Toward Creativity Justice: Interrogating the Promise of 'Universal' Creativity in Early Childhood Teacher Preparation

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Abstract

Creativity is a fundamental aspect of the human experience that is not equally supported across different early childhood education settings. We employ qualitative content analysis to explore how early childhood teacher education programs promise to teach creativity to their students. Our analysis of taken-for-granted creativity discourse within course descriptions reveals that programs mostly position creativity development as universal, devoid of learners' and teachers' sociocultural backgrounds, and free from larger educational and cultural contexts. We problematize this approach to creativity, and call for *creativity justice* in teacher preparation involving pedagogies that sustain *creative cultural repertoires of practice* of all learners, especially learners of color.

Introduction

"The option of being asocial or acultural, that is, living as a neutral being who is not bound to particular practices and socioculturally structured ways of behaving, is not available" (Markus & Hamedani, 2007, p. 5)

The ability to create is a central aspect of the human experience which "makes the human being a creature oriented toward the future, creating the future and thus altering his own present" (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 9). If creativity indeed defines humans (Bailin, 2015), we need to carefully consider Zeus Leonardo's question posted at a symposium of educational researchers. He asked, "Who gets to experience the full range of what it means to be human in the current education system?" (Leonardo, 2018). In culturally diverse and racially sagrigated schools creativity is often normed towards the cultural and experiential backgrounds of white teachers (Beghetto, Kaufman, & Baxter, 2011), and as such the creativity of racially different students is consistently evaluated lower than those students who resemble the teachers themselves (Gillam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic, 2016).

Perpetuating educational inequities, creativity can become a political tool (Rowlands, 2011). For example, "collision of new standards with old inequities" affects urban public-school students the most (Darling-Hammond, 2007, p. 318). Urban universal pre-K and Head Start early childhood settings may experience high pressures to meet common standards (Darling-Hammond, 2007), creating schools that relegate

"creativity and imaginative thinking to the margins of educational experiences" (Eckhoff, 2011, p. 240). Creativity suffers in environments ruled by scripted curricula and frequent assessments, which often accompany such high-stakes pressures (Amabile, Goldfarb, & Brackfleld, 1990; Eckhoff, 2011). As a result, critically unchallenged research on a "creativity gap" in urban schools compared to suburban schools emerges and perpetuates deficit perspectives (Dai et al. 2012).

Answering Zeus Leonardo's question, clearly not everyone gets to experience what it means to be creative and, thus, fully human in the current education system. While "we believe that creativity will save us" (Bailin, 2015, p. 1), learners of color "are not saved" in the "elusive quest for racial justice" (Bell, 1992, p. 1). As teacher educators, we need to work towards what we will call *creativity justice*, intentional efforts to sustain socio-culturally situated creativities in systematically oppressive educational contexts that predominantly serve students of color.

Early years are uniquely positioned to develop creativity (Vygotsky, 2004), and the field of early childhood education has potential to become the epicenter of *creativity justice*. To evaluate the capacity for this work, we first need to look at the profession itself. Fleer (2003) positions the field of early childhood education as a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), an evolving, living, and breathing organism that shares "routines, practices, rituals, artifacts, symbols, conventions, stories and histories" (Fleer, 2003, p. 64). Many of the fundamental principles of early childhood education (e.g. DAP) are informed by the inherent whiteness of policy makers and influencers in the field. Early childhood educators live by a shared code of ethics (Feeney, Freeman, &

Pizzolongo, 2012), a product of a predominantly Western professional organization (NAEYC). At the same time, as a community of practice, the profession "only allow[s] newcomers in when they have mastered the language and have understood the codes of practice…those who do not master the language of the practice are positioned as 'not being early childhood'" (Fleer, 2003, p. 65).

As early childhood teacher educators and researchers, we wondered about the nationally shared language of describing creativity to early childhood teacher candidates who will serve in culturally diverse and racially segregated schools. Could the language we use to describe "creativity courses" in teacher preparation limit the possibilities for *creativity justice*? In order to find out how we, as a profession, describe creativity to our teacher candidates, we conduct a national survey of early childhood teacher preparation programs across the United States to critically examine discourse on creativity in course catalogs. Based on our findings, we draw implications for moving our language of creativity and teacher preparation towards *creativity justice*.

Theoretical Framework

In education, much of understanding of creativity has been shaped by Rhodes' (1961) influential cognitivist framework that allows room for "asocial and acultural" teaching and interpretation of creativity, which is insufficient in culturally diverse and systematically oppressive educational settings. To counter the perception of creativity as a universal concept, we adopt Glăveanu's (2013) theoretical framework that illustrates creativity as a sociocultural phenomenon, deepening Vygotsky's original work on creativity and imagination in childhood (1967/2004). We also bring a critical lens to our

analysis and interpretation of creativity, drawing from culturally sustaining pedagogies (Paris & Alim, 2017) as well as a sense of importance of culture in school learning (Hollins, 2015) and understanding of racism as endemic to society that prevails in the US system of education (Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995). As such, we see creativity as a critical sociocultural phenomenon that encompasses internal and external creative processes behind diverse forms of creative expression that prohibit understanding of creation and evaluation of creativity as racially and culturally ambivalent processes.

