in the creative process. Cristina, an art teacher, considered the projects she assigned in class as problems for her students to solve. She discusses her teaching approach in the following example:

…I'm not sitting there going, “oh you do this or you do that, or you do this or you do that” it’s like, “here's the project, you solve the problem” and…that tends to be more my style, once I give them the tools it's, “here's a problem, now you solve it, and use your creativity, use your knowledge, use your inspiration…to create that”

Here, Cristina described her teaching approach as non-directive but as giving her students tools they can use to solve the problems she presents to them. Two other art teachers also described projects they assigned their students such as creating a model dorm room out of foam core and creating an individual cave painting. All the art teachers also developed rubrics for their students which outlined teacher expectations and
guidelines for projects. Students’ perception of these assignments, which includes the requirements for completion, and teacher expectations as explained in rubrics, is an agentive act that creates a cognitive context in which the individual engages in the creative process to complete the assignment.

Megan, an elementary school music teacher, provided a personal example of how she has engaged in a creative project which demonstrates how an assignment can initiate the creative process. She explained that she had attended a card making stamp party wherein she was given a pre-fabricated kit of materials to make a card. After observing fellow crafters she decided that, “I'm not gonna make mine just like that, I can take those same parts put it in together in a totally different way.” In this example, Megan’s perception of the assigned project, making a card, and the materials given created a cognitive context that allowed her to creatively decide how she was going to complete the project thus acting with agency in the creative process.

**Context as Interaction with Others**

Another group of teachers perceived the creative context as emerging from an individual’s interaction with others. It is within this social context that individuals can collaborate and engage in the creative process. This creative collaboration will be demonstrated through teachers’ examples of creative projects and in their descriptions of creative teaching.

**Collaborative creative projects.** Teachers gave examples of creative projects in which they collaborated with friends, students in their classrooms, and other co-workers.
For example, Alison described one of her creative endeavors as singing and performing with others. Her collaboration with friends included writing, singing, and recording portions of the songs. She expressed the joy she felt when collaborating with friends to create music, specifically hip-hop which is different from her previous training in classical music. Although Alison worked with her friends to create hip-hop music, illustrating the important role interactions with others have on the creative process, she also demonstrated an orientation to the self when describing the joy she personally received from the experience.

Erin, a middle school art teacher, described a creative project she developed for her students which involved a collaboration of ideas and work responsibilities between her and her students in designing the individual student’s ideal college dorm room. She outlined the requirements for the project including room dimensions and specifications for doors, windows, closets, sleeping and study areas, etc. Students also had the opportunity to collaborate and work together in pairs with the requirement that they double some elements of the design such as sleeping and studying areas. Erin collaborated with her students in the design phase by giving feedback on the accuracy of measurements of the room and showing the students how to use the necessary art tools. Within the construction phase, she cut the walls and floors for her students and then allowed them to construct and decorate it. The interactions between Erin and her students developed a social context that allowed them to engage in the creative process together, however, it also emphasizes the individual student within the social context because it was described as the student’s ideal dorm room which they were creating.
Collaboration between co-workers was another common type of social context mentioned by the teachers in which the creative process can emerge. These types of collaborations can include discussion of ideas or creating projects together. Jaime felt it was helpful to talk with other teachers to garner ideas to develop new teaching approaches. She expresses this belief in the excerpt below:

…I think when we have so many restrictions on how we can include creativity and the arts in our programs that we have to be even more creative and I think that sometimes those new ideas emerge from discussing the situations with others and so they can help you go in that direction that you need to go.

Due to the limitations on how the arts can be incorporated into classrooms, Jaime felt she needed to be creative in developing ways to include the arts in her curriculum. She believed these creative ideas often arise through discussions with other educators. In this way, discussions with other individuals develop the social context wherein individuals can process ideas and engage creatively together. Further, the ideas generated from such discussions are used to help teachers in their classrooms thus emphasizing the individual within the social context.

Collaboration between teachers can also be valuable in developing cross-curricular projects. Brooke, a middle school art teacher, enjoyed collaborating with other teachers and mentioned a project she developed with an English teacher that incorporated the art concept of foreground, middle ground, and background within the stages of a story. In this type of collaboration each teacher brought her area of expertise which created a social context wherein they could integrate ideas to create a project together. Brooke describes her reasoning for collaboration in the following excerpt:
…if you have a teacher that's willing to sit and just...process out loud, you can come to some really fun ideas...[be]cause...there are so many connections and cross overs with the way that human mind works and thinks and organizes that it comes up in art and literature and science in different ways and so then just to make those connections

Here, Brooke expresses her awareness of the many possible connections between academic areas, and through discussions with other teachers these opportunities can be acted on together to create something new.

**Creative teaching as a collaborate process.** A common emergent theme among participants’ descriptions of creative teaching was the process of collaboration between students and the teacher. The reciprocal relationship between student and teacher develops a social context in which collaboration of learning can occur and it is this reciprocal process in teaching that some of the teachers viewed as being creative. Some of the ways teachers collaborated with their students while teaching included being re-directed by student questions, adapting to student needs, asking students for feedback, and teachers learning from their students.

Laura explained that although she would write lesson plans for her class, her students would often re-direct the lessons with their questions. She discusses how this process can occur in the following,

…I think that's part of creativity too is really when the kids start to ask you, you're trying to tell them about I don't know fractions or something and...their questions will start to direct you into a different idea that relates to fractions or ya know in some way to them it relates to them in fractions...next thing you know you're outside dividing the class up ya know into halves and then into thirds and...showing them “this is what it looks like when a fraction creates itself,” so I kinda veer off
In the excerpt above, Laura explained how her students’ questions would divert the lesson plan into an area of student interest that reflected both the students’ questions and curriculum topic. Therefore, the teacher and students collaborated in the process of mutual teaching and learning of the curriculum.

Another frequently mentioned collaborative process that the teachers viewed as creative involved the need for a teacher to adapt to classroom situations and student needs. This took the form of both modifying curriculum lessons and the teaching approach in the classroom. For example, Kathy felt it was essential for all teachers to be creative individuals in order to meet the needs of elementary level students. Kathy describes how she adjusts her teaching approach in the following excerpt:

…I need to design curriculum…and deliver curriculum in a multitude of ways and I need to be able to think on my feet and be able to change direction if I see a…what they call a teachable moment…I need to be able to quickly adapt…my teaching…pedagogy, I mean very quickly not to lose the kids

In this example, Kathy explains how she adapts her teaching approach based on her students’ needs or understanding or situations in the classroom. Collaboration in this example takes place between the teacher taking into account student feedback in the form of needs, situations, and understandings, and modifying curriculum and teaching approaches based on that feedback. Therefore, both the students and teacher influence how teaching and learning co-exist in the classroom.

