13 KUAN CHEN TSAI

CREATIVE TEACHING AND TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Introduction

According to Bramwell, Reilly, Lilly, Kronish, and Chennabathni (2011), "good teaching is creative teaching" (p. 228). Burnard (2012) believed that teaching per se is a manifestation of creativity. She also emphasized that the role of teachers as agents to catalyze this process of change requires a high level of professionalism and expertise. To some extent, creative teaching does not necessarily mean introducing something new, but it means solidifying students' ideas, attitudes, and beliefs, that are already being formed and further maximizes the outcomes of teaching excellence.

The practice of creative teaching is rooted in the humanistic philosophy grounds that assume all individuals have the creative potential. Thus, educational efforts in creativity by creative learning and creative teaching should be advocated (Esquivel, 1995). Jeffrey (2006) and Jeffrey and Craft (2004) suggested that creative teaching and creative learning are highly correlated. In fact, Craft (2010) asserted that creative learning stems from creative teaching, which is characterized by "a sense of ownership, relevance, control, and innovation" (p. 300). Indeed, the relationship between teaching and learning is an interactive one between teachers and students, and it requires both sides to be engaged and to shape this "special discourse." Following this line of thought, Lin (2011) further proposed a framework of creative pedagogy, which is an attempt to bridge creative teaching and learning.

The biggest difference between creative teaching and creative learning is that the former concerns the pedagogy and the latter pertains to learning strategies. The idea of creative learning, in fact, involves two elements: the acquisition of new knowledge and the transformation of prior learning into new contexts (Mayer, 1989). How can a teacher help students focus on learning and transfer knowledge? One possible solution is creative teaching. The essence of creative teaching entails rekindling students' curiosity, which somehow has been quenched in the conventional and standardized test-driven school culture. Creative teaching further provides students with teaching experiences that are rich, positive, and sustaining.

The main purpose of this article was to survey related literature and promote creative teaching in the classroom, because it is argued that creative teaching is the prerequisite of teaching excellence. This article discusses three topics. First, the perspective of creative teaching is outlined. Second, modeling creative behavior is described. Third, practical guides for creative teaching are suggested.

What is Creative Teaching?

Rinkevich (2011) defined creative teaching as "a unique, customized, and meaningful exchange of knowledge among all individuals in a learning context" (p. 219). For Mayer (1989), the heart of creative teaching concerns instructional techniques that "enable [students] to transfer what they have learned to new problems" (p. 205). Craft (2011) further pointed out that the focus of creative teaching is on "exciting, innovative, engaging, and often memorable pedagogy" (p. 129). According to Sawyer (2010), creative teaching is "an improvisational performance [that] emphasizes the interactional and responsive creativity of a teacher working together with a unique group of students" (p. 185). Similarly, Tanggaard (2011) underlined the concept of creative teaching as being a creative teacher who is willing to experiment with new ideas and to take risks using other teaching approaches to create best learning conditions for students. Tanggaard (2011) also contended that the cornerstone of creative teaching is teaching itself. As he noted, "teaching is seen as a potentially creative and improvised activity, itself being the background for continued change in the daily work of teachers" (Tanggaard, 2011, p. 220). At the basic level of creative teaching development is the connection of the learned knowledge and the experienced context (Torrance, 1977).

A number of studies have identified several salient characteristics of creative teachers, such as curiosity, risk-taking, independence, open-mindedness, humor, self-confidence, flexibility, and aesthetic orientation (Burnard, 2012; Horng, Hong, ChanLin, Chang, &Chu, 2005). Burnard (2012) suggested these personality traits are connected to thinking styles, which include "visualization, imagination, experimentation, metaphorical thinking, reflection, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation" (p. 168). Moreover, Jeffrey (2006) identified four characteristics of creative teaching: (a) innovation, stimulating new insights and leading change; (b) ownership, concerned for teachers' own ideas or an adaption of others into teaching contexts; (c) control, having a certain autonomy and pace; and (d) relevance, the main interest of teaching in meaningful learning to impact students. He underpinned the consequence of creative teaching on how students experience this process and what kind of creative agency is unleashed by applying this teaching context. Mayer (1989) also suggested three key conditions for creative teaching: the presentation of meaningful material, the intention of an active learning process, and the evaluation of students' creative problem solving ability as learning outcomes.

