

On the Need for Creative Teachers

Abstract

The article presents basic information about psycho-pedagogy of creativity – the Polish perspective of preparing teachers of creative thinking. There are problems discussed connected with the theoretical framework of the new specialization of studies, its programme is presented and some implications are discussed.

The presented themes are placed into some general basic problems of the need for creativity in school – especially changing economy and the rise of creative class (Florida 2002).

Key words: *Creative education, creative teacher, psychopedagogy of creativity*

Introduction and overview

Education for creativity is one of the main purposes of today's school. Fast changes around need skills to react appropriately, because in most situations algorithmic solutions are not sufficient. Creativity understood not only as divergent thinking skills (fluency, flexibility, originality), but also (or mainly) as some personality traits and cognitive style, becomes a value in education.

Understanding that it is worth talking about “small c creativity” or “today's creativity” has long history and great future. It is because of the fact that teachers, parents and the whole society understand now that one can be creative without a creative product, that there is possibility of existing creativity without products, that a creative attitude or creative living may be even more important for masses than eminent creativity (cf. Szymański's (1987) theses about Fromm or Cudowska's (2005) creative life orientations theory). In many psychological and educational publications such a definition of creativity is connected with such traits as openness to experience, a sense of humour, nonconformity, thinking for oneself, child – like

sensitivity or curiosity. If creativity is defined in such a more egalitarian way, a creative person is often compared to a child who is naturally creative because of its inquisitiveness, expression and free thinking.

There is no doubt that in countries like Poland (and probably many East European countries) creativity is most often perceived as one of the important values to make the grade. In a political and even scientific discussion the term “creative” is used as “enterprising” – when an economist uses it, “intelligent and gifted” – when a parent is asked, nonconformist – when teachers are asked. Despite this semantic problem there are arguments to believe that the main psychological traits and characteristics spontaneously connected with creativity both in the field of psychology of creativity and naive understanding are close to each other.

Creativity is especially important at the times of transformation, changing political and/or economic systems (cf. A. Radziewicz-Winnicki, 2004). At such times it seems valuable to have flexible people, able not just to understand reality around, not just to adapt, but also to create their own life and change the world creatively. The main personality factor involved there is probably openness to experience sometimes understood as a synonym of a creative personality. Many educators agree with Sawyer (2006) who thinks this kind of everyday creativity is most important for modern economy of developing and developed countries. It is worth mentioning Richard Florida’s (2002) opinion that today’s economy is creative, thanks to the creative class – understood as innovative people effectively managing their knowledge. This understanding is close to Polish well – known psychologist Józef Koziński’s (1987) point of view concerning cognitive workers – a new, dynamic type of workers.

Representative sociological surveys (PGSS – Polish General Social Survey – detailed data presented in a different place – Karwowski 2004) show that Polish people asked about qualities desirable in a child choose nonconformity (thinking for oneself) more often than conformity (obedience). These results are quite similar to those of the U.S., multiple regression shows that the main predictor of the respect for intellectual nonconformity is the same in both cases, and that this is the educational level. Probably there is not much controversy in saying that such nonconformity can be understood similarly to a creative attitude and a creative behaviour style.

Psychopedagogy of creativity

In Poland since 1997 in Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education in Warsaw a new faculty called psycho-pedagogy of creativity has been functioning. This is M.A. students of education who want to work as creativity teachers and are

going to develop creative attitudes and abilities among children, the youth and adults.

The name “psycho-pedagogy of creativity” is not accidental, because the meaning is connected with psychology of creativity and educational studies on creativity. It is even better to say that we start with psychology to bring something new, important and interesting into pedagogy. Terms as “educational psychology of creativity” or “school psychology of creativity” are not well suited mainly because of the “psychological” meaning, when the purpose of the discussed specialization is to teach educators.

Psycho-pedagogy of creativity is a four-year master degree course in educational studies, each year with about thirty students and about of 1 000 hours of lessons, training and workshops per four years.

The originator of the studies was professor Witold Dobrowolowicz, PhD – cognitive psychologist of creativity. Organizing a new specialization the author assumed that there should be a connection between three main areas of interest: psychology of creativity, pedagogy of creativity and creativity training. So the psychological courses are: psychology of personality, psychology of individual differences, psychology of creativity, psychology of giftedness, social psychology of creativity, measurement of creativity – each course comprising 30 or 60 hours. The pedagogical and educational courses are: pedagogy of creativity, teaching thinking creatively, educational programmes and experiments. There are also some more applied courses – creativity in advertising, creative group managing, creative leadership at school.

