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Creative teachers and creative teaching

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Chapter objectives

By the end of this chapter you should have:

- **widened your knowledge of theory and practice about creative teachers and creative teaching;**
- **considered your own personal qualities and emerging pedagogic practice in relation to creativity;**
- **reflected upon specific features of creative pedagogic practice and identified ways forward.**

This chapter addresses the following Professional Standards for the award of QTS: **Q1, Q2, Q4, and Q27.**

Introduction

What are the key features of creative teachers' pedagogical practice and just how do teachers teach creatively and teach for creativity, thus fostering children's creative learning? This chapter seeks to respond to these questions putting forward a three-dimensional model in which creative practice is seen as a product of the dynamic interplay between the teacher's personal qualities, the pedagogy they adopt and the ethos developed in the class and school. A number of key features of creative practice are highlighted including: curiosity, making connections, autonomy and ownership as well as originality. These are explored and the difference between good teaching and creative teaching is examined.

Exploring creative teaching

Although in the late 90s the literacy and numeracy strategies in England (DfEE, 1998; DfEE, 1999) heralded a move towards increasingly centralised conceptions of classroom pedagogy over the last decade many teachers have exercised their professional artistry and sought to teach more creatively and nurture children's creativity (Jeffrey and Woods, 2003; Grainger, Gooch and Lambirth, 2005; Craft, Cremin and Burnard, 2007). They have been encouraged in their endeavours by numerous government reports and recommendations (DfES, 2003; OFSTED, 2003) as well as support materials (QCA, 2005a, 2005b) which have tried to encourage teachers to adopt more creative approaches to the curriculum and to teach for creativity as well as teach creatively.

Distinctions between creative teaching and teaching for creativity tend to highlight the teacher orientation of the former and the learner orientation of the latter. Creative teaching is seen to involve teachers in making learning more interesting and effective and using imaginative approaches in the classroom. Teaching for creativity by contrast is seen to involve teachers in identifying children's creative strengths and fostering their creativity.

The National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education suggests that the first task in teaching for creativity is 'to encourage young people to believe in their creative potential, to engage their sense of possibility and to give them the confidence to try' (NACCCE, 1999, p90). The same challenge might well be set your education department lecturers who need to help new entrants to the profession like you to recognise and believe in your own creative potential and enable you to take risks as you learn to teach creatively and teach for creativity. In the process they will be developing your professional awareness, understanding and capacity for making connections between your own creativity and that of the children you teach.

There has been considerable research into creative teaching, some of which focuses on people's perceptions of creative educators, and tends to result in long lists of particular character traits and propensities which such teachers possess (e.g. Fryer, 1996; Beetlestone, 1998). Other research makes use of close observation and analysis of creative teachers, resulting in case study accounts of individuals' classroom practice (e.g. Jeffrey and Woods, 2003; Grainger, Barnes and Scoffham, 2004, 2006; Cremin, Burnard, and Craft, 2006). The research work of Woods and Jeffrey has been particularly influential in this area in documenting the creative response of primary professionals to the changing face of education (Woods, 1995; Woods and Jeffrey, 1996; Jeffrey and Woods, 2003; Jeffrey, 2006) and in identifying features of creative teaching, namely relevance, ownership, control and innovation.

In seeking to become a creative teacher you will want to widen your understanding of your own creativity, and the imaginative approaches and repertoire of engaging activities that you can employ in order to develop the children's capacity for original ideas and action. You will also want to exert your professional autonomy, learning to be flexible and responsive to different learners and diverse learning contexts. For as Joubert (2001, p21) observes:

Creative teaching is an art. One cannot teach teachers didactically how to be creative; there is no fail-safe recipe or routine. Some strategies may help to promote creative thinking, but teachers need to develop a full repertoire of skills which they can adapt to different situations.

In a study of creative teachers, funded by Creative Partnerships Kent, the university-based team sought to investigate the presence of commonalities between teachers who were identified as highly creative professionals in both primary and secondary schools (Grainger, Barnes and Scoffham, 2006). This case study research, acknowledging the close relationship between teacher and learner creativity, focused on the nature of creative practice. It proposed an emergent creative teaching framework, highlighting three inter-related dimensions of creative practice: namely teachers' personal characteristics, their pedagogy and the class/school ethos (see Figure 3.1). Research in the field of creative teaching has highlighted different aspects of these dimensions and this is now explored, before a closer examination is made of the core features of creative teachers' practice.