Therefore, creative teaching could be defined as a behavior that teachers demonstrate when they take action and consciously use certain tactics, sometimes departing from their comfort zone and confronting ambiguity, in order to challenge themselves and their students to seek creative ways of learning. As outlined above, it is believed that the combination of three important elements contributes to creative teaching. A three-ring model is proposed here to demonstrate that teachers who are willing to practice creative teaching should gear toward at least three abilities to the task of teaching excellence. This model involves instructional tactics, creativity, and task commitment. Teachers can use a variety of stimuli (tactics) to inspire and encourage students to experience meaningful learning and develop their creativity. At the same time, teachers themselves should use their creativity abilities to effectively present material and communicate the content. Motivation and teacher attitudes also play a crucial role in the presentation of the material to students: Teachers need to be professional, responsible, and caring.

Modeling Creative Teaching

Without a doubt, teachers play a determining role in shaping students' learning. With regard to the promotion of creativity in the classroom, "teachers not only condition certain types of creativity through their teaching, but also through the manner in which they talk about creativity" (Tanggaard, 2011, p. 220). A number of creative teaching strategies have been reported by the practitioners in the literature, such as storytelling and personification (Irvin, 1996), ideational code-switching (Beghetto, 2007), creative writing (Monis & Rodriques, 2012), art-based and problem-solving approaches (Tanggaard, 2011), multimedia (Buckingham, 2013), technology (Lamb & Johnson, 2010), synergies (Conway-Gomez et al., 2011), and group discussion and brainstorming (Bezrukov & Cherepanov, 2012).

Specifically, Jeffrey (2006) observed teachers who employed creative teaching techniques, and he noted three things about those teachers: They were innovative, they enjoyed the process, and they invested time in their discussions with students. Bramwell et al. (2011) also found that creative teachers are hardworking, confident, flexible, nonconforming, intuitive, knowledgeable, and passionate about their work. Bramwell et al. believed personal intelligence, creative motivation, and personal values are important shaping factors of individuals' creative teaching. According to a synthesis of qualitative cases studies, Bramwell et al. (2011) further concluded that the creative teaching process stems from the interplay between personal characteristics and the professional and personal communities around teachers, and these processes in turn contribute to a variety of products, which reflect teachers' values and communities. To some extent creative teachers share many similar personality traits with eminent creators (Barron & Harrington, 1981;

Batey & Furnham, 2006), but the biggest difference between them is that creative teachers have a high level of interpersonal intelligence and relationships.

Rinkevich (2011) argued that "creative teaching is not done on a whim, but instead involves hard work" (p. 222). As a result, she suggested that the promotion of creative teaching should start with a teacher preservice education and then reinforce this concept by attending professional developing workshops for frontline teachers. Beghetto (2007) recognized the constraints of curricula and time for students to express their creativity in the classroom. In fact, he asserted that constraints are complementary to creativity. According to his interpretation, the definition of creativity implies the role of constraint as being guided creative expression in a proper context.

Creative teaching, therefore, is not a strategy. Nor is it a skill, a curriculum, an attitude, or any other single process. It is an outcome of subsets of those and other processes acting in concert to expand and stimulate students' learning. Creative teaching may even be better thought of as various efforts (motivation, approaches, supports from all stakeholders) by which processes operate on deliberation of content to produce fruits that are meaningful and favorable to students.

Practical Guides for Creative Teaching

Horng et al. (2005) conducted a qualitative study where they interviewed three award-wining Taiwanese teachers. These teachers used three main creative strategies to gain the momentum to accommodate the challenges in the classroom: student-centered activities, multiteaching aids, and effective class management. Horng et al. also found that the most important factors that lead to these successful creative instructions involve three elements: belief in education, dedication to education, and intrinsic motivations. Because teachers cultivate positive attitudes toward creativity, deliberate tactics, and friendly creative learning ethos, students are instilled with more creative thinking and are supported for creativity development.

Rinkevich (2011) recommended several creative teaching strategies: (a) adding surprise events in the daily routine of the classroom to provoke unorthodox thinking, (b) beginning a class with a fact of day to promote lifelong learning, (c) incorporating the environment to the learning space to encourage students to explore the world around them, and (d) providing an autonomy learning opportunity to develop students' strengths and interests. Iowa State University's Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (n.d.), for example, listed a series of creative teaching strategies in its website: brainstorming, concept mapping, role-play, storyboarding, decision tree, brain-sketching, reversal, fishbone, and the like. In addition, with the use of analogical models, Mayer (1989) found that these creative teaching methods are conducive to fostering students' creative problem-solving

134

skills (for more details, see pp. 207-208). In sum, these creative teaching strategies center on ideational skills and on the rational process to expand and combine ideas. In a sense, the rational process involves two stages: a divergent stage and a convergent stage. The former concerns the quantity of ideas, the more the better. Thus, forcing different irrelevant elements and ideas is an attempt to generate novel and unexpected relationships among ideas, thereby seeking unique perspectives of problems. The latter pertains to the quality of ideas. This evaluation stage leads to making a better choice within all kinds of possibilities.

