Are creativity teachers creative? A 6-year qualitative follow-up

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Abstract

Psycho-pedagogy of Creativity, a continual five-year undergraduate and graduate course of studies, was established in 1997, in Poland, at the Warsaw Academy of Special Education. The main goal of this specialization is to educate specialists who are well-prepared to develop children’s creativity and who know how to identify and solve educational problems. But are the graduates fulfilling their potential? Are they self-actualizing in real life? These are the main questions of the presented study. Six years after the first graduation of educators for creativity, I checked how they use their creative skills in everyday life. Qualitative methods such as biographical sketches and narrations were used in the research. Results show high diversity of lifestyles and vocational activities among creative adults and significant similarities between them. Their common characteristics are high life approval, balance between work and family, and seeking challenges. This study proves the effectiveness of long-term education of and for creativity.

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1. Introduction - The main assumptions of Psycho-pedagogy of Creativity

Psycho-pedagogy of Creativity was established in 1997 at the initiative of Witold Dobrołowicz, at the Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education (Kadowski, Gralewski, Lebuda, & Wisniewska, 2007). Since then this specialization has been educating future creativity teachers via five year Master and three year Bachelor studies. Studies constitute an innovative pedagogical experiment on both a countrywide and probably a worldwide scale. The main objective of Psycho-pedagogy of Creativity is to educate specialists who will be well-prepared for identification and development of creativity in children, youth and adults, people ready to search for creative solutions and innovations for the school system. Students are educated within two main areas: psychology and pedagogy of creativity. Their abilities and competences are also developed during numerous workshops and training sessions. This is a very characteristic feature of Psycho-pedagogy of creativity that in the course of studies students are subjected to intensive training of creativity. Thanks to a differentiated curriculum are ready to undertake various professional roles in educational institutions, alternative education sites and entities such as advertising agencies. The students’ creative abilities were tested before their applications for Psycho-pedagogy of Creativity were...
accepted. That is why there can be no doubt about the graduates’ creative potential. The main aim of this research was to analyze how their creative potential influences their lives. This paper discusses the following issues: the main assumptions of Psycho-pedagogy of Creativity, the method and results of the conducted analyzes.

2. Method

Biographical in-depth interviews were conducted with graduates of Psycho-pedagogy of Creativity, who finished their studies in 2002 and 2003. The information gathered included: secondary school, studies, professional, financial and family situation of the subjects. The interview and biographical method allowed to analyze the creative potential of the participants and its application in everyday life as well as provided insight into the problem of creativity from different perspectives: personal, professional and social (Calek & Tokarz, 2004; Lebuda & Wisniewska, 2009; Runco, 1993).

2.1. Participants and procedure

A total of eight graduates participated in the research: six women and two men. Five of them graduated six years ago, three of them- five years ago. The subjects chose the time and place of the interviews themselves. The interviews took from one to three hours.

3. Findings and Results

3.1. Seeking newness and creativity – reasons of choosing psycho-pedagogy of creativity and its evaluation

Why did the students choose a new, as they call it themselves - “experimental” specialization? Firstly, it combined two fields of their interests, pedagogy and psychology; some of them, interested in art, discovered an opportunity to develop their knowledge within this field; as one of the subjects says: “Here I was given a chance to develop my humanistic and artistic interests, I saw in this specialization a combination of two domains which were my passions”. Some subjects point out their constant tendency to take risk, experiment, their love for the new and this is how they motivate their choice of a pioneer specialization. Others saw a chance to broaden their horizons and an opportunity to participate in the creation of a new domain - many people stress the feeling of elitism and the mission of spreading the idea of creativity in Poland. Since creativity lessons are not obligatory in Poland, the professional future of these people was not certain, but despite this fact, as they often admit, the subjects never considered any other specialization. Even those who were planning to specialize in a different field decided to begin these studies after an introductory meeting. The subjects’ memories of the studies are very positive - they admit that it was a time of intensive intellectual and personal development, and also a time of building close interpersonal relationships. In their statements, the subjects attach great importance to the creativity trainings, they stress that it was a time of intensive intellectual and personal development, and also a time of building close interpersonal relationships. In their statements, the subjects attach great importance to the creativity trainings, they stress that these classes not only contributed a lot to their scientific development, but also had a significant influence on their personality. In their work, they use exercises and techniques presented during these classes and despite the time which has passed, some of them still keep their notes from the classes and use them in their own educational activities. Almost all the participants see the teacher conducting the classes as an example worth following, mentor and model. From the description of his person one can conclude that his knowledge, practical competences, rich experience, and the personality were particularly important for the participants. The graduates point out the importance of intellectual and interpersonal openness, honesty in student-teacher relations, passion and love for work and disinterestedness. They speak of this teacher in the context of friendship, inspiration and motivation for action. As one of the subjects states: “It was not pretended, it was so real. The guy was coming with his head full of ideas and surprised us every time, everyone simply wanted to participate in these classes. They made sense. And it's true that later on, for example in my own work, I was using many of these exercises”. In their reflection upon the benefits of the studies, the subjects emphasize the opportunity to broaden their intellectual horizons and get to know various new directions in science and pedagogical practice. Furthermore, most participants claim that the changes that occurred in them through active participation in trainings of various types and workshops were often more important than the knowledge they gained. The graduates stress that the studies helped them understand that one question may have many different answers and that any problem can be solved. One of the subjects says: “What do I
owe to these studies? Certainly openness, innovation and certitude that there are no problems which cannot be resolved, they can be resolved better or worse, there are many ways to do it, but it is always doable (…) Also looking at the tasks and problems from wider perspective – consciousness that I can understand something differently than somebody else; and this is natural to me”. Some of the people also appreciate the competence of doing creativity trainings and the general ability of conducting classes related to education to and for creativity.

