

Chapter 2

Unpacking the Triad of Creativity, Culture, and Development: An Exercise in Relational Thinking

Vlad Petre Glăveanu

Human development is perhaps one of the most fascinating areas of study within psychology since it not only addresses a phenomenon that describes our existence as living beings, marked by the passing of time, but also helps us understand our own psychology for, to really understand human nature, one necessarily has to consider it developmentally. And yet, the study of development has been for long subjected to a narrow reading of what it means to exist as a child and grow into adulthood. A persistent commitment to theories that proposed a more or less fixed, unilinear, timeless, ethnocentric and a-cultural view of development (Burman 1994) was characteristic of theorising in this field and, unfortunately, did not completely disappear. This is despite radical transformations in the 1980s that Bruner and Haste (1987, p. 1) rightfully called the signs of “a quiet revolution” taking place in developmental psychology.

The main shift has been towards considering the child as an active, agentic, competent social being, and not one that is only in the process of becoming, subjected to external influences, powerless in the face of biology or the environment. To know children means, in this new context, not only to experimentally study their cognitive development. It requires one to pay attention to their constant processes of sense making, “an activity that is always situated within a cultural and historical context” (Bruner and Haste 1987, p. 1). Therefore, the child is not an isolated unit that starts off in the domain of the purely biologically to only gradually move into the sphere of society and culture. The process of development is, from the onset, as much cultural as it is biological and trying to determine percentages in this regard is both futile and misleading. Moreover, development is by excellence a creative, constructive process in both a biological and cultural sense. If creativity etymologically derives from the Latin *creatio*, to make or grow, and culture from the Latin *cultura*, to cultivate, then development should be rightfully considered the cultural/cultivation process that helps humans create/make and grow within a world of other cultured, creative agents.

V.P. Glăveanu (✉)
Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark
e-mail: vlad@hum.aau.dk

On Development, Creativity, and Culture

The aim of this chapter is to consider precisely the interrelation between development, creativity, and culture. Although the development of creativity has been a topic of interest for decades in psychology and increasingly more authors raise the issue of development and culture, joining the three together, as the present book does, is not exactly common. This is all the more surprising considering my basic premise here: *not only that development, creativity and culture are deeply connected, but that to understand one without the others is virtually impossible, or at least reductive*. In making this claim I rely on previous scholarship, old and new, that focuses on the relation between development and culture on the one hand, creativity and development on the other. For example, Josephs and Valsiner (2007, p. 49) explicitly state that human development is *culture-inclusive*. For Valsiner (1989, p. 5), “culture-inclusive developmental psychology is a research paradigm that is primarily directed towards explaining how culture organizes the conditions for children’s development, and how children assimilate these conditions, and simultaneously accommodate to them”. For Keith Sawyer, on the other hand, both creativity and development are “processes of emergence in complex systems” (Sawyer 2003, p. 5), which, coupled with the statement above, we can define as complex cultural systems. Through this, Sawyer points to a key binding element in the interrelation of development, creativity, and culture: *Emergence*. The generation of new processes and structures is indeed the defining characteristic of living organisms, from the individual to the collective level, and corresponds to the core of what we understand by creativity. But, one might argue here, development is not only about novelty, it is equally about order and stability, otherwise it would be a chaotic, amorphous reality. This is precisely so and, in agreement with Oliveira and Valsiner (1997, p. 119), I subscribe to the idea that “the basic problem of developmental psychology is how to explain the persistent construction of novelty in the context of the relative conservatism of the developmental process”.

Relational Thinking

The first thing to rethink when approaching this central dilemma is the relationship between novelty and conservatism, between change and stability, the new and the old. A binary, dichotomic type of logic generally drives us to the conclusion that these are opposite processes or states. A relational way of thinking however (see Glăveanu 2012a), encourages a more complex and systemic perspective. Cultural psychology’s view of development illustrates this perfectly as its main concern resides not in delineating the new and the old but theorising their continuous interplay. The essence of development is change over time, but this change is

neither random nor disconnected from the past, it effectively constitutes a creative *continuation* of what exists in ways that constantly bridge the gap between performance and potential, between the here-and-now and the not-yet-here. In the words of Josephs and Valsiner (2007):

Within a truly developmental approach a stable and enduring ‘present’ is a fiction, as what we call ‘presence’ is in fact a steady state, relying on ongoing processes of active generation and regeneration. In other terms, from a developmental perspective a phenomenon never ‘is’, but always ‘becomes’, even if it appears to be identical to itself over time. True stability marks not only the end of any developmental approach, but is in fact absent in any living organism, including human beings and their psychological functioning. This simple insight has far-reaching consequences for psychological research in general, which are, however, to a great extent completely overlooked. (p. 48)