The ability to stay open to new ideas was also mentioned as part of creative teaching which allows for collaboration between students and teachers in learning and lesson planning. For example, Erin explained that it was necessary to stay open to new
ideas because her students can teach her “tricks” as well. She then utilizes these approaches in her teaching and will mention to her students that another student taught it to her. Therefore, although the teacher traditionally holds the role of presenting information to students, Erin felt a creative teacher needed to be willing to learn from her students, which creates a social context where collaboration of ideas is fostered. This type of collaboration of ideas also emphasizes the individual teacher in the creative process because she describes learning a new teaching technique herself.

Paige also felt she was open to new ideas and would directly ask for student feedback which she would take into consideration when adjusting lessons. When describing the purpose of her classroom meetings, Paige explained how she would initiate student feedback,

…I would even ask them like “okay ya know how do you feel about today's lessons, what'd you like, what didn't you like” and I would be open to suggestions ya know “well what was your favorite part” to know what they're enjoying…and there's something … that I can change for them, I'll change it and ya know, certain things like I said unfortunately like that's just how it is, I can't change it

In this example, Paige initiated the collaborative process in classroom meetings by directly asking students for their feedback on lessons. The social context created within Paige’s class meetings allowed her and the students to share ideas and feedback on lessons. The context also emphasizes the individual because it is Paige who will take the feedback and integrate it into future lessons she presents.
Sources of Motivation for Creativity

Two sources of motivation for engaging in the creative process were discussed by the participant teachers. First, reflecting the role of the individual in the creative process, one group of teachers recognized the ability for personal exploration, enjoyment, and pride one has when engaging in the creative process as a source of motivation. A second group of teachers focused on creating an environment wherein students can engage in creative endeavors as a source of motivation, thus demonstrating the important role interactions between others and the individual have in the creative process. Each source of motivation will be discussed below in both teacher beliefs and personal creative examples.

Intrinsic Motivation: Self as Motivation

Intrinsic motivation can include engaging in an activity for personal enjoyment or interest as defined by Ryan and Deci (2000). Various forms of intrinsic motivation were cited by a group of teachers when discussing the creative process, reflecting the importance of the self in creativity. For example, four teachers within the art Masters cohort felt that the creative process afforded an individual the opportunity to explore and learn about oneself; it also served as a way of respecting oneself. Cristina, an art teacher, believed individuals needed to explore themselves and creativity allowed them to do so. Similarly, Alison felt individuals can discover themselves through creative thinking, which she defined as thinking beyond cultural norms. She further added that when one is
able to think beyond such norms they are not being defined by “societal expectations” but rather through their own self-discovery.

Not only does the creative process allow one to explore himself or herself but some teachers believed it can reflect the self as well. Kathy believed that when an individual understands herself everything she does is creative. More specifically, Kathy explains, “I think the creative process is a real reflection of again knowing yourself.” Being creative also served as a way for individuals to respect themselves and one’s uniqueness. When asked if she expects her students to be creative, Jaime explained, “oh one-hundred-percent…that's part of that respecting yourself because your own ideas are unique to yourself, and through your own uniqueness comes your creativity.” In this excerpt, Jaime discussed how one’s ideas are unique to himself or herself and it is this uniqueness that results in creativity. The ability to explore, learn about, and respect the self are forms of intrinsic motivation for individuals to engage in the creative process. They also place a focus on the individual in the creative process because it emphasizes the personal benefits that an individual experiences when being creative.

Other reasons for engaging in the creative process as discussed by the teachers included personal satisfaction and enjoyment. Laura described her creative abilities as including a wide variety of artistic endeavors such as music, painting, photography, and ceramics. She discusses her choice of activities in the following excerpt,

…'ve done pretty much everything, I don't really have one, that's kinda always been my issue I don't like focus on one ya know I kinda try all this stuff and then come back to the things that make me happy, not necessarily for anybody else, but what I like to do
Although Laura has a wide variety of interests, she chose to explore those activities that provided her the greatest satisfaction, regardless of other individuals’ opinions of the activities. Music was one activity that Laura felt played a large part in her life, specifically her participation in a community orchestra. She described her experience at orchestra rehearsal as “soul feeding” where she could “absorb” the experience and nothing else mattered at the time. Laura also hoped that her students would realize the need to feed their soul through creativity later on in their lives as, “…I had to feed my soul to do this, I had to like give something to the world that…is not about anything else but what I did, what I made.” In this excerpt, Laura mentions the contribution of a creative product to society, but emphasizes the personal benefit (i.e., soul feeding) and a focus on the self in the process. She further expresses the focus on the individual when describing the need to “voice” one’s creativity as, “…you're like okay I was here, here's my part, you'll...know me forever cause of this one little thing.” Overall, Laura’s desire to participate in the activities that she enjoys and that feed her soul demonstrates an intrinsic motivation and focus on the individual in the creative process. Even when the creative product is a contribution to society, she emphasizes the individual in this contribution because she felt the product will always be associated with its creator. Therefore, the individual will have a lasting presence in society due to the contribution.

The desire to be creative for one’s personal enjoyment is another form of intrinsic motivation. At the time of the interview, Alison explained that she had recently began painting, an activity she began after her enrollment in the art Masters cohort. She
enjoyed creating abstract art because it did not have to reflect something “specific” which she felt she might “mess up” on or not create correctly. She described the newly found joy she receives from painting in the following excerpt,

…I found that like being able to be creative in ways where it’s not judged by anyone else, where it’s not for anything except just it, has been really good because when I was trying to do it in school or if I would try to draw something specific, I wouldn't enjoy it, I didn't enjoy it, but now I'm finding that I can enjoy it.

In this example, Alison explained that she did not enjoy being creative for school purposes or recreating something specific. Rather, she has found that she enjoys the creative process for what it is and not when it is judged by others. Alison felt that these personal beliefs regarding her reasons for being creative would positively influence her teaching approach in the classroom as well in that she would give her students the opportunity to be creative for themselves rather than for her. Being creative for one’s personal enjoyment, as Alison does, places a focus on the individual in the creative process rather than a focus on judgment or presentation of the creative product to others.

Engaging in the creative process can also result in feelings of pride, which can serve as a type of intrinsic motivation. Paige expressed the belief that one can take pride in his or her work upon completion of a creative product in her discussion of students and in her own personal experience. First, she felt it was important to give students the opportunity to be creative because it “…allows them to take pride in themselves.” Artistic endeavors were also an area she thought some students could “excel” in and “take pride in themselves” with more positive than negative experiences. Paige also explained that she takes pride in her own creations as well. For example, when
discussing her interest in writing poetry, she explains, “…whether someone else thinks it’s good or not, it’s not even about that, it’s about me taking pride in ‘I wrote that.’” In this example, Paige focuses on her personal feelings of pride in writing poetry rather than other’s judgments or feelings about it. The feeling of pride that one can experience places a focus on the individual in the creative process which can motivate individuals to act creatively.