3.2. Permanent education and widening horizons – after the studies

Many of the subjects, apart from pedagogical studies, have also finished other faculties, including sociology, psychology and other pedagogical specializations, for example social work, or post-graduate studies of various domains, such as sexual education, management of health care institutions, primary education and re-education. Some of the subjects had obtained a Ph.D. degree or are preparing their Ph.D. dissertations, and many declare the will to continue education under various forms. There seems to be a blatant need of broadening knowledge and learning new competences among the subjects. Interestingly, this tendency is not related to a pragmatic approach to the job market, because it is not a result of the willingness to change job or profession - it is related to ambition, a strong need of development and gaining knowledge. One of the subjects said: “I think I did it mostly for acquiring knowledge and broadening my horizons, because no matter whether I do something with this creativity or not, I will always think that I finished an interesting faculty. From pure interest, the desire to… Broaden the horizons”. In their reflections on education one can identify the high standards that the subjects set for themselves. Despite numerous awards and achievements in the scientific field, they have a feeling that they could do more, have wider knowledge.

3.3. Work as creative self-realization

Participants stress that at the time of graduation, despite the feeling that they did not know many things, they were certain that they would succeed on the job market and that they would be able to fulfill their professional plans according to their dreams: “I have a feeling that no matter where I go, no matter what I do, I will manage well. I will learn fast. I am not scared and I wouldn’t say <oh, I have never done that, so I will not be able to cope with it>(…) Whenever something new appears, I am not afraid of it”. In their professional activity all subjects are dealing with education on various levels and in various forms and fields. Currently, some work in institutions of formal education, from universities to kindergartens, where they are chiefly responsible for teaching creativity or modern techniques of knowledge acquisition, but they also teach other subjects, such as family life education or English (also applying the methodology of creativity in such cases). Some of the subjects work in companies indirectly related to education, such as companies offering trainings and workshops or in the Polish Scouting Association. There are also people who work for commercial companies on positions not related to teaching of creativity; these people, however, carry out additional classes, trainings and creativity workshops and declare that they find it a source of great professional satisfaction. One characteristic feature is that all the subjects are strongly involved in their work and spend much more time working than the norms indicate for a given profession. For them, work is a source of satisfaction, joy and provides them with stimuli for building positive self-assessment. In their work they feel appreciated, noticed and esteemed. Work is so important to them that even in case of health problems, family obligations or environmental difficulties the subjects do not resign from doing their job, trying to modify the situation and to reformulate their actions so that they allow for management of contradictory, and sometimes competitive requirements. Answers to the question about an ideal job revealed that it’s usually a job similar to the subjects' current occupation with several minor changes. For all these people, without any exceptions, the dream job is related to education. “In your life you need to do what you like, or something that you want to do, or that you expect you might like”. They claim that their job must be interesting, but the aspect of contact with other people is also crucial. The subjects frequently stress the social value of actions undertaken by them and the feeling of mission that accompanies them. Their work has a value of self-realization rather than instrumental value. The participants perform their professional responsibilities very scrupulously, and although facing new challenges and competition is a pleasure to them, they stress the importance of friendly atmosphere in the organization. They appreciate the possibility of independent activities at work, flexibility, and creative character of tasks.
3.4. Family – independence and commitment

