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Creativity and the Creative Teacher

April Dunham

Ouachita Baptist University

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April Dunham

CREATIVITY AND THE CREATIVE TEACHER

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CREATIVITY AND THE CREATIVE TEACHER

Creativity means to make form out of what is formless. It is relating previously unrelated things. It is making a deliberate process of making a new combination or patterning of materials, movements, words, symbols, and making the product available to others. Creativity does not have to produce something outstanding or surprising. It involves something new for the creator.¹

"Creativity is a widely distributed general, but uniquely human potentiality."² Many people feel that creativity is limited to those few who are gifted in art and music. This is not so. Man is by nature creative. His creative potential can be fostered and developed. It will show itself in many fields, aspects of behavior, media, ways, and forms.

Creativity is individual. The limitless character of individual differences demands creativity. Individuals differ in their amount of creativity, but their creativity can be enhanced and increased.³

Creativity is constructive. The possible by-products should be valuable to the individual and his society. Some say "creativity begins where know-how leaves off."⁴ In order to survive, we must discover new things and improve old things.

Creativity is a method of progress. Conformity is a way of maintaining the status quo. Our world is changing every day. The status quo must change, too. Creativity must prevail.⁵

It is easy to see that creativity has a place in the lives of men. The best place to start this creative process is in the public schools. "The need for... creative teaching techniques in the public schools has become one of the most demanding problems in this decade."⁶

Studies show that all children start life with a creative spark, but by the time they get to the fourth grade it is knocked out of them.⁷ This is because our schools and society as a whole tend to teach children to conform. They are expected to be just like everyone else. They are all taught to act alike, dress alike, learn alike, think alike, and on and on. Children soon learn which are the safest paths in life to follow. Soon they have hidden their creative potential so deep it never finds its way out again.

"Teaching is recognized as having worth because it brings about positive, desirable changes more efficiently and more consistently than accidental or non-purposeful experiences."⁸ If the schools are going to aid society in facing the day by day challenges that arise, then creativity must be stressed in the classroom.

The key to creativity in the school is the teacher. He must set a creative example for all students to follow. Creative teaching is a challenge to any good teacher. It is very difficult. It takes time and effort. Usually, it is much easier to just follow the mechanical conceptions of teaching. This requires little effort on the part of the teacher.

Creative teaching, however, expands the child's idea of home, home-living and family. He learns what it is to be a member of the world family.⁹ Children learn to view the world, its situations, and objects in ways that go beyond the cliches and accepted schemata. Creative teaching leads a child to invest some of his own uniqueness in the world.¹⁰ "Creative teaching is a high professional challenge and an art. It should be respected and recognized, pursued and supported as something worth much more than routine schoolkeeping."¹¹

Creative teaching has its shortcomings. It can always be improved. Just because a teacher is creative does not mean he does no wrong. Creative teaching is just the best way of opening up the hearts and minds of children to the world around them.

The creative teacher bases her ideas on several hypotheses.

1. There are many patterns of learning. No one teaching method meets the needs of all children.
2. The teacher cannot tell a child how to think. He must provide the child with freedom, encouragement, and opportunity to do so.
3. Learning is an active process. It involves participation and not just absorbing information.
4. Children need intrinsic motivation.
5. It is possible to discover and develop uniqueness in individuals.¹²

There are many qualities to search for in trying to find the creative teacher. One is personal charm. The creative teacher is tidy, not rude, and has a sense of humor.¹³ He is friendly to all his students. He is also trustworthy. He lives up to his word and plays fair.

The creative teacher is helpful. He is a resource person to whom his students can turn. He is wise and skilled. He knows his subject well, but readily admits he can make mistakes.

This creative teacher is consistent. He lives by the same set of values and shows the same self-control day by day.¹⁴ Along with this, he has a sense of integrity. He has beliefs and standards and can be counted on.

The creative teacher has a great concern for student performance. He knows how and when to praise; and when he does praise, he is sincere.

