CREATIVITY AT SCHOOL? CONCLUSIONS FROM POLISH STUDY

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Abstract

Referring to the visual study, conducted on non-representative sample of Polish secondary schools, the paper discusses a problem of creativity in the school environment. The study allows to distinguish three types of creativity related to school environment (farmed and triggered by school agenda – most frequent in the set; against school agenda; beside school agenda) which points to the conclusion that one may move from a concept of creativity (singular) to a concept of creativities (plural). Almost a half of pupils claim that their school is a creative place. However, it is worth to think about the type of creativity they refer to, since the dominant number of images taken by pupils present creative activities as related to the school agenda.

Keywords: Creativity, school, visual methods, education

Introduction

In the emerging information society and informational economy creativity and innovation (treated here as synonyms) become relevant factors of both social transformations and economic development. According to Manuel Castells and Pekka Himanen: 'an essential element for a country to attain productivity growth is innovation' (2002: 45). The authors state that innovations in private, public and civic sectors are being produced by educated individuals in the context of a culture of innovation which is a factor *sine qua non* of creativity (beside education and money). Culture of innovation is understood as an open web of individuals, desiring to pursue their passions. This concept is inspired by the hacker ethic (Himanen 2001), hence, Castells and Himanen call such individuals 'hackers', wanting a full self-realization, seeking to transcend themselves constantly, and as a result creating new material and symbolic qualities. A hacker's figure mirrors hyper-individualized individuals characteristic for the late modernity. Therefore, the concept of culture of innovation is closely related to the concept of individualist culture (Lash, Freidman 1992). The process of individualization situating an individual in the very center of the social produces a cultural context in which an individual must transcend his/her-self in order to be authentic. This intertwinement may explain – in cultural terms – why individual creativity became socially and economically desirable and give a reason to scrutiny it. In the following text I explore the problem of creativity at school, a relevant institution in the process of adapting individuals to social and cultural expectations one of which today is creativity. Whether Polish schools are creative places? I will try to answer to this question basing on research conducted in secondary schools in Poland, between 2011 and 2013. Pupils, participants of the research, prepared photo-diaries which show acts of creativity at school environment. Because of the scope of collected data the research is explorative. Therefore, it should be treated as an attempt to study the issue of creativity in school by the use of visual methodology.

Main Text

Today, the value of creativity is becoming increasingly higher. Following Castells and Himanen I do not define creativity as an attribute of an individual but as a feature of an environment or a culture – these are material and symbolic features of a place or a context that trigger creative acts which transcend existing conditions. Hence, a scrutiny of creativity is not about psychological constitution of an individual but about a context in which he or she operates. The main research question of the study refers to the problem whether pupils perceive school as a creative place.

Data were collected by the use of a questionnaire and a photo-diary. The first method delivers opinions of informants; the second allows reconstructing broader concepts and gathering associations which is of relevance in the study of a vague concept such as creativity. Additionally, a visual method may allow accessing spheres of experience which are hard to verbalize due to a dominant discourse. The dominant discourse on creativity (which defines it as a desirable and uncommon feature or attitude) might block expression of informants. Surprisingly, acts of creativity at school photographed by pupils are common, usual and mostly related to the school agenda. This conclusion is to be developed later in the text. Returning to visual methods, I selected a photo-diary which is a procedure of day-to-day taking photographs on a given topic. Pupils from 17 selected higher schools[167] in Poland[168], between 2011 and 2013, were asked to take photos of creative acts in the school environment for 5 day (Monday till Friday, one week). I received 335 questionnaires and 200 photographs from 30 returned photo-dairies. Photographs were analyzed by the use of content analysis method (Rose 2007). Let's discuss results.

