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Thinking outside of the (Western) Box: Cultural Psychology Perspectives on Creativity in Education

ABSTRACT

This paper expands upon the invitation to rethink how psychology has constructed knowledge, theories, and research while analyzing the epistemological foundations of educational practices in schools, especially those aimed at promoting creativity. Our goal is to critically explore the shortcomings of the traditional, Westernized individualistic, and mostly positivistic approach usually found in school contexts. To foster creativity, a more dialogical, socio-cultural, and collaborative framework is suggested, involving multiple perspectives and possibility thinking to address current educational challenges. Through an examination of education and creativity, we analyze educational practices in Westernized societies and explore the possibilities that arise from non-Western perspectives and dialogical approaches. The discussion is guided by the following questions: what kind of educational practices have been bolstered in Westernized societies? How do these relate to educating (with and for) creativity? A case study is included to provide concrete illustrations that substantiate our arguments. Incorporating decolonial frameworks into cultural and socio-cultural perspectives, as well as in creativity research, would enrich the understanding of these fields. Decolonial approaches can offer valuable insights by addressing power relations inherent in knowledge construction and practice. Embracing these approaches enables these fields to contribute to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of human phenomena.

Keywords: creativity, educational practices, cultural psychology, non-western perspectives.

This paper aims to expand on Glaveanu and Sierra (2015) invitation to rethink the ways in which psychology has constructed knowledge, theories, and research while analyzing the epistemological foundations of current educational practices in schools, especially those practices aimed at promoting creativity among students. Both traditional education and mainstream psychological approaches to creativity take place within an individualistic framework that does not help to make sense of the complexities involved in human development and in the sociogenetic approach to the emergence and promotion of creative phenomena (Glaveanu et al., 2019). Neves-Pereira and Branco (2015), for example, found that well-educated and extensively trained teachers approach creativity as an individual trait of certain students, not necessarily something that can be fostered or developed. Therefore, our goal is to critically explore the shortcomings of the traditional, westernized individualistic, and mostly positivistic approach usually found in school contexts, and to present and analyze the advantages of adopting a more dialogical, socio-cultural, and collaborative framework to favor the cultivation of creativity within educational settings.

First of all, it is essential to clarify some central theoretical-epistemological assumptions. Western (traditional) epistemological perspectives on topics such as creativity and education consist of specific worldviews reflective of the way in which Western (colonizing) cultures perceive, analyze, value, and act upon the world. These worldviews provide a framework that remains dominant in the construction of scientific knowledge due to a long and widespread history of colonialism and modernity (Mignolo, 2011). For instance, Cruz (2023) argues that within academic settings, written work is regarded as a demonstration of a scholar's high intellectual abilities, often perceived as an individual achievement rather than a collaborative effort. Despite this, the author emphasizes that collaboration is crucial for academic productivity, though it may not be as highly valued or recognized.

Several European nations colonized various parts of the world, imposing their cultures and knowledge upon indigenous and native populations—a process that continues through the mechanisms of globalization. This worldview, permeated by a colonialist and ethnocentric epistemology, tends to be highly individualistic and Cartesian, establishing an exclusive separation between Nature and Mind. Although this perspective does not encompass the entire narrative of the West, it remains the prevailing worldview today, as Adichie (2019) argued on the dangers of a single story—meaning the dangers of engaging with a one-dimensional narrative about a person, a community, a country, or a culture.

In the context of Western and non-Western issues, the discussion of the “Global South” represents more than just a geographic designation. For instance, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2012) has elaborated on the South’s epistemologies, arguing that the Global South refers to the history of people, communities, and cultural contexts that have suffered (and still do) under the oppression of colonial imperialism. Their culture and life experiences have been excluded, disregarded, belittled, and often erased by the power of violence. When these cultures and people’s lives are considered, new epistemologies emerge and can contribute to the construction of scientific knowledge in very interesting ways.

However, to be located in the Global South does not automatically imply that scientists or educators adopt a non-Western perspective, for the Western traditional perspective has dominated knowledge construction for too long. Pavón-Cuellar (2021), for instance, argued that in the Latin American context, much has been imported from the West that does not necessarily translate to the reality of Latin American people, yet such trends and practices keep being popularized and socially valued in the new context. It would be untrue to claim that all Global South countries produce non-Western knowledge, as centuries of colonization greatly limited the space for alternative perspectives. Still, perspectives critical of the status quo did and do emerge in this context.

In the same way, we can view the West. It would be untrue to state that countries of the Global North only produce dominant colonial positivist knowledge because many thinkers and scientists do not. In general, though, the pursuit of universal knowledge mostly relies on Eurocentric references. Instead of outright dismissing the knowledge that comes from the West, Pavón-Cuellar (2021) suggests a reflexive and critical assimilation of ideas, while keeping the horizon for the emergence of new perspectives. To be *open* to new epistemologies, theories, and methodologies, then, should be the direction assumed by a new scientific paradigm capable of adopting systemic, critical, multiple, and ever-developing perspectives on the topics under scientific investigation.

