Problems and Issues of the Teaching and Learning of Creativity in Hong Kong Schools

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Abstract

While creativity is now an important skill to be acquired by Hong Kong school pupils, little empirical research has been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching and learning of creativity in the Hong Kong context. Absence is also a knowledge-based critical review of the related problems and issues confronting Hong Kong teachers. Remediating those problems and addressing the issues are necessary to the enhancement of effective teaching and learning of creativity. This paper reviews four fundamental problems and issues, which can be categorized basing on their nature and essence - disciplinary, theoretical, cultural, and managerial - and then presents knowledge-based suggestions and theory-driven solutions, as well as research, professional, and policy implications.

Creativity in Hong Kong school education was still an unexplored area in the 1990s. Then, into the new century, it has finally received due attention from educators and reformers in the current reform context, in which the Curriculum Development Council had issued in June 2001 the document, entitled Learning to Learn, setting “the general directions for curriculum development in Hong Kong” in the first decade of the new millennium, striving to enable school children to “attain all-round development and life-long learning” (p. 1). [Emphasis original] Then, the Curriculum Development Institute (2001, p. 24), identifying nine generic skills to be acquired by students, places a premium on creativity and the development of creative thinking skills.

Given the curriculum policy endorsement, creativity has become a hot topic in Hong Kong school education. Many teachers then attend various seminars and workshops on creativity in teaching and learning. This is seemingly inevitable.
After all, to face the challenge of a new era, teachers should possess and strengthen the qualities of flexibility and creativity of the mind. These assets can enhance a teacher’s ability to present subjects and convey knowledge and skills in an interesting manner, while also taking pleasure in teaching and promoting students to acquire knowledge and skill in becoming more creative. In turn, students would have their creativity potential nurtured and knowledge and skill in creation enhanced. Nevertheless, while some researchers have conducted studies to yield information about creativity in Chinese culture (Chan, 1997), gifted Chinese children (Shi & Zha, 2000), perceived creative personality (Rudowicz & Hui, 1997; Rudowicz & Yue, 2003; Yue & Ho, 2002; Yue & Rudowicz, 2002), teachers’ perception (Chan & Chan, 1999), little empirical research has been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching and learning of creativity in the Hong Kong schooling context. Absence is also the informed critical review of the related problems and issues confronting Hong Kong teachers.

As a teacher educator actively involving in the teaching and promotion of creativity in Hong Kong schooling, I have noted that currently there are various problems and issues confronting both teacher educators and teachers. Remedying these problems and addressing the issues are necessary to effectively enhance creativity as a student-learning outcome with actual impact. This paper represents my effort to help meet these needs basing on empirical data that I had collected over the past five years in the field when I had acted as a teacher educator providing professional support to enhancing teacher creativity at the school level. Data collection was made primarily by means of school visits, classroom observation, informal interviews with teachers and students, and focused group discussions. I strive to highlight in this paper, which in essence is a report of my exploratory study, those critical problems and issues from an ethnographical perspective, and intend to yield a basis for educators to draw knowledge-based suggestions and theory-driven solutions, as well as research, professional, and policy implications.

**FOSTERING CREATIVITY IN HONG KONG SCHOOLS: BARRIERS AND PROBLEMS**

Notwithstanding its under-development in Hong Kong education, creativity has received due attention in the West since the 1930s and been well researched particularly since the 1970s. While creativity in education has now
enhanced credibility as a legitimate research field (Petrowski, 2000), the excitement of the topic to many educational psychologists begins long before its coming of age and long before the publication of the classic, entitled *Handbook of Creativity* (edited by Robert J. Sternberg in 1999), in which 22 chapters prepared by internationally renowned scholars appear.

As educational reformers of Hong Kong have begun to recognize that creativity is essential to the vitality of society, many researchers and teacher educators apt to make reference to the literature on creativity and “borrow” what can be adopted from the theories and models of creativity. The latter is applicable in the Western economic, political, and cultural contexts, though not necessarily feasible in Hong Kong. Problems and issues inevitably surface, of which can be categorized basing on their nature and essence - discipline, theoretical, cultural, and managerial. The discipline and theoretical issues are generic by nature and observable in many other countries, while the cultural and managerial barriers are somewhat idiosyncratic, caused by factors unique in the Hong Kong context.