**Pragmatic Motivation: Motivation to Help Others**

A second form of motivation, pragmatic motivation, focuses on the individual creating an environment in which other individuals can engage in creative endeavors, for example the classroom setting for students. Two patterns emerged in teachers’ discussions of how they used their own creativity in developing this type of environment; first, by orchestrating the classroom environment through lessons and second, through utilizing personal creativity to foster it in others. These two patterns also support the focus on the individual as having creative abilities on her own without assistance from others, and the role that interaction between the individual and others has in fostering creativity.

**Lesson planning.** A small group of teachers described their development of classroom lessons and curriculum as a personal creative ability, thus showing how they utilize their own creativity to develop a particular environment for students to engage in creative endeavors. Olivia mentioned two areas she was creative in, crafts and classroom lesson planning. She described her lesson planning as, “…building my own lessons and
tying things together and working off themes.” Stemming from her background in teaching, Rose, a music teacher, associated her creative abilities with the profession as she explains, “…my creativity…seems to be channeled always through teaching other people.” She believed her ability to go beyond given curriculum and make music meaningful by putting it in a context and presenting it to others was a creative act. In this way, she developed a classroom environment using her own creative abilities in which students could learn about and explore the domain of music. Both Olivia and Rose did not mention any other individuals as having an influence on their creativity in lesson planning. This reveals a focus on the individual in the creative process, particularly the teacher in developing creative lessons for others, because it is the individual teacher that has the creative ability to develop a particular classroom environment without assistance from others.

Utilizing personal creativity to foster others’ creativity. The second form of pragmatic motivation involved the teachers’ desire to create a classroom environment in which students had the opportunity and assistance they may need to be creative. In order to create such an environment, the teachers engaged in personal exploration and development of their own creative abilities and acted as a creative model for students. Development of one’s own creative abilities was achieved by some of the teachers through enrollment in a Master’s educational program. For example, Paige enrolled in the arts Masters cohort so that she could bring creative and art endeavors into her classroom, elements which she noticed were not as readily available to her students as when she was a child. She described the newly found joy she found while engaging in
artistic activities in her graduate classes, as well as the inspiration she’s received from the program to personally engage in drawing and painting on her own outside of school. Paige felt the enrichment she has received in the program will translate into her teaching because she now has empathy for the student, and inspiration to incorporate such elements in her classroom. Due to the lack of emphasis on artistic programs in schooling today, Paige felt it was important for her to learn about such programs because, “…if I didn't take that on my own, they wouldn't have it and…so that's another reason why I'm going back into this Masters program.” Paige felt it was important for her students to have artistic opportunities in her classroom which served as her motivation for enrolling in the Master’s program and developing her creative abilities so that she could provide such opportunities for her students.

Laura’s reasoning for entering the art Masters cohort paralleled Paige’s in that she too wanted to better utilize her own creativity in order to help her students be creative. She explains what she hoped to gain while in the program in the following excerpt,

…so I kind of just really wanted to understand more ways to reach students…and to use the creativity I already have to be more creative in the classroom and to make them more creative not just as students but as thinkers about how to you think about, how do you approach something differently, in a creative way

Wanting to help her students be more creative in the classroom motivated Laura to enroll in the Master’s program so that she could further develop her own creative abilities which she felt would aid in developing her students abilities.

Developing one’s own creative abilities can also aid in fostering students’ academic learning, in addition to creative development, in the classroom. For example,
three teachers discussed the empathy they have developed for struggling students as a result of their own personal artistic development while enrolled in courses such as drawing or theatre. Gail enrolled in a drawing elective course as part of a requirement for the art Masters program and as a way for her to overcome a past apprehension for drawing. In addition to gaining self-esteem from a drawing accomplishment while in the course, she developed greater empathy for her students’ classroom fears, as show in her quote below,

…[it] definitely helped my self-esteem and it helped me…kinda relate to my students that ya know those of my students who maybe don't read very well that maybe that's how they feel about reading ya know reading always came really easy to me but maybe that's how they feel when they've had constant failures in school in terms of learning how to read…so I can kinda relate my own fear about drawing to their maybe fear about reading

Gail was able to associate her struggles in drawing with her students’ struggles with reading. Thereby while learning about her personal creative abilities, Gail could empathize with her students learning process and bring that knowledge with her in the classroom to create an environment in which she can better foster their learning.

Michelle also wanted to provide the opportunity to engage in an artistic endeavor, particularly a lesson on cartooning, for the students who were enrolled in the after school program she had directed. However, instead of enrolling in an education program to develop her drawing skills, she taught herself the cartooning skills needed to help the students. Despite the lack of confidence in her own drawing abilities, Michelle discovered new talents by reading books and self-teaching herself. Therefore, Michelle’s
desire to enrich her students’ experience in art was motivation for her to develop her own creative talents, which were needed in order to teach her students.

Creating an environment to foster children’s creativity also served as motivation for teachers to be creative role models in the classroom. Nicole felt it was important for teachers to be creative role models for their students because, “…some things they do come up with on their own or they pull from other resources but in the classroom their biggest resource is their teacher.” She viewed the teacher as a resource students could utilize in developing their own abilities or ideas. Sandra further discusses how any teacher can model creativity for students while describing what she sees as a creative teacher,

…how you respond to the unexpected or the situation in creative ways that show many possibilities and perhaps give the person that you’re or the group that you're responding to that they see there are lots of options in life

Sandra viewed creative teaching as including the process of modeling and showing students possibilities in the world. In this way, students are then able to choose or reflect upon the options presented on how they could proceed further.

Finally, Robin, the English cohort professor, felt the faculty in her program modeled creative teaching in the classroom through such avenues as providing choices in projects. This was important to her because she believed if the faculty did not model creative teaching, her students would not incorporate it into their own classrooms.

Teachers’ utilization of their own creative abilities in order to foster students’ abilities supports the important role interaction with other individuals has in the development of creativity, particularly the interaction between teacher and student in
order to develop students’ abilities. Those teachers that developed their own skills in hopes of fostering their students’ abilities discussed attending educational programs or reading literature, thus showing the influence other individuals or materials can have on one’s personal development of creative abilities. The premise of teachers serving as creative role models for their students also reveals the need for other individuals in developing creative abilities because one can possibly learn through observation of such models. It is important to note that although these teachers were motivated to create a social context wherein their students could be creative, the focus was placed on the individual teacher’s agentive act in developing their own creativity and the role they have in modeling for students.

