THESIS

AN INVESTIGATION OF IMAGINATION IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

AN INVESTIGATION OF IMAGINATION IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Current literature concerning the role of imagination in education widely ignores the perspectives of students and teachers. This qualitative study aims to examine these perspectives through interviews with two language arts teachers and three students in two secondary school contexts. My research questions were: (1) What role does the imagination have in secondary education? (2) To what extent does the imagination deserve our attention as teachers? (3) What types of instruction, activities, and learning environments support student imagination? Participants reported that imagination plays a crucial role in education and offered several ideas about how best to cultivate imagination in the classroom. Given these findings I conclude that it is imperative that imagination receives more attention from educators and researchers.

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INTRODUCTION

Many people believe that the imagination plays an important role in education. In the most extreme cases, there are people like educational philosopher Mary Warnock and critical pedagogue Henri Giroux who believe that the imagination is the most important factor in learning. Warnock goes as far to claim that: "The cultivation of imagination…should be the chief aim of education" (*Imagination* 7). In a similar vein, Giroux declares that: "The task of deepening and expanding the imagination may be one of the most important pedagogical elements at work in any classroom" (*Education and the Crisis of Public Values* 62). While some might be hesitant to adopt such an extreme view, I agree with Warnock and Giroux. In my experience as a student and as a teacher, the imagination plays a meaningful role in every act of learning. Behind every significant educational development in my own life, I can report a specific imaginative leap in my thinking. In English, for example, the most important leap for me was when I realized that texts can be read in an infinite number of ways, and that there is no *Hamlet*; there are only versions of *Hamlet* as imagined by different people. In addition, whenever I consider the most important moments of growth in my students, I can identify imagination or imaginative thinking as a contributing factor. I often notice, for instance, that imaginative thinking plays a key role, for students, in identifying, explaining, and refuting fallacious reasoning. Beyond this, I believe that the imagination plays a crucial role in the way that we confront the most serious problems we encounter in the world, and that because of this, the imagination needs to be one of the highest priorities of public education.

Not everyone, however, shares the view that the imagination plays a leading or even necessary role in learning. Admittedly, it would be difficult to find someone who actually

opposes the imagination's role in learning, but it is clear that there are people who fail to value of the imagination in the world of education. In fact, currently the U.S. public school system in general fails to value the imagination, and that this is revealed by the fact that it is not prioritized in the same way that, for instance, analytical reasoning or communication skills are (I discuss this in more detail in the Literature Review). One explanation for this might be that, for many, imagination is synonymous with make-believe. So, one might say, "The imagination may be important for early childhood development, but when it comes to secondary education, we have too many other important goals to make room for the imagination." Another explanation for this might be that common sense rejects that imagination is even something that can be taught, and, as one might argue in an era of standards-based education, "Why should we prioritize something if we cannot reliably teach and reliably assess it?" I think both of these ideas are fundamentally flawed (again, this is discussed in the Literature Review), but both cut to the heart of what we view as the primary purpose of education. And this, of course, is a contentious issue.

Philosopher of education John Dewey believed that public education is about the cultivation of democratically inclined citizens, and that the purpose of public schools should be to support democracy as a way of life. Dewey was also a proponent of nurturing the imagination in education; in fact, he believed that "the imagination is as much a normal and integral part of human activity as is muscular movement" (*Democracy and Education* 237). While our world is significantly different from Dewey's in many pedagogically relevant ways, I accept Dewey's basic premise, but there are also many people who believe that Dewey's ideal is currently under attack. Giroux, for example, argues that we have allowed corporate interests to influence the ends of public education too much, and that education in the United States has changed for the worse (*Educational and the Crisis of Public Values*). Sir Kenneth Robinson argues that we have

for too long upheld a factory model of schooling that inherently kills creativity and runs against

our highest goals and values ("Why Schools Kill Creativity"). In addition, many people are

concerned about the potentially negative, long-term effects of legislation like NCLB on the U.S.

public education system, because it tends to prioritize accountability over quality instruction.

Assuming that there is at least some truth in each of these concerns it is difficult to discern

precisely what the true purpose of public education is in the U.S., despite any official statements

we might find on a website.

Although I agree with Giroux, Robinson, and critics of NCLB era ideals, I nevertheless

believe that there are many features of the U.S. public school system that still make it the best in

the world. As a pre-service teacher in Colorado in 2013, however, I cannot help but to wonder

about the dominant trends in education as reflected by legislation like Senate Bill 10-191, which

aim to accelerate student growth by reforming the way that teachers are evaluated. I am not

necessarily opposed to the idea of measuring teacher effectiveness (shouldn't we strive to put the

best teachers in front of students every day?), but I am concerned about the unintentional shifts

in priorities these types of decisions might cause. Will the already undervalued features of

imaginative thinking and learning be further marginalized in the curricula of well-intentioned

teachers across the state and nation? Will we lose generations of imaginative thinkers because we

are driven too heavily by the obligation to prove that students have internalized the knowledge

that we have deemed as "standard"? In light of the legislative decisions we have made, and the

consequences they will have, I suggest that we need to ask ourselves again, *what is the purpose*

of education, and what is most important in the classroom?

These are critical questions because the problems of the 21st century call for the most

imaginative thinkers and solutions in history. For example, cyber-bullying is a rampant and ever-

increasing problem in schools across the country, and existing solutions are far from adequate due to the scale and complexity of the issue. The National Center for Educational Statistics reported in 2011 that more than a quarter of students report having been cyber-bullied at least once in their school career. Who will imagine the best ways to prevent this problem, and others like it, in the future? And, of course, this is not the only type of violence that plagues or schools. With the tragic events of Sandy Hook, school shootings have once again demanded our attention and sparked a nationwide debate about guns and gun culture in America. As it stands, it is difficult to imagine a solution with which all stakeholders involved would be satisfied—and yet, *something* needs to be done. What will we do? Global warming, too, is a seemingly insurmountable problem that grows every year. The scientific community believes that these changes represent nothing less than an existential threat to our species. Who will imagine the kind of worldwide change necessary to curb the causes of global climate change? And who will imagine a way to cope with the damage that has already been done?

These are only a few of the countless problems we face nationally and globally. In light of realities like these, we desperately need to imagine better versions of ourselves, our relationships with others, and the world at large. We need to do this more than we ever have, and perhaps we need more imaginative thinkers than there have ever been. Right now, we need to be able to think the unthinkable and imagine the unimaginable. Only in this way can we begin to chip away at the problems of the 21st century, and only in this way can we truly move beyond what *is* to what might *be*. The world we live in is not the only the possible one, but without imagination, it is impossible to realize this. This is why the views of Warnock and Giroux are perhaps not all that extreme after all, and this is why it is imperative that we have a conversation about the imagination and its place in education. We need to understand and appreciate the full

power of the imagination. This means understanding the role imagination has in learning, the true extent to which it deserves the attention of educators, and types of instruction, activities, and learning environments that best support student imagination. We need to hear from students and teachers about how to do this. They are, after all, the primary actors in the world of education, and from my perspective, their voices are the most important on the issue of the role of imagination in education. My research aims to bring student and teacher perspectives into this conversation.

As previously touched on, I am approaching this study as a pre-service English language arts teacher in 2013. To some extent, this means that I am already biased in the direction of valuing the imagination in education. Moreover, like many of my fellow pre-service teachers, I am trained to be suspicious of the current accountability movement in the U.S. public school system (I am sure we can all, for example, recite numerous problems with standardized testing on the drop of a hat). These are both important elements of my developing philosophy of education. So, part of the motivation for this study comes from my strong desire to act in some way on my beliefs. I want to do something about the problems I see in education as opposed to merely complain about them. The best way I know how to do this is to conduct research to gather the right data and evidence to support arguments about what we, as educators, can and should do next.

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Many parents, teachers, and administrators would agree that the cultivation of student imagination is important, but there is surprisingly little support for imagination in the documents that actually guide instruction in U.S. public schools. The term "imagination," for example, doesn't even appear in the Common Core State Standards adopted by most U.S. states in 2012. Furthermore, despite related terms like "creativity" and "innovation," imagination also failed to make the list of 21st century skills supported by the U.S. Department of Education. This presents an interesting problem: if we, as educators, think that the cultivation of student imagination is important, then why isn't imagination one of the explicit priorities of public schools in the U.S.?

One explanation for this is a widespread view of imagination as the power to visualize fictional objects and states of affairs. This view is reflected in many popular dictionaries. Merriam-Webster's dictionary, for example, defines imagination as "the act or power of forming a mental image of something not present to the senses or never before wholly perceived in reality." Likewise, Oxford English Dictionary defines it as "the faculty or action of forming new ideas, or images or concepts of external objects not present to the senses." Understood only in this way, educators might understandably overlook imagination to focus on other more important goals, especially in a time of high-stakes testing and teacher accountability.

But there are good reasons to think that imagination is much more than visual fantasy and that it deserves more attention in the classroom. In this chapter I will review these reasons as put forward by experts in the conversation, and examine some of the ways that some people have attempted to make the imagination a priority in the classroom. While the perspectives of some teachers have been represented in the conversation, it is clear from the literature that their

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perspectives need to be given more time and considered in more detail. Moreover, the

perspectives of students on the role of imagination are almost universally ignored. Given that the

perspectives of students and teachers are vital on the issue of imagination in education, it is

crucial that we begin to invite them into the conversation as well. My research is devoted to this

end.

WHAT IS THE IMAGINATION?

Not merely mental visualization

Clearly one power of the imagination is to visualize the absent or the non-existent. When

I imagine, for example, what my cat looks like, I conjure up an image of something that isn't

present before me. Or, when I imagine what a purple unicorn would look like, I visualize

something that doesn't exist at all. But the rich and full power of the imagination cannot simply

be defined in terms of our capacity to bring images before our mind's eye. For one thing, it's

possible to visualize the same image in two different instances but not be imagining the same

thing. Philosopher of education Kieran Egan offers the following thought experiment to prove

just this point. He says, "One can distinguish between visualizing and imagining by reflecting on

the fact that to visualize Jane would be the same as to visualize her identical twin sister,

Giaconda, but to imagine Jane would be distinct from imagining Giaconda" (30). When I

imagine Jane, I do not imagine Giaconda, even though, as Egan stipulates, I have the same image

before my mind's eye. Elsewhere, Egan offers another route to the same conclusion: "you could

imagine a suitcase completely obscuring a cat but not visualize it in a way distinct from simply

visualizing a suitcase" (30). Put another way, imagination can't simply be mental visualization,

since I can imagine things that I cannot see, or things that are obscured from view.

Aside from these considerations, the imagination can make use of any sense, not just

sight. Philosopher Alan White explains that "imaginary tastes and smells are as common as

imaginary sights and sounds and we can 'smell' or 'taste' something in our imagination" (90). I can imagine the sound of an old rope twisting; I can imagine the taste of juicy strawberries on pizza; I can imagine the smell of burning coffee; I can imagine the feeling of warm sandpaper on my fingertips. While some of these imaginative acts might happen to be accompanied by mental images, in perhaps in flashes of associations, none of them necessarily require visualization. Otherwise, we would be committed to the seemingly absurd view that blind people had no capacity for imagination.

Finally, not every use of the term "imagine" is meant to reference our capacity to mentally envision something. We might here take a clue from the philosopher of language Ludwig Wittgenstein: "One ought to ask, not what imaginings are or what happens when one imagines anything, but how the word 'imagination' is used." Thus, we might look to an ordinary sentence like: "I can't imagine my brother wearing a tuxedo." By this, I do not literally mean that I can't visualize my brother wearing a tuxedo; rather, I mean to say something about my ability to conceive of him behaving in some way, which is not dependent on any particular vision of him. Therefore, it can't be that I mean something purely visual when I use the term "imagine" in such sentences. Egan also offers a number of other ordinary sentences where there is not a necessary tie to mental visualization: "I can imagine a world without war"; "I can't imagine wanting to live like that"; "I can imagine what the neighbors will think"; "I never imagined you would fail"; "Imagine her running a show company"; "Imagine selling your birthright for a mess of pottage" (29). In each instance, we use the word "imagine," but we are not necessarily referring to an experience of mental visualization.

So, what do these arguments prove? The purpose of each of these arguments is to demonstrate that any definition of imagination that reduces it to mere mental visualization is

unfairly reductive. This point is especially important to make in the world of education because there is a tendency for people to assume that the imagination has relevance in the visual arts only. A quick search of U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's public statements, for instance, reveals that the only time the word "imagination" has been used in the last four years was in a speech on the importance of arts education. Clearly, however, the imagination is not limited to the visual arts. We need to recognize that our everyday definition of the imagination is unfairly dominated by the metaphor of sight, and that we need to expand our understanding of it to ensure that it can receive the attention in schools that it deserves (I will discuss arguments for why the imagination is important later in this chapter). But this is not the only "myth" about the imagination that needs to be dispelled.