Glăveanu (2013) describes creativity at the intersection of the sociocultural backgrounds of creative actors, culturally influenced creative thoughts and behaviors, culturally and socially situated creative products, and contextualized material and sociocultural environment of each creation (Figure 1). In the following sections of the Theoretical Framework, we briefly describe each aspect of Glăveanu's model and add a layer of consideration for power and privilege in educational and societal contexts where creativity unfolds.
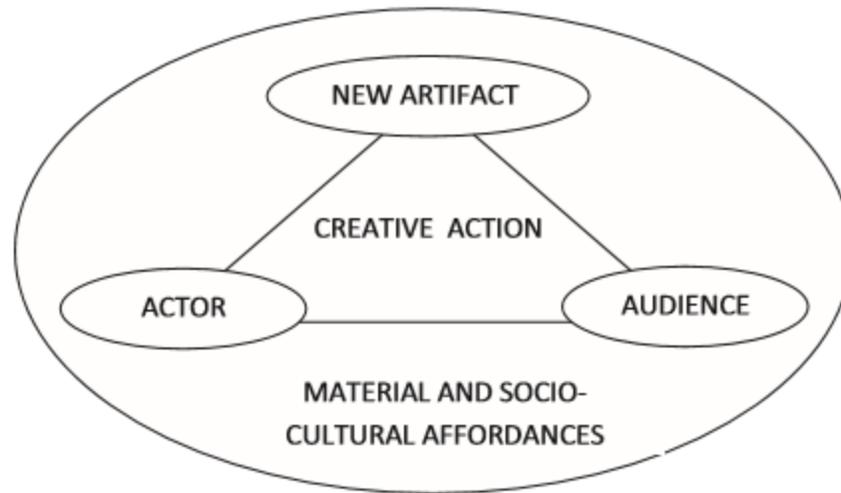
Figure 1. Integrating the five A's of creativity (Glăveanu, 2013)

The Creative Actor

The sociocultural *creative actors* "are shaped by a sociocultural context and act from within it, in coordination with others, to change and mold this context in suitable ways" (Glăveanu, 2013, p. 72). Previous research centering isolated personality and cognitive characteristics of creative people "tells us nothing about how people come to acquire those traits, how they might employ them in relation with other people, what happens when the social environment is favorable or adverse to a certain set of personal characteristics, and so forth" (Glăveanu, 2013, p. 72). In other words, previous environments shape individual creativities that respond differently to the same social and physical elements of the current environments.

Within the classroom, teachers and learners are creative actors whose sociocultural backgrounds and positionality uniquely interact with each other and the environment. For example, not every learner may be equally valued in the racially unjust and classist society, which may potentially suppress their creative expression at school. Such learners may develop creativity as an act of resistance to such systems with the support of creative people in their own communities who value the learners' identities and experiences.

The Creative Action

The *creation action* are internal (cognitive, emotional) and external (producing and expressing) processes. These actions are inseparable from the individual characteristics and sociocultural background of the creator as well as the "features of the situation" (Glăveanu, 2013, p. 73). Contrary to the established emphasis on isolated cognitive creative functions, the internal functions alongside the external (Glăveanu, 2013, p. 73). Cognitive and emotional processes involved in the process of creation are intertwined with the performative act of creation in relation to its context. Sociocultural understandings of the creative action "locate creative actions between actors, audiences, and artifacts" (Glăveanu, 2013, p. 73).

Within the classroom, creative action of the teacher is often directed at inspiring creative actions of the leaners (e.g., planning learning experiences and environments) or sometimes hindering them (e.g., teaching scripted curriculum, providing negative feedback). Learners' creative processes are grounded in their culturally situated cognition. For teachers it is important to know the differences within each community of

color in order to sustain individual cultural ways of being creative that draw on unique heritages towards non-essentialized futures. From a critical perspective, whose creative processes the teachers can more easily and willingly support may depend on their own race, culture, and experiences.

The Creative Artifact

The *creative artifacts* are objects resulting from "meaning-making activities that require interpersonal interactions" (Glăveanu, 2013, p. 74). While each creative artifact may have its unique physical presence, we understand and value its contribution within a "larger web of relations of people, things, institutions, and beliefs beyond that particular creation" (Weiner, 2000, p. 254). When an artifact is evaluated for creativity, its physical properties do not "tell us anything about the origin and functions of the product in question" (Glăveanu, 2013, p. 74). In a classroom context, each creative artifact of the teacher (e.g., a learning experience plan) and creative artifacts of each learner (e.g., a writing journal entry) can only be understood in relation to other teachers, other learners, and affordances. From a critical lens, not every creation is evaluated equally, allowing classist and racist discourses to dictate the value of someone's creative work.

The Creative Audience

The *creative audience* is a "vivid image of multiple others assisting, contributing, judging, criticizing, or using the creative act and/or resulting artifact(s)" (Glăveanu, 2013, p. 74). Every creator has numerous audiences ranging "from potential collaborators and family members to opponents and colleagues" (Glăveanu, 2013, p. 74) that are either

immediately present or imprinted in mind during the process of creation. What we create is inherently connected to our unique participation in social webs of existence and is an (un)conscious response to these webs. In a classroom setting, teachers and learners are each other's primary audiences. The work that learners and teachers produce is inseparable from the specific classroom context. Taking into account a critical perspective, positionality of the audience members matters. For example, how freely would a learner create knowing that the teacher may not welcome their work? The creative audience of this learner may become their home and community that support youth in sustaining their cultures and practices, yielding a transformative creative product that could not have been born in a hostile classroom.

