

Effects of Confucian Ideology on the Creativity of Students and How do the Teachers and the Parents Stimulate Creative Ability of Their Students and Their Children

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Abstract

The paper examines effects of Confucian ideology on the creativity of students and discusses the way the teachers and the parents stimulate creative ability of their students and their children. The results show that the learning by authority (teacher-centered) originated from Confucianism has a negative influence on the development of creativity in children. The emphasis on education in an early age in Asian countries is very significant, important and necessary but the way young children learn is likely to be repetitive learning and memorization. Certainly, these learning methods will minimize the creative thinking and creative ability in children because students or children learn by repeating and memorizing without thinking and understanding.

Keywords

Confucian Ideology, Student Creativity, Children Behaviour

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1. Introduction

We all are living in a rapidly changing world and definitely besides advantages we will cope with many challenges in our daily lives. In order to deal with these challenges, we need to be dynamic, self-motivated and creative. However, it is said that our creativity is originated from the educational culture in both our families and our schools (Duffy, 1998). This means that, in scope of educational area, learning and teaching styles in schools can directly affect the development of our creativity. Like some the cultures of Asian countries such as Taiwan, Korea and Japan, Vietnamese culture in which the structure of government, the family system and the life of individuals have been deeply influenced by Confucian-heritage cultures since Vietnam suffered from the

domination of the feudal system of Chinese state for a long time (Nguyen, 2002 & Dung, 1999). In educational area, the culture of Confucian ideology greatly affects the styles of learning and teaching in Vietnamese schools (Nguyen, 2002 & Phuoc, 1975). Confucianism emphasizes on the important role of the teacher in which students directly receive the knowledge from their teachers (Hiep, No date). Definitely this style of learning will influence creativity and imagination in students.

This essay will explore effects of Confucian ideology on the creativity of students and discuss the way the teachers and the parents stimulate creative ability of their students and their children.

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2. Effects of Confucian Ideology on the Creativity of Students in Vietnam

2.1. Definitions of Creativity and Confucian Ideology

2.1.1. Definitions of Creativity

Creativity is a term used frequently in most fields especially in the area of education. There are many different ways to define this term. According to Ritson and Smith (1975), creativity is the ability to reject “past experiences and come up with something new” (p.4). They argue that creativity has a relationship with intelligences since “all children are born with creative talent.” A creative person may be “independent, persistent, curious, reflective, uninhibited, etc” (Fielding, 1997). Similarly, Walberg (1988:342) has the same idea with Ritson and Smith (1975) as he states that creativity is dependent on intelligence and talent and “a talented child is one who shows consistently remarkable performance in any worth-while line of endeavor” (Havighurs, 1958 cited in Walberg, 1988p.342). This means that creativity cannot be taught and the environmental conditions do not affect the development of creativity in children. Like Ritson and Smith (1975), Torrance (1969:5) considers creativity as a process within which people are capable of seeing the problems, creating ideas or hypotheses, examining or modifying these hypotheses and communicating the results, while Duffy (1998) and Jones (1972) view creativity as the ability to discover things new which are meaningful and useful to individuals concerned. Duffy (1998) adds that there is a relationship between creativity and imagination since when people make something new they often use their ability to imagine to “detach their selves from the immediate world, to explore a range of possibilities.” (p.142). From the different point of views about creativity, it is my opinion that creativity can be the capability of thinking to discover things new, to realize the problems and then find out effective approaches to such problems. Also, I think that the environmental conditions have a great influence on the development of creativity.

There are many factors affecting the development and expression of creative thinking. In scope of educational area, Torrance (1973) addresses that unequal treatment between males and females in the class, overemphasis on academic achievement in an early age, conditions leading to “fear and timidity in both authority and peer relations” as well as “restrictions on manipulateness and curiosity” of children can influence and eliminate creative thinking and imagination in children. Definitely, not all children have creative ability and creative thinking when they are born.

Characteristics of children’s creativity can be taught and creativity of children can be affected from the educational foundation in the families, in the schools and in the society. This seems to be convincing when Fielding (1997), insists that creative thinking and imagination of children depend on social and cultural effects.

2.1.2. An Overview of Confucian Ideology and Vietnamese Culture

According to Hofstede and Bond (1988 cited in Chen and Chung, 1994:2), Confucian ideology consists of many principles in which the hierarchical human relationship, the emphasis on education in early age and Jen (benevolence) are considered as three basic principles controlling the whole society. Like the cultures of many Asian countries, Vietnamese culture has been affected by Confucianism. In the scope of this essay, I will exercise these key principles to evaluate and consider whether the effects of Confucianism on the creativity of students in the process of learning or not.

