

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 111 724

SO 008 564

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 TITLE Creativity and the Samoan Student.
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 PUB DATE [75]
 NOTE 31p.

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.76 HC-\$1.95 Plus Postage
 DESCRIPTORS Anthropology; *Conformity; *Creative Development;
 Creative Expression; *Creativity; Cross Cultural
 Studies; Cultural Environment; Cultural Factors;
 *Culture Conflict; Elementary Secondary Education;
 Originality; *Role Conflict; Self Expression; Social
 Influences; Student Development
 IDENTIFIERS Samoa

ABSTRACT

The conflict between Samoan culture and the development of creativity among Samoan students is examined. Creativity is defined as the process of sensing gaps, finding a means of effecting closure, and formulating hypotheses to eventually produce a novel product. The greater the pressure to conform, however, no matter what the source, the fewer the individuals who can preserve their creative functioning. The extent to which a culture encourages diversity and tolerates individual deviation affects this creative development. Samoan culture has relatively few discontinuities. Roles are assumed at birth and rarely change throughout life. Obedience to those higher in authority and power over those slightly smaller or younger is consistently upheld. There is a great lack of stimulation which might produce changes. Pressures are brought to bear when any tendency to change appears. However, the one major source of discontinuity is the impact of United States culture. The conflict between the two cultures creates extreme frustration among young Samoan students and leads to a high dropout rate in Samoan schools. Samoan educators are encouraged to be highly sensitive to creative students' needs in order to decrease the role conflict of Samoan students. (Author/DE)

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CREATIVITY AND THE SAMOAN STUDENT

In spite of the importance of creativity avowed by philosophers over the centuries, this aspect of human functioning has only recently begun to be considered worthy of concentrated study by psychologists. As Torrance has indicated in his survey of the psychological literature of creativity, the topic received mention as early as 1898, but only within the past decade has attention been anything other than sporadic.¹

Singer mentioned the possibility of investigating the psychological consequences of the various cultural changes which people in other cultures experience as a result of contact with western civilization. The vast majority of individuals in every society were so plastic as to form the mould for that society's culture pattern.²

Many writers included in their work an attempt to define creativity. In a review of these, Rhodes suggested that out of over fifty definitions that he collected, he could differentiate four classifications of meanings in terms of (1) person, (2) process, (3) press (interaction between human beings and their environment), and (4)

products as embodiments of ideas.³

Somewhat of a combination of these elements is embodied in the definition taken from Stein and used in this paper. That is, creativity is a process of sensing gaps, calling attention to these gaps and finding a means of effecting closure. The process involves alternative hypothesis making and testing, and results in an end product which is a novel work accepted as tenable or useful or satisfying by a group at some time.⁴

Novelty is, in the sense, that the creative product did not exist previously in precisely the same form. It arises from an integration of already existing materials or knowledge, but when it is completed it contains elements that are new. The extent to which a work is novel depends on the extent to which it deviates from the traditional or the status quo.⁵

Mead characterized the culture of Samoa as rigid, demanding of conformity and resistant to change.⁶ This relative stability combined with the aspects peculiar to the culture presents a problem worth investigating if the youths of American Samoa are to be guided with the

development of their creative thinking abilities. Doubly important is Hulbeck's belief that the ability of a culture to survive depends upon its pressure against the creative ability of its members.⁷

In any human society at any time and place and at any stage of cultural development there is presumably the same average percentage of potentially creative individuals. To give a fair chance to the cultivation of this potentially creative portion is a matter of life and death for any society. The Creator has withheld from Man the shark's teeth, the bird's wings, the elephant's trunk, and hound's or horse's racing feet. The creative power planted in a minority of mankind has to do duty for all the marvelous physical assets that are built into every specimen of Man's non-human fellow creatures. If society fails to foster this potential creative urge poses by its minority or stubbornly stifling it, Man is losing his birthright of being the lord of creation and is gaining in grounds to be the least effective species on the face of the earth.⁸

Razik reporting on Torrance's study pointed out that cultural factors strongly influencing this process of sensing gaps, finding a means of effecting closure, formulating hypotheses

to eventually produce a novel product. He also stated that it was possible for teachers, educational methods and materials, and parents to make real differences in the creative development of children.⁹

