RUNNING HEAD: THE ULTIMATE CLASSROOM

The Ultimate Classroom

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CRS 635, Summer 2010

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**Philosophy: The Important Pieces of Creativity**

***Definition***

When defining creativity, one needs to take into consideration the lack of a refined, specific definition from the outside world and the necessity to educate oneself to form one’s own opinion and definition. Creativity, like much of the world, is subjective. Davis (2004) stated “artistic and scientific creativity reflect enticingly mysterious processes, capabilities, and experiences that have baffled scholars, philosophers, and creative people themselves for centuries” (p. 9). For these reasons one cannot buy-in and solely believe another’s definition, but must use their own knowledge and personality in creativity to figure out what creativity means to them.

It is important to note that creativity is apparent in everyone. McCaslin (2006) wrote “one assumption accepted by psychologists doing research is that creativity is not a special gift possessed by a fortunate few but, rather, a human capacity possessed to some degree by everyone” (p. 24). All humans have some creativity, even though some people say they are not creative. Everyone has creativity, but those who are more creative believe in themselves.

Creativity is how a person develops a detailed idea to benefit some kind of entity or construction. This definition stems from Mel Rhodes (1961) “Four Ps” model, the infamous “novelty that’s useful” quote used by Amabile (1992) and several others in the field, as well as including Uribe’s (2010) theory about the influence of one’s attitude.

***Multiple Intelligences***

Howard Gardner has produced a vast amount of research for the field of creativity. His theory of Multiple Intelligences gives people an idea about their learning preferences. The theory also invites readers to discover than intelligence is not composed in a single, mathematical fashion, but instead there are eight intelligences (Gardner, 2002).

In fact, Gardner created the Multiple Intelligences so that he could learn more about himself and his preference for learning by the means of music (Gardner, 2010). As one knows more about their specific intelligence, they better understand their strengths as a creator. For example, a fourth grade student that genuinely enjoys dance is a kinesthetic learner. This student will mostly likely prefer to make meaning of what they learn by creating dance movements. They will also prefer to create a dance movement for assessment rather than write a poem.

Of particular importance, is Gardner’s notion that creativity and intelligence should grow continually throughout one’s life. Gardner (2006) outlined that if one does not aspire to continue to grow within their domain throughout their life they become “discontented experts” or “individuals who sought to transcend expertise but failed”. He went on to say that the “creative individuals” that continue to better themselves once they become experts in their domain become “geniuses” (p. 49). Gardner (2006) wrote, “it is the special province of the genius to challenge the domain and field, yet to arrive at a product or a solution that once again constitutes a new, more comprehensive domain—yielding an insight of broad human significance…Mozart is at least a vivid reminder of the heights to which a human being can occasionally rise” (p. 49). If one wants to truly climb great mountains within their domain and intelligence, one must realize that there is no “peak” in regards to their own level of expertise, but instead there is always room for growth. When we strive for continual growth within our domain, great things can happen.

The Multiple Intelligences play a valuable role in organizing a creative classroom. By taking multiple intelligences into account, teachers can reach out to all students’ needs with greater efficiency and can create well-rounded lesson plans. Sometimes when students are struggling in the classroom it is not because they have a low IQ, but because the material is not being presented in a manner that is most conducive to their learning style. Gardner (2006) argued that “mastery of a concept or theory requires repeated exposure to that material: one almost never achieves instant understanding. But it is a mistake to present the same content in the same way. Understanding is far more likely to be achieved if the student encounters the material in a variety of guises and contexts” (p. 60). This statement does not mean that Gardner believes every lesson needs to include all eight intelligences, two to three is sufficient. The point of coupling the multiple intelligences with the core curriculum subjects is to cater to student strengths and to add a variety of learning contexts to the creative classroom.

***Creative Climate***

Creating an environment that is conducive to stimulating creativity and learning is an essential skill of a teacher. Ekvall (1996) highlighted this importance when he stated “the climate has this moderating power because it influences organizational processes such as problem solving, decision making, communications, co-ordination, controlling, and psychological processes of learning, creating, motivation, and commitment” (p. 106). An elementary classroom benefits from Ekvall’s insights about creative climate just like businesses and organizations. The reason students go to school is to prepare for life and the working world, so it makes sense that the dimensions that develop a creative climate for work in an organization also develops a creative climate for work in a classroom.

Let us paint a picture. There are 25 fifth grade students in a classroom. There is a chalkboard in the front of the room, the walls are white, and desks are organized in five single rows. Students are expected to sit at their desks and take notes about the life cycle of a butterfly from the chalkboard and memorize their notes. Down the hall is another classroom with 25 fifth grade students. Desks are in groups of five and the students’ art work decorates the room from the floor to the ceiling. Instead of a chalkboard, there are four center areas with individual white boards. Students are expected to “show they know” by creating a poem, song, or dance about the life cycle of a butterfly. Which climate is more favorable for developing creativity and enhancing learning? The first classroom incorporates little room for growth. Students who are a linguistic or logical learner may do well academically in this classroom but there is still little room for creativity development. Cornett (2007) stated “students will not take risks if they do not feel that it is physically and psychologically safe to make mistakes” (p. 32). The second classroom opens the doors for some real creative development. This classroom involves freedom, idea support, risk-taking, debate, playfulness, and challenge (Ekvall, 1996). These are some of the qualities necessary in order to create a highly creative classroom environment.

