



Exploring the typical development of creative ability in young children

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5th International VdTMoCA Conference,
18 July 2017

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Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, I really am quite excited to be able to share with you today some of the preliminary findings from my project: exploring the typical development of creative ability in young children. Before we start, I would like to emphasize that what I am presenting today really is still very preliminary as I am still busy collecting and analysing data. Nonetheless, I would love to hear your comments and questions at the end of this presentation.

So let's begin!



When was the last time you were in a park or on a playground and you just watched children play? Or in a classroom with young children and watched them at work? Who can honestly say they have NOT been affected by the enthusiasm children show for learning, for trying out new things and for exploring their worlds? In a recent discussion with another OT, we came to the conclusion that we would be millionaires if we could somehow bottle a child's motivation, enthusiasm and persistence in new things and sell it to the world!

And this really is my starting point today, a true wonder at children's own being-doing- and becoming. Children have the power to surprise us, to show us how to truly enjoy being, and doing... But most of all they afford us the privilege of watching and observing their own growth into unique, special beings, their own becoming...and thereby to glimpse at the forces and circumstances that allow humans to grow.

INTRODUCTION

- Vona du Toit said:
 - “Each body is only alive by virtue of the fact that it is energised, vitalised and given qualitative dimension and direction by his inner Spiritual Living Force (volition) ”
 - “This force in turn must find human expression and realisation in the physical dimension ...in the body... in the world as we know it (action) ”
 - “As we express ourselves, man’s spirit and body are identified. He is in communication with his world, i.e. *encountering* his own reality...answering life’s demands and in this process, determining the quality of his *Being* – becoming Himself.”



Vona du Toit had this to say about becoming:

(Animation note: Click 1 to emphasize first point) “Each body is only alive by virtue of the fact that it is energised, vitalised and given qualitative dimension and direction by his inner Spiritual Living Force (volition) ”

(Animation note: Click 2 to emphasize second point) “This force in turn must find human expression and realisation in the physical dimension ...in the body... in the world as we know it (action) ”

(Animation note: Click 3 to emphasize third point) “As we express ourselves, man’s spirit and body are identified. He is in communication with his world, i.e. *encountering* his own reality...answering life’s demands and in this process, determining the quality of his *Being* – becoming Himself.”

Du Toit saw the development of volition and it’s expression in our actions as the development of creative ability and with a strong developmental background, she developed a model that described a method of facilitating creative ability in those with impairments.

Creative ability and children is a natural fit – the model is developmental in nature after all, but somehow , in the intervening years, the model has been used predominantly in the psychiatric field and the way it is described and used has

acquired a “dysfunction” feel about it. It is described for those with problems in creative ability This is where my interest in the exploration of normal development of creative ability starts.