Mussen and Kagan confirmed in their study with a group of conformists and independents that extreme conformity and submissiveness were traced back to people with overly rigid and extremely punitive parents. People who were conceived to be independent in their behavior had parents with less severe parental discipline.¹⁰

Working with a group of college senior girls, a group of research scientists and a group of architects, Crutchfield concluded that a group of girls selected on the basis of conformity scored low on test of creativity; a group of research scientists who were less highly rated on originality scored high on conformity; and there was a tendency for a group of architects with low creativity to score high on conformity and those with high creativity to score low on conformity.¹¹

Cattell and Butcher credited the novel work of citizens who are more willing to take calculated and long-range risks; and are willing to test limits to societies with flexibly

minded citizens, who are able to develop creative and constructive solutions to problems of government, can expect to progress by peaceful evolution instead of staggering through revolutions.¹²

This is certainly not to minimize the influence of human basic needs and motivations. Quite often in the past, differences in political outlook could easily be compromised through some novel discovery had the tendency to step "off the beaten track" not stifled by physical, emotional, and social needs not fully and satisfactory met. This assumption is perhaps substantially supported by conflicts flaring up in lesser developed countries.

The greater the pressure to conform, no matter what the source, the fewer individuals who can preserve their functioning on their highest level. In fact, the suppressing effect or external evaluation is responsible for the denial to the creative person of the opportunity and the right to be himself and open to the world; free to choose and select from the vantage point of his own

capacities, talents, and resources in terms of the person he is. Free enough and, encourageous enough to confirm the fitting and deny the nonfitting. It is of utmost necessity that the student frees himself from nagging anxieties and fear of punishment for having thought of ideas different from those the parents or teachers have. A student without such freedom can hardly be creative.¹³

Although freedom from anxieties and fear is of utmost necessity, the child still will not be freed from strains and stresses of his environment. Maslow's theory of basic human needs engage the child in a constant strive for the essentials of living and at the same time involve in a continuous struggle to maintain himself in the company of his peers.¹⁴

This theory emphasizes creativity in terms of complete character integration. It is the ability to transform ideas into reality---the result of which is self-actualization in the Maslovian sense. For example, it is quite difficult for a child to grasp the full strength of intellectual concepts if he is hungry, neglected, or has other primitive needs unfulfilled. Thus, while it is incumbent upon the child

to develop emergent synthesizing levels, it is, simultaneously, incumbent upon society to see that his prior needs are satiated to the extent that he can devote his energies to intellectual tasks. Simply, the child who is hungry is too concerned with his hunger to learn.

Guilford found in his study that authority prevents creativity and that the boy who was close to his mother and the girl who was close to her father at about age four to seven are both likely to be more creative.¹⁵

In his psychoanalytic study, Freud analyzed that the forces motivating the creative persons are the same forces that drive others to neurosis.¹⁶ Only, the creative person is reality oriented while the neurotic person is fantasy (non-reality) oriented. That creative thoughts derive from elaboration of free rising fantasies and ideas related to day dreaming and childhood play. Creativity, therefore, has its origin in conflict at the subconscious mind where there exists a state of constant imbalance of tension-release, tension-release of pent-up

emotions and restlessness. Schachtel calls this "the person's struggle to either open to outside forces or shut off inside;" while Marksberry calls it the period of incubation or mulling over that results in the flash of insight and elaboration. That is, if the environment were conducive to the development of this reality. If it were not, then, the obvious result would be disastrously suppression of the individual's urge to be himself, thus, detriminting his creative efforts.

In a sense, these strivings may place the child in a stage of constant inbalance and thus nurturing that inner tension-release conflict conducive for the conception of creativity; or, on the contrary as Henry¹⁷ conceived this conflict to be a reason for the child) to abandon all tendencies to heterogeneous behavior becoming a prisoner of that which was to set him free.

