



THE MEANING OF BEING A CREATIVE TEACHER THROUGH DISCOVERING

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Article History:

- received 9 January 2025
- accepted 17 April 2025

Abstract. The research problem relates to the lack of research in terms of perceiving the meaning of being a creative teacher. The study aimed to highlight the phenomenological structure meaning of being a creative teacher. The methodology was based on the approach of integral phenomenology. A total of 26 interviews were obtained. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews and analyzed by integrating approaches of practical and epistemological phenomenologies. Findings showed that for teachers the core component in the phenomenological meaning of being a creative teacher was discovering. The conclusions summarized that discovering within the phenomenological structure of being a creative teacher involves pursuing, updating, engaging, being spontaneous, and experimenting.

Keywords: creative teacher, discovering, integrative phenomenology, interview, school, student.

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1. Introduction

Creativity in the work of a teacher is the interaction between the physical and social learning environment, attitudes and characteristics of teachers and students, and a clear problem-solving process that creates a product or a physical object (Vincent-Lancrin, 2016). Creativity encourages teachers and students to take responsibility for risks and learn from mistakes. Teacher creativity is a prerequisite for innovation in teaching and learning, and also encourages the teacher and students to be lifelong learners (Stringaris et al., 2006; Treffinger, 2009; Stoppel & Czarnocha, 2017).

A literature review revealed that a creative teacher makes creative decisions (Težak, 2015), thinks creatively (Hariri et al., 2021), has an impact on the success of teaching (learning) (Pishghadam et al., 2012), students' imagination, teacher authority, reputation, and school administration's visionary leadership (Chen & Yuan, 2021), influences students' academic achievement (Nkalo Ruth et al., 2021), and is related to students' learning motivation (Vasudevan, 2013).

In international research studies until now, creativity research has not paid sufficient attention to the teacher, which could reveal unique, authentic experiences of creativity. No phenomenological studies have been found at the international scale on the existence or meaning of being a creative teacher, which is the focus of this research.

The research question was the following: what is the core component in the phenomenological meaning of being a creative for teachers? The study aimed to highlight the phenomenological structure meaning of being a creative teacher.

2. Literature review

The teacher's being in the narrow sense means a constant transformation into others through becoming (Beghetto, 2010; Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014). Being a teacher allows her/him to critically evaluate and self-evaluate her/his own and eternity's positions (Vasudevan, 2013). In everyday life, the knowledge of teacher's being is the essence of its comprehensive presence "here", as an action in the moment, which is concrete and real "now". The teacher exists, constantly asking questions about the meaning of being. It is the nature of the teacher to seek answers (Delmar, 2006).

The concept of a creative teacher is associated with teacher enthusiasm in the classroom, student autonomy, and a close and personal relationship with students (Chan & Yuen, 2014). Teachers do not agree that the lack of recognition of rules is important for students' creative behaviour, which may indicate some ambivalence about creative behaviour and disobedience (Chen & Padilla, 2022).

A creative teacher must create a new product – a lesson – at the end of the creative teaching/learning process. In a lesson, the creative teacher guides the student through the entire period of time allocated to the lesson (Jeffrey, 2006; Joubert, 2007). The obstacles that emerge during the lesson close the teacher's opportunity to search and formulate hypotheses, allow her/him to test and change teaching/learning methods, while at the same time immersing her/himself in other, new, yet undiscovered and unknown creative processes (Chan & Yuen, 2014).

A creative teacher is one who encourages reasonable risk-taking and unpredictable situations while fostering creative activity (Woods, 2004). A close relationship with students and a motivating classroom environment should be consistent with the content of the subject, the teacher's expertise, and her/his ability to convey complex knowledge in an understandable way (Aljughaiman & Mowrer-Reynolds, 2005; Deverell & Moore, 2014).

3. Research methodology

3.1. Design

This study took an approach that integrated van Manen's (2007, 2014) phenomenology of practice and Moustakas' (1994) epistemological phenomenology. This integral phenomenological approach tried to contribute to the further development of the methodology of integral phenomenology (Žydžiūnaitė & Arce, 2021; Žydžiūnaitė et al., 2022; Daugela & Zydziunaite, 2024). Phenomenology of practice presupposes a sensitive and humanly empathetic practice arising from phenomenological reflection on experience and feelings. In the broader context of life, experience and feeling refer to a mood, sensitivity, sensibility and sense of being in the world (van Manen, 2014; M. van Manen & M. van Manen, 2021).

van Manen's (2014) experiential or practice-oriented strand of phenomenology is the conceptual basis of research methodology. In analyzing the data, this direction was combined with Moustakas' (1994) epistemological phenomenology, which includes action and the social world with multiple meanings. As a result, an integral phenomenological procedure for the analysis of qualitative data was developed and implemented (Žydžiūnaitė & Arce, 2021). Such an integral methodological solution provided prerequisites for the development of the view

that one methodological version may not be sufficient for solving scientific problems. Integral methodological pluralism is associated with advanced phenomenology, in which phenomenological practice provides an enhanced epistemological orientation (Küpers, 2005, 2009).