Dynamism needs to be understood at multiple levels, from the microgenesis (emergence in the moment-to-moment course of action and thought), to the ontogenesis (emergence at the level of the life course), socio or culture-genesis (emergence of shared cultural frameworks), and finally phylogenesis (emergence of biological structures). Rather than treating these developmental processes separately, for as different as they are in ‘space’ and ‘time’, we should develop relational, integrative models that reveal how the four ‘paths’ of development are intertwined. Following Valsiner (1997), “through microgenetic processes, ontogenesis is regulated—under the influence of culture-genesis, and on the basis of the species-specific developed biological organism that has emerged in phylogenesis” (p. 169). In this sense, the border between biology and culture becomes blurred when considering them within the genesis of individuals, groups, societies. As Rogoff (2003, p. 3) asserts, “as a biological species, humans are defined in terms of cultural participation”. And it is this perspective of development that I will also take here as a starting point, one that is less concerned with supposed stages or phases and ‘inner’ functions like cognition, emotion, motivation, etc. Instead, together with Rogoff, I will take development to be reflected in, carried by and expressive of the cultural practices and circumstances of the communities children, adults, and elders grow into and participate to.

If human development is necessarily cultural in its unfolding, what exactly is the part creativity plays in this context? To begin with, several authors pointed to the intrinsic nature of this connection by subscribing to Moran and John-Steiner’s (2003, p. 63) observation that development and creativity are dialectically inter-related. In fact, this relation is so deep that Feldman (1999), a well-respected scholar in this area, remarked that “creative accomplishment, after all, is nothing if not a developmental shift (...). Creativity is quintessentially a developmental matter” (Feldman 1999, p. 170). Looking at this relationship from the perspective of development, the focus of any researcher should be on the “emergence of a new structural order of the phenomena from the previous state” (Valsiner 1997, p. 3), in other words, creative production. But is it possible or desirable to *equate* all

development with creativity and the other way around? Is there development that is uncreative or acts of creativity with no developmental consequences? To answer this question we need of course to bring to light our implicit assumptions about both phenomena.

Granting Children Creativity

One typical objection towards considering creativity as development is related to the supposed intentionality of creative acts compared to the less controllable nature of developmental changes. While it is true that deliberate novelty is an example of creative work, perhaps the most visible and/or celebrated work of this type, creativity exists also in acts of improvisation and habitual activity (see Glăveanu 2012b). To reduce creative expression merely to what the person wants or intends to do means to ignore the role of accidents, of serendipity, of chance, as well as isolate creativity at the level of visible outcomes that tend to radically depart from what already exists. Equally, to consider development unintentional altogether would suggest that the person has no role to play in this process, that to develop is something that ‘happens to’ the person rather than engages the person in relation to his or her community, as argued above. If education is what we plan and development is what happens then a huge disconnection is created between human activity and growth. Moreover, children at early stages in their life end up being completely denied any creativity. Vygotsky (1930/1967, cited in Smolucha 1992) was of the opinion that “one of the most important questions of child psychology and pedagogy is the question about creativity in children” (p. 51). And yet, this question has not only been put aside for a long time (Feldhusen 2002), neglected in favour of other topics, like theory of mind, but also often answered in the negative (see Feldman in Sawyer et al. 2003; Csikszentmihalyi in Sawyer et al. 2003). Even today, from a psychological standpoint (perhaps less so for parents and educators), the very notion of the creative child remains controversial (Gardner 1982). Elsewhere (see Glăveanu 2011a), I addressed this issue at length and it suffices to say here that not only for theoretical but practical reasons we need to grant children (the right to) creativity. The alternative would be to perpetuate an image of the passive child, subjected to universal developmental ‘laws’, waiting to grow the necessary abilities of a ‘full’ human being.

Creativity as the Rule of Culture and Development

Curiously, several of these misconceptions derive from a particular way of theorising culture, especially in its relation to development and to creativity. When culture is understood as an external factor, an accumulation of ‘things’ (be they norms, values, practices, objects, and so on), it becomes easy to believe that

children, subjected to this external environment, start ‘assimilating’ cultural artefacts, material and symbolic, and, in time, become better equipped to create new ones. What this conception overlooks is the fact that children do not grow into a culture, they *exist* within culture from the moment they are born and, arguably, long before that (think, for instance, of how future parents construct meaning about their child, how society creates a ‘place’ for children, etc.). When culture is not a thing but a relational process (see also Valsiner 2007), children’s role as actors within this process becomes visible. Age and biological development are certainly crucially important for the ‘parts’ a child can play within his or her immediate sociocultural environment (like the family, the school, the peer group), but the child never fails to participate and ultimately contribute to cultural processes. If culture is indeed an open system (Valsiner 1997), this means that its nature is defined by dynamic relations within and between its components and processes. The cultural system, as a whole, is not only marked or transformed by the revolutionary acts of (adult) creativity; it is continuously re-created by participation in social practices, the defining feature of development as described above. Creativity is not the exception but the *rule of development*. Indeed, we can agree with Jerome Bruner that “the power to recreate reality, to reinvent culture (...) is where a theory of development must begin its discussion of mind” (Bruner 1986, p. 149).

