

LET`S OPEN A SCHOOL FOR CREATIVITY
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Why should we talk about creativity nowadays?

Our way of thinking has not changed since the times of ancient Greece, even though this period brought great philosophers with remarkable ideas and brilliant inventions which contributed a lot to the welfare of humanity. Since the very beginning of philosophy, humanity was interested in looking for the truth, logics, proves, concrete knowledge and its analysis. A particular interest in the area was expressed by great European thinkers of the Middle Ages for whom it was extremely important to answer the questions of right and wrong. This way of thinking was the basis for establishing first schools and universities. Eventually, thinking as such became the sphere of rationale, reason and logics while creativity remained a talent which, unfortunately, was given to very few people. Edward de Bono a physician, author, inventor, and consultant, known as the originator of the term *lateral thinking* did not fully agree with the idea and claimed the following: 'We developed our way of thinking and logics which meant to give us right answers but we never developed the area of creative thinking. We resemble a car with three wheels: they are all well constructed and functioning, but they are just not enough for a car to ride. Of course, our civilisation did have great inventors and creators whose ideas turned the world upside down; however, this was the merit of very few people and we were never educated in a cultural way. This is why I claim that our thinking is rather poor. However, I do not intend that it is entirely bad; it just lacks the creative part that we seem to have forgotten'.

Edward de Bono in his works emphasises creative thinking rather than creativity as a skill to create art (music, painting etc.) Creative thinking E. de Bono is talking about could be defined as an ability to think which can be educated, acquired and transferred. Creativity as a separate academic discipline is taught in different schools around the world and helps successfully generate new ideas. These schools also provoke a non-stereotypical way of thinking, encourage thinking and speaking in a way that seems to be impossible or incorrect, but they still do not reject any idea, on the contrary, they use it to think further and encourage students` creativity. 'The problem of most systems of education in different countries is that when one asks them if they educate young people and teach them creativity, the answer is yes. What they actually mean is that they do so in the areas of music, art, dance or art and history lessons. But it is not what we are

talking about. Creative thinking, generating new ideas, looking for solutions in different situations – all of this is something that is left behind the understanding of conventional art. The same applies to construction and design. When we hear these words we immediately think about architects and designers; however, we should keep in mind that design is as fundamental as analysis. It is the ability to join the knowledge that we possess so that we could create new valuable concepts and this is creative thinking’, said Edward de Bono in one of his interviews when asked what was it that modern educational establishments lacked.

New technologies and creativity

A really serious challenge for both schools and universities is new technologies and the intensive flow of information which are so widely talked about and praised. The rise of technologies makes us identify thinking with knowledge which is easily accessible and this way of thinking becomes devalued. Students develop an understanding according to which thinking as such becomes unnecessary and it is enough to push the button and enter a proper key word into Google search engine and all the knowledge becomes available in a few seconds. Therefore, teachers in such situations should critically look at the application of technologies which should be based on creative designing and projecting of situations and solutions.

A teacher should plan his/her activities so that technologies would help to illustrate the process of education and would involve students making them activity creators. This would mean that it is not enough to only push the button and find certain facts and information. I remember when I was a student at a secondary school. I had a few lessons on Scandinavian literature. During these lessons we, the students, got familiar with the work of Finnish epic poetry *Kalevala*. As I remember now, it was a rather superficial acquaintance with the work based on a teacher’s explanations about what a work of epic poetry was. During my work experience I have met many Finnish and I always remembered *Kalevala*; I wanted to use it as an ice-breaker in my conversations, however, I could not say anything about it. Eventually I decided to find out something about the piece of writing. In a local library I found an old edition of *Kalevala* translated by one of the most famous Lithuanian poets J. Marcinkevicius. As I started reading it, I realised that it was really hard to understand it and the old-school edition with yellow pages could illustrate nothing to me. Therefore, I decided to surf the Internet. As I entered the word “kalevala” I got the result: „The *Kalevala* is a 19th century work of epic poetry compiled by Elias Lönnrot from Finnish and Karelian oral folklore and mythology.“ Was that enough for me? Of course, not. I started searching in other websites and came across additional articles, I also used YouTube as a source of information. I was amazed at how much valuable information I could find. I immediately thought about a modern teacher of literature: it must be rather simple for him/her to be creative while using

newest technologies and being able to combine traditional and innovative methods of teaching successfully.

I would like to come back to *Kalevala*, though. I open a random page: chapter 3; 205-210 lines

A mountain is water's Origin

and fire's Origin is heaven

the source of iron is rust

and copper's root is a cliff

A wet hummock is the oldest land

a willow the first of tree

a fir root first of dwellings

and a stone the first crude pot

As I was a Geography teacher myself, I do find lots of “geography” in these lines and I understand the thoughts and associations that they convey. A creative teacher could start with these lines in his/her lesson in order to encourage and motivate students to create and design situations which could have been encoded in these lines. Apart from this method, a teacher could also encourage students to use the way I used while trying to learn more about the piece of writing.

