

THE PLACE OF CREATIVE TEACHING METHODS IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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Abstract

The paper discussed the place of creative teaching methods in Christian education. It examined the nature of Christian education, the purpose of creative teaching methods, the methods in which the creative teacher employs in teaching creatively and teaching for creativity, and the obstacles in using creative teaching methods in Christian education. Therefore the paper recommends an atmosphere for creative learning be established, when teaching creatively and teaching for creativity, Christian education teacher should acknowledge the fact that learning is interpersonal and intentional and the creative Christian teacher must be role model of creativity.

It has been truly said that the most important developments in civilization have come through the creative process. Unfortunately however, most people have not been taught to be creative. This is the target of Christian education. The paper addresses the place of creative teaching methods in Christian education where it uses creative teaching methods to provide rich and varied contexts for learners to acquire, develop and apply a broad spectrum of knowledge, wisdom, understanding and skills to think creatively and critically, to make constructive decisions and solve

problems so they can make a difference for better in a fast- changing culture.

Since Christian education is God-centered, the fundamental assumption is that creativity originates in the character of God and is expressed in His creative work. The creative teaching- learning process is the engagement of Gods' truth with the learners mind, will, intellect and emotions as well as leading learners who are made in Gods' image to know, obey, and follow Him in order to live meaningful lives.

Meaning of Christian Education

Christian Education has spectrum of meanings to different people depending on their understandings and worldview. Some think of Christian education as the type of education that takes place in Christian schools, while others think of it as education that is provided in the Christian home, and/ or that which happens in the church context. All these people have the understanding that there has to be something Christian about the whole context in which education takes place if it is to be called Christian. But the implication that this understanding presents is that Christian education cannot take place outside of such Christian contexts. If Jesus and the apostles taught in a whole spectrum of contexts, many of these contexts were quite hostile to the Christian teaching, then the life transforming impact of a Christian teachers' life and work cannot be confined to a particular kind of educational context. Shortt (2009) pointed out that, Christian education is not and cannot be confined to them; rather it can take place in a whole range of contexts, formal and informal, 'Christian' and 'Secular'.

Pazmino (1997: 87) defined Christian education as,

... the deliberate, systematic, and sustained divine and human efforts to share or appropriate the knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, sensibilities, and

behaviours that comprise or are consistent with the Christian faith. It fosters the change, renewal, and reformation of persons, groups, and structures by the power of the Holy Spirit to conform to the revealed will of God as expressed in the Scriptures and pre-eminently in the person of Jesus Christ, as well as any outcomes of that effort.

This definition emphasizes the intentionality of a cooperative activity between persons and God. Thompson (2000) shaded light that the deliberate, systematic and sustained aspect of Christian education makes it intentional. Its knowledge, values, attitudes, skills and behaviors reveal its wholistic character. The desire to see persons, groups, and structures changed reveal the transformation aspect. Conforming to the revealed will of God, the model of the Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit shows the God-centered nature of Christian education. This type of education helps a person obtain the goals of life modeled by Christ and leads to the development of the whole individual in relation to God, fellow man, and environment, which constitute one of the most contemporary needs today.

Purpose of Creative Teaching Methods in Christian Education

In order to achieve the goal of Christian education, teaching Christian

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education therefore requires a great deal of creative efforts. The purpose of creative teaching methods in Christian education is to empower learners, young and adult to develop their potential as individuals and make informed and responsible decisions for living transformed lives. The society today needs young people who are flexible, creative, and proactive- young people, who can solve problems, make decisions, think critically, communicate ideas effectively and work efficiently within teams and groups. The 'knowing of knowledge' is no longer enough to succeed in the increasing complex, fluid and rapidly evolving world in which we live. In order to optimize lifelong learning and potential success, we must generally accept the fact that young people need to have opportunities to develop personal capabilities and effective thinking skills as part of their well- rounded education (Northern Ireland Curriculum, 2007: 1).

