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The Creativity-Fostering School as a Duty and Challenge of the Present Day

Szkoła wspierająca twórczość jako wyzwanie i zadanie współczesności

Summary: The article outlines in a synthetic way the idea of the creative school. Its understanding is presented in the context of some of the pedagogical concepts from the 1930s as well as contemporary approaches in Polish and world pedagogy. The features of a school supporting the creativity of students and teachers are highlighted. The concept of building a culture of creativity in school is presented, included in a discussion of the philosophy of change and development of the school as a learning organization. The dialogical nature of activities undertaken in the educational environment by ethically engaged participants of educational processes is emphasized as well as the role of the teacher as an authorized creator of the culture of creativity, who reflects on his/her professional activity, perceives the school as a place for students' development and realization of their own potential, and appreciates the thinking and creative actions of students and colleagues. The article also indicates the specific features of a culture conducive to creativity in school, enabling the learning of creativity and creative learning, as well as shaping creative life orientations of students and teachers.

Streszczenie: W artykule zarysowano w sposób syntetyczny ideę szkoły twórczej. Przedstawiono jej rozumienie w koncepcjach pedagogicznych z lat 30. XX wieku, a także współczesne jej ujęcia w pedagogice polskiej i światowej. Wyeksponowano cechy szkoły wspierającej kreatywność uczniów i nauczycieli. Zaprezentowano koncepcję budowania kultury twórczości w szkole, którą wpisano w filozofię zmiany i rozwoju szkoły jako organizacji uczącej się. Zaakcentowano dialogiczny charakter działań podejmowanych w środowisku edukacyjnym przez etycznie zaangażowanych uczestników procesów edukacyjnych. Podkreślono rolę nauczyciela jako upełnomocnionego kreatora kultury twórczości, który podejmuje refleksję nad swoją aktywnością zawodową, postrzega szkołę jako miejsce rozwoju uczniów i realizacji własnego potencjału, ceni myślenie i działania twórcze uczniów i współpracowników. Wskazano na specyficzne cechy kultury sprzyjającej twórczości w szkole, umożliwiającej uczenie się twórczości i twórcze uczenie się oraz kształtowanie twórczych orientacji życiowych uczniów i nauczycieli.

Introduction

The concept of a school which supports the creativity of students and teachers and provides the right conditions for their full psychophysical and spiritual development has long been present in pedagogical reflection. It was sketched by Henryk Rowid (1926) as far back as in the first half of the 20th century. The researcher made the pedagogical ideal of the real good –a synthesis of serviceability and nobility – the basis of the creative school. The concept is rooted in Polish philosophy, and particularly in the thought of Bronisław Ferdynand Trentowski. According to Rowid (1934, p. 23), extreme individualism in education leads to pedagogical anarchism, while extreme collectivism leads to uniformism and the "destruction of the highest good, i.e., of the free creativity of the personality." The basis of the everyday functioning of the creative school in this approach is mutual respect and trust (Rowid, 1933, p. 11) and striving to redirect and transform the "fighting instinct into gaining and fostering higher forms of social life" (Rowid, 1933, pp. 9–10).

In contemporary pedagogical literature, especially in the pedagogy of creativity, in which multi-faceted analyses of creativity in education are undertaken,

a reflection on supporting the personal creativity of entities/participants in upbringing and education processes is ongoing. The theory of education for creativity and creativity support, as well as the didactics of creativity, construct the basic narrative of the pedagogy of creativity as a scientific discipline. The definition of creativity as a form of support for human development was formulated by Polish social educators Kazimierz Korniłowicz (1930) and Helena Radlińska (1979) in the 1930s – thirty years before Joy Paul Guilford gave his famous speech inspiring psychologists' interest in creativity. It was also significantly ahead of the studies by American humanistic psychologists, including Carl R. Rogers, Abraham H. Maslow and Robert J. Mayo, as well as Erich Fromm, who pointed out the need to support the development of the creative potential of every human being (Szmidt, 2002). Supporting a person in their development, in their creative becoming, is also the basis for the original idea of *homo explorens* (Cudowska, 2004, pp. 254–269). In the following paper, I omit the genesis and the long history of creativity itself and its presence in education and upbringing, due to the limited framework of this text.[1]

Characteristics of the Creative School

Even though the characteristics of the creative school cannot be reduced to the learning processes alone, it seems necessary to briefly indicate the way these processes are perceived in the context of creativity. The categories of creative learning and learning to be creative are closely related and interdependent, but not synonymous. According to the definition proposed by representatives of the British governmental committee dealing with this issue, the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) (1999), teaching creatively consists in making this process interesting and more effective than the traditional one. It also includes developing and modifying learning materials and methods so that they arouse learners' interests and motivation to learn. One cannot help but feel, therefore, that this approach is an integral part of any good, well-conducted learning process.