**The Discipline Issue**

Creativity is an exciting topic in school education for many reasons. Among those is researchers’ acceptance of the assumption that creativity can be taught. It is based on such an assumption that such leading scholars as E. Paul Torrance strive to find the optimal and practice ways to help teachers effectively teach creativity (for Torrance’s position, see Heindel & Furlong, 2000). Then, in the teaching of creativity, typically employed is the discipline-based approach, with which the teacher, relying on the conventional expository mode of learning the teacher teaches students the nature, essence, and features of creativity, creative potential, creative behaviors, and current research findings. In other words, this discipline-based approach calls for the teacher’s sharing with learners the knowledge about what is creativity and how one can strive to become creative.

Admittedly, past research has helped developed a knowledge base and many instruments have also been validated to measure the degree and extent of the creativeness of people. Yet, creativity as a construct in education is not yet fully explored even in the West (Petrowski, 2000). In such a context, the assertion that creativity can be taught leading figure in the field of creativity, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, has
pointed out that children cannot be taught creativity: after all, creativity is caused by many factors, often acting in concert (Heindel & Furlong; Sternberg & Lubart, 1999) and thus learners’ possession of subject matter knowledge about what is creativity is insufficient to ensure the occurrence of creativity. More importantly, whether or not creativity can be and should be taught on a discipline-based approach is uncertain.

Based on frequent and interactive associations with teacher educators and teachers, both pre- and in-service, I have noted that many teacher educators in Hong Kong have taught creativity on a discipline-basis, teaching the theories, enhancement, methods, and models of creativity to the teacher participants; similarly, many teachers teach their students in schools in the same manner. The fallacy is that, rigorously defined, creativity is measured in terms of the originality and practicality of the outcome generated by the “creator-in-action” in the creative process (Coleman & Colbert, 2001), rather than the degree and extent of the mastery of knowledge about creativity or the cultivation of the potential of being creative. Focusing on the subject matter knowledge and the know-how to become creative does not help one become a creative person (Cropley, 2000). By the same token, asking teachers or their students to have ideational fluency, flexibility, originality, elaboration, and sensitivity would merely help them score high on creativity indices, with the high score having no direct bearing on their becoming creative (Amabile, 2001).

Creativity is more than a psychological construct. It is also operationalized in terms of its essence in the domains of productivity, economic value, and impact in the respective trade or industry (Coleman & Colbert, 2001). These important definitional elements, however, often receive little attention from those who teach creativity or strive to foster creativity in teachers and pupils. Often overlooked in the Hong Kong education community are the necessary conditions for enhancing creative outcome: for example, possession of in-depth foundation and procedural knowledge about how to get a particular task done; making reference to the usable knowledge that can be transferred from other fields to get that task done; and the persistence in getting the task done (Starko, 2000).

These necessary conditions being identified in the current literature have two important implications. The first is that one cannot teach creativity out of context – all the teaching and practices must be task-focused while learners need to have relevant knowledge about the task and typical ways to get the
task done. As such, merely teaching the theories, methods, and substance of creativity is not going to help make learners creative. The discipline-based approach employed by teacher educators and teachers should therefore be discarded once the teaching passes the initial stage of providing basic knowledge about creativity.

Instead, creativity as a quality of accomplishment characterized by originality and practical value should be a concept integrated or infused into the subject/skill being taught to teachers (or students) to facilitate their development of, for example, such abilities as evaluation, divergent approaches to production, and redefinition and such creativity dispositions as curiosity, willingness to try, self-confidence, imagination, tolerance for failure, pride in doing things (that they like) right, and interest in what others are doing. Take history education as an example: the teacher concerned should select a series of topics, consider how the content knowledge of each topic can become working knowledge for students to more fully explore problems under the topics, and then formulate problems for students to work on, with the pedagogical goals being that students could intentionally or unintentionally expand their creativity capacity, develop the needed dispositions, and enhance some precious experience in generating meaningful creational experience.

In sum, as Figure 1 shows, the relationship between educational progression (in terms of initial to maturing stages) and the degree and extent of performance (in terms of low and high levels) in the dissemination of content knowledge of creativity is linear at first but, once passing the initial stage, the relationship will level off to a steady development. In comparison, the degree and extent of performance in the integration of the knowledge and skill of creativity in subject matter teaching or learning surges after the early stage of educational progression.