Unhampered by prejudices, unvexed by too early conditioning to any one standard, he must come clear-eyed to the choices which lie before him. For upon him and upon him alone lies the burden of choice. And even more

importantly, continued Mead,¹⁸ this child of the future must have an open mind if he is to function creatively. That is, nourishing a full and rich storehouse of experiences and knowledge upon which he draws from in time of his mental discipline; incubate over this during the period of reintegration when he deeply and vivaciously interact with that which temporarily taken over his total existence until such moment when he should victoriously emerge with great jubilation saying "A HA!" and then, followed by the desire to "shine to the darkness." His joy in communicating to others what he created and more joy in the acceptance by others of his novel product. As we said earlier, it takes more than an open mind for a person to go through this entire process. He needs to be divergent in his thinking; he needs to be alone in privacy; he needs to be independent and he needs time above everything else.¹⁹

Stein hypothesized that the extent to which a variety of creative products are developed depends on the extent to which cultural influences permit the development of

both freedom between the individual and his environment and freedom within the individual; and, on the extent to which the culture encourages diversity and tolerates the seeming ambiguity that such diversity suggests. It is only obvious that the impetus of progress in any society is the degree of freedom the minority of creative people has obtained to deviate from that which is traditional and generally accepted.²⁰

A fundamental commitment of the educational program of American Samoa is to prepare each individual for a personally satisfying and socially useful life wherever he chooses to live. The task is inordinately difficult, to say the least, and perhaps impossible of attainment. Inherent in this commitment is the obligation to preserve the cultural heritage and foster the economic well-being of American Samoa.²¹

The need to educate the Samoan youngsters to be consistent with the expressed philosophy of the Samoan system of education presents a dichotomy. The difficulty

in achieving such goals is manifested by the fact that a youngster will first be educated to be able to live in Samoa and secondly, if not simultaneously, educated to be able to live elsewhere in the world. The former is convergent oriented and the latter is divergent oriented.

Barry and Wolf distinctly pointed out the problem inherent in bicultural program of education in that the individual had already engaged in the process of internalized learnings and had therefore become a full-fledged socialized member of his community by the time he entered school.²² In Samoa, the family members are expected to be polite, kind, and generous to each other. Private worlds are almost nonexistent. He lives in the house with no walls, in the village composed of the equally open houses of members of his family. Sharing of cooking and eating utensils in a village is common, and what is owned by one is looked upon as common property. The constant mingling of people which communal life involves and the enormous amount of leisure time available in which to devise "proper" ways of meeting any situations which might

arise in day-to-day existence combine to give rise to the ceremony and conformity demanded of the Samoan. The presentation of food, placement of individuals at meals, height of the house, number of beams in the ceiling, food distribution, time of eating, etc., are all rigidly systematized and must be followed.

Relatives from all the surrounding households play a role in children's lives. Any older relative has the right to demand services, criticize, punish, or interfere in a younger or smaller person's affairs. Punishment is bound up with age. Most often it is the next oldest child who is punished for the misdemeanors of the younger one, because he has responsibility for the younger siblings.

Mead felt that the general casualness, sharing of all possessions, and ease of life have contributed to the extreme lack of affective expression in Samoan life. To this might also be added the danger to the culture which friction and animosity would threaten and the consequent need to keep emotions under control, or to handle them

quickly when they are once aroused. Whatever the reasons, they love quickly, hate quickly, repent readily, and seem genuinely sorry for the wrongs they have committed even though they did them just a few minutes before, and even though they will probably do the same thing again soon.

Although the overall culture allows little divergency, certain areas offer an element of freedom from control. Songs are made up on the spur of the moment. Individuals vie with each other for the privilege of singing their songs and the usual result is that all artists have a chance to demonstrate their talents. No one is too young or too old to participate, and those who are unable to dance usually clown or pantomime.²³

Torrance's paper on discontinuities in a culture as factors in the growth of creative thinking abilities forms a convenient rubric for considering both the total and the sub-cultures in Samoa. His assumption is that a lack of discontinuities, or a smoothness of transition from one stage of life to the next, is conducive to an even growth

of creative abilities. A revision of behavior as one abruptly assumes another role is hypothesized to have a detrimental effect.²⁴

The Samoan culture in general has relatively few discontinuities. Roles are assumed at birth, and rarely change throughout life. Learning of how one must respond to his sexual role is consistent. Likewise, his obedience to those higher in authority, and his power over those slightly smaller or younger is consistent throughout his life. There is no "mine-yours" dichotomy in the Samoan culture. One never finds an isolated family starving or feasting in a village; all are doing and sharing the same thing. Similarly, no "alone-together" or privacy discontinuity exists. In fact, no privacy exists at all.

