

The creative teacher

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Whether with trepidation or triumphantly, we, as educators, venture into the next millennium guided by a paradigm shift of changing student needs. Traditional methodologies and traditional classroom settings are transforming, expanding beyond the four-walled cubes into the "virtual" amorphous cyberspace classrooms and reality sites outside of the typical ivy-covered towers of higher education. Because of technology-driven telecommunications and growing student diversity, we have a responsibility to be more innovative in our pedagogical approaches. Designing creative virtual classrooms developed within a theoretical framework of rationale is one answer.

Teaching is just not a means of transferring information from the textbooks to the notebooks of the student. Famous scholar and a humorist, Mark Twain once remarked, "Education is an art of passing on the information from the teacher's notebook to the notebooks of the student, without going through the heads of either of them". This may seem to be an exaggeration. But the fact remains that in most cases, teaching has been reduced to either sermonizing or dictating notes.

Teaching is an eminently creative work. It is in fact a performing art. Like a dancer or a musician, a teacher goes on performing a solo act day after day and year after year. For every performance, a musician or a dancer prepares so much to give effect to the performance. He/she gets the make up done; wears the appropriate dress; checks up the instruments needed. All these prior preparations make the performance a success. Teaching is a more serious and continuous performance. Do we prepare so seriously for our classes or take them casually? That decides the quality of a teacher and his creativity.

It is hard to envision what a creative teacher because there is no absolute definition of what it is and because everybody has an idea

of what a creative teacher should be, especially in this new century where there are more demands from our students. But there are characteristics teachers should possess to make them come close to the ideal and creative teacher.

When teaching itself is a creative work, what do we really mean by creative teaching? It basically means to employ appropriate tools and techniques to make the teaching very effective. So far we have concentrated on teacher-centered class and were more concerned about the content to be passed on using only the chalk and the talk. Today the chalk and talk method has to be replaced by variety of tools and techniques available to the teacher to make learning a joyous venture. There cannot be a single tool or technique for every class. A teacher has to judiciously decide which one to use in which class. The audio visual aids such as models, charts, radio, T.V, VCR, overhead projector, epidiascope and LCD projectors with the aid of computers are all available. It has been proved that visual impact is 3 times more powerful than only the audio.

Teacher must also use creatively the body language. He/she must undergo specific training in presentation skills that include the appropriate use of gestures, postures, eye contact and voice modulations. If these skills are used, learning becomes easy.

To make the class learner centered, there are varieties of creative techniques available. Some of them are group discussion, team teaching, quizzes, seminars, individual presentations, group presentations, brain storming, questioning, use of art and fine arts, story telling, clay modeling, role play, situation analysis, case study etc to supplement the classroom teaching. Field work, survey work, community service are also effective tools to bring about learning. Students should be more encouraged to do things with their own hands. There is a meaningful Chinese proverb "I hear, I forget. I see, I remember. I do, I understand." Creative teaching involves and includes experiential learning.

Many argue that creative teaching is not possible in remote areas where technology support is not adequate. To be creative does not mean to depend too much on technology. Techniques such as role-

play, situation analysis, mind mapping, visualization require only the creative abilities of the teacher.

The "Socratic Dialogue" technique is a very effective way to interact with students that are not particularly interested in the subject matter. The instructor's objective is through dialogue to lead the students to their own discoveries. In the process the learners realize that abstract concepts do not seem so abstract any more, they feel a sense of accomplishment and gain a deeper understanding that stays with them. Guiding the students, through dialogue, to think for themselves is an art and skill that can be mastered. In this method the active participants are stimulated and inspired and so are the observers. The technique is also known as "midwifery" because the learners are helped and guided towards the birth of ideas and solutions by their instructor.

The teacher should be resourceful to gauge the mood of the students and also should be able to quickly understand whether the students are following the subject that he is teaching. For this, appropriate and creative evaluation tools should be employed. He must immediately change into another method or technique, the moment he comes to know that the students are not with him. For this to happen he must be resourceful and knowledgeable about all the creative tools.

