Available online at www.elixirpublishers.com (Elixir International Journal)

Leadership Management

Elixir Leadership Mgmt. 62 (2013) 17457-17460

ISSN: 2229-712X

Promoting students' creativity through leadership styles

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 13 July 2013;

Received in revised form:

20 August 2013;

Accepted: 31 August 2013;

Keywords

Creativity,

Leadership styles.

ABSTRACT

In today's competitive world, the only thing that is constant is change. As a result, creative capacity is the key. Creativity has become a topic of ever-increasing interest in educational settings. Like it or not, teachers serve as the metronome in the classroom. The meter and behavior established by them set the patterns and establish the models for students' behavior as individuals and as a group. Thus, there is a need to identify the role of teacher leadership behaviors for students' creativity. The purpose of this article is to propose possible approaches to facilitate creativity in the classroom, especially with the emphasis on leadership perspective. First, the definition of creativity is discussed. Then based on the literature, several strategies and ideas of promoting creativity are reviewed. Next, a possible model is proposed, including knowledge, creative thinking, motivation and self-efficacy, goal setting and work group, transformational leadership, and supportive leadership. Finally, the implication of this model is described.

Introduction

Creativity has become a topic of ever-increasing interest in educational settings (Craft, 2003; Feldman & Benjamin, 2006). Therefore, there is a need for a greater understanding of the dynamics between the personal and contextual factors responsible for students creative performance in the classroom. In addition to there is a need to identify the role of teacher leadership behaviors for students creativity. Specifically, in the education arena, our knowledge of the role of leadership in the creative process remains limited. The importance of the identification of factors that amplify or stifle students creative behaviors is to facilitating the structure of classroom environments which is conducive to creativity (Shalley, 1995). The purpose of this article is to propose possible approaches to facilitate creativity in the classroom, especially with the emphasis on leadership perspective

Creativity Defined

People often use the concept of creativity and innovation in an interchangeable way; "others view them as symbiotically related phenomena necessary for the development of new systems, products, and technologies" (Ford, 1996, p. 1112). In short, "creativity is a prerequisite of innovation". In the same vein, this definition of creativity is also associated with four potential research paradigms: the creative person, the cognitive processes of creativity, environment issues to shape or inhibit creativity, and the product of creative performance (Batey & Furnham, 2006).

The Characteristics of Creativity

In creativity literature, various and considerable efforts have contributed to the knowledge of creativity from the perspective of cognitive (e.g., Diakidoy & Kanari, 1999), personality (e.g., Helson, Roberts, & Agronick, 1995), humanistic (e.g., Gardner, 1993), social (e.g., Shalley, Gilson, & Blum, 2000), environmental (e.g., Niu & Sternberg, 2003), psychology (e.g. Amabile, 1996), and neurobiology (e.g., Mumford & Caughron, 2007). Because of the diverse frameworks of each approach, the results of this phenomenon cause conceptual and empirical fragmentation. Against this backdrop, however, a substantial number of creativity scholars have contributed to a repertoire of theoretical frameworks, which delineates creative achievement under the influence of possible variables, including cognitive ability (e.g., HyounSook & Jin Nam, 2009), personality factors (e.g., Kim, Hon, & Crant, 2009), cognitive style (e.g., James & Asmus, 2000), motivation (e.g., Amabile, 1983), knowledge (e.g., Baer, 2003), environment (e.g., Oldham & Cummings, 1996), and the contextual influences (e.g., Woodman et al., 1993).

Promote Creativity in Classrooms

A number of studies have documented the efforts of educators to bring creativity into their classrooms (Ng & Smith, 2004; Petocz, Reid, & Taylor, 2009; Runco & Johnson, 2002). Creativity researchers have justified that creativity can be learned and taught through proper training programs with educators conscious contributions and developing a creativity friendly environment (Davis, 2006;Saracho, 2002). In line with this notion, some supporters suggest creative thinking should blend into the curricula, and with a more pluralistic approach will assist students to increase the quantity and quality of ideas (Lau, Ng, & Lee, 2009; Puccio & Keller-Mathers, 2007). Bleakley (2004) described ten different lenses of creativity that help to inform teaching, learning, and curriculum of creativity in higher education: (a) creativity as an ordering process, (b) creativity as rhythm and cycle, (c) creativity as originality and spontaneity, (d) creativity as the irrational, (e) creativity as problem solving, (f) creativity as problem stating, (g) creativity as inspiration, (h) creativity as serendipity, (i) creativity as resistance to the uncreative, and (j) creativity as withdrawal and absence (pp. 476-473). Sternberg (2010) pointed out "if we want to encourage creativity, we need to promote the creativity habit" (p. 397).