The second important implication is that, even when a creativity-enhanced curriculum is in place, sufficient time must be allocated to the teaching and promotion of creativity in application (in terms of training tasks). After all, the components of creativity include “original thinking, openness to new ideas, ability to tolerate uncertainty and adapt to change, self-esteem, self-motivation, persistence, and enjoying something for its own sake” (Coleman & Colbert, 2001, p. 5). All those attributes and tendencies take time to develop and get reinforced. With reference to the first implication aforementioned, the development of creativity in learners should be a pedagogical goal of the entire
class or grade at the school level. Only with the legitimate and mandatory requirements can teachers be compelled to think about creativity and incorporate creativity in their teaching, reserving sufficient time and delaying judgment for learners' creative behavior in the process of learning a particular subject or topic.

\[ (a) \text{ Dissemination of Content} \\
(b) \text{ Degree and Extent of integration of the knowledge and skill of Creativity:} \]

![Graph showing the relationship between educational progression and degree and extent of performance in creativity.](image)

**Figure 1:** *Relationship between Educational Progression and Degree and Extent of Performance in Creativity*

This further implies that the teacher education curriculum and subject syllabi must be revised to reflect that learning in formal school setting no longer calls for accumulation of knowledge but generic skills that make one capable of eventual self-learning, creative problem-solving, and actualization of one's creativity potentials. Thus, fundamentally, curriculum development, particularly school-based curriculum development, must have the teaching and learning of creativity fully integrated in all subject instruction as well as extracurricular activities. To enhance this full scope integration, a formal policy needs be drawn up and adopted by both the Education and Manpower Bureau of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and school leaders, and the policy has to be systematically and readily resourced and supported.
The Theoretical Constraints in Enhancing Creativity

In enhancing effective teaching and learning of creativity, educators in various parts of the world tend to choose the easy way to accomplish the goal. Thus, the current focus in creativity assessment is primarily on the creativity potential or attributes – that is, the traits and behavioral tendencies of learners in comparison with well-known creative persons. Judgment and measurement paid to the actual outcomes of creation have not been vigorous. The bias in the field towards the application of the Person-Process model, which focuses on creative attributes or potentials and on the production activities, in understanding and promoting learners’ creativity has made the study and teaching of creativity rather superficial. Thus, in many schools in Hong Kong, teachers merely ask their students to come up with new ideas about (or ways of) doing things and then label those acts as creative. They have in effect disregard the essence of well-disciplined, focused creativity – being creative is being able to produce outcome or output that is original and has practical values contributing to their own domain (see Coleman & Colbert, 2001).

One may of course argued that performing a particular task in a “new” way is already an act of creativity: for example, a child studying environmental protection in a general studies class may make an assertion against pollution from an animal’s perspective. After all, even though objectively many other children may have already employed this “new” way, subjectively the child has committed a creative act given his or her ignorance about what others have already done. If the pedagogical goal is to promote learners’ tendency to try out new ways of doing things, then the argument is fine. Besides, adults often incidentally suppress creativity in children by, for example, insisting children to do things the “right way” (Torrance & Goff, 1990). As such, those teachers’ focus on promoting students to do things differently is already a step forward. In the case of teaching and learning of creativity, however, the argument is still fallacious. This is because, rigorously defined, creativity is a construct that, as mentioned earlier, relates to the generating of wider and fuller impact in society, measured in terms of originality and practicality, rather than a term about tapping people’s inclination to do things differently.

