

THE NURTURING OF CREATIVITY IN THE HISTORY CLASSROOM THROUGH TEACHING METHODS – THE VIEWS OF TEACHERS AND LEARNERS

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Abstract

Nurturing creative thinking abilities in all learning areas and subjects is one of the cornerstones and ideals of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) in South Africa. This article reports on the results obtained with a pilot study that set out to determine the extent to which creativity is presently nurtured in the History classroom. A qualitative study by means of semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with learners (n = 4) and teachers (n = 2) of History at a secondary school was conducted to determine learner and teacher perceptions related to the nurturing of creativity through the instructional practices of teachers applied during teaching and learning.

The results revealed that the nurturing of creativity has not yet become reality in the History classroom. It was disconcerting to note that direct instruction dominates the teaching and learning of History and that very little opportunity for practical experience and interaction during teaching and learning exists.

The article concludes with recommendations to teachers on how to purposefully enhance creativity during the teaching of History.

This pilot study was conducted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for a BEd Honours degree, and to set the scene for a more extended study on creative thinking in History with larger groups of learners and teachers.

Keywords: creativity, creative thinking, lateral thinking, creativity and classroom practice, creativity and History teaching.

Introduction, problem statement and purpose of the study

History as a subject has come under heavy scrutiny, considering among others its value for learners who choose the subject that it is widely being

considered as useless. Even those who chose the subject consider the teaching of History as dull and boring (Jackson, 2005:8).

This has been cited as a global phenomenon which has now evolved into a negative perception surrounding the subject (Gorn, 2006:1). It is the researcher's opinion that it is only made this way by transmission and reception teaching methods and strategies, such as memorization and rote learning of dates and events that allow very little room for creativity during teaching (Jackson, 2005:9).

As a subject, History allows for a plethora of creativity. It just needs to be applied correctly in the classroom by making use of varied teaching methods. The History teacher has to move beyond the traditional paradigm of direct teaching and allow for more interactive, new and interesting methods of teaching History (Nickerson, 1999:54).

Problem statement

This problem has persisted for over a decade. Within the South African context, it surfaced after the 1994 elections when Outcomes Based Education (OBE) was first implemented. The government at the time, when implementing its education policy, decided to lessen the importance of the subject as it dealt with the past Apartheid regime. Therefore, change warranted the demise of the subject. Only a small fraction of schools within the D7 district of the Gauteng province offer History as a subject when entering the Further Education and Training (FET) phase.

Another cause for concern noticed by the researcher is that there is an alarming decrease in the subject being chosen in Grade 10. A question that could be asked is whether a lack of creativity during teaching prevents learners from choosing the subject. Learners are hesitant to choose the subject as they perceive it to be either useless to their future, or the most recurring, is that it is too dull (Jackson, 2005:8).

The researcher carefully assumes that it is not only subject knowledge that is important, but also the way this knowledge is transferred that can make all the difference in the education process. The education process of knowledge transference in History should focus on enhancing creative abilities (Nickerson, 1999:55).

For the purposes of this study, the research was conducted in the Grade 10 History classroom. This was initiated in order to determine whether creative teaching influenced whether or not learners chose History as a subject when they reached Grade 10.

Research question

Against the above introductory remarks, this research will address the following central question:

To what extent do teachers enhance creativity in the grade 10 History classroom through the choice of teaching methods?

Within this central question, further questions arise:

- What does creativity entail?
- Which teaching methods are best suited to nurture creativity in Social Science?
- To what extent do the choice of teaching methods nurture creativity currently within the teaching of Social Science?

Purpose of the study

The overall purpose of the study is to determine the extent to which teachers enhance creativity in the History classroom.

Flowing from the research aim, the following objectives are identified:

- determining what creativity in the social science classroom entails by means of a literature study and by determining teacher perceptions regarding creativity through an empirical study;
- analyzing the teaching methods that are best suited to nurture creativity in the social science classroom by means of a literature study;
- establishing the extent to which creativity is currently being nurtured in the social science classroom through the choice of teaching methods, by means of an empirical study.

