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Creativity in School: The Synergy of Multiple Factors?

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Abstract: The school from the "past" had as a role the production of a "passive" and mere receptor student. The educator nowadays needs to consider the social, historical and also cultural and individual differences of students, which must have a participation in their learning and development. Our goal is to reflect on the school's role in planning environments that encourage the development of creative potential in elementary school students. To support our reflections, we used the data from a preliminary study with 16 third-year students of a school in São Paulo State, for which the "Rating Scale Climate for Creativity in the Classroom" has been applied to. Although the results altogether have indicated a slightly positive perception towards creative expression in the classroom, the teacher mediation seems to occupy a intermediate space between encouraging and restraining the autonomy's development of the student in the production of new ideas.

Key words: creativity, creative potential, mediator teacher, classroom

1. The School Has Changed...

"School is ... / the place where you make friends /it is not just buildings, rooms, tables / programs, schedules, ... concepts / School is above all, people / people who work, study, / rejoice, people who know and cherish each other. / ... The important thing in school is not only to study or work, but also to establish friendly relationships, / to create atmosphere of fellowship, / is to live together, is 'to hit on her'! / Well, of course ... / in a school like that it will be easy to / study, to work, [create], to grow / to make friends, to educate yourself /to be happy." (Paulo Freire)[1]

The school nowadays has changed a lot compared to the traditional school. The school from the "past" had as a role, literacy and pedagogical instruction of children and adolescents. Most of all, the school's job was to build a literate student, who was able to read, write and do math, a passive learner who only had to reproduce what he/she read in the books or listen to what the teacher said, in other words, a mere receptor (Lima, 2011). However, the social and behavioral changes of recent decades have depicted a new student, family and thereafter, school profile,

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making necessary new methods of study, teaching and evaluation, which allow the pupil to participate and build his/her own knowledge.

These changes, increasingly faster, led to "…to the creation of other identities, both institutional and professional in the education system" (Freitas, Krebs & Rodrigues, 2005, p. 7). The educator from today needs to take into account the historical context in which the students are inserted and consider the cultural and individual differences of each one of them. According to Kinney and Wharton (2009, p. 23) "… we must acknowledge that children are active participants of their own learning. That means to put them in the center of the process, making sure they are totally involved in the planning and revision of their own knowledge along with their teachers..."

Therefore it is up to school today to create a pleasant learning place, in other words, an environment, which could encourage the development of the student's different skills. To Kinney and Wharton (2009), the environment may be considered as a third educator and should enable dialogue, recognize the student's role, in addition to ensuring that the teacher may listen to them and learn different ways of listening, becoming that way, productive for both parties, educators and students.

In accordance with Andrade and Amboni (2006, p. 20) "… the teacher who wishes to have a good didactic needs to learn day after day the students language, their perception, their life practices, knowledge, …to place problems and/or opportunities as well as meaningful, instigating and assimilable contents", and as Santos adds, " … to cause and develop critical and creative capacities in order to turn them into conscious agents of their own transforming roles in the society." (2013, p. 15). To make this possible it is necessary to work toward the development of creative potential.

In recent decades, creativity has been considered as one of the most relevant aspects of human development, in order to meet contemporary demands, which require a subject capable of. "… Recognize emerging realities, understand its implications and formulate responses that will generate new ideas and products". So, how school could handle these tasks?

2. Creativity

According to Antunes's assumption (2012, p. 362), ... it is easier to identify creativity than explain it. People do not seem to find much difficulty in pointing out/indicate a creative person/product in a certain specific area. However the same does not occur when a definition of creativity is asked. This fact is actually understandable, since creativity is a constructo, any single definition runs the risk of becoming a crude and reductionist simplification. It is no coincidence that many researchers make use of multidimensional models to assess creativity, not worrying to find a valid measure for all contexts (Wechsler, 1998).