2.2. Hierarchical Human Relationship and Creativity

According to Chen and Chung (1994), the Confucian foundation of human relationship is relied on the five fundamental relationships among “ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, older brother and younger brother as well as between friends.” In other words, the individual’s relationships with the family and with the society in the Confucian society are based on “filial piety, loyalty and obedience” (Kwon, 2002, Fielding, 1997) and also based on four values: “harmony, reverence, purity, tranquility” (Cam Nguyen, 1994). The valuable values of these relationships is the respectful treatment and reverence as well as loyalty of younger people to older people but these relationships can promote the complementary relationship between people and this can increase interdependency (Chen and Chung, 1994). Also, since Confucian ideology views family as a small hierarchal organization in the society and as an united entity (Cam Nguyen, 1994), all family members are placed in hierarchical relationship. This will maintain a complementary relationship between people in the family. Moreover, the values of self-respect and loss of face are very much on people’s mind (Lewis, 1999); therefore people are expected to avoid criticizing others’ ideas. Indeed, this complementary relationship can result in many negative consequences to the development of creativity in people especially children since they are not living in an independent environment. All their activities are supervised by elders or their parents so that they are always passive people in most situations.

Waley (1991) describes the attitudes of an Asian student towards learning following as: “I have listened in silence and noted what was said, I have never grown tired of learning nor

wearied of teaching others what I have learnt” (cited in Cam Nguyen, 1994). This shows that students who were born and have grown up in the cultures affected by Confucianism have passive attitudes in the process of learning. According to Kwon (2002), Korean children are expected to be obedient in the family and they must always respect the authority of elders and in schools, students constantly respect the supreme role of their teachers and consider their teachers as parents. The acceptance and obedience of the authority and respect for the teacher is considered as quality and virtue in Korean society like in China and in Vietnam. Unfortunately, this has resulted in the form of a passive learning and teaching style, ‘teacher-centered’, within which the teacher uses power to control the process of teaching and learning (Kwon, 2002). Ironically, this can eliminate students’ creative thinking in the process of learning because they do not have many opportunities to express their opinions (Fielding, 1997), to convey their thinking and their ideas unless they are asked to answer the questions instead of volunteering. Similarly, Chinese and Vietnamese students usually are quiet in the class and they merely challenge or very seldom argue with their teachers since the teacher is viewed as the powerful person who directly delivers knowledge to students (Wong, 2004 and Ginsberg, 1992 cited in Biggs, 1996). Also, Vietnamese students seldom look “the eyes of their teachers” (Nguyen, 2002) and challenge statements of teachers in class because challenging the teacher is considered as an impolite action in Vietnamese classrooms.

I think if you have read Biggs’s material you would not come to this conclusion. He is the leading scholar on learning styles of Asian students and his research points to their use of active learning and deep learning strategies

Whether teachers can develop student’s critical thinking and their creative thinking when they are studying in the teacher-centered instruction? How can parents develop and foster creativity in children? I think that it is very difficult for teachers and parents develop creativity in their students and their children in Confucian cultures if they do not apply more learner-centered approaches which focus on creative and critical thinking. In Confucian cultures, the supreme role of teachers in the class and passive obedience of children in their families can be two significant reasons resulting in fear and timidity in students and in children. These reasons also might lead to limitations on imagination and curiosity of students. This can be more believable and convincing when Torrance (1973) and Fielding (1997) state that limitations on curiosity (creative behaviour), fear and timidity have a great influence on the development and expression of creative thinking in children. The nature of children is curious about everything around them. Therefore, parents and teachers should promote curiosity in children since through their

creative and imaginative effort young children can express their thought and express their understanding as well as “think about and create new meanings” (Duffy, 1998).

2.3. The Emphasis on Education in an Early Age and Creativity

The centre of Confucian education is the “perfectibility and educability” of people in which the main aim of education emphasizes “the teaching of ethics” in an early age with the purpose of ensuring for students’ harmonious moral and physical development (Chen and Chung, 1994). Confucius himself saw the process of learning as deep: “Seeing knowledge without thinking is labour lost; thinking without seeking knowledge is perilous” (Biggs, 1996). Although Confucius’s approaches of education are individual, his purpose of education is to “shape social and familial values in order to conserve a particular political structure” (Biggs, 1996).

In Confucian cultures like Vietnam, education emphasizes academic performance in an early age and the use of competitive contests or examinations to evaluate the learning ability of students. Children in Vietnam are encouraged by their parents to begin their learning at the young age and most of them are able to read before going to schools. Many children are able to fluently read or sing poems and songs but they are likely not able to understand their content since these poems are taught by their parents through the repetition and memorization. According to Torrance (1973), one of the most important reasons leading to creativity elimination in children is “premature attempts in early age.” Torrance’s ideas show that children should be free to critically think, to naturally explore anything they like and their parents should not ask them to do what they do not like. The emphasis on academic achievement in an early age can eliminate the fantasy of children. Conversely, Duffy (1998) argues that the emphasis on education in an early age is suitable in order to encourage their creativity and their imagination. However, the issue is that how can parents and teachers promote creativity of children in an early age? Duffy (1998) points out that to effectively develop children’ creative thinking and their imagination, older people should provide children with many opportunities to help them represent their experiences, their feelings and their ideas.

