Learning and Collective Creativity
Activity-Theoretical and Sociocultural Studies

Edited by
Annalisa Sannino and Viv Ellis
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11 Professional Creativity
Toward a Collaborative Community of Teaching

Viv Ellis

The substantive focus of this chapter is school teaching, specifically in England, at a time when conceptions of profession, of teaching as a profession, and of the professional knowledge base of teachers continue to be contested. Teaching is sometimes defined as a “state-mediated” profession (Johnson, 1972) in that teachers mediate the state’s educational goals in relation to a state-defined clientele. This definition highlights the bureaucratic and regulatory aspects of professional work such as school teaching. Nonetheless, teaching is a type of profession that in England, as in many parts of the world, has become vulnerable to neoliberalism’s push toward the marketization of public services managed through vertical hierarchies of control—in other words, New Public Management (McLaughlin, Osborne, & Ferlie, 2002). Markets and hierarchies are seen as challenges to the traditional notions of professions as autonomous communities.

In this chapter, drawing on related theoretical resources derived from Marxian political economy—cultural-historical activity theory, the British tradition of cultural studies, and the critical sociology of professions—I argue that the difficult and contested concept of profession necessarily grows out of the processes of collective creativity and learning that are the focus of this book. Collective creativity is both a condition and defining attribute of professional cultures that make the actions of individual professionals meaningful and societally significant. A profession in its historical sense is recognizable because of its developmental stance toward both its own knowledge base and its social relations. Collective creativity and learning are distinguishing features of professionals as occupational groups, even when they are of the state-mediated kind and even when their organizational autonomy is challenged by markets and hierarchies.

The chapter’s argument is structured as follows. First, I consider profession as a contested concept and the collective, socially organized dimensions of professional work. I draw particularly on the critical sociology of Adler (Adler & Heckscher, 2006; Adler, Kwon, & Heckscher, 2008) and his theoretical model of a profession as a collaborative community with societally significant, knowledge-creating responsibilities. Then, I consider
creativity from the related perspectives of the British tradition of cultural studies and Vygotskian and neo-Vygotskian theory. From these perspectives, the twin emphases on human symbolization and economics in contemporary discourses of creativity are revealed. I also distinguish between my conceptualization and another conceptualization of professional creativity, specifically the category of "Pro-c" creativity of Kaufman and Beghetto (2009) in order to clarify the distinction between collective and individual conceptualizations of creativity. Next, I turn to education and, specifically, to school teaching in England. I note the contradictory pressures on professionals such as teachers in New Public Management regimes to be both compliant and creative at the same time as being constructed as vertically accountable, isolated individuals. It is at this point that I give an example from my own work of a formative intervention designed to stimulate or reenergize teachers' professional, collective creativity. In the final section, I draw together the preceding stages of my argument to propose professional creativity as future-oriented, intellectual interdependence, based on principles of semiotic freedom and democratic engagement with clients and publics, exercised within a collaborative community committed both to the development of new knowledge and to the elaboration of the system of values and ideals that underpin its authority.

It is worth acknowledging at the outset that such an argument risks presenting a very idealistic view of professions, one that perpetuates what might be described as the vested interests and monopoly power of certain occupational groups. My aim is to show that rather than seeking to advance professions and professional status as autonomous, self-serving communities, it is instead necessary under current (and likely future) conditions to see professions as collaborative communities that have relatively open social ties and actively seek public engagement in fulfilling their responsibilities for knowledge creation.

COMMUNITY: THE COLLECTIVITY OF PROFESSIONS

In this section, I build on earlier discussions of professions in the literature and engage with the work of Adler (Adler & Heckscher, 2006; Adler et al., 2008). A principal insight of Adler's critical sociology is that professional knowledge creation is a community-based, collective enterprise situated in cultural-historical context. In its emphasis on knowledge creation within communities of practice—or in joint work on the transformation of the object of activity—Adler's work is relevant to and extends the sociocultural and activity theoretical tradition of research on learning and collectivity.

For many, profession "is an essentially contested concept" (Hoyle & John, 1995, p. 1), associated with changing class relations after industrialization, the expansion of higher education, and the emergence of a twentieth
century welfare state. Conventionally, definitions of professionality refer to specialist bodies of knowledge, autonomy in work practices, and high levels of social responsibility. Freidson (2001) defined it as a “third logic,” separate and distinct from the ways in which other types of work are organized (under the logics of market and bureaucracy). Etzioni (1969) went so far as to insist that true professions are concerned with matters of life and death and cloaked with rights to “privileged communication,” criteria that perhaps only law and medicine can claim to meet.