Both education and creativity have a long tradition of being conceived—designed and studied—through the lenses of this dominant ideological background. Namely, a background that values psychologization, individualization, and outcome orientations (Valsiner, 2017). Consequently, most creativity research has been carried out in line with this view in the context of Western—or Westernized—school systems. This dominant framework also shapes and directs the development of specific values and practices in educational institutions. When research and theory translate into educational practices that intend to foster creativity, they end up following an often-unquestioned adherence to this biased and narrow perspective on the construction of scientific knowledge (Neves-Pereira & Branco, 2015), failing to take into account other perspectives that could offer an alternative, more productive and inclusive ways to foster creativity.

Therefore, it is crucial to critically examine the underlying assumptions, concepts, and methodologies pertaining to creativity research in order to ensure that educational practices consider other possible ways to promote inclusiveness and democracy across diverse cultural contexts. The question to start from, then, is what kind of educational practices have actually been bolstered in Westernized societies? Furthermore, how do these relate to educating (with and for) creativity? These are the questions that guide our exploration in this article.

We argue that viewing creativity and education only through a Western lens diminishes their potential. If we are to understand creativity in its complexity, we must move beyond the traditional systems of education (explored further below). This system not only silences certain groups and minorities but also homogenizes all involved, stifling the diversity and dialogue that permit creativity and learning to truly thrive. The prevalent vertical teaching paradigm not only mirrors Western ideologies but also reflects teachers’ fears of losing control or facing the unknown. Thus, it emerges from both socio-cultural and individual contexts. Exposing teachers to alternative educational paradigms can help them actively promote human development and creativity.

In the following sections, we address current educational practices in light of the traditional Western paradigm, then approach creativity from a cultural psychological point of view, one that resonates with

non-Western perspectives in how it questions key assumptions, concepts, and methodologies in creativity research. Additionally, we examine creativity and education through a socio-cultural lens. Finally, we provide a case study that serves as a concrete example to support and illustrate our arguments.

EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES AND THE TRADITIONAL WESTERN PARADIGM

In the book *Teaching to Transgress*,¹ bell hooks (1994) recounts her experience attending segregated schools as a black girl in the southern United States. For hooks, beginning her years of schooling in such institutions meant experiencing a radical loving relationship with learning. She learned from her teachers in all-black schools that devoting one's life to knowledge and learning was an act of defiance against white supremacy. hooks argues that this was a revolutionary movement against colonial forces because her teachers believed that their high-quality educational practice stimulated critical thinking and the joy of learning about oneself and the world. By doing so, they challenged the norm that the construction of knowledge should pertain only to a select few, members of the elite, who were predominantly white, middle, and high-class people in the US (hooks, 1994).

This practice becomes more evident to hooks as she addresses her experience of moving to racially integrated schools. For her, the change was not limited to moving to a different location, with different students and staff, but was an immersion in other meaning-making processes, values, and beliefs concerning people and education. She noticed that, in the new context, knowledge was about retaining information, and about compliance and obedience. Hooks says that this change, concerning her earlier experiences in all-black schools, “taught [her] the difference between education as the practice of freedom and education that merely strives to reinforce domination” (hooks, 1994, p. 4).

Why is this important to the study of creativity? There has been extensive research on the topic of creativity, innovation, and a longstanding interest in examining their educational implications, particularly in modern and postmodern societies. This interest has fueled a burgeoning industry centered on cultivating creativity in early childhood education, as a means of preparing students for a job market that increasingly requires creativity, versatility, and innovation as crucial qualities for securing a good position in the future. For instance, The Future of Jobs Report (2023) states that creative thinking remains one of the most relevant skills regarded in the workforce and the UNESCO (2022) report highlights that research and innovation, together with international cooperation, are essential elements in the future of education. It also stresses that discrimination persists, compounded by limited access to education. Poor instruction stifles creativity, while the high number of student disengagement and dropouts call attention to the inadequacies of the current schooling model. Students lack preparedness for current and future challenges, and yet creative thinking is still high on the agenda.

The current scenario presents a paradoxical situation where, on the one hand, creativity is highly valued in education; on the other hand, this professed value finds little resonance in actual pedagogical practices. According to Martínez (2002), a Colombian/Brazilian scholar, this discrepancy arises from the challenges associated with translating research findings on creativity into actual practices in educational settings. She contends that creativity is a multifaceted and intricate process, and oversimplifying the concept can get in the way of its practical implementation in school practices.

Therefore, one must ask what kind of creativity is being discussed, meaning, what is the concept of creativity adopted by researchers, psychologists, and educators, and what are its consequences? To be able to grasp the answer fully, however, we need to question further the place of creativity in society. For instance, we might ask: What is the place of or stance on creativity in Western capitalist societies, whose financial profits are generally prioritized regardless of their cost? What are the epistemological stances for understanding this multifaceted phenomenon? Psychology has a long history of producing knowledge deeply rooted in whitened and colonizing worldviews and theories (Pavón-Cuéllar, 2021). This has resulted in various outcomes, including training-oriented courses as well as positivistic and non-critical theories and practices, to name a few.

When we use the term “critical” in this context, it means adopting a stance that goes beyond considering only a singular point of view. It involves being aware and willing to question explanations of the phenomena that adopt a “neutral” or universalizing perspective. Critical stances prompt us to question what is often

¹ bell hooks is the pseudonym of Gloria Jean Watkins, an African American writer, professor, activist, and intellectual. In tribute to her maternal grandmother, Bell Blair Hooks, Gloria adopted the pseudonym bell hooks for her works. She has opted to have it with lowercase initials for two reasons, (a) to distinguish herself from her grandmother, and (b) to emphasize her work's message more than herself.

accepted as natural or universal (Pavón-Cuellar, 2021) and goes unnoticed because of instituted power relations. A subject of study that has always been culturally valued and socially acknowledged is easily naturalized. For instance, indigenous epistemology questions why mainly white anthropologists have historically focused on studying indigenous communities (as outsiders), instead of allowing indigenous people to be the primary subjects of their own knowledge construction (Krenak, 2019).