However, learning for creativity is presented differently in the aforementioned report. Namely, it is aimed at developing the individual abilities of students to think and act creatively (NACCCE, 1999) and is based on three

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[1]   The contents presented in this text have already been the subject of my analyses in a much wider dimension. See Cudowska (2017).

main activities: 1) encouraging creativity, which mainly consists in boosting one's belief in their own creative potential, encouraging the implementation of creative activities and developing high motivation, independence of judgment, willingness to take risks, persistence and flexibility in the face of failures; 2) helping students recognize their own creative abilities, based on the assumption that each person is potentially creative and has various creative abilities, for example, literary, mathematical, musical, plastic, technical, etc., and the primary task of education is to help students discover these abilities; 3) supporting the creativity of students by developing basic skills, sensitivity and dexterity, because creativity is derived from quite ordinary processes available to everyone, such as memory or curiosity.

Krzysztof J. Szmidt (2013) created the Index of Features of the School Supporting Students' Creativity, listing the basic properties and, at the same time, the criteria distinguishing a school where the goals of education for creativity are consciously realized. It covers twelve descriptive categories of a postulative nature: 1) stimulating and supporting students' creativity is an important goal of the school, equal to its other main goals, and hence is included in the educational and didactic program of the school and operationalized in everyday tasks; 2) special classes are organized at school to develop students' creativity (lessons, trainings, creativity workshops, creative thinking clubs, etc.), which take place systematically, continually, in a specially designated space and on the basis of creativity-fostering programs developed by teachers or adapted from the didactics of creativity; 3) the creativity of students is also supported during subject teaching, and teachers provide students with declarative and procedural knowledge on all aspects of creativity, namely, product, process, personality of the creator and other determinants, as related to their field of expertise; 4) teachers discuss and negotiate the understanding of creativity and derivative concepts, participate in professional development in the field of psychology, pedagogy and the didactics of creativity; 5) at school, the creativity of students is appreciated, the products of which are presented at exhibitions, shows and/or in school publications; 6) meetings with professional creators (artists, scientists, inventors) and trips to their studios are organized; 7) the school cooperates with cultural and art institutions, creative associations and creators as well as with parents, who are welcome in the facility; 8) teachers evoke students' internal motivation to create, consciously prevent situations that hinder the creative process, in particular the dictate of a single solution, impatience of the result, non-constructive originality, fear of a masterpiece,

and group ostracism; 9) interrogative thinking is promoted and stimulated, students are encouraged to formulate queries, question scientific assumptions and laws, speculate, raise hypotheses and verify them, and are granted the right to make mistakes and fail; 10) teachers are creative and innovative, use attractive and effective methods of teaching of their own authorship or adopted from others; 11) teachers evaluate the creative achievements of students in a thoughtful and in-depth manner, formulate constructive feedback enabling students to accurately self-assess their creative abilities; their evaluation uses scientifically and methodically justified assessment techniques; 12) the school develops the basic creative thinking abilities of students, measured by fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration of thinking, and shapes their creative mindset, which is characterized by openness, independence and perseverance.

Culture of Creativity at School

The features proposed in the Index are constitutive for building a culture of creativity in the school, one in which teachers share a belief in the importance of students' personal creativity – even if they differ in their understanding and methods of developing it – as well as recognize individual and group creativity undertaken for the welfare of the entire learning community as worthy of effort. What is particularly significant in this context is the understanding and experience of everyday creativity by educators as creators of its implementation at school. The perception of everyday creativity by teachers on the basis of biographical and narrative research was described by Monika Modrzejewska-Świgulska (2014). Culture understood in this way includes dialogical, partnership relations between all participants of school education and their commitment to teaching creativity and creative teaching. Its important element is also mutual kindness, which necessary in building an atmosphere of trust and safety in the school, which helps reveal creative abilities and shapes a creative attitude towards life outside the school walls as well.

