Chapter 13

Realabilities: Opening New Vistas to Enhance Knowledge, Attitudes, and Intentions towards Peers with Disabilities

Nava R. Silton
Marymount Manhattan College, USA

ABSTRACT

Children with disabilities are two to three times more likely to be victimized by bullying than their typical peers (Carter & Spencer, 2006). Since half of all preschool children with disabilities are now in mainstream classrooms (Diamond & Hong, 2010), it’s imperative to reduce bullying and to enhance sensitivity to peers with disabilities. Since children tend to exercise more effort when they have higher expectations of their peers (Rosenthal, 1989), it’s critical to showcase the competencies of children with disabilities (Siperstein et al., 2007). The following research assesses the impact of Realabilities, an animated TV show and comic book series, which emphasizes the strengths of five characters with disabilities (Autism, ADHD, Visual, Hearing and Physical Impairment) who harness their strengths and innate creativity to save their school from bullies. This chapter will present findings from five, creative Realabilities interventions using Morgan’s (1996) Shared Activities Questionnaire and Siperstein and Bak’s (1977) Adjective Checklist and will highlight future directions.

CREATIVITY, COMICS, AND CONSCIENCE

History of Creativity

The rise in the study of creativity is often associated with J.P. Guilford’s 1950 presidential address to the American Psychological Association (APA). Despite previous research in the area, Guilford is acknowledged for having convinced psychologists to pursue the scientific study of creativity. More specifically Guilford (1950) discussed the importance of exploring and cultivating creativity in schoolchildren (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2007).

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A number of researchers have alluded to the “Creativity Crisis” among schoolchildren in the U.S. today. Bronson and Merryman (2010) implicate excessive screen time (TV, videogames, and social media) as a potential obstacle in nurturing creativity in children. Sternberg (as cited in Wagner, 2012) intimates that “the problem is that schools sometimes treat [creativity] as a bad habit” as opposed to something that should be encouraged (Wagner, 2012, p. 17). He suggests that four year olds are continuously asking questions and are curious about how things function, but already by age 6.5, they learn that their teachers require the “correct” answer rather than the more provocative questions.

Fortunately, some countries are recognizing how crucial it is to proactively nurture creativity and innovation in their youth. In 2010, *Bloomberg Businessweek* revealed that Asian companies comprised 15 of the top 50 “most innovative companies” in the world. This is undoubtedly related to China’s push to compel all colleges to teach entrepreneurship and to focus less on standardized testing and more on creativity (Wagner, 2012, p. 4). Despite the aforementioned decline in nurturing schoolchildren’s creativity in the U.S., a 2008 Conference Board Report claimed that “U.S. employers rate creativity and innovation among the top five skills that will increase in importance over the next five years. Moreover, stimulating innovation and creativity and enabling entrepreneurship are among the top 10 challenges of CEOs in the U.S. (Wagner, 2012, p. 5). Finally, a 2011 Survey of over one thousand senior business executives from twelve countries revealed the following: 1) 95% of respondents contend that innovation is the principal lever for a more competitive national economy and 88% suggest that innovation is the optimal way to create jobs in their country, 2) 69% acceded that “today innovation is more driven by people’s creativity than by high-level scientific research,” and 3.) 77% agreed: “the greatest innovations of the 21st century will be those that have helped to address human needs more than those that had procured the most profit (Wagner, 2012, p. 6). The *Realabilities* TV Show and Comic Book Series Intervention, highlighted in this chapter, will attempt to accomplish this exact feat of utilizing a creative and innovative medium to address an area of significant human need pertaining to enhancing the knowledge and sensitivity of school children towards individuals with disabilities.

**Big C, Little C, and Mini-C Creativity**

If the constructs of creativity and innovation are so crucial to entrepreneurship, to job creation and to an overall more competitive national economy, it is useful to define creativity and to specify the nuances of this important construct. Sternberg, Lubart, Kaufman and Pretz (2005) define creativity as the ability to produce work that is novel (original, unexpected), high in quality and appropriate (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2007). Kelley & Kelley (2013) describe creativity as a capacity that is attainable by all individuals, as opposed to solely achievable by artists or “creative types.” The researchers suggest that any human act that achieves something new is referred to as a creative act, regardless of whether what is created is a physical object or some mental or emotional construct that lives within the person who created it and is known only by him or her (Vygotsky, 1967). Creativity is also thought to be necessary for solving pressing social issues (Sawyer, 2012).

So how do we distinguish the renowned Mozarts and Van Goghs from the everyday creative movers and shakers? Creativity has often been classified into the categories of Big C and little-c. Big C Creativity consists of clear-cut, eminent creative contributions by the Mozarts and Van Goghs of the world and little-c is deemed useful for recognizing and distinguishing among everyday creative expression. To take it one step further, Kaufman and Beghetto (2007) expanded upon these common categorizations of Big C and little c creativity by adding two additional categories, mini-c and pro-c. The researchers
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