It is this theoretical background that supports the model proposed below (see Fig. 2.1). In this simple depiction, creativity, development, and culture form a triadic, integrated and dynamic unit instead of three separate ‘entities’. Despite its simplicity, there are deep implications for those who try to systematically unpack this unit and understand how it ‘holds together’ and changes over time. My own understanding of these issues, elaborated below, starts from the (cultural psychological) notion of *mediation*. Mainly associated with the work of Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934), the concept of mediation has both a long history and multiple connotations. Sidestepping a lengthy discussion, I will simply consider an element as mediating a relationship when it intervenes, shapes and, most of all, makes possible that very relationship. Following this understanding it becomes clear how, in fact, each one of the three phenomena in Fig. 2.1 actively mediates the connection between the other two. Put simply, the resulting arguments are that: (a) culture mediates the development of creativity; (b) development mediates the creativity–culture relation, and (c) creativity mediates the development of culture. Each one of

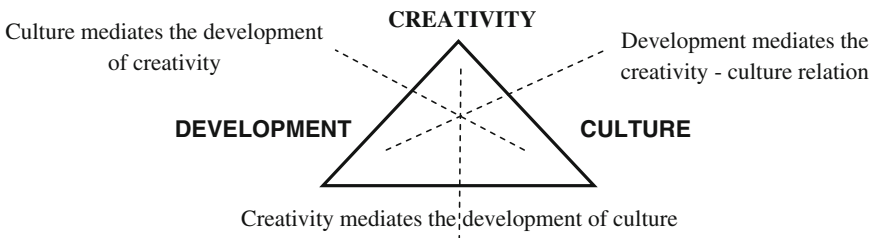


Fig. 2.1 Unpacking the creativity–development–culture triad

these arguments will be discussed in some detail as follows, drawing on foundational scholarship in the field of developmental and cultural psychology, namely the work of Lev Vygotsky, Donald Winnicott, and James Mark Baldwin. All three theorists contributed greatly to our understanding of the child (and adult) as a cultural and creative being.

Culture Mediates the Development of Creativity

There is little doubt today that culture plays a significant part in creative production (Lubart 1999), influencing the resources one uses, the paths taken to generate a creative outcome, and its final reception by the creator and his or her group. Culture is more than a mere context for creativity though, and creativity more than an individual's contribution to culture. To create means to perform *a cultural act* (see Glăveanu 2011b), to be an actor of culture and not just within a culture. This is valid for children as well as adults, all across the developmental spectrum. What does it mean for culture to mediate the development of creativity? First of all, it signifies the fact that creative expression, considered developmentally, is not universal but context-specific. There is no one 'formula' for how children for example employ their creativity, no absolute law escaping the mediating influence of culture and society (in their manifold 'incarnations': as parents and peers, as school topics, as video games and mealtime rituals, etc.). On the other hand, culture fundamentally makes possible the development of creativity by freeing the child and the adult from the immediacy of their surroundings. Symbolic aspects of culture, like language and signs, are crucially important for the very emergence of creative expression and shape its lifelong trajectory. Lev Vygotsky, the Soviet psychologist who is acknowledged as a founding figure of both developmental and cultural psychology, is rightfully considered a champion of this line of theory and research.

The use of Signs and Tools in Symbolic Play

One of Vygotsky's central contributions to our understanding of development more generally can be summarised by his well-known statement that "the path from object to child and from child to object passes through another person" (Vygotsky 1978, p. 30). Making development a social, and by this cultural and historical, affair, Vygotsky managed to challenge individualistic and exclusively cognitive accounts of what it means to mature. He pointed to the role played by others not only for taking care or teaching the child, but effectively mediating his or her connection to the world and its objects. This is why the emergence of signs and symbols and the acquisition of language were a key field of investigation for Lev Vygotsky. Until him, people observed children's first forms of speech and considered them to reflect an egocentric activity, something that is individual and

gradually becomes social, facilitating interpersonal communication more effectively. However, this view falls prey to the misconception of the strict border or demarcation between what is ‘individual’ and what is ‘social’. In fact, language originates *outside* the child and is gradually internalised in interaction with others, becoming inner speech, and not the other way around. Vygotsky’s novel perspective changed not only the direction of this trajectory but our view of one crucial ‘moment’ in the development of any human being: The first use of signs to regulate one’s own action, and of tools to master the external world. In his words:

The child’s use of tools resembles the tool activity of apes only while the child is at the pre-speech stage of development. As soon as speech and the use of symbolic signs are included in the manipulation, it is transformed completely, superseding the former natural laws and engendering for the first time properly human forms of using tools. From the moment the child begins, with the help of speech, to master situations, having preliminarily mastered his own behavior, a radically new organization of behavior arises, as well as new relations to the environment. Here, we are present at the birth of specifically human forms of behavior that, having broken away from animal forms of behavior, subsequently create intellect and then become the basis for work (Vygotsky 2004, p. 525).