Good teachers are good leaders. Firestien (2004) wrote, “It is the leader that sets the tone for his organization. More than anyone else, he has the power to shape the environment of his organization-whether that environment nurtures creativity or crushes it. The climate of most organizations simply reflects the leader’s attitudes and actions” (p. 204). Teachers need to be in it to win it. If a teacher’s attitude is not in the right place, it reflects in the students and the environment created is not able to reach its full creative potential.

Questions have begun to arise about the implications of debate and conflict within an organization (also applicable to classrooms). It has been proven by many researchers that organizations do better when there is a high amount of debate and a low amount of conflict (Ekvall, 2010; Ryhammer, 1996; Puccio, Treffinger, & Talbot, 1995). Recently, Isaksen and Ekvall (2010) have found reason to believe that “debate and conflict are two independent forms of tension that coexist when people interact” (p. 81). In the future, Ekvall may redesign his theory of the Dimensions of Creative Climate to include the term Tension, with debate and conflict being subsets to tension. When positive tension (debate) is placed on ideas (deadlines, project restrictions) there is added pressures on students to be more creative. Negative tension (conflict) relates to bullying or belittling a student or their work (Isaksen & Ekvall, 2010).

***Torrance Incubation Model (TIM)***

There are many formats and models available for creating lessons plans for the elementary classroom. The Torrance Incubation Model stands out from the rest since it brings to life creative thinking skills within children. Murdock (1985; 1999) and Murdock and Keller-Mathers (2002) stated “the before, during and after approach is common to many models, but Torrance’s deliberate use of cognitive strategies in each stage forms a basic delivery system for a creativity skill base that fully operationalizes how and what creativity skills can be deliberately taught, regardless of the content in which they might reside” (p. 11).

TIM can be implemented with an English lesson about famous poets, for example. The teacher may put famous poems scattered on the floor as students walk in to “heighten the anticipation”. When students have all arrived, the teacher may have them each pick up one poem to analyze. Students could use techniques such as “looking twice” or “getting into deeper water” to investigate the author’s purpose and “deepen the expectation”. Lastly the teacher would “keep the learning going” by having students “shake hands with tomorrow” by imagining what their poet’s life would be like in the future or what people will write about in the future(Torrance, 1990; Murdock & Keller-Mathers, 2002). This outline, along with many other opportunities and strategies, allow for students to find their own meaning about the content they are learning while having fun creating at the same time.

***Effectiveness of Play***

The effectiveness of play is underestimated in today’s world. By the age of four, many children understand that in our society they will play during their childhood, and work during adulthood. There is, however, more to the act of playing than what meets the eye. Statler, Roos, and Victor (2009) sum up an anthropological view about play when they stated,

While play may be completely ‘unproductive’ in the sense that it results in no direct value artifact (in the way that, say, work and art should), nevertheless it can produce certain higher-order benefits for cultures, as well as for individuals…the anthropological literature addresses play primarily as a narrative process through which cultural identity is created and transformed (p. 93).

The quote above is intended to portray the positive attributes of play for adults. Given the context (figuring out culture, finding one’s place in society), it is only fair to assume that we include children in benefiting this purpose. When children and adults play, they are trying out behaviors for themselves from that they have seen in their parents, role models, or elsewhere in society. This is a good way for children to find and decide on their own cultural identity.

When playing, children need options. Carlson (2008) stated “when children are able to express themselves fully and in a variety of ways, it contributes to added imagination, problem solving, and self-esteem” (p. 59). There is some speculation in the news about the usefulness of Legos© since a set of Legos© now often comes with a set of rules one must follow when creating their masterpiece. The best toys are the ones that do not have rules. When a child is given a set of Legos© with no rules they can create whatever they want, however they want. This is where creativity and problem solving skills can grow.

***Personal Growth***

A huge lesson that one cannot leave from Buffalo State’s Creative Studies program without is the knowledge that personal growth in creativity and learning is continual and never stops. Creative people are always learning and we always have the ability to create opportunities to learn for ourselves. There is no reaching the top of one’s domain, only hard work and solid effort are recognized. For the best of the best, winning a Pulitzer Prize is not the end for a career, but the beginning of what is great to come.