Psychological practices and interventions—many of them found in education—that stem from positivistic and non-critical assumptions are problematic because they take for granted the universality of data, findings and principles that cannot be immediately applied to diverse cultural contexts, especially those of historically marginalized groups (de França Sá & Marsico, 2022). Critical and decolonizing perspectives in psychology, as well as in other social sciences, have emerged to systematically question the supposed universal knowledge that stems from such ethnocentric Western science and worldviews (Bhatia, 2017; de França Sá & Marsico, 2022).

Understanding the complex relationship between current theories and practices around creativity and Western frameworks that govern science, economic activity, and society offers the background for our analysis of current educational systems. For example, hooks (1994) addressed how important it is to develop a critical mind in order to make sense of the complexities inherent to human phenomena, arguing that promoting this development within school contexts is essential to foster practices of freedom. In her writings, she pays homage to one of her own teachers, Paulo Freire (1996/2013), a Brazilian scholar and educator whose work was deeply rooted in the need to develop class awareness and inquiries concerning social structures and power relations among his students.

Both authors (Freire, 1971, 1996; hooks, 1994) have argued that the traditional educational systems overly focus on memorization and content transmission, which ultimately serves to maintain the socioeconomic status quo and reinforce the existing dominant power structures. Notwithstanding, the term “traditional” can be misleading, as these educational systems are not universal or ahistorical. Instead, educational institutions are a product of Western cultural ideals and characteristics, which underlie old assumptions about knowledge and learning that still prevail in our globalized world.

Educational systems tend to reflect the values and beliefs of historically dominant Western cultural traditions within societies. In the study conducted by Brazilian psychologist Patto (2015) on the issue of school failure, she managed to show that students’ low grades and high dropout rates were not the result of a personal issue with learning, as previously thought. Instead, they were related to the interpersonal relationships established within the institution and the prevailing social-class biases. In other words, Patto (2015) views school failure as a social and relational phenomenon, rather than an individual one.

Recognizing the need to examine and question the way systems of socio-cultural domination operate, hooks (2000) referred to them as “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (p. 45), coining this term in her work to provide a language to name something that is often left unnamed. Similarly, Freire (1971, 1996) introduced the term *banking system of education* to describe the educational approach that prioritizes the transmission of knowledge and obedience over understanding knowledge as a catalyst experience for individuals to “read” (critically locate) themselves in the world. He criticized the view of students as passive beings whose goal would be to consume content or information to be deposited in their heads by their teachers.

Ultimately, the banking system of education is paradigmatically uncreative. For instance, what is often at stake in paradigmatic views of education is whether the student or learner is seen as agentic and creatively engaged with the learning process, or as a passive recipient of information (Glaveanu, 2017). The latter perspective, described by Freire as highly problematic, fails to recognize the potential of education to connect individuals with their historical reality and life conditions. Freire proposed an educational model emphasizing critical thinking, empowering individuals to actively promote change and transform societies and the world. By doing so, education would empower individuals to develop their own creative agency and effectively respond to their life conditions (Freire, 1971).

Both Freire (1996) and hooks (1994) endorse the value of students’ contributions, actively encouraging their participation in class while expressing genuine interest in their perspectives. However, this approach is still viewed as highly transgressive and often triggers resistance within most schools’ systems. Even when values such as the multiplicity of perspectives, respect for diversity, and focus on inclusion and participation are made explicit, the actual educational practices supposed to enforce them often fall short, especially when it comes to engaging marginalized and oppressed voices and perspectives. This influences who gets to be recognized as ‘creative’ in the classroom and for what reasons. A context deprived of diverse perspectives

leads to an impoverished culture when it comes to creative expression (Glaveanu, 2020) and is often associated with implicit rules around when and how students (and teachers) are expected to be 'creative'.

What does this all mean in practice? As mentioned before, research and practices to encourage creativity have predominantly been carried out from a Western, mainstream standpoint (Glaveanu, 2017; Glaveanu & Sierra, 2015). This field is dominated by studies that focus on solitary individuals and their products. The mainstream perspective considers creativity as a property (attribute) of individuals, and creative processes are primarily seen as internal to the person. Researchers in this field typically measure and assess creativity by using tests and scales designed to evaluate items referring to issues such as the product's novelty, originality, and quality, as generated by the individual (Glaveanu & Sierra, 2015; Guilford, 1966; Kim, 2006).

However, this measurement-focused approach is too narrow and limiting, since it ignores—if not completely disregards—the cultural, social, contextual, and relational aspects of creativity (Glaveanu, 2019). Traditional research on creativity tends to focus on individual products and internal processes, neglecting the cultural and relational aspects of creativity (Branco, 2023; Glaveanu & Sierra, 2015; Sierra & Fallon, 2016). This reflects an epistemological stance that fails to acknowledge the importance of culture and social context in cultivating creative processes, related or not to problem-solving strategies, or original outcomes that gain societal approval.