A culture focused on creativity, on the realization of the creative potential of people in an organization, is particularly desirable in educational institutions. It seems to be an indispensable element of any school which fosters students' creativity, as an institution "in which creative thinking abilities – as well as emotional, motivational and operational dispositions that are components of the students' creative mindset – are purposefully and systematically awakened, supported and developed" (Szmidt, 2013, p. 393).

The culture of creativity emphasizes creativity at school, establishes a space for teaching creativity and creative teaching, and for shaping a creative attitude towards life in all its manifestations. It creates a space where help in creating and teaching creative skills can be given, thanks to their recognition as an important goal of school education by teachers, students, parents and the educational administration. The importance of the culture of creativity in shaping an environment conducive to the creativity of all the participants of the educational dialogue – and in the broadly understood change and development of the school – results both from the essence and specificity of this concept and from the phenomenon of its formation. It is created by people, and thus, it is the relationship between them, the nature of their mutual relations, their openness to change, willingness to cooperate and develop, their recognition of creativity as a value in personal and social life, that determines the impact the culture of creativity will have on the functioning of the organization as a whole. The culture of creativity – based on dialogue, cooperation, commitment and the kindness of partners in educational relationships – fosters not only the individual creativity of students and teachers for the benefit of the entire learning community, but also the improvement of institutions and the wider natural and social environment.

Determinants of the Culture of Creativity at School

The organizational culture of a modern school is conditioned by many factors creating a complex system of interactions, the sources of which are both inside the school and in its close and distant surroundings. It also evolves under the influence of changes in the field of education management. Although the decisive role is still played by the state, which forges education policy, defines strategic goals, determines the minimum teaching content and develops legal regulations, many decision-making powers are delegated from the central (government) level to regional and local levels and to the schools themselves. We are now witnessing a decentralization in funding, whereby local administrations and even individual schools have gained significant economic independence. In many European countries, the market model of school management is being introduced, in which the headmaster, as an educational manager, manages the resources – human, financial, and material ones as well as knowledge and time – in a thoughtful way.

The management process is also socialized; many structures and consultative bodies are created at all levels of management, including the central,

regional, and individual school levels. Advisory councils and advisory committees, composed of representatives of the educational staff, parents, students, the working or business world, and representatives of various economic and social sectors, linguistic minorities and cultural associations, give advice on educational reforms. Bogusław Śliwerski (2013) presented a critical diagnosis of the socialization of school management in Poland. There is an increase in school autonomy, a reduction in the scope of control exercised by central authorities to the benefit of regional and local authorities and the schools themselves. Parents, teachers, pupils and students are involved in overseeing the grading process, and the function of evaluation changes from controlling to advisory. Moreover, indicators for measuring the quality of education have been developed to assess the effectiveness of the education process. In the southern Member States of the European Union, such as Greece, Spain, Italy, Portugal, and in most of the countries in the central part of the community (Belgium, France, Austria, Luxembourg and some German Länder), national consultative councils have been set up (e.g., the Education Council in Belgium, the National Council for Education in Greece, the State School Council in Spain, the Education Council in France, the National Council for National Education in Luxembourg, and the Commission for School Reform in Austria; in Germany there are advisory committees in 13 Bundeslands) (Rabczuk, 2007; Váňová, 2006).

The basic condition for building a culture of creativity at school is the professional development of teachers, because it is the people who create an organization who primarily shape its culture, although the environment in which the organization functions is of no less importance in this process. The political entanglement of education, the fact that administrative changes are introduced top-down, and the technocratic and structural-organizational nature of these changes do not favor the organizational development of the school and sometimes even make it impossible. The participation of local communities, teachers, parents and students in all phases of education reform, from designing to implementing changes, has been postulated for years by international bodies as well, but is still far from being implemented. Uncritical faith in the regulatory power of the free market is fatal to educational reforms. Subsequent changes therefore seem inevitable, which should aim at improving education. Their determinants in the design and implementation phase should be their pedagogical and social rationality, not their technocratic one.

