

**Erudite, Insightful and Immensely Important:  
A Commentary on V. P. Glăveanu's Critical Article  
*The Psychology of Creativity – a Critical Reading***

**Roland S. Persson**

Jönköping University, Sweden

E-mail address: pero@hlk.hj.se

ARTICLE INFO

**Keywords:**

Academic world

Social dynamics

Politics of science

**Article history:**

Received 13 September 2014

Received in revised form 19 December 2014

Accepted 20 December 2014

ISSN: 2354-0036

DOI: 10.1515/ctra-2015-0002

ABSTRACT

Glăveanu's target article is indeed timely and thought provoking. This commentary argues that Glăveanu needs not to be criticised in regard to stances taken, but rather be encouraged to expand his scope further. I suggest that this should be done by addressing the need for inter-disciplinary knowledge synthesis and also by recognising and exploring the social dynamics (and politics) of the academic world. Researchers need to be knowledgeable with regard to both in order to further an understanding of creativity and also to apply research findings responsibly.

I cannot remember when I last read something that so excited me and made me react with reflection, positive surprise and with which, by and large, I also agreed. More often than not reading scholarly articles is a routine task and all too often a humdrum exercise offering little in the way of surprise or novel insight. Not so this article!

Glăveanu's writing leaves so many impressions that it is difficult to specify, in a limited allowance of words for a commentary, the richness of content that the author offers towards the status and future development of creativity in its many understandings, contexts and applications. Rather than criticise the issues discussed – for I cannot fault his reasoning and the important points raised – I think it is far better to actually contribute by adding to his reasoning and the arguments presented by making a few additional suggestions.

**The scope of the problem**

First, I think that Glăveanu is in fact modest in stating his case! The problems discussed are more extensive than suggested. They are by no means unique to psychology. In my experience most of what the author outlines as obstacles is a growing problem in all of the social sciences and even further afield.

As the author makes quite clear, understanding and developing a scientific discipline and its proper objectives is a complicated matter; much more complex than what the scientific community is often prepared to admit. To produce a reliable understanding of *Homo Sapiens* and her world we must consider *all* available knowledge and not restrict ourselves to what is considered 'kosher' by our own academic discipline alone, which is also what Glăveanu is suggesting (see also Persson, 2014; and Ambrose, 2005). I would even go so far as to say that a responsible scientist *must* also be a cross-disciplinary scientist! However, this goes against the grain of the current *Zeitgeist* favouring the development of increasingly focussed and specific fields of knowledge and their study. The number of professionals, including scholars, who endeavour to see 'the big picture' is steadily decreasing; in my experience, with it also, the willingness to go to the trouble of finding out what other scholars are doing, even though they might have much the same focus. This leads to a greater concern, which perhaps Glăveanu underplays somewhat in his article, namely the social dynamics by which science inevitably operates.

### **The social dynamics of the academic world**

Disputes and disagreements in science are not always motivated by a drive for understanding, but for maintaining territory and status. Few have outlined this more in depth than Segerstråhle (2000) as she studied the genesis of socio-biology at Harvard University in the 1970s and the resistance amongst more traditional scholars that it generated. The academic world can be thought of as 'knowledge monopolies' (Bauer, 2012), the members of which decide what canon of interpretation should be the correct one; a collective decision more likely to be prompted by striving for group cohesion, identity and dominance, rather than the search for objective truth. Hence, the choice of theoretical school, methodology or research questions is not only a matter of personal choice and preference. It is also a matter of whether or not one will be accepted, recognized in the scientific community and able to forge a career. Thankfully some will challenge such monopolies – and I believe this is in fact what the author is attempting – and with luck, create something new, worthwhile and closer to objective truth. However, such bravery usually comes at a social cost; a sacrifice that not many are prepared to make (Persson, 2013). Being critical, as Glăveanu argues, (2014, p. 12) "is the first step towards being *constructive*". Rightly so! But it is becoming increasingly less possible for the scientific community to stay critical, which brings me to another important issue, which I think needs to be added also, to the author's otherwise commendable article, namely that science is no longer in the hands of the scientists, but rather in the hands of policy-makers and the business world.

