



CREATIVITY: AN UNTAPPED RESOURCE FOR QUALITY OF TEACHING

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Abstract

Among the lakhs of teachers that we have in schools, there are some who are different. They are different not in terms of their educational qualifications or length of service but in terms of some characteristics and quality of teaching. They are the teachers who see worth in children. They do not believe in routine and examination-oriented mechanical teaching. They do not encourage rote memory of their pupils. They are dissatisfied with the present situation and wish to change it for the better. They believe in doing what can be done or what ought to be done without expectation of any reward. They bring newness into whatever they undertake with children. They are different and they boldly explore new and creative ways of teaching and learning (Acharyulu 1995). For a long time educators everywhere believed that one of the important determinants of successful teaching concerns the characteristics of teachers. This resulted in considerable research on teacher characteristics as related to instruction and achievement of pupils. An attempt has been made here to describe some of the personality characteristics including Cognitive characteristics and Personality and Motivational characteristic associated with creative teachers. Cognitive characteristics include flexibility, skill in decision making, coping with novelty, visualization, the ability to breakaway from fixed set of ideas and rigid thinking? Sensitivity to problems and finding order in chaos. Personality characteristics include a willingness to face and take risks; perseverance; being open to new experiences; commitment to work; high internal motivation; competence in meeting challenges; reflective; independence of judgement; display of courage; excellent work habits; capacity for sustained effort; persistence; liking to think; manipulate and toy with ideas; and a desire to improve upon currently accepted systems. As creativity still remains an untapped resource for professional development of teachers, helping teachers become creative through appropriate training certainly gains importance because after all teacher's creativity begets pupil's creativity.



Keywords: Cognitiveness, Creativity, Flexibility, Skill in Decision Making, Coping with Novelty, Visualization, Rigid Thinking.

Introduction

Among the lakhs of teachers that we have in schools, there are some who are different. They are different not in terms of their educational qualifications or length of service but in terms of some characteristics and quality of teaching. They are the teachers who see worth in children. They do not believe in routine and examination-oriented mechanical teaching. They do not encourage rote memory of their pupils. They are dissatisfied with the present situation and wish to change it for the better. They believe in doing what can be done or what ought to be done without expectation of any reward. They bring newness into whatever they undertake with children. They are different and they boldly explore new and creative ways of teaching and learning (Acharyulu 1995).

Who is a Creative Teacher?

It is easier to describe a creative teacher than offer a precise definition. A creative teacher may be described as an individual who introduces changes and novelties into day-to-day teaching and learning activities thus making education meaningful, enjoyable, useful, and explorative experience to children. A creative teacher is seen as an information-processor, a problem finder, a problem-poser and a problem-solver. Teaching is seen by the creative teacher as an exercise of imagination to generate fluent and novel ways of organising ideas, content and materials for solving problems. A creative teacher lays emphasis upon individuality of response. Every teacher can be a teacher of creativity. Fontana (1981) wrote: "Just as all teachers are teachers of language whatever their actual subject so all teachers are teachers of creativity".

Pupil Creativity: A Curriculum Goal for Creative Teachers

Creative teachers, irrespective of the subjects they teach lay emphasis on developing and promoting pupil creativity. They see creativity as one of the curriculum goals. At the elementary education level, the foundations of creative thinking are to be laid down. The search for alternatives can be a source of fun to most students if teachers call for such alternatives. Students love to engage themselves in such explorations and in the process learn and acquire skills, knowledge, and abilities needed for systematic inquiry.

In our classrooms, both teaching and learning are examination- oriented. The teacher is anxious to complete the syllabus without bothering to know whether the students are following or not. The society likewise expects the teacher to teach only that which is



prescribed and useful to students for the examination. As a result, even if there is a teacher who discourages rote learning and really gets involved in encouraging creative learning by pupils, it never lasts long. Consequently many valuable creative sparks of both teachers and students are lost. Torrance and Myers (1971) observe: "One of the big social dangers today is that people are afraid to become truly involved in anything. It is a natural consequence of a society that encourages a lack of involvement". This holds good even in our country.