Not merely make-believe

Another common idea is that the imagination is child's play; it's about fantasy, like dragons, wizards, and magic. Many theorists of the imagination, however, argue that the imagination is as much about reality as it is about fiction. In fact, many argue, the imagination is one way that we engage with the real world more accurately and effectively. Philosopher of education Mary Warnock for example argues that: "Imagination…is involved in all perception of the world, in that it is that element in perception which makes what we see and hear meaningful to us" (152). Anytime we perceive a building *as* a home, she thinks, or an expanse of land *as* a park, we go beyond what is directly given to us and activate our imaginations. On this view, the imagination is, far from being an extra capacity of our mind, a ubiquitous feature of experience as we know it. In fact, some argue, it is a precondition of experience, without which we wouldn't have meaningful experience in the first place. Egan supports this idea when he explains that the imagination "is not a well-developed, distinct function of the mind, but is rather a particular flexibility which can invigorate all mental functions" (36).

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But even if we granted, for the sake of argument, that the imagination is the business of children only, we would not have to admit that the imagination is merely about fictional entities, for, as White argues, "When we imagine something we think of it as a possibility which is actualized or real. But our imagination is quite neutral as to whether it is in fact real or not. Hence, though whatever is imaginary is imagined, not everything which is imagined is imaginary" (188). An example to prove this, again, is that I can imagine my cat sleeping on my bed, and this is not only realistic, but likely actual (he loves sleeping on my bed). And while imagination and fantasy are sometimes interchangeable, this is not always the case. Educational theorists Degenhardt and McKay use an example from a history class to prove this point:

> I may talk of imagining that I am Superman or of imagining I was a sailor on Nelson's victory. However, in the first case it would seem quite natural to substitute "fantasize" for "imagine"; in the second, it would be inappropriate unless the intended implication was that my imagining of life between decks was being done in an indulgent, ill-informed, or undisciplined way, perhaps proposing an anachronistic coziness or giving myself an improbably heroic role (241).

In other words, it is perfectly possible for me to imagine myself in realistic, even historical, situations that lead me to richer understanding of past events. It is not uncommon for us to imagine ourselves in another time, or to project ourselves in future situations. Given the sheer frequency of these types of imaginings, it is reasonable to conclude that the imagination is not merely about fantasy, and therefore not merely something that can have realistic content, but is also something that could have real effects on the way we live our lives.

Dewey supports this idea, too, when he says:

> We hear much nowadays about the cultivation of the child's 'imagination.' Then
> we undo much of our talk and work by a belief that the imagination is some
> special part of the child that finds its satisfaction in some particular direction—
> general speaking, that of the unreal and make-believe, of the myth and made-up
> story (61).

Here Dewey is criticizing the idea that imagination is all or even mostly about fantasy and fiction. According to Dewey, the imagination is not only something we activate outside of playful or fantastical contexts, but is something that plays a fundamental role in the very way we make sense of the world in the first place. In Dewey's words, "the imagination is as much a normal and integral part of human activity as is muscular movement" (237). This gives the imagination the role of "sense-making," for Dewey. And elsewhere, Dewey argues that the imagination "designates a quality that animates and pervades all processes of making and observation… It is a *way* of seeing and feeling things as they compose an integral whole" (267); and further that: "imaginative experience is what happens when varied materials of sense quality, emotion, and meaning come together in a union that marks a new birth in the world" (267). For Dewey, what this means is that imagination is what helps us organize the raw, disconnected mass of sense experience into a meaningful whole.

Northrop Frye, another philosopher of the imagination, shares Dewey's stance that the imagination is as much about reality as it is about fantasy. He says:

> It is a fact of experience that the world we live in is a world largely created by the
> human imagination… The imaginative or creative force in the mind is what has
> produced everything that we call culture and civilization. It is the power of
> transforming a subhuman physical world into a world with a human shape and

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meaning, a world not of rocks and tress but of cities and gardens, not an

environment but a home (421).

In other words, according to Frye, the imagination is implicated in every meaningful act of

perception whatsoever. The world as we know and understand it, for Frye, is in large part the

product of our imagination. Mary Warnock concurs with both Dewey and Frye on this matter. In

describing imagination, Warnock argues that:

Imagination…is involved in all perception of the world, in that it is that element

in perception, which makes what we see and hear meaningful to us. It is the

element, that is, by means of which we characterize and feel things to be familiar,

unfamiliar, beautiful, desirable, strange, horrible, and so on (152).

Thus, Warnock, too, treats imagination as a pre-condition for all meaningful experience, and

reserves for it a crucial spot in our mind's ability to make sense of and navigate the real world.

So, far from being merely child's play or make-believe, many theorists take the

imagination very seriously and uphold it as one of the most important elements of the mind.

Given that on even the simplest level imagination cannot be reduced to mere fantasy, it is clear

that we need a more refined understanding of what the imagination is and what it can do. More

than this, in light of several major theories of the imagination, we must recognize that

imagination is not merely child's play, but is a vital function of the mind that helps us make

sense of the world we live in. What could be more grounded in reality than that?

Seeing beyond what is to what might be

The imagination is more than mental visualization, more than make-believe, and is more

than some extraneous function of the mind. Certainly it allows us to visualize absent and non-

existent realities, but it also allows us to engage with real things and events and enhances our

experience with them. If this is the case, how then, should imagination be defined positively?

Many theorists believe that the concept of imagination is intimately tied up with the concept of possibility. White, for example, claims that "to imagine something is to *think of* it as possible being so" (184). In other words, the imagination is what allows us to go beyond the actual and see what is possible, or in some cases to see what is possible despite what is actual. In a very similar manner, Egan argues that "imagination is the capacity to think of things as possibly being so; it is an intentional act of mind; it is the source of invention, novelty, and generativity"(43). Egan's definition adds the idea that the imagination is what's responsible for any new idea or thought we might have. Another definition comes from philosopher Maxine Greene; she claims that to imagine is "to look at things as if they could be otherwise" (22).

The most significant part about each of these definitions is that none of them necessarily define imagination away as something entirely to do with what doesn't or cannot exist in reality. Not all possibilities are fictions and fantasies; some possibilities simply have not happened or have not been created yet. Imagination needs to be understood, therefore, as our capacity to consider and contemplate possible worlds, regardless of whether those worlds could exist in reality or not. The imagination is what allows us to see beyond what is to what might be; it allows us to expose the seemingly necessarily as the merely contingent.

WHY IS IMAGINATION IMPORTANT?

Many arguments have been offered for why the imagination is important or valuable, not only for students in schools, but also for society in general. In what follows, I try to manage these ideas into three clear categories. Essentially, I believe that the most compelling reasons for why the imagination is important are because (1) it helps students imagine themselves in new and surprising roles, that is to say, it supports individual growth, (2) it helps students prepare for the workforce and become competitive in the 21st century, and (3) it contributes to the

democratic health of society in general, i.e. it allows citizens to criticize existing conditions in light of what might be. All three of these arguments have in common the thread that the actual world (my actual self, what career I will have, and the status quo) is not *the only* world that can be. In other words, the imagination, generally speaking, is important, because it shows that the world can (and sometimes should) be otherwise.

Individual growth

Educational theorist Dan Nadaner argues for the value of the imagination to the individual; he claims that: "imagination makes thought more personal and gives the individual a more authentic kind of participation in his or her environment" (206). In other words, according to Nadaner, imagination is what gives our inner world color, and further it's what connects us to the world we know and understand. Without the imagination, Nadaner argues, experience wouldn't make sense, and it would be unlikely that we would truly have any sense of self. Egan takes this argument a step further and explains that a "well-developed imagination enables us to feel unsubdued by habit and unshackled by custom" (58). That is, with imagination, we can break free of our habits and become something different altogether. This, according to Egan, is the real value of imagination to the individual; it's what allows us to become other than what we are—by projecting other versions of ourselves for us to try to become.

In a similar vein, educational philosopher Maxine Greene argues that "Once we can see our givens as contingencies, then we may have an opportunity to posit alternative ways of living and valuing and to make choices" (23). Put differently, according to Greene, we have the power to look upon the actual state of life and discover other ways it might be. And it is only with imagination, Greene thinks, that this is possible in the first place. Warnock takes a slightly different track and claims that: "Being more imaginative, is, I believe, like being more healthy.

There is no need to raise the question 'Why do you want it?' or 'How does it benefit you?' If you already know what 'being healthy' means, you know that it is desirable, and desirable for its own sake and for its consequences" (153). Thus, Warnock believes that the imagination is inherently valuable, and that to be imaginative just is a good thing in itself. But there are also people who believe that the imagination is valuable, not merely because of what part it plays in our personal lives, but because of the part it plays in our professional lives.

Workforce preparation

Teacher researcher Jim Burke discusses the example of Kodak going out of business because of what he calls a crucial failure of imagination. As a teacher, Burke argues that our society tends to neglect imaginative thinking, and suggests that teachers need to spend more time teaching the imagination in schools. But Burke also thinks that the NCLB era is a major failure, because test scores do not translate into real world skills, like imagination. So, he thinks, this is not an easy task. His solution is for teachers to adopt what he calls the "seven personae," i.e. the storyteller, philosopher, historian, anthropologist, reporter, critic, and designer, to help give students the skills they need to succeed in the 21st century. Burkes idea here mirrors Egan's that teaching is very much like story telling, or even like a performance in some cases. Burke insists that imagination is an essential skill for students to compete in the workforce of the future.

In a similar manner, teacher Wendy Glenn argues that imagination is important because it's what gives students a competitive edge in the workforce. She argues that

> In our fast-paced world, we need new ways of thinking, alternative ways to address complex problems, and a willingness to consider unconventional solutions; we need to be imaginative. Using the imagination should be celebrated as a part of school curriculum (1-2).

For Glenn, imagination is as important, if not more so, than any other skill learned in school. She strongly believes that the primary value of the imagination derives from its power to help us solve problems and find new and better ways of thinking. This, she thinks, is why imagination deserves more attention in public schools. But workforce preparation is but one more reason why people value imagination; another has to do with what power it has in the political realm.

Democratic health

Dewey argues that the imagination is "the medium in which the child lives," and unless we see this as the "native setting and tendency" of the child, we will erect a "dead image" of the child, and fail to culture the "richness and orderliness of his life" (61). Ultimately this feeds into Dewey's larger argument that the health and growth of a democratic society depends on cultivating student imagination in "flexibility, scope, and sympathy" (61-62). Egan argues that: "Education is a process that awakens individuals to a kind of thought that enables them to imagine conditions other than those that exist or have existed" (47). He also thinks that: "By imaginatively feeling what it would be like to be other than oneself, one begins to develop a prerequisite for treating others with as much respect as one treats oneself" (55). In other words, for Egan, imagination is essential for sympathy, or taking on the perspective of others.

Philosopher Karen Hanson makes a very similar argument. She argues:

> If we can imaginatively identify with others, we can at once achieve both a better
> sense of ourselves and of those others. And when we do this for as long as we
> sustain this sympathetic imagination, we live with those others on truly common
> ground (140).

In other words, for Hanson, imagination is the true bridge between people that represents the basis of all relationships. It's what allows us to "move from isolation to a kind of communion,"

and in this communion, Hanson thinks, we can discover a better life. Ultimately this journey, Hanson argues, is but one part of discovering and living the good life. After all, establishing "healthy and accurate relationships with others" is itself one aspect of the good life.

Giroux argues that a robust imagination is vital for a healthy, democratic citizenry. More specifically, he says, "The task of deepening and expanding the imagination may be one of the most important pedagogical elements at work in any classroom." For Giroux, this is because the imagination is what allows us to see beyond what is given so that we can question the way things exist; he claims, "The ability to think beyond the self-evident and to be reflective about the grounds and framing mechanisms that shape one's identity and relationship with others is a crucial feature of a pedagogy of engaged and critical thinking" (63). Elsewhere Giroux also argues that: "Pedagogy should unsettle the obvious, encourage students to be self-reflective, teach them how to risks, and expand their capacity for thinking imaginatively" (68). In other words, according to Giroux, the cultivation of imagination should be one of the primary aims of education because imagination is what gives us the power to critique the obvious and move beyond what we take to be the ordinary and universal. Again, the imagination is what helps expose the seemingly necessary as the merely contingent.