REFLECTIVE TASK

Consider the many teachers whose practice you have observed in your training so far. Which do you consider to be the most creative teacher and why? Discuss your reasons with a colleague. What does your discussion tell you about how you currently perceive creative teachers? Is there a tendency for us to assume creative teachers are extroverts, flamboyant professionals? There is no evidence to suggest this is the case.

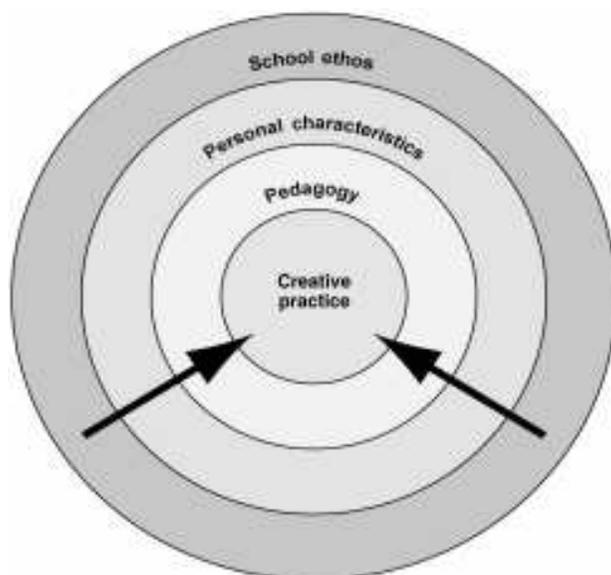


Figure 3.1 Diagram to represent a framework for creative teaching

Personal qualities

It is extremely difficult to identify the personality characteristics of creative individuals, although some researchers have sought to list features, including for example: curiosity, independence in judgement and thinking, intuition, idealism, risk taking and a capacity to become preoccupied with tasks (Torrance, 1965). In drawing together the findings from a number of studies, Stein (1974) again notes curiosity, independence, the capacity to become preoccupied, persistence and assertiveness, as well as domain expertise and unconventional tendencies.

Research in educational contexts reveals that confidence, enthusiasm and commitment are common qualities in creative teachers (Beetlestone 1998; Jones and Wyse, 2004; Grainger *et al.*, 2004) and that a sense of the self as a creative being is an important aspect of this (Sternberg, 1997). There is also some agreement that a key source of teacher self-confidence is secure subject knowledge (Gardner, 1999; QCA, 2003).

Creative teachers are noted by many writers to be comfortable with risk-taking in both their private and professional lives (Boden, 2001; Craft, 2001; Ofsted, 2003). Arguably they are at ease with demonstrating their own creative engagement and exposing the ambiguity and uncertainty inherent in creative endeavour (Halpin, 2003), and are likely to perceive failure as a learning opportunity. Several writers also emphasise the combination of childlike play and exploration with adult-like self awareness, and stress that such teachers are individuals who are curious (QCA, 2005a; Richart, 2002). In addition, Woods and Jeffrey (1996) highlight the humanist approach of creative teachers, their openness to emotions and feelings, and their strong moral and political investment in their work.

In noting personal creative characteristics from the research literature, however, we must remember that creativity can also be collaborative since ideas emerge from joint thinking and interaction (John-Steiner, 2000).

REFLECTIVE TASK

In order to foster creativity in the children you will want to model and share a range of creative experiences from your life, during which you engaged in using your imagination and developed ideas with others. Consider what insights you have learnt from problem-solving contexts for example, when you had to find and shape unexpected solutions. How might you share these? Bear in mind children need to know that creativity can involve challenge and even discomfort as well as pleasure and play, and that perseverance plays a part.

Pedagogic practice

Creative teachers' pedagogic practice is seen to be most effective when they help children find relevance in their work either through practical application or by making emotional and personal connections (Abbs, 2002; Woods and Jeffrey, 1996). Although it might be argued emotional engagement is a requirement of all good teaching, creative teaching depends upon it more because creativity is, as Csikszentmihalyi (2002) observes, a 'central source of meaning in our lives'. Identifying the purpose and relevance of work may help prompt 'flow', which Csikszentmihalyi notes is a common characteristic of creative people.

Practice which fosters children's self direction and agency as learners is also recognised as central (Grainger *et al.*, 2006; Jeffrey and Woods, 2003), this arguably arises most effectively from a pedagogy which seeks to involve them as co-participants, offering work that is of personal significance and ensuring there is time and space to experiment. Such an inclusive approach (Jeffrey and Craft, 2004) expects and fosters independence from the very earliest years of schooling (Cremin *et al.*, 2006).