Possible Avenues to Facilitate Creativity in the Classroom

Teachers have important resources at their disposal to facilitate students learning experience and unleash their potential in the classroom. A number of researchers argued that the

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implementation of concepts of organizational leadership in the classroom has a positive effect on students performance (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009). Therefore, this article proposes possible avenues in tandem with leadership behaviors in the school context to spark a creative light in students minds.

Knowledge Construction

Dominant-relevant skills, such as knowledge, intelligence, and expertise, are an essential component that affects individuals with creative potential. These skills are determined by antecedent conditions (e.g., in-born talent), experience, and education (Amabile, 1998; Hennessey & Amabile, 1987). Hunter et al. (2008) found different knowledge structures (schema, associations, cases, and blend) were involved in the creative process. More specifically, under the condition of idea generation, associational or schematic knowledge was more favorable, whereas under consideration of quality and originality of problem solutions, case-based knowledge took the lead. In another study along this line, Baughman and Mumford (1995) found that a combination and reorganization of knowledge structures played an important role in idea generation.

Creative Thinking

The test regarding an individual creative enterprise is judged by either by the quality of alternative solutions or by their quality and originality. Accordingly, creativity tests successfully demonstrated both creative thinking skills and generating various solutions (Ford, 1996; Woodman et al., 1993). A large number of empirical studies utilized the divergent thinking tests, including fluency, flexibility, elaboration, and originality, as a predictor of creative achievement (Barron & Harrington, 1981; Guilford, 1967). Sternberg (2003) maintained that teaching creative thinking could benefit the students academic performance. More specifically, Sternberg (2003, 2005) provided suggestions toward creative thinking: redefine problems, analyze solutions, defy the crowd, take risks, open minds, tolerate uncertainty, and be patient.

Therefore, teachers should develop the ability to identify the creative potential in students, to recognize creative outcomes, and to encourage the cognitive processes related to creativity. For the sake of development of creativity, teachers should utilize creativity-fostering pedagogy, including a set of skills: pattern recognition, connectivity to diversity, synthesis training, a schema of problem-solving, and divergent thinking exercises.

Motivation and Self-Efficacy

A strong body of work supports the idea that motivation is a core factor in influencing creativity (Amabile, 1988, 1996; Hennessey, 2003; Tierney, Farmer, & Graen, 1999; Woodman et al., 1993). Research evidence indicates intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to some extent function as cognitive bases of individual creative performance; this psychological phenomenon is positively related to self-efficacy that could promote creativity (Amabile, 1983; Beghetto, 2006; Hennessey & Amabile, 1987; Kasof, Chuansheng, Himsel, & Greenberger, 2007).

Teachers should develop a learning orientation that motivates students to advance creative self-efficacy to engage in creative activities. Taken together, the feelings of enhanced capacities or competencies are likely in turn to heighten creative effects. Teachers can reap the benefits of students creativity by the careful use of a reward and evaluation system, providing ample opportunities for free play with tasks, making intrinsic motivation as a conscious factor, focusing on the intrinsically enjoyable aspects of activities, and training students as active and independent learners.

Goal Setting and Work Group

Goal setting is a useful strategy to overcome the reluctance of involvement in creative attempts, thanks to inertia and attachment to one's comfort zone (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2008). A person's motivation for pursuing creativity is moderated by relevant expectations, emotions, and goals.

Group activity is the gestalt of all members' creativity inputs. Especially, "A group provides an arena in which members can use others as resources to augment their own knowledge" (Woodman et al., 1993, p.303). The diversity of team members with regard to knowledge and experience also contributes to enhancing innovation (Mumford, 2000). Another advantage of creativity through work groups is shared goals and commitments together with brainstorming for creative problem-solving.

Set up the feasible creative goals to buffer students from extraneous demands and disturbing motivation. Tailor creative objectives to creative input because of reinforcement of expectations contributing to the creative output. Team up students with diverse perspectives for collaborative creative learning and legitimate creativity-related goals. Build positive, creativity-facilitating receptivity and competency beliefs.