Clarification of the concept creativity

This problem of History not being taken as a serious subject does not only occur locally but on an international scale as well. In the United States of America, statistics revealed that the U.S History National Assessment of

Education Progress (NAEP), outlined that the American society is raising American youth who are not historically literate. A percentage of American learners have developed a paradigm that history is not considered as a subject of importance and the value of this subject is no longer existent (Gorn, 2006:1).

According to Pink (2005:23), creativity is a process which involves the collection of new concepts and ideas. Also, how these new associations stimulate the creative mind and link between previous concepts and ideas. Creativity is stimulated by the process which can be categorized as either being conscious or unconscious insight. There is however a misconception that 'creativity' is just the process of creating something new (Pink, 2005:23):.

According to Amabile (1999:52), one must truly understand the essence of creativity before creating assumptions about the phenomenon. Creativity should not be confused with talent. Creativity is not only associated with a certain amount of people, for example the view that only a few are born creative, or people of various cognitive abilities and skills such as artists or geniuses. Everyone therefore has the potential to be creative. The key component to nurture or grow creativity is motivation or 'the inner spark' (Amabile, 1996:14). 'Talent, personality and skill tell us what a child can do; motivation tells us what that child will do.' (Amabile, 1996:14).

Craft (2005:20) suggests that a distinction can be made between 'high' creativity and 'little' creativity. High creativity is seen as something new and remarkable which has transformed something in a significant way. By contrast, little creativity is seen as the ordinary but entire attitude toward life. It focuses on acting effectively with flexibility, intelligence and novelty in everyday situations. Craft (2005:21) also mentions that many different interpretations of creativity exist, including those who focus on the locus (person), the product (idea) and the impact (global or local). However, all these interpretations have a consensus that creativity involves the generation of novel ideas.

Nolan (in Fryer 2004:1) distinguishes between creative thinking, creative behaviour and creative action. Creative thinking is the generation of new ideas and concepts, whereas creative behaviour involves relevant behavioural characteristics which facilitate the creative process. Creative action is the physical action of doing new things, such as doing things for the first time and doing things 'which are new to the world' (Nolan, 2004:1).

All three of these dimensions are applicable within the classroom environment, as learners not only have to think creatively, but also have to behave and act creatively.

Another key concept pertaining to creativity is innovation. This could be seen as the implementation of new ideas to create something of value (Craft, 2005:20).

Novelty can be defined as an element of creativity. It refers to the quality of being new. It can also refer to something novel, that which is striking, original or unusual.

Originality is the aspect of created or invented works by as being new or novel, and thus can be distinguished from reproductions, clones, forgeries, or derivative works. An original work is one not received from others nor one copied based on the work of others.

Imagination is the sense of imagining, or of creating mental images or concepts of what is not actually present to the senses, and the process of forming such images or concepts. It helps provide meaning to experience and understanding to knowledge and it is an essential facility through which people make sense of the world. It also plays a key role in the learning process (Egan, 1992:31).

For the purpose of the research to be carried out, creativity will be dealt with according to the idea that it should stimulate critical thinking. To be critical in one's thinking allows for creativity through scrutiny of information, and selecting relevant pieces of information with which to approach it creatively. Another factor to be accounted for will be the idea of innovation and novelty. These aspects will be addressed when the research is carried out.

Research methodology

Literature review

Nurturing creativity through...

According to Steyn, Badenhorst and Yule (1991:14), for successful teaching to take place, a good method must be used by a teacher. A teacher has many choices when opting for a style to teach by. The teacher may write lesson plans, borrow plans from other teachers or search online or within books

for lesson plans. When deciding what teaching method to use, a teacher will need to consider learners' background knowledge, environment and learning outcomes.

Teachers know that learners learn in different ways but almost all learners will respond well to praise. Learners have different ways of absorbing information and of demonstrating their knowledge. Teachers often use techniques which present multiple learning styles to help learners store information and reinforce understanding.

A range of strategies and methods are used to ensure that all learners have equal opportunities to learn. A lesson plan may be carried out in several ways: Questioning, explaining, modelling, collaborating, and demonstrating.