Despite great commitment to professional work, maintenance of balance between professional and private life is observable. All subjects underline the importance of family in their lives. People without children demonstrate high educative awareness; their actions are thought through and have a goal. The most important educative values for them are self-reliance, high self-esteem, independence of thoughts and opinions, ability to overcome obstacles and social competences (Kohn, 1976). Their relationships are satisfactory, many stress that is based on respect for the needs of the other person, they emphasize a strong need of possessing some kind of private space in their relationship, for which the partner gives a conscious agreement. For the participants, there are two main meanings of success in life: first is self-reliance, independence, autonomy, the second is transgression, in a private meaning, reaching beyond one's own limits, difficulties and barriers (Kozielecki, 2007). It is worth mentioning that due to high professional activity and sacrifices for the family, participants sometimes resign from the realization of their interests. If they have the time just for themselves, they usually spend it reading, listening to music, watching a film or visiting a theater. Because of permanent lack of time, they often quit artistic activities of various types, such as writing poems, novels or painting. Currently their creative activity is related to three main fields. The first one being professional activity - in this field the subjects very often introduce improvements of different types. The second field is everyday life and activities related to the obligations performed at home, such as cooking, fixing various appliances or fitting out of an apartment. The third interesting field of creative activity is activity directed at their children – musical works composed for one's son or books written for (and together with) one's own children. Other artistic activities, like ceramic art, photography or writing are rather considered as plans for distant future and currently works of art are being produced only sporadically. The subjects reveal high activity in the field of science, some of them are authors of books and scientific articles, nevertheless they all admit that it is more like a craft for them, rather than creative work. Incredibly interesting is subjects' active approach to problems which they encounter in everyday life, as one of the subjects says: “Problems don’t exist, there are only tasks. This is how I try to approach it. In case of a problem people start moaning and a task simply needs to be done”. An example of such an approach to problem solving can be participation in an educative course, because one's two year old daughter is going through a very tough period, preparation of a home cookbook for an allergic child, etc. A high level of everyday creativity, or the so-called small “c” creativity, is observable among the subjects (Craft, 2001; Karwowski, 2009).

3.5. Psychological characteristics

High levels of self-consciousness and reflection, rich vocabulary, remarkable fluency in speaking and concentration on cognitive, aesthetic and family values are typical for all the subjects. High levels of energy seems equally typical, often resulting in multitasking, combination of many responsibilities, often from distant domains, and constant desire to improve. On the other hand, the graduates are to a large extent emotionally unbalanced, stubborn, with some symptoms of neuroticism, but also able to maintain significant self-control. As one of the subjects says: “I know that I'm difficult, I often have mood swings but I cannot separate myself from this”. It is possible that such high emotionality is helpful in creative activity (Heinzen, 1994). The graduates also share features such as a strong concentration on the aim, clear path and readiness for sacrifice in the name of their chosen goal. However, it is worth pointing out that an orientation for here and now is strongly dominating - the subjects rarely make plans for distant future, of which they think positively and indicate only the most general points on the line of time. They believe that the world undergoes such quick changes that instead of making plans for distant future they prefer to concentrate on gathering information and being up to date in all the areas of life important to them. The graduates do not succumb to the opinion of the majority or to the opinion of authorities, no matter what the consequences are. One of the subjects says: “I eventually told the professor what I didn't like. He didn't speak to me for two years, I was sorry, but I did not regret. Someone had to tell him this”. A possible consequence of such non-conformist attitude is a lack of authorities in life, as one of the subjects says: “I admire many people, but I haven't found someone whose example I would follow and whom I would constantly think of”.

4. Discussion

The studies of the effectiveness of creative trainings that have been conducted till now were focused usually on short-term actions (Wiśniewska & Karwowski, 2007) and based on quantitative analyses. The presented study analyzes the effectiveness of education of creativity teachers from the perspective of five, six years after graduation. Moreover, a specific training in which the subjects had been participating was certainly longer and more complex than typical classes concerning the development of creative competence or solving creative problems. The analysis proved that the participants’ profiles model of a creative person. What is more, the effects of stimulation and education to which they were exposed during their studies are durable and the acquired knowledge and abilities are still used by the subjects in professional and personal life. Moreover, they constitute an integral element of the identity of the subjects. The graduates function very well in the present reality, they can flexibly respond to the needs of the job market. Many of them have a well-developed motivation to teach either in the structures of formal education or in private entities of various degrees and types. The subjects themselves confirm in their statements that studying Psycho-pedagogy of Creativity has most importantly changed them, enabled them to overcome barriers in creative activity and to undertake actions more courageously.

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