For Vygotsky, thus, cultural mediation (with the help of signs and tools) shapes the development of all higher mental functions and forms of activity. Creativity makes no exception in this regard. Its origin is located in the first episodes of symbolic or pretend play, where objects begin to stand for something else, to *symbolise* more than what is immediate in perception. These first signs of creative behaviour are what Vygotsky referred to above as ‘specifically human’ action. In play, “action according to rules begins to be determined by ideas and not by objects themselves” (Vygotsky 1978, p. 97). At the same time, “play is the path of the child’s cultural development and specifically the development of his sign activity” (Vygotsky 2004, p. 564). The first signs used by the child are a mark of culture and it is the increased use of and contact with culture’s multiple resources, within interaction with others, that facilitates the development of creative expression. In essence, the symbolic universe specific for any cultural system frees the child from the here-and-now and creates the possibility for imaginative (re)constructions of the world. Vygotsky was concerned with the issue of imagination and considered it “the basis of any creative activity (...), equally part of all cultural life, including artistic, scientific, and technical creativity” (Vygotsky 1930/1967 cited in Smolucha 1992, p. 52). But what exactly is the developmental path of imagination?

Internalisation and the Zone of Proximal Development

For Vygotsky, it is precisely pretend play and object substitution that become internalised in the form of fantasy and imagination (Moran and John-Steiner 2003, p. 68). Moreover, the child’s capacity to imagine doesn’t reach its peak, as lay understandings claim, during preschool years, only to be later on suppressed by schooling and socialisation. On the contrary, it is when imagination and thinking in concepts become articulated, something characteristic for adolescence and

adulthood, that significant artistic and scientific creative outputs become possible (Smolucha 1992). What is important to note, for our discussion of creativity and culture, is the role of *internalisation processes* for the development of a fantasy world in the case of children. It would be highly misleading to consider internalisation the process by which something from the ‘outside’ (a sign or a capacity exercised interpersonally) gets ‘brought into’ the psychological system of a person by means of an almost passive act of copying. Many authors corrected such a misunderstanding by consistently underlining the active and creative nature of both internalisation and externalisation processes. For Lawrence and Valsiner (2003), the interplay between the two, which essentially captures the dynamic relation between person and environment, “guarantees both innovation and predictability in human minds and in their social contexts” (p. 749). This kind of perspective differentiates between a deterministic and constructivist model of development and socialisation. For Corsaro (1997, p. 18), children’s socialisation is described by what he called ‘interpretive reproduction’, a phrase that integrates both the creative and normative aspects of learning one’s culture and contributing to it.

In concluding, culture, as expressed in the use of signs and tools, mediates the development of creativity. In fact, as Vygotsky rightfully points out, there would be no creative or imaginative expression outside the acquisition of symbolic forms of action and their development over time. Play has a crucial role in this process and, as we will see in the next section, it bridges the gap between early acts of the child and celebrated creations of humankind, all grounded in the capacity to culturally mediate our contact with the world. But this mediation is not deterministic. Children are, from the very beginning, agentic users of signs and tools aimed at controlling both self and the environment. “The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” is what Vygotsky (1978, p. 86) famously referred to as the ‘*zone of proximal development*’. This powerful metaphor captures the enormous area of potential or possibility characteristic for human action at all ages, and its reliance on social interaction and cultural resources. It is also a metaphor for creativity, which can be said to emerge when children and adults make developmental breakthroughs but also, as a function, itself represents “a lifelong zone of proximal development” (Moran and John-Steiner 2003, p. 78) and, I would argue, anticipating the next sections, a zone of proximal development for culture itself.

Development Mediates the Relation Between Creativity and Culture

Creativity and culture are related developmentally. The only way to understand how creative acts are cultural acts is to consider them in their evolution and dynamic over time. In fact, the study of creativity as a purely individual, largely a-cultural function goes hand in hand with its understanding as a universal, static,

thus a-developmental phenomenon. In contrast, a study of the socio, onto, or micro-genesis of creativity necessarily considers its dependence on and contribution to a cultural system (again at a macro or micro level). This is clear for ontogenesis or the developmental history of the person and the scholarship of Donald Winnicott makes here a significant contribution to our understanding of the creativity–culture dyad at an early age. Winnicott, an English paediatrician and psychoanalyst, was concerned with the first stages of development in the case of children, and their gradual emergence as cultural actors. His writing reveals thus “the infant’s journey from absolute dependence, through relative dependence, to independence, and, in parallel, the infant’s journey from the pleasure principle to the reality principle, and from autoerotism to object relationships” (Winnicott 1960, p. 42). This is the path leading the child towards the *non-me* world of object and others, towards decentering his or her own perspective and understanding the existence of other positions. Precisely at the moment when children are capable of symbolic mediation, when they start using the first signs (something that Winnicott describes as transitional objects, see below), both creativity and culture become possible. Culture since the contact with the world is marked from then on by the use of signs, and creativity because the defining characteristic of the creative act is its capacity to create, combine and manipulate signs.