Teacher Creativity and Teaching for Creativity

Both teacher creativity and teaching for creativity are important for bringing about improvement in the quality of school education. In order for teachers to achieve a high level of effectiveness, there must be transformation of their creativity into a set of values, abilities and skills that will enable them to engage themselves in important, useful, productive and unusual professional work. They have also to impress people in authority by their creative contributions. Creativity should become a work value for teachers.

It is true that a teacher cannot teach creatively at all times. However, the outcome of a teacher's creativity should be more and better opportunities for students to experience and learn. Creativity in teaching is to be judged by the quality of opportunities actually provided by a teacher to his pupils and the extent to which it resulted in pupil creative productions. Creativity in teaching breeds creativity in learning.

To stimulate the creative spark in children, the teacher himself need not be highly creative to begin with. A willingness to welcome, accept and reward or praise students' independent thinking and new ideas are essential. Teachers need to be kind, concerned, courteous. Most of the teachers wish to be considered as possessing all these qualities too often they miss out simply because they neglect to put them into words. Words of gratitude, praise, sympathy or concern and words of love of joy used by the teachers would enable many a students to progress towards excellence in their own areas of talent. Some teachers find it hard to express words of praise or recognition. Although their heart may swell with pride at their students' achievement they fear that in praising him or her they may well make the student headstrong or that he or she will relax his or her efforts and not try so hard in the future. But surely it is far more likely that it would inspire greater effort and give the added confidence.

For some teachers words come easily and writing or expressing them is no problem, whereas for others, uttering deeply felt emotions is very difficult. But there is always a caring gesture to take their place, three or four words from the heart can convey a message



with as much warmth and sincerity as hundred words. And if words fail, one should remember how much a pat on the back can convey. Every child needs to know that someone cares for them. It is no answer to tell yourself: "He knows I am proud of him; they know I care what happens to them; they know I love them, I don't need to tell them." If you don't tell them, how are they to know. Affection, appreciation sympathy, recognition and reward should be communicated both verbally and non-verbally so that the students are encouraged and motivated.

Characteristics of Creative Teachers

For a long time educators everywhere believed that one of the important determinants of successful teaching concerns the characteristics of teachers. This resulted in considerable research on teacher characteristics as related to instruction and achievement of pupils.

Cognitive Characteristics

Cognitive characteristics refer to the traits, abilities and styles of information processing used by creative teachers. Originality relatively high intelligence, good imagination and verbal fluency are often the traits associated with creative teachers. The abilities of the creative teachers include flexibility, skill in decision-making, coping with novelty, visualisation, the ability to breakaway from the fixed set of ideas and rigid thinking, sensitivity to problems and finding order in chaos. The commonly mentioned processing styles include using wide categories and images, preference for non-verbal communication, building new structures rather than using existing structures, questioning norms and assumptions in their areas of specialisation (asking why?), being alert to novelty and gaps in knowledge, and using their existing knowledge as a base for new ideas.

1. Creative teacher has good command over the content of subject matter they teach.

Various studies have revealed that creative teachers have good knowledge of the subject areas. They have "an unusually intense interest or attraction for a special area" (Cropley, 1989). Creative teachers know their subject thoroughly and they keep pace with recent developments in their areas of specialisation. During the course of their teaching, they teach what is known and what is not yet known and challenge students to explore and seek the unknown. As Sydney Parnes has said, "creativity is thus a function of knowledge, experience, imagination and evaluation". It is possible for most teachers to learn the feel of creativity as they teach.

2. Creative teacher is good at divergent thinking

Creative teacher is good in divergent thinking, and convergent thinking. He recognises the importance of generating a number of ideas or solution. Fluency of thought characterises



the creative teacher. Ideas come readily and suddenly to him. He evaluates them for their quality and logic and selects the best and novel solutions.

3. *Creative teacher sees the link between mastery of basic skills and creativity.*

It is important for teachers to understand the basic skills which are contained within the innovative elements of a student's work. There is a strong relationship between the mastery of basic academic skills and creativity. Creative behaviour depends upon the mastery of basic skills. Creativity operates when children acquire certain minimum levels of learning. At best, proficiency and performance are limited educational objectives and the ultimate objective is pupil creativity.

