The Interplay of Creativity and Policy: Quality and Equality in Teacher Education

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Abstract

What is the relationship between creativity and policy in higher education? How does this relationship shape the educational outcomes and impact educational quality and equality? This paper examines the definition of creativity, its connection with higher education and policy in the course of history, and illustrates the complex interplay of creativity and policy. At the same time, it explores the impact on quality and equality with an example of an admission policy for teacher education programs at the College of Education, University of Hawaii at Manoa.

Introduction

As the educational systems expand and mature into the twenty first century, the educational policies become intricately established and structured. They play a central role in the quality and standards of education at the international, national, state, and local organizational levels. All this begs the question: Is there any place for creativity in our education enterprise today? Other questions necessarily also become apparent. What is the role of creativity in education? How can it be integrated with policies? What is its impact and added value to education? This paper will explore the above in the context of teacher education, especially preservice teacher education educational policy, following the philosophical frameworks of Dewey (1966), Greene (1995), and Banks (2006). It will illustrate the necessity and significance of the integration between creativity and policy so as to strive for quality and equality.

Definition of creativity

Throughout the history of human race, people hold creativity in high esteem and awe. It is via this very ability, capacity, and energy that the world as we know it has developed from the primitive Stone Age to a sleek technological global economy. However, this powerful force seems to be hard to harness, uncover, or name, and it constantly exhibit an elusive nature as we try to discover, engage, or develop it. Philosophers and other alike ponder where creativity comes from and what is the originating source. Is creativity a given gift at birth? Is it divine and from God? Is it developed and shaped in life by experience and education? While there are many questions, to start with we would like to ask a simple, or seemingly so, question: What is creativity?

Creativity, defined by the Webster Universal Encyclopaedic Dictionary, is either "the quality and/or ability to create" or "having the quality of something created rather than imitated" (p. 425). In other words, it is the quality or ability of human beings to make, develop, or do something that is unprecedented, new, innovative, and refreshing. Given the large population of human race and long history, a display of creativity by any individual, which is highly valued by and transformative in the society that she and he lives in at the time, is indeed not a trivial or trifle occurrence.

For ages, in order to expand consciousness on the elusiveness of creativity, philosophers, scholars, researchers, and educators, have toiled to explain the nature and entity of creativity. Howard Gardner (1989) states,

> Creativity is best described as the human capacity regularly to solve problems or to fashion
> products in a domain, in a way that is initially novel but ultimately acceptable in a culture. Of

particular moments are those achievements that radically alter our understanding of scientific phenomena or our conceptions of the personal so social world (p. 14).

With his theory of multiple intelligences, he categorizes different types of human intelligence as well as the kinds of creativities associated with them and the sources of such creative activities. At the same time, he points out the different avenues or learning strategies that foster creativity and enhance intelligence, such as "mimetic" and "transformative" (Gardner, 1989, p. 3). He believes that "creativity is most likely to be fostered by a transformative atmosphere" (p. 14).

Meanwhile, many others have shared their perceptions and insights on creativity. Often, people view creativity as the ability to build novel and unique connections as part of the problem solution. Maxine Greene (1995) illustrates that imagination and creativity "obviously deals in unpredictabilities, in the unexpected. It then requires reflectiveness on our part to acknowledge the existence of these unexpected and unpredictable vistas and perspectives in our experiences" (pp. 124–125). Thomas Disch (2007) indicates, "Creativity is the ability to see relationships where none exist." While English Writer William Plomer (2007) states, "Creativity is the power to connect the seemingly unconnected." Bill Moyers (2007), on the other hand, views "Creativity is piercing the mundane to find the marvellous." Others illustrate the connections between creativity and other qualities such as courage and trust (Land, 2007; Prince, 2007). American poet Maya Angelou (2007) captures the relationship of creativity with courage by saying, "I believe the most important single thing, beyond discipline and creativity is daring to dare." Rita Mae Brown (2007) highlights the trust and instincts, explaining, "Creativity comes from trust. Trust your instincts. And never hope more than you work."

All this indicates that creativity is not a disparate trait, but that it is intricately integrated with many other significant aspects of a person's capacity and ability. In addition, creativity is also deeply associated in human cognitive, biological, and spiritual spheres and profoundly rooted in the social and cultural contexts. In American Native culture, "a strong attitude integrally connects the power of Original Thinking or Creation Thinking to the power of mothering. That power is not so much the power to give birth, as we have noted, but the power to make, to create, to transform" (Allen, 1992, p. 29). Such power is shared with all creatures and thus sacred.