The way creativity is understood from the dominant Western perspective can be summarized by: (a) it is conceptualized from an individualistic approach, emphasizing personal attributes and internal cognitive processes; (b) it is outcome-oriented, with emphasis on novelty, originality, and utility in the capitalist context; and (c) psychological phenomena are seen as independent from each other, instead of being interdependent and part of the self as a whole developing system; this view is rooted in Cartesian philosophy, which claims for the separation of mind, body and nature.

From our critical and socio-cultural standpoint, developed in this paper, creativity should be investigated and theorized from a contextual and relational perspective, rather than from a traditional individualistic framework. This requires a re-examination of the epistemological principles adopted by creativity researchers, which certainly demands that they move beyond the usual Western perspectives with their associated measurement and creativity enhancement practices. It involves questioning the underlying assumptions and beliefs held by traditional approaches, as well as the incorporation of non-traditional, non-Westernized perspectives to enrich our understanding of creativity, education, and society.

Fostering creativity, within a Western framework does not take into account the systemic, cultural, and complex quality of the phenomenon, usually leading to creativity-training programs that are meant to be carried out with individual students, taken separately, within schools' contexts. By critically examining the issue, new epistemologies (Bhatia, 2017; de Sousa Santos, 2012) may suggest creativity-oriented educational activities based on inclusive and cooperative practices that can serve educational contexts in diverse cultures around the world. Some of these educational possibilities are discussed in the present paper.

CREATIVITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY

From a socio-cultural standpoint, creativity is viewed as a relational process that needs to take culture and context into account (Glaveanu, 2010; Glaveanu et al., 2019). Culture, in this perspective, is not something external to individuals, but a fundamental constitutive dimension of human beings. In other words, people and culture are deeply interdependent and reciprocally constitute each other (Branco, 2023; Valsiner, 2022). Creativity, then, cannot simply be conceived as the product of an individual's great mind, but rather it emerges from multiple cultural perspectives and interactions with others (Glaveanu, 2010; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009; Tanggaard, 2013).

This approach to creativity overcomes the limitations of previous views on the topic. Building from arguments on the cultural and social nature of creativity, conceiving creative processes as culturally constituted and socially participatory, hence acknowledging the complexities of this psychological phenomenon. This participatory perspective on creativity underlines the fundamental role of culture and sociogenesis,² not individuals and individual minds alone (Clapp & Hanchett Hanson, 2019).

Following a review of creativity theories, three paradigms have been proposed when it comes to the way in which we define, measure, and cultivate creativity in classrooms and in society (Glaveanu, 2010, 2017). The He-paradigm, or the paradigm of the genius, is one of the oldest approaches and one that has great

² Steaming from Vygotskian elaborations, sociogenesis emphasizes the social origins of human development (Van Der Veer, 1994).

appeal, both historically and currently, in Western cultural spaces. It basically reduces creativity to revolutionary achievements and celebrated creators to the exclusion of more mundane forms of creating, collaborative creative processes, and the contributions of marginalized communities. Unsurprisingly, in education, this paradigm reinforces the view that students are meant to learn, not to be creative, as creativity is, in any case, reserved for small groups of (genetically) gifted individuals.

The I-paradigm challenged part of this view since the 1950s, and in particular, democratized creative potential: anyone anywhere can be creative (depending on their circumstances). However, it left in place the individualism and psychologization of creative practices, including in the classroom, where creative potential becomes the subject of testing and the focus of person-based interventions.

In contrast, the We-paradigm, which emerged predominantly from studies conducted in the 1980s but with deep historical roots, starts from the premise that all creativity is collaboration and, essentially, co-creation. This marks a radical shift in education since group creativity starts to be recognized and studied and, more than this, more attention is paid to the relationship between creativity and culture. Not all We-based views, however, are equally concerned with issues related to inclusion and participation and, in this article, we follow cultural or socio-cultural theory³ as a line of thought that draws from both Western and non-Western scholarship in its efforts to reimagine creative education.

Cultural psychology (Valsiner, 2014, 2022), for example, sheds new light on the mutual constitution and development of individuals and societies. Culture and people are not seen as independent entities, but as mutually co-constructed. There is an inherent interdependence between the individual and culture, so it is necessary to consider that the environment also undergoes processes of development as it is transformed by the actions (imbued with meaning) of people (Valsiner, 2014). According to this approach, meaning-making processes play a key role in human development, and in the study of how these processes guide the co-construction of practices and actions (Branco, 2016, 2021, 2023; Lopes de Oliveira, 2021; Valsiner, 2014, 2022).

Creativity, in this context, is not a fixed entity but rather a socially constructed cultural sign (Branco, 2018), and may also be conceived as a value, resulting from internalization processes (Branco, 2023). It may be actively internalized by individuals through the co-construction of meaning between individuals and the dominant, hegemonic contexts they live in. That means that certain cultures do value creativity more than others, and they also tend to value creativity in specific domains more than others. However, most cultures across the world do encourage conformism and even obedience, despite the dissemination of discursive social messages in favor of change and creativity. This happens because societies tend to be conservative, and schools are particularly expected to enforce this kind of conformity.