4. *Creative teacher welcomes unusual and provocative questions of children.*

The creative teacher welcomes the ideas of his students. Many children hesitate to give their ideas for several reasons. Creative teacher, in particular, finds it essential to watch where those ideas which initially appeared silly lead to. This enables the teacher to know whether the child is using his imagination or whether he is simply pretending to be different. If such a follow-up of responses is not done, teachers may run the risk of stopping the good ideas along with the not-so-good responses. By doing so, they are also giving the class the impression that originality is not welcomed in the class. Creative teachers enjoy sharing their idea with their students both in and out of class. They like to pose question and to listen to questions. They encourage students to ask questions.

Schank (1988) aptly said, "In the clever posing of questions we may find clever answers". They build up a creative relationship with students. They make children feel that their questioning is both right and necessary and they keep on questioning without inhibition or fear. It is possible that some children may have answers. If a child finds answers himself by really looking around for information and drawing on knowledge and skills previously learnt and explore new ways of looking at things, the teacher has sown the seeds of creative thinking and learning.

There are times in the life of the child when interest and curiosity are so stimulated that to withhold information is to lose forever a rich opportunity for learning. Such situations are often referred to as "teachable moments". These are moments when the child is ready to learn. Creative teacher watches for these moments and uses them. Such moments arise sometimes spontaneously and sometimes they are planned deliberately by teachers.

5. *Creative teacher senses and identifies problems.*

A creative teacher formulates problems in workable, flexible and original ways. He is good in detecting gaps in knowledge and uses principles and skills relevant to the solution of the



problem. A creative teacher displays awareness and concern about unsolved problems.

6. *Creative teacher provides more activities to their pupils.*

A creative teacher provides more and more of activities which develop the natural creativity of children and in which they can experience success. These are the kinds of activities which accept different solutions and images as "being good". There should be a system which rewards such teachers for recognising children possessing greater elements of creativity than the norm and permit full development of their talents. A creative teacher allows students to follow their own styles of work. He readily adapts and if necessary changes his own plans, or mode of teaching to suit to students' interests and needs. He thinks of new ways of motivating students.

Personality and Motivational Characteristics

There is a combination of personality characteristics associated with creative teachers. The most commonly mentioned personality characteristics include a willingness to face and take risks; perseverance; being open to new experiences; commitment to work; high internal motivation; competence in meeting challenges; reflective; independence of judgement; display of courage; excellent work habits; capacity for sustained effort; persistence; liking to think; manipulate and toy with ideas; and a desire to improve upon currently accepted systems.

There are some broad set of skills and characteristics associated with teachers who may be described as creative. Some of these characteristics are described here.

1. *Self-confidence and Motivation*

Creative teachers often show their self-confidence in whatsoever they do. They visualise confidence in their ability and have a strong desire to excel others. They build in their students these qualities and promote their self-concept.

Creative teachers are highly motivated. Motivation is the tendency to move towards goals. It has direction, intensity and duration. It is a crucial component of all creative productions.

2. *Independence*

This is one of the critical traits showed by all creative persons. Independence should not be confused with impulsiveness, stubbornness or foolhardiness. "Independence is confidence in action". A creative teacher's independence is seen in situations which are challenging, ambiguous, complex, and puzzling. Creative teachers like to think about problems and issues and solve them in individualistic manners. They see themselves as inventive, independent, determined, industrious, enthusiastic, responsible and accountable. Independence is a prime personality disposition of creative teachers and these teachers,



therefore, are likely to encourage their students to think independently.

3. *Openness to Experience*

Openness to experience has been identified as an important characteristic of creative individuals. The creative teacher deliberately opens himself to new experiences. A creative teacher is receptive to what is new and different in the thoughts, actions, and products of oneself and others. A creative teacher is sensitive to details and is willing to act on and react to one's own ideas and solutions.

The creative teacher shares information with students and involves them in decision-making and problem-solving and thus broadens the traditional role of the teacher vis-a-vis student. He is willing to be corrected by students and is receptive to the ideas and strategies suggested by colleagues and students. He often evaluates his own efforts. He is willing to tryout strategies and techniques that contribute to quality of teaching and learning.