Transformational Leadership

The importance of leader behaviors in the classroom is that teachers see themselves differently and thus behave differently owing to expanding their leadership roles (Searby & Shaddix, 2008). Bass (1985) conceptualized transformational leadership with four components: intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, charisma, and inspirational motivation. As a result, it is reasonable to believe transformational leadership is associated with followers creativity. A number of studies confirmed that transformational leadership has a positive tendency toward enhancing creativity in either an individual level or group conditions (Gong, Huang, & Farh, 2009; Jung, 2000; Shin & Zhou, 2003).

Teachers should take advantage of the concept of transformational leadership through encouragement, emotional support, confidence, and consideration to maintain and form creative actions of students. The commitment of transformational leadership in students activities shapes their intentions to engage in creative work processes, via mutual trust, coaching, guiding, and inspiring, which ultimately produces high quality creative products.

Supportive Leadership

Based on the view of cognition, "creative work is a cognitively, demanding, resource intensive activity" (Mumford, Hunter, & Byrne, 2009, p. 355). Additionally, research displayed that the psychological process has a potential influence on creative performance. Supportive leadership especially has an indirect in impacting creativity by developing a trust relationship, increasing the perceptions of psychological safety, providing constructive feedback, promoting self-determination, and encouraging risk taking (Cummings & Oldham, 1997; HyounSook & Jin Nam, 2009; Oldham & Cummings, 1996).

Teachers should build a psychological safe zone that encourages freedom, creativity, risks taking, and a breaking-out-of-the-box attitude in order to maximize creative accomplishments. On the basis of leaders support, teachers can persuade students that they are capable of producing creative

outcomes and are satisfied with their achievements. Provide constructive and friendly feedback as a strong support for students, thereby showing appreciation and respect for their efforts.

Discussion

"Fundamental to living in the conceptual age will be the use of creativity" (Warner & Myers, 2009, p. 29). As a result, one of the key responsibilities of teachers is to plant the creativity seed in students minds. Above all, as Sternberg (2003) noted, "creativity is not just a matter of thinking in a certain way, but rather it is an attitude toward life" (p. 333). The ultimate goal of education is to help students develop their capabilities and in turn maximize their potential into practical use in everyday life.

According to Westby and Dawson's (1995) research, ideal students in teachers' minds are opposite to the behavior pattern of the creative prototype. It suggested that teachers might build a filtering system to welcome only some types of students instead of students with creative potential. Most importantly, the teachers perception of creativity is different from their action in a real classroom. In reality, teachers devalue creative development in students, albeit their self-reports support creativity. Thus, teachers should resist the temptation to dwell on authority and top-down management in the classroom at the expense of creative development. As this theoretical model suggested, appropriate and adequate teacher leadership behaviors could in fact facilitate students creative performance. The strategies capture five potential components that could enhance creativity, including knowledge construction and creative thinking, motivation and self-efficacy, goal setting and work group, transformational leadership style, and supportive leadership.

It is recommended that teachers could consider these strategies to cultivate a creativity-oriented environment for students" creative growth. More importantly, teachers have distinctive opportunities and abilities to introduce techniques that nurture creativity. Thus, these recommendations and practices are appropriately applied, when employed in a school context where creativity is the ultimate goal. First, some traditional teaching approaches should be adjusted or fundamentally changed. For example, is an analytical skill suitable for every class scenario? Second, the education system should provide the kind of training that promotes creativity development for both teachers and students. Finally, teachers should encourage diversity in the classroom allowing creative children to express their potential.

Conclusion

Given the evidence available at this juncture, one clear implication stemming from this review is that teachers do have a substantial impact on students creative process. Teachers, in fact, stand in a unique position to boost students creative actions by reason of a tendency to recognize what a student needs to be more creative. However, it should be noted that no model can capture all the facets that kindle the complex process of creativity. For example, teacher behavior is still embedded in a school context, which has a potential impact on the enhancement of creativity. Therefore, teachers efforts should be nurtured by all stakeholders who fully support initiatives to increase creativity. Policy makers, principals, administrations, and parents are all sharing responsibility for portraying the landscape of a creativity paradise. In conclusion, creative capital serves as an engine of students" growth and school dynamism (McWilliam & Dawson, 2008). In fact, creativity is found in many college and university mission statements as an important institutional commitment .This article has contributed the preliminary framework for investigations that diffuse students" creative sparkles through leadership interventions.

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