The Creative Affordances

The *creative affordances,* the material world with a "culturally constructed meaning", are the physical environments that inspire creators, aid in shaping their ideas, and support the creative action (Glăveanu, 2013, p. 75). Creators pay attention to "what can be done with an object rather than how the object is" (Glăveanu, 2013, p. 76). As creators discover new potentialities in their environment, they transform the affordances of the material world (Glăveanu, 2013). To "discover and fully exploit existing environmental potentials", creators have to develop knowledge and abilities in noticing and manipulating materials and physical environment (Glăveanu, 2013). Teachers and learners can notice different possibilities of the materials and uncover their potential in unique ways based on how well they can manipulate them. Adding a critical perspective example, if teachers rely on materials that only a few learners in the class recognize and

relate to, this could hinder creativity of the learners who do not share the racial, cultural and experiential background with the teachers.

Background Literature

The majority of existing research and practical literature in early childhood education positions creativity from a cognitivist or constructivist perspectives. Sociocultural lens on creativity is less visible and *critical* sociocultural perspective is still emerging in writing about creativity in early childhood education. This limits the scope of traditional literature review format for this paper. Therefore, we review literature that offers clues of importance of critical sociocultural perspectives on creativity in teacher education, highlighting elements that influence creativities of learners in culturally diverse and racially segregated contexts.

Creativity in the classroom happens in the epicenter of interactions between learners, teachers, and classroom environments - all situated within larger sociocultural, historical, and political contexts. The structure of this literature review follows these elements, adding interpretations about the social power dynamics that can go unchallenged in classrooms if researchers and practitioners continue to view creativity as an acultural set of strictly cognitive traits and abilities.

Creativity and Teachers (Creative Actors)

Classroom teachers establish a classroom setting that "values creative thinking across content domains, or, conversely, one in which creative thinking is undervalued or even discouraged" (Eckhoff, 2011, p. 242). Every teacher is a unique element of the

creative microcosm where early childhood learners agentially interact with the given physical and socioemotional spaces. Teachers (un)knowingly leverage their unique sociocultural and experiential backgrounds to mold the creative climate and teaching in their classrooms. Cultural backgrounds of teachers also impact their interpretation of creativity in learners who are different from them (Glăveanu, 2013). Research provides sufficient evidence to suggest the key role of who the teachers are (e.g., personality traits, experiential, and cultural backgrounds) in supporting or hindering their learners' creativity (Lee & Kemple, 2014).

Teachers' personalities and creative experiences directly correspond with their support for learners' creativity. For instance, openness to new experiences is a personality trait that predicts stronger preference for teaching in ways that promote creativity (Lee & Kemple, 2014, p. 85). Playful teachers are more likely to support learners' creativity than teachers who prefer rigid, structured interaction styles (Graham, Sawyers, & DeBord, 1989; Tegano, Groves, & Catron, 1999; Schacter, Thum, & Zifkin, 2006). At the same time, other personality traits such as extraversion versus introversion and emotional stability (calm versus anxious) have no impact on teachers' behaviors and preferences that support learners' creativity (Lee & Kemple, 2014). Beyond personality traits, teachers who seek out creative experiences and engage in creative behaviors (e.g., craft making, writing a story, or hosting a puppet show) are more likely to prefer teaching practices that foster creativity in their learners (Lee & Kemple, 2014), even when they appear less open to new experiences.

Teachers evaluate learners' creativity based on own sociocultural and experiential backgrounds. For example, teachers tend to rate the creativity of female and white students higher than the creativity of male students and students of color (Beghetto, Kaufman, & Baxter, 2011). Contrary to teachers' perceptions, gender differences have no strong impact on creativity. When such differences are found in studies (e.g., higher divergent thinking skills in women, higher creative problem-solving abilities in men), they are mediated by personality traits associated with creativity (e.g., openness to experience) (Lin, Hsu, Chen, & Wang, 2012).

In terms of race, there is no evidence of differences in creative abilities based on cultural or racial background. Nevertheless, teachers consistently rate the creativity of students of color unfavorably (Beghetto, Kaufman, & Baxter, 2011). As one of many implications, when teachers see certain students as less creative, students' confidence in own creative abilities lowers (Beghetto, Kaufman, & Baxter, 2011). "While strong efficacy beliefs alone cannot increase creative performance, weak efficacy beliefs can (and likely will) have a negative impact on creative performance (including, precluding some students from even being willing to share their ideas)" (Beghetto, Kaufman, & Baxter, 2011, p. 6). Teacher preparation needs to address the racial difference in noticing and valuing student creativity and its implications, interrogating white teachers' racism and locations of privilege, and disrupting the tendency to pathologize children of color (Annamma, 2017). Cognitive, constructivist, or even sociocultural understanding of creativity may not yield these powerful and necessary courageous conversations (Singleton, 2014). Our study analyzes the national teacher educator discourse on

creativity, specifically looking at the promises the programs make to teacher candidates about becoming self-aware facilitators of learners' creativity across racial and cultural lines.