But while all these attempts at definition have specialist knowledge, autonomy, and status at their core, they do not always emphasize the collectivity of profession as a concept, that profession represents an occupational group of specialist workers. Nor do they always recognize that the population of workers to whom the term professional might be applied is expanding just as the ways in which professionals work as part of teams and hybrid organizations is increasing. Unlike Etzioni’s dismissal of teachers and nurses (among others) as “semi-professionals”, others have attempted to distinguish between groups of professional workers on the basis of their relations to the state and public service organizations. Johnson (1972), for example, referred to three types of professional power structure: collegiate, patronage, and mediated. Teachers were in Johnson’s category of state-mediated professionals whereby:

An agency, usually a state organization, acts as mediator between the profession and its clientele in deciding the profession’s client population and in broad terms what should be provided for its clientele through a legal framework and the overall allocation of resources. By this means, the state acts as the corporate patron of the professionals who provide services on its behalf, through the state’s agencies. . . . The state delegates power to, and in the process, legitimizes the status of the professionals concerned. (White, 2006, p. 207)

State-mediation of professional work such as school teaching is often seen to “threaten[s] the maintenance or inhibit[s] the emergence of the ‘complete community’ of professionalization” (Johnson, 1972, p. 80). Adler and colleagues (2008; also Adler & Heckscher, 2006), however, rather than basing their discussion of professional work on a comparison with what might be viewed as a singular, anachronistic ideal-type, situate profession within three broad organizing principles—hierarchy, market, and community—and suggest that whereas markets and hierarchy are in the ascendant, they do not reduce the importance of community in understanding professional work. Indeed, the contribution by Adler and colleagues (2008) is an emerging theoretical model of collaborative community, one that sustains traditional community priorities of trust and collegiality while promoting more open social ties and the “stronger civic engagement necessary for the welfare of contemporary society” (Adler et al., 2008, p. 359). The model of
a collaborative community is also one within which the specialist knowledge from which professional work derives (and gains public status) can be accessed and developed.

Collaborative Community and Professional Knowledge Creation

In proposing collaborative community as a theoretical model of contemporary professional work, Adler rejects two earlier ideal types of community, Gemeinschaft (collectivist but insular, akin to craft guilds) and Gesellschaft (seen as embodied in modern liberal professions and experts for hire). Neither of these historical types of community are seen as adequate for current and future conditions in that they both have limited capacity to support the creation and diffusion of new knowledge. So, the “functional pressures” of market and hierarchy/bureaucratization “are encouraging the emergence of the collaborative form” of community” (Adler et al., 2008, p. 364). And an important focus of these functional pressures is the capacity of professional groups to respond to new problems of practice with new ideas—that is, the knowledge-creating capacities of professions. Indeed, the knowledge-creating capacities of the three different organizing principles (market, hierarchy, and community) of professional work are absolutely fundamental to Adler and colleagues’ general argument. Table 11.1 summarizes the different strengths and weaknesses of these organizing principles for professional knowledge creation (after Adler et al., 2008).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizing principle</th>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>High levels of trust facilitate access to tacit knowledge held in shared practices and promote local knowledge creation.</td>
<td>There is a risk of insularity within communities as “silos” and the closure of outward-looking innovation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>Flexibility and responsiveness to new problems of practice are encouraged.</td>
<td>Knowledge creation tends toward short-term “solutions” that lead only to individual capitalization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy</td>
<td>Managerial techniques of control can effectively disseminate codified knowledge.</td>
<td>Bureaucratic hierarchies provide weak incentives to create new knowledge and lack sensitivity to tacit knowledge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 11.1 The Strengths and Weaknesses of Three Different Organizing Principles of Professional Work for Knowledge Creation (Generated from the discussion in Adler et al., 2008.)
Adler and colleagues (2008) claim that their theoretical model of collaborative community integrates these three organizing principles rather than rejecting one or the other. Collaborative community as a new model addresses hierarchical forms of management, market pressures, and competition whereas simultaneously transforming traditional community principles. It does this by encouraging responsiveness to new work situations and by challenging local knowledge creation to have wider, systemic impact. Collaborative community as a theoretical model of the organization of professions is, therefore, interesting rhetorically as well as offering a challenging sociological analysis. As a concept, however, it is useful to my argument in this chapter in three ways. First, it emphasizes “value-rationality” as the basis of professional authority—the means by which professionals “coordinate their activity through a set of shared commitment to ultimate goals” (Adler et al., 2008, p. 366). Value-rationality in terms of school teaching reflects both the moral and ethical interests involved as well as the position of teachers as professionals in relation to the state but also to the wider publics. Second, collaborative community acknowledges the often hierarchical nature of organizations such as schools rather than sentimentally smoothing this out of the picture. And third, most important, collaborative community, in Adler’s formulation, sets a challenge to develop a “more outward-looking, civic kind of professionalism” (Adler et al., 2008, p. 369), not just in terms of interprofessional working (teachers, social workers, psychologists, health care workers, etc., working together) but in terms of public engagement with and beyond the client group of children and families.

