

DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF PRIMARY EDUCATION STUDENTS¹

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Abstract

The importance of creativity in addressing economic and social crises has been recognized in many international policies. These policies have been increasingly calling for the strengthening of the creative capacity and development of knowledge-based societies by strengthening the role of education. Both the school and the initial education are recognized as key factors in the development and strengthening of the creative capacities of individuals that are necessary for his further education and working life. The paper was inspired by the need to contribute to the debate on creativity in education. Among other things, this paper aims to diagnose a picture showing how creativity is perceived by students and how certain classroom practices can support and enhance the creative potential of students. The results, obtained with a questionnaire constructed in a specific way, show that the schools still lack the freedom and tolerance for the work of their students, as well as the openness to giving opportunities and time out of the curriculum, to innovate, adopt and research.

Keywords: creativity, education, classroom practices

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INTRODUCTION

Creativity is one of the things that have become increasingly important for the development of a knowledge-based, 21st-century society. Although nowadays, creativity is considered a key feature of the global economy, creativity is equally important for the social and personal well-being of each individual, as well. Education is what is considered a crucial place where such creative skills need to be developed.

Creativity is conceptualized as a skill for all – and not a talent only a few have, as many mistakenly believe. Creativity is an ability anyone can develop and, therefore, it can be stimulated or stalled. Although laypeople and creativity theorists often make the assumption that individual creativity depends primarily on talent, there is considerable evidence that hard work and intrinsic motivation—which can be supported or undermined by the social environment—also play central roles (Amabile, 2001). Education, as a main factor that influences the students' development, has the power to unlock the creative potential of individuals. Teachers are seen as key components in encouraging students' creativity (Sharp, 2004) and creators of creative climate needed for creative learning to happen (Esquivel, 1995), and schools, as important educational institutions, as the ones create the pillars for the development of creativity (Somolanji and Bognar, 2008).

But when we talk about encouraging students' creativity, it is important consider the students' thoughts on this matter are and their previous experiences. They are the ultimate users of all of the classroom practices aimed at developing creative thinking, and therefore, in addition to the theoretical overview, this paper also presents the students' attitudes to classroom practices that support the development of creativity, thus gaining a more complete picture of the development of creative skills in education.

The paper focuses on the development of creativity among students in the elementary education.

CREATIVITY IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

The concept of creativity is broad, complex and multidimensional – a concept that can be applied in many fields. It can relate to art objects or it can be to do with science and technology; it can refer to an idea that may occur accidentally or as a result of a long lasting efforts.

Different approaches to creativity suggest that creativity is a process or product that needs to be new and suitable (or to have value). (Ferrari et al., 2009). Originality and value are the main features of the creative process or product. What is questionable, though, is whether or not students, especially ones from elementary schools, can have their own original and revolutionary ideas about the environment. Therefore, Runco (2003) proposes that, when defining creativity in education, originality and value are to be understood in their everyday meaning. Creative work among students can be original and valuable for the particular student, but not for the society as a whole (Runco, 2003), and this is understandable given the age of the child. In the early school period, the assessment of creativity should not rely upon its influence and value on the wider social context, but rather on that particular child. This implies accepting a more democratic, everyday definition of creativity that recognizes every individual's potential to be creative. Therefore, when talking about education, it is important to conceptualize the creativity that recognizes the ability of each individual to develop the creative potential, and to consider the attributes of originality and value in relation to the individual, not the society.

TEACHING FOR CREATIVITY

When it comes to the development of creativity in education, there is an obvious sense that students can not "learn" creativity in the way they can learn the multiplication table, for example. Creative processes require a certain form of knowledge and practical skills, but that does not mean that creativity can taught by direct instruction. When talking about creative teaching, we distinguish two notions: *creative teaching* and *teaching for creativity* (Jeffrey and Craft, 2004). Creative teaching refers to creative approaches to work – approaches that can make learning more interesting and exciting for students, and can bring the content closer to them; while teaching for creativity refers to teaching directed towards the development of the creative opinions and behaviors of the student. The process of teaching for creativity is a difficult process that can not be turned

into a routine. However, some general principles of such teaching can be identified:

- **Encouragement:** having a positive image of oneself, and seeing oneself as a creative person, can be fundamental to the development of creative abilities, therefore, the first task in teaching for creativity is to encourage young people to believe in their creative potential;
- **Identification:** one crucial task of the process of education is to help young people discover their creative strengths. Creative behavior is often guided by the student's interests in a certain area or certain work, the excitement for a particular style of work that calls for employing imagination, and
- **Incitation:** creativity arises from many ordinary abilities and skills. For example, curiosity can be stimulated, and awareness - increased. Recognizing and acquiring knowledge about the creative process can also help foster creative development.

The process of teaching for creativity aims at creating an environment that is characterized by the promotion of: *freedom* and *autonomy* on both sides: *encouragement*, *openness to criticism* and *openness* to new and unusual ideas, *authenticity* of initiatives and responses; *respect* for each other, as well as towards the ideas that emerge; *non-emphasis on mistakes*, *having a sense of pleasure*, involvement and overall enjoyment in the creative activities. These steps seem simple, but they can be the most important factor in stimulating creative thinking and behavior and creating an incentive and all-encompassing environment for creativity development.