The three big reasons why theorists discussed above hold that the imagination is important are (1) the imagination has inherent value to the individual, (2) the imagination represents a crucial aspect of workforce readiness, and (3) the imagination plays a key role in how we understand and critique the existing states of affairs. There are certainly other arguments why the imagination is important, but many tend to fall into one or more of these categories. Each of these arguments also offers support for why the imagination deserves more attention in schools. But given the fact that schools tend not to prioritize imagination as something that is

worthy of instructional time, one might wonder why imagination is barely given any attention at all in schools. One explanation for this is that some people assume that imagination is something that cannot be reliably taught or assessed. Imagination is not as cut and dry as mathematical reasoning, one might argue, and so perhaps it is not worth our time. Although some people might find this line of reasoning entirely compelling, there are some teacher researchers who have found at least some success in trying to incorporate and support imagination in the classroom.

HOW CAN TEACHERS SUPPORT IMAGINATION?

Teacher researcher Mary Buckelew argues that teachers should try to incorporate and use a variety of visuals, including student generated, to promote student imagination in an English language arts class. She claims that:

> Breathing art into the English classroom gives students and teachers the opportunity to see with an artist's eyes possibilities where none may seem to exist, to hear with an artist's ear the rhythm of language and life, to touch with an artist's feeling of love and reverence, and to find joy in creating and living (7).

Buckelew argues that teachers can expand students' sense of what is possible by taking on perspectives other than their own. In her case, she used the perspectives of various visual artists to promote creative writing assignments that enhance student understanding, cognitive connections, as well as confidence in their own voices. She suggests that, while she is not directly teaching the imagination, she is nevertheless channeling the kind of creative thinking required for interesting artistic decisions.

Another teacher researcher, Chapman Frazier, explains that poetry can be used to promote imagination and empathy for perspectives other than our own. According to Frazier, "The process of creating a poem not only demonstrates the inherent characteristics of the

imaginative experience, but, when it is written and shared in a supportive group, validates diverse student voices and establishes the foundation for a classroom community" (1). Frazier finds that, through the process of, sharing found poems, taking poetic field trips, and writing phantom poems, students can learn the characteristics of imaginative experiences, which ultimately also helps to establishes a strong sense of classroom community. Frazier, very much like Buckelew, indicates that imagination is promoted through certain activities, and seems to be picked up more through emulation than direct instruction.

Egan is also an advocate for making room for the imagination in the classroom. In some sense, this is the primary goal of Egan's entire career, i.e. to discover the best ways to effectively incorporate imagination into the classroom. According to Egan, one of the best ways to stimulate and develop student imagination is through the "extremes and limits of human experience and the natural world" (72). Examples of this, Egan explains, are "the most courageous or the cruelest acts, the strangest and the most bizarre natural phenomena, the most terrible or the most wonderful events" (72). Egan believes that students naturally find thinking about and imagining the extremes of human experience interesting, and therefore imagination can contribute to student motivation and interest in the classroom.

Teacher Susan Stutler, arguing in a similar vein, suggests that using science fiction stories, like those from the *Twilight Zone* or even movies like the *Matrix*, work really well to promote student imagination. The bizarre and extreme situations presented in these stories, according to Stutler, inevitably make students question the value or reality of different aspects of their own lives. This in turn allows students to imagine worlds other than their own, and to think of new possibilities entirely. Thus, for Stutler, imagination and imaginative thinking are fairly easy to add to the normal classroom; it just takes the right, imaginative text.

CONCLUSION

I have given good reason to problematize the popular definition of the imagination that I think contributes to the absence of imagination in the goals of the U.S. public school system. If the imagination was merely about visual fantasy and make-believe, and was something that had little importance to the future lives of our students, and was something that couldn't really be taught anyways, I think we would be fully justified in excluding the imagination from our educational goals entirely. But we have good reason to suspect that the imagination is much more rich and important than the common view of it describes it. And although many arguments have been put forward in favor of prioritizing imagination in education, there is nevertheless a lack of student and teacher perspectives on the matter. Moreover, despite some ideas put forward by teacher researchers on how to lead imaginative lessons and classrooms, there are very few resources available to educators about how best to cultivate student imagination.

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and explain the details of my study as well as the methodological decisions behind the analysis of the data I collected. In the first section I describe the two schools in which I conducted my study, and in the second section I describe the people who volunteered to take part in this study. In the third sections, I discuss the specific pieces of data I collected, and I explain the methods I used to analyze this data.

SETTING

I conducted my research in two different schools in the same school district. Both schools are located in a small college town in a western state. The first school, Starry Lake High School, is a non-traditional public high school that represents itself as having an alternative model of schooling. Starry Lake is also a relatively small school, with fewer than 300 students enrolled. Additionally, there are fewer than 30 teachers who are employed at this school. The building itself feels fairly cozy, and the walls are covered with student work. It takes less than a few minutes to circle the entire building walking at a modest pace. Everyone in the building is friendly and seems to have a good relationship with one another. In contrast, the second school, Majestic Ridge, is much larger, and is a more of a traditional high school. Majestic Ridge is home to nearly 2,000 students, and over 100 teachers. The building is much larger than Starry Lake, and it is much easier to get lost in the various hallways. Most teachers seem to know each other, and there seems to be a strong sense of community at Majestic Ridge as well.

I conducted my interviews and observations primarily in two different classrooms in these two different schools. At Starry Lake, I observed Mrs. Lively's language arts classroom, and at Majestic Ridge, I observed Mr. Debonair's language arts classroom. Both rooms are

roughly the same size, but Mrs. Lively's room immediately appears more like an art classroom than Mr. Debonair's more traditional set up. Mrs. Lively's room has huge windows against one wall, and a Smartboard, a long stretch of cupboards, and a giant whiteboard on the others. Her room is plastered with student work, posters, and school related materials. One piece of paper on the wall that the stood out the most was a big blue sign that read, "Imagination," which appeared to be one of the central learning targets of Mrs. Lively's class. The desks in her room are set up in stations, where approximately four students per station can sit and work together facing inwards. The class I observed had just over 16 students enrolled, so there was quite a bit of space to move in her room. Generally, the room feels very warm and welcoming, and in some ways reminded me of an elementary classroom. I wanted to stay there longer than I did.

Mr. Debonair's classroom was set up quite a bit differently. First, the desks were arranged in rows, though slightly curved to create something of a half-crescent. The walls have a few posters, but very little student work, except by Mr. Debonair's desk. There are no windows in Mr. Debonair's classroom, but the room connects to another, smaller room where various student groups meet at different times in the day. At the front of the room, there is a Smartboard positioned next to a whiteboard, and on the other wall not situated with desks directly near it, there are tons of books on large bookshelves. Mr. Debonair's classroom is also warm and inviting, though there is certainly a different dynamic at work.

PARTICIPANTS

The active participants in my study consisted of two secondary English language arts teachers and a few of their senior level students. At Starry Lake, I interviewed and observed Mrs. Lively, and one of her students, Marsha. I also spent time with and observed the rest of Mrs. Lively's classroom. At Majestic Ridge, I interviewed and observed Mr. Debonair and two of his

students, Lenora and Zandra. In addition, I spent time with and observed the rest of Mr. Debonair's classroom. Mrs. Lively is both a language arts teacher as well as a social studies teacher. She has been teaching for over several years, most of which she has spent at Starry Lake. Marsha, her student, is a senior and will be graduating this year. Marsha is also a transfer student from another high school in town. She moved to Starry Lake because of the alternative model of schooling that it offers. Mr. Debonair is a language arts teacher who has been teaching for over fourteen years, the majority of which he has spent at Majestic Ridge. Both Lenora and Zandra, his students, are seniors at Majestic Ridge, and both are planning to graduate soon as well. Mrs. Lively's class size was nearly half the size of Mr. Debonair's with about 16 students; Mr. Debonair's had approximately 33 students. Mrs. Lively's class, therefore, felt more open, as there was literally more space to move around in the room. Mr. Debonair's class was noisier, and had a higher level of energy all around because of the number of students.

The entire study lasted no longer than one week in duration total at both schools. I observed teacher participants and their respective classrooms on multiple occasions. In addition, I conducted hour-long interviews with both teachers immediately following school. As for the student participants, in addition to having been observed in the classroom, I conducted hour-long interviews with each either before and after class. I asked all participants basically the same questions, and I obtained permission to audiotape the each of the interviews, from which I created transcripts. My notes from classroom observations were recorded in a single composition notebook. The transcripts and the field notes represent the extent of the data I collected in the course of this study.

The group of student participants represented students who are near the end of their public education. These students, I reasoned, have had experience the widest range of

educational settings within their school district. I felt that I had the most to learn from these students for this reason. The group of teacher participants represented teachers who are most familiar with this group of student participants. Moreover, these teachers, I felt, also hold the unique position of viewing students at the end of their public education, and therefore more frequently encounter students with the widest range of educational experiences. My primary goal was to recruit participants who had experienced several different types of learning environments, so that I might be able learn more about the imagination's role in public education.

Before contacting teacher participants, I researched their schools and classrooms online. Once I determined that these two teachers were the most desirable candidates for my study, I contacted them via email in an attempt to recruit for the study. Following this, I met with both teachers in person, and once I had recruited them, both helped me recruit student participants. Both teachers gave me the opportunity to explain my study to the class, and the teacher participants ultimately connected me with several potential student participants. The three participants represented in my study are the only students who actively volunteered to participate.

ANALYSIS

I began to analyze my data first by closely and carefully reading over the field notes and interview transcripts looking for any reoccurring themes, patterns, or categories. On the notes and transcripts themselves, I highlighted noteworthy sections with different colors according the idea or theme I believed was being expressed. For example, I used a yellow highlighter every time I noticed a participant speaking directly to what I perceived as the role imagination plays in education. Of course, once I had highlighted every part in the transcripts where participants were discussing the role imagination in education, I had to further distinguish the yellow highlighted passages with another color pen to note *different* roles participants noted about the imagination in

education. I used up to 9 different colors initially to track major themes that emerged from the transcripts. For each theme, and therefore each color, I had to distinguish different ideas under that theme with a different color pen. Needless to say, the transcripts were very colorful by the end of this process.

Once I had identified an extensive list of any ideas or themes that emerged or repeated between and across contexts, I began to build a list to track these commonalties. So, for example, on a separate piece of paper, I started to list major themes such as "real uses of the imagination," "student engagement," and "loss of imagination." Once I had crafted this list, I carefully reviewed it to see if I could collapse any of the common trends into simpler and clearer categories. Indeed, there were some trends, such as "honoring student choice" and "giving students opportunities to choose" that seemed close enough to fit under one theme (and eventually both of these ended up in the section called: *We get to make whatever the heck we want: Open-ended projects and the imagination*). While some trends more easily converged into broader categories, there were a few ideas that seemed at second glance to be too small and insignificant to record along with the rest (though I have kept these ideas saved in case they lead to something else down the road).

At this point, I had what I took to be the most significant themes that emerged from the entirety of the data I collected. From here, I returned to my primary research questions to see if I could come to any conclusions. I therefore created three different sheets of paper devoted to my three primary research questions: (1) What role does the imagination have in secondary education? (2) To what extent does the imagination deserve our attention as teachers? (3) What types of instruction, activities, and learning environments support student imagination? On each sheet of paper, I added the themes that I believed directly answered or in some way served to

answer the research question. For each question I had multiple themes that were ultimately backed by numerous important quotes from each participant.

Once all of this was done, I created a new word document with the three research questions as major headings. Under each heading, I typed the major themes I believed had emerged from the data. From here, I cross-referenced my annotated versions of the notes and transcripts, and began to copy and paste the most important parts from the originals to my new document. I then printed this document and began to examine the notes and selections from interviews more closely, with special attention to the specific ways in which I believed they were contributing to answer to the research questions. I annotated this document with thoughts, comments, and reflections, which later provided the basis for my written analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the data gathered in the course of this study. Primarily this data comes from the observations and interviews I conducted at two different secondary schools in two language arts classes. The first school I researched was Starry Lake High School, which is a non-traditional public school, and the second was Majestic Ridge High School, which is a fairly traditional public school, both of which are located in small college town in a western state. At Starry Lake, I interviewed Mrs. Lively, a secondary language arts and social studies teacher who has been teaching for over seven years, and one of her students, Marsha, a senior. I also observed Mrs. Lively's class on several occasions. Likewise, at Majestic Ridge, I interviewed Mr. Debonair, a language arts teacher who has been teaching for over fourteen years, and two of his students, Lenora and Zandra, who are seniors as well. I also observed Mr. Debonair's on several occasions. I have divided this chapter into three major sections according to my three primary research questions: (1) What role does the imagination play in secondary education? (2) To what extent does the imagination deserve our attention as teachers? (3) What types of instruction, activities, and learning environments support student imagination? Under each of these sections, I organize my analysis by major themes that emerged from the data.