Creativity is also regarded as the expression of a higher-level educational skill. It takes substantial effort for schools, teachers, parents, and the community to make students treasure and develop creative thinking. It also takes innovative teaching strategies to nurture children to become more sensitive to
environmental stimuli. Teachers should encourage students to repeatedly tackle objects and ideas and develop their tolerance for new ideas as well as to teach them how to test ideas (Meador, 2001). Yet, the development of these traits, thinking skills, and behavioral tendencies, which are major components of academic creativity (Torrance & Goff, 1990), still do not themselves guarantee the occurrence of creativity. Based on my experience in working with teachers and students, I have to point out the critical need for all learners to look into the significance and value of producing their outcome or output from the creation process, rather than getting satisfied by having something “new” produced. When students mistakenly focus merely on traits and processes, that is, applying only the Person-Process model, they could erroneously steer themselves toward becoming uncreative. After all, one could hardly be considered, by definition, creative if the product or outcome produced lacks the properties that satisfy the criteria of novelty and practicality. I have observed in too many classrooms that teachers have been committing this error. To rectify, the Person-Process model must be discarded, and be replaced by a Person-Process-Product model (Cropley, 2000). In other words, to effectuate creativity education in schools and universities in Hong Kong, learners must have their attention directed to the appropriate traits, to the process of creating, and to the values of the product (outcome or output in form of tangible work, expression, response, inquiry, solution, or even a vision [Giorgis & Johnson, 2001]). Only then can learners have a full exposure to the experience of being creative and fully develop skills that are essential to making creation a reality.

The above is only one step forward. Learners need to recognize that creativity takes more than creative potential and content knowledge of creativity, but the making of various decisions during the problem-solving process (Sternberg, 2000). What is needed next is that learners must be nurtured to make it automatic to ask an utmost important question in the pursuit of becoming creative: “What is it that I am supposed to achieve, bearing what original characteristic and value?” This question is utmost important for one utmost reason. In brief, while creation is an extremely taxing act, not all problems, jobs, missions, and situations call for creativity. Many of these incidents are routine, mechanical, or merely simple, often generating limited marginal benefits and do not require the creative merit. Should learners fail to determine under what conditions or in what situation that novelty and practicality are required, and then merely try to “reinvent the wheel” in pursuing the task on hand, they would become non-rational or even irrational actors. Very often,
this operates at great opportunity cost as they could have reserved the time and energy for other creative acts that deserve their full devotion.

Once the utmost important question is addressed, the learners need to ask a follow-up question: “Do I get what it takes to creatively achieve what I am to achieve?” The question builds on the research in (a) creativity – that below the IQ 120, the more intelligent one is, the more creative one is likely to be (Fuchs-Beauchamp, Karnes, & Johnson, 1993; Starko, 2000) – and (b) multiplicity of giftedness of children – that children have different talents and potentials (Gardner, 1993), and that they would excel when they could focus on what they are best suited to do (Han & Marvin, 2002). The question also draws the learners’ attention to the very fact that creativity is not for everyone, and someone is more creative in a particular situation while uncreative in other situation. Researches and teacher educators can therefore study the development of creative ability of students by examining classroom activities within and across disciplines. Hence, creativity must not be taught (or trained) unconditionally and non-selectively in all classes and to all students. Besides, as mentioned earlier, there is still a debate in the field about whether or not creativity can be taught.

All in all, it is perfectly all right for teachers to make efforts to create for their students an environment that both supports students’ creativity potential and develops the personal characteristics that are indispensable to achieving creativity. Yet, teachers also need to place a premium on preparing students for meaningful creative act. As such, the current mode of the teaching and learning of creativity should move from the decontextualized (i.e., non-task-specific) model to the contextualized (i.e., task-specific) model as Figure 2 depicted. It is with the students’ development of knowledge, skill, and ability in the actual creation process that they can be better prepared for enhancing the disciplined, focused, real world creativity.

The Cultural Barriers

It is much desirable that Hong Kong teachers can learn the various ways to infuse creative thinking in the curriculum content of languages, mathematics, sciences, social studies, arts, physical education and the like so that student learning could be enhanced, as in other developed countries (see, e.g., Swartz & Parks, 1994). Unfortunately, in reality, student learning can hardly be enhanced even when teachers are competent in teaching creativity. The
primary cause of this predicament is the cultural constraints in Hong Kong schools.