Definitions of Creativity

Creativity is an ability to create. Usually it is understood and defined differently. Creativity encompasses a number of individual human aspects and it is hard to find a common definition for the word which everybody would like to agree on. Therefore, different theories of creativity often use different definitions of the word.

It would be a good idea to analyse in greater detail practical and daily creativity which is related to common problems and task-solutions at school when completing both integrated and single-subject tasks. As it was mentioned before, creativity is often related to art, literature and music; however, it is not be enough to limit ourselves to these fields only; it is beneficial to talk about a broader space of creativity application.

There is an opinion that something that is created should be new and original and the result of it could be called a creative solution. However, the result of this creation can be seen as new and original only by a person who created it. But what matters here is that the creator finds his creative solution on his own. Nevertheless, the element of “newness” only is not enough for the result or object to be called creative. Let's take an example: having broken a vase, we will get a totally new combination of elements, however, this does not make the action of breaking the vase creative. The creative result should be useful, i.e. something that is valuable, beautiful and pleasant.

Therefore, according to what was said above, creative thinking could be defined as all possible forms of thinking because of which something new and original is created and that something is useful and pleasant for the creator and the others.

The Quality of Creativity

Guilford in his *Creativity Guide* (1950) suggested four expressions of quality of creativity: fluency, flexibility, originality and development. It is often said that it is impossible to actually measure creativity and every single attempt to assess quality of creativity is a subjective opinion of an assessor. However, the four expressions of quality of creativity mentioned before can include more detailed assessment criteria which would help to pass from a subjective evaluation to a more accurate one and such a transition would help students in self-evaluation.

Conditions for Creativity

Modern school communities look for the ways of how to help every student to educate the competence of creativity which is understood as a skill to think and act in an original, flexible, expedient and productive way. Such schools clearly realise the importance of educating an independent, enthusiastic and free personality who is able to think critically and solve problems. Creativity and entrepreneurship are directly related and help a person to live a fulfilling life in our society. Creativity provides opportunities to learn and create new things; it forms an ability to manage various life changes both practically and emotionally. It also allows us to think in a flexible way and make successful decisions.

The most important conditions for creativity development at schools are the following: creative teaching/learning environment and the creativity of teachers themselves. A safe and creative environment and motivating atmosphere are needed in order to encourage students to think critically and evaluate information; to allow them to create and alter rules according to a mutual agreement between students and a teacher; to inspire creative expression of learning competences. Consequently, such an atmosphere would definitely allow students to take their time thinking, dreaming, sharing thoughts, which is essential to implement new ideas of learners.

A teacher who works creatively always sets an example for his/her students and is more likely to educate a creative learner. A famous educator Herbert R. Kohl once said: "Nobody becomes a capable and creative teacher in a wink of an eye. The desire to teach and the actual ability to do so are not the same. There might be exceptions but one has to learn how to be a successful teacher".

Creative Environment and atmosphere

The mission of a school is to assure the implementation of a Curriculum and to educate students' abilities in both everyday activities and future professional development. In order to make this process creative we have to try to enrich teaching/learning environment making it attractive for

students with different learning styles. It could a well developed series of creative learning zones within the school and grounds, conducive to the development of a more creative, innovative curriculum. All types of learning could be undertaken by creating space for kinaesthetic learning; sounds for auditory learning and visual stimulation for visual learning.

In order to maintain a creative atmosphere at school and in class a teacher should be aware of unexpected questions, innovative ideas, the necessity to evaluate students` ideas and organise multi-functional activities, the importance of analysing cause and effects. Another important aspect in creating favourable atmosphere is stress management at school. Simon Cooper-Hind, a former principle, once said in his article *The Making of a Creative School* “It is widely acknowledged that “stress” plays an important part in determining learners` states of mind. Through observation and research we determined that there are key times of the school day at which children become stressed: the start of the day; play times; the last ten minutes of the day. We introduced music, question times, and a clear daily structure, which helped to dramatically reduce stress-related behaviour. The learners having a clear understanding of what is expected from them, what is coming and why it is important to them gave the children a sense of belonging and security, thus reducing anxiety”.

A modern and creative teaching/learning environment cannot do without modern means of teaching/learning which help to implement arising ideas quicker and to be involved in the current events and news.