However, one major source of discontinuity has entered the culture; the impact of another culture. The individual plays a role depending upon his major identification at the moment. When a Samoan student takes his place at a desk in a "palagi" (white man) school, he must play by the palagi's rules. Discontinuities creep in.²⁵

The Samoan culture could be characterized as follows: First, the culture provides no conditions for breaking away from the traditional pattern. There is a great lack of stimulation which might produce changes, and pressures brought to bear when any small tendency to change appears. Mead observed that the Samoan people "watch without boredom, night after night, performances that seem to the foreign eye pleasant but extraordinary repetitive and tedious." Secondly, the Samoan culture tends to reject discontinuities. Any attempts at change made by someone outside the culture typically fails. Very slight changes may be incorporated into the culture, but anything extreme is not assimilated. The measure to elect a Samoan Governor would have been a source of discontinuity. It was defeated three times at the public polls.

Young educated samoans are often rebuked by the older leaders for speaking their minds on issues contradicting samoan cultural values. One particular individual was told harshly by a samoan chief to wear his

shoes and go back to the land where he was educated; that his views were not tolerated in Samoa. Any attempt by the young educated Samoans to express their views on public issues of cultural nature is frowned upon and sneered at by the older chiefs. The rationale for this attitude is that younger people should seek the counsel of the more established and seasoned Samoan chiefs for they know more about the ways of the Samoans. Submission to authority is valued by the Samoans at all age levels.

As a result of this attitude, the culture has changed little in the past few centuries. The assumption is that the impact of another culture brings with it a source of stimulations, and an influx of ideas, thus introducing gaps of discontinuities which consequently lower the level of creative thinking abilities.

Keesing's assessment of the early point of contact of the western and polynesian cultures is still not too far-fetched by our present standards. More than twenty years ago he assessed that

... where two groups concerned have found that each others usages and values meet on some

common ground of understanding and utility, their relations have been on the whole more congenial and mutual adjustments easier than where there is little cultural meeting-ground . . . The aristocratic principle and extended family system typical of Polynesia . . . would have been particularly congenial to the earlier comers because of their similarity to European institutions.²⁶

Mead, on the grassroot level, advocated that the Samoan family and rearing of children was almost, if not completely, different from that of the Western cultures. The organization of the Samoan household eliminated at one stroke, in almost all cases, many of the special situations which were believed productive of undesirable emotional sets. The close relationship between parent and child, which has such a decisive influence upon so many in other civilization, that submission to the parent or defiance of the parent may become dominant pattern of a lifetime, was not found in Samoa. The absence of a real father-mother dichotomy was due to the loosely structured household where there were half a dozen or more adults all constituted authority to the child.

Mead, also, observed that the Samoan education (internalization) which resulted in different attitudes was the place of work and play in the children's lives. Samoan children from the time they were four or five years old performed definite tasks, graded to their strength and intelligence, but still tasks which had a meaning in the structure of the whole society. This meant that they fell right into the "rut", the time they were able to.

Conformity at home is only second to that which they find when they enter school. In school they learn to recite, memorize, and follow along with the group. The extent to which a child conform to the expectations of the teachers dictate his position in the class and knowledge of the materials studied. The "unfortunates" who through inner-directedness, and open-mindedness quite often find themselves punished severely to the point of chronic absentees.

Innovation among the young is a social sin, reported Keesing. If a child fails to cook the meal or the

grass according to the established pattern, he can inevitably expect punishment. If he is given an order, he is expected to carry it out to the letter of the instructions. For example, a twelve-year old child was sent to the home of an American teacher with a gift of food. The teacher was asleep when the child first began knocking and decided to ignore the interruption and continue his nap. Fifteen minutes later the teacher awoke to discover that the knocking was as steady as before. By the time he woke fully, dressed, and answered the door, he estimated that the child has been knocking steadily for more than one half hour. The child had been told to deliver the food and was so accustomed to obeying orders automatically that he could think of no alternative.

There is, undoubtedly, a criminal injustice that exists in our schools and curricula which are mostly oriented toward conformity and convergent thinking. There has been very little that exists for creativity and divergent thinking. The traditional process of socialization inherent in our schools is very harmful to the development of creativity.

It produces masses of "non-entities," the "good" controlled citizen. In this setting, the creative child learns to bring his observed behavior to the norms and expectations of the people around him. He does not eradicate forbidden inclinations, he retains their manifestations. Supporting his own self image emotionally, radically and evangelically self-defeating may eventually overtake his sole existence to the point where he is estranged and alienated from the company of his peers. This student will eventually rebel against the school establishment and is quite susceptible to dropping out of school to seek his "freedom" somewhere else. Students who drop out of school usually drop into something else.