Flexibility of style and pace is another recorded characteristic of a creative pedagogy (Grainger *et al.*, 2004; Halpin, 2003; Nickerson, 1999). Government documents agree that varying the tempo, allowing time for students to have their say, a willingness to be spontaneous and the desire to give each child an opportunity to excel, mark out those who are called creative (DfES, 2003; QCA, 2005a). Research into possibility thinking as the engine of creativity suggests that teachers pausing to stand back and observe learner engagement is another potent pedagogical tool (Cremin *et al.*, 2006).

Another strategy seen as common is the frequent use of open-ended questions, the promotion of speculation and the generation of possibilities (Craft, 2001; Robertson, 2002). It is suggested that teachers who reflect back questions asked of them will be developing a more generative and open stance in children (Cremin *et al.*, 2006). Fostering persistence and resourcefulness is also seen as important (Claxton, 1997; QCA, 2005a), as is providing time for reflection and refinement, and helping children make connections. There are many ways in which creative teachers use metaphor, anecdote and analogy to promote connection making (Jensen, 1996).

The English Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) creativity policy framework, identifies certain pedagogical approaches which it suggests enable creativity. While not reflecting all the available evidence noted above, they suggest:

- *establishing criteria for success;*
- *capitalising on the unexpected without losing sight of the original objective;*

- *asking open questions;*
- *encouraging openness to ideas and critical reflection;*
- *reviewing work in progress.*

(QCA, 2005a, 2005b)

REFLECTIVE TASK

Can you identify a recent curriculum activity which you believe led to learner creativity, prompting the children to offer more unusual or innovative ideas and connections or ask questions and generate possibilities to pursue? How relevant was the task to them personally and/or emotionally? What degree of control did the children have over the activity? Was time and space offered for open exploration? What was it about the pedagogy that supported their creativity?

Ethos

While ethos is central to a consideration of what makes a creative teacher, the dividing line between creative pedagogy and ethos is inevitably blurred, because of the links between creative teaching and learning and emotional security (Halpin, 2003; Jeffrey and Woods, 2003). Positive, trusting relationships and a high degree of emotional safety are seen as necessary to ensure a creative ethos (Shayer and Adey, 2002). Such relationships are likely also to be mirrored among staff (Barnes, 2003) since the institutional ethos will affect the ethos created by each teacher (Amabile, 1988). In terms of the physical and social environment, creative professionals appear to provide children with a range of resources, and the space and time to experiment with these purposefully (Cremin *et al.*, 2006).

The core features of creative teachers' practice

Research into the three major dimensions of creative practice suggests a diverse range of personal qualities and pedagogical strategies as well as different kinds of ethos are present in the classrooms of creative teachers. But attempting to encompass all of these is unrealistic, so what are the core features of such practice which as a trainee teacher you will want to adopt and develop more explicitly?

In examining the personal qualities, pedagogy and ethos of the classrooms of creative teachers, recent research with teachers of 4–16 year olds, revealed that five core characteristics were in evidence in each of these three dimensions of creative practice (Grainger *et al.*, 2006). These included: curiosity and a questioning stance, connection making, originality, autonomy and ownership, and a developing sense of themselves as creative people and creative educators, educators who consciously use their own creative capacity in the classroom context. It is clear that creative teachers in both their planning and teaching are alert to the potential mental connections between imagination and personal/professional experience and attribute high value to curiosity and risk taking, to ownership and autonomy and to the development of imaginative and unusual ideas in both themselves and in their children.

So to become a creative teacher, pedagogically conscious of trying to teach for creativity, you will want to work to attend to these core features (detailed further below) and become more creatively involved yourself. For as Sternberg (1997) points out, those who work most

creatively, identify and reward creativity in others and in addition, young people's creative abilities are 'most likely to be developed in an atmosphere in which the teacher's creative abilities are properly engaged' (NACCCE, 1999, p90). You will find considerable pleasure and satisfaction in being creatively engaged as a role model in the classroom as you seek to promote creativity in the children. Developing your awareness of yourself as a creative being is therefore an important first step, for with a flexible and creative mindset you will be able to teach creatively and foster creativity in the young.

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Seize the opportunity to become better acquainted with your own creativity in various ways. Perhaps you already engage at your own level as a creative artist (a writer, web-designer, musician, dancer, etc.) and could connect this to your work in school (Cremin, 2006), or you could seek to work in institutions with a creative frameset or instigate partnerships with the cultural/creative sector or research your own creative practice as you train. Plan a way forward to harness and enrich your creativity.