![Diagram of Decontextualized Teaching and Learning of Creativity vs Contextualized Teaching and Learning of Creativity]

**Figure 2: From the Decontextualized Teaching and Learning of Creativity to the Contextualized Teaching and Learning**

Two sets of cultures are prevailing, neutralizing the efforts to effectively enhance the teaching and learning of creativity. The first is the sociological culture of mediocrity. S. K. Lau (1997), a renowned sociologist and currently the Head of the Central Policy Unit of the HKSAR Government, has noted that the fabric of the Hong Kong community is found loosening since the early 1990s. According to Lau, the community has undergone "momentous socioeconomic changes since the 1980s" (p. 426). He reported:

Anxieties about an uncertain political future have already produced an exodus of people, prominent among whom are the better educated and those with professional and managerial skills... Sensing their collective powerlessness, Hong Kong people are using every means to safeguard the future of themselves and their families, including illegal, illicit or shady methods... The rise of interpersonal and social conflicts on the one hand, and the erosion of respect for authorities of various kind ... have together produced a social milieu suffused
with greed, querulousness, disorientation, sullenness, cynicism, small-mindedness, intolerance and nastiness. These are all signs of a fin de siecle mentality. (Lau, 1997, pp. 429-30)

With a fin de siecle mentality, Hong Kong people are concerned with enriching themselves in the most efficient and effective manner, disregarding ethics and collective interest and social values. Many of them are not concerned with excellence, while it is already a blessing when some do try to do their jobs right. Mediocrity has become a hallmark of Hong Kong (Leung 2000), and thus rarely could we find too many teachers and students willing and eager to stay with problems longer, to develop expertise, and to acquire operational knowledge when pursuing problem-solving. All these attitudes and behavioral tendencies violate the guidelines in enhancing creativity as discussed in the preceding pages.

The observation reported above, however, is hardly a basis for arguing that all teachers and students are mediocre. But then, as reported by the HKSAR Government’s Audit Commission (Sing Tao Daily, 22 November 2002), the discrepancies in academic performance among schools in Hong Kong are far too large, reflecting that there are indeed many schools, teachers, and students performing relatively poor and that they still have a fin de siecle mentality and are hardly prepared for the teaching and/or learning of creativity. Empirical research is thus needed to delineate in detail the problems caused by the fin de siecle mentality, identify the causes and consequences of the problems, and give remedial suggestions.

The second set is the pragmatic culture in Hong Kong schooling. Morris (1996) has rightly noted that curriculum reform must take into account the factor of public examinations. In Hong Kong schools, making the grade is vital to students, teachers, school administrators, and parents. This orientation towards ensuring students’ passing (or excelling in) public examinations affects “how” and “why” schools focus on “what” in the schooling process (Morris, 1996). There are exceptions - those students who give up at the early stage of schooling to survive in the examination-oriented education system, as well as their teachers and parents who, subjectively or well grounded, find it hopeless to try to push the students, whom they consider as failures.

As most stakeholders still give it a try, preparing for examination becomes paramount; often to the extreme that teachers teach and students learn only
what is relevant to satisfy the criteria of public examinations, with that the realization of creative potential becomes difficult or almost next to impossible (Runco, 2001). If the assessment of creativity is readily available, one may expect that teachers and students would strive to enhance creativity in teaching and learning. This, however, is more than a luxury. Even in the West, one could hardly find valid instruments that objectively measure the degree and extent of achievements in creativity. In contrast, instruments for measuring creativity potential are plentiful (Torrance & Goff, 1989). Yet, creativity potential is a merely necessary condition that could not induce chemical reaction unless other factors - such as technical skill, field knowledge, mental health, and opportunity (Cropley, 2000) as well as hard work and love of a craft (Amabile, 2001) - are at work.

This school culture differs from the aforementioned sociological culture in that the cause can be more easily removed – all the government needs to do is to depreciate public examinations and employ sets of assessment instruments that can have benchmarking effects on the promotion of commitment to effective learning and teaching. The government has been making moves to reduce the negative impact of public examinations (see, e.g., Education Commission, 2000). A good example is the recent restructuring of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (http://cant01.hkeaa.edu.hk/hkea/new_look_home.asp), which reflects the government’s commitment to have genuine assessment replacing the traditional examination system, which emphasizes rote learning and promotes examination-oriented teaching in the classroom. Until an operational and effective assessment system is in place, the washback effect – that is, the extent to which the use of tests and examinations influences the decision-making of teachers and learners in the teaching-learning processes - on teaching and learning in Hong Kong remains, as analyzed by L. Cheng (1997, 1998, 1999).