3.2. Sample

Saturation in the study was directly related to sample size: interviews were conducted until at least one new item was found during their analysis. Data collection was terminated when no new components emerged during the final interview that had not been mentioned in previous interviews (N. Jaušovec & K. Jaušovec, 2011).

A total of 26 interviews were obtained, but after the initial analysis, it was decided to use the interviews of 19 research participants, because in some interviews the cases and examples presented were not illustrative of creativity.

The researchers deliberately selected a sample of teachers with as diverse a work experience in educational institutions as possible, maintaining a balance in terms of gender. Among the 19 study participants were 10 women and 9 men. The age of the participants was from 26 to 70 years, work experience at school – from 5 to 48 years. Types of educational institutions where the interviewees worked: gymnasiums – 8, general education schools – 4, private schools – 7.

3.3. Data collection

Every interview was based on research participant's personal experience (personal anecdote) with which the hidden meanings were exposed. In this sense, anecdotes encouraged researchers to look for the relation between living and thinking, situation and reflection. In their narrations research participants were asked to focus on a specific event of experience: describe specific situations, an adventure, an event or a specific experience that stands out for its intensity as if it were the first time. Average of interview duration was 1.5 hours.

3.4. Data analysis

The analysis consisted of two stages. The 1st stage was based on van Manen's (2007, 2014) approach and consisted of four steps (Žydžiūnaitė & Arce, 2021). The first stage includes 1) uncovering thematic aspects; 2) isolating thematic statements; 3) composing linguistic transformations; and 4) gleaning thematic descriptions. The second stage relied on Moustakas (1994) approach with four steps: 1) grouping and reducing invariant constituents; 2) clustering the related invariant constituents of experience into a sub-themes and themes; 3) checking the themes whether they are expressed explicitly in the complete transcript; and 4) constructing a textual description as a fictional text formed on the basis of specific qualitative themes that emerged from transcribed interviews with their authentic content.

3.5. Ethics

Permission to conduct the study was granted at the meeting of the Department of Education Management and Policy, Education Academy, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania, on 12 October, 2021, protocol no. 4.

4. Findings

The results of the study revealed that being a creative teacher means discovering.

Discovering in the structure of phenomena being a creative teacher for research participants meant pursuing, updating, engaging, being spontaneous, and experimenting.

Pursuing for teachers is a sense of meaning through professional responsibility for teaching subjects, without repeating and using the same ideas. Even if the general curriculum does not change, the teachers must diversify it in her/his own way:

“In my opinion, I must have competence, creativity in teaching, and sincerity to pursue the students to success. Competence is obtained in university, and I should already have the sincerity quality when deciding to pursue the teaching profession to educate the future generation. A must have a sense of creativity so that students can find learning models suitable to apply in the classroom. As a creative teacher, I should find the ways to solve students’ problems in the class, at school, or outside the school. An example is my experience when teaching at a school and used different learning media from what the previous teacher used. Such variation mattered as the students liked my learning model, which was authentic. I strongly believe that pursuing could be implemented while taking into account the professional competence and practicing the professional agency in a classroom” (F).

Updating teachers associate with professional development in order the educational process is not routine, so they seek renewal in their daily work: “Every time you fall in love with a writer, a poet, through reading you are renewed, you are reborn from yourself” (B). Updating for teachers is related to experiencing a feeling of professional love, which stimulates creativity and they become “different professionals” (D):

“Creativity often feels like a luxury for updating in education when teachers face so many demands. Creativity in teaching is figuring out how to creatively adapt what I’m teaching, how I’m teaching it, and even where I’m teaching it to meet the needs of my students. However, it is impossible to be a creative teacher without updating, improvement, and professional development. Being creative is a constant learning, updating occurs every time. I am always in the context of ‘fresh’ knowledge” (E).

The teacher’s entire attention is directed to the student: “Because you sit at the end of the day and think: what will I do tomorrow and what is the most meaningful here?” (C). The thinking process itself includes teacher’s reflections on teaching meaningfulness:

“What is the most meaningful? How to most appropriately introduce the teaching subject and at the same time connect it with the educational programme? How to make the student willingly delve into things that are no longer very relevant to him today, uninteresting?” (D).

The reflections and questions that arise for the teacher excite her/him as a person sensitive to the student as the “Other”:

“The goal for every lesson is to help students learn. Students go through different things throughout the day which may affect their learning. Sometimes doing grammar exercises after a long day of school can be the last thing students want to do, so it is always helpful to change things up according to the students’ needs, whether it is switching to a fun writing activity or having a group discussion about something the

students are passionate about. Building up children's energy makes them more effective learners for the rest of the lesson and ensures they make the most of their time while also having fun" (S).