Many scholars have underscored the importance of recognizing the variety of students' learning preferences and then adapting appropriate teaching strategies to fit this variance in order to create an optimal learning situation for most students in classes (Heimlich & Norland, 2002; Sternberg, 1997). Indeed, As Pratt (2002) noted, there is no correct teaching method might be called good teaching. This statement could legitimatiz the demand of creative teaching because the essence of creative teaching is to ask teachers themselves to be brave and explore all possibilities. If this assumption is valid, then it should be acknowledged that there is no one correct way but that there are many possible ways to better lead students toward their career paths.

Stocktaking

One of the major advantages of creative teaching is based on the possibility of leading students to see a different world by challenging them to go beyond the framework of the standardized test and go beyond the existing paradigm, thereby exploring new or alternative perspectives of ideas and solutions. Most importantly, teachers need to be successful in teaching, especially when they are faced with solving dilemmas and are constantly improvising to handle daily-based classroom scenarios. As Tanggaard (2011) wrote, "teachers need to be creative" (p. 230) by acting as "creative and reflective practitioners" (p. 230). However, it is not an easy task. In fact, Simonton (2012) admitted that teaching creativity is a difficult goal and it demands "teaching creativity creatively!" (p. 220).

Creative teaching is an art (Gibson, 2010; Joubert, 2001). There is no fail-safe recipe for teaching, but proper teaching should be suited for proper contexts. Indeed, the notion of creative teaching portrays a different picture in the classroom. Teachers are viewed as experts and are granted "creative autonomy" (Sawyer, 2004, p. 12). The proverb, "All roads lead to Rome", can be applied to education because there are many ways to teach and learn, which can all lead to direct to the ultimate goal of successfully achieving one's educational goals. As an educator, it is one's responsibility to stir students' potential, and the use of creative teaching could justify this intention. The attitudes and values of teachers possessing toward creativity may not only increase their repertory of skills but also impact students'

creativity development and learning (Lucas, 2001). It is hoped that this article inspires educators and instructors to consider creative teaching, at any level, thereby leading their students to favorable positions in this knowledge economy. After all, the ultimate goal of creative teaching is to help students create something new using creative learning strategies and creative problem-solving skills.

Finally, five important aspects of creative teaching should be noted: First, it is not an extra task, but, it is an essential capability for teachers' ongoing development. Second, it is not limited to special subjects, such as the arts, but can be integrated into all subjects. Third, it requires deep commitment, concentration, risk-taking, and personal transformation from teachers. Fourth, it allows students to have a more meaningful academic journey. And fifth, creative teaching is not a safe activity; it can potentially be a threat to classroom management because of disruption and question of status quo resulting from the forces of change and personal reorganization.

Correspondence

Kuan Chen Tsai
6900 Vandiver RD J205
San Antonio, TX, 78209
USA
Tel.: ++1 210 717 9593
Email: ktsai@student.uiwtx.edu

Author's brief bio
Kuan Chen Tsai is a Ph.D. candidate in organizational leadership from University of the Incarnate Word, San Antonio, Texas. His major research interests relate to creativity and adult learning. He can be reached at the above email.

References

Barron, F. and Harrington, D. M., 1981. Creativity, intelligence, and personality. *Annual Review of Psychology, 32*(1), pp.439-476.
Batey, M. and Furnham, A., 2006. Creativity, intelligence, and personality: A critical review of the scattered literature. *Genetic, Social & General Psychology Monographs, 132*(4), pp.355-429.
Beghetto, R. A., 2007. Ideational code-switching: Walking the talk about support-

ing student creativity in the classroom. *Roeper Review*, *29*(4), pp.265–270.

Bezrukov, Y. I. and Cherepanov, M. M., 2012. Interactive teaching methodology: Collaboration of teacher and student (English). *Russian Juridical Journal / Rossijskij Juridiceskij Zurnal, 86*(5), pp.61-65.