Curiosity and a questioning stance

Personal qualities: Creative teachers demonstrate curiosity and genuine desire to learn. Such individuals are likely to have a wide range of personal interests and passions and knowledge of the wider world and are likely to share their enquiring stance with the learners, pondering aloud and reflecting on issues in classroom conversations in a genuinely open and interested manner. They are also interested in and curious about the children as people and as learners.

Pedagogically: Creative teachers make extensive use of large framing questions and employ a speculative stance in the classroom regardless of the subject domain or the age of the learners (Chappell *et al.*, 2008). Their questioning perspective demonstrates that the formulation of a problem is as important as the resolution of one, and they make use of generative questions, creating further interest, enquiry and thinking. Such teachers explicitly encourage children to identify and share their own questions, through brainstorms, partner work on puzzlements and recording questions on Post-it notes for example, as well as by providing opportunities for the learners to take responsibility for undertaking research based on their own enquiries in small groups. When invited to respond to children's problems, such teachers frequently employ reverse questioning passing back the responsibility for resolving difficulties to the learners, enquiring for example 'What can you do about this problem?'

Ethos: Being able and willing to express partial knowledge and show a genuine interest in issues through asking questions and generating possibilities involves taking risks, and is only possible in safe and affirmative environments, in which individuals feel supported and do not expect to be judged. It is evident that the ethos created by creative teachers tends to be positive, secure and inclusive, encouraging the articulation of tentative and reflective questions in whole-class and small-group conversational contexts. Furthermore, creative teachers appear to profile and give status to children's speculations, affirming these and expressing genuine interest in them.

For example, in a project on ancient Egyptians, a class of 8–9-year-olds grouped into research teams, each generated and selected a theme (food, daily life, clothes) to investigate, later presenting their findings to the class. Teams began by sharing their provisional knowledge and brainstorming questions and issues to research. Over time they used a range

of resources (books, artefacts, internet sites and photographs) to respond to their enquiries. The focus on 'identifying open, interesting and unusual questions' and the challenge to, '...dazzle us with your new knowledge' resulted in a buzz of research activity, which was sustained and developed through feedback and their teacher's genuine interest in their insights. As new enquiries and possibilities emerged, their most intriguing questions were highlighted and celebrated. At one point the teacher observed '...you've become researchers just like me – I wonder if you too will find questions you just can't really answer – we'll have to wait and see...'.

Making connections

Personal qualities: Creative teachers perceive making connections as central both to the craft of teaching and to themselves as individuals. They are often committed to personalising teaching and model the process of sense-making through making multiple imaginative connections in whole-class and small-group contexts. For example, in a poetry session, one teacher read aloud from a personal AA Milne collection and showed the children an old holiday photograph of herself in East Sussex at 'Pooh Sticks' bridge. They later brought in favourite first books and recalled when and where they had read them, or who had read them. Creative teachers know a great deal about their children's interests and passions and see this as essential knowledge in order to make connections.

Pedagogically: Creative teachers seek to avoid the limiting nature of subject boundaries, and make frequent references to other subjects and to the world beyond the school gate. They provide time to revisit prior knowledge, make links and offer multiple opportunities for children to work collaboratively in order to widen their perspectives. Such teachers encourage children to link their learning between subjects and within subjects and often prompt connections with the children's lives outside school. This appears to increase the relevance of the curriculum to the learners. As one teacher observed 'If they can't connect to what we're learning – can't make it personal – or relate it to what they know already, then they'll never retain it'.

Ethos: Creative teachers although aware of the requirements of the curriculum, often appear to give precedence to children's social and personal learning intentions over subject outcomes, and strongly defend their right to shape the curriculum in response to the learners. As a consequence the classroom ethos reflects considerable respect for the children whose emotional comfort and engagement is planned for, thus enabling them perhaps to perceive themselves as individuals first and pupils second, making connections to their lives as well as their learning.

Autonomy and ownership

Personal qualities: Creative teachers show a considerable degree of ownership with regard to planning, teaching and assessment. They exert a strong sense of professional autonomy in the classroom and demonstrate both flexibility and confidence, asserting their desire to create a co-constructed curriculum which builds on the learners' interests and their social/cultural capital, as well as curriculum requirements.

Pedagogically: Creative professionals focus explicitly on the development of children's autonomy. They seek to share ownership of the educational agenda and expect the youngsters to identify areas for enquiry and possibilities to investigate and review. They demonstrate considerable trust, interest and respect for children's ideas and set group

tasks which the children have to organise for themselves, engendering both self-direction and offering scope for collaborative creativity. Creative teachers thus provide freedom and frame challenges so that, as one teacher noted, 'they make their own decisions, get organised and take ownership of their learning'.