The Managerial Problems

How companies can encourage creativity in their employees is a management question that must be addressed in the new century (Simpson, 2001; Weiss, 2001). At the school level, the issue is more complicated because administrators need to find ways to encourage creativity in teachers as well as ways to ensure that teachers in return can encourage creativity in their students.
Unfortunately, in Hong Kong schools, administrators face many barriers, which can be classified as managerial barriers. In brief, Hong Kong has already progressed from top-down management to school-based management (Cheng, Mok, & Tsui, 2002). Yet, the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) (formerly the Education Department), as noted by the Audit Commission (Sing Tao Daily, 22 November 2002), has continuously issued many decrees and instructions to schools, to the extent that even EMB’s school inspectors themselves lost count of the decrees and instruction that they need to ensure faithful implementation or compliance at the school level. This continuous top-down control and interference reinforce school administrators’ tendency to do things in the “right way” as prescribed from above, defying the basics of creativity – for example, willing to try out new ideas by deviating from orthodox practices. In turn, school culture is still fostered in ways that the authoritarian approach to management can prevail, of which contradicts the convictions and beliefs in fostering creativity. The consequence is that the school culture and management system are deprived of the liveliness and vibration that creativity brings.

Teachers are also under exceptional stress. On the one hand, educational reform has become a way of life since 1997, pushing teachers to their limit in adapting “to” and “with” the various organizational and managerial changes in schools. And on the other hand, curriculum reform, particularly school-based curriculum development, has compelled teachers to seriously consider if it is indeed rational for them to faithfully follow the guidelines and recommendations of the reform initiatives from the government. Angela Mok-Cheung (2001) has vividly reported:

(Are teachers) ... willing to change their teaching styles and methodology when they themselves have been overloaded by the continuously increasing workload, both inside and outside the classroom? Research (see, e.g., Carless, 1998; Carless & Wong, 1999) has shown that Hong Kong teachers lack spare capacity to reengineer their work process. In effect, workload reduction is a necessary condition for promoting their changing teaching styles and methodology as the changes would inevitably induce cost – more inputs from teachers. (p. 199)

In short, as Elliott and Morris (2001) have highlighted, educational reform in a massive scale must take into account what teachers can accommodate and must have sufficient resources allocated to support the realization of the reform vision. The situation, however, has
teachers are being overwhelmed by the mounting reform pressure, lacking resources and capacity to cope with the reform demands from the government. As Cheng, Tsui, and Chow (2001) have underscored, “teachers … have great difficulties to implement the policy of enhancing student-centered learning when they have more than, for instance, in Hong Kong, 40 students in the classroom, while having an unreasonably heavy workload and lacking sufficient administrative supports” (p.23). Inevitably, commitment of effort to major learning endeavors must be matched by support from school leaders. But then, school administrators also lack the autonomy, support from the government, and the know-how and ability to face the various challenges and crises caused not only by education reform but socio-economic changes in Hong Kong as well. When the management capacity of schools is inadequate, more problems surface, in turn creating more stress on teachers.

All in all, under this management condition, it is difficult to ask teachers to fully cultivate creativity with knowledge and devotion in them and then in their students. That is why, understandably, many teachers employ the discipline-based approach and Person-Process model in teaching creativity.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As mentioned, there are various problems and issues confronting both teacher educators and teachers. To remedy the problems and address the issues are necessary to effectively enhance creativity as an outcome of student learning. In the preceding section, I have highlighted the four types of critical problems and issues. Basing on a critical review of literature and empirical data collected from educators in the field, as well as my reflections of my current teaching, I have strived to give a basis for educators and policy-makers to draw some knowledge-based suggestions and theory-driven solutions, as well as research, professional, and policy implications, when discussing the discipline and theoretical issues. Here, with reference to the discussion on other issues about cultural and managerial barriers and constraints, we would have a fuller picture of creativity in school education (see Figure 3).

The classification as depicted in Figure 3 helps highlight the proper mix of the elements involved in the teaching and learning of creativity: For example, in the early stage of educational progression, one would expect that teachers’ emphasis should employ the discipline-based approach, focusing more on the
content knowledge of creativity and placing a premium on subjective values of the outcome/product from students’ creation process. In contrast, as students progress, teachers’ emphasis should be on the integrated approach as advocated in this paper, focusing on students’ constructive experience in creativity and placing a premium on objective values of the outcome/product. The proper mix of the elements involved in the teaching and learning of creativity, however, depends also on the nature and essence of the subject matter to be learned by students as well as the degree and extent of the students’ talents, interests, and pedagogical needs. Further research is therefore much needed, just as noted in the field (Ripple, 1999).