METHODOLOGY

Apart from giving a theoretical review, the paper aims to gain data in an empirical way. In this way, a complete picture of the current situation in the development of students' creativity is obtained.

The research was conducted in order to check and determine the presence of classroom practices that encourage the development of creativity. This was done from the perspective of the students.

The research tool used in this research is a specially constructed questionnaire, composed of 11 questions. The representative sample consists of 139 students, from three primary schools in the Bitola region: The primary school of "Kole

Kaninski", the primary school of "St. Kliment Ohridski" and the primary school of "Goce Delchev". For the purposes of this research, the participants were numerous students from the third, fifth and seventh grade, all with different school achievements. The questionnaire was answered by the respondents in the presence of a teacher, and the time for filling it in was about 10 minutes. The respondents were asked to circle one of the given categories (Strongly disagree; Partly disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Partly Agree and Fully agree) for each statement that referred to a particular pedagogical situation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The initial analysis shows that there are numerous pedagogical situations in these schools that encourage creative thinking. Still, there is an evident lack of freedom and tolerance in the work of students, as well as giving opportunities and time out of the curriculum in order to innovate, adopt and research.

Upon being observed more meticulously, the results of the research show that the main pedagogical situations that encourage the creativity of students and are manifested through all of the three grades are: *encouraging thinking and creating new ideas, linking knowledge with real life, respecting the opinions and ideas of students and encouraging them to take part in different leisure activities.* (See Table 1)..

The analysis of the responses regarding the tolerance of the students' mistakes during classes, showed a certain dispersion of the answers in the students. This leads to the conclusion that students do not feel very confident when making mistakes. This can partially be the fault on our own education system, as a while, which in a way teaches us to be afraid of our mistakes. Making mistakes is extremely important for the development of creativity. Knowledge can not be promoted, nor new ideas created, if a person is not ready to try something new. In order to facilitate the development of creativity, it is important for teachers to show trust and tolerance in the work of students. Such attitude will give students more space to come up with their own solutions to a problem in situations where something does not work according to the plan

The concept of creativity is recognized by students, which can be ascertained from the claim "I know what creativity is " – a claim chosen by as many as 70% of the students who undoubtedly reported that they know what creativity means.

This suggests that the term is not neglected and has certain significance in the educational process.

An important conclusion can be drawn from the results regarding the statement: "During the classes I do not have to do what the teachers demands. Instead, I can do something else". 82% of the students fully agreed that it is not the case in their classroom. The high percentage of negative response leads to the confirmation that, in practice, there is no freedom for extra student activities and very little attention is paid to what students are interested in, what they enjoy and what they are good at. Students learn best when they see the relevance of what they do and when they are essentially interested in the activity or the task.

The last statements are to do with the individual characteristics of the students. Characteristics such as openness to new experiences, preferences for certain challenges, self-confidence and openness to risk taking are all marked by high values (the values gravitate towards 5). Such characteristics, as important predictors for creativity development, can have a positive impact on the formation of creative skills among students.

Table 1: Results of the questionnaire for students regarding the classroom practices and the individual preferences in the development of creativity

Curricular components for development of creative thinking	Strongly disagree		Partly disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Partly agree		Strongly agree	
	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%
1. The school encourages me to think and create new ideas	7	5	1	1	11	8	31	22	89	64
2. I know what creativity is	2	1	3	2	18	13	19	14	97	70
3. During the classes I do not have to do what the teachers demands. Instead, I can do something else	82	59	28	20	11	8	11	8	7	5

4. Teachers tolerate our mistakes during the work-process	8	6	8	6	17	12	35	25	71	51
5. During the learning process, we link the newly acquired knowledge with real-life situations.	7	5	3	2	17	12	28	20	84	60
6. We find the lessons that teachers organize interesting and we find the given instructions clear and	4	3	8	6	12	9	36	26	79	57
7. The school encourages me to work independently	4	3	7	5	9	6	26	19	93	67
8. The teachers respect the opinions and the ideas of the students	4	3	3	2	11	8	22	16	99	71
9. The teachers encourage us to take part in different leisure activities	5	4	4	3	10	7	27	19	93	67
10. I am interested in the new things	3	2	3	2	9	6	29	21	95	68
11. If I had the opportunity and means, I'd like to create new things	2	1	6	4	11	8	28	20	92	66

CONCLUSION

The results of the research showed that creativity as a concept is not neglected in education, and schools through various pedagogical practices strive for the development of creative thinking among students. In general, such classroom practices focus on linking knowledge with real life situations, encouraging the creation of new ideas among students and encouraging students in taking part in various leisure activities.

However, the results of this research have also shown that one of the obstacles to the development of creativity is that teachers do not give time and freedom to students for individual activities and experiences that will enable each student to develop their own creativity and originality. Time is a rare treasure in schools,

and from time-management's point of view, it may seem efficient to "tell" the students what they have to learn instead of creating activities that will enable them to participate actively in the discovery of knowledge. Putting aside time for certain individual activities and experiences is one of the ways in which creativity can be encouraged. When creating the curricula, one should ensure that the curriculum provides sufficient flexibility, time and space for students' research and development of classroom creativity.

Giving opportunities to develop the creative potential of students by increasing classroom practices that support the development of creative thinking and the reduction of those classroom practices that stall it should be a priority for each school in order to encourage the creation and the development of a more creative human capital.

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