



The Psychology Of Affect And Creativity: How Creativity Can Be Encouraged Among The Young Minds Within The Classroom Situation

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Abstract: In this work, an attempt has been made to explore the concept of affect and that of creativity. Then, to find out the relation between the two. It has been found that there is no consensus regarding the nature of the above relation. Finally, an attempt has been made to explore the different ways to encourage creativity among the young minds within classroom situation.

Key words: affect, creativity, relation, encouragement

The concept of affect:

According to Wundt the word 'affect' refers to a feeling state that is fundamental ingredient of human mind. Wundt argued that affect is a direct, psychologically primitive experience.¹ The term 'affect' refers to an underlying state or feeling a person has that is connected to their emotions. Affective states are usually described from two dimensions: valence (from positive to negative) and arousal (from high to low).

Although the terms affect and emotion are often used interchangeably, they are not exactly the same. Affect refers to the unconscious or subconscious basic feeling states that are felt at our 'core'. That is why scholars like, Russell and Barret called it 'core affect' (1999). E.g., irritability, pleasure, melancholy, etc. On the other hand, emotion refers to the complex psychological states that are often more consciously and acutely felt. However, emotion fades away within a very short period of time. E.g., the immediate conscious feeling of fear, anger can be classified as emotion.²

The concept of creativity:

Let us try to understand the concept of creativity. Creativity is often connected with intelligence. It is perceived as a mental product. But what is creativity? How the concept of creativity has originated?

At the outset of our discussion on creativity, it is worth mentioning Madeleine L'Engle (1982). According to her, unless we create, we do not live. Creativity is a productive way of living life.

But unless we are creators we are not fully alive. What do I mean by creators? Not only artists, whose acts of creation are the obvious ones of working with paint of clay or words. Creativity is a way of living life, no matter our vocation or how we earn our living...

Like most of the concept of human history the concept of creativity has also been evolved through time. A look at the origin of the concept of creativity reveals the fact that the origin of the concept of creativity lies in the concept of divine creation. The Greeks used to uphold the view that creativity is a gift that is bestowed upon by God or Goddesses only to a handful of population. The same idea can be found to prevail even in the Renaissance period. So, it is only at the onset of the enlightenment period that creativity has been started to be viewed as a realistic, practical and utilitarian phenomenon. After years of study and research now creativity is viewed as a rational phenomenon.

Even then, scholars find it difficult to define creativity; because this concept is composed of a number of components. Creativity is often expressed in various forms. At times it is viewed as an original way of problem solving, e.g., as found in case of the scientists; at other times it is viewed as a way of self-expression, e.g., as found in case of the poets or painters. Therefore, the difficulty remains, how to define creativity? Should we define creativity in terms of problem solving, or in terms of self-expression?

Further, there are certain basic disagreement. According to some, in order to have a pure understanding of the concept, only eminent level of creativity must be studied. What can be considered to be eminent level of creativity? If a creative expression achieves a significant level or path breaking level, only such an expression can be regarded as eminent level creativity and therefore, can be studied (e.g., Gardner, 1993; Sawyer, 2006). This type of creativity is called Big-C Creativity. The study of domain changing innovations and accomplishment fall under this category. However, some scholars oppose such a view and assert that 'little c' type of creativity should not be ignored. According to this group of scholars (e.g., Finke, Ward, & Smith, 1992; Weisberg, 2006)³ the study of fantasies and day dreams of less eminent people helps unveiling the hidden creative talent lying within them. So when common people come up with new ideas and pursue their creative goal, it has to be studied as expressions of creativity.

