

# An Analysis of the Student Teachers` Facilitation of the Development of Creative Expression and Aestheticism among Infant Learners in Art and Design

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**Abstract :** *This study analyzed how student teachers facilitate the development of creativity and aestheticism among infant learners. Informed by Howard Gardner`s Theory of Multiple Intelligence, Psychoanalytic Theories and Piaget`s Theory of Cognitive Development, this paper followed the case study design. The study was carried out at three government primary schools in Harare. Five student teachers, five mentors and their 200 infant learners were involved in the study. Data was collected through interviews, observations and document analysis. The findings revealed that success in children`s creative and aesthetics development depends on effective school support systems like: staff development programmes, adequate resources and supervision. The teacher`s understanding of developmental art stages helps to plan effective lessons. Children respond to visual triggers, attention - grabbing learning / teaching aids and a relaxed classroom atmosphere. Findings also indicated that strictly prescribed guidelines and an authoritarian outlook in Art and Design lessons curtail creativity and aestheticism. Children need time to discover, experiment, learn from mistakes, adjust and realign ideas for them to develop creativity.*

**Key words:** *creative expression, aestheticism, Art and Design, Infant learners, pre-service teachers.*

## Introduction

Creativity is defined as the process of putting experiences together into new patterns, new ideas or new products. Creative thinking is stifled in some Zimbabwean schools by social forces as well as teachers who restrain freedom of expression. The reason might be that teachers in Zimbabwean infant classrooms tend to be convergent in their background and training and hence may be ill at ease when pupils express views contrary to those expected. The general trend in our Zimbabwean infant schools has been to encourage pupils to reproduce standard, traditional and conventional work in Art and Design. There is need to encourage pupils to think and act divergently by being original, innovative and imaginative. This can only be achieved if pupils are assured that creative thinking will not result in conflict with authority and the existing value system. The child in the Zimbabwean infant classroom usually has a distinct tendency to lean towards dependency on the teacher rather than independence and personal freedom. Dependency means the child`s artistic behaviour is to a large extent determined by the teacher. This symbiotic relationship between the teacher and the infant learner is unhealthy for creativity.

Aesthetic development cannot be separated from creative development. Both are bound up with the whole process of growing and are influenced by all the variables from the

environment. In a broad sense, aesthetic education deals with a whole range of experiences in art. In a narrower sense, aesthetics refers only to the perception and appreciation of art. In simple terms, it involves the capacity to perceive, respond and to be sensitive to the natural environment and human creations.

Art and Design are interdependent areas. They simply cannot exist in isolation but rely upon good hand, eye and brain co-ordination, in other words, they spring from a harmonious relationship. The term Art covers that area of inventiveness with materials through which self-expressed emotions, ideas and feelings resulting from the visual interpretation of environmental experiences are communicated. The design aspect is the knowledge area in which inventiveness germinates and develops into recognizable artistic forms.

In this study, an analysis of how student teachers develop self-expression, creativity and originality through manipulation of art materials and tools was done.

## Theoretical Framework

The study draws its theoretical framework from Howard Gardner`s Theory of Multiple Intelligence, Piaget`s Theory of Cognitive Development and Psychoanalytic Theories. Gardner (1989) argues that human beings, as a species, carry out at least seven different forms of knowing which he called "The Theory of Multiple Intelligence". These intelligences are: language, logic and mathematics, music and art, spatial information, bodily kinaesthetic information, knowledge about other people (inter-personal) and knowledge about oneself (intra-personal). All normal children and adults possess all these forms of intelligences but each person has a different profile. Sadly, infant teachers emphasise certain forms of intelligences over others and clearly those who are not academically inclined are labelled failures without recognising that all children are capable in different ways. An infant teacher has to recognise that children who cannot make it academically can be stimulated in doing artwork. Moreso, this area of the curriculum can be used as an invaluable key to the unlocking of other interests and promotion of learning potential which might otherwise remain stifled and unrealised. On the other hand, the infant teacher has to recognise that Art and Design offers children with more academic bent opportunities to enhance their practical knowledge, giving them different intellectual channels of experience which are challenging and rewarding. Prentice (2010) points out that art in the infant classroom is a "servicing agency". He clarified this point by explaining that drawing and picture making skills developed in the art area can be applied with more confidence in mathematical and scientific subjects, in the illustration of