A teaching method that includes questioning is comparable to testing. A teacher may ask a range of questions to collect information of what learners have learned and what needs to be taught. Testing is another method of questioning. A teacher tests the learner on what was previously taught in order to identify if a learner has learned the material. (Steyn *et al.*, 1991:15)

Another teaching method is explanation. This form is similar to lecturing. Lecturing is teaching, giving a speech, by giving a dialogue on a specific subject, usually given in the classroom. This can also be related with demonstrating and modelling. A teacher may use experimentation to demonstrate in a science class. A demonstration is the circumstance of proving conclusively, as by reasoning or showing evidence. Modelling is used as a visual aid to learning. Learners can envision an object or problem, then use reasoning and hypothesizing to verify an answer.

Demonstrations are done to provide an opportunity in learning new exploration and visual learning tasks from a different perspective. Demonstrations can be exercised in several ways.

Learners working in groups are another way a teacher can implement a lesson plan. Collaborating allows learners to talk amongst each other and listen to all view points of discussion or task. It assists learners to think in an impartial way. When this lesson plan is carried out, the teacher may be trying to assess the lesson of working as a team, leadership skills, or presenting with roles (Steyn *et al.*, 1991:16).

The teaching methods that will be investigated within the research will include questioning as well as explanation. These will be scrutinized to

determine the extent to which they promote creative thinking in the History classroom.

... Creativity techniques

Nickerson (in Sternberg & Lubart, 1999:54) states that creativity techniques are methods that encourage original thoughts and divergent thinking. Some techniques require groups of two or more people while other techniques can be accomplished alone. These methods include word games, written exercises and different types of improvisation.

Nickerson (in Sternberg & Lubart, 1999:54) provides an outline of the array of creativity techniques that have been suggested. These include techniques that have been created by both industry and academia:

- Establishing purpose and intention;
- Building basic skills;
- Encouraging acquisitions of domain-specific knowledge;
- Stimulating and rewarding curiosity and exploration;
- Building motivation, especially internal motivation;
- Encouraging confidence and a willingness to take risks;
- Focusing on mastery and self-competition;
- Promoting supportable beliefs about creativity;
- Providing opportunities for choice and discovery;
- Developing self-management (metacognitive skills);
- Teaching techniques and strategies for facilitating creative performance;
- Providing balance.

Nickerson (in Sternberg & Lubart, 1999:55) sees the conventional system of schooling as “stifling” of creativity, particularly in the pre-school/kindergarten and early school years. The aim is to provide a creativity-friendly, rich, imagination-fostering environment for young children.

For the purposes of this study, the aspects of nurturing creativity that will be looked at include the stimulation and rewarding curiosity and exploration of historical information, providing opportunities for choice and discovery as well as teaching techniques and strategies for facilitating creative performance.

It is argued that the teaching methods of questioning creatively and allowing for learner participation will promote these creative qualities.

... History teaching

History is described as the study of the past, with special attention to the written record of the activities of human beings over time (Jackson, 2005:8). It is a field of research which uses a narrative to examine and analyze the sequence of events, and it often attempts to investigate objectively the patterns of cause and effect that determine events.

According to Jackson (2005:8), when encountering the past the creativity of the historian is directed to understanding unfamiliar structures, contexts, cultures and belief systems. Imagining what the past was like – how, why and when people did certain things, is central to being a historian.

Historical imagination, is vital to grasping the ‘other’ times and places under examination and to conveying both that difference and a personal understanding of it. “The ability to see a situation from a point of view that is not present-minded” is perhaps an essential component of the historian’s creativity and imagination.

Empirical study

An interpretivistic paradigm will be used as theoretical framework. Interpretive research is primarily exploratory and descriptive in purpose designed to discover what can be learned about the area of interest (Maree, 2007:52). The interpretivist researcher views the world as a socio-psychological construct where there are multiple realities forming an interconnected whole that can only be understood as these multiple realities.

A qualitative research design will be adopted within the research. Qualitative research is more descriptive and does not require statistics to reach a hypothetical conclusion (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:133). Qualitative research deals with experiences of participants on a more personal, subjective level and uses a narrative to explain findings.

The research will be a phenomenological study. This is due to the qualitative nature of the study, as certain phenomena which are occurring will be investigated, such as creativity and teaching methods. The study will attempt

to explain these phenomena and their interrelation within the classroom (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:43).