So, it is possible to understand why, for Guenther (2013), these are signs of high creative potential:

> Higher production in art and art education; originality, authenticity and fluency in the production of ideas, objects and actions; acuity of observation and perception; sensitivity and perceptiveness of the sets, colors, sounds, shapes; producing of unexpected and relevant, verbal or nonverbal responses; critical sense and realistic self-criticism; distraction, boredom and disinterest in regular classes; global thinking, holistic, little attention to details; marked intuition and intuitive thinking (p. 56).

And for Cupertino, for instance:

> Sense of humor; Ability of imaginative thinking; Nonconformist attitude; Divergent thinking; Spirit of adventure; Willingness to take risks; Ability to adapt, improve or modify ideas; Ability to produce unusual,

> unique or clever responses; Willingness to fantasize, play and manipulate ideas; Ability to generate a large number of ideas or solutions to problems or issues (p. 37).

According to Alencar (2005), "... creativity is something that all of us have in different measurements and can be developed at different levels. Thus, it is understood that all people have creative skills that can be developed and improved" (p. 28).

Vygotsky (1996) was also concerned about the creativity issue, acknowledging it as a feature present in all men. Based on the foundations of historical and dialectical materialism, the author stresses that there would be no subject more or less capable to create and innovate, but creativity should be considered a process that would develop the synergy of multiple factors, such as socio-historical, memory, imagination, the importance of brain development.

To this theoretician, social interaction plays an important role in learning and human development, which, in turn leads to the formation of higher mental functions, referred to "... more complex psychological mechanisms that are typical of human beings and which also involve conscious control of behavior, intentional action and the freedom of the individual in relation to the characteristics of the present time and space" (Oliveira, 1997, p. 26). However, it is not any interaction that produces development, it must be intentional and mediated by an adult or someone more capable.

It is what Vygotsky will call zone of proximal development (ZPD), conceived as

> …The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers (p. 97).

The Zone of Proximal Development may constitute an important tool for the teacher or another adult, since, by this method, the educator can start very early to develop the creative potential of the child, as it allows "... to take account of not only the cycles and maturation processes that have already been completed but also those processes that are currently in a state of formation, that are just beginning to mature and develop." (Vygotsky, 1984, p. 97).

It is therefore acting in the Zone of Proximal Development, in other words, discovering what is in the child's potential, that the teacher can use strategies, mediating their games in order to promote the achievement of new levels of development. The teacher can then be identified as someone important in building a favorable climate for creativity in the classroom, acting as a facilitator or inhibitor of the development of creative potential of his/her students (Alencar, 2005).

In this perspective, for the purpose of subsidizing the notes made here, we refer to data from an exploratory study[2] that used the Rating Climate Scale for Creativity in the Classroom (Fleith, 2010), with the aim to investigate to what extent this environment, the classroom, mediated by the action of the teacher, may favor the creative potential of students[3] because to the author, the environment is the driving force of creative potential and we need to investigate its influence on them, since genetic and environmental factors are constantly interacting, interfering in the creative process.

Such scale consists of 22 items, which answers are presented in a Likert scale with 5 points: (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) often, and (5) always — in which the student marks with an X the frequency that best shows what happens in the classroom.

This scale evaluates five factors: teacher's support to the expression of the student's ideas (Factor 1);

self-perception of students regarding creativity (Factor 2); student's interest in learning (Factor 3); learner autonomy (Factor 4); and encouragement from the teacher to the student production of ideas (Factor 5).

Factor 1 contains five items (e.g., the teacher cares about what I have to say, I have chance to participate in various activities). Factor 2 brings four items (e.g., I find myself creative, I feel proud of me). Factor 3 consists of six items (e.g.: I like the subject taught, I learn things that I really like). Four items comprise the Factor 4 (e.x.: I try to do the tasks in different ways, I can choose what I do). Factor 5 brings together three items (e.g.: the teacher asks me to think of new ideas, the teacher asks me to try, when I do not know the answer to a question).

Table 1 shows the frequencies of responses to the 22 items of the scale, grouped by the five Factors[4]. The maximum score achieved on the scale was equal to 92 points and the minimum was 61 points (mean = 74.6, SD = 10.1), results that wave to a possible positive perception of the students to the creative climate of the classroom.