**Sources of Creative Stifling**

All participant teachers responded affirmatively when asked whether they believed all individuals had the capacity to be creative. However, it is important to note that the majority of the teachers also underscored this idea with the belief that these creative capacities could be stifled. Two themes emerged in the teachers’ discussion of how creativity can be stifled: first, personally imposed limitations and second, the influence of one’s environment and the individuals in it. These themes support the larger patterns in this study with a focus on the individual or others in one’s environment in the creative process and will be discussed in detail below.
Self-Imposed Limitations on Creativity

Participant teachers discussed a wide variety of ways individuals can stifle their own creativity, illustrating one of the larger themes in this study with a focus on the individual in the creative process. Personal perception of creative abilities was one commonly mentioned way individuals can negatively influence their own creativity. Robin, the English cohort professor, believed it was “almost impossible” to define creativity but rather that it encompassed an individual’s perception of his or her ability. She explains these beliefs in the following excerpt,

…creativity to me is as I said has many faces and so to try to put ya know one definition to it, I personally think is almost impossible…it’s almost an individual ya know definition of how people perceive themselves as being creative and hopefully everybody does perceive themself as having some kind of creative…streak to them.

Other teachers also described the way some children can label their abilities, and in turn possibly limit what they believe they can do. For example, Laura felt a lot of children have a desire to be creative but constrain themselves from doing so. She explains,

…I think most kids want to create but by the time they get to that fifth and sixth grade, they're like, “I don't wanna draw, I don't wanna” ya know, “I don't wanna put myself out there [be]cause the rest of the world's gonna think I'm not cool”

In this example, Laura describes the perception some children can have of not being “cool” if they perform creatively. Extending this idea further, John distinguished the difference in perceptions younger and older individuals can have explaining,

…the younger ones are wide open and they have no considerations of “I can't do that,” “I'm not an artist,” “I'm not a singer”…as the older individuals do or
teenager or those that get into a social sensitive situation, the little one's they're totally open

Brooke discussed other types of personal perceptions that she felt influenced an individual’s ability to be creative. When asked to describe a creative child she knows, Brooke began by mentioning those who are not creative explaining,

… I feel like the ones that aren't are the ones that have somehow developed some insecurities about putting something out there, so I feel like I've had many that are creative…so I think of the one's that aren't and what makes them not creative is…self-esteem…lack of identity or…inability to risk

In this excerpt, Brooke focuses on self-esteem, identity, and ability to take risks as personal perceptions that can influence one’s creative abilities.

The teachers discussed two ways in which an individual can develop a negative creative perception of themselves: first, negative creative perceptions can evolve from having misconceptions about what it means to be creative, and second, through personal comparison of oneself with others. In support of the misconceptions individuals can have about creativity, Paige felt that some individuals believe they are not creative when they associate the behavior with certain domains, such as art or music. However, she believed creativity meant, “…doing things that came from you” which does not necessarily relate to a specific domain.

Discussing misconceptions about creativity further, Michelle explained the process by which her personal creative perceptions changed with a different understanding of what creativity is when discussing her own creative abilities below.

…I never thought I was creative, because when I was a kid I thought that meant being able to draw, or paint, or write a novel and I don't have any of those abilities…or sing, or write songs, ya know, I thought that's what it was. But I
think that it's not just that, being creative can be like cooking dinner with a few things that you didn't [have]…and I learned how, when I was…ya know just struggling as a single mom I learned how to be creative believe me, you had to be, you had to learn how to be creative with a little bit of money and make it go where it needed to go and…I learned I had some creative abilities I really didn't think I have

In this example, Michelle discussed how she did not believe she had creative abilities when associating the behavior with domains such as art and music. However, once she understood that creativity can be achieved in many different areas, she began to realize the creative abilities she did have.

Another way negative personal creative perceptions can develop is through comparison of one’s own abilities or products with others. Laura explained this type of comparison between classroom teachers when discussing her views on creativity in the following excerpt,

…I think it’s…sad that there are people who stifle their own creativity as teachers because they're scared that they're not as creative…like if you're teaching next to somebody who's an artist and I'm drawing on the board about a picture so my EL kids will get it and they come in, they're like, “oh my god I'm not gonna go do that”

Although teachers may be more self-critical of their creative abilities, Laura felt that once a relationship is established between the teacher and students, the students will not be as critical of the teacher as the teacher may be of herself. Rather, Laura explained that even though the students may laugh at a teacher’s attempts to be creative, they will still acknowledge the effort put forth for them.

The self-critical behavior that can result from personal comparison is one by which individuals can stifle their own creativity. In the following excerpt, Jaime
discusses how she feels this behavior begins early in life and how children need to
overcome it,

…I think sometimes when they look at others and they don't see theirs as good
because we are very critical of ourselves…and children learn to be self-critical,
self-criticizing very early…they need to be aware that, they need to accept what
they do as their own project and that there's beauty they just need to find it

In this example, Jaime explains how children need to be aware of the tendency to
be self-critical and acknowledge the “beauty” in their own work.

Some teachers also believed individuals can stifle their own creativity through a
lack of confidence and feelings of fear. For example, Cristina’s personal beliefs about
her own creativity demonstrate how a lack of confidence and fear can influence one’s
creative abilities. She discusses her own creative abilities in the following excerpt:

…I still lack that confidence ya know do I have the creativity? I think I have the
creativity…but…it’s more…an issue of confidence in…putting myself out,
exposing myself to that having never been formally trained in fined arts

Cristina described her lack of confidence as stemming from a lack of familial
support in her artistic pursuits in childhood and beyond. Although she studied graphic
design in college, Cristina felt she never fully explored her creative abilities and “learned
within the box” because of a lack in confidence and fear of criticism from her professors.
Interestingly, despite her current students’ admiration of her abilities and artwork,
Cristina continues to notice the faults in her work. Cristina’s fear of criticism not only
influenced how she explored her talents in school, but resulted in a lack of confidence for
others to observe her work, an issue she continues to work through today.
A fear of failure was also discussed by the teachers as a way individuals can stifle their own creativity. For example, Paige noticed her students had the tendency to always want to do things the “right” way. As a result she did not provide an example of her own artwork during art projects because as she explained, “…I will have half the class copy exactly what I do, [be]cause they want it, they wanna do it the right way.” She related this fear of failure as one way individuals can stifle their own creativity explaining, “I think when people say 'I'm not creative' it’s because they're afraid, they're the kids that don't wanna be wrong.” She felt the desire children have to always be right caused them to put up personal barriers in expressing their thoughts and ideas.

Paige also believed individuals may develop a fear of art due to a “…bad experience in childhood.” Paralleling this belief, Gail explained that her experience of failing a drawing class in high school resulted in years of fear of taking further drawing classes because she thought she would not acquire the skills, finish the class, or possibly be the poorest achieving student. She felt this absence of drawing skills, as a result of her fear, influenced her ability to solve problems while painting.