Creative teaching demands a prerequisite that a teacher must be creative. Creativity is all about having more options for a given situation. It is imperative that a teacher must undergo a long term and also periodic training in developing this art of creativity so that he in turn can make his teaching creative.

Whether you are a new or veteran teacher, you know the challenges of keeping students actively engaged in the learning process. To say the least, every little bit helps when you're in the trenches of the classroom. Creativity and effective delivery of instruction is essential to achieving student success.

An old educational proverb reads: "The mark of a great teacher is all the stuff that students remember after everything else is

forgotten." With Creative Teaching Techniques in your teaching arsenal, your students will be inspired and energized to learn. The end result will be that your students will become better life long learners. And, they'll remember that it was you who inspired them to achieve such great success in their lives.

A creative teacher is also compassionate. The influence this teacher makes on the students at their impressionable age is unimaginable. One right word at the right time and place can catapult a student into a totally different sphere of success. Following is a story, though tragic, indicates the influence of a creative teacher.

Pranod Nair was a student in one of the first third grade classes that Sister Helen taught at Saint Mary's School in a small village in Kerala. He was very neat in appearance but had a delightful mischievousness in him. He talked incessantly. Sister Helen reminded him time and again that talking without permission was not welcome in class. After reprimanding him, he always said, "Thank you for correcting me, Sister!" What impressed Sister Helen was his sincere way of saying it.

One day, her patience grew thin after hearing him talk once too often. She looked at him and said, "If you say one more word, I am going to tape your mouth shut!" Needless to say, Pranod talked again. In other words, she had to act on what she said because she said it in front of the class. She put a big X on his mouth. He winked at her and she started laughing. She removed the tape and then she heard the words, "Thank you for correcting me, Sister."

The years went by and he became her student again in the ninth grade. He was more handsome than ever and just as polite. This time he did not talk that much as he had to listen carefully to Sister's instructions in the "new math."

One day, everybody seemed to be frowning, frustrated with themselves and edgy with one another. Sister asked them to list the names of the other students in the room on two sheets of paper, leaving a space between each name. Then she told them to think of the nicest thing they could say about each of their classmates and

write it down. The following day, Saturday, she wrote down the name of each student on a separate sheet of paper, and listed what everyone else had said about that individual. On Monday she gave each student his or her list. Shortly after, the entire class was smiling. She heard comments like, "Really," "I never knew that meant anything to anyone," and "I didn't know others liked me so much!"

Several years passed. One time after returning home from vacation and being fetched by her parents, her father told her that the Prâmod's father had called. He quietly said that Prâmod was killed in Kârgil. Even in his deathbed, Prâmod looked so handsome. All she could think of at that moment was, "Prâmod, I would give all the masking tape in the world if only you would talk to me." She met one of the soldiers who was one of the pallbearers. He asked whether she was Prâmod's math teacher. When she nodded, he said that Prâmod talked about her a lot. After the funeral, they proceeded to one of Prâmod's classmates' farmhouse. His parents were there, too. His father said that the other soldiers found something on Prâmod when he was killed and he thought Sister might recognize it. IT WAS THE LIST THAT SHE MADE WHEN THEY WERE IN THE NINTH GRADE. Prâmod treasured it so much. His classmates gathered around them and said that they also treasured the list she gave them.

That's when Sister finally sat down and cried. She cried for Prâmod and for all his friends who would never see him again.

Thus a creative teacher is just not an information provider but a person who stimulates his students to greater success by living the values that he/she preaches. A creative teacher has no option but to be a role model.

Creative teaching suggests a very different vision—teachers are knowledgeable and expert professionals and are granted creative autonomy to improvise in their classrooms. People generally choose to become teachers with this vision in mind. Creative teaching results in deeper understanding among learners, a form of learning that is more difficult to quantitatively assess; yet, close

empirical studies of the discourse processes of collaboration have the potential to document these benefits. Implementing creative teaching will require serious, long-term investment in professional development for teachers and administrators, and basic improvements in pre-service teacher education. Yet it has the potential to result in brighter, more motivated, and more effective teachers, and to result in students with deeper understanding and improved creative and social skills.