The creative teacher is enthusiastic. He can sell the students on good work. He is skilled in communication. His explanations are clear, his instructions simple, and his answers ready.¹⁵

The creative teacher expects the most out of all his students. "An individual finds what he expects in other people, and persons tend to live up to what is expected of them."¹⁶ The creative teacher has that rare trait of empathy. He can put himself in the other person's role and feel as he does.¹⁷

The creative teacher must care about himself. "The self must enter into reorientation voluntarily, and transform itself creatively."¹⁸ He must realize that he is both a person and a teacher. He should not try to separate himself as a person from himself as a teacher. He must have a sense of purpose and commitment.

The creative teacher must realize that he has something to start with even if it is just that he was once a child. Teachers should not try to compare their creativity with that of others because creativity cannot be copied. It is good to associate with another creative teacher, but the form of creativeness must not be mistaken for the substance.

The creative teacher should ask himself these questions.

1. What are my areas of strongest sensitivity?
2. What excites my curiosity?
3. How do I really see problems?
4. What do I really value?¹⁹

Teaching must be more than just a job where you have to put up with brats all day. The creative teacher must feel that his way of teaching is his own unique contribution to society. Teaching should make him feel alive, curious, and excited about learning. He should become aware of new things and ideas. Quality teachers make contributions beyond the call of duty.

Confidence is of the utmost importance for the creative teacher. The teacher must feel adequate to cope with all the situations that arise--and these situations will be different from those of the ordinary classroom. If the teacher is not confident, he is always on his guard trying to cover up his incompetencies. He will not let the class get close to him for fear they will realize that he feels inadequate.²⁰

Perhaps, above all, the creative teacher must have courage. He should be adventuresome enough to try out new and different techniques and ideas. He also has the courage to admit that some of his ideas do not work. He allows the students to plan their own activities and has several activities going at once. He even goes so far as to let the children correct their own work.²¹

It might be said that his courage leads him to allow the children to think for themselves and express their own ideas. They can even take up class time to talk over things and let the class interpret things orally. However, the creative teacher must have the courage to face the consequences of his creativity.²²

Sometimes the courageous creative teacher comes to blows with the administration of his school. Conditions in some schools are not conducive to creative thinking. The educational leadership and the nature and scope of the curriculum affect creativity in the classroom.²³ School principals should try to build confidence and encourage teachers to use new ideas. In return, teachers should assume professional attitudes toward their work.

It is so easy for a teacher to get in a rut of using the same lectures, same lesson plans, same tests day after day, year after year. These constitute tried and true ideas and are much less trouble for the teacher. But when teachers become method-bound or manual-bound, they lose their creativity. They begin to feel that students grow only as they become more like the teacher.²⁴ These ideas are disastrous for the creative teacher. When this happens, he needs to evaluate his work because creative teaching should be a means of growing. If done right, it is more energy giving than depleting. It renews ~~as~~ it exhausts.²⁵

The teacher must jog himself out of these ruts of apathy. He could take a course in something different or read a controversial book. He should plan a new unit or give an old unit a new twist. Changing the class arrangement helps. Sometimes it is possible to trade classes with another teacher for a week or communicate creatively with others in the profession. Whatever happens, the creative teacher cannot allow his teaching to become stagnated.

The creative teacher watches how children learn and tries to find new ways to facilitate learning.²⁶ The teacher's concept of the learning experiences which should operate in the school is the most important single factor which determines the direction and quality of the educational program.²⁷

The creative teacher is conscious of the important differences in students, and feels a responsibility for meeting individual needs.²⁸ "Meeting individual differences is not a technique; it is a way of living. It includes accepting others, respecting their contributions, working for the kind of group operation in which in which each individual knows he has a part and encouraging each pupil to give his best in each situation."²⁹

The individual differences that increase or decrease purposeful activity are of great concern to the teacher. One of the most important differences that will affect teaching and learning is the home background. Economic conditions and social position also affect the school work of children. Personal health of the student makes a big difference. A hungry child will not react to the best creative teaching. The teacher must also cope with individual emotional problems of the students. The timid child may be afraid of the teacher and the rest of the class.³⁰ The creative teacher must help individual students overcome their weaknesses and mistakes and find solutions.