It is important to note, though, that this kind of cultural guidance or canalization does not determine or control the individual's meaning-making processes. Despite the dominance of certain cultural ideas, values, and beliefs, counter-hegemonic explanations, ideas, values, and beliefs also find their way through, resulting in a constant interplay of tension and resistance (Chaudhary, Hviid, Marsico, & Villadsen, 2018). In short, people resist, opening fresh venues for creativity. While cultures can indeed exert pressure toward conformity, it is necessary to acknowledge that they are never homogeneous in socio-cultural theory. Therefore, creativity involves both the struggle to go against existing societal norms and an actively drawing from the existing multifaceted cultural environment.

From a cultural and dialogical psychology perspective, Branco (2023) elaborates on how the fields of creativity, the development of the dialogical self (Hermans & Gieser, 2011; Meijers & Hermans, 2017), and the cultural/personal dimension of ethics and morality (Branco, 2018; Brinkmann, 2010) are closely intertwined. She explores the motivational roots of creativity and proposes a model according to which the ontogenesis of creativity as a value may give rise to a dialogical self-position, or I-position (positioning) that can guide the person's life trajectory to engage in creative thinking and cooperation with others—seen as legitimate partners—to explore and produce novel perspectives and solutions vis-à-vis all sorts of challenges. From this perspective, culture, social practices, constructive social relations, and individual selves mutually constitute each other as they develop toward a creative, collaborative, and democratic world and also resist engaging in this dynamic.

³ The socio-cultural perspective is a broad theoretical approach embraced by scholars influenced by Vygotsky's seminal ideas. Cultural psychology is a more specific version of a socio-cultural approach, as seen in the work of Valsiner and collaborators, who have expanded the theory to include the study of affective-semiotic processes, active in meaning-making and in how humans make sense of themselves and the world. In this paper, the use of 'cultural' and 'sociocultural' are seen as synonyms.

Alongside cultural psychology, recent works have included the idea of intersectionality (Akotirene, 2019) and decoloniality (Bhatia, 2017; de França Sá & Marsico, 2022), offering valuable insights as they strive to comprehend phenomena in their intricate interdependence and inter-relationality. Unlike the conventional tendency to approach phenomena from a Cartesian binary and categorical manner, these theories challenge us to recognize the myriad connections and relations that exist among multiple components of the whole, rendering processes involved in the configuration of a phenomenon nonlinear or not unidirectionally causal. Instead, intersectionality analyzes multidirectional connections and tensions arising from them, prompting the adoption of a more nuanced, complex, and comprehensive perspective.

As previously elaborated, we emphasize embracing theoretical and epistemological perspectives that take more than one viewpoint into account, due to the complexity of human development. In this sense, the concept of distributed creativity is very fruitful. It presents a view of creativity that emphasizes the relational and contextual nature of creative processes, where collaboration and engagement with diversity are at the forefront (Glaveanu, 2014; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009). As noted by Glaveanu (2018),

A sociocultural analysis of current creativity beliefs and theories is incomplete unless it fosters critical engagement with the beliefs and theories in question, uncovering not only what they “are” but what they “do” for the people who learn, use, and impose them on others.

(p. 119)

In summary, we propose that cultural psychology’s epistemological and theoretical framework has the potential to challenge Western hegemonic ideas because it is a theory not committed to ideas of universalization of data, but the actual and permanent co-construction of information (Valsiner, 2017). Additionally, it is a field that values cooperation and interdisciplinarity, acknowledging the limitations of psychological science while striving to transcend them through collaboration with other theories and researchers.

Thus, building upon this idea, the subsequent section introduces the dialogical paradigm as a crucial component of cultural psychology epistemology. Then, we elaborate on the interconnections of creativity, social relations, cooperation, and self-constitution. We also explore possible directions to promote their development in educational contexts, stressing the role of creativity as a pathway to encourage students to become active citizens.

CREATIVITY, SOCIAL RELATIONS, AND THE DIALOGICAL PARADIGM

Cultural contexts (schools, families, among others) guide individuals and groups to participate in specific cultural practices, which in turn generate the co-construction of specific meanings, beliefs, and values. As human values are immensely diverse, they can vary from violence and individualism to cooperation and democratic pluralism. Therefore, the first step to making sense of what cultural contexts are promoting is to identify the kind of social messages and practices that prevail in people’s everyday lives. The central question can be summarized as follows: Are social messages and practices fostering a dialogical and supportive environment that facilitates the recognition and emergence of creativity and innovative ideas? (Branco, 2023).

The dialogical paradigm, a key contributor to cultural psychological theorizing, proposes to substitute the traditional vertical, unidirectional view still adopted by most schools—the teacher teaches/the student learns—an act that can open a new venue for human relations and creativity within educational institutions. This paradigm aligns with the critical educational perspectives presented in the previous section, which underlined the transformative nature of education and the importance of the quality of the teacher-student relationships. Furthermore, it resonates with the cultural psychology perspective, as it acknowledges the reciprocal, multidirectional and co-constructive relationship between individuals and their cultural contexts.

As Matusov (2009, 2018) explains, the construction of ontological dialogues allows both teachers and students to listen to, respect and seriously take each other as legitimate partners in knowledge construction. Ontological dialogues do not refer to simple turn-taking episodes (teacher asks, student responds), but, instead, they trigger reflexive thinking, autonomy, inclusion, and collaboration (Matusov, 2009, 2018), all consisting of psychological processes and practices that lie at the basis of creativity.