Separate attention should be paid to creativity training organized for students. There is a four-year-long course of creativity including creative problem solving, heuristic expression, divergent thinking, artistic creativity, intuition and others. Beside the noticed courses there are some regular psychological and educational courses directed to students – due to a pedagogy studies programme.

After finishing education and fulfilling a master thesis, graduate students start to work especially in the educational system, rarely in some business organizations, research and development teams, advertising agencies and consulting firms. There are about one hundred graduate students who are surveyed every year in a longitudinal study evaluating the effects of education and checking how creative they are as teachers – do they use professional knowledge and methods to develop children’s creativity, what do they remember and so on. Results are going to be presented in close future.

Which skills are most important for an effective creativity teacher, or even going further a creative creativity teacher? Is there a reason to talk about pedagogy of creativity, are there any significant differences between a good teacher in general and a creativity teacher?

In our understanding of an effective creativity teacher there are some main areas of competences creativity teachers should have.

Firstly, it is hard to imagine a creativity teacher without any creativity skills. That is why there are hundreds of hours of creativity training. The purpose of the training is to develop such abilities as analysis and synthesis skills, deductive and inductive thinking, transformative abilities and developing of imagination, the same as divergent thinking, metaphorical capacities and remote associations ability. An important area of training results is teachers' personality developing especially such traits as openness, adequate self – evaluation, ability to identify and solve problems.

The second important factor is a zone of teachers' professional knowledge connected with creativity development. It means a creativity teacher, even a very creative could not be very effective one without deep understanding of students' creative processes. Preparation of teachers should stress the ability to remove obstacles and barriers of creativity. Of course, basic knowledge from such fields as developmental psychology seems necessary.

The third main area is developing leadership skills of a creativity teacher. We assume that a creativity teacher should behave as a transformational leader (Bass 1990). It means that he/she should motivate students to creative activity engaging them and influencing their intrinsic motivation. An effective transformational leader has to know how to create a positive climate for creativity in the classroom, how to avoid interpersonal conflicts or transform conflicts into positive outcomes. These competences require authentic involvement in teaching from the teacher, so there is no possibility to be effective without strong preference to work creatively.

Conclusions

One can ask after Plucker, Beghetto and Dow (2004) why creativity is not more important for educators, politicians, psychologists and society as a whole? The answer is not easy if we recognize how useful creative attitudes are in today's reality, how much positive influence creativity could bring into people's life. The first myth (Plucker et al. 2004) is the opinion that people are born creative or uncreative. In such understanding creativity is not teachable – if someone does not have creative skills, there is nothing to do for educators, parents or psychologists – they could just say 'I'm sorry'. In the light of the results of creativity training effectiveness (cf. Scott, Leritz, Mumford 2004) this perspective looks false. Creativity could be developed in many ways, and, what is more important, it should be developed! Creativity training, problem solving programmes, creative expression workshops

and many other activities are effective ways to develop children's creative potential. There is no rational reason to lack such an activity and to lose the chance to develop creative potential.

The second myth showed by Plucker et al., is understanding creativity as a phenomenon connected with some negative psychological aspects and traits. It is very important to know that many teachers simply do not want to have a creative student in the classroom, because of their irrational fear that such a student is radically nonconformist and not socially well-suited. Such implicit creativity theories are well-proven in empirical results. They confirm that a creative student is not perceived as an ideal student from today's school's perspective (cf. Westby, Dawson 1995). An important issue to consider is teachers' attitudes toward creative students. Stereotypical and biased opinions about creative children may disrupt teachers' treatment of them. There is some research confirming that teachers perceive creative children as chaotic and disrupting (Chan & Chan 2001, Chan 2000, Lau & Li 1996, Lau, Li & Chu 2004, Ng 2001, 2003, Rudowicz & Yue 2002, Scott 1999, Westby & Dawson 1995).

The third myth is thinking that creativity is a "soft construct" and should not be analyzed from the scientific, empirical point of view. The popularity of the term "creativity" in the media, associations between creativity and advertising provide teachers and researchers with a conclusion that real creativity is just Van Gogh activity – not typical of a student.

It is critically important for every teacher to know that creative skills can be developed and that it is worth trying to develop them. It gives fruitful results for society, but also for all students who develop their personality on the way to self – realization. Sensitive teachers have to understand that the reason to develop students' openness is not preparing them for accepting everything that is going on in the media, press or advertising. They must know that what is most important in creative pedagogy is development of a balance between creative and critical thinking, resulting in creative adapting to environment – an ability to differentiate between good and bad choices, worth and worthless steps – to live their lives in a creative way.

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