It is the teacher's responsibility to foster creativity. One way of doing this is through the classroom environment. Creative teaching does not occur in a cold, impersonal environment. A creative teacher does not have to follow a highly structured schedule every day and not depart from it. Creativity is discouraged when spontaneity is inhibited.³¹

The classroom environment should be informal yet supportive. All the children should feel accepted by their fellow classmates and the teacher. "Accepting pupils means that a teacher wants them to have the opportunity to improve, that he tries sincerely to find out what they are like and what they believe; that he supports them in their belief that they have value and the ability to improve; that he has faith that they will become more worthwhile."³²

There are some specific things the creative teacher can do to contribute to this feeling of acceptance in the classroom. He can call each student by name. The creative teacher does more than listen to all ideas. He responds to them. He

takes all questions seriously and avoids ridicule and sarcasm. He does his best not to embarrass any child. He welcomes all students and lets absentees know they were missed. He permits the students to choose their own seats and allows them to sit with friends. This shows that he is working with them. The creative teacher has the class work in committees. This emphasizes common interests.³³

In this type of classroom atmosphere the students will feel at ease and successful. They will feel like they belong. They will not be afraid to express their ideas and be creative.

Discipline is a big factor in the classroom environment. The creative teacher will establish regulations to cover the routine of the classroom. This way students do not get hung up on the routine and can go on to be creative.³⁴ When a student goes to work, the teacher should stay out of the way and see to it that others do not bother him.

It is important to remember that a creative classroom will be noisier than other rooms because it is more active. The teacher must free the children to dig into their own subconscious and bring to the surface ideas and dreams. As children do these things, self-control, self-direction, and self-discipline increase through creative activities. When this happens, discipline problems disappear.³⁵

On the opposite side of discipline is the role of permissiveness in the creative classroom environment. The creative teacher is permissive enough to enable the student to be honest. Students do not have to agree with the teacher. The teacher allows the students to explore in order to stimulate curiosity and experimentation. The creative teacher allows students to have some free time during the day to study and work on their own. Fresh ideas do not come with rigid schedules and just giving back facts.

A second way a teacher can foster creativity is through the materials and techniques he uses. The creative teacher recognizes that he can find many ways

to organize things, stimulate enthusiasm, and provoke thought.³⁵ The teacher does not have to stay with the textbook. He can branch out and bring in new material and use the book as a resource. Or he can choose a book, read it before the lesson, think about it, select parts to emphasize, and interpret, and introduce variations. Thus the teacher is using the book in a creative way.³⁶ Also, the creative teacher is continually striving to help students read between the lines.

Another technique of the creative teacher is to help the children develop the ability to elaborate on a good idea. Sometimes an original idea is lost because it is not complete. This can be done by making a picture tell as complete and interesting a story as possible, or by telling in words as complete and interesting a story from a picture. The teacher can have the children illustrate poems and stories or write a different ending for a story.³⁷

The teacher should also practice recognizing original ideas. He can ask himself questions such as Is it obvious? Is it commonplace?³⁸

Classroom creativity can be immediately improved by asking provocative questions. This makes learning exciting and increases information. There are 5 basic kinds of questions that will accomplish this.

1. questions requiring depth comprehension
2. questions requiring application of information
3. questions requiring analysis
4. questions requiring synthesis
5. questions requiring evaluation³⁹

The teacher should be respectful of children's questions. Poor questions can be used to teach the class how to ask good questions.

The creative teacher should help the child find answers. He seldom gives answers which can be discovered by students.

Another aspect of this classroom creativity is closure or when does a project end?. This is an important technique. A project should be long enough to accomplish

the purpose, but not long enough to kill interest. The teacher must teach the learner to use his own judgment on closure.⁴⁰

The creative teacher should not try to grade and evaluate everything. A creative way to correct papers would be for the teacher to put his comments about the paper on the taperecorder. The child could use earphones to listen to the tape. The tape might say something like this.

