

Creative Teaching and Communication: A Study of Creative Teachers' Traits and Skills as Perceived by Primary School Students

Leo Pak Kong YAM

*Hong Kong Association for Educational Communications and Technology (HKAECT),
Hong Kong
leoyam888@gmail.com*

Abstract: This is a survey study using a questionnaire to find out what creative teachers' traits and skills are as perceived by primary school children. The sample school is in the New Territories in Hong Kong. The 265 respondents are 5 – 6 graders of 149 boys, and 116 girls. The analysis method is to use simple computation of the 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire is designed for twenty questions about the teachers' performance in class such as the use of body language, humor, questioning, the use of ICT, as well as their affective behavior. After the presentation of data, the results are analyzed. Among the 20 questions, 9 questions of higher scores are relevant to the elements of 'creative teachers' as perceived. From this study, a model of six domains of "Creative Teachers' Traits and Skills" is developed.

Keywords: Effective teaching, creative teachers, creativity, communication, positive thinking

1. Introduction

Tao Xing Zhi (陶行之), a Chinese education philosopher, (1939) once advocated that creativity is the liberation of children's "brain, hands, eyes, mouth, space, time....., everybody can create, everywhere is the place for creation, everyday there is a chance for creation." (Zhang & Wang, 2019, p. 66)

Much research has been done on creativity, and creative teaching. In recent years, one of the dominant themes in curriculum reform is the shift from focusing on acquisition of knowledge to competence in applying knowledge learnt to solve problems (OECD, 2012). Under the competence-based curriculum, schools need to balance the focus between knowledge transmission and competence development. They need to provide learning opportunities for skill development (Lee, Chan, Xu, & Chun, 2017). In Hong Kong, among the nine generic skills proposed, the Curriculum Development Council (CDC) identified creativity, critical thinking, and communication as core skills, "Answer(ing) the question "What is worth learning?"...the actions to be taken include trimming obsolete or less essential content, restructuring school subjects, infusing critical thinking, creativity, and communication into the learning and teaching of existing subjects..." (CDC, 2000, p.19). In this study, instead of the aforementioned critical thinking, I focus on positive thinking because it is more relevant to primary school children as they may not be able to understand the concept of critical thinking, one of the higher order thinking skills, at this stage. So positive thinking, creativity, and communication are taken holistically. That means they are not three separate entities but are interrelated. For instance, once engaged in positive thinking, one is also engaged in creativity—generating new ideas from the thinking process, and in

communication—representing and presenting the ideas in an appropriate manner and context. In turn, once engaged in representing and presenting the ideas, creativity and positive thinking are needed to make the process effective and precise.

Many experts think of creativity as a set of skills and attitudes of which anyone is capable: tolerating ambiguity, redefining old problems, finding new problems to solve, taking sensible risks, and following an inner passion (Davis, 2018). It is essential for teachers to remember that creativity is not only a quality found in exceptional individuals but is also an essential life skill through which people can develop their potential to use their imagination, to express themselves, and to make original and valued choices in their lives (Nikolopoulou, 2018).

1.1 The Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to find out the traits and skills of effective teachers as identified by primary school students, rather than the perceptions of teachers or parents. Effective teaching is the common goal of every lesson. However, effective teaching means different things to different people. There are a whole range of factors influencing the effectiveness of a given lesson. Among these factors, motivation to learn in the lesson occupies the most critical position. That explains why, for any teacher writing a lesson plan, the first part will be “learning motivation”, i.e., using different means to arouse students’ interest and motivate them to learn in the lesson. Thus, this study defines “effective teaching” from the students’ perspective: “the teachers they like and the lessons they feel motivated to learn” (Questionnaires used in this study). This study aims at finding out the characteristics, traits, and skills that effective teachers possess as identified by primary school students. It explores the relationship between teaching effectiveness and creativity at large.

Since students in primary schools are too young to identify features of creative teachers and their traits and skills, this study started with asking them to identify the teachers they deemed effective in motivating them to learn willingly. They enjoyed the lessons of these teachers and were willing to spend time doing homework and studying course materials. Once identified and reminded to keep them in mind, the students would complete the questionnaire with 20 questions on the performance of these teachers.

2. Literature Review

There is a distinction between teaching creatively and teaching for creativity in its characterization of creative teaching. According to the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE, 1999), the former is defined as “using imaginative approaches to make learning more interesting and effective” (p. 89). Teaching for creativity is defined as “forms of teaching that are intended to develop young people’s own creative thinking or behavior” (ibid). In this study, we focus on teaching creatively, not teaching for creativity.

Torrance (1965) defined creativity as “the process of becoming sensitive to problems, deficiencies, gaps in knowledge, missing elements, disharmonies, and so on; identifying the difficulty; searching for solutions, making guesses, or formulating hypotheses about the deficiencies; testing and retesting these hypotheses and possibly modifying and retesting them; and finally communicating the results.”

Creativity, as interpreted by Howard Gardner, is a process of developing the eight-multiple intelligence (1983), using all the senses of students to solve problems in the teaching and learning. It is concerned with human learning in stimulating creative thinking and activities. Gardner (1998) stated, “Creativity must be humane, must acknowledge the whole”. In humane creativity, the teaching and learning process will be harmonious as students become the center of interest and they interact positively with their teachers.

In studying teaching effectiveness and creativity skills, the teachers’ characteristics and traits are set into the twenty questions in the survey. These traits and skills are grouped under six domains, namely:

(i) communication; (ii) integrity and trust; (iii) playfulness and liveliness; (iv) patience and empathy; (v) positive thinking and attitude, and (vi) peace of mind. Below is an elaboration of the six domains and how each of the six domains is related to creativity and teaching effectiveness.