Another debate regarding creativity revolves around the fact about the locus of creativity. Where does creativity lie? Does it lie with the person or with the process? If it is accepted that creativity lies with the person, then focus has to be on the personality, aptitude of the person creating; while if the focus has to be kept on the process, divergent thinking has to be given emphasis. In order to find a middle path an amalgamation of both, person and process has to be taken into consideration. Such a study of creativity, involving both the person and the process can never be an objective study of creativity. It has to carry the charge of subjectivity. Other than the given two views there exists another view of creativity which asserts that what is important in creativity is the end product. When the product is considered important in assessing creativity, two aspects of it turn out to be very significant. One is the novelty and the other, appropriateness. Novelty means the work has to be new or original; and appropriateness means it has to be useful or meaningful. There has been debate regarding the comparative importance of these two; but a pragmatic way out has been to keep a balance between these two aspects: originality and usefulness.⁴

Different psychologists have come up with different definitions of creativity:

Sternberg et al. and O'Hara (2000) hold that creativity is 'the production of an idea or product that is both novel and useful'⁵ Runco (2007) argues that such definitions should be called the "product definitions" of creativity. According to him, when it comes to creativity it is not the product but the process that should be given more importance. Beghetto and Kaufman (2007) defined creativity as novel, personally meaningful interpretation of experience, actions, and events. However, novelty and meaningfulness of these interpretations need not require to be original (or, even meaningful) to others.⁶

Affect and Creativity:

Creativity is often perceived to be an intellectual exercise. Affect, on the other hand, represents feeling states. So, apparently both seems to be antagonistic in nature. They are not expected to complement each other. Researchers over the years working on the relationship between these two concepts. Our focus remains on the nature of relation between affect and creativity at work.

Teresa M. Ambile of Harvard University, along with Sigal G. Barsade, University of Pennsylvania, Jennifer S. Muller, New York University, and Barry M. Staw, University of California have undertaken a research with 222 employees in seven companies that studies how affect is related to creativity at

workplace. There has been both qualitative and quantitative data. The result shows that there has been a simple linear relation between positive affect and creativity. Positive affect affects creativity in a positive manner. It has been identified as an antecedent condition for creative thought, even when there had been a gap of two days. On the basis of qualitative analysis, it has been found that positive affect has been generated as a consequence of creative product, and also present as a concomitant condition during creative process.⁷

They explained, "Creative activity appears to be an affectively charged event, one in which complex cognitive processes are shaped by, co-occur with and shape emotional experiences. The biographies, letters, and journals of well-known creative individuals abound with emotional drama. Popular literature has often described affective dysfunction as an ingredient of creativity, using stories of artists such as Vincent Van Gogh and Sylvia Plath to illustrate the troubled life of creative genius. Less publicized are the most positive images of creatives, such as the mathematician Henri Poincare, who reported that he experienced creative breakthroughs while on vacation, relaxed and comfortable (Vernon, 1970), or Mozart, who claimed that pleasant moods were most conducive to his creativity: "When I am, as it were, completely myself, entirely alone, and of good cheer – say, travelling in a carriage, or walking after a good meal, or during the night when I cannot sleep; it is on such occasions that my ideas flow best and most abundantly" (Vernon, 1970:55)"⁸

In this context, these scholars have discussed 'The Nature and Form of the Affect-Creativity Relationship'. Following Clore, Schwarz, and Conway, they point out that positive affect generates a variation in the cognitive process that in turn, stimulates creativity. Isen observes that positive affect can have three primary effects on cognitive activity. 'First, positive affect makes additional cognitive material available for processing, increasing the number of cognitive elements available for association. Second, it leads to defocused attention and a more complex cognitive context, increasing the breadth of those elements that are treated as relevant to the problem. Third, it increases cognitive flexibility, increasing the probability that diverse cognitive elements will in fact become associated. Isen concluded that, together, these processes lead positive affect to have a positive influence on creativity.⁹ Isen proves his point, positive affect induces changes in cognitive processing that facilitate creative activity, with a number of experiments. In some of the studies by Isen, positive mood has been induced by giving participants a treat or gift, or by showing a film clip of a comedy, or by making them listen to an 'affect-laden' music. These experiments showed consistently that a high level of creative performance have been preceded by the inducement of positive mood. In case of the experiments with students, these creative performances may involve, unusual but appropriate word association, greater fluency, more divergent responses than the usual, or even, enhanced performance on exercises required flexible problem solving. These empirical evidences make his demand more justified.¹⁰