On the role of imagination in education, participants tended to focus on imagination's role in *real-world critical thinking* and *student engagement*. By "real-world" I mean the everyday uses of the imagination that require us to solve a problem or rehearse mentally for a potential scenario in the real world. On the issue of whether imagination deserves the attention of teachers, participants offered ideas about *the value of imaginatio*n generally and *what we lose*

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individually and societally when we become unimaginative. Finally, on the matter of what teachers can do to support imagination, participants focused on *open-ended projects* and *non-traditional arrangements of space and time* in the classroom. Participants also universally agreed that the imagination *cannot be taught* or *assessed* in a traditional fashion, but that it can be *nurtured or cultivated*. I examine each of these themes in their own subsection under the relevant research question. To be clear, I do not analyze the data from Starry Lake and Majestic Ridge separately, but rather side-by-side. Additionally, the participants from different schools do not know each other and did not see or hear each other's responses.

THINKING BEYOND WHAT WE KNOW: THE ROLE OF IMAGINATION IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

When questioned about the role of imagination in learning and education, participants discussed a variety of topics ranging from TED talks to floods in Bangladesh. Despite the wide diversity in responses, there were nevertheless two major themes that emerged about what role imagination serves in the classroom. First, participants generally agreed that there is a strong relationship between imagination and *real-world critical thinking*. Second, many participants also agreed that imaginative thinking is more fun and therefore that imagination tends to encourages *student engagement*. I examine these themes in the sections below.

"It's not all unicorns and rainbows": Imagination as rehearsal for the real world

Before I conducted any of the interviews, my initial assumption was that the participants were likely to think of and describe the imagination primarily in terms of creativity, fantasy, and child's play. After all, it is very common for people to associate imagination with the arts, and not necessarily with real-world affairs. At first, my assumption seemed to be accurate, given the types of responses to my first question, which was: *What do you think of first when you hear the*

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word "imagination"? Mrs. Lively, from Starry Lake, seemed to associate imagination with young children who like to build castles or pretend to be rainforest animals. Marsha, also from Starry Lake, thought about "bright happy colors" and things people "might use to be creative like scissors and glue." In a similar vein, Mr. Debonair from Majestic Ridge thought of his children when they play, and associated imagination with role-playing generally. Likewise, Lenora from Majestic Ridge explained that imagination made her think about "little kids who are in their room and are creating all kinds of abstract stories." All of these responses in some way touch on the idea of imagination as fantasy or make-believe. But this is only where their views began.

When asked about whether imagination was limited to fantasy and make-believe, Mrs. Lively took a strong stance against the idea. In fact, she explained, the imagination has many real-world uses, and she illustrated her point with an example:

> The people who go and talk for TED, I'm sure they spend time imagining what that's like. And imagining what it's like when you step out on that stage and you're supposed to be talking to these hundreds of people about with your incredible ideas that they're excited to hear about.

In part, I think Mrs. Lively made this specific point because she likes to show TED talks to her students occasionally, but she also extended the point to cover any type of public speaking event in which someone might engage. She noted, too, the things that might go wrong in such an event:

> You know if you're thinking about speaking to people and you're nervous or you think about *what happens if I crash into the podium or the microphone goes out*? So, instead of using that energy to think o*h my god what if the microphone goes out... it's going to be awful*, thinking about instead *if the microphone goes off well then I might just do this*. So, it's a way to solve problems.

Mrs. Lively's point here is specifically about giving public speeches, but I think it extends to any occasion where someone needs to complete a task but where something might go wrong along the way as well. Imagination is what allows us to see what might happen so that we can prepare for the worst; it gives us the chance to rehearse mentally for an event before we experience it. This idea closely reflects Kenneth Burke's concept of reading as "imaginative rehearsals" for the real world, where reading about imagined events allows reader to consider how they might act given certain circumstances or conflicts (citation).

Mrs. Lively also gave a more chilling example in reference to the recent Sandy Hook shootings which happened a few days before our interview: "Or imagine what it feels like to, like in light of the shootings on Friday, imagine what it would be like if somebody was in here. Where would I put the kids? What would I do? That's an imagination process." It's a terrifying and unpleasant thought to have, but she's right; considering how to respond to real-world emergencies is something everyone needs to do, and imagination is what allows us to do this. For me, this seems like an incredibly relevant point to make about imagination's place in learning. Both students and teachers need imagination to think through possible real-world scenarios to prepare for emergency situations. This idea very much falls in line with the philosophies of Dewey, Frye, and Warnock, which hold that the imagination is a crucial element of mind that allows us to make sense of real-world situations accurately and effectively. Without the imagination, these theorists might suggest, responding effectively to such unthinkable situations might nearly be impossible. Mrs. Lively's comments, thus, reveal one strong view on the role of imagination in education and learning.

On a more positive note, Mrs. Lively reinforced the idea that imagination has real uses with a claim about what students need to do very often, which is think about themselves in the

future after graduating. What's important, according to Mrs. Lively, is "imagining yourself as a teacher if that's what you want to be or imagining yourself being in a courtroom for those kids who maybe want to be lawyers." For students generally, she explained, it's about "getting them to think outside themselves and to dream and try to see things in a new light or seeing themselves in someone else's shoes." Part of what Mrs. Lively means by this is that imagination is the motor of self-image, and without it, students wouldn't be able to see better versions of themselves or think of themselves in someone else's position. This idea closely mirrors Egan and Hanson's idea that imagination is not only a prerequisite for having a stronger sense of self, but of having more sympathetic relationships with others. Coming to understand one's self and one's relationship with others is a universal part of the learning process. For Mrs. Lively, the imagination is, therefore, "not always unicorns and rainbows," but rather represents a crucial element in real world thinking and learning.

Marsha, a senior from Starry Lake, echoed some of Mrs. Lively's ideas when I asked her about whether the imagination is all make-believe. She answered emphatically, "No, no!" and explained that imagination is much of the time about "finding solutions to everyday problems." She described several instances at her work outside of school where she encountered a problem that needed to be solved imaginatively. In addition, Marsha described several activities in school where imaginative thinking was required. She reported that these have been some of the fondest and most important educational experiences for her as a student. She also added that to understand the imagination's real world uses we need only to "think of every invention ever. Someone had to be imaginative and creative." Clearly for Marsha, imagination plays a role in any type of innovative thinking, which is something not necessarily limited to the world of

inventions, but is present in everyday learning and thinking. Imagination, for Marsha, is thus an essential part of her learning and problem solving inside and outside of school.

At Majestic Ridge, I gathered similar responses on this same topic. Lenora, one Mr. Debonair's seniors gave a simple and clear answer: "You can imagine Paris even if you've never been there. You can imagine things that are real like this; it's not always just make-believe and fake things." Even something as simple as thinking about some real place in the world where you've never been before is an exercise of the imagination, according to Lenora. And she expressed that this is a very common occurrence in any subject matter, though it might most often happen in English, social studies, or history. Zandra, too, also one of Mr. Debonair's seniors, gave a strong example; she explained that "Basically every concept whether it be abstract or whatnot... when it's developed, that's because of the imagination, because you looked beyond what was already there—what was already given to you." Zandra's suggestion here is that imagination is what's responsible for the generation of any idea whatsoever, and any time we go beyond what is "already there," we are making use of our imagination. According to Zandra, this suggests that imagination must play a role in learning, since learning cannot take place without using ideas to beyond what we already know.

Mr. Debonair, in line with every other participant, denied that imagination was restricted to fantasy and child's play. As an experienced debate coach, Mr. Debonair had several strong examples to prove his point. For example, he discussed the intricate, hypothetical cases that students sometimes build which might ultimately prove to have real-world relevance. One case in particular referenced our "need to support solar energy, because through solar energy we're going to develop space technology," which in turn advances "military capabilities" that will eventually open up "satellite technologies" that will allow us to defend ourselves against

asteroids that pose an existential threat to our species. Mr. Debonair explained that, while such cases may sound ridiculous or even outrageous at first, they nevertheless represent the kind of thinking taken very seriously by places like the pentagon or NASA. He also referenced another case that imagined the potential outcomes for global warming, including the geopolitical consequences of population shifts because of flooding in places like Bangladesh. Mr. Debonair suggested that any solutions to such scenarios necessarily represent "a product of our ability to think beyond what we know now to what could happen." For Mr. Debonair, then, imagination and imaginative thinking play a creative role in high-level critical thinking and learning.

Mr. Debonair also insisted that imagination can play a central role in whether students believe that learning is valuable in the first place. From his experience, he reported that:

> It helps if you can get students to imagine a situation later in life where the information we're learning may actually have some value or where something they did may have empowered them to get to where they want to go or just visualizing and imagining themselves as learners.

For Mr. Debonair, imagination is important not merely for advanced students in debate, but also for students of any level, because it allows them move beyond any particular day in school and realize the potential long-term or real-world value of learning in general. But Mr. Debonair also claimed that not a lot of students come to school with a vision of themselves as students, and this is why it's important to get students to "project a hypothesis for what happens if these things happen and to visualize themselves in the future that may exist as a result of choices they've made." In other words, for Mr. Debonair, imagination is the basis for any deliberative reasoning students might do about the future and their place in it. This represents another clear opinion on the real-world role of imagination in learning and education.

Far from the belief that imagination is all about make-believe and fantasy, these participants expressed strong opinions about imagination's place in real-world critical thinking and problem solving. Anytime students imaginatively rehearse for a speech, or consider hypothetical scenarios, or think about themselves in different places and times, they engage in the imagination. And since all of these activities and others like them represent common elements in the learning process, it is clear, from the perspectives expressed by the participants, that imagination undeniably plays a role in learning and education.

"Kids are going to hate your class": Imagination and student engagement

Beyond the role imagination plays in real-world critical thinking and learning, the next significant theme that emerged from my experience with the participants from both schools was that imagination and imaginative thinking are interesting and fun, and therefore that imagination can play a key role in student engagement. This idea aligned well my prediction that most participants would view imagination as something that excites and motivates students. From my own experience as a student, I know that I am often more engaged and motivated when I get to use my imagination. All but one participant explicitly supported this idea.

In response to further questioning about the role of imagination in student learning, Mrs. Lively's quick response was: "it makes things engaging." She also added, "Kids feel just in general more excited when they're allowed to be creative and to imagine things." Anecdotally, Mrs. Lively reported that whenever she used her imagination to create a new assignment or project, as opposed to using one that's been done before, she believed that her students exhibited a much higher level of engagement than usual. One particular example she explained was a "current issues project" where she asked students to research a current issue, take a stance on that issue, but represent that stance in the form of a snow globe instead of the usual paper or

presentation. She helped students make the snow globes with clay, old mason jars, glitter in water, and hot glue. I examined several of them; each was unique in appearance and demonstrated creative thought. Regarding the results of this project, Mrs. Lively explained:

> It's a lot more fun for them to build a snow globe than to speak in front of the class and listen to thirty other people do the same thing that you did. That's tiring for kids. It's tiring for adults. I don't enjoy sitting in the back of the room listening to thirty kids tell me about things I already knew existed—that's not fun.

Mrs. Lively's point here really resonates with me, because I've been in classes where the same types of assignments result in tiresome repetition of ideas and content. I think many students and teachers alike have experienced this as well at one time or another. When this happens too often, according to Mrs. Lively, teachers begin to lose the attention of their students, and the level of engagement drops to the point where no real learning is taking place. This is precisely why, Mrs. Lively explained, teachers need

> …to engage kids, because if you're not engaging, and you just stand in front of the room with an overhead, kids are going to hate your class, and that's going to make you feel like a terrible teacher, because you probably will be, because kids aren't learning anything.

From this statement alone, it is clear that Mrs. Lively strongly believes that imagination plays a vital role in student engagement, which for her is a necessary condition for learning. But she also had a lot more to say on the matter.

On a more philosophical note, Mrs. Lively wondered, "how many more incredible and amazing ideas would we have if we encouraged kids to be incredible and amazing in the classroom?" With this, she noted the dangers of quiz-based teaching where teachers,

intentionally or not, encourage students to think the same way all of the time. For Mrs. Lively, if this is all we do, then "that's all we're going to get when they're adults—a bunch of robots that know how to take multiple-choice tests." She added further, "it's not fun to memorize 50 vocabulary words and take a test and do some writing and then take another test and then read a book and answer more questions. That's not interesting!" Although Mrs. Lively's opinions are strong, I don't think they are too uncommon. In fact, they seem generally to align well with common critique of "teaching-to-the-test" in the era of standardized testing. In addition, they seem to echo my concerns about the potential consequences of the NCLB era for the future of imaginative thinkers. In Jim Burke's terms, will we have more failures of the imagination if we continue to have uninspired and unimaginative curricula? Mrs. Lively's view here seems also to be reflected in the thoughts and responses of the other participants.