CREATIVITY: SYMBOLIZATION AND ECONOMICS AS TWIN ACCENTS IN THE DISCOURSE

In this section, I show how the twin perspectives of cultural studies and Vygotskian and neo-Vygotskian theory reveal the contradictory emphases in contemporary discourses of creativity, contradictions that set the human capacity to symbolize and make meaning against economic conceptualizations of innovation and capitalization.

The British tradition of cultural studies, especially in the work of Raymond Williams (1958, 1965) and that associated with the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Hall, 1980; Hoggart, 1957; Thompson, 1963; Willis, 1977; Willis, Jones, Canaan, & Hurd, 1990), made a significant contribution to understanding creativity during the late twentieth century. Arising from a range of intellectual heritages, especially those derived from Marx and critical theory of the Frankfurt School, cultural studies sought to recover creativity from elitist, individualistic accomplishments in the arts and instead assert it as a general human capacity. This capacity arose from a species desire to symbolize; the development of
the individual and the development of the culture through symbolic activity were posited as reciprocal processes:

We insist that there is a vibrant symbolic life and symbolic creativity in everyday life, everyday activity and expression—even if it is sometimes invisible, looked down on or spurned. We don’t want to invent it or propose it. We want to recognize it—literally re-cognize it. (Willis et al., 1990, p. 1)

The significance of Raymond Williams’s early writing on culture and creativity cannot be underestimated as a contribution to the intellectual context in which Vygotskian and later cultural-historical ideas were understood in the United Kingdom. His careful analysis of the cultural shifts of meaning—creativity as divinely inspired, to creativity as the exceptional revelation of human experience by the artist, to creativity as ubiquitous (Williams, 1965)—anticipate many of the later developments, particularly in the educational discourse: Faced with the criticism that his analysis of creativity as an everyday capacity detracted from the evaluations of “high culture,” his response cut across later distinctions that were to be made between “little c” (“mundane”) and “big C” (elite or “high”) creativity (Amabile, 1983; Craft, 2005; Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009):

The solution is not to pull art down to the level of other social activity as this is habitually conceived. The emphasis that matters is that there are, essentially, no “ordinary” activities, if by “ordinary” we mean the absence of creative interpretation and effort. Art is ratified, in the end, by the fact of creativity in all our living. Everything we see and do, the whole structure of our relationships and institutions, depends, finally, on an effort of learning, description and communication. (Williams, 1965, p. 34)

Jones (2011) distinguishes two main accents in the contemporary discourses of creativity in England. The first is a mid-twentieth century emphasis on symbolization and self-development: “any human development beyond the stage of elementary mental functioning is dependent on sign-making” (p. 21). He connects this accent with “Marx’s stress on human creative powers . . . given a linguistic inflection, specific individual actions coalesce into a general, collective creativity, which is a defining and sustaining property of humanity” (Jones, 2011, p. 21). The second accent in the discourse, according to Jones (2011), has its source in “economic production and enterprise” (p. 23). Proponents of this second accent assert a changed “post-industrial” or “post-bureaucratic” order in which educational structures and institutions are seen to lag behind the transformed economic structures of global capitalism. From this perspective, the aims of education should be to unlock creativity just as post-industrial
workplaces have done. Creativity, under this analysis, becomes a set of “thinking skills” necessary for the individual’s prosperity and the global economic competitiveness of their employers (and nations). Creativity is a “set of dispositions involving qualities such as initiative, innovativeness, commitment, patience and concentration, whose stimulus and justification lay primarily in economic life” (Jones, 2011, p. 24). The second accent has been completely “severed” from the first and its emphasis on human symbolization and individual and cultural development. For Jones, the economic stimulus and justification has been in the ascendant in discourses of creativity in England over the last decade.