Sampling

The population for this study will comprise all learners at school level with History as a subject. Due to time and logistical constraints, the study population will comprise all learners in Grade 10 and 11 History classes at General Smuts High School. One teacher per grade will be randomly sampled. The sample from the classes will be two learners, one per grade, chosen at random. The type of sampling will therefore be the non-probability sampling technique. More specifically it will be convenience sampling, as the participants will be readily available to the researcher.

Data Collection

Due to the qualitative nature of the research, the method best suited for data collection would be an interview. The reason for choosing this method is to ask those who have been sampled more specific questions and not to generalize. It is to get personal experience answers from the sample. The interview will thus be semi-structured one-to-one. The questions will be contracted in accordance with what literature reveals regarding creativity and the teaching methods to nurture creativity (Babby & Mouton, 2001:30).

Questions asked to the learners:

- Question 1: Do you enjoy History as a subject at school?
- Question 2: Are you as a learner actively involved during teaching?
- Question 3: What teaching methods does your teacher use when teaching History?
- Question 4: Does your teacher make use of the following methods when teaching History? Debates, role-plays, field trips, cooperative learning groups, discussion and interviews.

Questions asked to the teachers:

- Question 1: Explain in your own words what creativity in the History classroom entails.

- Question 2: Do you think it is possible to nurture creativity among learners during the teaching of History?
- Question 3: What teaching methods do you use when teaching History?
- Question 4: Do you have an understanding of the following teaching methods? Direct Instruction, Indirect Instruction, Interactive Instruction, Independent Study, Experiential Learning.
- Question 5: Do you make use of the following teaching methods while teaching History? Debating, role-plays, field trips, discussion, interview

The validity and reliability of the information gathered from the sample will be guaranteed by tape recording the entirety of the interview so as to capture the original words of the participants. This will be evidence for the data collection. Once the interview has been transcribed, the participants will receive the transcript and verify that it is indeed what they have said (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:93).

Certain ethical issues are bound to surface when conducting the research. There are however ways to avoid these issues. By gaining the consent of the participants and explaining the purpose of the research, it avoids certain problems. When interviewing the participants, their anonymity will be assured. No names will be taken either, once more to ensure anonymity of all involved in the research. Participants will be identified by means of codes. The research will also be voluntary, so no participant will be forced to partake in the research. Confidentiality will be guaranteed as only the researcher will have access to the data obtained.

Results

The data analysis, due to the qualitative nature of the research, will be a deductive content analysis. Content analysis involves looking at the content of the data and breaking it into certain themes in order to extract meaning.

This will involve tape recording the interviews with the respondents. Afterwards, the tape recordings will be transcribed into written format for analysis. The main method for analyzing the data would be to get the thoughts of the respondents and to classify these thoughts into certain themes and categories. (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:108)

Discussion

Based on the codes that were identified in the verbatim transcripts of the interview responses, the researcher reports on the trends and themes identified in the data.

Discussion: Learner responses

From the responses it appears as if the learners enjoy History as a subject as teachers make it “fun”, “interesting” and “challenging” (cf. 1). This appears not to be in line with the argument of Gorn (2006:1), who indicated that History is now being viewed as a dull and boring subject (cf.2.1).

The responses from the 4 learners indicate that involvement during the teaching of History is indeed taking place, as they can “voice views”, “ask questions” and “debate” (cf.2). All of these responses support the idea that active learning, which is indeed a part of teaching and learning, is important for nurturing creative thinking (Nickerson, 1999:54).

All of the responses from the learners clearly indicate a tendency of reliance on direct instruction (explanation, discussion, using notes, textbook reading) in the History classroom, and to a lesser extent indirect instruction (do work on own) (cf.3). This is in agreement with Jackson (2005:44) who states that History teachers seem to only make use of direct instruction and do not use other methods, which leads to dull History lessons.

Once more, it is clearly evident from the learner responses that the teachers make use of mostly direct instruction, as they all make use of discussion. None of the teachers, according to the learners, make use of role-plays or field trips, which are more interactive and experiential approaches to learning and essential for nurturing creativity (cf.4). This concurs with Jackson’s argument (2005:45) that teachers do not promote creative thought in classrooms due to lack of diversity when it comes to teaching methods.