Marsha, her student, also described experiences where she was engaged because her teachers gave more attention to her imagination, and she explained the positive impact these experiences have had on her motivations as a student in general. Referring to her current class with Mrs. Lively at Starry Lake, Marsha reported that: "I get to use my brain; I don't have to just regurgitate what I learned throughout the week for some multiple-choice test on Friday." She explained that, like many classes she has had at this school, she has been encouraged to work on creative projects where her imagination was prioritized as a central element in completing the given task. Marsha described this as very "pleasing" to her as a student, because her creative and imaginative thoughts were actually honored and valued. This, according to Marsha, really engages her as a student. Moreover, Marsha reported,

> …as a student, I really appreciate it when my teachers give us opportunities to use our imagination. Like when I look around this room—there's not a bare spot on

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the wall. It's full of maps, quotes, and there's student work, and everything I look

at, I think, 'oh, I remember learning about that,' or, 'I can explain to you what that

means.'

For Marsha, there is a direct link between being able to use your imagination in class and having

meaningful learning experiences, and she explains this simply by stating that it's "fun to use your

imagination." After being a part of a school that tends to value her imagination, Marsha even

went as far as to say that "it's really hard for me to learn if I can't like imagine things and be

creative with it." While not every single student shares Marsha's preferences and values, Marsha

represents a clear case of a student who strongly believes that imagination plays an important

role in the motivation behind learning and the meaning that is ultimately derived from it.

Both Lenora and Zandra from Majestic Ridge also expressed beliefs about the role

imagination serves in student engagement. Lenora explained that when imagination is introduced

into the classroom, "it gets your thoughts moving, like when you're trying to think of a new idea

or a new concept to apply to a book or to what you're talking about—like a new spin on

something." For Lenora, imaginative thinking is fun, because it's "free-flowing," and there isn't

necessarily a right or wrong answer when you're being creative, because you're just trying to

come up with new ideas. This can be really invigorating for students who are used to sitting in

rows and working on assignments or activities with objective goals or answers.

Similarly, Zandra reported a higher level of buy-in when she is asked to use her creative

side. One instance, which actually took place outside of the classroom setting but still in school,

that stood out to her the most was a time when a middle school English teacher got her involved

in creating banners for school dances. She explained that

…it doesn't seem like much, but at the time I needed that. I wasn't really a part of

anything at that school. And then, she asked me to paint a portrait of her and her

sister and that's what kind of really sparked my whole entire life. I've really liked

painting and drawing and all that stuff.

For Zandra, this time in her life was particularly important for her as a student because she felt

that the teacher finally appreciated her and her creative ideas. And for the first time, Zandra

reported, "a teacher saw me for what I was doing and not my grades." This is clear example

where imagination, or at least an imaginative activity, played a significant role in a student's

interest in and engagement with her education. She bought in to school more because she was

asked to use her imagination. It's difficult to imagine that this is a unique case too, as many

students seem to be highly motivated by tasks that require them to put their own imaginative

ideas into a finished product. When students' creative and imaginative ideas are valued, they

themselves feel valued, and this is the reason imagination is tied to student engagement.

The two big answers, then, coming from participants on my first research question (i.e.,

what role does the imagination have in secondary education?) are: (1) imagination is required for

real-world critical thinking, which is one of the central aims of education, and (2) imagination

has a dramatic influence on student engagement inside as well as outside the classroom.

USE IT OR LOSE IT: THE EXTENT TO WHICH IMAGINATION DESERVES OUR

ATTENTION AS TEACHERS

On the issue of whether imagination deserves the attention of teachers, and to what extent,

two prevalent themes emerged from the responses of student and teacher participants. First,

many participants talked about the ways that our schools and society tend to undervalue, and

sometimes even devalue, imagination and imaginative thinking, which causes us to *lose*

imagination mostly in order to conform to the norms of society. Second, several participants expressed ideas about the *value of imagination* in school and beyond. These ideas ranged from personal happiness to the health of a democratic society. I examine these themes in the two sections below.

"The world produces boring adults": Refusing to fold by making room for the imagination

Of all the themes that emerged from interviews and observations, the idea that our culture tends to undervalue or even actively devalue imagination is one that I had not anticipated being so prevalent among the participants, but everyone in some way touched on this idea. I had no initial assumptions concerning this matter, as it was essentially a surprise to me that participants would end up speaking to this issue. In both the Introduction and Literature Review, I gave several reasons to think that our current public education system tends to ignore the imagination in terms of educational goals, but I did not necessarily extend this idea into a criticism about our culture or society generally. But the fact that every participant had something to say about this issue, I think, speaks to the perceived importance of imagination by these participants and to the idea that it therefore deserves our attention as teachers. If the imagination is something that shouldn't be lost in the process of growing up and maturing, then it's something that probably deserves time and attention in school.

Mrs. Lively was the most outspoken voice on this matter. For her, the imagination is something that our society tends to squeeze out of children as they begin to mature, and that this is a detriment not only to the children themselves, but also to society as a whole. Part of this, according to Mrs. Lively, results from the push to get a 9-5 job after finishing school. After all, as she questioned, "How often in big huge office buildings when you're working in a cubicle do you have the opportunity to imagine?" Mrs. Lively conceded that, of course, not every job

requires imagination, but, according to her, this doesn't necessarily mean that we should stop valuing the imagination across the board. She explained that when we pressure children to stop playing games or thinking in fun and strange ways, we begin to undermine the imagination that later blossoms into the kind of "big thinking" needed in the adult world. Mrs. Lively discussed, for example, the idea that "people have a hard time thinking about what it might be like to be someone in Ethiopia who doesn't have water because they've lost that skill." In other words, the kind of imagination required for thoughtful and empathetic stances toward the world and other people is lost in the push for conformity in our society. Mrs. Lively's response here runs parallel with philosopher Karen Hanson's claim that strong and accurate relationships require that we can imaginatively identify with each other on multiple levels.

Mrs. Lively also explained that a loss of imagination also tends to equal a loss of interesting and engaging people. In her opinion, "The world produces boring adults. Somewhere between 16 and 21, something is lost and people become less creative and fun. They start tucking in their shirts and stop joking around." There is no good reason, according to Mrs. Lively, why the world needs to be this way, and she viewed herself as an exception to the general trend. "Somehow I never folded," she explained. By this, I think Mrs. Lively meant that she considered herself to be one of the lucky people who escaped the pressures of society and the push to conform to the world of "boring adults." From what I observed of her and the creative way she runs her class, I would have to agree.

Mrs. Lively also discussed one way in which the loss of imagination in our society is connected to the world of education. "Some people have lost imagination by the time they're in their 20's or 30's," she explained, "which is when they're going through Ed programs." From Mrs. Lively's perspective, this is one of the reasons why some new teachers simply repeat the

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ways in which they were taught, and this is a problem because it contributes to a vicious cycle: unimaginative teachers fold students into unimaginative adults who later become unimaginative teachers who repeat the process. To stop this cycle, Mrs. Lively explained, teacher educators need to sit down with pre-service teachers and say, "Hey, think! Be creative! Don't just fill stuff out. Don't just do what was done to you. Think about what could make those base ideas into something else—something more." As a pre-service teacher myself, Mrs. Lively's point was particularly striking; it made me reflect on what I was learning and how I was being instructed to teach. Mrs. Lively insisted that teachers need to break out of this mentality by asking themselves questions like: in what ways am I contributing to this cycle? To what extent am I complicit in the loss of imagination in our country? Am I an unimaginative teacher?

But Mrs. Lively was not the only participant who believed that imagination deserves more attention in the classroom because of the societal pressures that cause a loss of imagination. Marsha, the Starry Lake senior, described her experience as a transfer student. Before attending Starry Lake, she went to a more traditional public high school in the same town for one year. Her biggest complaint with the old school was that it failed to push her imaginatively. From Marsha's point of the view, the school had almost never valued her imagination, and she reported feeling a sense of disappointment that she had spent time in a school that was more interested in tests and quizzes than creativity. When I asked her why creativity and imagination were so important to her, she responded:

> You can know all kinds of things and you could recite the first hundred digits of pi, but where's that going to get you? If you're not creative with it, then other people aren't going to learn and you're not going to able to either. That

knowledge is just going to be there and it's not going to do anything. Imagination

is what takes knowledge and makes it into something else.

For Marsha, education is truly valuable only when it couples knowledge with imagination. She recited the famous Albert Einstein quote, "Imagination is more important than knowledge," but added that the two almost never come apart. For her, knowledge without imagination doesn't "do anything," and imagination without knowledge is just play (not that you can't learn anything from play, she insisted). But the transition to Starry Lake, Marsha explained, was one of the best decisions of her life, because her imagination is more valued there than anywhere else. And this is something, she claimed, that would be really good for her personally in the long run.

Mr. Debonair, from Majestic Ridge, independently arrived at very similar ideas in the course of our interview. When I questioned him about whether he believed that his school valued imagination, he explained that Majestic Ridge encourages and supports creativity, especially in the visual and performing arts, but that imagination was not explicitly prioritized in the same way. He further explained that this is likely because of larger cultural trends. "I don't think our culture necessarily encourages adults to be inventive or imaginative," he stated, "but I think it's really important and to me at least." I asked Mr. Debonair, then, about whether and how schools contribute to a loss of imagination in adults, and he gave an example from an experience he had while in college. He described a professor he had for a class on Milton who claimed to value critical thinking, but when Mr. Debonair offered some alternative perspectives on *Paradise Lost*, the professor shot him down in front of the class for not having the "right" answer. Mr. Debonair explained the experience in the following way:

He basically slammed me for daring to imagine something as the meaning of the

text that wasn't something he decided was already the meaning. So, there was no

room for original thought, it was: you're expected to think what he thought, and say what he said. If you did that, then you understood Milton, and if you didn't, well you clearly didn't understand Milton.

Mr. Debonair's experience, I think, represents an instance of stunting the imagination for the sake of tradition. There is one way in which, according to his professor, *Paradise Lost* ought to be read and understood, and anything that falls outside of this tradition is wrong. And although the professor was likely not being malicious, I think Mr. Debonair was embarrassed in front of the other students, and was therefore less likely to offer other, potentially imaginative ideas and interpretations in the class again. What I think this shows is that every time we, as educators, insist on a right answer above all else, at the expense of silencing interesting ideas, we risk stunting our students' imaginations. We fail in general, I think, to value imagination when we privilege one way of thinking over many. How many valuable and interesting ideas are lost because it's too important that we uphold tradition? Mr. Debonair's experience tells me that excluding the imagination in the classroom can do real damage, and that this gives us good reason to try to include the imagination as much as we can in our classrooms. Mr. Debonair seemed to support this idea when he explained that, "if we lose imagination, I think we lose a lot of really important things, like the ability to think about the world that isn't and try to make it the world that is. I think that that has got to be a part of education." This claim fits so well with Giroux's theory of education that I believe it could have just as easily come from Giroux himself as it did from Mr. Debonair. For Giroux, imagination is an absolutely indispensible piece of education that enables us to critique the actual world in light of other possible ones.

Lenora also touched on the idea of the loss of imagination in our society, and reported that: "I know at least personally I've lost some of my imagination." She went on to explain that

imagination is something that most people lose as they grow older. I asked her why she believed this, and she replied, "because it's not as accepted, I guess." I pushed her to expand on this idea, and she explained as follows:

> I think what's socially acceptable is part of it. Now it's more acceptable in high school to have a better or creative imagination, but going through middle school you need to be normal. It was just kind of like that, peers saying things like 'if you believe that, you're weird' and then you would feel bad. So, in the middle school years I lost some imagination.

Lenora's point extends Mr. Debonair's from before because while Mr. Debonair's was a point about how teachers can inhibit student imagination, Lenora's seems to be about how peers and school culture generally can stunt imagination. If being imaginative is not perceived as being cool, then many students won't desire to be imaginative, even if they are naturally inclined to do so. Lenora's point suggests, too, that imagination deserves the attention of teachers, because, giving time for it in the classroom and validating it might be the best way to reestablish imagination as something positive and desirable.

Zandra from Majestic ridge faced similar challenges in her career as a public school student. On several occasions, she reported, she had to be "held back" or "restrained" in her creativity, because her thinking was too far outside of what teachers were looking for. One particular example she explained stood out:

> Last year in Spanish, we had to write children's books… and I decided to make my story a little more creative than other peoples' and write about how rabbits turned into tears and are collected by this one boy at night. That probably doesn't make sense, but it's like I was really stretching it and I feel like that's an example

of imagination and it got me in trouble because I wasn't able to keep up

academically with what I was trying to communicate.