Wheeler (2006) extends the cultural studies emphasis on “symbolic creativity” by drawing on recent biosemiotic theory. Scientific studies of species-specific characteristics such as symbolization have become the focus of Wheeler’s research and lead her to question contemporary economic inflections of creativity, limited in terms of their capacity to explain cultural development and limited also because of their emphasis on the present:

In particular, because creative freedom and innovation in modernity come to be conceived mainly in terms of economic freedom and market innovation—which are very partial ways of conceiving human creativity—we need a more comprehensive account of cultural creativity than that afforded solely by the idea of economic innovation and individual capital accumulation. Creativity—the means by which human cultures evolve—is a social affair. Its contraction to the sphere of economic self-interest, especially as that is conceived of only in terms of the greedy present of an individual lifetime, is quite simply a historical category mistake: Creativity is not simply about either profit or the present. For the brilliance of human creativity lies also in its intuition of things as yet unseen that will be revealed “in later days to other eyes” (Wheeler, 2006, p. 141, quoting M. Polanyi).

Wheeler’s critique of individualistic, ahistorical conceptualizations of creativity—memorably phrased as “the greedy present of an individual life-time”—has much in common with the Vygotskian and neo-Vygotskian perspectives on creativity.

**IMAGINATION, TRANSFORMATION, AND INTELLECTUAL INTERDEPENDENCE**

Vygotsky’s papers on creativity distinguish between childhood, adolescent, and adult creativity but together build a general argument for the importance of the imagination in all forms of intellectual activity. For Vygotsky, “imagination was conscious, concrete, and—especially after childhood—interdependent with thinking in concepts and reasoning” (Ayman-Nolley, 1992, p. 82).
Smolucha, a translator of these papers, has shown how the creative imagination, although evident in childhood play, "becomes a higher mental function" (Smolucha, 1992) when, during adolescence, it is integrated with thinking in concepts. The "maturity" of this higher mental function is found in artistic and scientific creativity. But, overall, Vygotsky emphasized the "combinatory imagination" (the creative synthesis of previous experience in new situations) as an aspect of all cultural life. As such, creativity could only be identified or "labeled" in relation to existing domains of concepts or discourses or ways of reasoning. Indeed, Vygotsky suggested that it was the growth of conceptual understanding through adolescence that set the ground for mature creativity: "For the first time the formation of concepts brings with it a release from the concrete situation and a likelihood of a creative reworking and transformation of its elements" (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 276).

The reworking and transformation made possible by the combinatory imagination is at the core of Vygotsky's ideas about creativity, according to John-Steiner and Meehan (2000). For Van der Veer and Valsiner (1991, 2000), underpinning the combinatory imagination is "intellectual interdependence." Basing this idea on the dialectic between internalization and externalization in Vygotskian theory, Van der Veer and Valsiner (1991) argue that the meanings of cultural tools aren't simply internalized by the individual "but, rather, they are analyzed and reassembled in novel ways. Hence the individual is a co-construct of culture, rather than a mere follower of the enculturation efforts of others" (p. 395). Externalization based on the reflective perception and internalization or transformation of signs and symbols together form the general human capacity referred to as creativity. Later, in their examination of the development of ideas in science, Valsiner and Van der Veer (2000) develop this idea of intellectual interdependency as a way of understanding the relationship between institutions, individuals, and "nature." Intellectual interdependency is the process by which new understandings of phenomena are:

actively constructed by intentional persons, who are involved in a field of mutually communicable meanings, or ideas. Within this field, persons act in a goal-oriented manner: Communication is directed towards personally desirable possible future state of affairs [sic]. (Valsiner & Van der Veer, 2000, p. 10)

Valsiner and Van der Veer's concept of intellectual interdependency, based as it is on Vygotsky's sociogenetic epistemology, is a useful contribution to the elaboration of professional creativity. It suggests that the collectivity of a profession is not based on an accumulation or aggregation of individual mental processing but on a dialogic and expansive transformation of shared social arrangements arising out of disruptions, breakdowns, or contradictions that emerge when intellectual heritages come into contact with one another over time. Intellectual interdependency, in Van der Veer
and Valsiner's formulation, therefore also captures some of the historicity of creativity and the nature of creativity as a general human capacity evident in individuals that is nonetheless developed socially. Intellectual interdependency builds on Vygotsky's dialectical emphasis on continuity and change, reproduction, and transformation:

If human activity were limited to reproduction of the old, a person would, in essence, be attending only to the past. The creative activity of an individual does this, essentially: It attends to the future, creating it, and changing the view of the present. (Vygotsky, 2004, 50)

This cultural and historical view of creativity—whether derived from the resources of cultural studies or Vygotsky's radical psychology—is strikingly different from dominant views of creativity and learning or teaching in much of the educational research, as I show in the next section. Centrally relevant to the idea of professional creativity is the concept of intellectual interdependence, "the process of construction of new ideas through the transformation of old ones in a communicative process" (Valsiner & Van der Veer, 2000, p. 12) and the contribution of these new and transformed ideas to the knowledge base of a collaborative community that is evolving historically. As such, professional creativity as I am conceptualizing it in this chapter is profoundly different from another conceptualization of professional creativity—the category of "Pro-c creativity" proposed by Kaufman and Beghetto (2009). "Pro-C," according to Kaufman and Beghetto (also Kaufman, Beghetto, Baer, & Ivcevic, 2010), is an individual characteristic of "professional level creators who have not yet achieved legendary status" (Kaufman et al., 2010, p. 381) but who have nonetheless received the approval of their peers and "prizes/honors" (p. 382). Professional creativity as defined by Kaufman and Beghetto is a social marker of individual expertise in a particular craft—and a specific (pre-"legendary") stage in the development of that expertise at that. Professional creativity, as I have been conceptualizing it, is both a criterion and a precondition for a kind of relational work in the public sphere that leads to the collective creation of new and transformed knowledge on the basis of authority bestowed by a system of shared values and ideals.

SCHOOL TEACHING IN ENGLAND: COMPLIANCE AND CREATIVITY

In this section, I turn to education and specifically to school teaching in England. Following a selective review of some of the literature on creativity and teaching and learning, I discuss the contradictory pressures on teachers in England's New Public Management policy regime to be both compliant and creative at the same time as being regulated through vertical forms of accountability and audit. I then briefly discuss an example
from my work of a formative intervention designed to stimulate teachers’ professional creativity.

Craft (2005) offers a broad survey of the international research literature on creativity and learning, focused particularly on the institution of schooling. She notices a shift away from twentieth-century interests in psychological measurement toward an early twentieth-century focus on knowledge production and innovation, reflecting what others have seen as increasingly economic accents in the discourse. While noting the unhelpfulness of false dichotomies, Craft nonetheless organizes part of her discussion around the distinction between creative learning and learning creativity. The former, she suggests, is associated with making learning “more interesting and effective” (Craft, 2005, p. 22); the latter is designed to foster young people’s creative capacities. What underlies both approaches, however, in Craft’s analysis—even when overlaid with the field evaluation or systems theories of creativity derived from Sternberg (1988) and Csikszentmihalyi (1988)—is an individualistic conception of the learner, creative or otherwise. Craft’s proposal for creativity as “possibility thinking” (Cremin, Burnard, & Craft, 2006) grows out of developments in “thinking skills,” where creativity can become an individual, teachable, metacognitive skill useful for achieving already valued ends. Likewise, Sawyer (2012), while rejecting the false dichotomy of “structure” and “improvisation” in his discussion of expert teaching, nonetheless maintains the binary terms of the relationship between individual autonomy and scripted instruction. Expertise in classroom teaching is conceptualized as individual, disciplined, improvisational performance (Sawyer, 2012, p. 5), consequently underdeveloping the collective and intellectually interdependent nature of disciplinary work.

From both perspectives, there is an underemphasis on the collective nature of expert teaching as professional work.