The Third or Potential Space

Fundamental for the psychology of Winnicott (1971) is the notion of a *third or potential space*. Sidestepping an old and harmful dichotomy in the discipline between the psychological, inner world, and the outside environment, he points to a third area of experience specific for what it means to exist as a human being. “The place where cultural experience is located is the potential space between the individual and the environment (originally the object)” (Winnicott 1971, p. 100). This third space is the world of cultural symbols and norms that, from a Vygotskian perspective (see previous section), come to regulate both the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ worlds. This is also the space of creativity since this third area of existence is associated also with the “intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work” (Winnicott 1971, p. 14). In other words, cultural production is placed at the intersection between person and world, it is precisely the *encounter* between the two that never fully takes place ‘within’ the person just as it doesn’t happen ‘outside’ of the person either. The important question is how, developmentally, does this third space come to be?

The baby’s confidence in the mother’s reliability, and therefore in that of other people and things, makes possible a separating-out of the not-me and the me. At the same time, however, it can be said that separation is avoided by the filling in of the potential space with creative playing, with the use of symbols, and with all that eventually adds up to a cultural life. (Winnicott 1971, p. 109)

For Winnicott, just as for Vygotsky, the developmental path from child to world goes through another person, in particular the caretaker (he refers mostly to the role of the mother). However, if Vygotsky emphasised the mediating nature of this relationship, Winnicott is fundamentally concerned with its emotional quality. As the passage above reflects, he considered that the most important characteristic to be developed in the child–adult relationship is *trust* (in the mother’s love). The separation from the mother causes anxiety and it is a first evidence of the fact that the child exists within a non-me environment that is not always ready to satisfy his/her needs. The only way this ‘traumatic’ experience can be surpassed is by developing a symbol of the union with the mother, effectively the first expression of symbolic activity, which comes to constitute the potential space. This symbol of union is typically an object (toy, blanket, etc.) the child becomes attached to, that stands in for the mother’s breast. It is a deeply emotional symbol of overcoming distance or absence. The toy becomes what Winnicott famously referred to as a ‘transitional object’, a first possession with a crucial developmental role. Between 4 and 12 months, broadly (Winnicott deliberately left room for plenty of inter-individual variations), transitional phenomena stand at the root of symbolism and, later, of creative activity. For him, “when we witness an infant’s employment of a transitional object, the first not-me possession, we are witnessing both the child’s first use of a symbol and the first experience of play” (Winnicott 1971, p. 96).

Creativity and Culture in Play

Again in a striking parallel with Vygotsky’s thinking, Winnicott believed that there is a direct connection between play and cultural experience. Also, for him, “in playing, and perhaps only in playing, the child or adult is free to be creative” (Winnicott 1971, p. 53). This is how, once more, the three elements that concern us here are reunited: Creativity, culture, development. What is essential for the scholarship of this author though is the idea that creativity and culture are *twin-born* in the first uses of symbolic means during episodes of play. They share the same developmental origin. In his words: “cultural experience begins with creative living first manifested in play” (Winnicott 1971, p. 100). The way in which Winnicott understood creativity however differs from what is commonly referred to when using this term: accomplished creators and creations with a visible social value. The creativity that concerned him was universal and belonged to being alive, it was in fact an expression of being a living organism capable of signification and existing within the world of culture.

I discussed Winnicott’s contribution to our understanding of both creativity and culture elsewhere (see Glăveanu 2009) and here what is important to emphasise are his ideas about how, developmentally, creative expression relates to cultural experience. A key role in this intersection is played by the first use of signs, what Gardner also rightfully called “the greatest imaginative leap of all” (Gardner 1982, p. 170). The psychoanalytical tones of Winnicott’s thought are obvious and they

add to our conception the centrality of emotional connections between self and other, the very relation that facilitates this notable achievement. Since “a baby cannot exist alone, but is essentially part of a relationship” (Winnicott 1978, p. 88), we need to focus also on what Winnicott described as the ‘good-enough mother’ or parental figure, adaptive for the child’s development because of love. The consequences of poor parenting are enormous for the development of the child, including his or her capacity to create and, ultimately, to participate in and contribute to culture. It is, finally, this role of creativity to shape the cultural environment and its development that I turn to in the next section.