(i) For communication, Aristotle once said, “The man who can live alone is either an animal or a god” (Cited in Vu, 2016). Human beings are social animals, and they need to get along with one another through communication. The communication of human beings is like a net, knitted to construct a society. However, human communication is flexible, changeable, and unpredictable (Yam, 1982, p.49). Every day, we communicate, communicate, communicate. In fact, are we truly communicating with “intent, affection, feelings, opinion, ideas, meanings or an attitude” when engaged in our conversations? Or are we using questioning to arouse interaction in the learning and teaching process? Do we consider the “receiver’s” field of experience (Schramm, 1954, p. 4-8) with reference to their perception (Yam, 2012, p. 85-89)? The elements of body language/non-verbal communication also play an important role in the communication process (Yam, 1994; Yam & Tso, 2013, Unit 9 & Unit 10). If we are not communicating or not telling the truth, the “true intention” will be revealed; our body language will betray us. Freud (1933) said, “He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore” (p. 77-78). Our messages are being detected non-verbally as a “lie”.

In fact, our messages in face-to-face or in verbal/oral/listening communication are a “personalized, one sided view of thought” favoring our own values, and “convenience, interest, and needs”. With this comes the phenomenon: “Why we see what we want to see” (Pogosyan, 2019). It is in the eye of the beholder.

Since the turn of the Millennium, Information Communication Technology (ICT) has been popularly used in education. We have to differentiate human communication from information and technology communication. The adequate use of ICT is based on human communication. In education, there is a pressing need in designing and cultivating creative use of technologies to increase teaching effectiveness. School children, generation after generation, will enjoy the ever-improving ICT. However, we have to pay attention to how students and the public use the technologies.

To me, without human factor, information communication and technology or media used in teaching and learning can only be a dead object, no matter what form it takes. Therefore, when using technology, we have to set goals and learning objectives, and closely knitted strategies in the creative teaching and learning process. We need to have unshakable confidence and positive attitude to “humanize technology” in order to make technology serve teachers and students. We cannot do it the other way round and make mankind the slaves of technology. In short, effective teaching without communications is something like a jewel box without the key to unlock its treasures.

(ii) For integrity and trust, making promises and keeping secrets from friends and family members would be a very respectful responsibility. Integrity is a key to creativity, according to Gabriel Bar-Sawme (2019). He said, “Keeping your integrity works in your advantage in the long run: it will make you more trustworthy to others, help you to know yourself, keep your energy within yourself which will make you more creative and feel better about yourself.” (ibid.) I did not foresee that when I was the formulating question on integrity (i.e., Question 13), the score is the highest among the twenty questions. After careful analysis, I think besides so many traits and skills that creative teachers require, according to this study, being trustworthy and preserving your honor of integrity would be one of the most important traits and skills for any teacher to observe. Integrity will make people trustworthy. By practicing integrity, keeping your promises, and fulfilling your responsibility as you promised, it will make you more creative and feel more joyful. You will practice the virtue of integrity honestly.

Having integrity is a positive character trait where you are regarded as being respectful and truthful. Creative and effective teachers should be honest, impartial, fair, and should keep their promises, especially when personal secrets are revealed by students. Creative teaching is an interactive process,

both the students and the teachers should share their views and feelings truthfully to foster mutual trust. “Mutual trust: in the practical meaning, is very significant for the success of the project and leads to increasing creativity” (Bidault & Castello, 2009). In short, effective teaching without integrity and trust would be something no better than quick sand, where no foundation can be built on it.

(iii) For playfulness and liveliness, Greeks and Chinese in ancient times used “play” -- drama and theatre performance -- to celebrate special or religious festivals to honor their gods as entertainment. Today, psychologists and therapists would use play, drama therapy, or music to heal people with mental stress, anxiety, or depression.

Play is beneficial throughout life. It is an intrinsic motivated approach and exploration to use different kinds of forms to develop children’s creative mind and perceptive vision of the world around them (Whitton, 2018).

It is a human instinct. When a baby is born, he/she starts to play with his/her mouth, fingers, and hands. As an adult, he/she may play the piano or musical instruments to enjoy themselves. At any rate, this “playful behavior” may induce a kind of hormone called dopamine to generate happiness which will make the players lively and joyful.

Lieberman (1976) once stated, “the more you play, the more creative you become in later life, in that playfulness ultimately becomes a personality trait”. When a player is deeply involved in the “play process” enjoying the fascinating moment, he/she will experience a “flow” feeling as if he/she is “losing” himself/herself. The feeling is amazing and tremendous.

In creative teaching, children start exploring knowledge as a form of playful learning. In creative dramatics, or playmaking (Ward, 1957), children use miming, pantomiming, role playing, storytelling through games to deliver their imagination, curiosity, and script writing. Teachers with lively, humorous, and expressive dispositions will cultivate a creative and imaginative learning motivation (Keller & Yam, 1999). Playfulness and liveliness teaching takes different forms. You can design a lesson as if it is an “exciting drama”. You create a lesson full of humor, “suspense, surprise”, a lesson that is “suspicious, intriguing, interesting, inspiring, contrasting, comparing” in the “climax” (Yam, 1991, p.375-376). It is a montage to indulge the students’ attention, curiosity, imagination to foster a creative and dynamic learning experience.

There are lots of teaching methods which can motivate students to learn lively and creatively, like games, role play, drama, collaborative reading aloud, recitation, etc. Above all, teaching is relaxing, full of playfulness and a lively process of interaction between the students and the teachers. Whitton asserted, “The job of a teacher is to teach students to see liveliness [and playfulness] in themselves” (Whitton, 2018). In short, creative teaching situation, playfulness and liveliness are relational and they complement each other.

(iv) For patience and empathy, one said, “When patience comes to creative work, patience is truly a necessity” (Rasmussen, 2019). Being patient when you are in an impulsive and agitated mood, you can keep your nerves calm and drive away your frustrations. Then you will take control of yourself first and take a deep breath. You will stay in the serene mood (Argandona, 2019), and enjoy peace of mind, strengthening your confidence and positive attitude. Patience enriches your human relationships and benefits your mental health. More importantly, it is a virtue that cultivates a pleasant, creative, and positive personality.

Patience is the art of listening, observing the body language of the person or student with whom you are communicating. To share an unfavorable or adverse situation that the person/student is being confronted with, a creative and effective person or teacher would express sympathy and empathy to the person or student. As Pradham said, “Empathy is another fantastic source for creativity” (Pradham, 2016).