In England, from 1997, the New Labour government of Tony Blair enacted a series of educational reforms designed to change the economic, institutional, and pedagogic structures of schooling, in part by changing the way that teaching as professional work was understood. Although the degree to which the reforms were successful is questionable, the scale and pace of change was ambitious and the levels of funding likely to be unrepeatable for generations: More than £3.8 billion was invested in just one strand of these reforms alone, the National Strategies (Department for Education and Employment, 2001; Department for Education and Skills, 1998; Ellis, 2011b). The National Strategies specified, school term by school term, year by year, what and how every child should be taught in great detail, often with teacher plans and resources that amounted to scripted instruction. The unprecedentedly high levels of funding for the Strategies (initially focused on literacy and numeracy as “basic skills”) led, amongst other things, to literally thousands of lesson plans and other resources becoming available on government websites and hundreds of new textbooks for schools, sold to them as “Strategy-compliant.” A national system of heavily scripted
training for teachers was complemented by a statutory requirement on university education departments to base their teacher education programs on the Strategy materials. Schools and university education departments were inspected by the government's Office for Standards in Education to assess their degree of compliance with Strategy routines, and penalties (in the form of intensive monitoring, the downgrading of public rankings, the withdrawal of funding and, ultimately, closure) were applied.

From the outset, an integral part of the New Labour reforms to public services such as education was to change what it meant to be a professional—to "transform" professionalism, as Tony Blair's "delivery expert" Michael Barber put it (Barber, 2005, 2007).

From Barber's perspective, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, teachers particularly were "uninformed" occupational groups—professional work in the public services was founded on a poor knowledge base and was inflexible and unresponsive to client (and state) demand (the state-mediated nature of teachers as professionals becoming acutely obvious during the reform period). In his retrospective analysis of the New Labour reforms with which he was so closely associated, Barber (2005, 2007) divided the period into two phases: the first, of "informed prescription" where teachers were unapologetically told what to do in minute detail and punished for noncompliance. Barber referred to this phase of reform as aiming to change teachers' behaviors, not their minds (Stannard & Huxford, 2007): "Hearts and minds" were unimportant considerations when reform was urgent. The first phase included the introduction of the National Strategies in primary and secondary schools. The second phase was to be one of "informed professionalism" where teachers were to be able to exercise their judgment on the basis of lessons learned. This phase corresponded, roughly, to the period when the initial gains in test scores in literacy and numeracy leveled off and teacher morale plummeted, something noted in the government-commissioned evaluation of the Strategies (Earl et al., 2003). It was during this phase that creativity gained a higher profile in the evolving policy framework.

Between 2002 and 2010 (ending with the election of a Conservative-Liberal coalition government), almost one-third of schools in England had contact with a scheme known as Creative Partnerships, a joint enterprise between the Department for Education and the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport (Hatcher, 2011). Creative Partnerships claimed to have worked with over 50,000 teachers and to have provided specific training in "creative teaching and learning" for over 32,000 (Sefton-Green, Thomson, Jones, & Breslin, 2011). It was in receipt of over £160 million of public funds, a fraction of the budget of the National Strategies but a significant sum nonetheless. Creative Partnerships was founded on a belief that teachers, by working alongside a "creative practitioner" (artist, musician, actor, etc.) would encourage "creative learning" across the school curriculum, regardless of subject. Money was invested in local projects and, framed as
action research, aimed to improve children's attainment by encouraging "creative learning." In researching the interventions of Creative Partnerships in schools, Hatcher (2011) and others (e.g., Hall, Thomson, & Russell, 2007) noted a "culture clash" between school teachers and creative practitioners. Creative practitioners sought to enact "competence pedagogies" where collaboration with teachers and students was directed at developing underlying knowledge and specific skills; teachers tended to enact "performance pedagogies," where their interest was in imitating what the creative practitioner did so that the task could be repeated. A superficial appropriation of creative practitioners' cultural tools on the part of school teachers was, as Hatcher noted, hardly surprising given the context of New Labour's educational reforms. Not only had the tight prescription of teaching routines and public measurement of standards produced a situation where teachers' work was focused on "measurable outcomes rather than on the processes of learning" (Hatcher, 2011, p. 407), but associated reforms of economic and institutional structures such as the Academies program were leading to reduced opportunities for collaboration between teachers and schools as market competition was encouraged. The Academies program—loosely based on the American charter school movement—encouraged or coerced schools to opt out of school districts, partner up with commercial or charitable organizations, and sign contracts for the provision of services directly with Secretary of State for Education.