So, why do schools persist in adopting a vertical, traditional paradigm? One of the reasons can be found in the fear of losing control of their students. An illustrative example of this dynamic is offered as follows. One of our doctoral students obtained consent from a middle to high-class private school to develop his research on children’s active participation in one of their fourth-grade classes. As his research progressed, though, students increasingly became more empowered and questioned some of the school’s and teachers’

rules. As a result, the school staff invited the doctoral candidate to withdraw, and his permission to continue his research was denied.

The major problem here is that educators are not prepared to face challenging situations, which may cause uncertainties in their daily dealings with students. As teachers, they should be trained and qualified to deal with emotional troubles deriving from affect-laden situations in their classrooms, like different kinds of violence, displays of prejudices, and all sorts of conflicts and divergences. Notwithstanding, as they are not prepared to face such situations, but are expected to *know* everything (their expertise should not be contested), as well as are expected to keep calm no matter what, teachers try to avoid at any cost situations to which they were not prepared to deal with (hooks, 1994). Therefore, they keep working from the vertical paradigm, making use of a traditional set of practices to impose their authority instead of conquering this authority by relating to students as a wise, dialogical, and open-minded teacher.

Of course, the practices implemented in a classroom are not solely at the discretion of the teacher's personal preference, many are the societal and administrative pressures to control teachers and students, and to follow the established curricula by the book (Matusov, 2009). Thus, there is a double standard at play in school contexts. Teachers are expected to exhibit creativity and bring innovative ideas to their classrooms, yet they often lack the necessary support and opportunities to do so. When teachers are asked to maintain rigid control over their classrooms, it hinders their ability to foster a creative and dynamic learning environment. This distinction aligns with the insights of hooks (1994) and Freire (1996), who emphasized the contrast between liberating education and education committed to maintaining the existing power structures.

Another aspect worth examining is schools' persistence in investing their efforts into promoting cognitive performances, to be measured with the help of validated scales, often at the expense of their primary goal, which should be to foster students' whole development. When practices of socialization and promotion of ethical, democratic positioning are not adequately planned and intentionally encouraged in school contexts, students end up being guided by the hidden curriculum (Junqueira, 2010), meaning they would tend to reproduce those values and practices prevalent in their culture, that is, they start to expect external control and continuous guidance (heteronomy) which inhibits the emergence of autonomy, critical thinking, sense of belonging (collaboration), and creativity.

In this context, Tanggaard (2019) is critical of teachers' efforts to basically increase students' quantified performances in academic tests, while leaving creativity and socio-moral objectives out of the picture. She criticizes the "conservative focus in schools on traditional subjects and cultural reproduction" (p. 166), to which we add, many pedagogical practices are void of motivational components that encourage students to be curious, have initiative, be creative, and contribute to their own learning experiences.

Autonomy, cooperation, and agency should be encouraged if we aim to foster creative, responsible, and democratic citizens (Borges-de-Miranda & Branco, 2019; Branco, 2018, 2023; Wagoner, de Luna, & Glaveanu, 2018). And here lies the power of a socio-cultural dialogical paradigm. The empowerment of students may contribute to the development of participatory creativity (Clapp & Hanchett Hanson, 2019), the appreciation of novel perspectives to make sense of problems and possible solutions, as well as encouraging students to engage in ethical practices and cultivate prosocial values.

This leads to an epistemological shift concerning creativity, seen no more as an individual phenomenon but as a participatory, distributed, and relational experience (Glaveanu, 2015; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009). To this end, we present an empirical case that demonstrates the significance of exploring the constraints of pedagogical practices through dialogues with teachers. We will showcase the perspectives of one teacher in particular who shared her experience and challenges with implementing innovative and creative pedagogical practices. We underline the importance of moving beyond performance-based cognitive approaches and embracing a more comprehensive understanding of what it means to educate for creativity. Adopting this viewpoint allows us to establish a strong foundation for coming up with practices that support students' development by creating rich and inspiring learning environments able to nurture creativity.

CASE STUDY

The study (Paula, *in press*) referred to here for illustration purposes, employed a qualitative methodology. From this perspective, data are not viewed as an immutable product of reality, but rather as a co-construction between researchers and participants. The research was carried out in the form of an 8-week focus group (Marková, Linell, Grossen, & Salazar Orvig, 2007), with the participation of 13 teachers. They worked at public or private Elementary and High Schools across Brazil, namely, Brasília, Minas Gerais, Santa Catarina, and Rio de Janeiro.

During the meetings, participants were able to discuss and elaborate on some of the relational challenges they encountered in their respective school environments together with the researcher. From the beginning, the researcher's efforts were directed to co-construct a dialogical framework with participants. Initially, the focus was on exploring the dynamics between teachers and students to identify specific difficulties and problems posed by participants. Topics of discussion included strategies employed in conflict situations, instances where uncertainty arose, as well as instances where successful solutions were achieved. It is noteworthy that even though the researcher had a semi-structured plan for each meeting, the dialogical orientation adopted allowed for changes and flexibility to accommodate the topics the participants brought forth. The study's dialogical methodology, therefore, favored:

1. **Diversity:** Teachers from different states and backgrounds engaged in weekly discussions about their challenges, providing an opportunity to hear and engage with *multiple perspectives*.
2. **Focus on interactions, not outcomes:** The study recognized the intrinsic value of participants' engagement, motivation, and perspectives, encouraging meaningful exchanges.
3. **Focus on participants' developmental processes:** These were inferred from discussions, narratives, and positionings regarding all sorts of topics, well beyond the researcher's suggestions, involving the active participation of everyone in the group.