poems and prose and in the production of maps. Thoughtful, caring infant teachers will plan their general curriculum to be “all- embracing” and will realise that creative expression and aestheticism must be used to enhance learning potential and to increase excellence across the infant school curriculum. Infant teachers, as Art and Design advocates need to realise its basic values to the child. Piaget’s Cognitive Development theory argues that art has cognitive values. It fosters the child’s ability to represent one’s experiences with symbols. This point is further validated by Goodenough cited in Seefeldt and Barbour (1986) who claims that as children create art, they organise their thoughts and actions into patterns and symbols. Psychoanalytic Theories also suggest another basic value of Art. The theories point out that Art is emotionally satisfying. Through visual arts, a certain amount of tension can be released while allowing expression of thoughts, ideas and emotions. To create a product increases children’s feelings of competence and self esteem. Psychoanalytic Theories also emphasise that Art is social, that is, it helps children to develop skills of working together, co-operation and sharing. Art also has academic values. The power of art to foster children’s academic skills has been fully documented (Green and Hasselbring, 2001; Lansing, 1999; Lewis and Livision, 2011 ). Because working in the visual arts does involve the use of symbols, it is related to children’s achievement in academic skills.

The Theory of Multiple Intelligence points out that infant years are often described as the golden years of creativity, a time when every child sparkles with natural artistry. Hence, if teachers do not foster this creativity, the Theory argues that a kind of corruption takes over so that ultimately children mature into artistically stunted adults. Seefeldt and Barbour (1986) are of the opinion that infant grade children have “ a sensitive period” in Art and Design where if a teacher negatively permeates the child’s natural artistry, the child creativity is curtailed and impoverished for life.

### Statement of the Problem

Some Infant teachers have problems in defining the role they should play in facilitating the development of creative expression and aestheticism among learners. This leads to failure in planning developmentally appropriate experiences in Art and Design. Furthermore, some pre-service teachers perceive Art and Design as a time filler given to learners when real work is finished. Such pre-service teachers thus view Art and Design as a meaningless challenge and teacher directed end product. From the above perspective, the researcher can conclude that theories about the teacher’s role in Art and Design range from laissez faire attitudes to heavily directed teaching based on rigid systems and techniques. Some teachers have no flair for or understanding of Art and Design because of lack of knowledge, thus offering learners a lightweight experience which fails to extend, stimulate and enrich the children’s creativity.

### Research Question

The research was carried out within the framework of the following main question:

How do pre-service teachers foster the development of creative expression and aestheticism among infant learners in the teaching and learning of Art and Design?

The following sub-questions will provide answers to the above question:

- 1) Which methods do student teachers use to foster/enhance the development of creativity and aestheticism?
- 2) How do student teachers assess children’s work in creative expression and aestheticism?
- 3) What problems do student teachers face in facilitating creative expression and aesthetics?
- 4) What intervention strategies can be put in place to help student teachers to facilitate creativity and aesthetics?

### Research Design

The study followed the Case Study design which evolved around an in-depth study of how student teachers facilitate the development of creativity and aestheticism among infant learners.

### Participants

Five student teachers who are in their second year of teacher preparation were involved in the study. All student teachers taught Grade Two. A total of 200 infant learners were involved in the study. In addition, five mentors of the student teachers involved in the study also participated in the study as inter-observers. That is, they observed the lessons together with the researcher and also participated in joint action planning sessions.

### The Setting and time frame

The study was carried out at three government primary schools in Harare. The researcher visited the schools for three months to observe Art and Design lessons.

### Data collection

The study draws its methodological perspectives from the Qualitative approach using the following data collection methods: interviews, lesson observations and document analysis. Interviews were used to solicit information from student teachers on the framework within which they plan Art and Design lessons. The researcher also used the observation method culminating in a total of 30 lesson observations. During the observations, the researcher video and audio tapped the events that were unfolding during the instructional process. In addition, field notes were written in case the machines failed. Having observed the instructional process, the student teachers, mentors, and the researcher held joint action planning sessions with the aim of encouraging a collaborative approach to the professional development of both the researcher and pre-service teachers. The following were noted in the joint action planning sessions: weaknesses and strengths of the lessons and intervention strategies. Indicators of creativity and aestheticism were also noted. Document analysis was an ongoing process in the study. Ideally, the researcher looked at these documents: schemes of work, lesson plans and record books which provided additional data and insight into the phenomena under study. The documents revealed and

confirmed how pre-service teachers facilitated creativity and aesthetics.

### Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis were concurrent, that is, data was analysed as it was collected. From field notes, the researcher searched through the data for regularities and patterns as well as for topics the data covered. In short, the researcher developed a coding scheme. She organised her data by identifying codes, illustrating and substantiating the plausibility of the codes, Direct quotes and excerpts from all data sources were also used. The research report is descriptive in nature. The emphasis being on describing phenomena in its context and on that basis interpreting the data.

### Findings and Discussion

This section presents an analysis of how student teachers facilitate the development of creative expression and aestheticism among infant learners. This analysis emerges from three sets data collected from lesson observation, interviews and document analysis. The analysis was a process of successive approximations towards an accurate description and interpretation of phenomena under study.

#### Suitable methods for teaching Art and Design

All student teachers were of the opinion that there is need to demonstrate to the learners whatever task they are supposed to undertake. One student teacher indicated that guided discovery is important. She went on to say it's important to let the children do their own work and teacher can move around praising and helping children as and when they need help. The other student teacher pointed out that the teaching approach is dependent on the topic or activity. She added that if an activity is complex, children need to be guided or they will need a model to copy from.

From the above perspectives, the writer can point out that there are no tried and true cookbook approaches to becoming creative or to teaching creativity. What determines the value of Art instruction is the teaching method employed. In the writer's view, faulty teaching can create in learners a thorough dislike for Art that may remain in them for the rest of their lives.

The writer shares the same view with the participants who said it is important to let children do their own work because developing creativity and aesthetics is a series of personal evolutionary steps. Creativity is often intensely personal work. In this respect, letting children do their own work should not culminate in a laissez-fair approach. Further the writer wants to point out that it is important for the teacher to stand back and let children express themselves freely. This leads to self initiated activities. The basic ingredient of Art therefore comes from the child himself. The task of the teacher would thus be that of providing a conducive environment for inventiveness, exploration and production.

One participant indicated that the teacher has to move around and offer assistance as and when necessary. The writer is of

the opinion that this will enable the teacher to develop a sensitive awareness of individual children as well as the creative process. Just being there to serve as a springboard may be sufficient. The teacher should be ready to support and help but must not interfere as the children produce art. The most powerful way to develop children is for the teacher to be a role model. Children develop creativity not when a teacher tells them to, but when he/she shows them how.

One student teacher insisted on the value of group work and said it is excellent in the sense that the stimulation children received from one another contributed to a creative atmosphere. This sharing of thought and enthusiasm is quite different from copying one another. In the writer's view, in group work there is collaboration, trial and error as well as questioning which are all healthy ingredients for creative output.

A confusing dichotomy among student teachers was whether art should be taught or simply be made available to the infant children to perform. It was apparent that it was not clear whether the art curriculum should be characterised by a hands-off approach for the teacher, a hands-on approach for children or by an instructional programme which seeks to extend and refine children's skills and knowledge.

#### Problems faced by student teachers in facilitating the development of creativity and aestheticism

From the responses given, the issue of time was very controversial. Two student teachers shared the same view that they struggle to get time from their mentors to do Art and Design lessons. If at all they were allowed to do an art lesson, it strictly adhered to the one hour allocated to Art and Design. If children did not finish their work, they would wait until the next time Art is done. Children were not allowed extra time to finish their pieces of work like the normal practice with other subjects. Infact, students revealed that their mentors prefer to do other subjects like Maths, English, Social Studies and Shona in place of Art and Design. Schools held end of term competitions to see which class had more passes in English, Maths, Shona and Content subjects, thus time allocation for Art and Design was used to do revision of those subjects.

For creativity to develop, children need to be allocated adequate time to explore, discover, experiment, to learn from mistakes, to adjust and realign their ideas, time to make corrections, time to dream and wonder. Children need chances to work themselves into the experience and develop their feelings and ideas as they go along. For this reason, it is important to schedule adequate time periods that allow children to move in and out of the expressive experience as their needs dictate. The writers noticed that discontinuities in creative activities often resulted in loss of interest in the activity. This meant that if student teachers did not allow children to finish their work, it stifled their creativity. In the researchers' view, for any creative activity to have real value, it requires careful consideration and a flexible approach dictated by the nature of work at hand. From the writer's observation of lessons, some children work methodically and with great care and require long stretches of time to complete

their work and yet this is not available within the Zimbabwean context. There should be adequate time for exposure, immersion and a child should be offered opportunities for self discovery and self definition. Adequate time is thus a necessary pre-requisite for effective creativity.