In Pradham's words, "Gratitude plays the perfect part in building creativity" (2016) which is evidently connected to empathy. Gratitude is a kind of behavior connected to creativity, to appreciate whoever grants you timely help in need or a favor or blessing, that you feel obliged and happy (Yam, 2018). Empathy requires an understanding of "putting yourself in others' shoes," how you see and perceive the way he/she is thinking, feeling, and their perspectives. As the person acknowledges their sympathetic and empathetic response, they will appreciate his/her behavior and in return, the person expresses gratitude.

In education, we express our gratitude to the teachers who demonstrate their lively, creative, and positive attitude, based on "human-centered" learning (Yam, L.P.K., 2009). It is expected that our children will enjoy the "competence-based curriculum.....which needs to provide learning opportunities for skill development, in the hope that the Curriculum Development Council will develop the "nine-generic skills....., creativity, critical thinking, and communication as core" (Lee et al., 2017).

Patience and empathy are virtues which foster creativity. A teacher should try to explain pleasantly in detail the problems the students encountered using different kinds of teaching methods until they understand. Having a "never give up" attitude can create valuable inventions. For example, Thomas Edison failed hundreds of times to create the first practical and affordable electric light bulb. He must have the tolerance to accept what is being confronted in adversity (Stoltz, 1997, p.6-13). With this example, the teacher can enlighten those students who did not do well. In practicing the virtue of patience without haste, teachers may avoid mishandling problems. A creative teacher is effective if he can have self-control.

To practice patience and empathy, we have the following words of wisdom to observe:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

---- Galatians: 5:22-5:23

This divine message enriches the main theme in this study. In short, creative and effective teaching, and patience and empathy, are inclusive and it takes time for creative and effective teaching to emerge.

- (v) For positive thinking, James William (1842-1910), an American philosopher and psychologist, in his words of wisdom: *Power of Positive Thinking*, asserted, "The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitude". Too many negative feelings and emotions make the existing problem or situation too heavy for anyone to carry. Negative feelings will reduce the quality of thinking and the state of tranquility. It also affects the management of one's emotional intelligence and adversity response. Think positively, and your brain will induce a kind of hormone—dopamine—which serves as a "neurotransmitter" to cultivate your creativity.

Being positive, your mind is active and clear, making things easier to handle, and to be solved. You become more appreciative, grateful, encouraging, and motivating in your study, business, and life. According to Brian Tracy, a person having a positive attitude is full of hope and confidence to "handle what is tough, along with remembering that nothing is at all negative all the time" (2014). The power of positive thinking is so dynamic that negative thoughts can be removed.

Tracy further reinforces that the power of positive thinking helps individuals to develop creativity. It is apparent that creativity nourishes the teacher's creative teaching attitude. Positive thinking needs logical planning and a mindset on an affirmative goal/aim. Without discreet planning and a fixed goal, you will not be able to stick to the directed channel to fulfill your "want", or "aim". Tracy (2014) asserts that "positive thinking can help you gain inner peace", a tranquil mind. In Chinese classical literature, *The Great Learning* (大學), it illustrates:

“When you have stability, you can be tranquil; when you are tranquil, you can be at ease; you can deliberate, when you can deliberate, you can attain your aims.”
(Muller, 1992)

In a creative teaching situation, the most essential principle is to cultivate positive thinking. Your positive attitude will encourage you to go forward, enjoying a “playful, lively and imaginative” learning atmosphere. It will lead to a “Happy, Healthy Optimistic—H2O”, and positive mentality. For instance, even if you say “Good Morning” joyfully in a positive voice and an expressive tone, you will delight your students. Positive attitude is contagious. In short, positive thinking is the spark that ignites the flame of creative and effective teaching.

(vi) For peaceful mind, teachers during the past months have been struggling against the “virus” cautiously and nervously about their well-being, besides worrying about their teaching jobs, and the health conditions of their students and family members. Together with other adverse factors, the mental stress is tremendous. The cultivation of AQ (Adversity Quotient) and EQ (Emotional Quotient) needs to be strengthened (Stoltz, 1997).

With a peaceful mind, people can reduce their anxiety, nervousness, and stress. The ability to concentrate on creative work, studies, and learning will be achieved. However, the peacefulness agent is the prerequisite of a calm mind, a solitude and tranquil inner peace. Zhuge Liang (諸葛亮) (181-234 A.D.), a respected statesman and strategist in ancient China, in his admonition to his son, said, “If you are not indifferent, you cannot understand your aspirations. If you are not quiet, you cannot go far. (非淡泊無以明志，非寧靜無以致遠)” So, a peaceful mind is needed to cultivate morality. In addition, cultivating a peaceful mind could enable you to facilitate harmonious interpersonal communication. Through these self-actualization efforts, creativity emerges.

In a school situation, no matter how “disorderly and disturbing” the class is, the creative teacher, in a calm and peaceful disposition, would manage the situation positively. People with a high AQ can control their anxiety and maintain a peaceful mind to handle conflicts. AQ and EQ are the foundation for cultivating creativity engagement. AQ and EQ are interconnected to complement each other resiliently. Together with Creative Quotient (CQ), they develop “Creativity Triangle/Creativity Incubation” (Yam, 2012, p.376-394), which will be transformed into the enlightenment of illumination. Wallas (1926) proposed one of the first complete models of the creative process. It consists of the four-stage process of preparation (or saturation), incubation, illumination and verification (or implementation). This illumination, the spark moment that suddenly pops up, is the result of the enduring struggle of ‘flight or fight’ efforts. With the balance of AQ and EQ and a peaceful mind, the energy of creativity is unleashed. In short, peace of mind liberates the energy of creativity in effective teaching.

3. Research Design

This study uses a survey to identify the traits and skills of a creative teacher who can motivate students to learn readily. I, the author, am aware of the fact that primary students may not realize what creative teaching is because the concepts of creativity and creative teaching may be beyond their cognition. So the survey would first ask students to identify the teachers they like and the lessons they feel motivated to attend. Then students were asked to do the questionnaire composed of twenty questions. These questions described the teachers’ performance in class. In analyzing the teachers’ performance in class according to the survey results, the traits and skills of effective teachers are identified. In turn, these traits and skills are compared with traits of creative teaching. I, the author, infer that effective teaching is also creative teaching and effective teachers are creative teachers.

