Creativity – A New Vocabulary

Edited by

Vlad Petre Glăveanu
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Charlotte Wegener
Creativity – A New Vocabulary
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Creativity – A New Vocabulary

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Foreword: The Importance of Being a Vocabulary

This book has all the potential for being very dull. After all, to create a vocabulary for the various perspectives that try to make sense of creativity cannot be a creative act itself. Vocabularies are there to fix – rather than open – the minds of inquiring human beings. They set up standards – and standards can be the archenemies of anything creative.

Or so it seems. In the ordinary, common-sense ways of looking at vocabularies and dictionaries we look for certainty, seek clear and final definitions and meanings of concepts that are otherwise hard to understand, so that our own personal projects can be fortified by the power of the ‘true’ meanings. We strive for certainty – rather than creativity – in our searches for socially legitimised meanings. So, how can anybody invent the need for a book such as this one – *Creativity – A New Vocabulary* – as a contribution to our contemporary research and practices of being creative in everyday life by fooling around, playing to be serious in business and politics, and being charmed by the ever-creative journalists who invent new calamity stories and by other decorators of our life environments?

The answer is simple: there are two functions of searching for the generalised meanings of widely used concepts. Only one of these is that of giving us certainty – looking up the meaning of a word in a vocabulary may give the layperson certainty of the meaningfulness of the life one lives. This is the original, and ordinary, use of vocabularies, dictionaries, encyclopaedias and other authoritative sources of knowledge. In this function, the authorities – who have summoned the making of a vocabulary – exercise their social power on the laypersons who are expected to obey ‘the right meanings’ of the words. This function is the opposite of any creative act in human lives; it leaves the diligent user of such authoritative sources without any other option than to obey the laws set by the authorities. No innovation is possible, other than by command from the authorities.

Fortunately, human beings are resistant. They are not only ‘sloppy users’ of ordinary language (to ‘correct’ that, they might be sent to consult a vocabulary!), but also active resisters of the meanings of ordinary words in extraordinary contexts. How many times do we encounter
the intervention of a waiter into our intimate relations with delicious food in a restaurant who unceremoniously but politely asks ‘Are you still working on your sushi?’. The deep response to such intervention is implicit resistance in anger – ‘I am enjoying my meal, not working on it!’ The waiter, who is obviously working on his or her job, might be sent to consult a vocabulary for the distinction between work, dinner at a restaurant and enjoyment – but his or her learning the meanings would not change the setting at the dinner. Your enjoyment of your dinner might be slightly tainted by the insistence that what you do is actually ‘work’. You never thought you left your ‘workplace’ to go to another job – eating a dinner in a restaurant! And you resist such implications.

Creating a vocabulary of creativity, in this book, is itself an act of resistance. The authors resist the tendency to fix the field and close it for further inquiry. The field of creativity needs to remain open to new (creative) ways of inquiry. By elaborating the different terms used in creativity discourses – in science and beyond – the second function of a vocabulary is exemplified. This is – quite in opposition to the first – that of opening the mind to new perspectives in dealing with anything that comes into the general realm of the label ‘creativity’. A creative vocabulary of creativity includes both new and old terms used in creativity discourses in ways that show how their meanings could be further expanded, how different terms are linked by their implications and how academics’ talk of creativity can guide – but not determine – innovation in everyday activities.

So, to summarise, this book has all the potential for not being dull at all! But its actual functions are in the hands of its users. One can – in vain – search for ‘the right’ definitions in it. That would be a great deal of work, wasted in the wrong place. Or, alternatively, the user can thoroughly enjoy the nuances of meanings that contemporary creativity research in the social sciences has introduced into making sense of the still mysterious (for scientific psychology, at least) capability of human beings to innovate their life environments – and, through these, themselves. This is a book for those who like to fool around with ideas and bring them to new social practices. And that is the most enjoyable practice of them all.

Jaan Valsiner

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Contributors

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