Supporting the Development of a Culture of Creativity

Shaping and implementing a culture of creativity at school is fostered by a new paradigm in thinking about educational change, opposed to bureaucratic rhetoric and technocratic planning, as presented by Michael Fullan (2015). The researcher discusses the problem of the "meaning of change", which concerns the very understanding of change, its legitimacy and essence, and the "phenomenology of change," which indicates the way people experience it. Both issues are related to the subjective perception of change by its implementers and participants. Change cannot be assimilated until its meaning is understood and shared by those who implement it, namely, by teachers. Changes in education are usually introduced in a way that does not take into account the subjective reality of the change, namely, the teachers' experience of reality. Building a culture of creativity in a creativity-fostering school requires, first of all, the transformation of the subjective reality of its actors. Educators should perceive themselves as experts of change; each teacher must strive to be an effective change agent – that is, to be aware of its nature and process.

The basic theses concerning educational change clearly point to those of the teacher's personal competences which make evident their creative attitude to life and testify to their creative mindset (Cudowska, 2004; 2009). Fullan lists four main abilities influencing one's readiness to change: a) creating one's own visions of work at school; b) internalizing the norms, habits and techniques of continuous learning; c) personal mastery, which is not limited to specific skills and competences, but indicates a creative approach to life; and d) cooperation with students, management, parents, the educational administration and representatives of the local community. It is also imperative that all the parties involved understand any change, its sense and manner of implementation (Potulicka, 2001). The effect of changes in education, seen as processes rather than events, is making the education system a learning organization. Change is then built into everyday activities and becomes a normal element of the system's work, which is how the culture of change is shaped. This also creates favorable conditions for shaping a culture of creativity that fosters not only the implementation of the basic ideas of creative learning and learning creativity, but also the shaping of creative mindsets and the development of all participants of school education in the formation of complex personalities, capable of creativity in everyday life.

The justification for such a perception of the necessary change in education is also provided by Per Dalin, who understands school improvement as its transformation into a learning organization (Hildebrandt, 2001). In this case, the school is perceived as an organization and unit of change in which the "subjective reality," that is, the way change is perceived by all the members of the school community, is important. Peter Senge describes the necessary change as "metanoia," namely, a change in the way of thinking that involves grasping the deeper meaning of learning: "A learning organization continuously expands its ability to create its own future" (Senge, 1990, pp. 13–14). The basic idea behind the organizational development of a school is to help educational institutions "learn how to learn" so that they become learning organizations, capable of introducing changes and creating their future. Change is thus seen here as learning, as a process of mutual adaptation and development consisting in sustaining efforts in self-improvement focused on changing formal and informal procedures, processes, norms and structures (Hildebrandt, 2001).

Ken Robinson (2015) also emphasizes the bottom-up nature of changes improving the functioning of the school, enabling individual and team creativity. He proposes changing the outdated, industrial model of education into a personalized, ecological system enabling the use of students' creativity in order to prepare them to cope with the challenges of the modern world and achieve full development opportunities. The researcher believes that the most important thing is to create a school environment that supports the natural ability to learn, in which the richness of experiences and contexts, play and role playing, are taken advantage of. He emphasizes the power of visionary leadership in introducing changes and the need for principals and teachers who create the right conditions for students' development in schools and help them to learn. The basis for such an improvement are four pillars: a) health – that is, supporting and developing the student's well-being in intellectual, physical, spiritual and social terms; b) ecology – namely, care for the sustainable development of the student and the entire community; c) justice – that is, developing the talents and potential of all students regardless of their life situation; and d) caution – that is, creating optimal conditions for the development of students guided by care, experience and practical wisdom. The main task of education in this approach is to stimulate the lively culture of the schools themselves so that they achieve their economic, cultural, social and personal goals. It is expressed in creating conditions for students to achieve financial independence, to understand and appreciate their own culture and respect the diversity of

other cultures, to become active and sensitive citizens, and to "connect with their inner world and the world around them" (Robinson & Lou, 2015, p. 83).

Organizational development of the school is of interest to many researchers and is the goal of a number of international projects, including the International School Improvement Project (ISIP) or the International Movement Towards Educational Change (IMTEC) – both initiated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), dealing with the analysis of educational change (Dalin & Rolff, 1993). The perception of school development through the use of its internal resources also fits into the concept of the creative school of John Nisbet, who emphasizes its ability to adapt, create or reject innovation. Organizational development of schools is not possible without a culture of cooperation and dialogue characterized by spontaneity and its voluntary nature but also a certain dose of unpredictability (Gołębniak, 2004).