One example illustrates well the changes introduced by participants during the meetings. Initially, the investigative assumption was that teachers would mostly focus on talking about their experiences with students. However, as the sessions progressed, teachers mostly expressed and discussed their concerns about school administration, parental involvement, and the impact of social media and technologies on students and everyone else. These were worries, for instance, about potential exposures due to audio or video recordings of their classes without their knowledge or consent.

Here, we will focus on one participant who expressed particularly interesting comments on her challenges in implementing innovative and creative pedagogical practices. Olivia (pseudonym) is a Brazilian teacher working in a private school at the time of the research. She was responsible for teaching English classes to middle and high schoolers. When discussing implementing dialogical and innovative practices with her classes, she shared with the group that she felt restrained in her role as a teacher, because there were some topics that she could not simply speak about. Olivia elaborates:

I must choose the [material] I'm going to use in the classroom **very** carefully, (...) so that the text doesn't generate a double meaning in the classroom. A double meaning (...) regarding **any** controversial subject. So, it's **quite** complicated because text interpretation is very broad, you know, and all the time you must manage situations that can generate some controversy.
(*participant's emphasis are in bold*)

The school's insistence on the teacher's complete control within the classroom extends to the unrealistic belief that a teacher can manage every possible interpretation that students would have over any material, such as a comic book, a painting, or a text. Teachers' expectations to cultivate creativity in such environments become quite impossible, creating a paradox. Creativity inherently involves risk-taking and dwelling in uncertainty (Beghetto, 2019), and this overwhelming need for control gets in the way of truly fostering creativity within educational settings. Olivia continues,

When you work at a private institution, if you discuss a highly controversial topic and the student goes home and portrays it from a different perspective, showing it to his parents, this creates a huge problem... and, the institutions in general, especially private ones, are not always supportive of the professional, the teacher, in that situation. So, it's very complicated. At least that's how I see it, I have to choose very carefully everything I'm going to say, the way I'm going to say it, the manner in which I'm going to say it, so that there are not two, three, or four interpretations.

No wonder teachers are overwhelmed and overworked. Instead of prioritizing the creation of a safe and supportive classroom environment, where students can freely explore, experiment, and actively engage in learning processes, teachers find themselves preoccupied with managing and predicting every potential negative reaction that may arise from class activities. Consequently, this leaves little space for creativity and new possibilities to emerge.

During the focus group sessions, the recurring topic of challenges imposed by school administration and parents prompted our decision to show a documentary with the teachers and discuss it in the group. This

documentary (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HX6P6P3x1Qg>) showcased 10 different schools in Brazil that shared something in common: they were in the process of implementing innovative, creative educational practices. Through testimonials from parents, students, educators, and professionals from diverse fields, the documentary emphasized the need for changes in the traditional school model. After watching the documentary, the teachers were asked to share what stood out for them. Then, Olivia contributed to the discussion by stating:

I must confess that I was very surprised. I was unaware of this teaching methodology. [To see] how they implement it, how some teachers act as mentors who guide and organize, how there is a sense of responsibility among students towards their own learning (...) I never imagined there was such a different method from the traditional one, many students mentioned that. It's not about being in a classroom, in rows, where the teacher front and center. No, there they want to show the student as the protagonist of the story, as someone who possesses and knows how to deal with their own knowledge, you know? (...) I was truly delighted by the documentary because I didn't know that these types of democratic schools existed and that they operated in this way. We are so used to having only a traditional system, and there is so much, so much to learn... Oh, I felt like a complete novice (laughs) while watching the documentary. But it was great because it opened my mind to various projects that I can do in the schools where I teach. There are so many different things I can do! And I'm not doing them. So, I was fascinated by the project, really.

Here, we observe that active dialogical discussions on novel perspectives seem to have opened new possibilities for Olivia. Initially, sharing the frustrations of the constraints imposed by the institution, Olivia believed that she did not have the freedom to introduce any ideas that were too different from the status quo, because they might lead to controversy, and she would not be able to control the situation. That left her with restricted options on what she could do in class. Notwithstanding, as the collective discussion progressed, and the documentary served as a valuable resource to encourage further exploration, Olivia expressed her surprise and realized that, maybe, there were other possibilities to explore.

In pointing out this realization, however, we are not suggesting the teacher had complete autonomy, or that the actual constraints she perceived were unfounded. On the contrary, Olivia highlighted real constraints in her pedagogical practice, which were fear of institutional retaliation and lack of support, fear of students' interpretations, unconsented recordings, and lack of alternative models for teaching. Nevertheless, Olivia managed to identify and reflect on potential opportunities even within those constraints. These possibilities, as she expressed, were not previously considered by her. This suggests that the group discussions broadened her horizons, bringing previously unconsidered alternatives to the forefront.

In this case, the experience of possibilities is more important than actualizing those possibilities. The reason for this is rooted in the understanding that by actively exploring possibilities through dialogue with diverse perspectives and maintaining an openness to others, entirely new avenues for development are shaped. This is the type of valuable critical and reflective process encouraged by non-Western scholars (Freire, 1971, 1996; Hooks, 1994; Mignolo, 2011; Pavón-Cuellar, 2021). It is through this dynamic process of engaging with differences and embracing diverse perspectives that meaningful learning takes place.