Ethos: The classroom ethos of creative professionals also reflects this sense of autonomy as children are expected to take shared responsibility for shaping their own learning. They are trusted and viewed as co-participants who have to make decisions for themselves, use of available resources and complete their work in the time available. In viewing classrooms as the children's spaces, creative teachers share responsibility for the environment, and encourage voting on the role-play area or the organisation of the reading corner for example.

Fostering originality

Personal qualities: We are all creative in different ways in our personal lives, although you may not be used to thinking of yourself as creative. Creative teachers are prepared to take risks, and remain open to new ideas, sharing any particularly inventive practices they trial or develop. Through involvement in the creative process of generating and evaluating ideas, creative teachers seek to develop their creative dispositions and enhance their ability to be inventive educators.

Pedagogically: Creative teachers model creativity and take part as learners in the classrooms; they experiment with resources, engage in problem-solving, take up different roles, and generate and critique their ideas. Such teachers demonstrate considerable flexibility and model creativity by being innovative, acting spontaneously, and shifting the focus of sessions in response to children's interests and questions, thus tempering the planned with the lived. In perceiving children as creative thinkers, they leave space for uncertainty and the unknown and show considerable creative assurance in building on unexpected contributions or enquiries, fostering the autonomy of the learners in the process.

Ethos: Creative teachers pay attention to unusual ideas or novel elements evident in children's work and celebrate and affirm these in order to help them appreciate the development of their creative thinking. Such teachers also seek to profile and make public the children's original and alternative work in displays, presentations and assemblies.

Creative teachers

Professionally independent and curious, creative teachers are aware of themselves as creative beings, although for some this may be a relatively new insight. They model, demonstrate and foster a questioning stance and the making of connections, and a marked degree of autonomy and ownership; in the process they value and nurture originality and the generation/evaluation of ideas. Through such practice they seek to develop the creative dispositions of their students.

Recognising and exercising personal creativity appears to be an important part of creative teachers' professional and personal meaning-making. So perhaps the difference between being a good teacher and being a creative one is one of emphasis and intention. Although good teachers recognise the importance of inventiveness, creative teachers see the development of creativity and originality as the distinguishing mark of their teaching. They recognise their own creativity and seek to develop such a creative mindset in the children.

The creative teacher, it is suggested, is one who is aware of, and values, the human attribute of creativity in themselves and seeks to promote it in others. The creative teacher has a creative state of mind which is actively exercised and developed in practice through the four core features of creative practice (see Figure 3.2). These features are closely interrelated and are fostered in schools which profile creativity, expect the unexpected and encourage the professional autonomy of the teaching staff, enabling them to take supported risks as they collaborate with one another and the children on their learning journeys.



Figure 3.2 A model of creative practice and a creative state of mind

PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK PRACTICAL TASK

To widen your confidence and efficacy as a creative professional, consider the core features of creative pedagogical practice and identify one which you wish to develop further. Plan how you might nurture this capacity in yourself as well as in your teaching and learning; how might you make it more explicit in your pedagogy and classroom ethos? Discuss your plan with other trainees, and decide whether you will be able to profile this element of creative teaching in a forthcoming serial practice.

A SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- > **Creative teachers are aware of and value the human attribute of creativity in themselves and seek to foster such a mindset in the young.**
- > **Creative practice is multilayered; it encompasses the three dimensions, namely personal qualities, pedagogy and ethos, each of which has a distinctly creative orientation.**
- > **Creative teachers personally, pedagogically and in their classroom ethos, both demonstrate and develop children’s curiosity, their connection making, autonomy, ownership and originality.**
- > **Creative teachers are autonomous professionals, who actively model their own creative engagement in the classroom and seek to nurture this in children.**

> While all good teachers reward originality, creative ones depend on it to enhance their well-being and that of their pupils; they see the development of creativity and originality as the distinguishing mark of their teaching.

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In order to develop and sustain your own creative state of mind, your flexibility, collaborative capacity, optimistic and creative disposition as an individual and as creative practitioner you should seek to:

- prize a questioning stance and foster children's curiosity through offering them the chance to undertake their own enquiries;
- make personal and professional connections;
- exert your professional autonomy and co-construct the curriculum with the children, thus increasing their ownership and autonomy;
- encourage, profile and celebrate originality in both yourself and the children;
- continue to read and reflect upon your growth as a creative professional and research your own and the children's creative learning within and beyond the classroom.

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