Creativity Mediates the Development of Culture

Completing our inquiry into the triadic and mediated relationship between creativity, development, and culture, we need to consider lastly how creative expression actively shapes cultural phenomena and their unfolding in time. From a sociocultural perspective, people inherit practices invented by others. People also contribute to these practices, perfect and master them, and, at times, transform them (Rogoff 2003). Moreover, if enculturation from early ages of development presupposes ‘acquiring’ meanings, values, action scripts and so on, this process is never without a potential for ‘inquiring’, for changing them more or less radically (Shimahara 1970). What is important is that inquiring happens *during* acquiring and so there is no disjunction between learning and practicing, including at the level of childhood. It might be difficult for some to conceive of children as active and creative social agents in the cultural arena (Corsaro 1997), but this becomes clearly obvious for a cultural psychologist who understands development through the prism of participation in social practices. It is indeed the case that,

as children move across settings that involve different formats for participation, they actively engage in variable way relating their own repertoire of practice. This concept helps to focus on children’s own agency in selecting, rejecting, and transforming multiple ways of engaging in the world. In the process, children in turn contribute to the formation of the routines and practices available to the next generation. (Rogoff 2003, pp. 491–192)

In order to appreciate this perspective we need to return, once more, to Vygotsky’s emphasis on processes of internalisation and consider them, as Lawrence and Valsiner (1993, p. 152) do, “not seen as an automatic copying or transmitting operation, but, instead, as one involving coordination of the new with the old, and restructuring of both”. From early on, children prove to be both active and constructive in their interaction with the cultural world (Valsiner 1997), which does not mean that they are not actively shaped by it in turn. In fact, a *bidirectional model* of socialisation (Kuczynski et al. 1997) describes best this dynamic reality by pointing to the double exchange taking place between person and environment. As such, by adopting these theoretical lenses, socialisation becomes “not only a matter of adaptation and internalization, but also a process of appropriation, reinvention, and reproduction” (Corsaro and Eder 1990, p. 217).

Persistent Imitation as Creative Action

While all of these points about the role of creativity within the development of cultural practices are informative in their own right, what we need is an actual theoretical framework that can encompass the *whole* range of cultural changes, from micro alterations to macro transformations, within a developmental perspective. This is what the American philosopher and psychologists James Mark Baldwin offered as a seminal contribution at the turn of the last century. To understand how this bridging of levels is possible we need to start first from Baldwin's description of early development which, complementing Vygotsky and Winnicott's interest in the emergence of the symbolic function, focuses on the *action* of the child. What Baldwin (1894) noticed is that young children distinguish themselves as great imitators. They imitate by repeating actions, something he referred to as 'circular reactions', which reproduce their own stimulus. For as simple and repeated as these expressions seem, they are in fact crucial for the development of the mind and Baldwin famously considered imitation as the law of the progressive interaction between organism and its environment. What is important to note here is the word 'progressive'. Indeed, a circular reaction is as much a re-enactment of an action (a re-action) as it is a form of *pro-action* (Valsiner 2000). In reality, a close look at this fundamental process would show us that there are no two repetitions alike since the first act changes the context for the second act. This is how, instead of falling prey to an easy association between imitation and lack of creativity, Baldwin's insightful writings describe precisely the opposite, that circular reactions constantly produce novelty, especially when they take the form of 'persistent imitation', a form of constructive experimentation with the elements of the environment. The outcomes of persistent imitation are not reproductions of a model but variations of it, a clear proof of the creative potential embedded within children's action.

Habit and Accommodation

Baldwin did not end his developmental theory at the level of early childhood though. Instead, he offered a broader framework into which imitation and creativity (or, better said, imitation *as* creativity) can be integrated. At a higher level he identified and studied the interplay between two general principles, that of habit, grounded in the repetitive cycles of action referred to also above, and that of accommodation, the innovative breaking of habit (Baldwin 1903). Once more, these terms seem at first to resonate with a certain understanding of habit as the antithesis of creativity (see Glăveanu 2012b), the principle that leads to stability, even stagnation within the life of individuals and of the society. And yet, for Baldwin, accommodation can only take place on the basis of habit, being "in each case simply the result and fruit of the habit itself which is exercised" (Baldwin 1903, p. 117). And he goes on to say that "every new thing is an adaptation, and

every adaptation arises right out of the bosom of old processes and is filled with old matter” (p. 118). We can notice the same logic of the circular reaction applied, on a much larger scale, to the dynamic between habit and accommodation, something that comes to reinforce the idea that creativity is an ever-present potential in human action, including in the seemingly imitative gestures of children. Indeed, “the child, or the man, must be a facile imitator before he can be an inventor. (...) He must, by constant self-imitation, practise the combinations he already knows, and by so doing come to see the possible forms of novelty into which the materials may be cast” (Baldwin 1902, p. 572).

To sum up, how can these actions have the potential to shape the development of culture? For Baldwin, the child is neither imitator nor inventor, it is *both* at once. Moreover, what we tend to look down on as simple reproductive behaviours on the part of children (or adults), are in fact precious stepping stone on the path to high-level creativity. Baldwin’s (1902) inspiring metaphor for this is that imitation is the natural schoolmaster of invention. This is valid both in the case of personal and societal creativity and the development of any cultural system, from that of a family or classroom to that of a whole community, depends on this developmental accumulation of habits and repetitive gestures, especially since all repetition is, in practice, repetition with a *difference*.