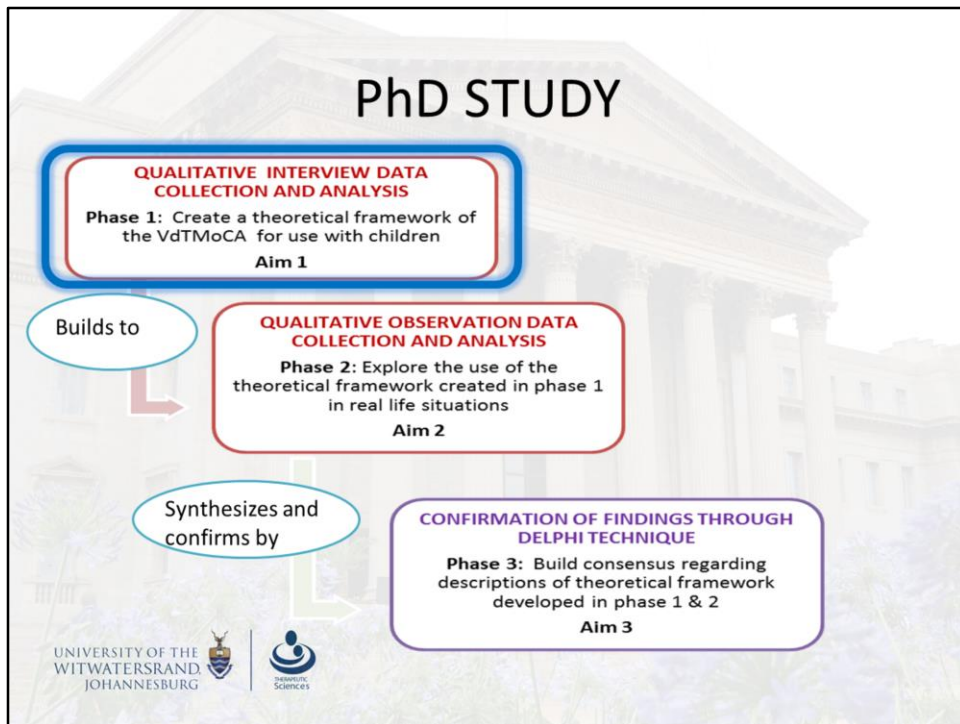
PhD STUDY

- Explorative study
- PURPOSE:
 1. explore **typical** development of creative ability
 2. Create descriptors for *self-presentation* level of motivation & *constructive explorative* level of action

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Two years ago I presented a proposal of how to go about exploring the developmental aspect of Vona du Toit's Model of Creative Ability and today I would like to present some of the initial results of that project. The purpose of my PhD is to explore the typical development (as opposed to the recovery of) creative ability in young children, with the main focus on the self-differentiation and self-presentation levels of motivation and the destructive, incidentally constructive, and constructive explorative levels of action, with the view to develop descriptors of these levels that would be applicable to typically developing children.



My study is divided into three sequential phases .

The aim of the first phase is to create a theoretical framework for the Vona du Toit Model of Creative Ability for use with children, through an extensive literature review and interviewing experts in the field (both experts on the model and paediatric experts).

The second phase will be to explore the use of this theoretical framework in real life situations and I will be doing that by spending prolonged time observing children within their preschool environments as well as at home.

The final phase of the project will be to build consensus between the experts on the descriptors of this framework as developed in phase 1 and 2.

Today I am going to present the preliminary findings from phase 1, and I must emphasize that these findings are still very preliminary. I hope to return again in 2 years with a finalized product!

Sample

- 9 Interviews (still need to do 3-4 more)
 - 5 Experts on VdTMoCA
 - 3 Experts in paediatrics and VdTMoCA
 - 1 Expert in paediatrics with knowledge of VdTMoCA



Just to quickly give you an idea of the people I have already interviewed:

I have done 9 interviews so far and have about 3 – 4 interviews still to do. Of these 9 interviews, 5 participants are considered experts on the Vona du Toit Model of Creative Ability, 3 are experts in the model as well as in the field of paediatrics (all three of these experts are also involved in teaching students), and 1 is a practicing clinician who is an expert in paediatrics and has a working knowledge of the model.

The people I still need to interview include 2 more model experts, a paediatric and model expert, and another clinician.

The sample is heterogeneous in terms of age and experience – and I have purposefully tried to interview a wide range of experts in order to get diversity in opinion.

All the interviews I have done so far have been audio-recorded and transcribed so that I can easily go back to them to listen to discussions again.

Interview Questions

- 4 Main questions:
 1. The core of VdTMoCA and the development of core concepts
 2. The development of self-differentiation and self-presentation
 3. The development of destructive, incidentally constructive and constructive explorative action
 4. Growth or movement through levels
- One additional question for paedes experts:
 5. Use of the model in practice (strengths and weaknesses)



There were 4 main questions that were discussed during interviews. There was considerable fluidity in the order of the questions and the probes used, as participants were given the opportunity to tell me what they thought was really important to explore considering the aim of project.

