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The effect of teachers’ emotional and perceptual characteristics on creative learning

Gunseli Orhon a *

*aAkdeniz University, Faculty of Education, Antalya 07058, Turkey

Abstract

Teachers play two major roles in the educational process. First, they are expected to facilitate learning environments with opportunities for students to discover their individual talents and transform these talents into skills toward self-actualization. Second, teachers are perceived as role models encouraging students to become creative individuals in society. Teachers may face conflicts between the limitations of the cultural framework and universal educational aims. Conflicts between a teacher’s cultural surrounding and universal educational objectives influence their perceptions and emotions about everyday creativity in the classroom. Perceptual and emotional processes go along, but they have different influences on teachers’ actions. The Perceptual- Emotional Model discusses the situation.

1. Introduction

Culture controls our thinking styles and our feelings. We develop a perspective on the world via experiences which we and our ancestors get from the environment, develop value systems emerging from our experiences and transmit them to young people. Gradually, we create cultural identities from unique life experiences and develop our cultural structure through generations.

THE EFFECT OF CULTURE ON EDUCATION

As education plays an important role in cultural development, the quality of educational policies needs special focus. Should we protect our cultural values in education? Or should we insist on change? How can we decide on the optimum balance between these extremes? Culture seems to play a crucial role to answer these questions.

In individualistic cultures where each person’s development is shaped by his/her own unique characteristics, educational philosophies are person- oriented. Individuals in such cultures equate their values with their individual actions and believe that whatever they do will change the present and the future. However, in collectivistic cultures where group values overlap individual potential, the philosophy is oriented towards the importance of the group. These cultures emphasize group values and may ignore the importance of individual potential for the present and
future. In collectivistic cultures, educational objectives aim to educate youngsters to become future conformist citizens who will protect the status quo, while people in individualistic cultures are educated to become individuals who will create innovations for the present and the future, modifying societal rules according to current conditions and developmental needs.

Education in collectivistic cultures might be regarded as a means for political decision makers to establish their ideologies through future generations. Power groups with a particular belief and ideology can establish formal and informal educational institutions to make their beliefs dominant in future generations. Conflicts may arise between religious and secular schools, or controversies between public schools emphasizing national values and missionary schools emphasizing the values of foreign cultures. These schools have sometimes opposing missions and aims, which may create polarization in the culture, and this may lead to sub-cultures who resist each other’s values and ethical priorities, that affect the learning of young children. Conflicting sub-cultures seek to spread their ideologies through collectivistic systems which require the unconditional loyalty of their members.

THE ROLE OF TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS IN CREATIVE LEARNING

Teachers play two major roles in the educational process. First, they are expected to facilitate learning environments with opportunities for students to discover their individual talents and transform these talents into skills toward self-actualization. Second, teachers are perceived as role models who encourage students to become creative individuals in society. Thus, teachers themselves are expected to acquire creative thinking skills. However, this may not be the case much of the time in practice. In earlier times, the role of teachers was perceived to be primarily as agents of bureaucratic state expansion or religious power (Gillingham, 2006; Masanori, 1998; Shkedi and Horenzyk, 1995). Socrates was accused of instigating the opposition of his students to the ideological and religious values of the state (Bruell, 1999). Even today, teachers in most countries are manipulated to implement the curriculum based on the values and ideologies emphasized by the government.

Teachers may face conflicts between the limitations of the cultural framework and universal educational aims. This is paradoxical, because teachers are also important contributors to the creation of culture. In cases where teachers are involved in a particular cultural background for a long time, they may fail to separate their professional identities from their cultural commitments or identities. Thus they may perceive, evaluate and judge about children’s developmental characteristics within the boundaries of that culture (Celep and Bulbul, 2003; Gordon, 1999).

Conflicts between a teacher’s cultural surrounding and universal educational objectives influence their perceptions and emotions about everyday creativity in the classroom. Perceptual and emotional processes go on most of the time in daily lives but I believe that they have different influences on teachers’ actions. This is discussed on the Perceptual-Emotional Model I developed (Oral, 2008). Fig. 1 summarizes the model.

The first dimension of the model includes teachers’ perceptions of creative development. We perceive the world through our individual schemata, derived from our experiences and observations. Experiences based on facts and knowledge lead us to frame perception. When teachers have inadequate schemata about creativity due to inadequate practice or knowledge, they may misjudge creative behaviors or learning needs.

The second dimension in the model is teachers’ optimism or pessimism. How teachers feel about their students’ creativity is an important determinant for students’ creative development in the future, as creativity may be accompanied by novelty, which many teachers don’t feel comfortable with. When teachers have pessimistic feelings, their responses to signs of creativity, for example, asking frequent questions, independence, nonconformity to classroom rules and divergent thinking, might also be negative. When teachers have optimistic emotions, they respond positively to the same behaviors.

When the teacher is optimistic with the concept of creativity, yet has distorted or missing knowledge/practice about creativity, he/she may fail to notice real talents in real amounts, overemphasize student creativity; reward ordinary products too much; and establish unreal aims and losing time to reach them. Insisting on piano lessons for children with little or no interest or talent can be a good example. As a result, the educational process may end up with subjective evaluation of products, distorted perception of talents, and real creativity may be left unnoticed.

When the teacher is optimistic about creativity and also is well-donated about about it, he/she identifies children’s talents correctly; facilitates the learning environment through resource management; searches for the ways of developing potential based on continuous and objective observation and universal values of behavior. As a
result, the educational process ends up with creative learning, self actualization, transforming creative potential into ideas, and solutions and products in society.

The following characteristics of teachers include optimistic attitudes in terms of emotions and are focused on knowledge / lack of knowledge about creativity.

When the teachers are pessimistic on creativity on the other hand, the results differ in terms of having knowledge about creativity and lack of knowledge.

When the teacher is pessimistic about creativity and doesn’t have adequate knowledge about the concept, he/she may end up with failure to transform creative potential into skills or products; misconceptualizing creative characteristics as threats for the existence of status quo; devaluation of creativity; and even punishment of creativity or enforcement of students to conform majority. Thus the educational process ends up with meaningless fear of novelty, failure to utilize creative potential in society, and resistance against innovations and change.

When the teacher is pessimistic yet knows creativity theories and practices, s/he may perceive all talents correctly but gives priority only to those required most by the society; such as pushing a musically gifted child into medical school due to high prestige in society. In such situations, the educational process may end up with failure of self-actualization and conformity to cultural expectations and needs, as well as neglecting creative needs and potential.

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<tr>
<th>Optimistic</th>
<th>Pessimistic</th>
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Figure 1: The Perceptual-Emotional Model of Teacher Reactions to Creative Outputs (Oral, 2008)
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References