Additional ways the teachers mentioned that individuals can stifle their own creativity was through being overwhelmed, fatigued, or having a lack of interest. Two teachers discussed how school requirements and expectations can cause teachers to feel “bogged down” and unable to perform creatively. Nicole mentioned the state standards, testing, and expectations of parents, students, co-workers, and administration as some causes of feeling overwhelmed. She explains how this can influence one’s teaching in the following excerpt, “…some people just feel so bogged down by A through Z that they
forget ya know, 'oh, well I need to put some of me in this classroom too.’” Nicole refers to the many requirements and expectations on teachers as “A through Z” which can cause individuals to feel “bogged down.” She goes on to explain that because of those feelings some teachers can forget to add some of themselves into the classroom. The process of making lessons more interesting or adding “life” to the lesson were ways in which Nicole felt individuals could add some of themselves to the classroom and be creative.

Robin felt that when teachers are overwhelmed they have difficulty accomplishing what they need to do. She explains how this can influence a teacher’s ability to be creative in the following excerpt, “…sometimes when you're that tired or you're that locked in you don't have the energies and you don't move beyond to be able to be creative.” In turn, Robin felt this inability to be creative in the classroom due to fatigue deprived the children of a creative role model and observing a “love of learning” in the classroom.

Finally, having interest in a specific domain was mentioned by Olivia as being necessary in order to be creative. She explains the difference in the need for knowledge or interest in creativity in the following excerpt, “…I don't think you would necessarily have to know something about it, but I think there…[would] have to be some sort of interest in the area.” Olivia believed that an individual did not need to thoroughly know about a specific area to be creative in it, but would need to have a general interest in that area. Therefore, it can be argued that a lack of interest in an area can stifle one’s creativity in certain domains because it prevents one from further exploring the possibilities.
In summary, the teachers discussed a wide variety of ways individuals can stifle their own creativity including personal perceptions developed from misconceptions of creativity and comparisons of oneself to others, having a lack of confidence or fear of creativity, and feelings of being overwhelmed, fatigued, or lack of interest in a specific area. Each of these personal behaviors places a focus on the individual in the creative process and the possible detrimental effect the individual can have on their own creative abilities.

The Influence of Other Individuals and Environmental Limitations on Creativity

Three environmental factors were discussed by the teachers as causes of creative stifling, in particular, an individual’s home life, educational experience, and culture. Each of these areas emphasizes the role of the interaction between the individual and others in one’s environment as having an influence on the creative process, specifically the ability and desire for an individual to be creative.

Robin discussed how one’s home life can stifle some individual’s creativity through the feedback and actions of family members in the following excerpt:

…if somebody has a creative streak and a family doesn't appreciate…that streak or they don't think it’s something that they can make a living at…then obviously…then they're not going to foster that…in them as a child

Although Robin believed all individuals had a “spark” of creativity, she felt its development depended on how the individual perceived it and how others nurture it. Therefore, due to the importance Robin placed on nurturing an individual’s creativity, the
lack of a nurturing family is a source she believed can stifle the development of one’s creativity.

Cristina also felt a lack of support and negative feedback from parents can stifle creativity which in turn she explains, “…the opportunity to be creative goes away, the desire to be creative goes away.” Cristina supports this belief due to her personal struggle with confidence in her own creativity due to negative feedback and a lack of familial support which was discussed earlier in this section on how individuals can stifle their own creativity. This example shows a process of how creativity can be stifled in that negative feedback from other individuals is appropriated and translated into personal insecurities that can become personally imposed limitations on creativity.

The frequent imposition of behavioral rules and commands adults, including parents and teachers, use around children were other ways Michelle felt could stifle children’s creativity. She believed adults, “…take…[creativity] away from them, adults do, not just teachers, but their parents.” Michelle felt creativity was taken away by the use of such rules and commands as, “do this, don't do that, no that's not okay, don’t use that word, don’t play over there.” She felt allowing children to explore things on their own without such limitations was important for children’s creativity.

Individual’s educational experience was also discussed by the teachers as having the potential for negative influences on creativity. Two themes emerged regarding these beliefs: first, the role of teacher behavior in stifling creativity, and second, the influence of the institution of schooling in general. The teacher behaviors discussed which can stifle creativity included negative feedback and limiting possibilities for students in the
classroom. Erin explained that she tried to give positive comments on all her students’ work because as she discussed, “…you don't wanna shut them down ya know you don't want them to think they can't do anything right so you have to always find something positive to say.” She describes the results of positive feedback in the following way, “…it’s just a good thing…it works to help people feel good about themselves and I don't think you produce well when you're feeling negative.”

Cristina also mentioned the potential for teachers to stifle creativity and in turn, she strives to not give harsh feedback to her students. Similar to Erin, Cristina felt such negative feedback can influence a student’s perception of herself as she explains, “…to tell somebody that that isn’t good at all…can really hurt how…they perceive, particularly in art or with the, ya know the visual arts that how…they perceive what they can do in the future.” Both Erin and Cristina mentioned the detrimental effects negative teacher feedback on students’ creative work can have on future creativity through its influence on students’ feelings and perceptions of abilities.

Another group of teachers viewed the practice of limiting different answers or responses and different ways to solve problems in the classroom as having negative effects on children’s creativity. Olivia explains how such limitations imposed by some teachers or parents can influence children in the following excerpt:

…if kids over and over are told that “no this is the right way” or “this is the way it needs to be done” then they eventually…kind of succumb to “okay do it the teachers way” or…if it’s the parent “do it the parent’s way” and so they tend to turn off their decision making processes and say “well I don't need to think about how to do it, I know what the teacher wants me to do, do it that way.”

Olivia felt that continually correcting and re-directing students to the teacher’s
way of doing something would cause students to shut down and no longer engage in the thought process and succumb to the teacher’s preferences. Nicole also concurred with the negative influence that teacher limitations can have on student creativity and added that students will not explore their individual personalities or preferences in such a limiting environment.

It is important to note that a common emergent theme among the teachers was the premise that in life there is often no right or wrong answer or only one particular way of doing things. This belief supports the open-minded nature of these teachers in allowing for multiple student responses in the classroom rather than requiring students to give specific teacher approved answers, which many believed could stifle students’ creative thinking.

In discussing the influence of the institution of schooling on children, Laura believed some children’s creativity ends at certain ages because within education they “…get told that they can’t be” creative. She felt this may be due to the requirements on teaching which leave no time for creative endeavors. However, she also believed it was important for educators to encourage children to personally explore creative avenues even if they are not offered in school.

Further discussing the role of the schooling institution, Brooke felt schooling suppresses creativity by only paying “lip service” to the arts and it is not being “truly valued.” She believed these attitudes are related to testing requirements as she explains, “…it all trickles or it all can be traced back to what…can and cannot be measured.” Paige also noticed education’s focus on what she called “hard core facts” rather than
promoting the arts, and discussed the lack of art curriculum or supplements she received as a first year teacher. Although Paige acknowledged the need for standardized testing and Brooke understood the importance of academic knowledge, both teachers also expressed the significance creativity has in society’s development and therefore should not be ignored in schools. Heather felt it was important for schools to promote creativity in students as well, however, she stressed the importance for this to begin early on in schooling and continue throughout children’s education. She cited the positive effects of such nurturing in the children’s artwork who attend Waldorf schools where artistic endeavors are introduced early and incorporated throughout the schooling years.