The 4 questions centred firstly around the core concepts of the model (in the opinion of the person being interviewed) and how they saw development in these concepts. Then the discussion moved on to the development and manifestation of self-differentiation and self presentation levels of motivation together with the destructive, incidentally constructive and constructive explorative levels of action. Finally we discussed aspects of growth or movement through the levels.

For paediatric experts there was one extra question (usually at the start of the discussion) about their experience of using the model in practice.

I am still in the thick of data analysis at the moment. I am using a form of directed content analysis which allows me to code the data with certain pre-existing categories obtained from the model. However, the coding process is fluid and so categories and themes can also emerge from the data itself.

What I would like to present to you now is my first impression of my data. For the sake of time, I am also going to focus on certain aspects of my data, particularly the

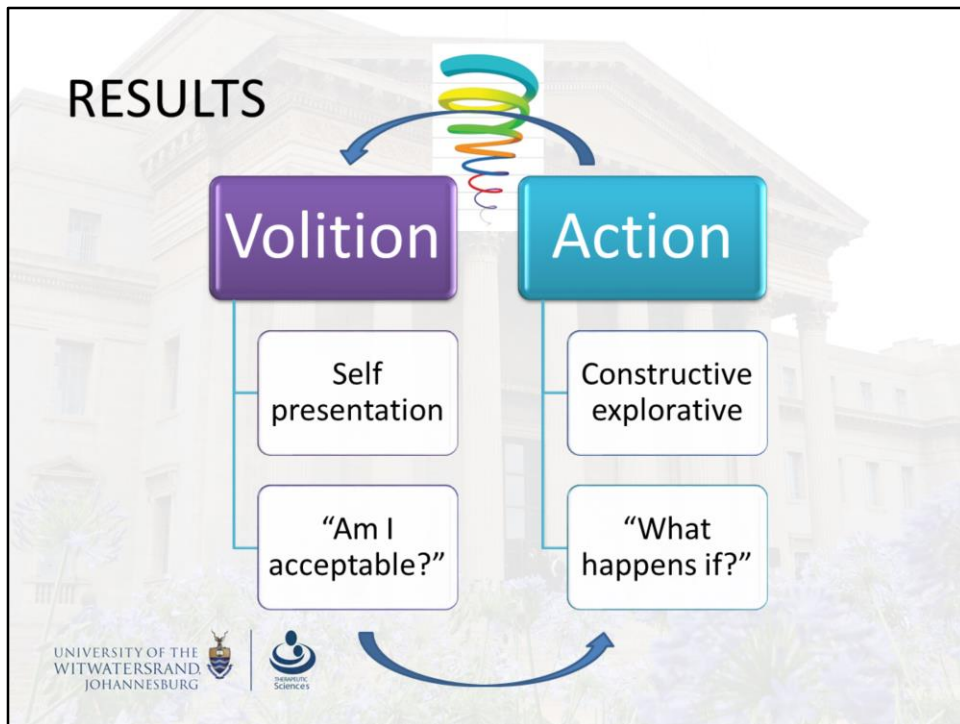
self presentation level of motivation and the constructive explorative level of action.



RESULTS & DISCUSSION

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Unsurprisingly, when asked about what participants saw as the core of Vona du Toit's Model of Creative Ability, all pointed to the concepts of volition and action. This really is the basic premise of the model and is perhaps the best place to start.

(Animation note: first click to bring up arrows) All participants agreed that these concepts are closely linked and in many ways inseparable, although the exact relationship was described in different ways. One participant used the term "holding hands", another spoke about embeddedness. Action cannot happen without volition, but at the same time action drives volition and thus in many ways can be conceptualized like a spiral (a few participants spoke about an actualizing cycle like this one) (Animation not: second click to bring up spiral).

Just as a note, there is some debate about the term "volition" and its relationship to motivation and this came up in many of the interviews. This is a thorny subject and still needs much work to tease out the specifics. So for this presentation we will consider volition as the inner drive to becoming, and action as the outer manifestation of that becoming.

