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Creativity in Everyday Life

Creativity is often seen as a skill reserved for artists, inventors, engineers, or “idea people.” In reality it plays a major role in every human’s day to day life. From problem solving to learning new skills, creativity gives us the ability to adapt and improve. According to Dr. Robert E. Fraken in their article “What is Creativity?”, creativity involves both originality and effectiveness. It requires you to be open to new ideas and for you to be comfortable with the unknown and ambiguous. In the article “Why is Creativity Important in Everyday Life” by Betsy Roe, Roe emphasizes that creativity helps people express themselves and navigate uncertainty. I chose the articles “[How I Taught My Son to Bake – And What You Can Learn from It](#),” and “[Don’t Capture Ideas. Play With Them](#),” both by Jeffery Baumgartner as they prove that not only can creativity be learned, it is essential that teachers, parents, and employers know how to foster creativity in those under them in order to succeed.

In his article “How I Taught My Son to Bake – And What You Can Learn from It,” Baumgartner recalls how he taught his son to bake through allowing him to experiment and learn through trial and error rather than direct instruction. He and his son picked out a cookie recipe for his son to follow and left him to figure it out on his own other than answering his questions. The result of his son’s first attempt was not sweet, and rather than telling him directly that he forgot sugar, he asked the guided question “why might that be?” This allowed for his son to reflect upon his own performance using logic and reasoning, which in turn caused the lessons he learned from this first attempt to stick in his memory better. Baumgartner uses this example to highlight the importance of letting people learn by doing and making mistakes rather than through direct, supervised direction or micro-management. In the case of facilitating the learning of your child as a parent, he highlights how this method shows that you trust your child and avoids any blows to self-esteem that may come from correcting them before they have even had the chance to try out their ideas. In the case of a manager overseeing a group of employees, he notes that a manager’s approach to a problem may not be the best approach, and letting your employees experiment allows them to find areas of improvement that they may otherwise have not been able to find in the absence of experimentation.

As an educator, I found that Baumgartner’s main ideas reflect my own experiences teaching my students. Coding, the subject I specialize in, is an iterative creative process much like cooking is. More than half of the sentences I speak at my job are guiding questions designed to make my students reflect upon the code they wrote and think about how they might do it better next time. Very early in my time as a tutor, I found that this approach promoted a deeper understanding of our projects and the wider coding principles we use in them than if I gave them a tutorial. Baumgartner also mentions the importance of “keeping your mouth shut” when your child, student, or employee is making a mistake until after they have made it. This allows for them to see the direct cause and effect of the creative and engineering choices they have made and reflect on what they might be able to improve upon in the future. His comments about how my solution may not be the best one also match my experience. The number of times one of my students has had a better idea than I have is both a humbling experience and an excellent opportunity to learn from them.

In his article “Don’t Capture Ideas. Play With Them,” Baumgartner challenges the common advice to always capture creative ideas immediately, arguing that this strategy can cause the creative

process to come to a screeching halt. He elaborates by explaining that committing idea to paper or whiteboard can make them seem final and fixed, which is the opposite of what you want at the beginning of any creative project. He likens the process of playing with your ideas to playing with Lego bricks, saying that our ideas should be the “building blocks” of our greater creative vision, rather than finished products or projects. He then goes on to explain how businesses stifle creativity among their engineers, artists, writers, and other creatives by making every small idea into a product, rather than letting them evolve into a bigger idea through play and experimentation.

I found that once again Baumgartner’s ideas mirror my own experience. Throughout my time in grade school, we did an activity called the Spaghetti Tower Marshmallow Challenge. The class was split into teams and given uncooked spaghetti and mini-marshmallows. The team that can build the tallest, free-standing structure with the materials provided wins. I noticed that as I aged, the challenge got harder. This was because the older our class got, the longer we spent brainstorming rather than actually playing with the materials, and thus our results got worse the older we got. This also reflects my experiences in software engineering. I find that I get the best results when I just play around with my ideas rather than trying to make sure I have planned everything before jumping into a project.

I think that both of these articles highlight incredible important ideas about the creative process that I wholeheartedly agree with. “How I Taught My Son To Bake” highlights the importance of a teacher, mentor, or manager that gives those under them the room to iterate and make mistakes. Doing so fosters independence, trust, and confidence in those learning under you. The ideas discussed here very closely mirror my existing teaching style. As such, I think that the ideas discussed in “Don’t Capture Ideas...” are more applicable to my self improvement. I cannot count the number of projects I either abandoned or didn’t even start because I got too caught up planning rather than playing. I really like the analogy of each idea being a Lego piece, as I spent a large amount of time playing with them as a child. I will be taking the ideas discussed here and using them to improve how I interact with the creative side of my mind.