MacDonald revealed that a significant number of high school seniors considered themselves alcohol drinkers. ²⁷ The concern here is simply that a good portion of the seventy percent (70%) of creative children not detected by our intelligence tests may drop out of school into alcoholism and other drug consumers. This dropping out of school into drug abuse is rapidly taking its toll in

American Samoa.

At this time when the process of education is characterized by technology both as means and ends, syndromes, bandwagons and innovations for the sake of technology all contribute a sort of rigidity that interferes with mental activities effecting creativity in the classroom. The process of socialization itself and its traditionalism also threantens creativity.

It is crucially important for the classroom teachers, counselors and school administrators to watch for symptoms of creativity and be highly sensitive to the needs of these children. Authorities in the field of creativity have discovered these traits to be characteristics of a typical creative child. This child is significantly intelligent; he is quite dominant and very adventuresome; he is emotionally sensitive --- easily goes to extremes - far right, far left or far out; he does not seem to need others - he is a loner and usually independent; he has a high tension level-

prone to nervous breakdown and tends to be up-tight all the time; he is less subject to standards and group norms; he is highly fluent verbally; he dislikes details always concerns about the whole issue and loves to put things back to order; he is a bold introvert; he is often judged as irresponsible --- but in reality he is quite responsible. He has a reputation for wild or "silly" ideas; his high productivity record is often "off the beaten" tract; among everything else, humor and playfulness mark his presence and is always funny and pleasant to have around.²⁸

In order to honestly educate this segment of our student population, we need to have in our classrooms teachers who are able to, first, identify them, second, meet their needs. We must, also, search our philosophy of education, means and ends and general attitudes toward the very important process of acculturation. It is not farfetched to say that our old value system is undergoing change and new sets of values are rapidly

emerging. In this era of blending of cultures, it is vitally important for the classroom teacher to achieve a measure of sophistication in the performance of his job. Maximum productivity cannot be attained unless teachers are doing those things in which they have greatest competency. In teaching, students should be encouraged to look for differences as well as similarities both in their own behavior and attitudes and in the behavior and attitudes of others. A poem, for example, would produce certain effects in one student; several other reactions in another; and no reactions at all in a third student. This type of multidimensional teaching will provide the necessary avenue for the rapid development of potential creative abilities in children.

Strict adherence to one method, the tightly structured plan and the rigidity of most innovative programs all contribute to blocking the process of sensing gaps and

effecting means of closure. The ideal teacher should be an eclectic pragmatist who changes and adjusts to the tone of his classroom and the notes of the individuals in his classroom.

Before one declares the impossibility of the task of developing the creative potential of the Samoan students, one is, fortunately, encouraged by Keesing who, many years ago, declared the possibility and achievements of the South Pacific peoples

Social Scientists and practical workers alike are beginning to realize what great gulfs lie between many cultures, some of which have been moving along divergent lines for millennia. To bridge them at all fundamentally and comprehensively presents a tremendous educational task. It should require more than one generation, at the very least. This is especially true where Western and primitive cultures are involved, as they are oriented so differently. The task, however, must not be oriented as impossible, even if so difficult. An increasing numbers of individuals from South Sea groups have already demonstrated that it can be done; indeed, some have shown by outstanding creative work their ability to use the materials of civilization brilliantly, and several with outstanding genius.²⁹

Despite the impact of cultural pressures, psychological stress and strains; adherence to traditions and status quo; educational bandwagons and syndromes; Keesing still believes that the task is quite possible of attainment.

It is creativity that took the United States to the moon and back. It is creativity that will soon reveal the secrecy of the human genes and its wonder; and it is, certainly, creativity that is needed to bring American Samoa and the rest of its South Pacific neighbors to the scheme of things and out of the status quo.

Consistent evidence indicates the plight of the Samoan student in regard to developing his potentials in creative thinking abilities. His own family works against him; his community; he school; the peer group and even the views of himself all contribute to suppress his native creative abilities.

To answer the challenge of his bicultural settings
and peer group, the school must gang up with time in
order to transform the imbedded conformity and conver-
gence to useful independence and divergence.

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