Creativity and higher education

What then is the relationship between creativity and higher education as well as its policies? Or is there any relationship between them at all? Based on creativity's definition above and the history of higher education, the inception of higher education itself was a product and outcome of creativity. When we look back at the inception and origin of higher education institutions, whether in Egypt, China (Da Xue in Shang Dynasty in 1100 B.C.), Spain (University of Salamanca since 1218 A.D.), or France, the variations and the names, the first higher education institutions came forth as an enterprise of creativity regardless of location or time (Altbach & Umakoshi, 2004; Mao, 1984). Higher education was, and still is, the special place where scholars develop and transmit the advanced knowledge and play significant roles with the established governing bodies of the land, may they be feudal, colonial, imperial, industrial, capitalistic, liberal, democratic, or any forms in between. Creativity does not stop at the birth of higher education; it is very much intertwined with the evolution and growth of each single aspect of higher education.

In the U.S. for example, Harvard was the first university (1636) in North America (except the higher learning of Native Americans), which brought the higher education system from Europe and Britain to the colonies. Since then, creativity has shaped and impacted many of the changes that have occurred at Harvard. For example, there were several key actions: the establishment of Redcliffe College (1879), the creation of the G.I. Bill (Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944) which enabled veteran World War I soldiers to enter and pursue their education in the elite "ivory tower," the desegregation (Richard T. Greener, first American student graduated in 1870) (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2007), the coeducational opportunities including the hiring and tenure and promotion of women and minority faculty, to name a few

(Bethell, 1998; Hoerr, 1997; Cremin, 1988; President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2005; Wikipedia, 2007). Without exaggeration, it is fair to say that creativity has been the driving force of the establishment of higher education itself.

These developments in higher education not only create the new boundary and frontier of the enterprise, but also bring forth the profound philosophical and structural transformation in the process. Higher education evolves from a privileged and hierarchical system to a much more leveled field that is more open, inclusive, assessable, and participatory worldwide. All these are the evidence and products of creativity.

Policy: creativity and/or captivity

As higher education expands and interacts among its institutions and with society, it develops and creates educational policies at various levels (program, department, college, university, state, nation, professional organization, and international criteria) to enhance quality, management, and consistency. Each policy, small or big in its scale, came into being with the Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) of creativity. Various educational policies permeate higher education within and without, stabilizing the entire enterprise akin to the internal steel structures of a tall building. For instance, the common policy that for higher education admission, applicants need to complete the general education from kindergarten to twelfth grade successfully now is practiced in all the nations. The policy that each institution or academic unit needs to have professional accreditation is implemented globally, although the actual accreditation agency and process may vary field-by-field or country-by-country.

As ever present as educational policies are in higher education, interestingly, once they are created and adopted, they tend to manifest another nature, which seems to contradict the force of creativity that bring them into the world. That is to say, policies start to have a confining and limiting power that resonates with captivity and constraint instead of creativity. One of the examples that exists in the College of Education (COE), University of Hawaii at Manoa is that of our admission requirements for preservice teacher education programs. There is the policy that applicants must have a cumulative 2.75 grade point average (GPA) (2.5 for math and sciences majors). The policy is to safeguard the quality of the program and teaching profession and it also makes sure that the students enrolled in the programs will have the knowledge base on which to build their professional education. The policy also ensures that COE preservice programs meet the requirements for national accreditations and professional programs review such as National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) (2000). However, in practice, when this policy is reinforced, quite a number of applicants who did poorly in their freshman year a decade or so ago and who have a semester GPA of 3.00 or above are eliminated. So are those of applicants who are in rural areas of Hawaii, where they do not have access to the courses needed to increase their cumulative GPA. All these are compounded by the fact there is a severe national shortage of teachers in math, sciences, special education, and world languages in the United States. Each year, the Hawaii Department of Education (HI DOE) would have hundreds of vacancies when school starts even when they hire emergency teachers who are not highly qualified according to the U.S. Federal Government's standards (HI DOE, 2007).

In this case, the policy seems to hold the applicants as well as the COE preservice teacher education programs and the HI DOE hostage, and create a professionally, academically, and legally challenging situation and complication. More importantly, most of the applicants in the above categories are often culturally underrepresented students in rural areas such as native Hawaiians and Filipinos. The access issue has much to do with educational equality and equity. The continuous denial of their admission to COE preservice teacher education programs greatly impacts the teaching force and education quality and sustainability in their rural communities. The philosophical question is: Are we providing educational equality or quality if we provide the same treatment to students who are culturally and professionally diverse and who have a variety of needs? As many multicultural education theorists and researchers repeatedly illustrate, "one standard size" cannot fit all (Banks & Banks, 1997; Bennett, 1995). The danger of standardization is that it diminishes the essence of higher learning that higher education is destined and created to protect and build: the search for truth, the richness of knowledge, the diversity of scientific

disciplines and pathways. More than a century ago, Dewey proposed and called for "intellectual opportunities [to be] accessible to all on equitable and easy terms" (1916/1966, p. 88). Gollnick and Chin, (2002) continue to advocate for "equality and social justice in a democracy" in today's educational systems (p. 21).

