

Study Finds Core Knowledge and Creativity Not Mutually Exclusive

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A new study by Dr. John Baer of Rider University indicates that Core Knowledge can go hand in hand with highly creative work.

Because Core Knowledge is very specific about what students should learn at each grade level, critics have sometimes suggested that the curriculum promotes rote learning and a decline in creativity. Baer set out to examine this possibility by comparing the creative performance of middle school students who had been attending Core Knowledge schools with the creative performance of students at a matched non-Core Knowledge school.

In his study there three comparisons were conducted: poems written by seventh-grade students, short stories written by seventh-grade students, and short stories written by eighth grade students. Four experts evaluated the creativity of each story and poem using consensual assessment techniques. Inter-rater reliabilities were acceptable for group comparisons, with coefficient alphas of .83 for the eighth-grade stories, .79 for the seventh grade stories, and .77 for the seventh-grade poems.

Only one of the three comparisons yielded a statistically significant difference, and that difference favored the Core Knowledge students (p .0002). The charge that students attending Core Knowledge schools are likely to become less creative in their thinking was not substantiated. Results suggested that devoting more attention to acquiring detailed content knowledge does not necessarily depress creativity, and may even have a positive impact in some areas.

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