The sample school is a primary school in Hong Kong. Participants were 5-6 graders; 265 students (149 boys and 116 girls) participated in the study. The questionnaire was set in Chinese. The analysis used the simple computation of the 5-point Likert scale. The survey was composed of two parts. In part one, students were asked to identify teachers who can motivate students to learn readily: “Think about the

teachers who deliver lessons you like to attend. These teachers may have taught you or you may imagine one. You would like to spend more time and effort to meet your teachers' demand." After that, students were asked to do the questionnaire composed of twenty questions. These questions described the teachers' performance in class. See the questions in the Appendix 1. Among these questions, some of them are related to creative teaching, positive thinking, and communication traits and skills, including the use of body language, humor, questioning, the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)/media, such as Zoom learning and teaching, IT communications, augmented reality, virtual reality, etc.

Results:

Q.1: Teachers often allow students to speak out in class without prior permission or according to order. They let students express their thinking freely and respond to teachers' questioning (54.3%).

Comment: "Openness" is a crucial element to cultivate creativity whatever the dimension is. Openness facilitates creativity and understanding. In teaching and learning process, being open and promoting freedom of expression enriches imaginative and critical thinking, as well as problem-solving skills. Studies (Kaufman & Gregoire, 2016) show that cultivating creativity needs an open mind to new experience in art and science: "openness to experience---the drive for cognitive exploration of one's inner and outer worlds---is the simple strongest and most consistent personality trait that predicts creative achievements."

Q.2: Given that students do not intentionally disrupt the class, teachers do not mind whether students strictly follow school regulations in class. For instance, students are allowed to discuss in low voice in class (55.5%).

Comments: Patience and empathy would be appropriate to calm down a hectic situation. Patience can allow room for improving the situation as long as the students are not restless.

Q.3: Teachers often use Information Communication and Technologies, both hardware such as computers, iPad, or mobile phones, and software such as PowerPoint, Zoom, and AR/VR, to arouse students' imaginations to understand better the subject matter contents. Effective teachers not just keep on lecturing (69.4%).

Comment: For the past two decades, students have welcomed the sophisticated development in ICT. Yet, discreet and appropriate use of ICT in the cultivation of students' critical mind, imagination, and engaged actively in learning is needed; otherwise, harmful effects will be resulted.

Q.4: When students encounter difficulties, such as in mathematics or languages, teachers will try to use different teaching methods to make students understand clearly and will not neglect the students and keep on lecturing (66.4%).

Comments: Patience is a virtue. A teacher should be persistently trying his/her best to explain in detail the problems the students encountered, using different kinds of teaching methods until the students understand. People with the 'never giving up' spirit and a positive attitude can create valuable inventions. A creative teacher is an effective teacher, who should have a positive mind and tolerance to accept what is being confronted in adversity.

Q.5: Based on the course contents, teachers will often find ways to expand the contents by telling stories about famous people, stories that cultivate morality, scientific inventions, healthy living, and the natural world, to inspire the students to think positively (65.3%).

Comments: Creative teachers would enrich the subject matters in the class and outside the classroom by telling and sharing the successful persons' fine deeds, including stories, morality, adventures, inventions, their wonder of the nature, and healthy lives. This enables them to think positively. These

are examples of life education aiming at broadening the horizon of students and making them aware of how to live a meaningful life.

Q.6: In class, the teacher always expresses his/her opinions on current affairs, popular television programs or movies (59.3 %).

Comment: Teachers have their own ways of thinking and perspectives. They have their own perceptions and values. During the lesson, they may mention current news or social issues. They may hold on to their aspiration persistently and their own viewpoints without accepting or listening to other points of view. Research studies show that students do not favor teachers to prevail their own thoughts or beliefs (O'Neil & Reid, 1985). In the communication process, the interactive, sharing behavior and positive attitude should be observed to attain effective teaching and learning. Teaching is not to profess knowledge or sell commodities. In my words, I call this, "The teacher is like a porter of information".

Q.7: Teachers are often engaged in teaching and often have so many things to teach us. It seems they have endless things to teach (52.4%).

Comments: When a teacher or anybody keeps on talking and talking about his/her own ideas, the receivers would not lend their ears to these "empty" messages. In didactic teaching, it is like a "fountain of knowledge" spreading water to nowhere.

Q.8: Teachers use different methods in teaching us. They require us to think first before answering the questions. Correct answers will be given after that (63.4%).

Comments: Questioning is a way to stimulate thinking, deepening imagination, inspiring curiosity, and fostering creativity. Creative thinking is divergent thinking. Questioning encourages the brain to think. A Chinese scientist scholar, Li Zheng Dao (李政道) (The Mirror, 2010) remarked that, "To innovate, you need to learn: Learn just to find answer is not learning. To innovate, you need to learn: The more you ask, the more you innovate!" Creative teachers should encourage students to discuss the questions and answers through brainstorming. Many teaching methods, such as debating and discussion, are good for questioning training. Questioning is the art of asking. Effective teachers can formulate the right question at the right time. The guru of management science, Peter Drucker asserted, "The question is more important than the answer."

Q.9: Teachers often praise and motivate students to raise questions for discussion. Through discussion, communication is deepened, and resonance nurtured (63.4%).

Comments: Welcoming students to ask questions motivates students to think positively and to attract attention to listen attentively to the teacher. Some puzzling ideas may be cleared and facilitating resonance. As a matter of fact, through the communication process of asking and answering, students will delight teacher's appreciation and encouragement. They can connect the whole learning process through interactive communication, transforming a very inspirational and motivational discourse. John Keller (1999), one of the advocators in motivational learning, devised a model of motivational learning — "ARCS" (Attentions, Relevance, Confidence, Satisfaction).

Q.10: In classroom teaching, teachers only use oral communication and seldom make use of computers or ICT to assist teaching and learning (41.1%).

Comments: It is apparent that students would not like a lesson without any ICT to enrich the subject matters. Using AR/VR and e-learning is fun and more interesting. At this present moment, Zoom learning is unavoidable and flipped classroom learning is challenging and flexible.

Q.11: In class, the tempo and pace, the voice intonation and expression of the teachers do not help us to pay attention to the course contents (44.9%).