Cultural influences mentioned by one group of teachers which can have a negative influence on children’s creativity included societal barriers and media influence. Kathy discussed the importance for teachers to eliminate societal barriers, whether from home or media, which she felt can infiltrate into the children’s classroom and “…[corrupt] their abilities to create.” In addition to the media, Gail mentioned video games and “…violence in our culture and the images that young children see” as influencing children’s creativity. When asked to discuss how those cultural images can influence children’s creativity she explained, “I think it…forces them to think that there's only one way of viewing the world and one way of being, and one way of acting.” This type of view of life is in contrast to what Gail described as creative, which included observing a situation and solving problems in different ways as well as being able to think outside the box and express oneself in various ways such as, “writing, speaking, painting, [or] drawing.”
In summary, the interactions between an individual and others in their home life, school, or culture were believed by a group of teachers to have a possible negative effect on creative abilities. However, although the interactions within these social contexts play a role in the creative process, the ultimate focus was placed on the individual and how the interactions can negatively influence an individual’s creativity.
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

In an exploration of teachers’ beliefs regarding creativity and how those beliefs relate to instructional practices in the classroom, a qualitative analysis of teacher interviews revealed two emergent themes in their conceptualizations of creativity. Specifically, the role of the individual and the interactions between the individual and others in a social context were emphasized within each of the following areas: (1) origins of creativity, (2) how the context is related to creativity, (3) sources of motivation for creativity, and (4) sources of creative stifling. It is also important to point out that in some cases even when the social context was the initial focus of teacher discussions on the creative process, the emphasis was ultimately placed on the individual in the creative process. This chapter will present a discussion of the two emergent themes found in this study as well as implications these teacher beliefs have for educational practice.

The Role of the Individual in the Creative Process

One of the major themes found within teachers’ discussions about creativity was the focus on the individual in the creative process. This was evident in a group of participant teachers’ beliefs of creativity as having natural origins and that individuals were born with the ability to be creative. The belief in the innate origins of creativity has
been documented in past research, however, the number of teachers supporting this belief are limited, similar to that found in the current study ($n = 3$). For example, less than 1% of participating teachers in the study by Diakidoy and Phtiaka (2002), and 4.8% of prospective and 8.8% of in-service teachers in the study by Kampylis et al. (2009) believed creativity was innate, and because of this fact it could not be developed. The participant teacher in the case study by Sak (2004) also believed creativity was an ability individuals are born with or without, however, it could be developed in those without the inborn ability.

Participant teachers expressed the theme of individuals as forming the cognitive context in which they engage in creative endeavors. More specifically, teachers’ described individuals as acting with agency in using either appropriated elements in their environment, prior knowledge, or perceptions of problems or assignments to create the context. Vygotsky’s theory of creativity aids in explaining how this process occurs. The environment, prior knowledge, and perceptions of problems mentioned by the participant teachers serve as prior experiences which Vygotsky (2004) proposed are important to utilizing one’s imagination. Individuals then internalize these experiences and reconstruct them based on their own personal characteristics (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003; Vygotsky, 2004). These internalized experiences represent the elements from which the individual pulls from to engage in imaginative thinking and ultimately creative production (Vygotsky, 2004). In other words, the internalized experiences create the cognitive context in which individuals engage in creative endeavors. The agentive role
the individual has in the formation of the context as discussed by the participant teachers’ also emphasizes the individual in the creative process.

Past research supports the participant teachers’ belief in the necessity of the environment and prior knowledge for creativity. For example, many teachers in this thesis research described experiencing or observing one’s environment, internalizing those experiences and producing something from it as representative of the creativity process. Similarly, the teacher participating in a case study by Sak (2004) described creativity as including three elements: perceiving the world, acting with a purpose, and creating something for impact. The belief in the necessity of prior knowledge for creativity as expressed by the participating teachers in this study has also been explored and supported by past research. For instance, half of the teachers surveyed by Diakidoy and Phtiaka (2002) believed a large amount of prior knowledge was essential for creativity. The majority of student teachers surveyed by Diakidoy and Kanari (1999) felt creativity was facilitated by a large amount of knowledge. The findings of this study extend this past research by providing examples of three types of prior knowledge that teachers believed contribute to creativity, that is, academic knowledge, cultural knowledge, and domain knowledge. The latter of these elements is supported by the componential framework presented by Amabile (1983) in which domain-relevant skills are part of three elements, including creativity-relevant skills, and task motivation, that contribute to creative performance.

Individuals were also discussed as engaging in the creative process in order to learn about and respect the self, for enjoyment, satisfaction, or pride, each representing a
type of intrinsic motivation and focusing on the individual in the creative process and the personal reasons for being creative. Similarly, Diakidoy and Phtiaka (2002) found that a slight majority of teachers’ described creative individuals as being intrinsically motivated. The focus on intrinsic motivation has also been argued by Amabile (1983) to promote creativity over extrinsic motivation.

Finally, the individual was discussed as possibly stifling his or her own creativity through a variety of methods including personal perception, self-critical behavior, lack of confidence, fear, and exhaustion or lack of interest. The belief in the importance of some of these elements for creativity has been documented in past research. Cropley (2001) proposed that children need to have positive self-evaluations in order to be creative which supports the participant teachers’ belief that self-critical behavior can have a stifling effect on creativity. Being confident has also been used as a descriptor of creative individuals (Diakidoy & Kanari, 1999; Diakidoy & Phtiaka, 2002; Harrington, 1999; Runco & Johnson, 2002; Runco et al., 1993) as well as a feeling that needs to be fostered or nourished in individuals in order for one to be creative (Craft, 1998; Fleith, 2000; Fryer & Collings, 1991).

Similarly, having high self-esteem has been suggested by research (Cropley, 2001) and reported by teachers (Craft, 1998) as needing to be fostered in individuals to promote creativity. Feeling exhausted was another factor that could stifle one’s creativity as mentioned by a participant teacher in this study. These feelings were also expressed by the teachers surveyed by Aljughaiman and Mowrer-Reynolds (2005) in that they felt too overwhelmed by academic responsibilities to help develop students’ creativity. It is
important to point out that those feelings were related to a lack of time rather than importance placed on creativity (Aljughaiman & Mower-Reynolds, 2005).

In support of the lack of interest factor as having a stifling effect on one’s creativity, student teachers surveyed by Diakidoy & Kanari (1999) reported the characteristic of having many interests as fundamental for creativity. Similarly, Runco et al. (1993) found that the majority of teachers believed having narrow interests was a trait not conducive to creativity; those findings were confirmed by a study with U.S. and Indian parents and teachers (Runco & Johnson, 2002). It is interesting to note that the participant teachers’ in this study focused on the elements which can stifle one’s creativity, whereas past research has examined the elements characteristic of creative individuals or that need to be fostered in order to be creative.

