Creativity – its place in education

"The roots of a creative society are in basic education. The sheer volume of facts to be digested by the students of today leaves little time for a deeper interrogation of their moral worth. The result has been a generation of technicians rather than visionaries, each one taking a career rather than an idea seriously. The answer must be reform in our educational methods so that students are encouraged to ask about "know-why" as well as "know-how". Once the arts are restored to a more central role in educational institutions, there could be a tremendous unleashing of creative energy in other disciplines too."
Source: OnArts: Creative New Zealand. Michael D. Higgins, the former Irish Minister for Arts, Culture and Gaeltacht

But is it enough to focus on the arts as the source of creativity in education? Is there a much broader role for creativity in education?

"All our futures: Creativity, culture and education", the UK National Advisory Committees report [DfEE, 1999] defines creativity as:

> *"First, they [the characteristics of creativity] always involve thinking or behaving **imaginatively**. Second, overall this imaginative activity is **purposeful**: that is, it is directed to achieving an objective. Third, these processes must generate something **original**. Fourth, the outcome must be of **value** in relation to the objective."* This from the UK.

From the US - the Creative Classroom Project was a collaboration between Project Zero and the Disney Worldwide Outreach to produce materials that help teachers explore and understand:

1. the role of creativity and innovation in teaching and learning
2. the importance of developing classroom and school environments that can bring out the best in teachers and students, and
3. methods for making classrooms more engaging places

The following quote, from one of the teachers involved in the project, adds to the UK definition.

> *"Although most people might look for signs of creativity in the appearance of the bulletin boards, student made projects, centers and displays in the classroom, I feel the truly creative classroom goes way beyond what can be seen with the eyes. It is a place where bodies and minds actively pursue new knowledge. Having a creative classroom means that the teacher takes risks on a daily basis and encourages his/her students to do the same."*

Why should we bother?

- *Our school system is a thinly disguised conspiracy to quash creativity.*
- *We are at an inflection point. We seem to be re-inventing everything – except the school system, which should [in theory] underpin, even leads, the rest.*
- *The main crisis in schools today is irrelevance.*
- *Our educational thinking is concerned with; 'what is'. It is not good at designing 'what can be'.*

The above from Tom Peter's book Re-imagine. Peter's is very critical of our present ways of educating and although focused on American education his comments could relate to most education systems across the world.

Peter's vision:
 - a school system that recognizes that learning is natural, that a love of learning is normal, and that real learning is passionate learning
 - a school curriculum that values questions above answers, creativity above fact regurgitation, individuality above uniformity and excellence above standardized performance
- a society that respects its teachers and principals, pays them well, and grants them the autonomy to do their job as the creative individuals they are, and for the creative individuals in their charge.

Is this a vision that you could buy into?

> *Robert Fritz comments that "The most important developments in civilization have come through the creative process, but ironically, most people have not been taught to be creative."*
> *Source: Robert Fritz, The Path of Least Resistance, 1994.*

Is it important to our futures that creativity be taught?
What place should creativity have in our education systems?
Should we teach creatively or teach for creativity?

> *"By providing rich and varied contexts for pupils to acquire, develop and apply a broad range of knowledge, understanding and skills, the curriculum should enable pupils to **think creatively and critically, to solve problems and to make a difference for the better**. It should give them the opportunity to become **creative, innovative, enterprising** and capable of leadership to equip them for their future lives as workers and citizens. It should enable pupils to **respond***

positively to opportunities, challenges and responsibilities, to manage risk and cope with change and adversity."
Source: UK National Curriculum Handbook [p 11-12]:

Creative students lead richer lives and, in the longer term, make a valuable contribution to society. Surely those are reasons enough to bother.

Creativity in the classroom – what does it look like?

When students are being creative in the classroom they are likely to:

- question and challenge. Creative pupils are curious, question and challenge, and don't necessarily follow the rules.
- make connections and see relationships. Creative pupils think laterally and make associations between things that are not usually connected.
- envision want might be. They imagine, see possibilities, ask 'what if?', picture alternatives, and look at things from different view points.
- explore ideas and options. Creative pupils play with ideas, try alternatives and fresh approaches, keep open minds and modify their ideas to achieve creative results
- reflect critically on ideas, actions and outcomes. They review progress, invite and use feedback, criticize constructively and make perceptive observations.

To encourage the above is likely to require a change in the way schools are run and the way teachers teach.

> *"The most powerful way to develop creativity in your students is to be a role model. Children develop creativity not when you tell them to, but when you show them."*
> *Source: Robert J Sternberg, How to develop student creativity*

Creative Teaching

> *"We humans have not yet achieved our full creative potential primarily because every child's creativity is not properly nurtured. The critical role of imagination, discovery and creativity in a child's education is only beginning to come to light and, even within the educational community, many still do not appreciate or realize its vital importance."*
> *Source: Ashfaq Ishaq International Child Art Foundation www.creativity-portal.com*

Creative teaching may be defined in two ways: firstly, teaching creatively and secondly, teaching for creativity.

Teaching creatively might be described as teachers using imaginative approaches to make learning more interesting, engaging, exciting and effective.

Teaching for creativity might best be described as using forms of teaching that are intended to develop students own creative thinking and behaviour. However it would be fair to say that teaching for creativity must involve creative teaching. Teachers cannot develop the creative abilities of their students if their own creative abilities are undiscovered or suppressed.

