**Sawyer, K. (2019). *The creative classroom – Innovative teaching for 21st-century learners*. Teachers College Press.**

When you think about a creative classroom, what ideas come to your mind? What do you envision? In *The creative classroom – Innovative teaching for 21st-century learners*, Dr. Keith Sawyer, a Professor in Educational Innovations at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, presents his vision for creative classrooms. Sawyer doesn't focus on describing a physical environment but draws attention to the point that, in his opinion, will make the difference. He refers to the teaching strategies that will allow students to learn the creative knowledge needed to approach new problems, find innovative solutions, and develop as creative thinkers.

Sawyer points out that most schools still use what he calls "instructionism", an ineffective pedagogy in which teachers deliver the content and tell students what they are supposed to learn. Meanwhile, students try to memorize as much content as possible and then demonstrate what they've "learned" in a test. According to the author, this educational approach only teaches "shallow knowledge" or superficial facts and procedures. Students don't learn in a way that encourages them to be creative. Creative knowledge, on the other hand, is *deep knowledge* (includes the understanding of principles and theories that provides context to shallow knowledge), *big knowledge* (involves a broad understanding of each subject), and *connected knowledge* (knowledge is connected to other contents within and across disciplines).

Based on his studies of jazz and improvised theater, Sawyer suggests a new pedagogy called "guided improvisation". Using this approach, teachers don't need to choose between teaching for subject-area knowledge or teaching for creativity. "Guided improvisation leads to creative knowledge" (p. 7). When students learn creative knowledge, they also learn shallow knowledge, but they can use the facts learned in a flexible way. They don't merely repeat what they memorized, but they adapt the knowledge to new situations and problems.

By using guided improvisation, teachers don't plan for a scripted, fixed sequence of actions, but they plan to allow improvisation. That way, the lesson involves both the teachers and the students, giving the chance for collaboration to emerge. Considering that learning is a collaborative path is, in my view, one of the highlights of this book.

Sawyer also points out that "if students are scripted down a linear path, then they aren't given the chance to construct their own knowledge" (p. 58). In an era where things are changing fast, and we are continually talking about the importance of being lifelong learners, I believe it's crucial to provide students opportunities to keep building their knowledge and having ownership of their learning process. When Sawyer proposes that guided improvisation can promote creative knowledge and, therefore, prepare students for continued learning, he shows this approach addresses one essential need of today's education

Sawyer underscores that the learning trajectory isn't a linear path but an improvisational one. That's why there is a need for flexibility and adaptability. Although continually using the word "improvise", that can have a negative connotation in education, he brings more credibility to his point when he shows that "students learn creative knowledge more effectively if their classroom activities are constrained and structured" (p. 4). He doesn't debunk the need for teachers to plan, define the learning goals, and guide students with scaffolds, but he innovates by suggesting that teachers should use improv techniques in the classroom.

Sawyer is also realistic by recognizing some challenges of this pedagogy. First, he mentions that it's not easy to teach with guided improvisation. Teachers need to find a balance. He says, "there's no single, perfect way to balance structure and improvisation. Every classroom, every grade, and every subject will need a different balance" (p. 57). The author also emphasizes that a creative school depends on school culture, leadership, structure, and assessments. Although teachers play an essential role, Sawyer states that "schools for creativity have leaders who support creative classrooms and who advocate for this new vision for schools" (p. 84).

This is the first time I read the term "guided improvisation", but I would not say it's an entirely new idea for me. Even Sawyer mentions how some expert teachers already do what he proposes by using their lesson plans in flexible and improvisational ways. So why read this book? Because Sawyer thoroughly addresses some crucial points: 1) the need for creativity in schools; 2) teaching for creativity is not opposed to teaching the content; 3) creative learning is related to deep learning; 4) creative teaching and learning require a balance between freedom and structure, 5) learning is a collaborative path; 6) a school's creative mission is imperative to support creative teaching. If teachers and school administrators read this book and keep these concepts in mind, it will be a great start towards a more creative education. And it will also help build the notion that a creative classroom is much more than a physical space. It's what happens inside this space that matters the most.