

Reviewed by Leonard Davis

Lifelong Kindergarten: Cultivating Creativity Through Projects, Passion, Peers, and Play

Written by Mitchel Resnick
Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017

Mitchel Resnick, MIT professor and director of the Lifelong Kindergarten Group at the MIT Media Lab, has more than 30 years of experience in designing meaningful and transformative creative learning environments. In *Lifelong Kindergarten*, he proposes that a kindergarten style of learning should be a model for the rest of schooling because it develops creative and critical thinking capacities, valuable traits needed for a continually changing society. Kindergarten-style learning is marked by what Resnick calls the Creative Learning Spiral and the Four Ps: Projects, Passion, Peers, and Play.

Creative Learning Spiral

Kindergarten students are immersed in activities that involve learning through imagination. Activities such as building block towers and castles, telling stories, and so on, cover all aspects of the creative spiral process: Imagine, Create, Play, Share, Reflect. Resnick notes that this process can serve as the “engine” for creative thinking. As students move naturally through this spiral, they generate ideas, try them out, make changes and revisions, receive ideas from others, and then create new ideas based on their own experience. Resnick’s Creative Learning Spiral is analogous to the Orff Schulwerk approach where students are actively

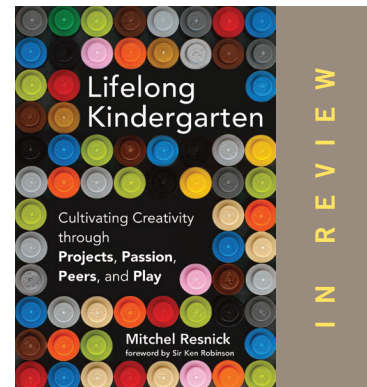
engaged with music learning through the process of imitation, exploration, improvisation, composition, and reflection. The Creative Learning Spiral is also similar to the artistic process of Creating found in the National Core Arts Standards (<http://nationalartsstandards.org>).

Projects

Many educators advocate for active learning experiences; however, Resnick notes that it is not enough to learn by doing—students need to be making something as well. Traditional curricula are organized around key concepts and skills. The danger is that this allows only for “solving sets of disconnected problems,” and learners end up with knowledge without knowing why and how it can apply to a new situation. In the music classroom, this would be akin to teaching students *about* music and then not allowing them to create music themselves. With a project-based approach, students encounter knowledge and concepts within a context and apply their learning to new situations.

Passion

Resnick argues that students’ “passion and motivation will make them more likely to connect with new ideas and develop new ways of thinking.” He champions constructionist educator Seymour Papert, who advocated for projects with “low floors” and “high ceilings.” A project should provide easy ways for novices to begin (low floors) but also ways for them to work on harder and more sophisticated projects over time (high ceilings). Orff Schulwerk is an approach that provides low floors through elemental music making and creating, and high ceilings as learners grow in musical understanding and skill development. Excitement and passion are crucial to the creative learning spiral. Optimal learning experiences are fueled by personal interest and passion for the topic, include phases of immersion and reflection, and then can transfer to new situations.



Peers

Historically, learning has been framed as an individual endeavor. Rodin's famous sculpture, *The Thinker*, symbolizes thinking as solitary. Resnick points out that thinking is actually integrated with doing and making in collaboration with others. Ideas are shared and built upon through interaction. Although the concept of students sharing ideas and building on the work of others is viewed as cheating in some environments, knowledge-building can come from community interaction. The teacher plays a crucial role in creating a collaborative learning environment. Learning occurs through sharing ideas, respecting others' ideas, and supporting and caring for one another. The teacher is viewed as the catalyst, consultant, connector, and collaborator in creating this type of environment.

Play

Parents and educators use the word *play* in many different ways. Some types of play lead to creative learning experiences; others do not. Some types of play have a defined structure (i.e., a singing game). Others are more open-ended (i.e., dramatizing a story, improvising). Resnick quotes John Dewey, who extended the focus from play (the active) to playfulness (the attitude). He explained that "playfulness is a more important consideration than play. The former is an attitude of the mind; the latter is a passing outward manifestation of this attitude."

The challenge for educators is to cultivate playfulness in a current educational paradigm that can be preoccupied with data. Quantitative

evidence of learning (numbers, percentages, and the like) can fail to document a playful attitude in a student that could cultivate creative thinking and joy of learning. Resnick believes that learning and play should be documented, illustrating what students have created, how they created it, and why: "If we truly care about preparing today's children to thrive in tomorrow's society, we need to rethink our approaches to assessment, making sure to focus on what's most important for children to learn, not what's easiest for us to measure."

The Path Toward Lifelong Kindergarten

Resnick, an optimist, believes that over time stakeholders in education will increasingly realize the critical importance of helping children develop creative capacities, and a "new consensus on the goals of education will emerge." As the rate of change in the world continues to accelerate, schools must learn how to adapt to society's constantly evolving conditions.

The main ideas of this book are congruent with the values of Orff Schulwerk: student-centered learning with an emphasis on creative expression. This book both affirms the values and practices of Orff Schulwerk and aids in understanding that an emphasis on creative, inquiry-based, student-centered learning can and should be a part of teaching and learning at all age levels. Reading this book as a school community could provide all teachers the chance to be involved in improvement that centers on developing learners who are creative thinkers, and Orff educators could lead in those changes. As Resnick says, "Creative thinking has always been and will always be a central part of what makes life worth living. Life as a creative thinker can not only bring economic rewards, but also joy, fulfillment, purpose, and meaning. Children deserve nothing less." ■

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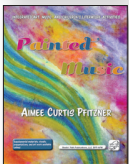


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