Creativity and Learners (Creative Actors)

Who the learners are (e.g., personality traits, experiential, and cultural backgrounds) appears to be important for their creative experiences at school. Research consistently finds that teachers prefer to work with students who do not exhibit personality traits associated with creativity (e.g., independent, nonconformist, progressive, or chance-taking) (Westby & Dawson, 1995). Teachers rate characteristics that impede creativity as more desirable and sometimes discipline learners who have higher creative potential (Stone, 1980). In order to be liked by teachers, some learners may suppress their creative expression and alter their behavior to "display properties that make them easier to manage in the classroom" (Westby & Dawson, 1995, p. 8). While some creative students find ways to be academically successful in these environments, their creative performance may suffer, remain unrecognized, or may even get them in trouble (Stone, 1980; Westby & Dawson, 1995). According to the US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2014), early childhood learners of color disproportionally "get in trouble" more often than their classmates. Through the lens of critical sociocultural creativity, this statistic may suggest that suspension rates highly correlate with exceptional creativity of learners of color within racist school environments.

Beyond personality traits, learners' cultural and experiential backgrounds play a role in their creativity. For example, a Nakota learner can use visual-kinesthetic means to tell a story grounded in the spatial syntax of the Plains Sign Talk (Farnell, 2002). Students form Nepal, Somalia, and South Sudan imbed their creative storytelling in unique family traditions (Strekalova-Hughes & Wang, 2019). Such culturally situated creativities need to be supported in the classroom in order to sustain cultural practices of the learners and their communities to resist cultural assimilation and empower cultural continuity (Paris & Alim, 2017). While anti-racist work in teacher preparation is an integral part of achieving social justice, understanding creativity as a critical sociocultural phenomenon and creativity justice work is needed to sustain unique cultural histories and practices within diverse communities of color. This work historicizes creativity within each community and resists essentialized perspectives on creative expressions (e.g., rap as a universal experience for all African-American students or even all students of color).

Culturally situated cognition related to creativity is another aspect that needs sustaining. For instance, metaphorical thinking strongly intertwines with children's creativity (Runco, 2014) and is inherently culturally situated (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Metaphor is "pervasive in everyday life" and how we "both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 3). For example, a metaphor we frequently live by in Western cultures is "time equals money". People may say that something can "save you time", someone is "wasting time" or "spending time wisely". This understanding of time is highly contextualized in Western ways of being and "there are cultures where time is none of those things" (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p.

9). Metaphors prevalent in different communities uniquely shape creative thinking and enculturate children into how to think and how to act (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). To benefit learners from culturally rich communities of color, teachers need to notice and interpret deeper meanings embedded in each learner's creativity.

In our analysis, we pay special attention to the role of cultural and experiential backgrounds of learners in creativity development. We consider whether teacher preparation programs promise to prepare teacher candidates for the culturally situated complexity of creativity in their students.

Creativity and Classroom Environment (Creative Audiences)

Creativity is situated in broader historical and cultural contexts (Glăveanu, 2013; Vygotsky, 1967/2004). Societies view creativity differently, and these perceptions shape the presence of creativity in the classroom. For example, Korean teachers identify the social value of creativity as a central environmental factor in creative teaching (e.g., how others appreciate one's creative expression and how particular acts of creativity contribute to the needs of the society as a whole) (Lee & Seo, 2006). In the United States, where intellectual and creative endeavors are strongly connected to intellectual property and patent laws, the social value of creativity beyond entrepreneurship is not as pronounced (Lee & Seo, 2006). China's increasing focus on competitiveness in knowledge economy through innovation increases "demand for more creativity research and educational programs' giving creativity the status of a 'rising star in both academic and practical fields" (Niu, 2006, p. 389).

In addition, classist and deeply raced societal discourses on creativity may determine much of who may be considered an "artist" vs. a "folk artist" and whose work is displayed in critically acclaimed museums and galleries around the world and at what cost. The lives and work of artists of color (e.g., Faith Ringgold and Michael Basquiat) highlight the pressures that the society can place on people and learners of color that are important to unpack in teacher preparation programs.

Educational policy is another example of societal influences on creativity in schools. For instance, after the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) in the United States, schools responded with a focus on student assessment and high-stakes test performance, feeding an educational environment that "functions to suppress both the [learners'] creativity and the support for creativity that teachers can bring to the work of teaching and learning" (Lee & Kemple, 2014, p. 83). Similarly, the United Kingdom's policies have changed to foreground knowledge attainment at the expense of children's curiosity, agency, and art education (Craft, Cremin, Hay, & Clack, 2014, p. 16).

Some educational policies attempt to counteract creativity decline in classrooms. For example, CAEP, the teacher education accrediting body in the United States, adopted the InTASC standards to support quality in teacher preparation across the country. These standards clearly articulate the expectations placed on teacher preparation programs and future teachers to "engage learners in critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative problem solving related to authentic local and global issues" (InTASC, 2011, p. 8). The request to support teacher candidates in nurturing creative thinking, creative problem solving, and ability to "forge new understandings, solve problems, and imagine

possibilities" (InTASC, 2011, p. 8) is tied to accreditation and, thus, this policy is another external influence that plays out in creative affordances in classrooms.