Teacher / pupil interaction during Art and Design lessons was also a problem. Student teachers were authoritarian in nature in the sense that they assumed too control over children's creative activities. The student teachers issued too many orders and directions to children. They preferred a highly ordered and controlled classroom which did not tolerate the behaviour of youngsters that did not fit into their pattern of order and control. Classroom procedures were not flexible enough to allow children to deviate from the given instructions. In some lessons children were told what to draw and how to draw the pictures. Learners were not allowed to do their own work thus stifling their creativity.

In some cases children were given models to copy from and any deviation from the instructions was reprimanded. In the writer's view, a child who is given a model to copy from becomes inhibited, restricted and accustomed to imitation rather than self-expression. Creativity is about sensing the child's potentialities and helping that child to attain them. No two people are alike. Creativity is personal. It is a language of one's thoughts which is personal, so why provide a model to copy from? Models should simply be used as discussion points and not for copying.

In the writer's view the most significant skill the teacher can cultivate in presenting self-expression materials is the ability to let children explore them as their impulses and feelings require, intervening only when there is need. The more instruction the student is offered, the less creative they became. The writer noted that learners who were taught dictatorially and not according to their needs produce stereotyped work. An authoritarian outlook made children timid.

Student teachers had problems with coming up with content for their lessons. They repeated the same topics and their activities throughout the year. For example, during term one the students did string pulling, paper weaving, painting a baby foot, paint blowing, leaf and potato prints, The exact activities were repeated in the following terms without any variations. Skills developed were exactly the same. One might argue that skills are developmental and are perfected over a period of time hence the repetition. One doesn't have to repeat one activity to perfect a skill. Activities can be varied or extended in order to help the child to develop the same skill. A good Art and Design curriculum needs sufficient continuity so that skills can be developed, refined and internalised and hence become a part of an expressive repertoire. Although all topics in their schemes of work and lesson plans lend themselves to creativity and aesthetics, in some cases the teachers failed to adequately facilitate creativity and aesthetics. One example is as depicted below:

**Table 1: An excerpt from a scheme of work**

Week Ending	Topic Content	Activities	Source of Matter	Teaching and
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				Learning Aids
17/6/16	Drawing - Pattern making using alphabet letters	- Manipulating drawing tools - Teacher demonstrates pattern making using alphabet letters - Children imitate the teacher's demonstration - Displaying children's work on the wall.	Handbook of Suggestions page 15	Newsprint, pencils

The above excerpt is a clear indication that Art activities prepared by the teacher stifle creativity in the sense that pupils were required to imitate the way the teacher did the patterns. The teacher not only demonstrated the patterns but also told the children to imitate the patterns. The teacher actually used the word imitate which according to the English Dictionary (2009) means 'to copy the behaviour, appearance, to appear like something else...'. This hampered originality and novelty.

In the above excerpt, aestheticism was not properly articulated since the student teacher simply wrote 'display children's work on the walls' without further elaboration of what the main features of the pictures were, what sort of pictures were to be displayed and why. Again in the above excerpt the materials mentioned in the scheme of work are only two, that is, newsprint and pencils. In the writer's view, the materials were too simple to challenge the child's creativity. Although the materials were open ended and self expressive, the teacher did not let the children use them creatively. Thus most lessons were dominated by demonstrations and imitations.

From the document analysis of record books, the writer found out that student teachers had problems with assessing children's creative activities. Although some kind of record keeping is necessary in Art and Design, the method and content should be carefully considered. Much time and energy was wasted by systems which offered very little real information in the final analysis. Comments such as 'well done, good work, fairly done' are meaningless unless there is knowledge of the quality of practice of the teacher as well as an understanding of the criteria on which they are based. Some student teachers were marking and grading children's art work. All forms of marking, for example, numeral or literal grades should be rejected at this stage as they take into account judgement of particular aspects of end product assessment or offer highly subjective views which have very little to do with overall development and are equally inappropriate. In the writer's opinion, putting a grade on the child's work is harmful because it turns his attention away from creating to concern for the picture itself. Grading Art at infant level has no function because the child has no conscious awareness of

making Art in any manner other than that which is natural to him. In the writers' view, grading infant art will bring about 'forced competition' among children as opposed to 'natural competition'. Children in infant grades are usually unaware of any competition in art because their drawings are merely a means of expression.