Pupils think that is worth to be a creative person. 323 respondents of all 335 said 'definitely yes' or 'rather yes' ('definitely yes' – 240 answers, 'rather yes' – 83), (Figure 1). Additionally, respondents find themselves creative – 245 pupils chose answer 'rather yes' and 'definitely yes' (Figure 2).
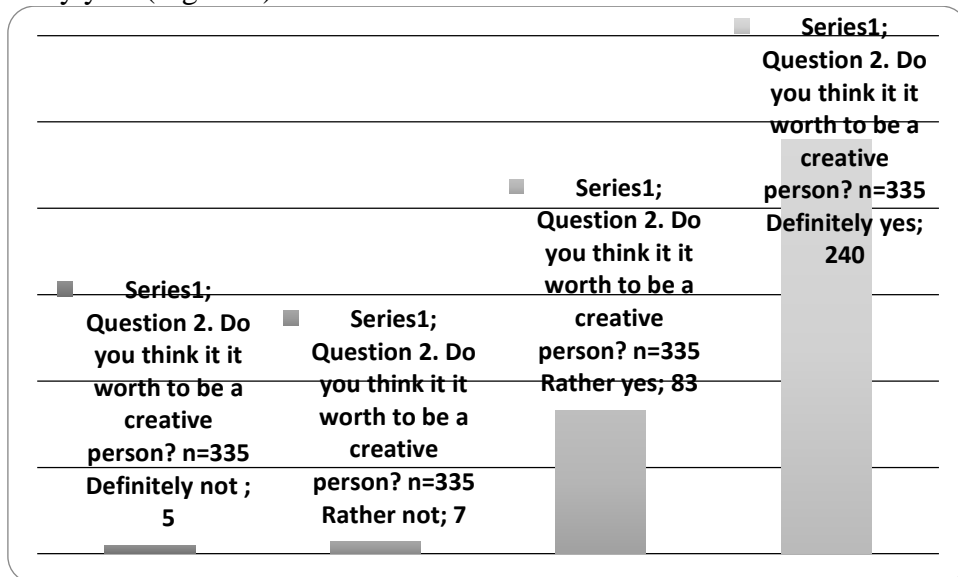

Figure 1. Answers to the question: 'Do you think it is wort to be a creative persons?' n=335.

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[167] Pupils in age of 13-19.
[168] The research was a part of my classes on visual methodologies. Students selected schools and conducted the research. I am thankful to students from CSWU and CC for participating in the project.
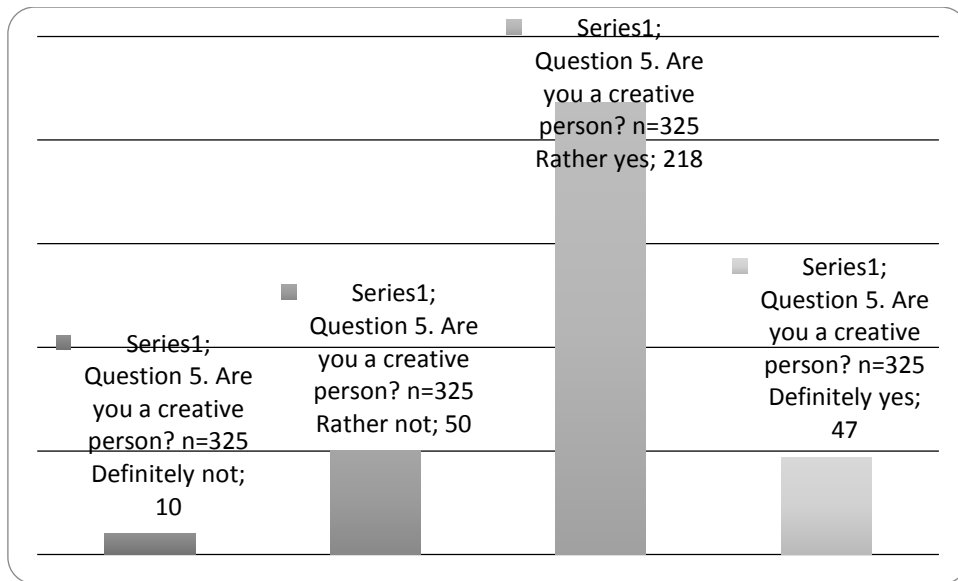
Series1;
Question 5. Are
you a creative
person? n=325
Rather yes; 218

Series1;
Question 5. Are
you a creative
person? n=325
Rather not; 50

Series1;
Question 5. Are
you a creative
person? n=325
Definitely yes;
47

Series1;
Question 5. Are
you a creative
person? n=325
Definitely not;
10

Figure 2. Answers to the question: 'Are you a creative person?' n=325.