Zandra felt that her ideas weren't necessarily appreciated in the academic context, and further

that her teacher didn't fully understand what she was trying to do. I think it's ironic that even in a

creative and imaginative activity, like writing a children's book, that a student's imagination can

be restricted. Aren't imaginative projects like this supposed to be innovative and open?

Zandra's experience here connects well with a point Marsha made at Starry Lake:

I think about the art classes I took at other schools and I'm like 'how is it even

possible that you can limit someone's creativity?' It was all in this box. 'You have

to do this this and this, but you can chose the colors.' By the end of it everyone's

looks the same just with slight differences because somebody is left-handed or

somebody different have that color paint at their table.

Both Zandra and Marsha have experienced classrooms that, on the surface, appear to

support imagination, but in reality pressure students into conforming to the "right" end point.

This is not far from Mr. Debonair's experience with his professor and *Paradise Lost*. What each

of these experiences show is that even when schools try to support imagination, they can

sometimes end up stunting it instead. When students are embarrassed for having a creative idea,

or when students' ideas aren't honored or appreciated, or when students are pushed into

conforming to an ideal or standard, imagination generally is discouraged. And when imagination

is discouraged, imagination can be lost, and this is something for which none of the participants

advocate. Instead, from the perspectives of the participants, imagination is something that

deserves the attention of our teachers, because imagination is too often lost. These experiences,

therefore, speak directly to my second research question.

In line with the idea that our society "folds" the imagination out of people, participants also discussed the long-term value of imagination and imaginative thinking. This is the second theme that emerged on the issue of whether the imagination deserves the attention of teachers. Many participants explained that the imagination does in fact deserve the attention of teachers because the long-term value it carries beyond graduation in adult life. Participant responses included ideas about the joy being imaginative brings on a personal level, the instrumental value imagination has in the workplace, and the value imagination has to society in general.

In response to the question, *what value, if any, does imagination have in adult life?* Mrs. Lively had two answers. First, she explained, imagination is important for adults because it allows them "to think outside themselves and to dream and try to see things in a new light or seeing themselves in someone else's shoes." This seems mostly to be a point about the value of imagination for the individual. The imagination represents the power, according to Mrs. Lively, to step outside of oneself and see other possibilities and other lives, not just of our own, but also of others. This is valuable personally, because we can see ourselves in a new light, and reinvent ourselves if we want or need to do so. But this is also, again, a point about having more empathetic relationships with others. The more effectively and accurately I can imagine myself in your shoes, the more effectively and accurately I can understand who you are and where you're coming from, which contributes to stronger and longer-lasting relationships. Again, this relates to Hanson's view that imagination is crucial for strong relationships. But, Mrs. Lively's discussion of the value of imagination did not stop there. She also insisted that imagination is important for a health society in general. "What we really want," Mrs. Lively suggested, "is to produce good citizens and members of society who are innovative and come up with amazing

ideas." Mrs. Lively's claim here very clearly connects to Dewey's philosophy of education and to his arguments about the importance of imagination for creating healthy democracies. But it also relates to Giroux's notion that good citizens are imaginative ones who can create new ideas and new ways of thinking to contribute to better modes of life.

Marsha, on the matter of imagination's value in adult life, focused primarily on the value it has no matter what career path you chose to take. "It's because it's the real world," she explained, "even if you go have an office job, you're going to have to work with people. There's going to be other people there and you're going to have to learn to work with them." For Marsha, there is a strong connection between imaginative thinking and being able to work with other people to solve various problems and conflicts. She described several instances in her own life when she needed to be imaginative to work well with other people. This again reinforces the idea that imagination in one person supports stronger relationships between people, which is incredibly relevant in the world of education, since relationships are an ever-present and necessary feature of all educational contexts. Marsha also noted more generally, "you can use imagination in anything. It can be work or play. But work is productive and it's something you have to do to be a part of a society that is good." According to Marsha, then, the imagination is something that has value down the road. And for this reason, she explained, the imagination deserves attention in schools. The better our schools prepare students to be imaginative, the more effectively and productively they will work with others and contribute to society.

Mr. Debonair agreed with this idea, but took a slightly different track. For Mr. Debonair, most of the value of imagination in adult life derives from the relationships it helps to build, like those between father and daughter, or teacher and student. With regard to the relationships he has with his daughters, Mr. Debonair explained:

I think to be a good parent you've got to be imaginative because you've got to be

able to connect with kids on a non-literal level and a level of play, and engage

them with what is not known and what is not limited, and have the kind of play

that encourages those things… I think it's really important as an adult not to be

boxed in by the four walls.

As a father, then, Mr. Debonair considers imagination to be crucial for connecting with his

daughters on the right level, and to be able to encourage them in the right way. But imagination

also carries serious value for him in the classroom with his students. The same idea applies that,

to connect with students, you have to be able to think with them about strange and interesting

things in an unrestricted fashion. Imagination is what helps to bridge any gap between student

and teacher. "I think that education works best, it's most meaningful," Mr. Debonair added,

"when it asks students to think in ways that are creative and different and beyond the realms of

limitations of things as they are." This is perhaps the strongest view on the value of imagination

in the classroom expressed in any of the interview sessions. Mr. Debonair certainly seems to be

advocate for the idea that imagination deserves the attention of teachers.

Mr. Debonair, however, also made sure to extend his point beyond the world of education.

He noted that, in general, "imagination is really important for adults." Given how he explained

this claim, I believe his point is one not about the imagination's value in the workplace or society,

but just in one's personal life. Mr. Debonair seemed to suggest that imagination is valuable for

its own sake, because it adds richness to life that might not otherwise be there. About his own

life, Mr. Debonair explained:

Maybe it's because I'm a bit of a geek, but I really enjoy being imaginative and

being silly and being playful and being unpredictable and I think you have to be

able to, in some ways, imagine yourself as not being a serious adult in order to do those things. You know, kind of a Peter Pan syndrome.

For Mr. Debonair, the imagination seems to be something that adds color to life, and allows adults to be playful and fun, and to not always take everything so seriously. Mr. Debonair, in some ways, described himself as fitting a Peter Pan archetype, where internally he never "grew up," but instead remains really creative and imaginative, and this has inherent value for him.

Lenora, his student, made a very similar point when she described the imagination as something that can bring an individual happiness. From her perspective, the imagination

…can just make you happy. Like, I'm happy when I'm thinking of new things and when I'm reading books, and that creates more imagination because you're picturing what's going on instead of just having the TV tell you and showing you what it is. I like that part of it too.

Lenora, then, also sees the imagination as something that it is valuable for its own sake, because it is something that creates happiness and joy. This is in part because more imagination equals more freedom of thought and more ideas. Whenever we can see more, think more, and imagine more, it can be a very joyful experience for us. It's why people like incredibly dense and rich books that create entire worlds that we can explore while simply sitting at home. Imagination is fun and it can make you happy. Now, while not everyone agrees that schools always need to be places where we focus on what is fun or what makes you happy, Lenora and Mr. Debonair represent strong perspectives on the importance of giving at least some attention to imagination in the classroom. If imagination has personal value, and keeps you young inside, and keeps your mind open to new and exciting worlds and ideas, then perhaps the imagination deserves the

attention of teachers simply for this reason. But, if anyone remained unconvinced, Lenora's ideas did not stop there.

Lenora also pushed the idea that imagination has serious value in the workforce, regardless of the profession. Lenora explained that, "in the workforce, if you can't create a new product or anything like that, you need to develop new ideas or to develop the process of being imaginative to create those ideas." Although Lenora's point here sounds like it is restricted to jobs that require people to create new products specifically, I think her point is broader than this, because it can encompass any occupation where new ideas are involved, which is most. She elaborated further that, "if you want to keep moving forward or up, you need to keep creating new ideas or faster and more efficient ways of doing things, and those can't be created by sitting in a cubicle. You have to be thinking and creating." Lenora's point here is that imagination is crucial for making progress in the workforce, because progress always depends on thinking of new ideas or better ways to do things. This point also seems highly relevant to Jim Burke's critique of the bankruptcy of Kodak as a failure of the imagination; without imaginative and innovative thinking, we risk, not only missing opportunities for moving forwards, but also opportunities for falling backwards. While innovation and imagination are not always exactly the same, I nevertheless think that Lenora's idea stands that imagination has instrumental value in the workplace. And given that workforce preparedness is something U.S. public schools value fairly highly, it seems reasonable to conclude that, if Lenora is right, the imagination deserves more attention in the classroom.

Surprisingly, there was one voice of dissent in the group of participants on the matter of the value of imagination in adult life. Zandra, from Majestic Ridge, seemed to suggest that, while

imagination can be important for some people, it is not necessarily important for all. More specifically, she explained:

> I feel like it depends on the person, really. I feel like most of the people who don't have strong imaginations are able to—it's not like a handicap—they just find other things or ways to be good at what they do. I feel like strong imaginations are important but only for certain people.

Zandra's point is certainly legitimate. Not everyone needs to be imaginative, and it's not necessarily a bad thing if someone lacks the imagination that other people have. There are plenty of happy people, I'm sure, who do not perceive themselves as being all that imaginative, and likely there are plenty of professions that do not require imagination as an essential skill. Despite her viewpoint, however, Zandra did nevertheless suggest that this truth did not necessarily mean that teachers shouldn't give the imagination more attention in the classroom. In fact, she explained, for her in particular, the imagination is really important, and it is something that she wished were prioritized more by her teachers and her school.

On the matter of the extent to which the imagination deserves the attention of teachers, then, participants had similar and thought-provoking answers. The first big idea is that, because our culture and society naturally tends to devalue imagination, which contributes to a loss of imagination for most adults, teachers should establish more space and time for the imagination in the classroom. And they should do this, according to participants, because of the long-term value imagination has beyond school. This value can be viewed as inherent, as when the exercise of the imagination brings joy to the individual, or as instrumental, as seen when imagination contributes to the progress of the workplace. But the value can also be seen as societal in that imaginative citizens contribute to a healthier democracy.

NURTURING THE IMAGINATION: TYPES OF INSTRUCTION, ACTIVITIES, AND

LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS THAT SUPPORT STUDENT IMAGINATION

When questioned about the ways that teachers can support student imagination in the

classroom, student and teacher participants universally agreed that imagination is something that

c*annot be taught or assessed* in traditional ways; although, each participant reported that

imagination can be nurtured or cultivated in one way or another. With regard to the specific ways

in which teachers can help cultivate student imagination, two prominent themes emerged from

participant responses. First, most agreed that *open-ended projects* that honor the ideas and

choices of students promote imagination; when students are given one goal, but are allowed to

take any path to that goal, imaginative thinking tends to be encouraged and rewarded. Second,

participants reported that *variations in traditional spatial arrangements* of classrooms can help

imaginative thinking, but also that *uninterrupted blocks of time* to work helps significantly as

well. These themes are examined in the sections below.

"There's no such thing as imagination class": Cultivating imagination as opposed to teaching it

More than any other, the idea that imagination cannot be taught was the most clearly

accepted by all participants. My initial assumption was that some participants would support this

view, because my intuition strongly suggests that imagination is not like other skills or abilities

in that one cannot be instructed on how to do it better, that is, to be more imaginative than one

was before. Imagination seems more like an innate creative ability than one that is learned from

society or culture. However, I also thought that there would be at least some support for the idea

that imagination could be taught in certain ways, because, of course, not everyone shares the

majority of my intuitions. I had expected, in my own mind, to at least be challenged with once

contrary ideas, but in fact, I ended up learning more about the beliefs I was already carrying.

When presented with the question of whether imagination can be taught, participants responded in the following ways:

Mrs. Lively: I think imagination is a skill that needs to be nurtured just like we practice reading, writing, or speaking in front of people. Imagination is a skill that needs to be practiced and if you don't, then it's definitely one of those things you see go away.

Marsha: I don't think it's something that can be taught. I think it can be cultivated. I think it's something that people are going to have naturally, like everyone has ideas but you can share those ideas or you can expand on them, and you can combine your ideas with others and I think that's how you cultivate it.

Mr. Debonair: I think it can be modeled. I think it can be encouraged. I think that situations can be created that challenge students to think in imaginative ways. I don't know that I feel that you can actively teach imagination, but I do feel that you can certainly model it by putting students in scenarios and then demonstrating imagination in action. I don't think I could sit down and teach how you do imagination.

Lenora: I think it can be encouraged but I don't know if it can be instructed. You can't be like 'this is your imagination time.' But maybe like through creative writing or some other things like that you can create more and have it be developed, but I don't think it can be taught.

Zandra: Well it definitely can't be taught, but it can be encouraged by a teacher, because imagination is very internal; it's individual.