> "My wife and I went to a [kindergarten] parent-teacher conference and were informed that our budding refrigerator artist, Christopher, would be receiving a grade of unsatisfactory in art. We were shocked. How could any child – let alone our child – receive a poor grade in art at such a young age? His teacher informed us that he refused to colour within the lines, which was a state requirement for demonstrating 'grade level motor skills." Source: Jordan Ayan, AHA!

Teaching with creativity and teaching for creativity include all the characteristics of good teaching – including high motivation, high expectations, the ability to communicate and listen and the ability to interest, engage and inspire. Creative teachers need expertise in their particular fields but they need more than this. They need techniques that stimulate curiosity and raise self esteem and confidence. They must recognize when encouragement is needed and confidence threatened. They must balance structured learning with opportunities for self-direction; and the management of groups while giving attention to individuals.

Teaching for creativity is not an easy option, but it can be enjoyable and deeply fulfilling. It can involve more time and planning to generate and develop ideas and to evaluate whether they have worked. It involves confidence to improvise and take detours, to pick up unexpected opportunities for learning; to live with uncertainty and to risk admitting that an idea led nowhere. Creative teachers are always willing to experiment but they recognize the need to learn from experience. All of this requires more, not less, expertise of teachers.

> "Thousands of years of history suggest that the schoolhouse a we know it is an absurd way to rear our young: it's contrary to everything we know about what it is to be a human being. For example, we know that doing and talking are what most successful people are very good at – that's where they truly show their stuff. "
> Source: Deborah Meier, in Dennis Littkys The Big Picture

Creative teachers need confidence in their disciplines and in themselves. There are many highly creative teachers in our schools and many schools where

creative approaches to teaching and learning are encouraged. But many schools and teachers do not have access to the necessary practical support and guidance in developing these approaches. Consequently there are important issues of staff development.

It is important to reduce or eliminate the factors which inhibit the creative activity of teachers and learners and give priority to those that encourage it. There are, in education, extraordinarily high levels of prescription in relation to content and teaching methods. There are huge risks of de-skilling teachers and encouraging conformity and passivity in some.

We have an interesting paradox. We have industry commentators saying that, for a successful future, we need people who think, are creative and innovative and yet our education systems seem to be working against this. At a national level government has a responsibility to reduce these risks and to promote higher levels of teacher autonomy and creativity in teaching and learning.

> *"Human creativity is the ultimate economic resource."*
> *Source: Richard Florida The Rise of the Creative Class*

> *"Over the past decade the biggest employment gains came in occupations that rely on people skills and emotional intelligence .. and among jobs that require imagination and creativity. . Trying to preserve existing jobs will prove futile – trade and technology will transform the economy whether we like it or not."*
> *Source: Michael Cox, Richard Alm and Nigel Holmes Where the jobs are – New York Times 13/05/04*

> *"The past few decades have belonged to a certain kind of person with a certain kind of mind – computer programmers who could crank code, lawyers who could craft contracts, MBA's who could crunch numbers. But the keys to the kingdom are changing hands. The future belongs to a very different kind of person with a very different kind of mind – creators and empathizers, pattern recognisers and meaning makers. These people – artist, inventors, caregivers, consolers, big picture thinkers – will now reap society's richest rewards and share its greatest joys."*
> *Source: Dan Pink, A Whole New Mind*

Teachers encouraging creativity

Carolyn Edwards and Kay Springate in their article "The lion comes out of the stone: Helping young children achieve their creative potential" [Dimensions of Early Childhood] give the following suggestions on encouraging student creativity:

- Give students extended, unhurried **time** to explore and do their best work. Don't interfere when students are productively engaged and motivated to complete tasks in which they are fully engaged.

- Create an inviting and exciting **classroom environment**. Provide students with space to leave unfinished work for later completion and quiet space for contemplation.

- Provide an abundant supply of interesting and useful **materials** and **resources**.

- Create a classroom **climate** where students feel mistakes are acceptable and risk taking is encouraged. Appropriate noise, mess and autonomy are accepted.

The UK National Curriculum in Action web-site offers suggestions as to how teachers can encourage pupil's creativity. The site includes short video clips of teachers discussing their approaches to encouraging creativity and then demonstrating these approaches. Examples are given of encouraging creativity while planning, introducing activities, teaching and revising work.

They are well worth viewing. [www.ncaction.org.uk/creativity]

Individual teachers can have a huge influence on encouraging students to be creative but for creativity to flourish it needs to be built into the whole school ethos. This is the domain of the principal and other school leaders.

School leaders encouraging creativity

Teachers can do a lot to encourage creativity in their classes but it's a job only half done without the support of the school leadership. School leaders have the ability to build an expectation of creativity into a school's learning and teaching strategies. They can encourage, recognize and reward creativity in both pupils and teachers.

School leaders have the ability to provide resources for creative endeavours; to involve teachers and pupils in creating stimulating environments; to tap the creativity of staff, parents and the local community and much more.

They have the ability to make creativity art of the staff development programme; to include creativity in everyone's performance reviews; to invite creative people into the school and most important of all, to lead by example!!

The last word[s]

"Steve Jobs has done more Cool Stuff than anybody else in Silicon Valley. . . . one of his success secrets is loading every development team with artist … and historians … and poets … and musicians … and dramatists. He says he wants to bring to bear, on each project, the best of human cultural accomplishment. So how come schools don't get it? Budget crunch? First programmes to be cut? Art and Music. I say … the hell with the math budget [I really don't mean that.] Let's enhance the art budget and inflate the music budget. Training in Creativity is important, in general. But it is absolutely essential in this Age of Intangibles and Intellectual Capital."
Source: Tom Peters, Re-imagine

Do you agree and are you doing anything about it? I'd love to hear from you.
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