The Role of Interactions between the Individual and Others in a Social Context

The second emergent theme throughout teachers’ discussions of creativity emphasized the interactions between an individual and others in a social context as having an influence in the creative process. Even though some teachers discussed interpersonal interactions as having a role in the creative process, they also expressed an emphasis on the individual within that process. For example, six teachers held a belief in both the natural origins of creativity and the importance of others to nurture the ability, thus affirming both the individual (natural origins) and the social context (nurture by others) role in the creative process. The participating teacher in the case study presented
by Sak (2004) held a similar belief in that individuals are born with or without the creative aptitude (natural origins) and that it could be developed in those born without the aptitude (nurturing by others).

The individual was emphasized most often within the social context theme in participant teachers’ discussions of the formation of a creative context through interactions between individuals. For example, Alison discussed working with her friends to create hip-hop music, thus demonstrating the role of interactions with others to form the creative context. However, she also placed a focus on the individual when mentioning the joy she herself receives in the process of working with her friends. Erin, an art teacher, also illustrated the role of the individual in the creative process when explaining a dorm room project she created for her students. She and her students collaborated in designing and constructing the dorm room thus forming the creative context together through their interactions. However, Erin described the final project as the student’s dorm room which places a focus on the student as the individual having sole ownership of the final product. Paige discussed having classroom meetings with her students wherein she asked students for feedback on lessons which, if possible, she would use to readjust the lesson plans in the future. Although these interactions allowed for collaboration of ideas between student and teacher and formed a social context, it was ultimately Paige who took the ideas and reworked the lessons thus emphasizing the individual’s role in the creative process.

The interaction with others in a social context, as described by the participant teachers, parallels a supportive relationship in which the individuals share their
knowledge and collaborate on ideas thus forming the creative context together. Similar to the importance of interactions to forming the creative context as expressed by the participating teachers, Craft (1998) found teachers in the UK to value the premise of relationships to fostering creativity. These relationships included the dynamic interactions between learner and teacher, the relationship with oneself, and with other individuals that play a role in fostering creativity such as colleagues and parents (Craft, 1998). Further supporting the role of relationships to fostering creativity, the participant professor in a case study presented by Cole et al. (1999) was described as creating a supportive environment in his college course by forming personal relationships with his students which he believed was vital to promoting students’ creativity. The relationships formed between the professor and students created a level of comfort in which students could convey their opinions and attitudes and the professor would provide constructive feedback in a non-judgmental environment (Cole et al., 1999). The findings of the current study support the belief in the importance of relationship to fostering creativity when viewing the interactions discussed by the participant teachers as a type of relationship in which individuals not only form the context but create from it as well.

Pragmatic motivation was another area in which teachers expressed the importance of interaction with others to foster creativity but also emphasized the role of the individual in the process. Within this type of motivation an individual utilizes his or her own creative abilities to help foster creativity in others, thus supporting the important role of interactions between individuals. The focus, however, was placed on the individual teacher in this process because not only did the teachers emphasize the use of
their own creativity in designing lessons, creating a specific type of classroom environment, or acting as a creative role model, but some specifically enrolled in a Masters program to better develop their own creative skills in order to do so. The belief in the necessity to develop one’s own creativity in order to foster others has been supported by prior research. For example, teachers in the UK believed that educators need time for personal development and nourishment in order to be creative (Craft, 1998).

Furthermore, Zwirn (2005) found that art teachers and students believed they needed to continually engage in artistic endeavors in order to be successful art teachers. Art teachers felt personal artistic engagement would aid in being an excited artistic role model and an innovative teacher that does not merely rely on the same projects. Art students felt they should continue to participate in artistic endeavors because it would aid in breaking projects down into steps and be a competent and confident teacher for students (Zwirn, 2005). The findings of this thesis extend this work by describing participants’ feelings of empathy they gained for struggling students after they participated in a difficult creative endeavor while enrolled in the Masters program.

Finally, the process of stifling creativity was discussed by the participating teachers as occurring in three domains; an individual’s home life, educational environment, and culture. The home environment was described as a potential source for creative stifling through limited support or lack of positive feedback and the imposition of rules on children’s behavior, which have been supported by prior research. Harrington (1999) argued that individuals are less likely to produce creatively in an environment that
does not value or support their creative work. Further in support of the belief that the imposition of rules from adults, including parents and teachers, can stifle children’s creativity, teachers in the UK believed free choice at home would foster creativity (Fryer & Collings, 1991). In addition, the teachers interviewed by Fleith (2000) believed limiting the number of rules on students would aid in developing their creativity. The belief in the opportunity to have choice in projects and learning in the classroom would foster creativity has also been documented in past research (Diakidoy & Kanari, 1999; Fleith, 2000; Fryer & Collings, 1991).

The educational environment was described by the participating teachers as stifling creativity through teacher behaviors and through the institution of education in general. In addition to teachers giving negative feedback, the limitations imposed on student responses were also described as possibly stifling student creativity. Similarly, Cropley (1992) proposed society’s pressure to conform as one element which can inhibit creativity. This conformity included teachers’ demands for adherence to expected ways of behaving and completing work in the classroom. As a result, children do not fully express their individuality to others (Cropley, 1992). A group of participating teachers in the current study also believed the institution of education stifles creativity through a greater focus on required curriculum and testing to the sacrifice of artistic or creative endeavors. A similar belief was held by the prospective and in-service teachers surveyed by Kampylis et al. (2009) in Greece. Specifically, the majority of prospective and in-service teachers believed students did not have much opportunity to express their creativity in the classroom and that the textbooks and materials used in the classroom did
not provide for creative opportunities (Kampylis et al., 2009). The participating teachers in the present study further discussed the stifling effects cultural influences of media culture and societal barriers can have on children’s creativity. Although the interactions between the individual and others occur within a social context, the result of these interactions ultimately influences the individual’s perception of his or her own abilities, thus placing the focus on the individual in the creative process.

**Teachers’ Beliefs in Relation to Western Culture**

The focus on the individual in the creative process and within the interactions in a social context where creativity occurs can be better understood when viewing creativity as a relational construct. Hasse (2001) described individual creativity within institutions, such as higher education, as being related to the main activity or goal of the institution. The American educational system is an example of an institution of Western culture which according to Rudowicz (2003) developed its educational goals from the socialization practices of Western culture. Specifically, Rudowicz (2003) described North America as an individualistic society that values “freedom, independence and human rights” (p. 284). As a result, individuals are brought up to become autonomous and self-driven to achieve individual goals (Rudowicz, 2003). From these practices, Rudowicz (2003) explained that the goals of “independent problem solving, self-expression and creativity” (p. 284) are seen as important characteristics for children by American teachers. Therefore, the goal or main activity of the institution of the
American education system can be argued to develop independent, self-regulated thinkers who are self-motivated to pursue their own goals. When the definition of creativity is viewed as related to institutional goals (Hasse, 2001), the American education system may regard the independent acts of children as creative and focus on the individual in the creative process because these corresponds with the goals of the institution. This conceptualization of creativity in American education supports the teachers’ emphasis in this study on the individual in the creative process as well as within the interactions in a social context.