Creative teaching methods create cultural teachers and equip learners to handle a changing culture, to wrestle with contemporary issues and discover how to respond as Christians. Today we are in a fast-paced culture where information overload, strong audio-visual orientation, creative arts, poetry, music, art, literature, drama, etc are emerging to be important elements of worship, ministry and communicating the gospel in our contemporary culture. Cunningham (2001) rightly observed that, in a fast-moving and fast changing culture, creative approach to learning

and living and tackling new problems may better prepare our children and youth for the future. Encouraging learners develop their God-given talents and abilities in this context can be instrumental in helping them learn to function as co-creators with God in bringing into existence cultural innovations which are socially as well as individually beneficial. This needs a perspective that looks to the future with hope and expectation. It may also require using new methods or old methods in an innovative way. Creative teaching methods are a means to the end of leading learners, made in the image of a creative God to know, obey and follow their creator fully.

Christian Education Teacher Teaches Creatively

Christian education teachers participate with God as He moves and works in making all things new in the lives of the learners. The most powerful way to develop creativity in the lives of learners is to be a role model. This is very important. Learners develop creativity not only when you teach them to, but when you modeled it. Creativity is described as a person's quality, but it is more a quality of ideas, behaviors, or products and can be developed. Bozik (1990) observed that 'creativity can be fostered and developed in just about everyone'. Moore (1990) explained further that creative teacher is not a source of creative ideas; instead, the creative teacher encourages learners to experiment and facilitates an

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environment where creative ideas, behaviors, and products may be discovered and experienced. Creative teaching in Christian education involves teaching creatively and teaching for creativity. Teaching creatively might be described as teaching using imaginative approaches to make learning more fascinating, engaging, exciting and effective. While teaching for creativity might best be described as using forms of teaching that are intended to develop learners' own creative thinking and behavior, and it will be fair to say that teaching for creativity involves creative teaching. Teachers cannot develop the creative abilities of their learners when their own creative abilities are not discovered or suppressed.

Morris (2006, February) explained that teaching for creativity is not an easy option, but can be enjoyable and deeply fulfilling. Creativity takes commitment. It is time consuming and involves planning to generate and develop ideas and evaluate whether they have worked. It involves confidence and detours to pick unexpected opportunity for learning. Creative teachers are always willing to experiment but they recognize the need to learn from experience. All these require more expertise of the teachers.

Teaching creativity also requires relationships. Cunningham (2001) pointed out that creative teaching is highly inter-personal and involves being sensitive to the learner. Encouraging creativity in a learner requires that the teacher 'nurtures' the uniqueness that

lies within each learner. He or she must be attuned to the potentialities as well as the probabilities. In the same way, teachers who are creative work closely with their learners. They talk with their learners and are deliberate about establishing positive relationships with them. They are open and honest. In the learner-teacher relationships, flexibility encourages participation, listening and laughter are exchanged. A Climate of mutual respect and acceptance among learners and between learners and teachers is facilitated so learners can share and develop in community as well as independently. Exploratory thinking is risked in an atmosphere of warmth and support.

Creative teachers appreciate the hard work and preparation necessary to facilitate a creative learning-experience. Much of these preparations take place outside of formal lesson planning time. Creative teachers care enough to work hard to multiply the natural ability God has given them. And last, Christian education exposes teachers through training to creative activities and methods which increase their teaching competencies and enhance the receptivity to the learners' creativity.

Methods of Teaching Creatively in Christian Education

No method in and of itself is creative simply by definition, but there may be some teaching approaches that lend themselves more readily to creating a creative context. A method becomes creative as it is used by teacher in such a

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way as to bring forth creative thinking and activity within the learners.

An atmosphere for creative learning must be established as Bozik (1990) observed that a creative atmosphere is emotionally safe for nurturing. It is intellectually stimulating as questions are encouraged and new ideas are welcomed. Undeveloped ideas can be safely explored and tested. Alternative perspectives and approaches are presented, invited and examined. Feldhusen and Treffinger (1977) added that, "in this environment the teacher becomes a resource provider and director of divergent learning activities." Since Christian education is God-centered, creativity is inviting learners to make sense of God's Word and God's world. If methodologies, curriculum, or structures of the learning environment are tough and un-conducive so that data are hard to understand, learners have no opportunity to make sense of it. In a creative atmosphere, learners are provided with enough content to face and challenge understanding. In the challenge, their biblical foundations are strengthened the more.

Educational methods that facilitate creative learning and divergent thinking include the following strategies that Torrance and Myers (1970) suggested:

- Present ambiguous, uncertainties, and incompleteness.
- Heighten anticipation and expectation for what is to come.