At a school level, a community of practice mediates large-scale sociocultural influences (Wenger, 1999). In creatively high-performing schools, teachers acknowledge and mediate larger political and social pressures by leveraging their own value of creativity and expertise in promoting it in children. For example, teachers in an English primary school collaborated to overcome scripted curriculum and overemphasis on assessment and applied successful pedagogical strategies to support creativity (Craft, Cremin, Hay, & Clack, 2014). Specifically, they co-constructed creative learning experiences with colleagues, demonstrated a strong emphasis on children's agency and ownership in learning, and articulated high expectations for skillful creative engagement (Craft et al., 2014). Thus, creativity in the classroom is shaped by how teachers agentially respond to the external societal pressures and at times actively exercise productive disobedience to expectations that hinder their learners' creative development.

To conclude, to pursue *creativity justice*, we need to consider how diverse creative backgrounds and individual characteristics of children of color intersect with those of their teachers and peers in schools. In addition, these intersections need to be considered in the context of higher accountability and a push-down curriculum in culturally diverse and racially segregated settings. Otherwise, the deficit perspective of urban children as less creative (Dai et al., 2012) may work to function as a self-fulfilling prophecy. As a starting point, we use critical sociocultural grounding of creativity to

frame our investigation of creativity representation in course descriptions in teacher preparation programs across the United States.

Methodology

To conduct a review of early childhood degree programs for their representation of creativity, we carried out a national survey of early childhood education programs in every state and territory of the United States. We limited our search to state universities as they are more highly regulated by government and therefore more representative of the national strategic vision for creativity. We employed qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000; Schreier, 2014) to critically analyze representations of creativity that might perpetuate existing inequalities in early childhood education. Next, we discuss our data collection, coding scheme development, and data analysis in more depth.

Data Collection Procedure and Selection Criteria

The data collection process consisted of two stages conducted by the authors of the paper and two graduate assistants. During Phase I of data collection, team members were assigned particular states and US territories. Within each geographical unit, they identified state universities, schools of education, and initial early childhood certification teacher preparation programs; located programs of study; identified courses on creativity; and, finally, found associated course descriptions in university catalogues. This data was compiled into a shared central database. During Phase II of data collection, the central database was cross-checked for data accuracy.

First, we identified state universities and colleges located in every state and territory of the United States (a total of 665 institutions). Then, we searched for colleges/schools of education and found them in 523 of the identified universities. We explored each school/college of education to find programs that prepared early childhood teachers for initial certification since these are the teacher candidates who are more likely to work in public early childhood settings, including urban ECE. We identified a total of 387 programs that fit our selection criteria.

Once all early childhood initial teacher certification preparation programs were identified (a total of 387 programs), we obtained their programs of study. We looked at programs of study within the programs to find course titles that contained words with the root "create". Our search yielded "creativity", "creative", and "creating" as the three-word derivations used in course titles in early childhood teacher education (Table 1). The data collection yielded 134 course descriptions of "creativity courses". While other courses in early childhood listings may imply their creative orientation without clearly including creativity in their title (e.g., "art methods", "music history"), we only focused on how creativity is explicitly positioned by teacher educators.

Table 1

"Creativity Courses" in Early Childhood Teacher Preparation

Course Title Key Word	N	Course Title Examples
Creative	105	Creative Expressions in Early Childhood Creative Learning in Early Childhood Education Methods in Creative Arts for Young Children
Creativity	29	Creativity and the Arts in Early Childhood Enhancing Childhood Creativity Creativity in Early Childhood Curriculum
Creating	4	Creating Environments for Learning and Play Creating Environments for Young Children Creating Meaning through Literature and Arts

Data Analysis

First, we analyzed courses to sort them into two categories: those that mention any aspect of sociocultural context and those that do not (Table 2). We defined sociocultural context as any reference that defines people and settings in assumed or explicit relation to other people and settings. For example, if a child is described as having special needs, this description positions the child in a sociocultural relation to other children and their experiences. If a school is described as public, this description

signals a sociocultural relationship to other schools. While a child's age would fit in our definition of sociocultural relationship to others, we excluded it from analysis. More often than not, the course description used age to signal the degree to which it belongs (e.g., early childhood vs. middle and secondary certification area).

Table 2

Presence of Sociocultural Aspects across Courses

Sociocultural Aspect	N	Course Title Examples	Course Description Examples
Yes (37%)	49	Social Studies & Creative Arts	Value of play and creative arts in early childhood; integration of visual arts, music, dance/movement, drama and social studies into the K-3 classroom curriculum; instructional design; authentic assessment, and evidence-based practice for adapting the curriculum for *diverse learners*.
No (63%)	85	Creative Expression and Play in Early Childhood	Addresses the importance of high quality and meaningful play and creative arts experience across the early childhood curriculum. Applies the creative arts to enhance the development of basic skills.

Second, we focused more closely on courses that mentioned sociocultural context to capture differences between contextual aspects mentioned in the course descriptions. Through the process of emergent coding, we identified the following aspects among the course descriptions: teaching methods reflecting sociocultural positionality of children, classrooms reflecting sociocultural positionality of children, curriculum reflecting sociocultural positionality of children, children's positionality in relation to other children, family as context, community as context, and larger sociocultural characteristics (see Table 3). Some courses mentioned more than one sociocultural aspect and were coded as such, yielding 70 instances where sociocultural aspects entered into 41 course descriptions.