Mentioning repeating and memorizing learning in relation to the competitive contests in Confucian cultures, Wong (2004) asserts that the systems of assessment and examinations in most Asian cultures affected by Confucianism emphasize the importance of memorizing and rote learning. This means that in order to take part in the competitive contests and get high scores students are required to “memorize” knowledge that they are taught by their teachers to “reproduce in

examinations.” The following examples will prove rote learning of Asian students. For example, a Malaysian student says “...in Malaysia as long as you study and memorize what you learnt you can do well” (Wong, 2002) and some Vietnamese students have the same ideas with Malaysian student when they say that “The most important thing in Vietnam is you have to learnt hard all that your teachers say. Even if you try to learn you can get the best mark. You have to learn hard too much. If you study in the college, in the exam the lectures will give you some hints, you can prepare for it...” (Wong, 2002). These statements shows that the main purpose of schools is help their students pass all tests in school year therefore; rote or repetitive learning and memorization are emphasized by teachers and educators in Vietnamese schools today (Ha, 2004). Watkins and Biggs (2001) argue that students in Confucian cultures such as China, Taiwan, Korea, Hong Kong and Vietnam are taught in classroom conditions that make students to become more passive in the learning process. In fact, rote learning (memorizing without understanding) cannot result in a high academic achievement.

3. How do the Teachers and the Parents Stimulate Creative Ability of Their Students and Their Children

Duffy (1998) notes “If we want adults who are creative and imaginative we must start in their earliest years, we promote them at this stage will remain with them” (p. 09). Actually, we are living in a multi-racial community, a changing community, in which there are many advantages but too many challenges. Thus, we and young children need to be creative to cope with these challenges. Young children will grow up and they should be creative in any situations in order to cope with incessant change, to deal with unexpected and new situations. Also, they must be more creative and imaginative to be able to flexibly think about an issue in many different ways, and to work with people from many different cultures (Duffy, 1998). However, how can we (parents and teachers and educators) with traditional beliefs about teaching develop creative, critical thinking in our children and our students? I think that, in order to encourage the development of creativity, the first thing is the recognition of positive benefits of learning actively. According to Torrance (1970), there is a significant difference between learning by authority (teacher-centered approach) and learning actively (student-centered). “Learning by authority takes place when students are told what they should learn and when they accept something as true because an authority says that it is. Learning by authority involves such abilities as recognition, memory, and logical reasoning.

On the other hand, learning creatively through creative and problem-solving activities in which it involves basic skills such as recognition, memory, logical reasoning and evaluation, as well as divergent production and redefinition” (A brief summary from Torrance, 1970).

From Torrance’s comparisons between two kinds of teaching approaches, we are able to recognize the significant benefits of learning creatively. Therefore, in order to foster or encourage children’s creativity, parents should create a stimulating environment (Davis & Rimm, 1985), a safely and democratic atmosphere (Duffy, 1998), a respectful attitudes and a friendly relationship (Torrance, 1969 and Williams, 1976) towards their children. Young children should be encouraged to express their opinions and critically criticize others’ ideas and adults must value their thinking even their opinions may be wrong. Also, parents should guide children to solve the problems in many different approaches and this requires children to critically think and to imagine. Through the critical thinking and imagination children will find out many solutions to the problems. The following is a sample written by (Williams, 1976). This is a lifelike evidence of learning creatively that help children think about. “What will you do when your child asks the question?

How can I do this? Instead of immediately answering the child’s question you might say ‘Well, how you think it should be done? Do you have any ideas?’ (Williams, 1976).

Indirectly, according to Williams (1976), by this approach we make the child more confident in his ability, more courageous and productive in his thinking as well as more responsible for the consequences of his thinking. Clearly, these characteristics play an important to encourage children’s creativity.

Duffy (1998) said that “Parents are ‘experts’ on their on child, while other educators (including teachers) are experts on children at a particular age and stage of development.” Here, he emphasizes the importance of teachers and educators in encouraging the development of creativity in children. However, how can teachers encourage and develop children’s creativity in Confucian cultures in which learning is more teacher-centered model? How can teachers change their thinking to make their teaching more effective and more valuable? Tang (1996) argues that “meaning changes in teaching thinking are likely to occur if such teachers encounter learning experiences that differ from those to which they are accustomed, and they are encouraged to reflect on the differences.”

4. Conclusion

Throughout the considerations of effects of Confucian values

on the styles of learning and teaching in Vietnam as well as in Asian countries, I realize that the learning by authority (teacher-centered) originated from Confucianism has a negative influence on the development of creativity in children. The emphasis on education in an early age in Asian countries is very significant, important and necessary but the way young children learn is likely to be repetitive learning and memorization. Certainly, these learning methods will minimize the creative thinking and creative ability in children because students or children learn by repeating and memorizing without thinking and understanding (Fielding, 1997). Also, hierarchical human relationships emphasizing the values of benevolence and obedience in both family and society (Fielding, 1997) can support more conventional thinking and increase limitations on critical thinking and creative activities. It seems to be difficult for parents and teachers to apply new teaching approaches focused on creative thinking skills but certainly the teacher-centered model will be placed with student-centered one. To effectively develop and to promote creativity of children and students, educators should change educational policies in which materials and curriculum must offer “many opportunities for creative behavior, by making assignments, independent learning, by kinds of questions teachers ask in class, by the kinds of problems used for discussion” (Gulbenkian, 1982 cited in Duffy, 1998).

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