A review by England's National College for School Leadership (NCSL) noted that one of the (in their words "unintended") consequences of the Academies program was that it reduced opportunities for collaboration with teachers outside of their academy (or chain of academies—partnered with the same sponsor) and was also underpinned by a conviction that their particular approach was "always right" (Hill, 2010). Chains of academies, the NCSL report noted, tended to impose a standardized model of teaching. Indeed, sometimes these standardized approaches were branded and sold or traded with "delivery" of teaching on the standardized model being used as a key performance indicator. Lack of student progress was regarded as indicative of low levels of fidelity to the model rather than any deficiency in the model itself. And as the Academies program grew and new schools have been built, architectural designs have increasingly excluded any kind of communal area or meeting place for teachers. Following a recent decision by the Secretary for Education, schools in England no longer have to provide staff-rooms ("for use by the teachers, for the purpose of work and for social purposes") that were once a legal requirement (Bloom, 2012).

Many of the educational reforms in England over the last 15 years have sought to produce teachers as isolated professionals—isolated within their schools, in turn isolated from other schools—and subject to strong vertical accountability. Market competitions between schools (for client parents and their offspring) based on test scores and other quantifiable measures
Hierarchical control and tight prescription of centralized routines and resources has partly given way in a “second phase” of reform, and creativity has been appropriated as a mode of delivery. The discourse of delivery—of scripted instruction in order to deliver “results”—is now accented with creativity, but creativity of a very odd kind: a backward-looking creativity where the outcomes are already known (a particular percentage of the student population achieving the benchmark test score), so that the teacher’s challenge is to reverse-engineer their interactions with students to achieve that result.

STIMULATING PROFESSIONAL CREATIVITY

In the context of these reforms, between 2005 and 2008, I was engaged in a formative intervention in the teacher education setting, an intervention involving a collaboration between groups of English language and literature teachers in four schools and the students from one teacher education program (my own). The project was framed as a variation of Developmental Work Research (Engeström, 2007), a methodology designed to stimulate “critical design agency” among participants, a form of agency synonymous with the conception of creativity being developed in this chapter. My intention was to stimulate—or reenergize—the professional creativity of teachers by promoting a collaborative community within the social space of the Developmental Work Research participatory data analysis workshops known as Change Laboratories (Ellis, 2010, 2011a). At a fundamental level, the teachers’ participation and my own was sustained by a commitment to the ideas that creativity can be developed relationally—through an openness to the new, a willingness to examine the present, and to mutual communication.

In previous reporting of the outcomes of this project, I have emphasized the ways in which joint analysis of the ethnographically generated representations of current practices (“mirror data”) surfaced relatively superficial appropriations of key conceptual tools (for language and literacy teachers) such as genre. Compliance with the National Strategy reform routines produced genre as a set of rules that needed to be followed in the teaching of writing. New ways of organizing the teaching and learning of writing emerged in the social space of the Change Laboratories arising out of a recovery of a deeper appropriation of genre (on the part of teachers and student teachers) as a recognizable patterns of interaction rather than a “tickable” list of features, and this recovery was then put into an articulation with future actions, new ways of organizing the teaching of writing under current conditions. What has been underemphasized in my accounts of the project has been the time taken in the preliminary stages to work with teachers to find a genuine problem of practice, to perceive a problem, or to frame a question before even reaching the stage of reflecting on data....
that mirrors the problem or question. And this, for me, was the essential preliminary to generating new ideas, preliminary to the possible articulation of an object of activity. The story as I have told it has underemphasized this major shift in perception required on the part of the participating teachers, a shift that required seeing the possibility of a shared object, when object is understood as something desirable, motivating, and sense-making. Reaching the point when good intentions (agreeing to engage in development work with me) became what might be called a “need state” (Bratus & Lishin, 1983) was a reciprocal part of the process whereby a potentially shared object might emerge, and the subsequent analysis of contradictions might become productive. The gradual process by which an intentional, future-orientation might emerge—a state some, after Fogel (1993, p. 125), refer to as “anticipatory directionality” (Engeström, 2005)—was the essential preliminary stage through which the professional creativity of the teachers was eventually to be realized. And in a context at a time when teachers were not only not required but actively discouraged from engaging in this sort of activity (when fidelity to the standardized model is the sole criterion for professional authority), the time taken for new possibilities to become visible was considerable. In such a context, formative interventions are disruptive at many different levels.