Table 1 Frequency of Responses to the Items, Grouped by Factor, Scale and Associated Measures (n = 16) 2013

Factor	**In my classroom Item**	*Never*	*Rarely*	*Sometimes*	*Often*	*Always*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Average*	*dp*
Factor 1 Teacher's support to the expression of student's ideas Average = 17.9 dp = 3.5 Min = 13 Max = 25	1. Teacher pays attention to my ideas	3	2	5	1	5	1	5	3.2	1.5
	2. I have chance to participate in several activities	0	1	4	5	6	2	5	4.0	1.0
	3. My ideas are welcome	4	5	4	2	1	1	5	2.4	1.2
	4. Teacher gives me enough time to think about a history I have to write	0	2	3	2	9	2	5	4.1	1.1
	12. The teacher cares about what I have to say	0	2	3	2	9	2	5	4.1	1.1
Factor 2 Self-perception of students regarding creativity Average = 13.9 dp = 3 Min = 5 Max = 18	6. I find myself creative	3	3	5	2	3	1	5	2.9	1.4
	8. I use my imagination	0	2	0	5	9	2	5	4.3	1.0
	10. I have a lot of ideas	2	4	5	2	3	1	5	3.0	1.3
	20. I feel proud of myself	1	1	5	4	5	1	5	3.7	1.2
Factor 3 Student's interest in learning Average = 23.1 dp = 4.9 Min = 13 Max = 30 Min = 6	9. The work I do is fun	0	4	2	2	8	2	5	3.9	1.3
	11. When I start a task I enjoy finishing it	1	5	0	2	8	1	5	3.7	1.5
	13. I like the subject taught	0	1	2	3	10	2	5	4.4	1.0
	15. I learn the things I really like	1	1	7	3	4	1	5	3.5	1.1
	18. I learn a lot of things	0	1	1	2	12	2	5	4.6	0.9
	22. I make a research on books when I want to learn more about a subject	2	5	2	4	3	1	5	3.1	1.4
Factor 4 Learner autonomy Average = 9.6 dp = 1.9 Min = 6 Max = 12	4. I try to do tasks in different ways	9	2	3	0	2	1	5	1.0	1.4
	5. The teacher asks me to show my work to others.	7	4	2	0	3	1	5	2.0	1.5
	16. I can choose what I want to do	7	4	3	0	2	1	5	2.0	1.4
	17. I get so involved with tasks that do not know what's happening near me.	2	2	6	3	3	1	5	3.0	1.3
Factor 5 Encouragement from the teacher to the student production of ideas Average = 10.2 dp = 2.7 Min = 5 Max = 15	14. The teacher asks me to think of new ideas.	3	2	5	2	4	1	5	3.0	1.4
	19. the teacher asks me to try, when I do not know the answer to a question	0	0	5	3	8	3	5	4.5	0.9
	21. the teacher asks me to think of a lot of ideas	2	5	4	3	2	1	5	3.0	1.2

3. Creativity at School: What For!?

One of the main goals of primary education, which is the focus of the present study, according to the National Curriculum Parameters (NCP), is that students are capable of. "... Question the reality by formulating problems and trying to solve them, using for that the logical thinking, creativity, intuition, the capacity for critical analysis, selecting procedures and verifying their suitability" [italics added] (Brazil, 1997, p. 69).

Because creativity is a potentiality it should be encouraged in the classroom environment as Alencar states (2002). "... Creative learning experiences [are] one of the pathways to emotional well-being, contributing positively to the quality of life of the individual" (p. 167). For this to happen, the teacher needs to know how to identify the student potentialities in order to exercise his/her practice on what is in the Zone of Proximal Development, i.e., on what is found in his/her potential, what the student has not reached yet, but it can be reached with his/her mediation.

This aspect can be confirmed in the data of the present research. We noticed that a good portion of the students stated "The work I do [often or Always] are fun" and "I [often or Always] learn things I really like". That means the teacher needs to use strategies that aims to vary the classroom experiences and not only to focus on what students already understand or know, so they can feel encouraged to reach new levels of development.