Table 3

Creativity Courses with Elements of Sociocultural Context

Aspect	N	Course Title Examples	Course Description Examples
Teaching methods reflecting sociocultural positionality of children (e.g., Developmentally Appropriate Practice methods, culturally responsive teaching, inclusive teaching practices, and adapting activities for special needs)	25 (18% of courses)	Planning Creative Experiences for Young Children	Development of attitudes, materials, and skills needed to *plan and teach age, individually, and culturally appropriate curriculum* for young children

Classrooms reflecting sociocultural positionality of children (e.g., diverse classroom, inclusive early childhood settings, and small and large groups of children, developmentally appropriate learning environment, dual language classroom, culturally, linguistically, and cognitively diverse classrooms)	13 (9% of courses)	Play, Creativity, and Learning	A study of play theories as they relate to creativity, development, and learning. Will provide early childhood and elementary educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to promote and guide children's play as a fundamental learning mechanism *in culturally, linguistically, and cognitively diverse classrooms*. Emphasis on effective strategies, equipment, materials, and activities that support and encourage children's play and creativity in early childhood and elementary grades.
Larger sociocultural characteristics (e.g., democratic society, historic and cultural aspects of the arts, national/global cultural understanding, accountability climate, public school)	10 (7% of courses)	Arts and Creative Expression in Early Childhood	This course introduces students to the process, skills, and inquiry of the arts through an integrated curriculum approach. The course focuses on the visual and performing arts as related to literature, technology, and children's lives. Students develop a critical perspective on the arts as related to creativity, literacy strategies, culturally responsive teaching and learning, and the *role of the arts in a democratic society.*

Curriculum reflecting sociocultural positionality of children (e.g., DAP curriculum, culturally responsive curriculum, inclusive curriculum, adapting curriculum for ELL students, multicultural curriculum)	9 (6 % of courses)	Creating Environments for Young Children	This course presents an overview of knowledge and skills related to planning and implementing *developmentally and culturally appropriate curriculum* and environments for young children from birth to eight years old. Students examine how to create and use the physical environment as the foundation for promoting activities that support learning and development, with an emphasis on language and literacy development and the essential role of play.
Children's positionality in relation to other children (e.g., 'learning of students from diverse backgrounds', 'reaching students of all levels and backgrounds no matter what their cognitive ability, learning style, or native language'	7 (5% of courses)	Creative/Effective Teaching Performance-Based Learning	…Course focuses on creative activities. Students should be prepared to improve the learning of *students from diverse backgrounds* with an emphasis on the teaching and learning process.
Family as context (e.g., 'children reflecting culturally and linguistically diverse family systems')	3 (2% of courses)	Creative Activities for Young Children	A study of concepts and content including: arts (sound, color, rhythm, movement) in the early childhood curriculum; methods and materials for developing creativity; room arrangement; and a review of relevant research. Candidates will observe and work with children of diverse ages and with children reflecting *culturally and linguistically diverse family systems* in early childhood settings and will implement arts-based lessons.

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| *Community as context* (e.g., 'member of community', 'community relationships') | 3 (2% of courses) | Integrating Social Studies and Creative Arts in Early Childhood | This course is an exploration of the Arts and Social Studies as they impact learning experiences in the early childhood settings. Visual and performing arts will be emphasized in a learning environment that helps children become more *aware of their physical and social surroundings and learn to become members of a community*. Students will learn how to develop instruction that promotes play that leads to genuine learning. |

The final layer of coding involved creativity-specific sociocultural analysis. We developed a coding scheme that represented the five socioculturally grounded elements of creativity for learners and teachers (actor, action, artifact, affordances, and audience) from Glăveanu's (2013) theoretical framework. We then applied the coding scheme to analyze connections between sociocultural aspects and creativity. In other words, we were looking to see which aspects of creativity were deemed to be more strongly connected to sociocultural factors in the way teacher preparation programs described creativity courses to their students.

Findings

This study explores how early childhood teacher preparation programs across the United States describe creativity in "creativity courses" required by their program of study. Our findings reveal that creativity mostly exists in sociocultural vacuums in university catalogues. Over half of "creativity" course descriptions do not mention any aspect of the sociocultural context of teaching and learning in their promise to prepare

teacher candidates. Qualitative analysis of critical sociocultural aspects of creativity reveals that, with minor exceptions, course descriptions suggest that creativity develops universally and is separate from learners' and teachers' experiential and cultural backgrounds, and that creativity in schools is free from broader sociocultural influences. In the next section, we discuss each finding in more detail.

Learners Might Be Diverse, but Their Creativity Is Not

Our findings suggest that teacher preparation programs promise to teach their candidates about *creativity development as universal.* For example, some courses explicitly offer to prepare teacher candidates to work with learners who are "progressing through universal sequence of creative development." Other courses package universality of creative development more subtly and offer "an examination of developmental patterns in children's artistic behaviors" and to "explore stages of development of children in the arts." On a large scale, the data suggest that teacher education programs represent creativity as disconnected from learners' experiential and cultural backgrounds. According to our findings, the message communicated to teacher candidates is that learners' creativity develops in a predictable way in response to "external stimuli" provided by teachers.