(Animation note: third click to bring up blocks) There is broad consensus amongst experts that between the ages of about 3 years and about 5 to 6 years the child is developing volition within the level of self-presentation and developing action within the level of constructive exploration and thus that the behaviours we see in this age

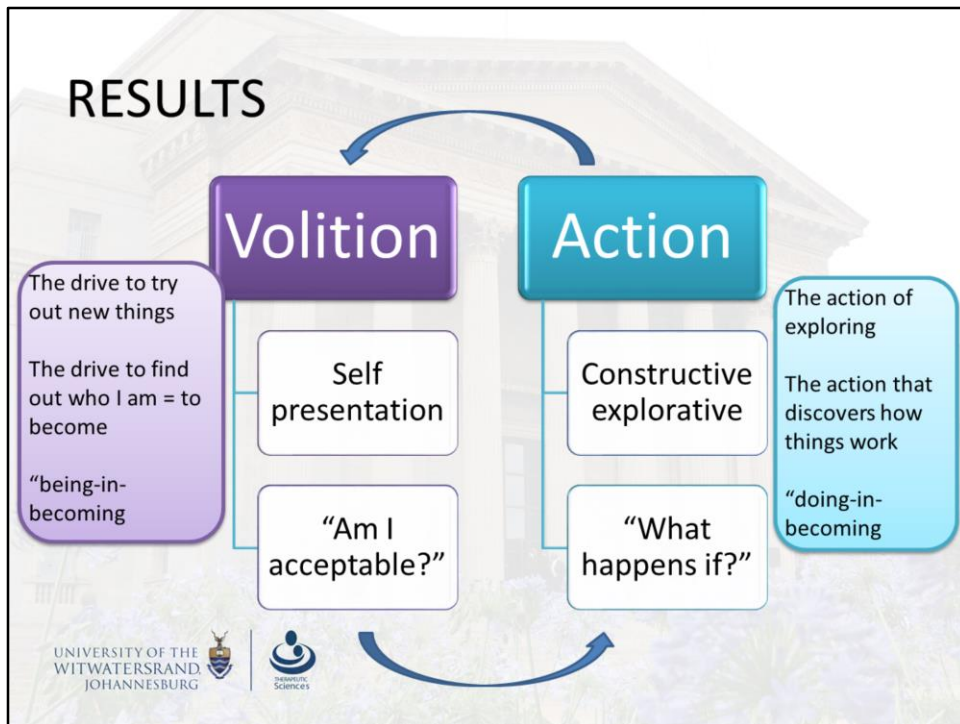
group will most likely reflect these creative ability levels. (There are, however, two notable dissenters from this view which I will discuss briefly a little later on).

The developmental essence of these levels can be distilled into two questions: “Am I acceptable?” and “what happens if?”

“Am I acceptable” manifests in a child presenting themselves to others in order to discover themselves – du Toit described this as “being-in-becoming”

And “What happens if?” manifests in a child exploring to discover how things work – du Toit called this doing-in-becoming”

This “am I acceptable”, and “what happens if” flows backwards and forwards and is greatly influenced by feedback from the environment. The child learns from the reaction in the environment about the world, about other people and about themselves and this allows them to develop the necessary knowledge, feelings and self control that allows them to move towards the participation levels.