Gaining skills in creativity positively correlates with our social skills. In a qualitative study, Duffey, Haberstroh and Trepal (2009) questioned counselors and found that “participant narratives illuminated how authenticity, power, empathy, and creativity interacted to create environments and relationships that fostered growth and creativity recursively. From these reports we developed a model of relational competencies and creativity” (p. 104). When one learns about the attributes of a creative person and a creative climate, they have great potential of gaining the motivation to be creative and improve those attributes within oneself. In accordance, when one has the opportunity to take assessments such as Torrance’s Test in Creative Thinking, the Emotional Index, Foursight, and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, one has the opportunity to gain further insight about themselves. When one knows more about themselves, one is better able to play to their strengths and figure out how to improve on their weaknesses.

**Vision: How it comes Together**

One of my goals for integrating creativity and education is to make tutoring and homework time more fun and easier by involving creative problem solving techniques. I hope to someday institute an end of day or after school program that combines the education of basic creative problem solving skills and the act of doing homework, provided my future place of employment does not already have a similar service already in operation. The children that show up to school day after day without having their homework done often also lack the support and planning skills to do it on their own. Students involved in this program in grades one or two would learn skills about how to do homework with others (ex. Figuring out how to get help if there is a problem, how to check homework problems with other students, etc.). Students in grades three or four would benefit from learning skills that help them do their homework by themselves. They would learn the steps of the problem solving process and how to implement the process in getting their homework done. Third and fourth graders would practice the process during tutoring time by doing such things as: *assessing the situation* (indentifying what homework has to be done), *formulating the challenges* (what materials do I need? will I be able to do this by myself?), *exploring ideas* (creating answers to homework questions), and *exploring acceptance* (review homework, did I do this right?) (Puccio, Murdock, & Mance, 2005).

This goal/plan was developed on the basis that there are many schools that would benefit greatly from this program. I believe more children would be motivated to do their homework when applying the creative problem solving process, especially those whom do not get support at home when doing their homework. By integrating the creative problem solving process, doing homework would be more fun, structured, and meaningful. Students would gain better planning and organizational skills. Teachers would be happier that more students do their homework each night. Also, when homework gets done, students extend their learning and get a better understanding of subject matter, possibly raising grades.

Due to this long-term plan requiring that I be employed and am not currently, I have developed a short-term goal to put this idea into practice. It would be great if I could help one of my nephews get ready for kindergarten. In his placement exam he tested very below average and could not identify any of the letters of the alphabet. I want to give him some of the tools from the creative problem solving process that will help him learn how to indentify his letters and learn how to read. By September 7th (his first day of school), my goal is for him to be able to identify the entire alphabet, know some sight words, and be able to count to 100.

**Strategic Plan: How it will Happen**

When it comes time for me to be in position to start a creative problem solving homework club, I plan to start by talking to my principal and team members about the idea and see if anyone else is interested in partaking in this club. I will then look to make a half-hour time block at the end of the day with my team members devoted to this club. Selected students will regularly take part in this club, while other students meeting with my other team teachers for other tutoring or enrichment activities. If other teachers are reluctant to join in, I can start this club within my own classroom. If need be, I can incorporate a center rotation so that I am catering to Multiple Intelligences when students can all students can partake in end-of-day activities that best suit their needs.

As for my short-term goal, I plan to center my time this 2010 summer on tutoring my nephew to be ready for kindergarten. I will work with him three days a week for at least an hour and we will read a book before bedtime at least four nights a week. I plan to implement the Torrance Incubation Model when I work with him in order to heighten his curiosity about learning, integrate play with letter identification, and develop divergent thinking skills by brainstorming.

One strength of these plans is that I know the importance of having a homework/tutoring program like this in place, which motivates me to work harder to reach this goal. Also, as I work towards my long-term goal of making this creative problem solving homework club school-wide, I will be helping my nephew. He is one of many children that would benefit from learning some tools for creative problem solving in order to be more organized and self-reliant as he enters his school years. As I work with him, my skills for incorporating creative problem solving tools with school work will expand. I will learn more about what sections and tools of the creative problem solving process will best fit with some school related tasks.

There are several weaknesses to this plan. To start off, I am not sure what school district I will be employed at in the future. When I do get a teaching position, I am not sure whether or not the school I work for will need this type of program since there may already be a sufficient plan in place. I will also need to do some research about the protocols that need to be followed when attempting to start a program at my future place of work. One weakness I have when working with my nephew this summer will be aligning schedules. I will have to create some sort of fixed schedule for meeting with him so I can develop a workable routine.

There are many opportunities for growth in this vision. Other teachers may see the usefulness of this idea and may join in or want to get versed in the creative problem solving process. This would spread the usefulness of the process to many more people. Student grades may increase due to them being able to deepen their learning. My nephew may enter kindergarten at grade level.

As opportunities arise for my plan, so do threats. Other teachers may not be pleased with the thought of taking time out of the end of their day and in turn may not want to participate. Parents of children who do their homework may get upset over the fact that some kids do not have to take their homework home and their children always do their homework at home. One threat for this summer while working with my nephew is his lack of motivation to learn. I will have to take some time to build his skills around being a disciplined learner.

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