Comments: During the past fifty years, I have done a few studies on body language/non-verbal communication, most of the students showed great interest in the teacher's voice, gestures, and facial expressions. But in this study, about half of the respondents were not agreeable with these areas.

Q.12: During class teaching, the teacher seldom flexibly uses body language, such as hand signals, facial expressions, or eye-contact to communicate. Furthermore, lacking the lively flow of the lesson, the voice level, intonation, and pace can hardly make students enjoy learning (49%).

Comments: Body Language and non-verbal communication more often than not have been welcomed by students in other studies. However, this study shows that most of the respondents may not show interest. They do not think body language/non-verbal communication are so motivating in learning. Some of the students might be too concentrated in the lesson.

Q.13: Teachers value students' privacy and never reveal any secrets that teachers have promised to keep. They will not openly tell individuals' secrets such as his or her family matters and illness (75.9%).

Comments: Integrity and trustworthiness are commonly acknowledged as the essence of morality. The concern of punctuality of class time and keeping students' secrets are welcomed by students (O'Neil & Reid, 1985).

Q.14: Teachers often do not accept students' answers or points of view that are different from theirs (49.4%).

Comments: Clearly, students would not accept any teacher's prejudice, ego-centeredness holding on to his/her ideas, or vantage points without approving their answers. Again, in the communication process, the attitude of empathetic listening and open sharing is essential. It is all because the teacher has a strong subjective consciousness of his own.

Q.15: Whenever a student breaks the school regulation, the teacher will not openly scold him/her. On the contrary, the student is often given a chance to explain his/her misbehavior. The teacher shows his/her love and respect towards the student and guides him/her to understand why such a behavior is made (63.1%).

Comments: To show empathy is basically the ability to understand others' emotions. It is a trait considered to be developed like other interpersonal skills. The behavior of empathizing comes naturally to most people who show concern and sympathy to those friends needed psychological and empathetic support in time.

Q.16: The teacher is tirelessly finding out the reasons why certain students are not motivated to learn in class (53.5%).

Comments: Patience is a very positive attitude in solving problems. You can stimulate motivation if you can have a positive mind. However, if the students are not in the mood, you have to try out some other strategies to remedy the situation. Patience, positive thinking, and possibility attitude may help; at least, you can eliminate stressfulness and anxiety.

Q.17: The teacher keeps on talking about the contents of the subject matter until the class ends without caring about the students' responses or feelings (37.4%).

Comments: The students' reaction to this question is not favorable. The score is the lowest in the study. The problem is the lack of interaction, and active communication showing concern to their presence. The talk, talk, talk is a one-man show only. Non-verbally the students are isolated.

Q.18: There are many group discussions in class and team-spirit is cultivated among students (53.6%).

Comments: Teamwork is one of the most essential skills in fostering a collaborative spirit. Meanwhile, small group discussion in learning is favorable. However, the skill in facilitating effective communication in team building is very significant. Virtually, collaboration is connected to creativity.

Q.19: The teacher keeps a ready eye observing students' reaction in class. He/she would eagerly try to understand students' performance in class. Consequently, he/she seldom keeps his/her eyes on the teaching materials or the ceiling. It is fun to attend his/her lessons as interesting topics are often raised to make us laugh. We do not feel bored in his/her lesson (69.1%).

Comments: Playfulness is made up of spontaneity, manifested joy, and a sense of humor. Anna Craft (2000) suggested that "where the teacher was playful, children are more creative. Divergent thinking did occur in the students when the teachers were playful (p.167)." In a classroom situation, playfulness and liveliness, in due course, can be considered as a motivational activity, whereby, it makes students learn readily. In fact, playfulness is regarded as a healthy personality trait.

Q.20: The teacher is often discreet and careful about his/her behavior. He/she may be a conservative and keeps a peaceful mind. He/she would not major on the minor in dealing with students' disciplinary problems (61.5%).

Comments: The study of cultivating peace - peace of mind in recent years has been moderately prevailing. The practice of mindfulness and meditation to secure inner peace has taken place in schools.

In a school situation, when undesirable disputes or conflicts occur, the creative teacher would manage such a state with discretion by keeping his/her peace of mind in fair and logical reasoning. Peace and harmony would be the goal of the situation.

4. Discussion

In my over 60 years of academic work in teaching, research, and publications, I realize in this study that "effective teachers", as perceived by the student respondents, possess a number of traits and skills. These traits and skills are, in turn, grouped and aligned into the six domains of effective teaching, namely (i) Communication; (ii) Integrity/Trust; (iii) Playfulness/Liveliness; (iv) Patience/Empathy; (v) Positive Thinking/Attitude, and (vi) Peacefulness.

In the decades of teaching activities, I have been delightfully committed to teaching as a creativity and humanity cultivation. It is my perception that to attain effective teaching and learning, teachers should act upon and observe the above domains as reference.

In the analysis, I further discover that creative teaching is embedded in effective teaching. Davis (2018) states that "Creativity requires a safe environment in which to play, exercise autonomy, and take risks. As teachers, it's up to us to establish this kind of supportive classroom." I perceive that creative teaching is the use of ICT, having integrity, empathy, and a positive mindset. This will make students feel free, open, flexible, curious, imaginative, lively, confident in learning, making their minds refreshing and active (figure 1).



Figure 1. Creative Teaching: My Way

Creative teaching is effective teaching because it fosters learning by increasing students' motivation, as well as deepening their understanding of the subject matters. In turn, such academic attainment promotes creative thoughts and brings sense of joy to both teachers and students.

To foster creative teaching, teachers have to cultivate passion and a clear mindset in teaching. Their efforts will affect positively the Ethos of school, which is the promotion of positive culture and communication in schools, inter-schools and the community at large. As such, the school ethos would foster positive learning environment. However, ethical issues should be taken into account when school promotes its ethos. As Cropley (2014) stated that the ethics of creativity should not be ignored, and teachers must fulfill their moral responsibilities.

4.1 Implications

In pursuing effective teaching in my career, creative teaching emerges as my main concern. However, the creativity in teaching and learning that I have gone through is a journey of hardship, tolerance, adversity and mental stress. Nevertheless, the other side of the same coin is that it also brings forth "Happiness, Hope, Humanity and Satisfaction". Such teaching experience has been rewarding and fruitful. It is a payoff experience.

