



**LEARNING TO LIVE CREATIVELY: THE POSSIBILITY OF A LANGUAGE EDUCATION
CURRICULUM**

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Abstract

Albeit the debate what should be the aim of education and language education by different theoretical traditions, no consensus were reached until now. As the ultimate aim of everyone's life is to live a happy life, the aim of education should be concerned with helping its stakeholders to teach/learn how to live happily. In the context of being ascribed great importance in recent years by western and Asian Countries alike, creativity has been gaining special focus from policy makers and curriculum developers. The present paper argues that learning to live creatively can be regarded as one of the important skills to be developed in order to live happily in a world of cut throat competition and among uncertainties. The paper also looks into the possibility of a language education curriculum in the making of a creative person by means of understanding the conceptions of creativity and its development. The paper finds that conception of creativity plays a key role and proposes that teacher education curriculum should incorporate different theoretical traditions in understanding creativity and stresses the need of a contextualized curriculum in its developmental process.

Keywords: *contextualized curriculum, creativity, curriculum developers, language education.*

Introduction

The present paper tries to enquire the possibility of the present language education curriculum based on constructivist learning theories in the enhancement of creative ability in children. The study presupposes creative ability as an essential life skill that is to be included among the four pillars of education. Even if the queries what should be the aim of education and what should be the aim of language education have been discussed and debated elaborately by different theoretical traditions, no consensus were reached until now. The aims of education change with time and social need which in turn bring changes in the aims of language education also. While there are plethora of debates on what should be the aims of education, it has indisputably accepted that the development of skills (Dewey, 1997) as one of its important aims. Skills can be broadly any skill such as cognitive skills, life skill, communication skill, or artistic skill. These skills are developed only through giving exposure,



practice, and encouragement. The present society no longer demands the individuals who possess knowledge banks whereas it is in demand of knowledge producers, individuals who possess the potential to 'create knowledge in novel ways'. Wua & Albaneseb (2013) observe "Creativity, as 'a possible vehicle for individual empowerment' (Jeffrey & Craft, 2001, p. 3), a source for novel solutions to collective concerns (Fisher, 2002) and a prerequisite for the construction of new knowledge (Plucker, Waitman, & Hartley, 2011) is by nature an educational objective" (p.4). Even if the aims of education and language education are set, "one of the major criticisms raised against our educational system is that it has neglected, and all too often suppressed, the natural creativity of the young" (Kneller, 1965 quoted in Ronda, 1992,p.5).

The formal education of a child starts with primary education and hence it lays down the foundation of all basic knowledge. Primary education comprises lower primary and upper primary education. Lower primary education covers subjects like science, social science, mathematics and language. Among these subjects learning language is very important as it is the vehicle of thought that helps to learn all other subjects. Therefore Kothari Commission recommended a three language formula, study of mother tongue (regional language) in the lower primary level; Hindi (National language) and English (a foreign language) from upper primary level onwards. Recognising the relative importance of mother tongue in the development of the child, Language education starts in the primary level with the learning of mother tongue followed by Arabic as optional and the learning of English language in the fourth standard as compulsory. But because of the interest of the people in the English language as a major criterion to get job, the language is currently enjoying higher status in the society, which has forced to introduce the subject in many states in the first standard itself. Now all these three languages are introduced in Kerala in the first standard itself.

Progress in the Objectives of language education

There are clearly defined objectives and separate textbooks for children to learn language. The objectives of language education vary with time. Along with the social function of language it is very much important for the individual in a sense that as there is no thought without language, no development without language. Language is a key factor in physical, emotional, and intellectual development of the child. The analysis of the textbooks before the formation of the state pointed that gaining command over word meanings were the objective of Malayalam language education during that time. Pronunciation of words correctly, comprehension of the given text whether it is a verse, poem, or story were also given attention. Even all the letters were introduced in the first standard itself. Therefore it was the duty of the teacher to transact the content given in the prescribed textbooks. Instructions were given in the textbooks to describe the ideas given in the lessons. It never addressed the issue of reading, appreciation of art and active learning of children. In spite of the ability to communicate in language children were destined to learn language mechanically as questions



and answers. They were never given opportunities to use language meaningfully in different contexts.

Learning language occupies a central concern in education. Language attributes a person with tool to generate thoughts. Children do not learn without a tool to operate his/her thought. There is no thought without a tool. These tools can be anything like language, number, or computer. As a result learning a tool is very essential for operating thought processes. Therefore the purpose of education is to equip children with tool to develop skills and abilities. Language education does not simply mean getting access to listen, speak, read and write. There was a time when language education was conceived of as learning alphabets, words, word meanings, and comprehension questions and answers. Language education was confined within the text and teacher occupied the central position in all the activities related to the text. But these ideas have been modified and got refined with recent theories in psychology and learning stressing that creativity is central to arts education and therefore it is the natural curricular place to develop creativity (Hope, 2010). Constructivist learning theory was the principal one among them. Along with the introduction of constructivist learning theory in education aim of language learning also has changed from answering questions to creating language meaningfully. It states that children do not learn language mechanically where as they construct language in contexts. Learning a language means to equip the child to use different forms of language (discourses) in varied contexts. Therefore providing education is the only way to the development of the child and society.