If we rather think that distraction, boredom and disinterest in some interesting lessons are frequently teachers complaints regarding their students, since the focus of the students are facing other activities less boring than the commonly held in room classroom, it is important to think of practices to make learning enjoyable, contributing to a lively and supportive learning environment, facilitating the creative process (Araujo, 2012).

The high frequency of [never] and [rarely] composed by the items in Factor 4 (Student Autonomy), shows us a centralization of teacher towards their students. To Fleith (2010), controller teachers favor an inhibitory environment of creativity. It is shown in the National Curriculum Parameters (NCP) that. "... The will to learning does not depend solely on the student, it also demands that the teaching practice assures conditions for this favorable attitude to manifest and prevail itself" (Brazil, 1997, p. 65).

However, if the teacher is a controlling and inhibiting type, this attitude is compromised, since it is essential to have freedom to explore/risk new ways of seeking new ideas, i.e., breaking standards and norms, and the controller teacher is often limited or restricted to standards, failing to pull away from the oppression of lesson plans, becoming hostage to routine and bureaucracy, which mechanize the process of teaching-learning (Bragatto, 2003).

The NCP also add that teachers who wish a more curious and investigative practice by their students, should prioritize activities that require this attitude and not inactivity. They should value the process and the quality, and not only the performance speed, besides not being satisfied with standardized answers/behaviors of their students, aiming for creative and original strategies.

Using data from the research to support these statements, a positive aspect of Factor 4 stands out from a large number of participants who said "I'm [sometimes or often or always] so involved (a) with the tasks that I do not know what's going on around me."

This fact can show what Renzulli calls "commitment to the task" (Renzulli, 2004), and should be valued by the teacher. Also, the great number of answers [often or always] for the items "the teacher gives me enough time to think about a history I have to write" and "when I start a task I like to finish it", becomes irrelevant, since is "…in the thinking level that is necessary to have time to imagine" (Bragatto, 2003, p. 75).

Nevertheless, it is possible to note certain conformity by the teachers when the most of their students answer "I [never or rarely] seek to do tasks in different ways". This encouragement of predictable and acceptable behavior inhibits the child's self confidence and assures the dominance upon her/him, restricting his/her world of experience (Bragatto, 2003, p. 77), leading her/him to an attitude of dependence and distrust of his/her spontaneity and potential, opposing to the creative process that demands adventure and risk.

Perhaps that can explain the fact we observed in the survey, 9 of the children stated "My ideas [never or rarely] are welcome" and 10 pointed out that "The teacher [never or rarely] asks me to think about new ideas". Furthermore, although 14 children have stressed that "I use [often or always] my imagination, a good part of them said "I [never or rarely] think of myself as being creative" and "I [never or rarely] have lots of ideas". That may be due to the lack of attention of school in offering elements that allow teachers to identify and stimulate the different expressions of creativity of the students who are overwhelmed by tasks and routine jobs that limit their pedagogical action.

It is also known to this the fact that teachers themselves have sometimes a skewed idea of creativity and therefore have difficulties in facilitating the development of the creative potential of their students (Santos, 2013), because they do not consider, for example, that sense of humor; Nonconformist attitude; Divergent thinking; Spirit of Adventure etc., may represent signs of high creative potential.

Resuming the factor 4, the item "The teacher asks me to show my work to the others" was pointed out by 11 of the students who signed [never or rarely]. This is alarming when you consider that the dynamics of teaching should encourage. "... Not only the discovery potential of the individual work, but also, and especially, the collective work" (Brazil, 1997, p. 28). Amabile (1989) emphasizes the importance of students having spaces and moments of sharing experiences, interests and ideas, and also opportunities for evaluating the learning process itself, creating therefore a climate in the classroom that is favorable to the creative process. These moments of exchange enable students to imagine other points of view, which, to Sternberg (2000), is one of the strategies to develop creativity in the school context.