Despite the strong trend in the participants' answers that imagination cannot be taught through direct instruction, each participant nevertheless expressed some notion that imagination can nevertheless be nurtured, cultivated, developed, encouraged, or modeled. Moreover, the participants all independently agreed in one way or another that imagination isn't about getting the right lesson or activity to students, but about creating the right conditions for imagination to flourish. In addition to the idea that imagination cannot be taught, participants also expressed agreement that imagination cannot be assessed and graded in traditional ways. Mrs. Lively reasoned that imagination "cannot be assessed like a math problem can, because with a math problem, if you don't solve for X correctly, it's wrong." Her insinuation here is that imagination can't be graded, because there is no single "correct" answer when it comes to imagination. She likened an exercise of imagination to a drawing: "did your drawing come out the most beautiful in the class? No, but did you put in your best effort?" Here, Mrs. Lively seems to be suggesting that, while the product of imagination cannot be graded, perhaps the effort that went into creating the product can.

Lenora expressed a similar idea when she explained that imagination cannot be graded "because there's no right answer, so you can't say 'you're wrong' if you imagine something that's not correct." Thus, Lenora seems to agree with Mrs. Lively that imagination is not about getting the right answer, because there is no right answer, and she drew an analogy between imagination and art as well. She explained that, although a piece of artwork cannot be graded, the choices, including the media as well as the variety of techniques that went into creating the piece, can be examined for the level and amount creativity that went into the process. Marsha echoed both Mrs. Lively and Lenora when she exclaimed emphatically, "You can't grade imagination!" But she also insisted, however, that "you can definitely tell that someone is

growing." To prove this point, Marsha described a creative project that she had been working on all year. Essentially, her teacher asked her to create and take notes in a sketchbook as opposed to the more traditional lined notebook. The only rule was that she had to answer, in some way, the given questions, but that she could do this in any way that she wanted. She showed me that in the beginning of the book, she tended to be more conservative with the way she displayed her work; most of the writing still conformed to a left-to-right structure and in top-to-bottom parallel lines, as it would in a composition notebook. But later in the book, as she described, Marsha became more creative by taking more chances. Her work included colors, images, and much more artistic design. From this, Marsha concluded that anyone could tell that she had grown, even if no one was prepared to grade her on her imagination.

Comparing imagination to creative activities in the context of grading was a common idea among participants. Mr. Debonair, too, made a similar comparison, but this time with creative writing. More specifically he discussed the difficulties associated with grading poetry:

It's a similar problem in teaching a creative writing class. How do you grade a poem? For me, to assess that, the default is the skills and the use of the language that the poet is employing to create meaning. And the part that I can't easily assess is why you decided to write this on a forest and yours is on Mars and yours is on Haiti and yours is on... so, it's harder to say.

This idea falls in line with the belief that a finished product of the imagination cannot necessarily be graded, but that all of the creative decisions that go into an imaginative project, to some extent, can. Part of being imaginative, according to Mr. Debonair, is making intentional decisions on the basis of skills and knowledge that you do have. Imagination completely ungrounded by anything whatsoever, likely has no hope of being assessed, Mr. Debonair suggested, but when coupled

with other, more tangible abilities, it can. So, for Mr. Debonair, students can show that they

know how to do certain imaginative things, and they "can still get a good grade without having

to be a creative genius." But in terms of assessing the imagination as such, Mr. Debonair asserted,

"imagination is beyond any measurable standard for any mastery; it's something that is different

and inventive and that's why it's got value."

The one voice of dissent, again, came from Zandra. On the issue of whether the

imagination can be graded, she reported: "I feel like it can be, but I feel biased. I guess if you

were to grade imagination, if you organized it and it had to follow a certain amount of criteria,

then you would be able to grade it." Thus, although Zandra agreed that imagination is not

something that can be taught, she expressed an intuition that perhaps it can nevertheless be

graded. According to Zandra, the key to grading the imagination would be in discovering and

following the right criteria. This suggests an interesting place for further study in educational

research: are there other abilities or traits that cannot be taught but that can nevertheless be

assessed in certain ways?

So, in general, participants voiced the view that imagination cannot be graded, but that it

can be nurtured or cultivated in a certain way. For me, this created the image of growing the

imagination as one would a plant. Everyone knows that plants are not forced or told how to

grow; rather, a gardener first sets the conditions for growth, and the plant grows on its own

accord. This idea, too, is reflected in the types of responses that participants gave on the issue of

how exactly imagination can be developed in the classroom. First, open-ended projects, where

students are granted creative license on how to craft the finished product, help prepare the right

conditions for nurturing and expanding the imagination. And second, alternative spatial

arrangements as well as uninterrupted blocks of time also contribute to the right conditions for

cultivating student imagination.

"We get to make whatever the heck we want": Open-ended projects and the imagination

When I questioned participants about what types of instruction or activities support

imagination the most, almost all immediately began to describe open-ended projects as live

options. In this section I use "open-ended" to refer to projects where students are given one

definite goal, but are allowed to take more than one path to get there. A good example of an

open-ended project might be a portfolio, where students display a finished product or set of

products that were created in response to a single assignment or prompt, but where no two

portfolios end up looking the same. As a student, Mrs. Lively recalled one class in particular that

always offered open-ended projects. In this class, they built potato guns and robots, and other

highly imaginative projects that would be unlikely to appear in most classes. But, as Mrs. Lively

explained, there can be too much freedom to the point where students aren't sure what the

teacher is looking for in a finished product. This is why, in her class, Mrs. Lively allows a similar

amount of freedom, but offers students a little more guidance. She explained as follows:

> If I'm asking kids to do some kind of drawing assignment and they want to create
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> something out of clay instead, and they have the means and the way to do that,
>
> then that'd be something where I'd say 'yeah that's fine,' because it's still
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> something that gets them to the right place.

According to Mrs. Lively, this type of freedom really encourages imagination, because it hands a

lot of the decision making process over to students. And from Mrs. Lively's perspective, it

doesn't really matter what students produce as long as they demonstrate the skills and knowledge

she wants. She explained further that "honoring their ideas and requests and having them feel

safe to decide" is an incredibly important part of the learning process. So, for Mrs. Lively, student choice in open-ended projects is one type of project that supports student imagination.

Marsha seconded this idea when she claimed that: "I really appreciate it when my teachers give us opportunities to use our imagination." She referred again to the project mentioned before where she worked on a sketchbook as opposed to a traditional notebook to guide her work in Mrs. Lively's class. "It's more like an art project and I can make it whatever I want," she explained, "and I don't just have to sit with pen and paper. I can use colors and ideas and make the pictures cartoony if I want—just as long as I show what I know." Marsha clearly enjoys more artistic types of projects, but she insisted that this is not the only type of project that encourages imagination. As long as the project gives students the option to choose between alternative paths, even if none of the paths involve artistic elements, the project is likely going to support student imagination, she claimed. Marsha concluded that, really, her imagination is most supported when "we get to make whatever the heck we want." This idea echoes Maxine Greene's notion that exercising the imagination is joyful, and that it feels good in much the same way that exercising the body can.

In response to this same line of questioning, Mr. Debonair also described a past experience as a student where he felt that his imagination was valued and supported. In a middle school English class, he recalled that his teacher conducted a kind of weeklong writing seminar where everyday students were asked to sit down and write for 45 minutes at a time in response to a single writing prompt or photograph. He explained that there was basically unlimited freedom granted to students in what they wrote about, so long as they were writing at the same time and in response to the same prompts. About this experience, Mr. Debonair reported that he felt his

teacher had really created genuine opportunities for students to imagine characters and worlds of their own making. One experience in particular stood out in his memory:

> I still remember this story I wrote about a lion named Monarch and how his Serengeti had been burned up and all his pride had been killed and that he was the last lion left and he was staring out across the desolate wasteland... very Shakespearean (laughter).

I consider it very significant that Mr. Debonair's story is still readily apparent in his memory; this tells me that this experience had a serious impact on him as a student and creative thinker. His ideas and decisions were validated and they were not scrutinized and criticized in the way that other types of assignments often are in schools. For Mr. Debonair, though, the most important aspect of this experience was that "there was a general direction for what we were asked to do, but there was a lack of defined limits or barriers to how we did it." And so, in Mr. Debonair's case, too, an open-ended project was what supported his imagination. "I think it was the freedom to take what was in front of us and do whatever we wanted with it" he added, "and that was what really was opening up the imagination." Mr. Debonair explained that this is the kind of thing he often tries to do for his students now that he is the teacher.

Lenora also described various types of open-ended projects as ways to encourage imagination and imaginative thinking in the classroom. She explained one in particular that she had working on for an art class:

> One of my teachers gave us an assignment and all you had to include was something with architecture. It could be anything in the world—it just had to include architecture in some small way. And so your mind is blown trying to think of these different ideas that you could incorporate architecture.

Lenora went on to explain that this was one of her favorite projects ever; she described it as very difficult, because there was so much freedom involved, but she really enjoyed how creative she was allowed to be with the finished product. In general, Lenora stated, whenever teachers offer an assignment like this, she becomes very excited, and she feels that it is the best way to encourage imaginative thinking. There is no right or wrong answer when it comes to this type of project, she explained, and so there are no worries about what is acceptable and what is not; all you have to do is include the necessary components.

Zandra, too, identified projects as a type of activity that genuinely supports student imagination. In fact, she explained, "every time I hear 'project,' it's, like, 'yes!' I can be creative," and she added, "I feel like tests are a lost cause in that regard because, well, they're obviously necessary, but they're not much help with imagination." When I pressed Zandra further about this point, she explained that tests aren't necessarily supportive of imagination, because they don't usually give the kind of space required to be imaginative. There are right and wrong answers, and that's all there is to it, she explained. What's needed is freedom, the freedom to choose which direction to take your answers in, and without this freedom, according to Zandra, the imagination is not really going to be allowed to play. Clearly it is important to understand the expert criticisms of the NCLB era, and what they have to say about tests, but Zandra's perspective here matters too, because she is a student and students have a stake in the state and future of education in our country. We need to hear from more students like Zandra.

"The structure of a classroom can really kill imagination": Classroom space and imagination

Aside from general comments and reflections on open-ended projects, another idea multiple participants touched on in one way or another was the spatial arrangement of learning environments and how this might contribute to cultivating student imagination. Mrs. Lively

mentioned, for example, that she liked to keep her classroom more like an art studio than anything. I noticed from my observations that this was true. The desks were arranged in pods with no real center to the classroom. Students have big open spaces to move around, and their desks are close enough that they can collaborate very easily. Each desk faces the center of the pod, and the surface area of the desks is much larger than desks that you would find in a traditional high school (they feel more like tables when you sit down at them). Mrs. Lively explained that this is to give off more of a workroom feeling as opposed to a traditional classroom with rows. She also explained that she tries to give students plenty of time to work and figure things out for themselves in this space, which makes it more like a center for discovery than a place for lectures. In fact, Mrs. Lively explained, she almost never actually lectures for more than 10 minutes a class period (though, I do not think her implication here was that lectures are unimaginative inherently). Her philosophy is that students are the center of the classroom, and she has attempted to set up the space of her room to reflect this ideal.

Marsha also discussed the ways in which the arrangement of space can influence the imaginations of students. About Starry Lake, in particular, Marsha explained:

> We put a big emphasis on circles because in a circle, if everyone's sitting in a circle no matter where you look, you're going to be able to see everybody. And that's our big goal with circles is no back seats, because in a circle you can always see everyone and everything.

According to Marsha, circles in particular are supportive because they disrupt the usual kind of activities and behaviors found in traditional classrooms. Because Marsha transferred from another high school, she was able to reflect on the differences in arrangements:

When I was at my previous school everyone sat at their own individual desks all

lined up in this grid. And if the person behind me wanted to say something, I

didn't know who was talking, because I couldn't see their face. And it's not easy

to turn around in those desks and the teachers don't like it when we turn around to

talk to people.

Marsha's point here is about how traditional rows in a classroom aren't conducive to class

discussions or sharing ideas. Clearly she felt less open to ideas and conversation while sitting in

rows, because there are typically restrictive rules, as she suggested, that come along with such a

spatial arrangement. But at Starry Lake, she explained, "with our tables, we have groups of

people we can talk to and it is encouraged to discuss what you're learning instead of just spitting

it out on a test or a paper that you're writing." For Marsha, one big part of imaginative thinking

is talking and working with groups. She explained that most of her imaginativeness, in a way,

comes from the ideas and imagination of other students, and without opportunities to share these

ideas, she doesn't feel that her imagination is really being supported. Thus, circles in particular

represent one specific spatial arrangement that Marsha believed to be important for imaginative

thinking.

