Developing student creativity in a learning environment of wonderment and active engagement

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Creativity is as important in our classrooms as numeracy, literacy, science or technology. The 21st century has been described as the creative age (Florida, 2006). There are teachers who are excellent at encouraging wonderment and establishing environments that enhance creativity in their students. The purpose of this research was to investigate these teachers who were able to develop such classrooms and identify if common pedagogical and environmental attributes existed. This research was conducted in an educational climate driven by National Assessment Standards for Numeracy and Literacy. Many of the teachers involved describe a tension between the New Zealand Curriculum that encouraged innovation, creativity, curiosity and inquiry with an increased emphasis and time requirement to meet the new numeracy and literacy standards.

The research participants were 124 teachers in nine primary schools in the upper North Island of New Zealand. The schools ranged from two teacher rural schools, to 25 teacher urban schools. The use of a variety of school types and geographic locations gave the study a random representative sample of New Zealand primary school teachers and diverse student populations. A social constructive framework underpinned the research. Three phases were involved in data collection, the first phase surveyed teachers' perceptions and understanding of creativity in the classroom. The second phase interviewed teachers on their classrooms art programmes and development of student creativity. The final phase involved observing teachers' pedagogy that developed creativity.

The findings indicated that the majority of teachers had confusing and/or conflicting perceptions regarding creativity and the skills necessary to develop student creativity. Creativity was strongly linked to visual arts, dance, drama, music and literacy. There were classrooms where arts and creativity across the curriculum were evident. The teachers in these classrooms most often had a tertiary qualification in or a strong involvement in one or more of the art disciplines. Their classroom environments were places of student engagement and vibrant student works on display and under construction. Witches, zombies, dinosaurs and monster machines were accepted and given life through crayon, keyboard, wire and pliers. These teachers used innovative approaches involving student choice, inquiry and multiple solutions, collaborative talk and making and doing. The teachers were seekers of knowledge; searching for new ways to stimulate and engage students in learning. A wonderment classroom was found to meet the diverse multi-cultural, multi-ability mix found in New Zealand schools.