All student teachers pointed out that they do not put the art developmental stages into consideration when planning lessons. All student teachers including the two who did Art as their main subject revealed that they were not familiar with art developmental stages, although these are clearly articulated in the Zimbabwean Art and Design syllabus (1985:74). One student teacher professed that that she didn't even know that art had developmental stages. Because student teachers are not aware of the characteristics of the developmental stages, they failed to facilitate the artistic development adequately. Yet familiarity with a child's stages of artistic production helps a teacher to determine what kind of stimulation, assistance and general education treatment a child requires. However, they all agreed that considering the developmental stages in planning lessons is beneficial to the development of creativity and aesthetics. One student teacher commented that putting developmental levels into consideration would enable her to plan activities which children are able to cope with. Another student teacher said that considering developmental stages helps in planning activities which children can comprehend. She further pointed out that learners master skills easily if art developmental stages are considered. In short, the student was saying the art stages enable the teacher to plan activities which are developmentally appropriate (activities which suit the child's level of art development).

In the writers' view, considering art developmental stages when planning means putting into perspective not only art activities but the kinds of materials and tools suitable for each stage. It further implies creating an environment conducive for artistic production. Considering art development stages implies that as children's developmental stages change, teachers must critically appraise their own perceptions and expectations in art and be honest with themselves as to whether they really understand the development of the child's artistic production. As children develop so does their subject matter, materials, tools and stimulation. From the responses given, the researcher can conclude that what really happens in Art and Design education depends far more on the teacher's understanding of the nature of art and the child's artistic development. Ideally, such understanding will result in increased acceptance and valuing of creative behaviour as well as supporting originality in thought and deed.

Among the problems noted in the lessons were: questioning techniques used by some student teachers which were not thought provoking and thus could not trigger creative thinking. Some lesson demonstrations were convergent in nature, that is, they did help the learners to see solutions to problems from different perspectives. In some cases there was inadequate provision of materials leading to chaotic situations where some children did not do any activities at all. In some instances there was too much surveillance, that is, the teacher kept hovering over children telling them what to do.

Joint action planning was done in order to come up with intervention strategies. As mentioned earlier on, the researchers held joint planning sessions with the validation group which consisted of five mentors and five student teachers. The mentors acted as inter-observers who criticised the researchers' work, challenged her findings and hence finally validating the results of the study.

In light of the above problems the validation group came up with possible solutions to solve the problems. Solutions were incorporated into subsequent lessons. Among the solutions put forward were: use of divergent questions is crucial in triggering the children's creative thinking, questioning should be tactful enough to inspire the children to complete their pictures. Lesson introductions should provide pupils with an organizational framework upon which ideas and knowledge that follow are placed. There is need to provide attention – getting teaching and learning aids which appeal to the learner's sense of sight. Lesson introductions should help children to reflect on events that are immediate and personally meaningful. A short discussion initiated by the teacher allows each individual to search for meaningful personal events related to the theme being explored. The purpose of lesson introductions should be to focus on and review their own thoughts.

Lesson demonstrations must be divergent and thus help learners to be oriented towards multiple solutions. In short, when a teacher demonstrates an article for children, he /she should insist on children doing it from their own differing perspectives and not copy the teacher. Use of both verbal and non verbal reinforcement was viewed as crucial. Creativity does not occur automatically, only a child who is emotionally and intellectually moved is in a position to relate to artistic expression. In addition it was the validation group's view that children can not be expected to sit down with materials and blossom forth as artists without some type of motivation.