There is another camp of theorists according to whom negative affect generates more creativity. These theorists often put forward evidences from relation between 'affective illness' and creativity. Ludwig has undergone an experiment (1992) with 1,005 individuals of 20th century. He chose his subjects from 45 variety of professions. What he did find from his experiment is that there is a 'slight but significant correlation between' two factors, i.e., depression and creativity¹⁰. Besides, a number of systematic studies support the claim that there is a strong correlation between affective disorders like depression and bipolar illness. Later, Feist concluded (1999) 'that there is a reliable relationship between affective illness and high level of creative accomplishment'¹². However, Feist also made it clear that such a relation holds good primarily in case of artistic creativity. His claim about such a correlation does not apply in case of scientific creativity. However, they point out that as most of the experiments on affect and creativity link is laboratory based, this 'relationship in organizational settings is still very much an open question.'¹³

In another article, 'A Dynamic Perspective on Affect and Creativity' Ronald Bledow, Kathrin Rosing and Michael Frese have argued 'that creativity is influenced by the dynamic interplay of positive and negative affect'¹⁴. High creativity can be an effect of "affective shift". What can be considered to be a "affective shift"? If an individual goes through a series of negative affect followed by a decrease of the same and, at the same time, an increase of positive affect, then the process will be regarded as "affective shift". They have examined 102 employees on the basis of experience-sampling study; and the outcome supported

their hypothesis. Further, an experimental study with 80 students emphasized the proposed connection between an “affective shift” and creativity.¹⁵

These scholars acknowledge the claim (Isen, 1999) that positive affects like happiness or enthusiasm gives rise to high level of creativity, they question that whether positive affect alone can cause creativity. They point out that creativity is one of the most complex mental functions and it is likely that the ‘whole spectrum of affective experiences’¹⁶ play certain significant role in it. Under such conditions, not only the positive affect, but also negative affect like anxiety, frustration, and distress contribute significantly in creative accomplishment. So, according to them, the position of Isen or Amabile reveal a one-sided and incomplete view on creativity. They proceed further and acknowledged that positive and negative affect both have significant roles in creativity. They have illustrated their core position with an analogy of a phoenix. They explained that phoenix is a mythological bird. It ‘burns to ashes and subsequently resurrects from its own ashes’¹⁷ and turns into a colourful bird. This cycle is repeated over and over again. So, the rise of a phoenix had been preceded by a phase of decline. These scholars claim that human creativity or emergence of a new idea face a prior condition of negative affect. However, this negative affect leads to a condition of high positive affect. Here lies the similarity between a phoenix and a creative individual. They argued that the past research on the relation between affect and creativity put emphasis on the rise of the phoenix, and ignored the previous condition of decline of the phoenix. In other words, the initial presence of the negative affect has been ignored; and therefore they could find a strong relation between positive affect and creativity. So, such findings were partial and incomplete. They have also pointed out that the researchers have also neglected the dynamic nature of affect. They explained, ‘A person’s affective experience changes continuously; emotion rise and fall in response to external events, and mood are subject to ongoing, gradual change’.¹⁸ So, if an authentic research is to be conducted in this area, the change in affect and the interplay of positive and negative affect in the situation of creativity have to be considered.

Encouraging creativity among young minds within classroom situation:

If it is admitted that opportunity can bring about an enhancement in creative accomplishment, let us take a note on how creativity can be encouraged among students. Regarding this, different thinkers have come up with different suggestions. Some of are as follows:

- **Cultivation of intrinsic values:** There can be two types of value: intrinsic value and extrinsic value. Value that is assigned to something for its own sake; value that a thing has in itself is called the intrinsic value of the thing. On the other hand, value that is assigned to something because of what it does, what utility it brings about, is said to be the extrinsic value of a thing. E.g., the beauty of the sunset or the joy of reading poetry are said to have intrinsic value since these are valuable on their own right. Wealth, fame, food are examples of extrinsic value. Extrinsic value is also called instrumental value, since it is instrumental to some external end. Teachers can nurture young minds so that they can develop the ability to recognise the intrinsic value of things. Inculcation of such values help them to realize the joy of creative pursuit.
- **Free environment in the classroom:** Unless a student feels free to express her thought and ideas, creative activity cannot even take its first step. So, the classroom environment has to be kept very comforting. A safe and supporting environment in the classroom is mandatory in which students can ‘raise their question, explore their interests and pursuit their curiosity.’¹⁹
- **Learn by doing:** Confucius said, “I hear and I forgot. I see and I remember. I do and I understand”. So, let the students have activities of their own; so that they can explore and discover. Eg, they can be asked to form questions out of their portions being taught. They can be given collaborative work like, preparing a summer research project where each member of the group will contribute according to her capacity. This active engagement will help them develop their creative skill.
- **Encourage curiosity:** Usually in the traditional method of teaching students are taught for writing answers in the examination. So, traditional method of teaching put lot of emphasis on rote learning, where their ability to remember and recall information is tested. Along with this, opportunities can be

given to explore their area of interest and writing a summary on it. They can be asked to design a short programme on it, like organising a student's workshop, or an exhibition of books or pictures from their respective area. Such activities can be conducted on a collaborative basis also.

- **Allow failure:** Failure is common to anything new. So, when it comes to young students, some efforts will definitely not give results. This is where the students need the support of the teachers most. In fact, learning through 'what didn't work' teaches us all valuable lessons in life. At such hours of failure what helps the students to motivate themselves further, is a constructive feedback. So, a supportive mind and constructive criticism can be considered as some of the ways to nurture the creativity among the student at the difficult times.

- **Respect each student's input:** Young minds are enthusiastic, but sceptical about the worth of their thoughts. They may come up with different ideas. Teachers need to be patient to listen to their ideas. Considering those ideas, discussing them, show respect for every idea coming from the other end. This kind of respectful approach on the teacher's end, adds immense value to the creative pursuit of the students. So, encouragement, recognition and value are the three ways to motivate students to think creatively.²⁰

- **Breaking the glass ceiling:** In learning situation nothing is final; nothing should be taken for granted. Every assumption, every axiom can be questioned. In fact, students should be encouraged to question assumptions. In this way, they learn to think of a problem from multiple perspectives. In other words, they learn to think out of the box or innovatively.

- **Widen the horizon:** Students should be encouraged to exchange their thought with diverse group. 'By looking at different cultures, religions and upbringings, children can embrace thinking differently and celebrate the diverse contributions that people around the world make.'²¹ That is why heterogeneous classroom is supposed to be more conducive to creativity for the students.

- **Six Thinking Hat Method:** One of the ways of enhancing creativity can be by applying six thinking hats method at work. What is meant by six thinking hats method? Edward de Bono authored a book called 'Six Thinking Hats' (1986). He believes, "the main difficulty of thinking is confusion, where we try to do too much at once, Emotions, information, logic, hope and creativity all crowd in on us. It's like juggling too many balls". In order to resolve this confusion, he talked about six different types of thinking, where each type of thinking has been associated with a hat of a different colour. The white hat is the objective hat, focuses on facts and logic, the red hat is the intuitive hat, focuses on emotion and instinct. The black hat is the cautious hat, used to predict negative outcomes. The yellow hat is the optimistic hat, used to look for positive outcomes. Blue hat is the hat of control, used for management and organization. The green hat is the creative hat, used to generate free ideas without censor. So each thinking hat represents one lens or perspective of thinking²². For collaborative work, this method can be very useful for students. This kind of lateral thinking is regarded to be helpful to avoid conflict and bias when people work in groups.

- **Explore spiritual or emotional creativity:** One can connect to divine through the work of art. Such connectivity helps us remain humble about our creation. Students can be encouraged to spiritualise their passion to discover the aspect of divinity in life.

In conclusion, it must be admitted that although the relation between positive or negative affect on creativity remains undecided, the quest for creativity is something that has to be preserved within the human mind; and teachers can play a significant role in facilitating the creative urge in young minds.

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