Figure 3: The Creativity Matrix to Enhance Teaching and Learning - Classification in Terms of Approach, Focus, and Value of Creativity

I have underscored in the discussion on cultural barriers that the element of the public-examination orientation must be removed. Here, I can add that the cultural problem at the societal level – the prevalence of a fin de siècle mentality – is more by nature an ideological problem that can be addressed only by the formulation of a new social ideology in Hong Kong about what is in life that Hong Kong people should strive for. The irreparable damages that
an absence of such a much-needed ideology can induce have been discussed by Hong Kong social scientists (see, e.g., Chow, 1992; Leung, 2000). It is just hopeful that social scientists will soon help Hong Kong develop the needed ideology to revitalize the mentality of Hong Kong people and in turn facilitate their quest for creativity. Otherwise, no matter how hard teachers try, most of their students would be unable to cultivate their own creativity potential and unable to make their production, as well as products, creative. Then, ultimately, Hong Kong may, as Leung (2001) has projected, get defeated in the competition in the Asia-Pacific, particularly with China, and then subsumes into a third-rate city in China in the coming years.

While the future of Hong Kong may seem bleak in view of the propositions presented in the preceding paragraphs, one may need to remember that history is often made by a few leaders who could successfully draw followers in large numbers to reform their society. Thus, Hong Kong may still get its way through the current mess (for a review of the current problems confronting Hong Kong, please refer to the Chief Executive’s 2003 Policy Address at http://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/) particularly when creativity in the younger generation is treasured.

The future hope pretty much builds on teachers: after all, they as the “glorious engineers cultivating human souls” (Li, 1999, p. 184) are the ones in the best position to equip their students with the needed knowledge, skill, and ability to actualize human potentials for making Hong Kong an economically competitive city and a socially stable region inductive to further human growth and development. As a teacher educator actively involved in the teaching of creativity, I have solicited opinions from many teachers and school administrators. Many of them are very committed and devoted to quality education while administrators are very supportive, notwithstanding the fact that their hands are tied. Given my identifying for many teachers the critical problems and issues of the teaching and learning of creativity in Hong Kong, as reviewed in this paper, most of the teachers involved have become more perceptive in how to approach creativity in Hong Kong education, while many of them are better equipped to deal with those critical problems.

In the past, teachers often wondered why so many students were not interested in creation or the creative act. They now realize that too often students are being hard-pressed by their parents to devote time and energy to preparing for public examinations, rather than school projects that promote creativity. The
latter do not help them get good grade in public examinations. Teachers now also realize that the effective teaching and learning of creativity calls for full integration of creativity in the school curriculum, rather than reciting content knowledge to their students and asking them to, for example, simultaneously enhance convergent and divergent thinking, which is meaningless when the thinking is not built on some operational knowledge of the task on hand.

The above signs of progress, however, are insufficient. More teachers, as well as school administrators and policy-makers, need to be familiar with the critical problems and issues discussed here. Or else, they would be unable to find their way out from those barriers and constraints. They, nevertheless, need further help from researchers. In brief, researchers need to identify for teachers the various factors that encourage creativity in teachers and students or the factors that hinder creativity development. Regarding the former, it is obvious that researchers should help, for example, (a) the development of a construct-valid assessment system for assessing and benchmarking teachers’ and students’ progress and achievement in creativity; (b) ensure the presence of a host of factors that help promote the transfer of academic creativity to disciplined, focused real world creativity; and (c) strive to reinforce the necessary and contributory conditions that full-scale support from Hong Kong society, particularly its members who are major stakeholders in creativity education (such as parents and employers).

Regarding the latter, Hong Kong, just as other cities or countries in the Asia-Pacific, such as Singapore (Tan, 2000), has yet to catch up in the race of research on creativity. More work is needed. In particular, there is the critical need for researchers to identify for teachers and reformers factors that negatively affect creativity development in Hong Kong, including, for example, (a) the psychological and social-psychological factors that induce fears for being creative, (b) the difficulties in establishing a typology of creativity at different educational levels, (c) the personality traits and types that teachers and students have developed in the current educational context that defy efforts to promoting creativity, and (d) the features and characteristics of home environments that do not foster or discourage creativity in students.