At school, cooperative culture is based on the understanding and sharing of common values by a team of teachers, the principal, students and parents. It is spontaneous and voluntary, because it is created by the teachers themselves, results from their needs, gives them satisfaction and promotes the development of their own initiative and their establishing and implementing common tasks. Cooperation goes beyond the established framework, often takes place during informal meetings, even short ones, is a permanent element of mutual relations, and is part of the everyday life of the school. In creating a culture of cooperation and learning at school, the teachers' preferences for creative life paths are of particular importance, in addition to the many factors already indicated, as they contain features that are extremely important in the process of building their sense of agency and responsibility for educational change and school development. These creative inclinations include the professional development of teachers as a continuous learning process. They assume openness to other people and change, readiness for continuous improvement, entering into dialogical relations with the world, commitment and responsibility in carrying out tasks and searching for new, better solutions to difficult and problematic situations.

Shaping a culture of creativity in the school – one that is open to learning for both its members and the entire organization – requires the fulfillment of many conditions. First of all, all participants of educational processes must share the belief that the school is a unit of change responsible for its own development. Teachers should have a sense of agency and willingness to cooperate,

they should feel responsible for the learning outcomes of their students. In such an organizational culture, conflicts are used as opportunities for learning and development. The process of change depends on the mutual relations, trust and openness of the partners of the dialogical relationship. The school, as an open system, is constantly evolving. A change in one element of the system influences changes in its other parts, and the process of change itself is comprehensive; not only organizational and technical aspects of the school are subject to change, but the interpersonal relations, norms and values followed and realized in everyday work undergo transformation as well.

The culture of creativity is conducive to spontaneous learning, constant cooperation between teachers, students, parents and the local community. It is based on mutual dialogical relations in everyday work, on shaping a learning community in which teachers and students set goals together and establish tasks and procedures for their implementation for the common good (Kwieciński, 2000). In a school with such a culture, the concept of work is also changing – from the routine, standardized one to a creative one. The creative approach to work is dominated by partnership relations between people, team activities, searching for new ways to implement goals, shaping a research attitude, developing a dialogical education strategy, a sense of agency and reflectiveness, which I perceive in an axiological and anthropological perspective as a personality trait. Following Lech Witkowski, I refer it not only to broadening one's point of view, but also to caring for the quality of one's own justifications in the context of their complexity and depth of associations, studying the essence and meaning of the situations that have arisen (Witkowski, 2009). Such reflectiveness is conducive to shaping the creative mindset of an individual and is simply indispensable in the teaching profession.

Conclusions

Building a culture of creativity at school cannot be subject to strict and unchanging rules. The formation of such a culture is an extremely complex process, depending on many factors, both internal and external to the school. Undoubtedly, the teacher plays a fundamental role in this process as the source and driving force behind every change, as a conscious, empowered entity creating the school's culture, as a professional who not only acts, but also carries out self-reflection and self-evaluation of everyday practice. However, other conditions are also important, for example, a social climate conducive

to creative activities and cooperation of the school with actors of the local environment. Creating a culture of cooperation and dialogue in a school open to organizational ingenuity and the creativity of educational entities is at the same time the effect and a condition of the organizational development of the school. It is a complex and continuous process that requires conscious actions of authorized teachers, students, parents, educational authorities and other entities of the environment in which the school operates. The search for the sources of its meaning does not end with theoretical considerations in the areas indicated in this paper, but goes beyond them towards educational practice, which provides many premises for the importance of the school's organizational culture in realizing the creative potential of students and teachers.

The theoretical proposition presented here arose from the belief that there is a need to build an educational space conducive to everyday creativity and to shape creative life orientations of all the participants in educational activities. It requires further analysis and research. It can also be an inspiration for practitioners, teachers, educators and educational managers to introduce solutions in everyday school work that would bring the culture of creativity to life. I suppose that specific actions in this area could result from their own passions, interests and abilities, because there is no single recipe for shaping the culture of creativity at school; it can only be created in mutual cooperation, in dialogue, through joint activities carried out for the benefit of the entire community, using resources inherent in people and the environment. Building a culture of creativity in education requires a preference for creative life orientations at least among the initiators of this process, especially since they are associated with a sense of coherence, namely, a sense of comprehensibility, resourcefulness and meaningfulness which favors the well-being of all people.

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