

Creativity vs. Curriculum

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Creativity can be defined as “the ability to transcend traditional ideas, rules, patterns, relationships, or the like, and to create meaningful ideas, forms, methods, interpretations, etc.; originality, progressiveness or imagination” (Dictionary.com). Each of these descriptions are outcomes which students are often expected to execute throughout their educational years. Creativity is a gift that cannot be taught, but one that must be fostered from each individual (Jesson, 2012. p7). A quality or skill that is unique to one’s person. Although students’ creativity has always been an important role within the education system, it has most recently become lost behind the overwhelming importance of teaching the set curriculum. It is articulated by many teachers that students often stray from expressing their creative abilities in fear of receiving a poor evaluation. It is situations like this that should cause for society and its educators to take a step back, allowing them to ponder how creativity in the education system has been lost. To reconsider and further examine creativity’s essential role and successes within education.

Creativity has multiple roles in the educational process which aim to foster and facilitate the educational learning development of both students and educators. However, due to pressure on the educational system to achieve curriculum and assessment outcomes, creativity has therefore been given secondary standing. As a result, creativity being intended for individuals to develop their own personal learning style has become overlooked. Teachers feel the inability to creatively present their lessons due to the overwhelming pressure to meet the curriculum expectations (Denovan, 2019). Having spoken with multiple teachers within my practicum school, it was very clearly presented that they believe it is difficult to foster the creativity of students with such strict guidelines (Denovan, 2019).

As a pre-service teacher who has little self-experience with creativity and its role in education, I felt it would be fascinating to consider it through the eyes of an experienced teacher. Having contacted my cooperating teacher, I asked two questions: What is your thought on creativity and its role in the education system? And, do you believe creativity in the education system has been lost in any way? Not to my surprise, she felt as though creativity no longer played the same role in the education system that it used to. From observing Monday classes, students appeared to be partaking in what looked like creative activities. However, when sitting down with my cooperating teacher she expressed that if not for the curriculum she would be doing activities and lessons with the students a little different. Although she stated she has only been in the system for 10 years, she felt that “creativity is stifled” (Forde, 2019). She emphasized on the idea that “there is such a focus on meeting curriculum outcomes, data collection and analysis, that creativity tends to be put on the back burner” (Forde, 2019). When examining Gene Derrell’s *Creativity in Education*, he stated “many people are busy measuring, testing, and identifying the products of creativity. In being so engaged in the outcomes of creative endeavor, they fail to comprehend the significance of the process”. I felt this reinforced to the idea of the importance that is being held on the curriculum. In addition, Forde stated that “the education system moved away from play based learning long ago and that has negatively impacted creativity in the primary years” (Forde, 2019). While searching for texts related to my chosen topic, I found *Play, Playfulness, Creativity and Innovation*, *Creativity in Education*, and *The Importance of Play-Based Learning* were three texts that supported Ms. Forde’s belief of the importance of play and how creativity has become secondary importance.

Similar to Ms. Forde’s comments, Ms. Crammond had similar opinions. She also expressed that the education system strayed from using play based learning in the curriculum,

but that it is slowly making its return. Through discussions with experienced educators, it is evident that play based learning is an important aspect to maintaining positive class outcomes. It is a method which allowed teachers leeway to creatively articulate lessons rather than simply focusing on achieving set benchmarks. Crammond continued by saying she felt that ‘play’ is what allowed students to be creative. That “creativity not being on the forefront today as it used to be has affected how students perform” (Crammond, 2019). Continuing our conversation, she expressed that due to high expectations on curriculum and outcomes which are to be covered, teachers feel “letting them be creative has to be done through the curriculum itself otherwise we aren’t covering what needs to be covered” (Crammond, 2019). This causes many educators to feel guilty and as though they need to justify themselves and their ways of teaching. Finally, Crammond revealed that a teacher’s willingness to allow creativity is partially dependent on if they have a secured contract or lots of experience teaching. This bit of information resonated with me. It made me consider to what degree, when I have my own classroom, I would stray from the expectations to allow more of what I believe. I completely reconsidered the approach I will one day need to make. I asked myself questions such as, how can I alter my approach towards teaching the set curriculum, while also allowing students unlimited use of their creative abilities?

From a slightly different perspective, but still focusing on creativity, Sir Ken Robinson’s Ted talk considers the idea that “schools kill children’s creativity”. He expresses that creativity is as important as literacy and should therefore be treated with the same standards (Robinson, 2006). In school, students are taught that it is okay to be wrong, however, are often not the case when receiving poor grades on their work. This causes students to be fearful of stepping outside the box and expressing their creativity when being assessed with such strict outcomes. The

mandatory benchmarks within the curriculum are therefore, as stated by Robinson, “killing students’ creativity”. An educator who allows students to correct their work and learn from their mistakes is incorporating creativity into their outcomes of the curriculum. However, giving students poor grades instead of allowing them the opportunity to fix it, diminishes their creativity rather than enhancing it. Finally, Robinson expresses that “creativity is not something we grow into but yet something we grow out of/are educated out of”. This becomes the underlying role of the educator to decide which they are going to do. This can help us recognise how such a strict desire to achieve the curriculum is causing many students to “grow out of or be educated out of” their creative selves. Evidently the curriculum is of great importance, however, students’ being capable of expressing and enhancing their creativity is of equal importance. In my kindergarten classroom, I enjoy observing how each student is slowly finding their own unique way to express themselves. They are young learners’ eager to be creative and share what they know. It is their opportunity to discover the special gift they hold that makes them different from those who surround them.

Considering the opinions of Forde, Crammond, Denovan, and Robinson, I decided to further inspect my outlook of my kindergarten class and their ability to freely express their creativity. When considering this, I realized that when my students’ complete a math lesson for example, everything is predetermined for them. When they complete an art piece, they all have the same or very similar end results. I was viewing their lessons as fun and creative opportunities for the students, however, they are activities which have set conclusions. Students are told how to do an assignment, given specific materials for the assignment, and little to no time to complete their assignment. In addition, I observed that whether a student is completed their work or not, due to time constraints of the day and the curriculum to complete, it is the educators who makes

tell them when they are completed. Teachers play a primary role in the development of an adolescents creative mind, therefore, allowing students time to create their own unique masterpieces can be a ground breaking achievement in their educational creative development (Crammond, 2019). In contrast, this can be a difficult objective to accomplish with such large class sizes. Teachers are unable to focus their time with each individual student with such large classes. As a former student, it was not uncommon to hear those around you saying that teachers are there to educate and help prepare you for the real world. Thinking more about this made me question why creativity has therefore been put on the back burner? If creativity helps students develop, learn self-worth, and problem solve, etc., I found it difficult to understand how those aspects are any less important than the curriculum? Both objectives are working towards preparing students for the real world (Scolastic). I personally believe that allowing students the opportunity to develop their creative minds is just as important as maintaining the curriculum.

To conclude, having spoken with numerous educators and reading articles, it is understood that creativity has been diminished and curriculum outcomes are now the primary focus. Students are no longer able to freely build upon their creativity due to the high expectations of educators to communicate the curriculum. It has become ever more difficult for both teachers and students to thrive under such conditions. If given the opportunity, every student has the ability to be creative, however, it is finding a way to unearth that ability that can be the greatest challenge. It is the role of an educator to find different ways to reach everyone in their audience, whether the student be a kinesthetic, visual, or auditor learner. It is their role to help reveal, enhance, and develop students' abilities to be creative. Allowing more focus on creativity, and less on the set curriculum, would allow educators to make learning diverse and

fascinating in order to incorporate all students of all ranges. Overall, it takes creativity to inspire creativity.

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