Conclusion: Thinking Relationally About Development, Creativity, and Culture

In a recent article (see Glăveanu 2012a) I argued that what we need in the psychology of creativity is more relational thinking and the overcoming of a series of deeply seated dichotomies that prevent us from observing the actual continuities and holistic nature of the phenomena we study. When it comes to considering the triad between development, creativity and culture, some of the most harmful dichotomies we need to challenge are those discussed in the previous sections: individual versus social, symbolic versus material, inner world versus outer world, imitation versus invention, and so on. The model proposed in Fig. 2.1 starts by positioning all three elements in relation to each other and continues with a discussion of how each one has a determining role to play in the inter-relation between the other two. Drawing on the foundational scholarship of important figures within psychology, psychoanalysis and philosophy, like Lev Vygotsky, Donald Winnicott, and James Mark Baldwin, we were able to observe how the child’s development of the capacity to symbolise, having a strong emotional basis and a deep connection to action (e.g., circular reactions), constitutes *simultaneously* a creative and cultural achievement. We might even push this argument further and conclude that one can never conceive of creativity without culture and the other way around, and cannot think about their interdependence outside a developmental perspective.

To think relationally means to think *developmentally*. It also means to accept paradoxes and even entertain contradiction as a way of productively dealing with complex, real-life phenomena. And what can be more complex than the development of creativity within a cultural context? Valsiner (1997, p. 323) shrewdly notes that the course of human development is “deterministically indeterministic”, it specifies constraints which are, in the end, the basis for novel, surprising constructions and trajectories. There is both stability and instability, familiarity and unfamiliarity, permanence and change across the lifespan, and the necessary interplay between the two can only be fruitfully theorised in a relational manner, as phases of a unitary process. Following Baldwin, we can go even further and say that these stages hold in fact the kernels of the opposite tendency.

What is the practical relevance of this inquiry? Adopting a sociocultural perspective on development, creativity, and culture has deep implications not only for how we get to understand children and their activity, but also how we relate to them and foster their creative expression. For a long time our image of the development of creativity has been marked by the notion of ‘*creativity slumps*’ once children enter school and particularly during the fourth grade (Torrance 1967). While there are some individual differences in this regard (Charles and Runco 2001), the general view of artistic development, for example, takes the shape of a U curve, going from high potential during preschool years, to a decrease in creative expression from which only a few children later ‘recover’ (Gardner 1982). To begin with, this perspective doesn’t account for the “multiple trajectories of development” (Valsiner 1997) available to the person or the role the person has as an agent of his/her own development. The path of creativity might present slumps and peaks (Charles and Runco 2001), or proceed in zigs and zags (Gardner 1982), but these stand out so radically only when we are unable to see that creativity never ‘disappears’ but changes its quality of expression during development to accommodate changing ways of relating to the social and cultural world.

In the end, developmental, cultural, and creativity theory have a deep impact on the very reality of growing up by making us more sensitive to certain aspects of this reality and oblivious to others. But what we must remember at all times is that psychological theory itself “grows out of the life and the conditions of culture” (Bruner 1999, p. 232) and this is very much valid when it comes to ideas about children’s development (Valsiner 1997). Theorising childhood is not only a scientific but a cultural, historical, institutional, and political act and this observation is not to be denied, hidden or fought against but carefully reflected upon. The greatest danger lies in the perverse tendency of developmental models to pass from describing what ‘*is*’ to deciding what ‘*ought to be*’. There is never a ‘more’ versus ‘less’ correct perspective on development but there are views that actively fail to grasp the creative and cultural nature of what it means to be human, including to be a child. Towards dispelling such misconceptions, the present chapter hopes to have made a modest contribution.

Acknowledgements The author would like to express his gratitude for support received from the Niels Bohr Centre for Cultural Psychology and the Qualitative Studies group at Aalborg University, Denmark, as well as the research group Education and Diversity International (EDI), in the process of formulating and writing this chapter.