Characteristics of a Creative Teacher

It can be said that creative teaching is a certain branch of art. Nobody can teach a teacher how to be creative. There are no rules or recipes according to which we could get the desired result – a creative lesson. Of course, we could come up with some advice of how to become creative and I have attempted to do so in this article. However, these pieces of advice may not always be helpful, depending on specific conditions and situations.

A famous expert in schools` assessment Teresa Cremin (UK) in one of her Ofsted reports (2007), writes: “Creative practice is seen as a product of the dynamic interplay between the teacher`s personal qualities, the pedagogy they adopt and the ethos developed in the class and school. Key features of creative practice are: curiosity, making connections, autonomy and ownership, as well as, originality. In order to be creative it is necessary to widen your understanding of your own creativity, and the imaginative approaches and repertoire of engaging activities that you can employ in order to develop the children`s capacity for original ideas and action. You will also want to exert your professional autonomy, learning to be flexible and responsive to different learners and diverse learning contexts.”

In addition to this, the Ofsted assessors who have a great experience in assessing schools and teachers distinguished a few features of a creative teacher who is

- noted by many writers to be comfortable with risk-taking;
- likely to perceive failure as a learning opportunity;
- flexible in style and pace;
- observant to learner engagement;
- willing to use open-ended questions;
- varied in using the tempo;
- willing to be spontaneous;
- able to foster persistence and resourcefulness.

Creativity in Geography Lessons

Creativity in Geography and other subjects can be expressed by being inventive and original, being able to join different content parts of a subject. In order to be successful in teaching geography, a teacher should do the following:

- look for various problems in geography and solve them together with students;
- provide a number of alternative solutions to a problem;
- react appropriately to the changes in the process of problem solving;
- be original;
- always remind students what the most important aspects in a certain task are;
- detail in moderation;
- be open to innovations and new expressions of students' work results;
- understand both verbal and non-verbal emotions;
- relate ideas to content – use experience to find meaningful links;
- help to join concepts that are relatively unrelated;
- visualise the process of teaching;
- encourage students to enjoy visual games;
- use different styles of teaching which allow to touch, hear, see and explore;
- break conventional regulations and create new rules;
- have sense of humour in every situation;
- project future opportunities together with students.

The Box of Creativity

I would now like to introduce one of the methods I used in my Geography lessons. This method allows to constantly refresh the knowledge and abilities of a teacher and his/her students; it provides infinite opportunities for the imagination and inventiveness of a student and a teacher.

Let's have a "magic box of creativity" in our class. During the lessons we could take out the so-called "geography glasses" which would help to see ordinary things with different eyes of a geographer. Together with students we put on the glasses and take a look at what we have in the magic box and how we can use it in an original and inventive way in our geography lessons while establishing links and connections within the information that surrounds certain objects. In this box we can find a number of things which are related to geography in one way or another; they can help us to illustrate different topics in geography, transfer students to faraway places, help to feel the spirit and exceptionality of the objects. For example, in the magic box we can find a cup which says "Milan". While looking at it together with students through "geographical glasses" we can try to answer a number of questions which will require original and creative ideas and the successful use of knowledge already possessed. The questions we could ask are the following: Where is Milan? What is exceptional about the city? What would we drink from this cup in Milan? Coffee? Where does it come from? Why do Italians like drinking coffee so much etc.? In the magic box we can also find a piece of rock and we could ask: What is the name of it? How was it formed? What is the origin of it? Where can we find it? Can we find it in the school yard etc.? If we take a look at a candy in the magic box, we will find out together with students where it was made, what ingredients were used to make it, where we can get these ingredients, whether it is healthy or not.

All the questions related to the objects in the box are not only to revise the information we already know but also discover a number of subject links and interpret them creatively. What else can we put into a magic box? A shred of linen, a clip, a shiver of glass, a lump of sugar, a bone button, a seaside stone etc. Nearly everything could be suitable as geography encompasses a number of natural, social, cultural concepts. We can add up new objects to the magic box. We can also think of different activities related to different objects. For example, we could ask students to bring various objects that are related to a certain topic (e.g. solar radiation). Some of them might bring sun protection cream which would also become an object which we could look at through geographical glasses. What is the effect of this cream? What is it made of? How long is it effective etc.? This pattern could be applied to explore anything while looking for creative links drawing on the experience and information already possessed by a teacher and students. When we see the need

to add up to the knowledge of students, we can look for additional information on the Internet by using appropriate skills and modern technologies; we could also involve parents in such activities.

There is a great number of new philosophies and methodologies of how to teach the students of today. However, the most important approach to teaching, to my mind, would be the individual philosophy of every teacher which would help him/her to answer to everyday questions: What am I going to do with my students during the lesson today? Why am I going to do that? How will I do that? What is the result that we are going to reach together?

In great respect to Finnish teachers whom I learn from as well.

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