Discussion: Teacher responses

In order to support or refute the findings of the learner responses, the teacher responses were analyzed and compared to those of the learners.

From the responses of the two teachers, it is evident that there is some understanding of what creativity in the History classroom entails (cf.5).

Both teachers referred to “original thinking”, which also relates to innovative thinking, which according to Craft (2005:20) is essential for creativity in the History classroom. Teachers also referred to “self-reflection” which is also in line with what Craft (2005:20) explains, stating that learners should critically think of ideas and also imagine the time periods under discussion.

Both teachers responses were positive to this question as both said that it is indeed possible to nurture creativity among learners in the History classroom (cf.6). Both teachers however stated that time and discipline were essentials to nurture creativity. This is in accordance with the statement made by Nickerson (1999:54), who has listed several ways in which creativity can be nurtured within the classroom.

The responses from the teachers were mixed for this question. Participant 5 was more specific by stating that Direct Instruction is used in the classroom as well as storytelling. Participant 6 generally commented that all possible teaching methods are used, not being entirely specific (cf.7). Tuovinen and Sweller (1999:6) state that direct instruction is an essential method for teaching any subject, but that it should not be the only method being used. A subject like History which includes a lot of content, so this method remains vital.

Once again, the responses varied amongst the teachers. Participant 5 had a clear understanding of all methods, but with Participant 6, confusion was evident between indirect and interactive instruction (cf. 8). Interesting to note is the inclusion of the dependence on Outcomes on what methods to utilize when teaching. Literature reveals that interactive instruction has the potential to nurture the most creativity within learners as stated by Sessoms (2008:35).

All the responses from the teachers indicated that they all make use of the above mentioned strategies, but to varying degrees. This is important, as not all the strategies can be used all the time. The balance should be there that these methods are at least used instead of not at all (cf.9). Jackson (2005:45) has stated that in order to effectively nurture creativity in the classroom, a balanced strategy is the best option.

Triangulation of learner and teacher data

During the initial data analysis of both learner and teacher responses, it became apparent that the teachers, particularly when asked about particular

teaching methods and whether they make use of the said methods, contained several excuses as to why the methods were not being utilized. These included class size, disciplinary concerns as well as dependence on the learning outcomes.

It is then possible to assume that the learner responses contain more validity, as there is general consensus among their responses regarding which teaching methods are being used in the class. No excuses or discrepancy is evident within the learner responses.

From this deduction, it can be stated that mainly Direct Instruction is utilized within the classroom. This has been identified by the use of textbook teaching and explanations, which are both strategies used within Direct Instruction.

To a lesser extent, Interactive Instruction and Independent Study are also utilized in the classroom, evident from the learner responses, who stated that debating was done in the classroom, which is an Interactive strategy. The Independent Study is evident when the learners responded that homework tasks are given where the learners have to complete it on their own.

Certain strategies, such as role-plays, field trips and interviews were not used in the classroom, again due to certain factors which the teachers deemed would hamper their effective utilization. Therefore Experiential Learning and Indirect Instruction are not being used.

With regard to the question whether creativity is nurtured in the History classroom, the following is stated. As stated previously, the learner responses are taken to be more valid than the teacher responses, as there is more consensus among their responses.

What should also be noted is that the teacher responses and the learner responses were in opposition to each other. The learners stated that not all methods were being used, but the teachers stated that they made use of most, if not all of the methods.

Creativity is not being nurtured within the History classroom in this particular instance. It can not be nurtured by only making sole use of one method. The Direct Instruction method is essential to the teaching of History as there is a lot of content that has to be explained, and it can nurture creativity if used properly. The key to successfully nurture creativity by using this method is by making creative use of higher order questioning.

Creativity is best nurtured when learners are given opportunities to interact

with each other and to share their ideas, either in written format like an essay or by making use of a debate or discussion. It is vital to promote critical and self-reflective thinking skills, especially in a subject like History which contains a tremendous amount of opinionated and biased content which needs to be interpreted.