It is quite challenging to ask individuals to go beyond their imaginative boundaries, particularly when their imagination and possibilities have been shaped by longstanding and non-dialogical dominant values and beliefs. Yet, autonomy coexists in interdependence with social and cultural constraints (Borges-de-Miranda & Branco, 2019). This is why we argue that dialogue can open avenues for creativity and new possibilities to emerge. At the same time, engaging with new possibilities and creative endeavors can promote meaningful dialogue—a reciprocal process.

Therefore, creativity plays a multifaceted role within the educational framework. Firstly, it acts as a process, demanding that participants genuinely engage in novelty, with one another and with the multiple perspectives that arise. Secondly, creativity can serve as a powerful tool for challenging and decolonizing Western-centric views within education. By actively promoting diverse perspectives and alternative ways of knowing, creativity becomes a catalyst for dismantling the hegemonic narratives and cultural biases that have traditionally dominated educational systems. It can empower individuals to question prevailing norms, challenge existing paradigms, and open up spaces for more inclusive educational practices. As such, creativity becomes a cornerstone in creating inclusive, empowering, and culturally responsive educational environments that nurture the growth and development of individuals within a diverse world.

CONCLUSION

This paper initiated by exploring the questions of ontology and epistemology in relation to both Western and non-Western principles. Subsequently, we examined education and creativity as prominent examples of these principles. Then, introduced the perspective of creativity from a cultural psychology standpoint, and presented a case study to offer concrete illustrations to substantiate our arguments.

Going back to what we mentioned, traditionally, throughout history, there has been a longstanding belief that creativity entails a disruptive rupture from established norms and conventions. Western perspectives on creativity especially have been centered around divergence, emphasizing originality and novelty. The prevailing value placed on creativity in Western modernity revolves around the notion of creating something that breaks away from the past and from the community, bridging forth something (ideally) never thought of before. This perception feeds on and perpetuates the myth of the genius in the He and I-paradigms (Glaveanu, 2010).

This perspective, however, is not without its gaps, which non-Western cultures have been increasingly bringing to the forefront and actively challenging. Key questions arise: What are the costs (financial, emotional, or societal) of novelty? Is creativity for the sake of creativity enough? Who has access to and training in the kind of creative thinking that is valued?

In non-Western perspectives, the notion of creativity is deeply tied to human relations and connections with the environment. It is a notion that values and fosters communities and sustains itself over time, embracing and incorporating differences rather than seeking a complete rupture with the past. The concept of difference is inherent in how creativity is perceived, but within the Western tradition, it can manifest as a pursuit of difference for the sake of difference itself, often valuing departures from the norm (such as “disruptive innovation”) as long as it is not a norm that challenges the established power relations. This inclination toward novelty for the sake of novelty can sometimes be accompanied by an uncritical reverence, where the pursuit of innovation becomes almost automatic and unquestioned.

The effort of critical non-Western perspectives, as we see them, aims to shift the discourse away from the singular focus on individual outcomes and cognition, toward a deeper understanding of the relational and social aspects of the phenomenon. This shift involves moving away from a Cartesian logic of binaries and dichotomies to move toward approaches that value diversity, complexity, and multiple perspectives.

We argue that the socio-cultural and cultural psychology approaches, elaborated in this paper, foster a paradigm shift, as they reject the imposition of hierarchical notions of higher or lower creativity, which often stem from an ethos of measurement that seeks to establish hierarchies of potential and achievement. Instead, the participatory multiplicity and diversity perspectives aim to acknowledge and honor different ways of being and thinking, fostering authentic inclusion, not only the discourse of inclusion.

In educational contexts, teachers face challenges in aligning discourse and practice, values of cultivating creativity, and practice of being creative, as Olivia's case pointed out. It is important to note that the case study presented in this paper was twofold: first, it provided insight into the teacher's voice and perspective, with the intention of talking *with* her, not *about* her; second, the primary focus of the research construction was on the process of interaction itself, not on classifying reality or measuring which individuals or ideas were more creative. We intended to showcase a methodology that highlights the significance of participatory approaches that prioritize dialogue and the co-construction of meanings.

The major challenge for decolonial perspectives lies in the need to summon the courage to challenge deeply rooted assumptions. The way creativity is formulated in the West aligns seamlessly with an individualistic approach to education within a market-oriented economy; these aspects are profoundly intertwined, and so naturalized that they are hard to name, as hooks (2000) contended. In contrast, non-Western and decolonial perspectives question the underlying reasons for focusing solely on individuals. This line of questioning disrupts established norms and reveals power dynamics at play. It becomes evident that defining creativity in certain ways, relying on quantitative measures, and educating in specific manners sustain particular social hierarchies that favor those who are more readily recognized or published (de França Sá & Marsico, 2022).

While the discussion elaborated in this paper exemplified in the case study represents a small ripple in a larger ocean of psychological research that wants to address creativity in educational contexts, it propels us in the right direction. If we pause to contemplate the implications of our actions as researchers, educators of all levels, as cocreators of knowledge, what possibilities may emerge?

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

ETHICS INFORMATION

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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