Most important and perhaps a bit counterintuitive, almost a half of respondents admit that their schools are places fostering development of their creativity. 'Definitely not' and 'rather not' answered 147 out of 331, and 'definitely yes' and 'rather yes' 184 respondents (Figure 3).

Series1;
Question 7.Do
you think that
your school is a
place fostering
your creativity?
n=331 Rather
not; 103

Series1;
Question 7.Do
you think that
your school is a
place fostering
your creativity?
n=331 Rather
yes; 127

Series1;
Question 7.Do
you think that
your school is a
place fostering
your creativity?
n=331
Definitely…

Series1;
Question 7.Do
you think that
your school is a
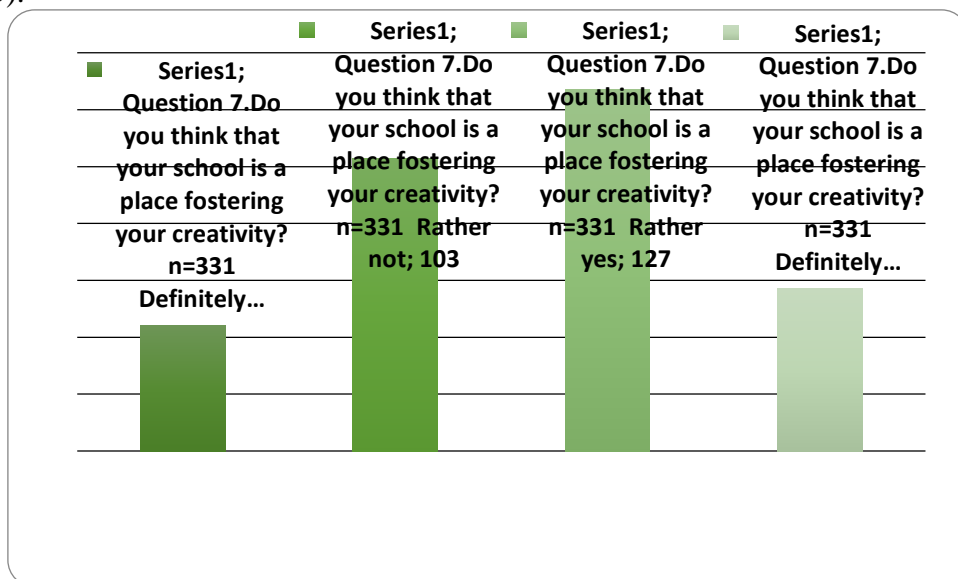place fostering
your creativity?
n=331
Definitely…

Figure 3. Answers to the question: 'Do you think that your school is a place fostering your creativity?' n=331.

Visual data shed light on these declarations. Collected photographs – acts of creativity at school by pupils – were coded according to – only – three categories: acts of creativity farmed, defined and triggered by the school agenda (code 1) – most frequent in the set, acts of creativity against the school agenda (code 2) and acts of creativity beside the school agenda (code 3). Photos 1, 2, 3 and 4 were coded as 1 because creativity presented in the pictures refers to acts triggered by the school: a composition on the pin board (Photo 1), a Christmas tree made from books (Photo 2), classroom decorations (Photo 3) and stickers, graffiti and tags on classroom walls (school's authorities allow for it) (Photo 4). Photo 5 and 6 are examples of creative acts which are against the school agenda (code 2), since the respondents indicate creativity as an activity allowing to 'fight boredom at school' (Photo 5) or present themselves imprisoned (Photo 6). Photos 7 and 8 are coded as 3, because their

content does not refer directly to the school agenda – the pictures are an abstract expression of creativity.

Photography 1. An example of creativity produced within and created by the school agenda. A respondent wrote below the picture: 'On this photograph I can see the creativity, because ... there's an interesting comparison of works of art with the present days '.

Photography 2. An example of creativity produced within and created by the school agenda. A respondent wrote below the picture: 'An effect – humanistic Christmas tree ;D'.