## The politics of science

Irrespective of academic field, the scientist is being socially reconstructed, as is the function of science in society. Many scholars have criticized this development and have outlined the metamorphosis of the researcher from one heralded as a philosophical actor in a well-supported environment of academic freedom, to a pragmatic innovator of controlled ideas, services and technologies promoting economic growth by research validated *only* by its marketable potential (e.g., Hil, 2012; Nocella, Best & McLaren, 2010; Rider & Hasselberg, 2013). Glăveanu favours a social and contextual framing for building an understanding of ‘distributed creativity’. Again, I agree. Context and cultural diversity are important issues here. We need cross-disciplinary perspectives, understanding of the collective and the individual in the collective and to pursue our study with every known method, including being willing to construct new methods. In addition, we need time, but time alas is hard to come by in an academic system ruled by politics and economic efficiency. The continued theoretical construction and practical application of Glăveanu’s model assumes, I think, that we have continued academic freedom. Currently, this freedom is limited and it seems increasingly to be shrinking, because time, as the saying goes, is money (Bailey & Freedman, 2011).

In conclusion, Glăveanu’s target article is necessary reading for anyone endeavouring to understand creativity and wishing to develop it. I have no criticisms to raise against the issues brought to the fore in the article. However, I feel strongly that there are further aspects to consider, which would probably add significantly to what Glăveanu is attempting to achieve: a) The scope is more extensive than what the author modestly argues, and b) the inherent inertia in the academic world due to group dynamics can explain, at least in part, why science is not ‘objective’ and why development is so slow. Finally, Glăveanu’s argumentation also needs to account for the politics of the world external to that of the academic world, since the former increasingly desire to control all aspects of the latter for the benefit of economic growth. No matter what theory or what school of thought we favour, these are external social forces which most certainly affect what is possible and what is not possible to achieve in the academic world.

## REFERENCES

- Ambrose, D. (2005). Interdisciplinary expansion of conceptual foundations. Insight from beyond our field. *Roeper Review*, 27, 137-143.
- Bailey, M., & Freedman, D. (Eds.) (2011). *The assault on universities. A manifesto for resistance*. London: Pluto Press.

- Bauer, H. H. (2012). *Dogmatism in science and medicine. How dominant theories monopolize research and stifle the search for truth*. Jefferson, NC: MacFarland & Company, Inc.
- Glăveanu, V. P. (2014). The psychology of creativity: A critical reading. *Creativity. Theories – Research – Applications*, 1, 10-32; DOI: 10.15290/ctra.2014.01.01.02.
- Hil, R. (2012). *Whackademia: an insider's account of the troubled university*. Sydney, Australia: University of New South Wales Press.
- Nocella, A. J., Best, S., & McLaren, P. (Eds.) (2010). *Academic repression. Reflections from the academic industrial complex*. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Persson, R. S. (2012). Increasing self-awareness, decreasing dogmatism and expanding disciplinary horizons: synthesising a plan of action towards culture sensitivity. *Gifted and Talented International*, 27, 1, 135-154.
- Persson, R. S. (2013). Who decides what giftedness is? *International Journal for Talent Development and Creativity*, 1, 2, 27-40.
- Rider, S., & Hasselberg, A. (Eds.). (2013). *Transformations in research, higher education and the academic market. The breakdown of scientific thought*. Dordrecht, NL: Springer Science.
- Seegerstråhle, U. (2000). *Defenders of the truth. The battle for science in the socio-biology debate and beyond*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

**Corresponding author at:** Roland S Persson, Jönköping University, School of Education & Communication, SE-55111 Jönköping, Sweden  
E-mail: [pero@hlk.hj.se](mailto:pero@hlk.hj.se)