For creativity and aestheticism to develop, there is need to provide plentiful and varied materials which are developmentally appropriate. Materials for use in art should be open ended so that children can explore different possibilities with it. Restrictive materials curtail creativity. Activities like colouring and template work are restrictive and devoid of creativity. It is important to plan activities where children are able to express their own feelings and thoughts without being restricted by outlines. Subject matter for lessons should be related to children's experiences so that they can comprehend thus increasing creative output. Use of personal themes for creative expression is important since children can only express themselves fully when they know what they are doing. Student teachers were advised to interfere with children's work as little as possible. Too much surveillance caused the creative urge of some children to go underground. The teacher should play the role of the interested adult and not the director of the child's art.

In the writers' view, pupils were adequately motivated during the lessons observed. Motivation did not come from one source only. Materials used provided motivation, for example, clay and construction materials. There was a natural drive for

### **Intervention Strategies**

expression because of the wide variety of materials which led learners to be enthusiastic in their creative output. From the interviews it is apparent that all student teachers valued the use of diverse materials in stimulating art making. Use of open – ended materials which can be used in different ways is important for creative development. These include: clay, leaves, paint, paper, grass, twigs, charcoal, glue, maize stalks and pieces of cloth can be manipulated by children with ease because they are familiar to them. They are self –expressive materials which generate creative play thus encouraging originality of thought. The most valuable quality that these expressive materials have in common is that there is no right thing to do or one right way to use them. They are fundamentally useful because they foster creativity, build self-esteem and provide a safe, failure – proof experience.

The writers noticed that articles made by boys displayed intellectual playfulness and imagination which are all indicators of creativity. Most girls made articles like: dolls, cups, mats and other feminine products. It is boys who experimented, explored with materials on a wider scale hence came up with interesting products. Girls came up with feminine products because they have been socialised into domesticity. This limits the girl child's creativity as opposed to the boy child who is expected by society to be highly motivated, adventurous, assertive, boys should generate ideas, come up with solutions to problems, take risks and be initiators.

In some cases there was psychological motivation as well in the classrooms, that is, children felt safe, secure and comfortable. The atmosphere was relaxed in some cases as evidenced by the freedom in the choice of materials. In addition, a warm friendly attitude enabled the learners to be creative. To motivate children, one student teacher went beyond the sensory experience, she probed what the writer might call the children's "inner landscape", that is, their dream world, their desires and reveries. She did this through thought provoking questions. To ensure maximum involvement and success, one student teacher awakened the children's ideas through rhymes and finished pictures.

Praising is another important motivating strategy as highlighted by participants. The writers shares the same sentiment in the sense that some children need attention and will quickly learn to produce whatever the teacher praises. The writer also wants to further add that the teacher should be a flexible person, able to throw away his plans and to capitalise upon the enthusiasm and interest of the children. It is the ability to be warm, friendly and democratic in nature that will provide the learners the opportunity to express themselves freely, both in words and in artistic expression. Hence to some extent this becomes a two-way exchange. Not only is the supportive atmosphere necessary, but also flexible channelling of the youngster's feelings and emotions.

Aesthetics was also discussed and students were advised to urge children to discuss their own pictures. Children were also asked to compare each other's work with specific reference to details of pictures and colours. Giving children an opportunity to decide which picture to display conveys a sense of respect for their judgement. Its important to put children into the

mindset of beauty in nature, beauty in the classroom and this will help to appreciate each other's and their own work.

Because the student teachers had a lot of difficulties in assessing children's work, the writers, inter-observers and the students suggested that the following should be considered when doing assessment:

- The child's process of working, for example, initiative and independence.
- Handling of materials.
- Mastery of skills.
- Stages of personal development, for example, whether the child has confidence in producing artwork / drawing advanced artwork for her age .
- Curiosity and creativity, for example, asks questions constantly, uses resources to find answers to questions or waits to be told what to, experimenting, problem solving etc.

### Conclusion

A general overview of the above findings indicates that the success of fostering creativity and aestheticism depends on the teachers understanding of the nature of Art and children's developmental stages. Furthermore, use of evocative and descriptive imagination and memory is crucial for creative and aesthetics development. Children respond positively to visual triggers and a relaxed classroom atmosphere.

On the basis of the research findings, it can be concluded that success in children's creative and aesthetics activities depends on a number of factors like: school support systems, in this case the school targets the cognitive areas of development with the areas of intuition, self- expression and affectivity being left to develop on their own. It can also be concluded that strictly prescribed guidelines deter experimentation, exploration and innovation. In addition, forced competition (as opposed to natural competition), rules, control and conformity hamper creativity.

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