By identifying for teachers the various factors that encourage creativity in teachers and students as well as the factors that hinder creativity development, researchers would help generate an empirical basis for us to ask more critically and learning creativity in Hong Kong
schooling: How can we transform the current teaching and learning from the foci on “academic creativity” and “content knowledge focused teaching and learning of creativity” to focusing on “disciplined, focused real world creativity,” which is measured in terms of originality and practical values and on the application of the model of “Person-Process-Product focused teaching and learning of creativity”? Answers to this critical question are likely to call for a host of system level and site level reform measures, including those being discussed in the preceding sections. Empirical research, particularly action research at the school level and clinical experiments, is much needed.

In this context, teacher educators need to get actively involved in both the research and professional development domains. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the problems and issues of the teaching and learning of creativity in Hong Kong teacher education, but given the knowledge, perspective, and experience, teacher educators are for sure in the best position to find out practical ways to foster creativity in school curriculum and encourage creativity in teachers. In view of some research findings (see, e.g., Huber, 2000; Sternberg 2000) suggesting that average people do have potential to become creative when they receive proper training, responsible teacher educators and teachers should strive to help foster creativity in school pupils, notwithstanding the debate on whether or not creativity can be taught: after all, they would not want to reject the truthful hypothesis at great cost.

In the pursuit, a guiding principle that must be observed by teacher educators is that rigidity in the classroom must be reduced, as rigidity is hardly conducive to the realization of teachers’ creativity potential (Starck, 2000; Kimbell 2000). Then, teacher educators should redesign the curriculum to advocate the joy and excitement of being a creative teacher and to enhance teachers’ own range of capabilities to conduct creative teaching. By doing so, teachers can then be better prepared to support their pupils to develop some core characteristics of creativity, such as originality, innovativeness, thinking and observation skills, flexibility, willingness to try, self confidence, and imagination (Rudowicz & Yue, 2000). Moreover, teachers can be trained to provide their pupils with learning experiences that are research-proven and to design school-based curriculum to develop imagination (Egan, 1992), fluency, flexibility (Goertz, 2000; Runco, 2001), adaptability (Simpson, 2001), tolerance for new ideas (Meador 2001), and elaboration (Beattie, 1997), which are essential to fostering creativity in pupils. Furthermore, as educational problems are unique in different schooling context, teacher educators should
also actively engage in action research, with or without the partnership of teachers and school administrators, in finding solutions to address those idiosyncratic problems in different schools (and teachers) facing unique problems.

In sum, teacher educators play a pivotal role in the teaching and learning of creativity at the school level in helping teachers, students, and Hong Kong become creative; yet, as Wang, Duan, and You (1997) have pointed out, the task of fostering creativity in teachers and eventually their students is hardly simple.

CONCLUSION

If we aspire to become a change agent in educational reform, we need to re-think our teaching and learning methods through multiple perspectives and re-construct a richer and more rounded view about the essence of education. To be creative is not necessarily to aim for a highly developed personal attribute, but to strive for a heightened awareness that induces flexibility, energy, and vividness. It is difficult to draw a distinction between a “creative” teacher and an “ordinary” teacher. Creativity does not license the misuse of a teacher’s professionalism. Only a responsible, caring attitude toward teaching makes for teaching competence of any kind. The teaching and learning of creativity should produce meaningful connections, build momentum in teacher learning and transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries of the school curriculum. Hong Kong teachers and students need creativity and Hong Kong needs creative teachers and students. I am aspired to believe that when stakeholders make research-based and theory-driven efforts, effective teaching and learning of creativity in Hong Kong can be enhanced, while also providing direction for future improvements in education.

NOTES

¹The nine generic skills underscored by the Curriculum Development Council (2001) are “collaboration skills, communication skills, creativity, critical think skills, information technology skills, numeracy skills, problem-solving skills, self-management skills, and study skills” (p. vi). Further, “... a priority focus will be focused on the development of three... namely, communication skills, creativity and critical thinking skills” (p. 25). [Emphasis original]
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REFERENCES


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