References

- Baldwin, J. M. (1894). Imitation: A chapter in the natural history of consciousness. *Mind*, 3(9), 26–55.
- Baldwin, J. M. (Ed.). (1902). *Dictionary of philosophy and psychology*. New York: MacMillan.
- Baldwin, J. M. (1903). *Mental development in the child and the race: Methods and processes* (2nd ed.). London: Macmillan & Co.
- Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, J. (1999). Infancy and culture: A story. In S. Chaiklin, M. Hedegaard, & U. J. Jensen (Eds.), *Activity theory and social practice: Cultural-historical approaches* (pp. 225–234). Aarhus: Aarhus University Press.
- Bruner, J., & Haste, H. (1987). Introduction. In J. Bruner & H. Haste (Eds.), *Making sense: The child's construction of the world* (pp. 1–25). London: Routledge.
- Burman, E. (1994). *Deconstructing developmental psychology*. London: Routledge.
- Charles, R. E., & Runco, M. A. (2001). Developmental trends in the evaluative and divergent thinking of children. *Creativity Research Journal*, 13(3&4), 417–437.
- Corsaro, W. A. (1997). *The sociology of childhood*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Corsaro, W. A., & Eder, D. (1990). Children's peer cultures. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 16, 197–220.
- Feldhusen, J. F. (2002). Creativity: The knowledge base and children. *High Ability Studies*, 13(2), 179–183.
- Feldman, D. H. (1999). The development of creativity. In R. Sternberg (Ed.), *Handbook of creativity* (pp. 169–186). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gardner, H. (1982). *Art, mind, and brain: A cognitive approach to creativity*. New York: Basic Books.
- Glăveanu, V. P. (2009). The cultural genesis of creativity. *Revista de Psihologie Școlară*, 2(4), 50–63.
- Glăveanu, V. P. (2011a). Children and creativity: A most (un)likely pair? *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 6, 122–131.
- Glăveanu, V. P. (2011b). Creativity as cultural participation. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 41(1), 48–67.
- Glăveanu, V. P. (2012a). From dichotomous to relational thinking in the psychology of creativity: A review of great debates. *Creativity and Leisure: An Intercultural and Cross-disciplinary Journal*, 1(2), 2012, 83–96.
- Glăveanu, V. P. (2012b). Habitual creativity: Revising habit, reconceptualizing creativity. *Review of General Psychology*, 16(1), 78–92.
- Josephs, I. E., & Valsiner, J. (2007). Developmental science meets culture: Cultural developmental psychology in the making. *European Journal of Developmental Science*, 1(1), 47–64.
- Kuczynski, L., Marshall, S., & Schell, K. (1997). Value socialization in a bidirectional context. In J. E. Grusec & L. Kuczynski (Eds.), *Parenting and the internalization of values: A handbook of contemporary theory* (pp. 23–50). New York: Wiley.
- Lawrence, J. A., & Valsiner, J. (1993). Conceptual roots of internalization: From transmission to transformation. *Human Development*, 36, 150–167.
- Lawrence, J. A., & Valsiner, J. (2003). Making personal sense: An account of basic internalization and externalization processes. *Theory & Psychology*, 13(6), 723–752.

- Lubart, T. (1999). Creativity across cultures. In R. Sternberg (Ed.), *Handbook of creativity* (pp. 339–350). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moran, S., & John-Steiner, V. (2003). Creativity in the making: Vygotsky's contemporary contribution to the dialectic of development and creativity. In R. K. Sawyer, et al. (Eds.), *Creativity and development* (pp. 61–90). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Oliveira, Z. M. R., & Valsiner, J. (1997). Play and imagination: The psychological construction of novelty. In A. Fogel, M. C. D. P. Lyra, & J. Valsiner (Eds.), *Dynamics and indeterminism in developmental and social processes* (pp. 119–133). Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sawyer, R. K. (2003). Introduction. In R. K. Sawyer, et al. (Eds.), *Creativity and development* (pp. 3–11). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sawyer, R. K. et al. (2003). Key issues in creativity and development. Prepared by all authors. In R. K. Sawyer et al. (Eds.), *Creativity and development* (pp. 217–242). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shimahara, N. (1970). Enculturation—A reconsideration. *Current Anthropology*, 11(2), 143–154.
- Smolucha, F. (1992). A reconstruction of Vygotsky's theory of creativity. *Creativity Research Journal*, 5(1), 49–67.
- Torrance, E. P. (1967). *Understanding the fourth grade slump in creative thinking* (Report No. BR-5-0508; CRP-994). Washington, DC: US Office of Education.
- Valsiner, J. (1989). General introduction: How can developmental psychology become 'culture inclusive'? In J. Valsiner (Ed.), *Child development in cultural context* (pp. 1–8). Toronto: Hogrefe and Huber Publishers.
- Valsiner, J. (1997). *Culture and the development of children's action: A theory of human development* (2nd ed.). New York: John Wiley.
- Valsiner, J. (2000). *Culture and human development: An introduction*. London: Sage.
- Valsiner, J. (2007). *Culture in minds and societies*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Edited by M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner & E. Souberman. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (2004). *The essential Vygotsky*. In R. W. Rieber & D. K. Robinson (Eds.). New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1960). The theory of the parent-infant relationship. In D. W. Winnicott (Ed.), *The maturational processes and the facilitating environment: Studies in the theory of emotional development* (pp. 37–55). London: Karnac.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1971). *Playing and reality*. London: Routledge.
- Winnicott, D. W. (1978). *The child, the family and the outside world*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books.



<http://www.springer.com/978-981-287-635-5>

Creativity, Culture, and Development

Tan, A.-G.; Perleth, C. (Eds.)

2015, XVIII, 256 p. 14 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-981-287-635-5