In a discussion of the limits on creativity from a cultural studies and biosemiotic perspective, Wheeler points to the need for institutional and bureaucratic power structures to be continually disrupted:

As human societies grow into ever more complex forms, they also produce accretions of power—first in institutionalized religion, and then in institutionalized secular bureaucracies and other blocs—whose general effects of vested interests tends towards limitations (first mythic and then rationalized) upon the creativity which all humans are inclined to bring, if at all possible, to their expansive labor on, or in, the world of the human Umwelt. (Wheeler, 2006, p. 137)

The methodology for stimulating professional creativity I have been discussing in this section could be described as a disciplined attempt to disrupt existing practices on the basis of a shared commitment to transform the object of activity. In this way, professional creativity in the way I have been conceptualizing it, far from being an idealistic device to reproduce the power and authority of (professional) vested interests and self-serving monopolies, is rather an indication of the responsibility of professions to engage in the “more outward-looking, civic kind of professionalism” Adler et al. (2008, p. 369) has proposed. My discussion of the methodology in this section has not sought to present a simple panacea or to recount a victory narrative. Rather, I have tried to indicate the long timescales and close relationships necessary to reach even the preliminary stage in stimulating professional creativity under conditions of New Public Management.
TOWARD A COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY OF TEACHING: THE CHALLENGE

In this chapter, and the attempt to elaborate professional creativity as a useful idea, a future-oriented intellectual interdependence has been advanced as intrinsic to professional work. A profession, as a type of collaborative community, must manage at least two directions of activity simultaneously—one that encourages disputation and deliberation among the particular community, a sharing and transformation of intellectual heritages, learning; the other direction, outward, open to peers in other communities and also the wider publics, an expanded collectivity. The "outward-looking, civic kind of professionalism" proposed by Adler et al. (2008, p. 369) is one that might more fully realize the "collaborative ideal" in a context in which the functional pressures of markets and hierarchies have to be addressed. A yearning for a time when professional work meant disciplined performance by autonomous individuals is no longer good enough, if indeed it ever was. At the same time, it is important to recognize that, historically, neither the highest levels of creativity nor the highest levels of professionality have been associated with scientific rationalism, so assertions of future-orientations need to be carefully qualified. As Lektorsky (1999) pointed out, creativity isn't merely an advanced form of scientific rationality that can simply be expressed as modernizing "progress." A great challenge for modernizing states and reform-minded professions is, therefore, one of encouraging democratic debate within and about the goals and purposes of professional activities such as school-teaching rather than defaulting to technical-rationality and the reformist modalities of New Public Management. For the transformation of teaching and learning in schools, a consideration of what Lektorsky called "a new type of rationality" would be necessary, the main feature being its "attitude of profound value" (p. 69). Proposing, after Adler and others, value-rationality as the basis of authority for a profession such as teaching requires an acceptance of necessary indeterminacy and openness, of prolonged and expansive cycles of activity time, and of attending to the future rather than continually seeking to measure the present. Therein lies the challenge—and it is a political one.

At a time when university involvement in the professional education of teachers is under threat in some parts of the world (Zeichner & Bier, in press), professional creativity as a concept also suggests both a more engaged and a more critical role for higher education than may be the case at present. Conceiving of the work of university faculty such as teacher educators as stimulating the recognition of breakdowns, contradictions, and disruptions in professional practices, encouraging intellectual interdependence, and facilitating the creation of new ideas and social arrangements that respond to these problems of practice, offers a rather different prospect to the endless production and quality assurance of individual autonomous professionals. Teacher education as a field might, therefore, have a much more significant role than it does at present in producing the conditions for a future-oriented, intellectual interdependence that permits the exercise of professional creativity in school teaching.
NOTES

1. Williams's path-breaking studies of culture were published at the same time as the first English translation of Vygotsky's *Thought and Language* became available. The experimental, school-based pre-service teacher education course that was offered by the London University Institute of Education during the 1970s prescribed *Thought and Language* and Williams's *The Long Revolution* as core texts.

2. Although I believe the criticism of Sawyer's inherent individualism in his discussion of teaching, it is important to acknowledge Sawyer's other efforts to elaborate "group creativity" (Sawyer, 2003) and "group genius" (Sawyer, 2007).

3. For a more detailed enumeration of creativity initiatives in educational policy in England throughout this period, see Craft (2005, pp. 12-14).

4. The contrast might perhaps also be described as one between disciplinary or discipline-specific pedagogies on the part of the creative practitioners or artists and performative pedagogies on the part of the teachers.

5. The project was termed a variation of DWR principally because I was a participant in the activity systems under examination as well as the researcher-facilitator.

REFERENCES