Between this and that, even if the results, in general, have indicated a slightly positive perception towards creative expression in the classroom, the teacher mediation seems to occupy an intermediate space between encourage and inhibit the development of learner autonomy in the production of new ideas, as it may be seen in students' statements such as "I have [often or always] chance to participate in various activities" and "I [never or rarely] can choose what I do", respectively. Due to the centralizing power of the teacher, the school making still has to deal with many limitations and lack of freedom, not allowing students to express their creative potential, which reinforces the appointment made by Alencar (2005) on the importance of the role of the teacher in encouraging student participation in the learning process. The question is: how? The role of the facilitator teacher is not reducible to the mere transmission of information and knowledge, but, on the contrary, it is active and interactive in the relentless pursuit to produce fruitful and meaningful answers.

4. Final Considerations

It is important to emphasize that this article resulted from an initial exploratory study about the factors that could influence the encouragement of creative potential in the context of the classroom, by applying a promising tool for measuring the climate for the development of creativity in classroom. However, we must show that the results, which supported the discussions made in this study, are not conclusive, and should be taken as a case

study due to the small sample size.

Therefore, they can provide indicators for further studies, as well as to assist teachers and other school staff in developing proposals to contribute to the development of differentiated instruction, which takes into account the potential of students.

It is also speculated that creating productive environments, in an effort to create situations that may favor the creative potential from both students and teachers, as Kinney and Wharton (2009) say, it is of great importance because it allows to innovate and vary the activities, preventing them from being not only in the classroom. In accordance with Coutinho and Lisboa (2011), the change suffered by the world and society cause doubt about the paths to be taken by the school so that it can meet the demands of those individuals who live in an environment of constant change. We must make room for the students to take risks, to create, to venture and innovate, in order to practice and develop their creativity.

If the school aims to bring up critical students who are committed to think about the knowledge of which they have contact with and practice them, it must not consider them to be passive in the process neither transform them into players of knowledge (Santos, 2013). In a competitive world, where information is rapidly spread, it is necessary to have a school which stimulates the student to produce his/her knowledge in a creative way; a versatile student, capable of interacting with an environment which is frequently changing, of reflecting about the problems they may face along the way and finding innovating solutions for them (Santos, 2013; Coutinho & Lisbôa, 2011).

To conclude, we believe men's creative activity and the fulfillment of their potentialities act towards their emancipation, making them able to participate in a world, which is constantly changing. Thus, according to Christopher and Constantino (2011), it is imperative to work with the teachers so they know how to deal with the diversity found in classrooms and may encourage students' creativity.

After all, "[what] more can you ask the teacher but to innovate, to put within reach of his/her [student]… to transmit them knowledge and ideas that convey the world's vision?" (Mellouki & Gauthier, 2004, p. 567).

Notes

(1) School. Rizoma Freireano, v. 8, 2010 accessed 03/03/2013, available online at: http://www.rizoma-freireano.org/index.php/a-school-paulo-freire.

(2) Project submitted to the Ethics and Research Committee from UNESP/Assis, which was approved (View n. 211.264). The study was conducted based on a sample, for convenience, consisting of 16 students, including 11 girls, belonging to the 3rd grade of elementary education at a public school located in the suburbs of a city in the countryside of São Paulo, with about 100 thousand inhabitants. The population in question is composed of 74 students, 44 girls and 30 boys, average age 8.6 years (SD = 0.7), belonging to four classes of third graders.

(3) Students responded individually to the "Rating Scale Climate for Creativity in the Classroom", on their last day of class in the first half of 2013. The researchers, after explaining to the students the purpose of the visit and the "interview" started reading the questions in the scale for them while they were following them with the questionnaire in hand, and clarifying the doubts regarding the understanding of the issues. Afterwards, students marked an X in the selected alternative. The application of the survey instrument took place in the classroom in the school studied.

(4) It was used for the treatment of the data obtained, a descriptive statistical analysis in which we calculated the frequencies and averages for each factor and scale item.

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