



Teaching Applied Creative Thinking: A New Pedagogy for the 21st Century (ACT Creativity Series) (Volume 2)

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Book Review

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The “new pedagogy” offered here is an integration of educational theory, common-sense pedagogy, and the authors’ own experiences in applying a different way of teaching and learning. The particular focus of the book is on teaching “applied creative thinking” to the teaching and learning process.

The 168-page book -- in workbook format -- has twenty-five short chapters, so readers should not expect deep coverage of the varied topics reviewed. Chapters I through XI (some as short as three pages) present core ideas of the pedagogical model. Chapters XII through XX present sketches of nine specific teaching strategies.

The authors offer a creative thinking pedagogy applicable across subject matters. They borrow from Holbert and Taylor’s definition of pedagogy as “intentional teaching, that is, the embodiment of principles in practice” which entails a combination of theory and praxis (4). The new pedagogy the authors propose is essentially a reframing of the teacher’s role as “Mentor-from-the-Middle” (borrowed from the work of Erica McWilliam) in a learning context (physical and attitudinal) that will help make the shift from a teacher-centered to a learner-focused pedagogy in order to foster creative thinking as both process and outcome. Of necessity, agency for learning requires a shift in the center of authority from teacher to student in order to facilitate self-directed learning. A “Key Concept” of Chapter VIII, “The Meddler-in-the-Middle is a theory that is difficult to translate into practice” is not encouraging (48). Their response to this challenge is to reframe the Meddler-in-the-Middle approach using the metaphor “Mentoring-from-the-Middle” as a “new paradigm.”

The new paradigm replicates established educator roles and reframes the function of the teacher under the metaphor of Mentor-from-the-Middle. In this model the teacher assumes the roles of scholar, mentor, facilitator, coach, model, and critical reflector. These roles in turn, purportedly, combine to help transform the learner into an active creative thinker. Aside from helping to facilitate the shift away from a teacher-centered pedagogy, how this reframing of the teacher's role translates into students becoming "active creative thinkers" is not explicated satisfactorily.

Following the shift in the teaching role, the authors present a structure for the learning experience. They organize the learning experience into six phases: information gathering, crystallizing, creating the project, completing the project, skill-making, and evaluating the learning unit. This scaffolded constructivist approach to structuring the learning experience, coupled with a shift in the teacher's place in the classroom environment (moving from the front of the classroom to the middle of the classroom, among the learners) represents the book's new pedagogy.

The parts of the book that specifically address the ways creativity is fostered speak to the importance of the setting (environment) for learning (Chapter V), some portions of Chapter VII summarizing insights from neuropsychology, and Chapters XII through XXI which present sketches of nine specific creative teaching strategies (including mainstays such as brainstorming, collaboration, pattern recognition, metaphors, crossword puzzles, and video games).

The chapter on instructional technology (Chapter VI) could have been left out as it added little substance to the matter of creative thinking, nor did it advance new ideas about the use or impact of instructional technology on teaching and learning, or particularly, on creativity.

This is not a poor book, but it is also not a great one. The authors overpromise on a "new" pedagogy for the twenty-first century, but do offer a sound model that reflects a helpful shift in the role of the teacher, a particular model for organizing the learning experience, and responsible attention to studies in relevant fields that can inform effective educational practice.

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