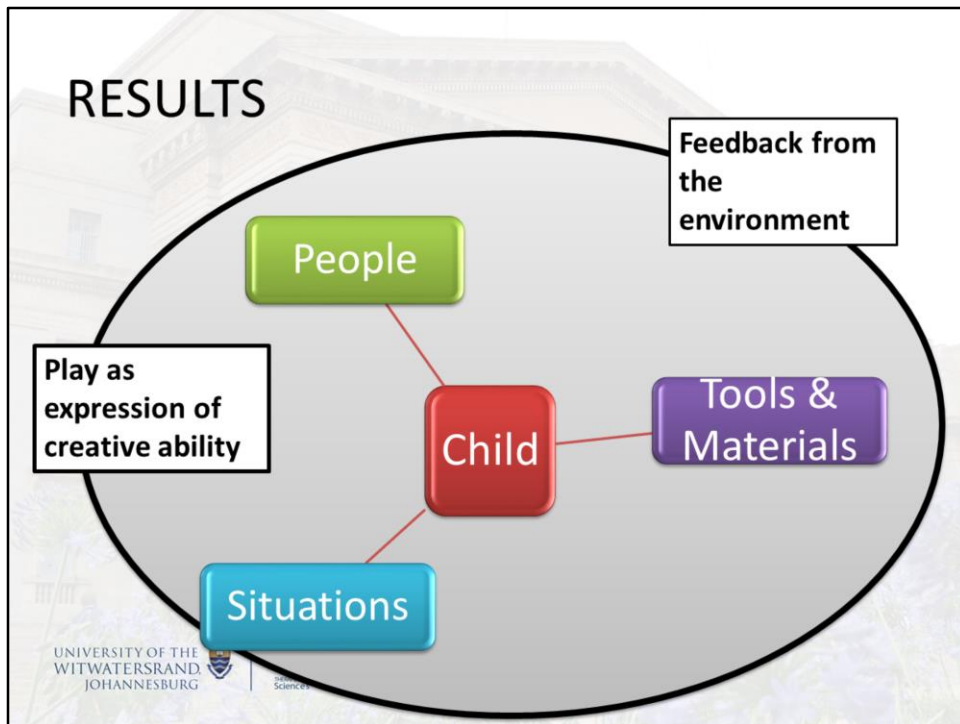


(Animation note: Click 1 and 2 to emphasize bottom blocks during questions) The developmental essence of these levels can be distilled into two questions: “Am I acceptable?” and “what happens if?”

(Animation note: Click 3 to bring in text box on left) “Am I acceptable” manifests in a child presenting themselves to others in order to discover themselves – du Toit described this as “being-in-becoming”

(Animation note: Click 4 to bring in text box on right) And “What happens if?” manifests in a child exploring to discover how things work – du Toit called this doing-in-becoming”

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The second core element to a discussion of creative ability common to all participants was the relatedness of a child to people, situations, and tools and materials and this is how to determine a creative ability level. Within each of these three components understanding how a child deals with norms or rules, how a child manages anxiety and how a child expresses explorative action need to be explored as well as how feedback from the environment encourages development. *(Animation note: Click 1 to bring in circle and feedback box)*

(Animation note: Click 2 to bring in play box) One of the interesting suggestions by a number of participants was the possibility of play expressing the development of creative ability. Play is a child's working out of the world and is the place where children are most able to express their own volition and action on the world. It is when they are at their freest and could be the best place to see creative ability emerging. When pressed for examples, participants mostly gave examples of children at play and so I have followed their example and generated a basic theoretical framework to connect play action with creative ability volition and action.

Self Presentation – constructive explorative Action	
People and Situations	Play
<i>“Am I acceptable”</i> • Learning about social norms and rules • If I behave in this way today, what will the world say? • What are the rules/norms of being with others • How do I play with my friends?	<i>Social structure of play</i> • Parallel play • Associative play • Cooperative play • Playing games with rules Socio-dramatic play
Impulse Control Games with rules	

So let’s look at how young children may relate to people and situations. Really the big question here is “Am I acceptable?”. Self presentation is all about learning which behaviours are acceptable within social groups and which are not. Children gain control over their separation anxiety and develop confidence to go out into the world and meet new and different people. How many of you have seen 4 or 5 year olds call out “look at me, look what I’m doing!” This epitomises the presentation of self to the world and it is the feedback from the world that either affirms the behaviour presented or suggests to the child to try something else.