In the process of writing up this study, I missed a crucial factor in developing children's creativity. Rogers (1969) has a metaphor about cultivating a child's creative thinking: one cannot control "how the sun sets" as if you cannot control how children develop their creativity (p. 236). The connotation is that creative teachers should open children's minds to freedom of expressions, independent thinking, and cultivate creative thoughts and imaginative visions. Tao Xing Zhi reminded us that creative teachers are not born. It is a cultivation of personality. He proclaimed that "Everybody can create... Every day, there is a chance for creation." (Zhang & Wang, 2019, p. 66)

All in all, going through the difficult and joyful times in this study, I have come to realize that creativity, communication and other effective teaching traits and skills in education need further studies. It is mentioned in the Curriculum Development Proposal proposed by the scholars (Lee, Chan, Xu, & Chun, 2017).

5. Conclusion

In this study, when I drafted the questions, I only thought of what reactions or responses the respondents expressed, with respect to their perceived “creative/effective” teachers were. To my great surprise, my editor and I discovered that we have gladly created a creative teacher model ---“Creativity: A Perceived Creative Teacher” which covers six domains of traits and skills, (i) Communication; (ii) Integrity/Trust; (iii) Playfulness/Liveliness; (iv) Patience/Empathy; (v) Positive Thinking/Attitude, and (vi) Peacefulness. They are holistically connected. In my research, rarely can I find these domains which are inter-related in the cultivation of a Creative Teacher. Among those 20 questions, “Integrity/Trust” got the highest score (75.9%). “ICT” came second, scoring 69.4%; “Playfulness/Liveliness” scored 69.1%, and “Patience/Empathy” scored 66.4% respectively. Other questions scored in the following manner, “Positive thinking” (65.3%), “Questioning: thinking” (63.4%), “Questioning: motivation” (63.4%), “Peace of Mind” (61.5%) and “Communication” (59.3%). This study enlightens me that a creative teacher, being lively, positive, trustworthy, patient, and creative with an open mind, is a life-long cultivation. Teachers should observe these traits closely and use them as guidance for their creative teaching.

5.1 Research Limitations

Some of my colleagues, and family members—except my son who is in Boston—advised me that I should not take this “intellectual” journey. I believe their reason is that they care about my health and didn’t want me to have too much stress. Besides, I have been too ambitious to “dream” that I could put all my relevant experiences into this study. Twenty variables/questions for investigation is difficult to focus on the major theme—perception of a creative teacher to be analyzed profoundly and sound. Moreover, “personal experiences” may not be convincing in a research-oriented paper.

During the incubation period of the study, I tolerated myself for almost three months reviewing related literature, and bits-and-pieces of information on the web. However, I always maintain a positive mental attitude regardless of the epidemic situation in Hong Kong. Reality is reality, principle is principle. Rules and regulations must be observed. The show must go on. I hope the above Six Domains of Creative Teaching and Communication Model can be of use in your teaching journey. Although at my age, I may not be as vigorous as a young person, yet I still have a fervent heart, a mission and a goal to pursue cultivating creativity in communication and education. That is why I ventured to work on this paper. As a life-long educator, I educate, I make contributions; I make mistakes. I learn from these valuable experiences. I have a positive mind.

“Calling for Quality Creative Teaching”

*Quality for academic excellence is your mission and goal,
Untiring enthusiasm for the love of creative teaching and learning to develop our young as a whole,
Assurance for quality service with a firm commitment so true indeed,
Learning how to learn and facilitate learning in the learners’ interest and need,
Identification of instructional objectives falls in the domains of cognitive, affective, and behavior,
Total positive involvement with learners lights up the spirit of both the learners and the teachers,
Yearning for self-actualization day after day to rectify oneself in the pursuit of excellence,
“Quality pays, quality results” depends on the standards and requirements set for assurance.*

Acknowledgement

This article is dedicated to Father J. O’Meara, S. J.