The danger is real in the practices of higher education everyday, and the outcomes of such practices can be dire. The paradoxical relationship between creativity and policy orients our attention to further examine the policies philosophically and to scrutinize our practice and implementations practically. Educational policies, however creative they are developed to meet the needs and ensure the quality of higher education, however necessary they are for the daily practice, consistency, and sustainability of the higher education, can be limiting, restraining, excluding, and damaging in their implementation. They can be detractive, and contradictory to creativity, and they can be damaging to the profession and community. Smith (1985) discusses this tension between creativity and order in his essay, and actually argues that the constraints and tensions themselves are fertile ground for creativity.

What, then, is a more constructive and harmonious relationship between creativity and educational policies? To integrate the complexity of this relationship, the oriental philosophy and the model of "Yin and Yang" or Tai Chi (Bloefeld, 1991; De Barry, 1960) may represent the dynamics of the two and their related relationship better. Tung Chung-Shu makes this philosophical concept prominent through his scholarly works among Chinese scholars. "This constant reaction of the two forces on the metaphysical and physical planes was used to explain all the processes of growth and change in the natural world" (De Barry, 1960, p. 191). Or from the western philosophies, Hegel's dialectic logics (1949 & 1957) describes the nature of this relationship well. To him, thought or creative thought is conceived as a "continuum, not as a series of mechanical synthetic unions… It could be said that the continuum is characterized by a moving, constant 'synthesizing': a moving, growing, ever changing thought process" (Ozman & Craver, 2003, p. 25) The relationship and connection of creativity and educational policies are not a linear linkage, which creativity brings forth educational policies and stops its connection with educational policies after the formation of policies. Rather, creativity and educational policies have an interdependent and intertwined spiral relationship, where creativity continues to have ongoing and significant impacts on educational policies and vice versa.

For any educational policies to be effective and successful, they need to draw on creativity during their implementation process, to fine-tune, adjust, and adapt so that they will work as they are actually designed and go beyond their originally design as educational practices and demands change and evolve. Stokes (2006), in her book titled *Creativity from Constraints: the Psychology of Breakthrough*, actually indicates that the constraints are often a problem, in this case educational policy, in providing the context for creativity and problem solving. In other words, constraints could serve as creative tools.

Educational policies, on the other hand, are not the only benefactor of creativity; they play critical roles in determining whether creativity continues to remain as the living force or cease to function, and they can provide vital input and development for the direction, content, and form of creativity. It is essential for all of us as educational philosophers, scholars, and educators to recognize that both creativity and educational policies are a continuum, which interact with each other organically, actively, and constantly. This relationship of creativity and educational policy largely determines that both entities are living and changing forces of the development of higher education. At the same time, it is through this multiple and related relationship that they make higher education effective and responsive. It prevents the educational policies from becoming detractive, restraining, and exclusive. By doing so, they work better, in unison, to strive for educational equity, equality, and excellence.

In the case of COE admission requirements of GPA, the faculty and program administrators are reviewing the policy to identify the issues. They are in the process of amending the existing policy by adding other considerations such as recent GPA, successful teaching experiences, and passing scores for professional content and pedagogy tests, as well as other considerations to provide access and opportunities to applicants while maintaining the vigor and integrity of the programs.

Conclusion

While this policy issue cited above seems to be "insignificant" or "small," it actually does connect and have an enormous impact on fundamental matters such as justice, fairness, quality, diversity, and democracy. Those who have the access to teacher education programs today hold the keys to the quality and equality of education tomorrow. Whether we provide fair opportunities to underrepresented students in preservice teacher education programs largely impacts on who would be the future leaders and how the local communities will survive in the global environment.

As Professor Eleanor Duckworth at the Harvard Graduate School of Education pointed out in her book, The *Having of Wonderful Ideas: And Other Essays on Teaching and Learning* (2006), the process and the implementation of great ideas are as powerful as having these ideas. A wonderful idea from the force of creativity can only be wonderful and effective when it is meaningfully implemented in educational practice. In turn, it rejuvenates and provides for the very force of creativity. The mindful nurturing of this integrated and interactive relationship of creativity and educational policy is the challenge for all of us as thinkers and doers, creators and keepers, teachers and role models in the higher education context as being a shared "social vision and dance of life" (Greene, 1995, p. 60).

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