The most obvious play development that relates to the presentation of self is the development of the social structure of play, particularly the development of first associative play (at about 3 to 4 years) and then cooperative play(at about 5 to 6 years). Here children learn the basic structure to social norms and learn first to share and play together and then to actually work together towards a common, shared and collectively decided goal. Here is where the exploration of behaviour towards others and situations comes to the fore. For example: at first children may react with aggression, such as hitting or pinching if a friend does something they don’t like. Generally there will be negative feedback from the environment – the friend might cry, and might withdraw and not want to play. Adults may mediate within the situation by suggesting alternative actions, such as saying sorry, asking friends for toys, sharing and playing together. As children try out different ways of interacting with their friends, they will receive feedback on what was good and what was not so

good and so behaviour changes over time and children slowly learn about social norms.

(Animation note: Click 1 to bring in impulse control box) One participant explicitly raised the importance of the development of impulse control in social situations. Unfortunately I don't have enough time to explore impulse control in depth as this could be a whole presentation on it's own! However, when you see a child bursting to tell her mom something, but having to wait while mom finishes her conversation with the teacher, or when a child has to wait his turn during ring time before telling his story, or having to control basic emotions such as anger or frustration and not act out with aggression, then we can clearly see the effort exerted to try and meet the social norm and to control impulses. Clearly in this early stage, children are not always successful at controlling their impulses, but certainly display a need to learn to do so!

(Animation note: Click 2 to bring in socio-dramatic play) And finally, I guess the most dramatic exploration of social norms and relating to people and situations develops into the socio-dramatic (or complex imaginative) play of the 5 and 6 year old, where children explore by creating their own rules and norms and playing these out with friends.

Throughout early childhood, the social norms of interacting with others are made overt to children through the structure of their homes and preschools as well as by the adults and peers in the environment. As they reach the age of 6 to 7 years, they no longer need to be reminded all the time how to "play nicely" with friends or how to behave in their classes. As their play moves towards more structured games with set rules, and they become more aware of social norms, their motivation and action develops into the participation levels and they are ready to move on!

Self Presentation – constructive explorative Action	
Tools and materials	Play
<i>“What happens if”</i> • Discovering how things work • Exploring properties of tools and materials • Process driven (not focussed on product) • Skills development	<i>Creative or constructive play</i> • Artwork and crafts • Building with blocks or lego • Outdoors – sand & water & mud & leaves, etc
Product-centredness	
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And then there’s the relation to tools and materials. This is where constructive explorative action can be most obvious. The question here is “what happens if?” and the child is really exploring the properties of tools and materials in order to create. As one participant put it “there is no longer banging an object or eating sand just for the sake of the sound of banging or feeling the texture. Now the preschooler explores in order to go onto a more formalized outcome”. .. Eventually to create something. The action is process driven and not really focussed on the product, but the child is aware of their own effort and proud of their creations regardless of the true quality. This is most obvious in creative or constructive play, particularly in arts and crafts where children can explore with a variety of tools (such as stamps, paintbrushes, sponges, etc) and materials (such as ink, paint, crayons, clay etc) to create something on a blank piece of paper. The child is proud of her own output and the environment rewards the effort when mum puts the artwork up on the fridge for everyone to see!

Exploration also encourages skill development (such as fine motor skills and perceptual skills) and as skills develop tools and materials can be combined and used in more and more complex ways.

(Animation note: Click 1 to bring in product box) Slowly teacher or mum introduces product norms to the child: “do you see any people with green faces around you? Do you think you could try and cut on the line? How do we make your lego building really

look like a house?” and slowly over time the child becomes more aware of the product and so shifts focus from the process to the product. All participants agreed that once a child became product centred, and aware of product norms, they had moved up to the participation levels.