Mr. Debonair seemed to be highly conscious as a teacher of the spatial arrangement of a

classroom and how different arrangements support of hinder different types of thinking and

learning. About one class in particular, Mr. Debonair explained:

When I teach the creative writing poetry class, I'll deliberately move the room

around, so it's not the same structure every day. And then I'll deliberately move

to other parts of the building just to get out of the structure, because I think that

the structure of a classroom can really kill imagination.

In addition to this, Mr. Debonair described how funny he found it to watch students come into the classroom and "freak out" because the desks have been moved. He explained that students get so used to the structure of a room that they conform to it very naturally and easily, and that they get really upset when that structure is gone. But, for Mr. Debonair, traditional arrangements of space make students too comfortable with traditional ways of thinking; students too easily confuse the ordinary with the necessary, and they often fail to see that things can be otherwise. This is why it is essential, according to Mr. Debonair, to shake things up every once and a while, and demonstrate to students that the "normal" way of doing things is not the only way of doing things. Clearly, for Mr. Debonair, varying the spatial arrangement of a room, or moving into new spaces altogether, is one way to support student imagination.

Lenora's ideas seemed to echo Marsha's from before more than any others on this issue, and very much like Marsha, Lenora focused on the benefits of class circles for stimulating and pushing student imagination. Primarily she described "open discussions" where students sit in a circle and talk about books or whatever they happen to be working on at the time. I questioned her about why circles in particular support imagination or imaginative thinking, and she explained that it's "because it gets your thoughts moving, like when you're trying to think of a new idea to apply to the book or to someone else's comment, or trying to put a new spin on something to disprove somebody else's argument." For Lenora, I think that the interaction with other students, as well as the engagement with new ideas, contributes most to imagination. But she also added that circular arrangements are much different than other classes because there "you're all sitting in rows and you're not really supposed to talk—you're just supposed to take in information and output the answers." I asked Lenora about what was so bad about this and she replied that "when you have lines, it's like the people in the front row are more important than

the people in the back row or vice versa depending on your class." Lenora here seems to be suggesting that traditional spatial arrangements, where desks are set in rows, tend to unfairly privilege certain speech positions, and eventually some students are left out of the conversation. This, she thought, was not supportive of student imagination, and that one of the best ways to encourage imaginative thinking is to make sure everyone is allowed to contribute ideas.

When questioned about the effect of spatial arrangements in classrooms on student imagination, Zandra stated simply she enjoyed it when "teachers mix it up." She claimed that this just added a different dynamic to the room, and allowed you to think and act in ways that aren't your typical way of going about things. She described one experience in particular when one of her teachers "shoved all the chairs to the other side of the classroom and like we all over the place." She explained that days like that just "sort of shake everything up and really encourage imagination." But Zandra's favorite class structure of all is art class, where none of the desks face a particular part of the room. I asked Zandra why she liked this, and she explained that it "allows you to focus on yourself." This made me think about my own time in art classes that were arranged the same way. The idea that there was no other center but your own work really resonated with me, and I tend to agree that this can be very supportive of the imagination.

While not all of the participants shared a single view about how the space of a classroom should be arranged to best support imagination, all of them agreed in some way that the spatial arrangement of a room is nevertheless important to the development of imagination. The idea that circled discussions in particular can help imaginative thinking is an intriguing one, and represents one potential avenue for further research. Many of the participants also, however, agreed that the way timed is managed and used in a classroom can also contribute to the growth of student imagination.

"Can you just say 'go work on this' and not talk?": *Time management and the imagination*

Despite that Mrs. Lively did not explicitly speak to the different ways in which managing time can stimulate or hinder student imagination, I noticed several things about the way she ran her class that seem relevant to this point. Most of the time that I was in Mrs. Lively's class observing, she seemed to be taking on the role of a coach more than that of an instructor. The typical routine was that she would take roll, get students started on a task, and then give them plenty of uninterrupted time to work on their own. Students were very much self-guided in this way, and I can only assume that she had established strong norms at the beginning of the year for the class to run this smoothly on its own. But I noticed that students tended to be very productive and creative with the time they were given. Of course, Mrs. Lively was hovering around the room constantly, and she would answer questions here and there, but ultimately students truly seemed to appreciate the time they were allowed to use in her class. Floating around the room myself, I noticed, in some cases, students wouldn't say one word for the whole period. Some worked entirely by themselves and others in groups, but always fairly quietly. I believe that this gave them room to breathe, and work in manner that suited them. It also gave them time to have extended and deep thoughts about what they were working on, and I couldn't help but to think about other classes where teachers are constantly moving students from task to task. In this type of situation, I wondered how much imaginative thought is really made possible—how imaginative can you be when you don't have time to stop and contemplate? While there was no direct proof that Mrs. Lively's students were more imaginative than any other students in different situations, my gut told me that this was an environment that was conducive to imaginative thinking.

Unlike Mrs. Lively, Mr. Debonair explicitly spoke to the ways that time can be used in class to enhance the imaginative thinking of his students. Mr. Debonair seemed to pay very close attention to the clock in his classroom, and he explained that he makes strategic use of time to hit all of the standards and educational goals required by the Common Core. And although he feels compelled to make use of every minute in the class period, he explained that he is not necessarily opposed to shifting his plans to accommodate the needs and wants of his students. He described one time in particular when he changed his plans for the day after hearing several requests from his students. On this day, his students were working on a blocking for a short performance of a scene from *Romeo and Juliet*. Here, they were making decisions about costumes and props and practicing their lines. Mr. Debonair explained that they seemed to be feeling a little pushed for time with the whole assignment, and they finally posed the following question to him: "Can you just say, 'go work on this' and not talk?" Mr. Debonair found this fairly amusing, because it implied that they did not want him to talk for the rest of the class period, but he also viewed it as a serious request. So, he gave them the time to work, and he didn't regret it. Mr. Debonair explained that this experience stood out to him, and it's one that he tries to remember from time-to-time, because it shows that, occasionally, students just need uninterrupted time to work. He reflected that sometimes as a teacher "you have to be flexible in what you think the ways to achieve your goal are, and then find ways to nurture that during classroom without being bought so exclusively on the structure." To add to this point, Mr. Debonair suggested, you have to let your goals guide your classroom structure and not the other way around. He claimed that, for example, not giving enough time to students to work and think can be "a big part of limiting the access to imagination in the classroom." Clearly, then, for Mr. Debonair, the management of time is one important factor in supporting student imagination in the class.

With regard to the ways that teachers can support student imagination in the classroom the three prevalent ideas that emerged from participant responses were (1) open-ended projects tend to support student imagination by offering students choices and opportunities for creativity and imaginative thought; (2) non-traditional spatial arrangements tend to "shake thing up" and support imagination by encouraging more group-oriented activities, like circle discussions, that open up conversational space for exchanging ideas; and (3) uninterrupted blocks of time support student imagination by giving students time to breath, and think and imagine in deeper ways than they are used to doing.

CONCLUSION

When I reflect on the interviews and experiences I had with the participants I invited into the study, I feel that I learned more about the imagination's place in education than I did from reading any of the articles or books behind my literature review. I came into this project strongly believing that imagination plays a crucial role in learning, but I didn't really have many specific ideas about exactly how and why this is the case. But even in my short time with a handful of students and teachers I am more confident than ever that imagination truly does deserve more time and attention in classroom across the U.S., and I walk away from this study with some clear and concrete ideas about how to support imagination in the classroom. To be sure, I have not reached any absolute findings concerning the role of imagination in education, but I am prepared to draw a few modest conclusions on the matter.

On the role imagination has in education, I conclude that imagination plays a key role in critical thinking, and that this role is not limited to imagined hypothetical cases, but rather extends to real-world thinking and problem solving. The participants offered several examples to prove this point. Mrs. Lively's notion that imaginatively rehearsing for emergencies like school shootings was particularly memorable, as were Mr. Debonair's ideas about the complex reasoning that can go into imagining future catastrophes like asteroid strikes. More than this, I am also convinced that imagination can also play a key role motivating student engagement. And while this belief was likely something I walked into this study carrying, I now feel that I have better reason to hold on to it. Exercising the imagination is fun, and unimaginative activities and lessons are often not. Marsha, Lenora, and Zandra all strongly reinforced the idea that imagination and imaginative thinking creates more exciting learning environments and therefore

motivates them as students. We cannot ignore their voices. So, I think it is clear that imagination certainly has a place in education.

On the issue of whether the imagination deserves the attention of teachers, I am willing to assert that, indeed, it does, and to a fair extent, for several reasons. Many of the participants referenced the fact that an expanded or deepened sense of imagination can be joyful, and after having reflected on this idea, I agree. This means that the imagination, if nothing else, carries value in its own right for the imaginative individual. Having new ideas and thinking in different and unexpected ways offers an intellectual freedom of thought that is inherently valuable. Mr. Debonair's notion of the "Peter Pan syndrome" stands out in my mind as something that supports this idea really well. But there are other reasons why the imagination is valuable, and therefore deserves attention in schools. Another significant reason is that, as several participants noted, imagination and innovative thinking carry instrumental value in the workplace. Few career paths require no imagination whatsoever, and many require quite a bit. If students are going to be prepared to join the 21st century workforce, they therefore need to be prepared to be imaginative. Marsha in particular seemed to advocate for this idea passionately. Aside from this consideration, there is also the idea that imagination is what grounds any empathetic or moral stance toward other people. Many participants discussed the idea of taking a perspective other than one's own. This, it seems to me, is the most important reason why imagination deserves more time and attention in the classroom. If we want to understand each other better, so that we might work toward more harmonious and caring relationships, we have to become more imaginatively aware of and engaged with one another.

With regard to the types of instruction, activities, and learning environments that support student imagination, I feel that I have gleaned the most from these participants. One important

conclusion that could perhaps be easily overlooked is that student imagination is supported simply by giving choices and opportunities to students whenever possible. Teachers often get caught up with making sure that students meeting the standards, which is not a bad thing in itself. But it can diminish the value of the learning process for students when teachers equate teaching some standard with a particular assignment, with which they have some image of the "right" product. If, instead, teachers would, on occasion, create a new open-ended projects to meet the same standards but give students freedom and choice, I think student imagination could be served well. Every single participant supported this idea explicitly. Of course, this comes with some risk, as one of the teacher participants noted, because it means giving up more control of the class. However, the benefits in many cases, I believe, would outweigh the potential costs.

In addition to this idea, I feel confident in concluding that the space and time of a classroom might be among the single most important factors in cultivating student imagination. The spatial arrangement of a room, as well as the way time is managed over the course of a class period, are viewed so automatically as ordinary and unimportant that they need to be brought to our awareness to see what effect and influence they might have on imagination and imaginative thinking. The idea that classroom structure can inhibit extraordinary thinking is a striking one, and one that I think deserves further research. Additionally, the idea that students need uninterrupted time to think and work to be imaginative is one that is so clear and strong that I am surprised that its weight and significance had not already crossed my mind before this study. In my own life, I feel very strongly about getting extended periods of time to work and think about various projects. Although none of these ideas give very specific "do's or don'ts" for teachers, I feel that they offer strong guidelines for how best to begin creating a classroom environment where imagination is supported and nurtured.

Implications for future study

      Much more research needs to be done on the role of imagination in education. What still surprises me is the remarkable lack of student and teacher voices in the current conversation. The interviews I conducted seemed to yield an incredible and interesting amount of rich data to analyze. We need more. More student and teacher perspectives on the imagination in education need to be gathered so that the views and beliefs of the major actors in the world of education can have a fair influence on that world. Returning to some of the concerns I raised in the Introduction, this type of research is more important than ever. Who will imagine the most effective solutions to the most pressing problems of the 21st century? How can we begin to imagine better versions of ourselves, our relationships with one another, and the world at large? To answer these questions, we need again to consider the fundamental purpose of education in the first place. Our priorities should not be comprised entirely of standardizable concepts and skills, and we *have* to make room the imagination in the classroom. We cannot afford *not* to make room for imagination, but to do this well, we need to continue to study and understand the role and value of imagination in education as well as the most effective ways to support student imagination in the classroom.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(1) What do you think of first when you hear the word "imagination"?

(2) Can the imagination be taught? Can imaginative thinking be taught? If so, can you explain why you believe this? If not, can you explain why not?

(3) What role, if any, does the imagination have in student learning?

(4) Do you think your imagination plays a role in learning?

(5) Do students need to exercise their imaginations in order to learn?

(6) Describe one way, if any, that you value student imagination in your classroom.

(7) Can you describe a time when a teacher of yours valued or failed to value your imagination?

(8) Do you have an assignment or an activity that you believe supports imagination?

(9) Can the imagination be assessed? If so, please describe the ways in which you do so. If not, can you explain why you believe this?

(10) Do you think the imagination has value in adult life? Please explain.