Photography 3. An example of creativity produced within and created by the school agenda. A respondent wrote below the picture: 'Creative variety of ordinary lamps. And what a joy!'.
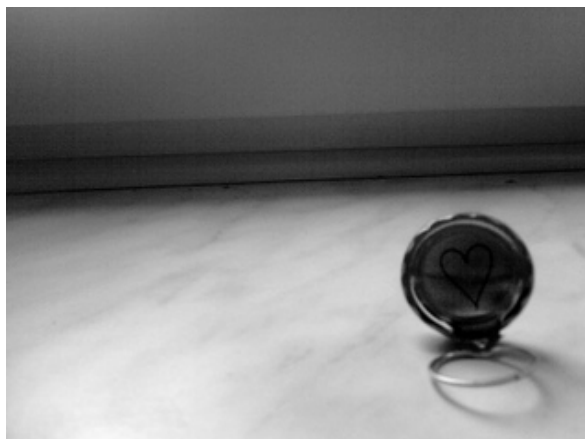

Photography 4. An example of creativity produced within and created by the school agenda. A respondent wrote below the picture: 'I took this photo to show that the students in my school do stickers, graffiti and tags, and it is not suppressed'.
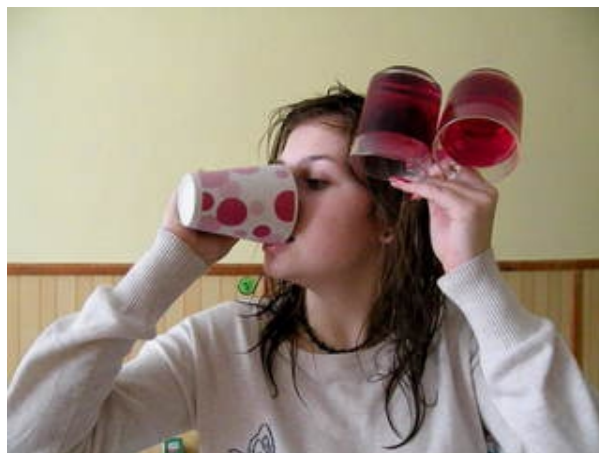
Photography 5. An example of creativity produced against the school agenda. A respondent wrote below the picture: 'In this photograph I see creativity as it is a creative way to kill boredom in class :)'.

Photography 6. An example of creativity produced against the school agenda.

Photography 7. An example of creativity beside the school agenda.

Photography 8. An example of creativity beside the school agenda.

Table 1 presents visual data quantitatively.

Code / Frequency	Acts of creativity farmed, defined and triggered by school agenda	Acts of creativity against school agenda	Acts of creativity beside school agenda
SUM	**171**	**12**	**15**

Table 1. Frequencies of codes in the set.

The code 1 dominates in the set of visual data (171 for 198 photos). This result clearly shows that pupils perceive school as a creative place. However, 'the quality' of creativity also counts. Instances of creativity presented in these photos are institutionally approved once: inscriptions and decorations on the walls of a school, newly created items such as a Christmas tree from books, the robot from Star Wars or playing table tennis during breaks. Hence, pupils see creativity where and as they should.

At the same time only a few images were coded as against and beside the school agenda. This indicates that the contestation of the school is being seen by students as a creative activity. These are, for instance: inscriptions on the benches (breaking the rules), drawings in a notebook (next to the educational activities in the classroom), distinctive shoe for walking around the school (versus uniformity student), the words "I love you" on the board (versus function). A creative act in these cases is related to go beyond institutional boundaries imposed by the school.

Conclusion

The study seems to clearly show that the photo-dairy method is a good tool for the study of creativity. Distinguishing three different types of creativity related to school environment (farmed and triggered by the school agenda – most frequent in the set; against the school agenda; beside the school agenda) points to the conclusion that one may move from a concept of creativity (singular) to a concept of creativities (plural). It also shows that in everyday understanding creativity is not a monolithic concept.
Referring to the collected data one may say that almost a half of pupils claim that their school is a creative place. However, it is worth to think about the kind of creativity, since the dominant number of images present creative activities as related to the school agenda.

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