**Comparison of Art Cohort and English Cohort Teachers’ Beliefs**

No discernable difference was observed between the art cohort and English cohort Master students’ beliefs about creativity in the classroom. The concurrence of beliefs may be related to the incorporation of creativity and artistic endeavors into subject presentation and instruction in each of the Masters programs. For example, Robin, the participating English cohort professor, discussed the faculty of her department as modeling creative teaching for students so that the students can bring it back to their classroom. Sandra, the participating art cohort professor, discussed structuring her classroom in a way to show her students that a variety of art domains can be incorporated everyday in the classroom. The similarity in beliefs may also be related to the common practice and ease with which creative endeavors are embedded into everyday classroom lessons. For example, the teachers in this study described a variety of projects they
developed for the students from dioramas, to free choice of projects, to creating costumes to give their students an opportunity to be creative while enhancing the classroom lessons. Although incorporation of creative endeavors may have been prevalent in teachers’ classrooms in this study, how the teachers incorporated creativity into their classroom and the emphasis placed on creative ability may not be related to their educational program of study, but rather the individual belief systems developed and held over time.

**Implications for Educational Practice**

The teacher beliefs regarding creativity explored in the current study will have implications for future educational practice in promoting creativity in students. The dichotomous view that creativity is a result of nature or nurture as discussed in the current study will have implications as to how creativity is developed in students and evaluated in the classroom. Viewing creativity as a natural characteristic which individuals are born with does not allow for an individual to see the role of the classroom or the interpersonal interactions within it that can influence creativity’s development. As a result, such a view can constrain how teachers provide for student exploration and development of creativity in the classroom, as well as the teacher’s evaluation of it. There may be limited opportunities for the student to further explore his or her creative abilities. In addition, teachers may not be aware of the outside resources, such as
experiences or prior knowledge as discussed in this study, that a student may utilize in creative production when evaluating students’ work.

Viewing creativity as a result of nurturing from other individuals may inhibit one from seeing the characteristic as a natural ability. However, this viewpoint may inspire teachers to provide students different types of activities and interactions in the classroom to develop student creative abilities. For example, providing opportunities for students to draw on prior experiences or knowledge as resources to use in creative engagement and production or opportunities for collaboration as discussed in the current study.

Understanding the importance of intrinsic motivation for creative engagement, as mentioned by some of the teachers in this study, and supported by prior research (Amabile, 1983) may encourage teachers to develop activities where students have the opportunity to engage in creative endeavors for intrinsic purposes, or to help students to find those elements in tasks that can produce intrinsic motivation in themselves.

Having an understanding of how one’s belief systems regarding creativity can affect the nature of student’s engagement in creative endeavors provided in the classroom is important for teachers to begin the reflective process of their own beliefs and practices. It is only with this understanding that teachers will be able to examine their own beliefs about creativity which can include its definition, evaluation, and/or importance placed on the ability to be creative. Reflection of one’s beliefs will then allow for teachers to structure their behavior and classroom environment in ways that can best develop creative abilities in their students.
Reflection on one’s own creative belief systems may also allow for awareness of one’s personal abilities which was discussed by some of the teachers in this study. For example, Michelle described herself as believing she had no creative abilities when associating creativity with stereotypical domains such as drawing or painting. However, she explained that her struggle as a single mom allowed her to see that creative acts can be accomplished in any domain such as cooking, and as a result she became aware of creative abilities she actually had. Therefore, personal reflection may be beneficial for individuals to discover their own talents and abilities.

Exploration and development of one’s own creative abilities was discussed by another group of teachers as influencing their teaching approaches as well. For example, Gail explained that her personal struggle with drawing and experience while enrolled in a drawing course allowed her to empathize with her students’ struggles in the classroom. Other teachers discussed enrolling in a Masters program to further develop their own creative abilities in hopes of fostering their students’ abilities. Due to the positive influence enrichment of teacher’s personal creativity has on classroom instruction as discussed by the teachers in this study, and its benefit to students, educators should encourage and provide opportunities for teachers to explore and cultivate their own personal creative talents.
Limitations and Future Research

The beliefs explored in this study will be of value to researchers and educators in further understanding how teachers conceptualize creativity through their own voices and the meaning they have attached to the construct. Although the qualitative methods used here helped better understand the construct and how it can influence instructional practice in the classroom, the limitations of this study indicate important directions for future research.

First, the findings of this study are limited to the specific population explored of classroom teachers furthering their education in a Masters program, specifically with an emphasis in the arts or English domain. In addition, these beliefs are limited in scope to a specific time in the teachers’ educational program. However, due to the changing dynamics of education overtime, including student populations and government support for education, as well as the influence experiences in a Masters program can have on teachers’ beliefs, it would be advantageous to explore how teachers’ beliefs about creativity change overtime to gain a better understanding of how these beliefs develop and influence teaching in the classroom. For example, examining student teachers’ beliefs as they complete their teaching credential would provide a better understanding of their initial beliefs before entering the classroom. Following these teachers further in their career will also allow researchers to determine how their local school culture or teacher’s personal educational pursuits can influence their beliefs about creativity. Comparing the beliefs of teachers who choose or not choose to further their education
would also aid in understanding how additional education pursuits may influence teachers’ creativity beliefs.

Next, the disproportionate number of art cohort and English cohort Master students participating in interviews in this study may have limited the comparative analysis of the two groups. However, given this limited sample size, little variance in creativity beliefs was observed between the art cohort and English cohort students. Due to the similarity in beliefs, it would be valuable for future research to explore those beliefs of teachers enrolled in other Masters programs, such as history, science, or curriculum development, to examine if these beliefs are held across a wider and more diverse population of teachers. With a greater understanding of how teachers enrolled in different Masters programs conceptualize creativity, educators and administrators may begin to recognize the value of and better understand how creative endeavors can be incorporated in various academic subjects and lessons.

Finally, this study is limited to the beliefs of the participants gathered from self-disclosure in interviews and did not observe how these beliefs relate the teachers’ instructional practice in the classroom. In order to completely understand how the creativity beliefs are related to instruction in the classroom, future research should observe teachers’ practices in their classrooms. Exploring student engagement in creative endeavors while in the classroom will also help determine how a teacher’s practices, stemming from their beliefs, influences students’ engagement and development of creative abilities.
REFERENCES