Inclusion of creativity within educational policy documents

How the concept of creativity is occupied a place in educational policy documents is worth digging up to understand its progress of inclusion in curriculum documents over the years. There have been tremendous efforts in the form of policy documents and projects since 1990 to incorporate creativity in school curriculum and fostering creativity through education in children (Craft, 2003; Gibson, 2005; Ng & Smith, 2004; Park, Lee, Oliver & Crammond, 2006; Hong & Kang, 2009). According to Frydenberg & Andone (2011) the aim of learning is changing from the traditional 3 Rs (Reading, wRiting, and aRithmetic) of the 20th century to the 4Cs, namely Critical thinking and problem solving, Communication, Collaboration and Creativity and innovation skills. The Taxonomy of Educational Objectives set first by Bloom and revised by Krathwohl (1956) also suggests the ability to create at higher levels of habit of thinking. The west has shown an interest in the studies on creativity and theories and researches began to flourish in that part of the world. Its resonance can be seen in Asian countries also. Countries like Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and South Korea emphasised the inclusion of a creativity fostering curriculum in school education (Choe, 2006; Niu, 2006; Ng & Smith, 2004; Tan & Law, 2004; Hong & Kang, 2009).

A preliminary enquiry that traces the inclusion of creativity as an important component of curriculum orientations in the educational experience of children in Kerala shows that the



period of DPEP and the post DPEP have made significant reforms in this area. Development of literary creativity was embedded within the curricular aims, content area, and instructional practices followed during this period. In order to understand the root of this emergence, we have to situate it in curricular reform efforts since 1994. Since then the curriculum frameworks, especially National Curriculum for Secondary Education (NCFSE, 2000) and National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005) were based on the constructivist paradigm and child centred approach.

Everyday Creativity and the Role of Education

The study shows evidence for a consistent interest in creativity in policy documents over the past 20 years to put creativity as an important aim of education and thus invites the attention of educational institutions to facilitate creative thinking in children. It is based on the assumption that all children possess the capacity to be creative. To this end National Curriculum Framework (NCF-2005) recommends “Education must provide the means and opportunities to enhance the child’s creative expression and the capacity for aesthetic appreciation” (p.11). What is stated in NCF (2005) is accentuated by the recommendation of Kerala Curriculum Framework (KCF, 2007) that it is crucial to give scope for development of creativity in all subjects and opportunity for self-expression at the primary level (p.32). Vygotsky (2004) recognised the importance of the development of creativity through schooling and also rejected the notion of creativity as the product of sudden inspiration (Daniels, 2008). He argued that the active promotion of creativity was a central function of schooling. To quote Esquivel (as cited in Ann Ciez-Volz, 2008, p.5), “all individuals have the potential to be creative, that children are naturally creative, and that creativity may be a lifelong process”. It is the duty of educators to nurture the innate abilities in a child. Hope (2010) notes “If we want to develop creative potential in schools, we must want the necessary structures and means for its development as much as we want the results. A number of major adjustments are required. Necessary means include the provision of environments that philosophically and operationally support creativity, increased respect for local knowledge, and altered approaches to assessment and evaluation” (p.39). As a result, an important shift has occurred in the total educational system from behaviourist paradigm to constructivist paradigm. It has been almost 20 years after a major shift happened in the Kerala Education system. Over the years this has been reflected in many aspects of the educational process in the state.

Constructivist curriculum as a Practice Oriented Experience

The focus on creativity has been shifted from mere reading experience to practice oriented experience embedded in the curriculum and the whole educational processes indeed. Contrary to the earlier concept that creativity development is a matter of arts subjects, it has been included across all subject curricula from pre-primary education to lifelong learning. Thus with the multiple roles it has been acting, education functions as a new agency of



publicizing creative writing in the society through children. A preliminary enquiry confirms that it has been developed well among children in the present scenario and showing expressions in the form of school magazines, class magazines, individual portfolios, and books. In order to understand the implicit link between education and the development of literary creativity among children Shaheen (2010) maintained that it is important to explore and analyse the curricular reforms and instructional practices which takes place in classrooms. As the constructivist curriculum has been working over twenty years of its introduction this would also be a better time to evaluate the new trend set by it in the educational and societal spheres in Kerala. Moreover researches in development of higher order thinking skill has been getting significance in the new education scenario.

Conclusion

The study finds that language education through constructivist curriculum has a key role in helping the children to live creatively. Constructivist curriculum based on child centred and activity oriented method has enough scope to the development of creativity among its subjects. Constructivist classroom can provide an enriched setting in which children will go through a structured process that provide opportunities to acquaint with different discourses, receive inputs through different modes of narratives, guidance, multiple modes of self-expression, sharing of ideas, motivation to work alone and in groups, scaffolding, self-evaluation and evaluation of others' ideas, editing and refining by themselves and recognition for their efforts. It offers freedom for the teacher to incorporate all these tailoring to the need of the child in varying contexts and also offers freedom for children to express their ideas through multiple modes. Its orientation to child and his/ her activity attaches a key role to culture in its process of meaningful learning. Hence it can be concluded that the culturally and contextually embedded constructivist curriculum offers the possibility of a language education curriculum to learn creativity and to live creatively. The paper finds that teachers' conception of creativity plays a key role in the development of creativity in children and proposes that teacher education curriculum should incorporate different theoretical traditions in understanding creativity. It also stresses the need of a contextualized curriculum in its developmental process. Even though education has been acting as the facilitator of developing many human resources it has never been an active agency in the development of creativity. The study points to how education can be a potent agent in the development of creativity among the individuals by opening up resources and opportunities to make them air their thoughts, imaginations and feelings in concrete and purposeful way.

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