Being spontaneous is a way to stimulate interest in learning, to add excitement to a lesson, and provide opportunities for students to be creative and proactive. Here are some ways being spontaneous in the classroom:

"When students are given agency in the classroom, they are more motivated to actively participate in the lesson. This can be achieved through something small, such as letting them choose a warm-up game. I can ask students to be the 'teacher' and share with the class something they are knowledgeable about. I had a student who loved *Pokémon*, and every lesson he would teach his classmates about a different *Pokémon*. He spoke English more confidently, and the other students enjoyed the weekly *Pokémon* lesson while also developing their listening skills" (T).

Students' trust in the teacher frees them from constraints, so spontaneous ideas are born during discussions: "That trust arises. It's an idea that is born 'here and now'. I hadn't foreseen it in advance. We just talked and it was born" (C).

Experimenting teachers associate with personal and professional responsibilities: "Even though I have the framework of the subject being taught, that material, I teach it differently every year" (E). The teacher tends to experiment with the available material, thus constantly expanding her/his students' horizons. The students are fascinated by the lesson and do not want to leave the classroom after the bell rang announcing the break. The students, fascinated, immerse themselves in their reflections, experiencing learning catharsis: "She [the student] sits at the table, cannot leave the classroom, says: 'How can I say everything in that line?'" (A).

Experimenting shows how important it is for a teacher to immerse her/himself in the search for educational methods. It is possible to find a suitable educational method for a group of students, but this does not mean that it will suit another group or all students in a particular group:

"I need to not be lazy to delve into it and find the right trend of education. These are methods, students, and teachers. Some students are suited to frontal learning and they perfectly absorb encyclopedic knowledge and apply it. Others need a different kind of learning – they need to emotionally experience the joy of learning and then, when their motivation arises, they concentrate and delve deeper. Each student learns in own way. Even in a group, when a common learning tendency prevails, each student absorbs information differently and uses it in own way" (I).

The teacher, looking for ways to interest the student, unexpectedly opens up new cognitive spaces for her/himself. This is the teacher's desire to improve and delve deeper into her/his professional field, without stopping and feeling knowledgeable, actively participating in self-education through experimenting:

"My self-education can fluctuate as changes in professional expectations, such as developing creativity in students, may demand knowledge and skills with which I have no experience. Regardless of changes I must adapt their practices to accommodate them. I can interest a student because her/his interest is 'contagious', emotionally affecting,

and exciting. When a lesson is finished and a student comes up and says: 'Teacher, would you recognize another one of your trembling fingers?' (a line of poetry). There may be only two students in the classroom, it doesn't matter to me at all, how many. But I am reaching them through experimenting and such process is the context of my professional development through self-education" (H).

5. Discussion

Based on the study findings formed the phenomenological structure of the phenomenon being a creative teacher consisting of being discovering. For a creative teacher discovering means pursuing, updating, engaging, being spontaneous, and experimenting.

Being discovering within the phenomenological structure of being a creative teacher in our research study means cluster of processes without accentuating the skills required to implement these processes in connection with knowledge transformations. This is a difference from the results of study conducted by Alexander (2008), who was focused on teachers' skills for producing ideas that are both original and valuable, and transition from the simple explanatory knowledge to a more complex state of transforming knowledge creation.

Thus, our research and international research studies' (Boyle, 1983; Armfield, 2007; Alexander, 2008; Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014; Beghetto, 2020) findings allowed us to assume that teacher creativity at school is related to the formal education system and it is requirements in each country, and could be implemented mostly within the boundaries of the educational subject in a monodisciplinary way. Therefore, teacher creativity, according to research participants, based on discoveries focuses on the organization of subject teaching and learning, application of innovative methods, and tools.

Therefore, there was a gap between the approach that teacher creativity based on discoveries is possible only when implementing interdisciplinary teaching and learning in schools and monodisciplinary, and subject-based approach, which is focused on specific subject-related knowledge and academic achievements (Chan & Yuen, 2014). Our findings showed that teachers participating in the study perceive the need for the curriculum to be oriented towards a processual interdisciplinary approach, which is inseparable from teacher creativity through and for discovery. Teachers see the monodisciplinary approach, focused on the subject, as a limitation to the implementation of teacher creativity through and for discovery in their work with students.

The research study had the limitation: the research sample was based on the experiences of teachers, school communities and students themselves regarding teacher creativity, which is not rare is a choice related to emotions, therefore, in the future development of the study, it is relevant to rethink more precise criteria for selecting research participants.

The results of the study contribute to the development of the concept of teacher creativity and creativity competence. For a teacher, being creative means experiencing one's own creativity and using it to influence the creativity of students, regardless of the teaching/learning discipline.

6. Conclusions

Teachers experience of being a creative teacher in an authentic, individual, unique way, so creativity is cognitive and emotional process, which should not be seen only as a skill and/or component of specific competence. However, the phenomenological meaning of being a creative teacher is concrete component – discovering – involves pursuing, updating, engaging, being spontaneous, and experimenting.

A creative teacher looks for possibilities rather than choosing between what is available, and must be able to make decisions in a specific situation while connecting different ideas, evaluating and combining them into a new, original production. Phenomenon of being a creative teacher refers to the ability to consider the needs of the environment and make a unique and original solution based on several ideas.

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