Bramwell, G. Reilly, R. C. Lilly, F. R. Kronish, N. and Chennabathni, R., (2011). Creative teacher. *Roeper Review, 33*(1), pp.228-238.

Buckingham, D., 2013. Teaching the creative class? Media education and the media industries in the age of "participatory culture." *Journal of Media Practice, 14*(1), pp. 25-41.

Burnard, P., 2012. Rethinking creative teaching and teaching as research: Mapping the critical phases that mark times of change and choosing as learners and teachers of music. *Theory into Practice*, *51*(3), pp.167–178.

Conway-Gomez, K. Williams, N. Atkinson-Palombo, C. Ahlqvist, O. Kim, E. and Morgan, M., 2011. Tapping geography's potential for synergy with creative instructional approaches. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education, 35* (3), pp.409-423.

Craft, A., 2010. Possible thinking and wise creativity: Educational features in England. In R. A. Beghetto and J. C. Kaufman (Eds.), *Nurturing creativity in the classroom* (pp.289-312). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Craft, A., 2011. Approaches to creativity in education in the United Kingdom. In J. Sefton-Green P. Thomson K. Jones and L. Bresler (Eds.), *The Rutledge international handbook of creative learning* (pp.129-139). New York, NY: Routledge.

Esquivel, G. B., 1995. Teacher behaviors that foster creativity. *Educational Psychology Review, 7*(2), pp.185-202.

Gibson, R., 2010. The 'art' of creative teaching: Implications for higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education, 15*(5), pp.607-613.

Heimlich, J. E. and Norland, E., 2002. Teaching style: Where are we now? *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, (2002)*93, pp.17-25.

Horng, J.-S. Hong, J.-C. ChanLin, L.-J. Chang, S.-H. and Chu, H.-C., 2005. Creative teachers and creative teaching strategies. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, *29*(4), pp.352–358.

Iowa State University, Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, n.d. *Techniques for creative teaching*. Retrieved from http://www.celt.iastate.edu/creativity/techniques.html

Irvin, S. M., 1996. Creative teaching strategies. *Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing*, *27*(3), pp.108-114.

Jeffrey, B., 2006. Creative teaching and learning: Towards a common discourse and practice. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 36*(3), pp.399-414.

Jeffrey, B., and Craft, A., 2004. Teaching creatively and teaching for creativity:

Distinctions and relationships. *Educational Studies, 30*(1), pp.77-87.

Joubert, M. M., 2001. The art of creative teaching: NACCCE and beyond. In A. Craft B. Jeffrey and M. Leibling (Eds.), *Creativity in education* (pp.17-34). New York, NY: Continuum.

Lamb, A., and Johnson, L., 2010. Bring back the joy: Creative teaching, learning, and librarianship. *Teacher Librarian, 38*(2), pp.61-66.

Lin, Y. S., 2011. Fostering creativity through education: A conceptual framework of creative pedagogy. *Creative Education, 2*(3), pp.149-155.

Lucas, B., 2001. Creative teaching, teaching creativity and creative learning. In A. Craft, B. Jeffrey, and M. Leibling (Eds.), *Creativity in education* (pp.35-44). New York, NY: Continuum.

Mayer, R. E., 1989. Cognitive views of creativity: Creative teaching for creative learning. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 14*(1), pp.203-211.

Monis, M., and Rodriques, M. V., 2012. Teaching creative writing in English language classroom. *Indian Streams Research Journal, 2*(10), pp.1-6.

Pratt, D. D., 2002. Good teaching: One sizes fits all? *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 2002*(93), pp.5-16.

Rinkevich, J. R., 2011. Creative teaching: Why it matters and where to begin. *The Clearing House, 84*(1), pp.219-223.

Sawyer, K. R., 2004. Creative teaching: Collaborative discussion as disciplined improvisation. *Educational Researcher, 33*(1), pp.12-20.

Sawyer, K. R., (2010). Learning for creativity. In R. A. Beghetto and J. C. Kaufman (eds.), *Nurturing creativity in the classroom* (pp.172-190). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Simonton, D. K., 2012. Teaching creativity: Current findings, trends, and controversies in the psychology of creativity. *Teaching of Psychology, 39*(3), pp.217-222.

Sternberg, R. J., 1997. *Thinking styles*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Tanggaard, L., 2011. Stories about creative teaching and productive learning. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 34*(2), pp.219-232.

Torrance, E. P.,1977. *Creativity in the classroom: What research says to the teacher*. West Haven, CT: National Education Association.