Conclusion and recommendations

Findings from the literature review

In order to obtain information for constructing the interview schedule to determine how creativity is nurtured in the History classroom, a thorough literature review was conducted. From the literature review the following conclusions were made regarding the nurturing of creativity:

There are various forms of creativity, including artistic, academic, industrial and intellectual creativity. All of these forms branch from the same term, creativity, but they all differ in some respect. In order for one to be artistically creative, one would need to be skilled in art. This is dependent therefore on talent, whereas academic creativity relies more on critical and self-reflective thinking skills, which anyone could master.

Many factors can influence whether one is creative or not. These include factors like age, gender, position in family and socio-economic conditions. Research has indicated that differing genders do not influence creativity, as both genders can be equally creative. Age on the other hand can significantly influence creativity. This is apparent in children who still need to develop certain cognitive abilities and skills, whereas older children who have already developed display higher levels of creativity.

A variety of teaching methods were also researched, including Direct Instruction, Indirect Instruction, Interactive Instruction, Independent Study and Experiential Learning. Included in this review were all the strategies that could be utilized within the classroom, such as debating, role-plays, interviews, field trips and discussion. It has been identified that all methods can potentially nurture creativity, if utilized correctly.

The nature of the subject History was also examined, wherein it was noted that History has been regarded as a content driven subject. This is however not the case currently within the South African curriculum. The subject now promotes not only knowledge acquisition, but also vital skills such as analysis

and interpretation, as well as values.

Findings from the empirical research

The following findings were derived from the empirical research:

It is evident that learners in this particular environment do enjoy History as a subject. There are many reasons for this, including personal enjoyment attained from learning the subject, being able to express opinions and that the teacher can play a role in making the subject enjoyable.

It has been found that certain discrepancies exist between the learner and teacher responses. This is evident when looking at the question of what teaching methods are used in the classroom. The learners state that mostly Direct Instruction is used, whereas the teachers respond by saying that most methods are indeed being used. The researcher has therefore relied upon the learner responses as they appear to be the most trustworthy responses. This is the case because all the learner responses have consensus, whereas the teachers responded with certain limiting factors as to why methods can not be used, including class size, disciplinary problems and dependence on learning outcomes.

It is evident that the teachers know what creativity in the History classroom entails, but the problem lies with the nurturing of that creativity. It is possible that teachers simply rely on Direct Instruction due to its simplistic delivery.

From this interpretation, it can be concluded that creativity is not being nurtured within this particular environment as mainly Direct Instruction is being used. It should be noted that Direct Instruction can nurture creativity if used correctly, i.e. creative questioning, but in this instance it is not used in that manner. Teachers still make use of textbook teaching and notes on the board.

Recommendations

In light of the findings, I recommend the following:

It is imperative for teachers to make an effort to familiarize themselves with the various teaching methods that could be utilized within the classroom, in order to improve the development of creativity of the learners in particular.

In order to develop knowledge and skills that will enable teachers to implement alternative teaching methods effectively, teachers should register

at Higher Education institutions for courses related to teaching and learning. This could also be achieved through INSET training and initial teacher education.

The Department of Education should introduce extensive and comprehensive training and workshop programs that will provide the type of training which will assist teachers to develop and enhance their knowledge and skills of alternative teaching methods.

In addition to the above-mentioned, experts in the field of teaching and learning should be invited by the Department of Education to visit schools to provide practical guidelines to teachers in the classroom.

Teachers themselves should engage in discussions with their colleagues in order to share their knowledge and skills regarding implementation of alternative teaching methods and nurturing creativity. They could visit each other's classrooms and evaluate their implementation of the various methods.

This research also points to important implications for teacher education programme training. The training programs should equip teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to implement the various teaching methods in the classroom.

Conclusion

Although the adoption of various alternative teaching methods would be quite difficult and challenging for most teachers, and the study indicates that the implementation practices of History teachers who took part in the study are not utilizing all of the methods and are not nurturing creativity all of the time. Creative development is important as it supports the holistic development of the learners in the classroom.

Therefore it is imperative that History teachers accept the challenge to find ways of utilizing the various teaching methods in order to nurture creativity more effectively. If teachers do not rise to the challenge, then History will indeed be seen as a dead subject that is boring and dull, with no learners choosing the subject in Grade 10.

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