- Look at the same thing from a variety of psychological, sociological, cultural, physical, or emotional points of view.
- Ask provocative questions.
- Encourage steps out of the comfort zone of the known and familiar.
- Explore missing elements and new possibilities.
- Use surprises.
- Work to make events and places concrete and visual.
- Experiment and test ideas.
- Encourage hypotheses.
- Transform and rearrange information.

In many of these creative approaches, there is a move from a verbal symbol system to a visual, auditory, and tactile symbol system, which may involve having learners draw, sing or dramatize content rather than talking about it.

Feldhusen and Treffinger (1977) suggested seven fundamental considerations to be met in a creative learning experience. These are:

1. Provide the initial experience to interest students in inquiring about a problem, concept, situation, or idea. The use of media, role playing, and demonstrations are generally successful investigative starters. Learning centre with a number of viable options is an excellent beginning.

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2. Provide the students with manipulative situations and materials to begin avenues of explorations. Games, media, files, sourcebooks and discussion are all good starters.

3. Supply information sources for students' questions. Outside sources, field trips, speakers, peers, and the teachers are good supplements to written sources. The community and the world at large are fair game in the information-seeking stage.

4. Provide materials and equipment that will spark and encourage student experimentation and production.

5. Provide time for students to manipulate, discuss, experiment, fail, and succeed.

6. Provide guidance, reassurance, and re-enforcement for students' ideas and hypothesis.

7. Reward and encourage acceptable solutions and solution strategies. Use failing experiences as instructional motivators: Question why a solution will not work and ask open ended questions. A supportive, positive climate will spawn the best results.

The above suggestions are for learners of all ages. Divergent thinking is not limited to adult nor is creative and hands-on learning limited to children. Edwards and Springate (1995) identified that, young children have wonderful capacities to explore their world

creatively. They are capable of analysis at a level appropriate to their age and can be challenged to grasp the integration of related subject areas. They appreciate open-ended and long term projects and desire to express their ideas through a variety of symbolic media and expressive avenues. In addition, older children, adolescents, and adults have the capacity to re-cultivate the capacity to approach learning and life creatively. When provided with time, space, materials and climate to be creative, and when encouraged by a teacher who provides the occasion for creative adventure, individuals who are made in the image of God- the creator can be invited to create with incredible outcomes.

Obstacles in Using Creative Teaching Methods in Christian Education

In Christian education, teachers who are committed to using creative methods may face different challenges in implementing these approaches. Challenges may be as general as the sacred/secular dichotomy in which creativity is considered appropriate for the school or studio but not for the church or the ministry setting. Challenges may be as individual as doubts about one's creative ability, resulting in the restriction of God-given gifts, talents and potentials (Cunningham, 2001).

Another bottleneck is that each time a new creative activity is introduced, a measure of risk is assumed and the cost must be calculated. The

tendency is to return to that which is known and familiar. Some obstacles to creative teaching include:

Conformity, over planning, dependence on the known and familiar, and the way it has always been done, overuse of lesson manual without freedom to try original ideas. Teaching behaviors that discourage creative and critical thinking include treating learners as tape recorders and lecturing every class.

Finally, creative methods themselves may become obstacles to learning if teachers become slaves to the methods rather than owning it as the tool it was intended to be. It has been truly said that your weakest teaching method is the one you use the most. You may be gifted and creative, but if your creativity becomes more clear and predictable it becomes a weakness for future creative teaching.

Conclusion

In Christian education, there is no one way of teaching and learning creatively. Various creative approaches may be employed to attain a desired goal. Exploring creative teaching and teaching for creativity is a journey to the unknown and the untried, for both the teacher and the learner. These journeys are rarely without adventure. We learn both from failure and success, but mostly we learn much more from failure which is always different and surprising, rich with nuances to be mined at a later date. When we teach creatively we model Jesus, our Savior, Master and Lord, the Master teacher, who taught

what He lived and lived what He taught—always in an amazingly new way. However, while we employ various creative approaches to creative teaching and learning, the paper therefore recommends first, an atmosphere for creative learning to be established. Secondly, when teaching creatively and teaching for creativity, Christian teacher should acknowledge the fact that learning is interpersonal and intentional. And last, Christian teachers should model God the creator and become role models so as to develop the learners' creative thinking and behavior in order to glorify God with their creativity which is the ultimate goal of Christian education.

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