Other Results

- Creative capacity, creative response, creative participation
- The nature of volition
- Self-directedness
- Creative ability and resilience
- Developmental model vs Recovery model?
- Strengths and weaknesses in practice
- Opportunities for research



There are so many other aspects to this incredible model that I don't have the time to discuss here today. During the interviews, interesting views on concepts such as creative capacity, the multi-faceted nature of volition, the self-directed nature of child volition, the link between creative ability and resilience, the difference between using the model as a developmental model versus a model of recovery, the strengths and weaknesses of the model in practice and the opportunities for further research were all discussed with enthusiasm. I hope to be able to share more of these results in the near future at events such as the WFOT conference in Cape Town next year.

One thing, however, became clear during the interviews and my data analysis (and this presents as both a strength and a challenge to the model): everyone who uses Vona du Toit's Model of Creative Ability has a slightly different interpretation of what it is and how it works. This makes the model flexible for use in many different forms of practice, but also makes it vulnerable to distortions. I have realised that the only way to truly get to the heart of creative ability in children is to actually spend time observing children. So that's the next step! Now it's time to collect hard evidence for the manifestation of creative ability levels in children and see whether all our opinions are truly supported by data.

So some questions for Phase 2:

- Are the age ranges really correct?
- What do children really do?
- Child volition?
- The link between the development of creative ability and play?
- And development of sensory regulation?
- What are the elements of the environment that support the growth of creative ability



So to finish off I would like to highlight some questions that will need to be explored further in phase 2.

(Animation note: Click 1 for first question) Firstly, are the age ranges really correct? Most participants seemed to agree on the general age range of self presentation between about 3 years to about 6 years, but there are some notable exceptions. There is one participant who strongly disagrees that children in the early phase of formal schooling (in SA we call it the foundation phase and it's for 7 – 9 year olds) can possibly be at the same level as adults with psychiatric conditions that are capable of living with some independence within the community., thus that they cannot be already moving onto participation levels at school. But there is also another strong opinion that levels are not fixed, that they fluctuate and that actually a young child can be on a high level of creative ability provided they are able to meet the expectations of the environment. The only way we will be able to resolve this question is by spending prolonged time observing children of different ages and trying to measure their creative ability levels.

(Animation note: Click 2 for second question) Secondly: there's the question of what children actually do. All of the participants were particularly reticent to really give concrete examples of behaviour that can be used as descriptors of self-presentation and constructive explorative action in children. This may of course be because, as occupational therapists, we are more accustomed to working with people that have

problems, that have faced trauma, or have impairments than working with typically developing people. So often we know how to describe something that is missing, and we know when things go wrong, but we somehow struggle with the normal! Again this can only be solved by spending time in the field.

(Animation note: Click 3 for third question) Thirdly: there's a need to explore the quality of children's volition and drive as compared to adults who have regressed due to trauma or impairment. Many of the experts whose experience was predominantly with adults spoke of the person at the self-presentation level as being fragile and vulnerable and needing very careful handling, while many of the paediatric experts spoke of children's volition as robust, strong, and self directed. This could be a key difference between a developmental process and a recovery process.

(Animation note: Click 4 for fourth and fifth question) And then there's the possible link with the development of play and possibly self regulation.... Maybe the way that children play is an expression of the development of creative ability? Many of my participants think this is a very real possibility and I have presented my current results to illustrate this belief. We know that play changes and evolves over time. So maybe this will be a way to develop descriptors of the models' levels that will be easily applicable to children.

(Animation note: Click 5 for sixth question) Finally: what are the specific elements in the environment that promote growth across the levels. After all, typically developing children do not receive occupational therapy to facilitate the development of their creative ability and teachers and parents are not trained to carefully select activities according to the model's criteria to ensure growth. Thus there must be some form of scaffolding deeply embedded in the general environment of children that promotes their development of creative ability.



Thank you so much for coming to listen to me today and I must say I am now very eager to hear from you on what your thoughts or comments might be regarding the creative ability of a child!

Thank you!

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