

Teaching Creatively or Teaching for Creativity

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One of our graduate programs focuses on Creativity and Cognition. Many teachers from across the United States are students in these Masters-level classes on creativity and learning. Throughout the semester we learn about developing creativity in both their personal lives and in their classrooms. As I read the thoughts and reflections of these teachers/students, my thoughts go back to my first encounter with what it means to be a creative teacher

It was the fall of the year. Our school was buzzing with excitement. This was the year we were going to focus on creative thinking in our classrooms. Every time the word *creativity* was mentioned, we all thought of Betty. “Just think,” we would whisper, “we are all going to be Betty’s by the end of the year!!”

Betty was one of those naturally creative people. Her classroom was always full of some new adventure. One week there were streamers with books the students had read blowing in the breeze. Another week it was a painted bathtub over in the corner for students to plop into while listening to music or reading a book. Then, there was the week Betty moved a keyboard into the room and set every lesson to music. Betty would compose a song or a poem for every birthday or special occasion. We admired the way Betty could turn a rock or an old can into an attractive lesson prompt. Every time we passed Betty’s room her students had a different seating configuration and something new had been added to the walls or ceiling.

Across the courtyard was Linda. Linda had a traditional looking classroom. There was never anything hanging from the ceiling, the students had the same seating arrangement all year – rows, and her bulletin boards were covered with plain paper. We were all anxious to see how a program on creative thinking was going to force Linda to change!!

As the year progressed, Betty continued to share the new project ideas she was designing for her students while Linda kept bubbling about the exciting ideas the students were sharing during class discussions. By the middle of the year, it became obvious—Betty was a creative teacher—*the imaginative use of materials by a teacher*, and Linda was teaching for creativity—*placing emphasis on the development of creative behaviors in students*. In Betty’s room, she was the creative star. She was doing 90% of the creative thinking. The students were the observers—waiting each day to see what their teacher would dream up next. In Linda’s room, the students were the creative stars. She quietly facilitated and encouraged their creative thoughts and ideas.

By the end of the year—Betty’s creative teaching resulted in students who were *dependent creatives* (they needed Betty to be creative), while Linda’s students became *independent creatives* (they knew how to use their minds even without her presence).

Over the years I have seen this scene replayed many times. We conclude that the teacher who is creative with materials and environment is also developing the same ability in his or her students. Quite often the teacher’s creativity is overpowering the student’s creativity with the result being students as observers to creativity rather than producers of ideas. Teachers who are bursting with creative energy need to find an outlet for their creative energy other than the classroom—join the community theater group, write a book, or take up a creative hobby. Make the classroom a place for developing the creative thinking of the students.

It is not what we see when we walk past a classroom that is important, but what we hear when we listen to the students discussing their lessons. The creative teacher will have an exciting looking room. The teacher who is teaching for creativity will have an exciting sounding room.