While teacher preparation programs acknowledge that learners' diversity is relevant to learning, it appears to be irrelevant to creativity. The general analysis of sociocultural aspects reveals that learner differences (9% of courses), culturally responsive teaching (18% of courses) and curriculum (6%) are brought up in course descriptions despite the overall sociocultural vacuum. More specifically, ability and

language are the primary diversity characteristics that learners bring to the classroom. However, learner diversity in course descriptions is disconnected from their creativity. For example, the course titled *Creative Expressive Arts* advertises the following to prospective students:

> This course presents the rationale and value of integrating the arts into the classroom curriculum. Students examine the nature of creativity, the elements of music, and the elements and principles of art. This course teaches methods of creating assessment-based instruction to promote artistic activities as well as *adapting activities for special needs and ELL students.*

Such examples of preparing for learners' diversity resembles focus on academic differentiation, rather than focus on sociocultural nature of creativity. "Adapting" instruction for special needs and linguistic backgrounds aligns more closely with the language of modification and/or accommodation for learning in general rather than the development of creativity in particular. Academic differentiation is critical for teacher candidates' professional preparation, which is evident in the emphasis courses placed on it. At the same time, the understanding of creativity as unique to learners based on their cultural and experiential background is missing from early the descriptions.

Based on our analysis, teacher preparation programs suggest to teacher candidates that while learners are diverse and might learn differently, their creative processes and products are the subject of a universal path of creative development. This finding is consistent with the way creativity is represented in research in general as an individualistic "in the head" process (Glăveanu, 2013). The "individualistic, static, and

oftentimes disjointed" view of creativity (Glăveanu, 2013, p. 69) glosses over the important role of the sociocultural background of the learner and its relation to the sociocultural background of the teacher and the creative school context.

Teachers Might Be There, But Is Their Creativity?

While teacher education research consistently points out the intersectional cultural gap between teachers and learners (Hollins, 2015), our analysis of course descriptions suggests that teacher education programs do not prioritize addressing this gap. Teachers' experiential and cultural backgrounds were largely missing in general, especially their connection to creativity. None of the courses communicated the need to prepare teachers to consider their own sociocultural backgrounds in relation to learners' creativity. One of 134 courses highlighted diversity in creative processes and actions among teachers by promising to discuss *"diverse range and variability of creative development including creative thinking, creative processes, creative abilities"* of educators of young children. This is a step closer in preparing teacher candidates to recognize their creative process as culturally situated. The next step would be to link these unique teacher processes to learners' contextualized creativity.

The sociocultural positionality of a teacher is important in any curriculum and teaching certification area (Hollins, 2015). Perhaps even more so when it comes to creativity development, given the subjective judgment of other people's creative abilities (Beghetto, Kaufman, & Baxter, 2011) and highly contextualized evaluation of other people's creative products (Glăveanu, 2015). In addition, teachers' individual approach to classroom management may fundamentally affect creativity. For example, teachers who

emphasize student autonomy rather than those who centralize control over their students are more likely to have stronger creative classroom climates (Deci, Nezlek, & Sheinman, 1981). The absence of cultural and experiential positionality of teachers in course descriptions may signal the teacher-neutral "best practices" for creativity. This approach may undermine learners who are experientially and culturally different from the teacher, which is often the case in urban early childhood settings.

Beyond sociocultural positionality, our analysis of course descriptions that mention teachers/educators (23 instances) revealed their powerless/absent position in the creative process. Teachers were represented as either the target audience of the course (e.g., "this course is designed for future teachers") or, more frequently, as passive subjects of preparation. For example, teachers would be "provided", "acquainted", or "helped" with skills and knowledge related to teaching. Only in two instances did the teachers' role become the central part of the promised curriculum. These courses empowered the agential voice of the teachers describing the "teacher as the creative artist" or promised to dedicate time to understanding the "teacher's role in supporting the development of creativity." Teacher education programs need to centralize the teacher as a creative agent intentionally supporting learners' diverse creativities (thoughts, behaviors, and artifacts).

Classroom Creativity is Free from External Sociocultural Context

First, our findings reveal that teacher education programs downplay the realities of a push-down curriculum and high stakes accountability and shy away from promising to teach strategies to harness creativity in different school contexts. For example, only

one creativity course in our sample articulated the need to prepare teacher candidates for creativity-conducive practices in the context of accountability pressure:

> Theoretical and practical aspects of play, creativity and arts-based learning are the central tenets of this course. Students will gain fundamental knowledge for constructing playful learning experiences across early learning settings, *particularly within the context of the standards-based, high-stakes accountability climate of education in the United States and beyond.*

This example illustrates how educational policy shapes the classroom and may influence how teachers adjust their teaching for creativity in this educational reality. Early childhood teachers believe that school and classroom environments fundamentally affect their ability to nurture learners' creativity (Eckhoff, 2011). Counter-creative mandates that overemphasize conformative assessment may reinforce teachers' limiting beliefs about teaching for creativity. "Preservice teacher education programming holds the potential to empower preservice teachers to promote creativity across all learning experiences" by explicitly acknowledging environmental barriers to classroom creativity and offering strategies for overcoming them (Eckhoff, 2011). For example, teachers can advocate for creativity, actively experiment in the classroom, and gradually incorporate creative materials and experiences (Eckhoff, 2010).

