



BOOK REVIEW

The Creative Classroom: Innovative Teaching for 21st-Century Learners

Keith Sawyer

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Those wishing to foster student creativity should consult Keith Sawyer's *The Creative Classroom*. Dually a "how-to" guide for enacting fresh pedagogy and a thorough rebuke of traditional, teacher-centered classrooms, Sawyer has assembled a highly-accessible text that will challenge even the most innovative instructors. Sawyer's experiences in jazz, improvised theater, and learning science render a nuanced, practical guide for improving classroom teaching in the twenty-first century.

Marked by a lecture-heavy environment, traditional classrooms have long been the dominant paradigm in American education. These environments encourage the transmission of shallow, surface-level knowledge and fail to germinate students' creativity or proficiency in meaningful content. Thus, students shuffle between classrooms, briefly remembering isolated facts before jettisoning them for more of the same. As a result, students recall only a fraction of what has been taught and are inhibited from achieving transformational learning experiences.

Sawyer's vision is radically different. Instead of this disjointed portrait, he advocates for imbuing classrooms (and schools) with creativity. This does not mean simply offering additional coursework in creative fields; as Sawyer notes, creativity is domain-specific and cannot be attuned in isolation. The pursuit of imaginative instruction begins with establishing creative habits of mind within all contexts, including the values of playfulness and accepting failure. The most overarching of these virtues, a concept termed guided improvisation, receives significant attention throughout multiple chapters in the text.

As an ethic, guided improvisation undergirds any creative classroom and requires teachers to blend structure and choice into all aspects of education. Instead of focusing exclusively on what content will be delivered, creative teachers plan opportunities for students to uncover mastery through independent and group exploration. Guided improvisation shifts teachers' attention from attempting to control every moment of class to cultivating an environment rich in opportunities for students to make meaning of key concepts. Naturally, this arrangement repositions an instructor from serving as the "sage on the stage" to the more helpful "guide on the side." Implicit in this shift is an instructor's ability to probe understanding in real time based on student responses. The text closes by addressing a school's responsibility in enabling creative pedagogy, including its culture, organizational structure, and assessment practices.

For faculty members in theological education or religious studies in a liberal arts setting, this text should prove immediately valuable. Beset with capacious amounts of information to cover, faculty members can over-rely on lecturing or direct instruction

at the expense of other methods of instruction. Consequently, students focus on memorizing isolated facts at the expense of cultivating rich stores of meaningful knowledge. Especially within these disciplines, it is not enough for students to grasp brittle fragments of knowledge. Instead, students should be empowered to connect seemingly disparate information into a powerful, cohesive whole. Refreshingly, Sawyer does not offer a checklist of tasks or recommended activities for achieving this outcome. Instead, *The Creative Classroom* convincingly argues for a more authentic, student-facing pedagogy that equips all learners to succeed.