References

- Argandona, A. (2019). *The importance of patience in a work place*. Retrieved from <https://workplaceinsight.net/the-importance-of-patience-in-the-workplace/>
- Bar-Sawme, G. (2019). *Integrity is a key to creativity*. Retrieved from: <https://medium.com/@gabrielbarsawme/integrity-is-a-key-to-creativity-60d935eea77b>
- Bidault, F., & Castello, A. (2009). *Trust and creativity: Understanding the role of trust in creativity-oriented joint developments*. R&D Management, 39, 259-270. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9310.2009.00557.x
- Cropley A. (2014) Neglect of creativity in education: A moral issue. In: S. Moran, D. Cropley, & J. C. Kaufman (Eds) *The Ethics of Creativity*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. doi:10.1057/9781137333544_15
- Craft, A. (2000). *Creativity across the primary curriculum: Framework and developing practice*. London, England: Routledge.
- Curriculum Development Council (CDC). (2000). *Learning to learn: The way forward in curriculum development*. Retrieved from https://www.edb.gov.hk/attachment/en/curriculum-development/cs-curriculum-doc-report/learn-learn-2/E-ch_3a.pdf
- Davis, L. C. (2018). Creative teaching and teaching creativity: How to foster creativity in the Classroom. *Psych Learning Curve*. Retrieved from <http://psychlearningcurve.org/creative-teaching-and-teaching-creativity-how-to-foster-creativity-in-the-classroom/>
- Freud, S. (1933). Fragment of an analysis of a case of hysteria (1905). *Collected Papers, 111*, 13-149.
- Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Gardner, H. (1998). Navigating toward good work. *Commencement Address* delivered at Pennsylvania State University, 8 August.
- James, W. (n.d.). William James Quotes. *Briany Quote*. Retrieved from https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/william_james_104186
- Kaufman, S. B., & Gregoire, C. (2016). *How to cultivate your creativity*. Retrieved from <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-to-cultivate-your-creativity-book-excerpt/>
- Keller, J. (Writer), & Yam, L. P. K. (Host). (1999). *Motivational design for learning*[DVD]. UGC Project. Hong Kong: Lingnan College.
- Lee, J. C.-K., Chan, N. C., Xu, H., Chun, D. W.-S. (2017). Students' and teachers' perception of creativity, communication and problem solving in the school curriculum: Hong Kong perspective from seven-year. *Educational Practice and Theory*, 39(1), 31-51.
- Liang, Z. (n.d.). An admonition to my son. In *Collected works of Zhuge Liang* (B. H. Tse, & Q. D. Chen, Trans., 2013).
- Lieberman, N. A. (1976). Playfulness in play and the player: A behavioral syndrome viewed in relationship to classroom learning. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 1(2), 197-205. doi: 10.1016/0361-476X(76)90023-0
- Muller, A.C. 1992 The Great Learning (大學) Trans. Retrieved from: http://www.acmuller.net/con_dao/gratlearning.html
- National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) Report (1999). Retrieved from: <https://www.readyunlimited.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/all-our-futures1.pdf>
- Nikolopoulou, K. (2018). *Creativity and ICT: Creativity and ICT: Theoretical approaches and perspectives in school education*. Retrieved from https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-95059-4_5
- OECD. (2012). *Education today 2013: The OECD perspective*. Retrieved from https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-today-2013/executive-summary_edu_today-2013-3-en#page1
- O'Neil, M., & Reid, J. A. (1985). *Educational and psychological characteristics of students gifted in English*. Canberra, Australia: Commonwealth Schools Commission.
- Pogosyan, M. (2019). *Why we see what we want to see: The neuropsychology of motivated perception*. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/between-cultures/201907/why-we-see-what-we-want-see>
- Pradham, N. R. (2016). *Gratitude, empathy, and thinking - How to get creativity*. Retrieved from <https://make-up-and-breakup.com/>
- Rasmussen, C. (2019). *Power of creative patience*. Retrieved from <https://skinnyartist.com/power-of-creative-patience/>
- Roger, C. (1969). Freedom to learn (ed. Carl Rogers and William R. Coulson). Columbus, Ohio: A Bell & Howell Company.
- Schramm, W. (1954). How communication works. In W. Schramm (Ed.), *The process and effects of mass communication* (pp. 4 – 8). Champaign, IL: The University of Illinois Press.
- Stoltz, P. G. (1997). *Adversity quotient: Turning obstacles into opportunities*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Son.
- The Mirror. (2010). An interview: Li Zheng Dao [In Chinese]. The Mirror [鏡報月刊], 401(12), 36.

- Torrance, E. P. (1965). Scientific views of creativity and factors affecting its growth. *Creativity and Learning*, 94(3), 663-681.
- Tracy, B. (2014). The power of positive thinking: How thought can change your life. Retrieved from <https://www.briantracy.com/blog/personal-success/positive-attitude-happy-people-positive-thinking/>
- Vu, E. (2016). *Aristotle's philosophy*. Retrieved from <https://www.oasishighschoolcommunity.com/single-post/2016/03/01/Aristotles-Philosophy>
- Wallas, G. (1926). *The Art of Thought*. Google Books. Retrieved from: https://books.google.com.hk/books/about/The_Art_of_Thought.html?id=FJtWswEACAAJ&source=kp_book_description&redir_esc=y
- Ward, W. (1957). *Playmaking with children* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Whitton, N. (2018). A playful approach to learning means more imagination and exploration. The Conversation.com. Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/a-playful-approach-to-learning-means-more-imagination-and-exploration-94850>
- Yam, L. P. K. (1982). Interpersonal communication: An educational perspective. *Chinese University of Hong Kong Educational Journal*, 10(3), 49.
- Yam, L. P. K. (1991). *Education, communication, technology*. Hong Kong: The Continuing Education, Baptist College.
- Yam, L. P. K. (Producer & Host). (1994). *Body language and non-verbal communication in education* [DVD]. A University Grants Committee (UGC) funded project, The Consortium for the Promotion of Teaching Skills and Technology (1995 – 1999). Hong Kong: Lingnan College.
- Yam, L.P.K, (2009). A speech delivered at a conference featuring “Education, Communication, and Technology, a reflection of humane communication in teaching and Learning” “Student Center Teaching and Learning” 《教育、傳意、科技的整合：”人與仁”為本教與學的反思》，電化教育研究月刊，第十一期(總第199期)。 <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/gary.stuman.htm> (2009.09.29)
- Yam, L. P. K. (2012). *Education, communication, creativity*. Hong Kong: Riding Publishing.
- Yam, L. P. K. (2018). Gratitude: Cultivating a communication of life and living - A seminar in celebration of Thanksgiving Day, organized by Emersion Associates Ltd., Hong Kong.
- Yam, L. P. K., & Tso, W. B. A. (Host). (2013). Non-verbal communication and body language. In L. P. K. Leo & W. B. A. Tso (Eds.), *ENGLA122F: Presentation Skills* (Unit 9). Hong Kong: The Open University of Hong Kong. Retrieved from www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuNYxKxUIM4
- Yam, L. P. K., & Tso, W. B. A. (Host). (2013). Managing your voice. In L. P. K. Leo & W. B. A. Tso (Eds.), *ENGLA122F: Presentation Skills* (Unit 10). Hong Kong: The Open University of Hong Kong. Retrieved from <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=KmSAltN7R0s>
- Zhang, R., & Wang, Z. (2019). The enlightenment of Tao Xing Zhi's democratic education thought on college ideological and political courses. *Advances in Economics, Business and Management Research*, 82, 65.

Appendix. Survey Instrument

Questions

1. 老師經常容許學生不按先後次序，或說話前先舉手規定，讓學生以開放的態度自由發表意見或回應老師的問題。
Teachers often allow students to speak out in class without prior permission or according to order. They let students express their thinking freely and respond to teachers' questioning.
2. 祇要學生不是故意搗亂，老師不在意全班學生是否嚴格遵守紀律。例如老師會容許學生間的細聲的討論。
Given that students do not intentionally disrupt the class, the teachers do not mind whether students follow strictly the school regulations in class. For instance, students are allowed to discuss in low voice in class.
3. 老師經常用教育科技工具（如 iPad、PPT 簡報、電腦、AR/VR、zoom.....）引起學生想像力，從而更明白所要學習的內容，而非單是口講。
Teachers often use Information and Communication Technologies, both hardware such as computers, iPad, or mobile phones and software such as PPT, Zoom, AR/VR, to arouse students' imagination to understand better the

subject matter contents, and not just keep on lecturing after lecturing.