Second, we found that describing classroom creativity as untouched by education policy is symptomatic of another related theme: sovereignty of creativity in classrooms from a broader sociocultural context. Only a few courses (7%) acknowledge the importance of external sociocultural context by including promise to prepare teachers for

learner diversity present in "*today's public school population*", learn critical perspectives on the *"role of the arts in a democratic society"*, and highlight the connection of art to cultural context (e.g., *"historic and cultural aspects of the arts"*).

Vygotsky (1967/2004) and Glăveanu (2013) centralize the interplay of broad sociocultural factors and individual creativity traits. The overall context-free conception of creativity may misguide early childhood teacher candidates to believe they can apply "best practices for creativity" identically regardless of the learners, schools, and overall societal contexts. These understandings are especially damaging to learners who are culturally different from their teachers and attend schools that are prone to higher pressures of accountability (Darling-Hammond, 2007). For example, while private early childhood programs have more options in resisting curriculum pushdown, universal pre-K and Head Start programs that serve more learners of color are held more accountable for mandated kindergarten readiness expectations that may result in curriculum pushdown. Perhaps, in addition to anti-racism education, teachers should also learn a bit of productive disobedience in service of creativity justice to resist conformity and neoliberalism.

Discussion

Creativity is a sociocultural phenomenon (Eckhoff, 2011; Eckhoff & Urbach, 2008; Glăveanu, 2013; Glăveanu, 2015; Vygotsky, 1967/2004) that requires a critical lens to understand the implications of unequal dynamics of power and privilege in the Unites States schools (e.g., Annamma, 2017; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017). On a national scale, early childhood educators are under pressure to teach in

ways that may hinder learners' creativity in general and learners of color in particular due to the subjective nature of creativity and its sociocultural roots that, among other things, are not readily visible to an assimilationist gaze (Paris, 2012). These pressures require a counter reassurance of creativity's importance in the classroom (Prentice, 2000) by teacher educators and intentional efforts by teacher preparation programs to support teaching creativity from a critical sociocultural perspective. Unfortunately, our study finds that teacher educators mostly promise to teach a universal development of creativity that appears disconnected from learners' and teachers' experiential and cultural backgrounds existing in a sociocultural societal vacuum.

The education system continues to overlook learners of color with diverse histories, cultures, and languages (Hollins, 2015) including creative heritage and futures of their communities. Different culture-specific ways of thinking and being creative need to be intentionally sustained (Paris, 2012) so that these ways can continue to alter the present and create the future where learners from all backgrounds have the cultural fluency to contribute to the evolving creative fabrics of their cultures. In addition to anti-racist curriculum, teachers have a responsibility to notice (Strekalova-Hughes & Wang, 2017) and support different cultural ways of being (Paris, 2012) by sustaining culturally specific creative processes and practices of learners within diverse communities of color that can otherwise be essentialized and/or suppressed. In the words of Janks (2010), teachers and learners "have to be taught how to use and select from all the available semiotic resources for representation in order to make meaning, while at the same time combining and recombining these resources so as to create possibilities for

transformation and reconstruction" (p. 25). For instance, a teacher can value and support cognitive processes of a Somali learner that are necessary to create new riddles traditionally used by his family for amusement and passing time before resettlement in the United States (Strekalova-Hughes & Wang, 2019). Another example might be sustaining the cognitive processes of an African American learner who can deeply connect with an intergenerational creative artifact and, at the same time, freestyle - activating unique cognitive and emotional processes that require high creativity levels.

Concluding Thoughts and Next Steps

In this study, we explore 387 early childhood teacher preparation programs in the United States to identify required creativity courses and critically analyze how teacher educators describe creativity to their students. The snapshot of this discourse suggests that teacher education may not be ready to support teacher candidates in understanding, interpreting, and sustaining creative ways of being that can enrich cultural dexterity and pluralism in schools and communities (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017).

This work requires early childhood teacher educators to consider the critical sociocultural nature of creativity and guide teacher candidates to overcome perceived barriers to creativity and activate their learners' creative histories and affordances within each community of color. The goal of recruiting teacher candidates of color from a range of cultural backgrounds becomes essential as well as guiding white teacher candidates in understanding their own dissimilar creative histories and positionalities in classrooms and communities.

To capture the diversity of creativity within learners' evolving cultures, we invite the research community to build on the concept of cultural repertoires of practice (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003) and research *creative cultural repertoires of practice.* We define *creative cultural repertoires of practice* as evolving creative ways of thinking and being that sustain and contribute to the collective fabric of creative intergenerational assemblages within each cultural community. Research on identifying creative cultural repertoires of practice and developing corresponding teaching practices might support culturally sustaining pedagogies in education (Paris & Alim, 2017). Finally, instead of looking for creativity gaps in learners (Tan, Marathe, Valtcheva, Pruzek, & Shen, 2012), future research needs to focus on the *creativity debt* in teacher education (to borrow Ladson-Billings' (2006) *education debt* analogy) and gear up for *creativity justice* in urban teacher preparation and culturally diverse and racially segregated early childhood classrooms.

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