Creativity and Reason in Cognitive Development

To what extent do creativity and imagination decline in childhood? What factors might influence a decline? Theories of cognitive development show only unidirectional progress (although theorists may disagree whether such progress occurs steadily in small continuous improvements or comes in stages separated by plateaus during which developmental gains are consolidated). Declines in levels of skill are quite uncommon, yet many have observed just such an unusual pattern with regard to the development of creativity and of the imagination. Is there something about the development of one kind of thinking that undermines imaginative and creative thinking? Is it perhaps the process of schooling itself, with its focus on the acquisition of knowledge and the production of correct (rather than imaginative) answers, that promotes this decline? This book explores these questions from a variety of perspectives. Essays from psychologists and educators from diverse backgrounds discuss the relationships among creativity, reason, and knowledge.

James C. Kaufman is an assistant professor of Psychology at the California State University at San Bernardino, where he is also the director of the Learning Research Institute. He received his B.A. in psychology from the University of Southern California and his Ph.D. from Yale University in cognitive psychology, where he worked with Robert J. Sternberg. Kaufman’s main area of expertise is creativity. With Sternberg and Jean Pretz, he developed the propulsion model of creative contributions, outlined in The Creativity Conundrum (2002). He coined “the Sylvia Plath Effect,” based on an analysis of female poets, in an article in Journal of Creative Behavior, and his recent work on poets dying young has been featured in the New York Times, on NPR, BBC, and CNN, and in newspapers and magazines across the world. His other books include International Handbook of Creativity, Intelligence Applied, Psychology and Free Will, Creativity Across Domains: Faces of the Muse, Gender Differences in Mathematics, and The Evolution of Intelligence.

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This is for Joshua Butler, who hails from a long line of familial creative accomplishments and has embraced the life of being a creative artist, a movie director, with all of its joys and struggles. His capacity for ingenious wit, rigorous analysis, and bursts of imagination could serve as its own chapter of this book.

– JCK

For Sylvia, whose creativity never ceases to amaze and inspire me.

– JB
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