4. 當學生有學習困難時，例如難明的詞語或數學題目，老師經常試用不同的方法，嘗試使學生明白，直到學生明白為止，而不會繼續教下去。

When students encounter difficulties such as in mathematics or languages, teachers will try to use different teaching methods to make students understand clearly and will not neglect the students and keep on lecturing.

5. 老師經常找機會，根據教科書的內容，把有關知識融入講課內容，例如講述一些成功人士、良好品格的故事，以及科學發明、大自然和健康生活的例子等，以啟發正面思考。

Based on the course contents, teachers will often find ways to expand the contents by telling stories about famous people, stories that cultivate morality, scientific inventions, healthy living and the natural world, so as to inspire the students to think positively.

6. 老師經常在授課時不斷發揮自己對各種事物的觀點，例如新聞、電視台的劇集或其它節目，看到的電影等。

In class, the teachers always express their opinions on current affairs, popular television programs or movies.

7. 老師經常能投入教學，有很多東西教我們，好像永遠都說不完、教不完的情況。

Teachers are often engaged in teaching and often have so many things to teach us. It seems he/she has endless things to teach us.

8. 老師經常用提問方法講授課文，要求學生思考後才回答問題，然後告訴學生正確的答案。Teachers use different methods in teaching us. They require us to think first before answering the questions. Correct answers will be given after that.

9. 老師經常鼓勵和讚賞學生提出問題，以引起討論動機，加深溝通和了解，從而產生共鳴。Teachers often praise and appreciate students to raise questions for discussion. Through discussion, communication is deepened, and resonance nurtured.

10. 老師講課時，經常口述所有內容，很少應用資訊科技輔助講解。
In classroom teaching, teachers just use oral methods and seldom make use of computers or ICT to assist teaching/learning.

11. 老師講課時說話節奏、語調聲音和表情都難以讓我們專心上課。
In class, the pace, the voice intonation, and expressions of the teachers do not help us to pay attention to the course contents.

12. 老師上課時，很少靈活運用身體語言，如自然的手勢、表情和眼神等；另外，很少以流暢的說話節奏、語調和聲線等，吸引我們輕鬆開心的學習。

During class teaching, the teacher seldom flexibly uses body language, such as hand signals, facial expressions, eye-contact to communicate.

Furthermore, lacking the lively flow of the lesson, the voice level, intonation, and pace can hardly make enjoy the learning.

13. 老師重視學生的個人秘密，從來不會講出同學要老師守的秘密。又不會對全班同學講出不利某學生的事情(例如他們的家庭、個人的疾病)。
The teachers value students' privacy confidential and never leak out any secret that teachers have promised to keep. They will not openly tell individual student's secrets such as his or her family matters and sickness.
14. 老師經常不接納學生的答案、或與老師不同的觀點。
Teachers often do not accept students' answers or points of view that are different from theirs.
15. 當學生犯了校規，老師不會當眾責罵那位同學。相反，老師經常給機會讓那犯錯的同學解說。然後以關愛的態度，引導犯錯的學生，與有關學生分析犯錯的原因。
Whenever a student breaks the school regulation, the teacher will not openly scold him/her. On the contrary, the student is often given a chance to explain his/her misbehavior. The teacher shows his/love towards the student and guides the student to understand why such a misbehavior is made.
16. 老師經常積極不厭其煩地找出學生缺乏學習動機的原因。
The teacher is tirelessly finding out the reasons why certain students are not motivated to learn in class.
17. 老師經常依書直說的講授課文、總之就是講、講、講，講到不停，直到下課。
The teacher keeps on talking after talking about the contents of the subject matter until the class ends without caring about the students' responses or feelings.
18. 老師經常進行分組討論學習活動，以培養學生的團隊合作精神。
There are lots of group discussions in class and team-spirit is cultivated among students.
19. 上課時老師經常觀察學生的反應，洞悉我們上課時的表現，不會祇望課本和黑板。他/她會用笑話或有趣話題，使學生發笑，使我們不覺得沉悶。
The teacher keeps a ready eye observing students' reactions in class. He/she can eagerly detect our performance in class because he/she seldom keeps his/her eyes on the teaching materials or the ceiling. It is fun to attend his/her lesson as interesting topics are often raised that make us laugh. We do not feel bored in his/her lesson.
20. 老師很多時都非常謹慎，以保守、息事寧人的態度處理學生紀律問題。
The teacher is often discreet and careful about his/her behavior. He/she may be a conservative and keeps a peaceful mind. He/she would not major on the minor in dealing with students' disciplinary problems.

About the Author

Leo P.K. Yam, the Founding/Honorary President of the Hong Kong Association for Educational Communications and Technology, obtained his Master of Science in Speech-Education, University of Wisconsin and his Doctor of Education at TC, Columbia University, where he directed the TV Research Studio. For over 25 years, he had developed tertiary teaching staff development programs for Lingnan College, Baptist University, Shue Yan University, and Chu Hai College of Higher Education; and his teaching interests include creative teaching, effective presentation, TV/Media, public speaking, theatre-arts, etc. He had also served as a visiting professor at The University of Pittsburg, headed the “China Program” of the School of Education at The University of San Francisco, and supervised the School of Education’s Educational Communications Centre at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. His research interests range from education, communication, technology, creativity, to body language. At Lingnan College, he was awarded a UGC grant to direct a project on Tertiary Teaching and Technology, in which 13 videos (DVD) were produced. His book publications include *Education, Communication, Technology, Communication: Poetry 300*, *The Power of Oral Communication*, and *Education, Communication, Creativity*.

Journal of Communication and Education © 2021

ISSN 2311-5157

www.hkaect.org/jce/

Please cite as: Yam, L. P. K. (2021). Creative teaching and communication: A study of creative teachers’ traits and skills as perceived by primary school students. *Journal of Communication and Education, 5(1)*, 104-120.