4. *Willingness to Face Obstacles*

Creative teachers, because they are different from others, encounter obstacles. In fact everyone encounters obstacles. Many teachers are unable to persevere beyond the obstacles that crop up. Many times the ideas of creative teachers are rejected and they often receive unfavourable and discouraging comments. The creative teacher, however, is not dragged down by them. He shows perseverance.

5. *Curiosity*

Curiosity is associated with exploratory behaviour and the need to know and understand. Individual teachers differ widely in their tendency to become curious. Highly curious teachers tend to ask more and better questions in class, show more persistence in problem-solving and be more adventurous in the choice of activities for promoting curiosity of children. The creative teacher is aware that if curiosity is to be encouraged and used to advantage by the teacher then threats to self-esteem of students are to be kept to a minimum.

6. *Enthusiasm*

The creative teacher likes his own job and expresses enthusiasm to toy with ideas and materials in new ways. He tends to be cheerful in the face of adversity and persistent in his efforts. He takes pride in student achievement. He sets well-defined goals for himself and his students. Enthusiasm as an important characteristic of creative teachers has also emerged in various research studies.

7. *Task-commitment*

Commitment provides enough time for the small changes that occur as one gathers



experience in some domain to evolve into something original and innovative. Creative teachers have a tendency to spend much time thinking about their work and this leads to the possibility that something new will develop. They tend to be as knowledgeable as possible about the old and this is necessary for anything new to emerge. Creative teachers display task-commitment in whatever activity they undertake. Task-commitment refers to the effort brought to bear on a particular task or specific performance areas. Task-commitment is often described by using terms like perseverance, endurance, hard work, dedicated practice, self-confidence, and a belief in one's ability to carry out important work. Creative teachers display these qualities. They have a special fascination for the subject-matter of their chosen field and they involve themselves totally in a specific problem or area for extended periods of time and often outside normal duty hours, searching for new possibilities. Originality of thinking and freshness of approach to teaching-learning problems characterise their nature. They have the ability to set aside established conventions and procedures when appropriate or needed. They experience a sense of responsibility for making new things happen. They have a commitment to innovation.

8. *Intrinsic Motivation*

Intrinsic motivation is important for performance. The creative teachers receive much of their push from their own internal desire to be creative. They motivate themselves. Teresa Amabile (1986) wrote that "extraordinary talent, personality and cognitive ability do not seem to be enough. It is the labour of love aspect that determines creativity." Teachers will be most creative when they are intrinsically motivated primarily by the interest, enjoyment, satisfaction and challenge of the work of teaching itself. A teacher's love for his work is primarily related to his creative performance.

9. *Risk-taking*

In order to be creative, teachers need to take some risk. Throughout the creative process, there is a sense of risk. Fear of taking risks interferes with creativity, A teacher may come up with novel and possibly tangible solution or idea to a problem, but fear of being incorrect stops him from making it public. This is also true of students. Therefore, one way to increase teacher's capacity would be to increase his capacity for taking risks. The relationship between risk-taking behaviour and creativity is not as simple as it appears. Whether or not a teacher should take a risk may depend on the nature of the problem on which he is working.

10. *Self-concept*

Self-concept refers to a store of self-perceptions. It consists of answers to such questions as



"Who am I? What do I value? What do I believe in? What are my strengths and weaknesses? How capable a person am I?" In other words, self-concept refers to self-attributes of a person. The term 'self-esteem' is used to refer to the extent to which individuals regard these self-attributes in positive and negative terms.

Teacher's who think of themselves as highly capable will try to work hard in order to match their estimates with their self perception. Self-image of the teacher affects performance. As Cropley (1989) has said, "a positive self-image fosters, among other things, willingness to take risks and to engage in self-criticism." Teachers who think well about their own abilities tend to do well.

An attempt has been made here to describe some of the personality characteristics of teachers. These are by no means exhaustive. A teacher may not have all these characteristics to be creative. But some characteristics have to be present in them before they are recognised as creatives. Teachers are creative by virtue of a combination of intellectual, personality and stylistic attributes. Helping teachers become creative through appropriate training is certainly important because after all teacher's creativity begets pupil's creativity. As creativity is still by and large remains an untapped resource for teachers' professional development. So a step towards this direction will be highly appreciable. Certainly, the early training of these teachers will make the difference to them and to us.

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