Teacher--"Find where I put number one in the margin of your paper. There is a misspelled word there. See if you can find it."⁴¹

There is one other important technique for the creative teacher. She should never say, "What is it?" She should always say, "Tell me about it."

There is one other important thing that can be said about a creative teacher. He is realistic. He knows that creative teaching is not the answer to all the educational problems. He knows that on some days it is easier to be creative than on others. He knows that the class will not always respond to the same degree. But he also feels that it is better to have failed than to never have tried to be a creative teacher.

In Summary, creativity can be defined as looking twice, listening for smells, digging deeper, cutting holes to see through.⁴² We create with words through poems, stories, plays. We create with our bodies through dance, rhythm, and games. We create with our hands through pencils, crayons, and paint. Creative expression cannot be taught. The teacher is the element that makes self-expression possible. "For what can the teacher contribute to the education of a child, if not a bit of his own uniqueness as a human being, his own creative thought and actions?"⁴³

¹Alice Miel, Creativity in Teaching (Belmont, California: Wordsworth publishing Co., 1961), p. 6.

²Laura Zirbes, Spurs to Creative Teaching (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), p. 3.

³Miel, op. cit., p. 7.

⁴Ibid., p. 56.

⁵Kimball Wiles, Teaching for Better Schools (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1960), p.184.

⁶Fred B. Dixon and Clarence H. Spain, "The Search for Creativity," Clearing House, XXXIX (November, 1964), 165.

⁷Ibid.

⁸"Creativity and the Elementary School Teacher," Elementary School Journal, LXVII (October, 1965), 2.

⁹Zirbes, op. cit., p. 55.

¹⁰Miel, op. cit., p. 41.

¹¹Zirbes, op. cit., p. 41.

¹²"Strategies for Creative Teaching," Instructor, LXXVI (May, 1967), 17.

¹³William Alexander, Are You a Good Teacher? (New Your: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1959), pp. 21,22.

¹⁴Wiles, op. cit., p. 80.

¹⁵Alexander, op. cit., pp. 21,22.

¹⁶Wiles, op. cit., p. 53.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁸Zirbes, op. cit., p. 47.

¹⁹Miel, op. cit., pp. 62-65.

²⁰Wiles, op. cit., p.49.

²¹"Strategies for Creative Teaching," op. cit., p. 26.

²²Wiles, op. cit., pp. 186-190.

²³"Creativity and the Elementary School Teacher," op. cit., p. 8.

²⁴"Strategies for Creative Teaching," op. cit., p. 24.

- ²⁵ Miel, op. cit., p. 53.
- ²⁶ Kaoru Yamamoto, "Does Teacher Creativity Make a Difference in Pupil Learning?", Elementary School Journal, LXVII(February, 1967), 265.
- ²⁷ Abraham Shumsky, Creative Teaching in the Elementary School (New York: Appleton-Century, 1965), p. 5.
- ²⁸ Wiles, op. cit., p. 143.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p. 163.
- ³⁰ Ibid., pp. 142-145.
- ³¹ Zirbes, op. cit., p. 31.
- ³² Wiles, op. cit., p. 56.
- ³³ Ibid., p. 59.
- ³⁴ Ibid., pp. 186-190.
- ³⁵ Miriam E. Wilt, Creativity in the Elementary School (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1959), p. 7.
- ³⁶ Shumsky, op. cit., p. 5.
- ³⁷ E. Paul Torrance, "Creativity in the Classroom," Instructor, LXXIV (December, 1964), 21, 57.
- ³⁸ E. Paul Torrance, "Creativity in the Classroom," Instructor, LXXIV (November, 1964), 27.
- ³⁹ E. Paul Torrance, "Creativity in the Classroom," Instructor, LXXIV (October, 1964), 35.
- ⁴⁰ Miel, op. cit., p. 39.
- ⁴¹ "Strategies for Creative Teaching," op. cit., p. 20.
- ⁴² E. Paul Torrance, "Creativity in the Classroom," Instructor, LXXIV (May, 1965), 13.
- ⁴³ "Creativity and the Elementary School Teacher," op. cit., p. 9.

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