

## CREATIVITY AND EDUCATION

Author: Dr. Ghenim Neema : Mohamed Ben Ahmed

University, Oran 2, Algeria

Reçu le:18/03/2016

Accepté le:15/06/2016

### Abstract

*This article is about creativity in education. It includes a dichotomy between authoritarian and authoritative teaching and the relevance of creativity within these two perspectives of teaching, not to say two philosophies in education. There are two distinguished examples in literature that epitomises these two types of teaching. Mr Gradgrind, a famous example in British literature is taken as a model of authoritarian teaching. And Mr Kitting, a professor of literature in the American movie "Dead Poets Society" is taken as an example of authoritative teaching. Who is more positive to creativity in education: an authoritarian or an authoritative teacher? Is it beneficial for a language learner to be creative? The article proves that authoritative teaching is open to creativity in comparison to authoritarian teaching that inhibits creativity in general.*

### Key Words:

Creativity, Authoritarian Teaching, Authoritative Teaching, literature, imagination

The classroom is a small space; it is a miniature representation of life. It is a place where creativity is expected to happen since the teachers as well as the learners are likely to deal with unfamiliar ways use of language. My concern in this paper is to draw a

dichotomy between authoritarian and authoritative teaching and creativity such as the use of metaphor within these two perspectives of teaching.

### Creativity and Authoritarian Teaching:

*"Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them."* (Dickens 1995: 9)

At the present time, people tend to question authority in education. People are more inclined to grant autonomy to learners. We have to take into account that the more autonomy is granted to learner, the less authority is left for teacher, and the more authority is awarded to teacher, the less autonomy is left for learner. A famous example in literature *Hard Times* epitomises schooling pupils into obedient submission. The fictional teacher called Thomas Gradgrind is described by Dickens as a man of evidence, a man with *"a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket...ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature"* (10) Gradgrind embodies what educational psychologists call now "an authoritarian teacher" in chapter two from *Hard Times*, Gradgrind asked a girl called Sissy Jupe to give the definition of a horse. The girl fell in absolute anxiety by this question and the teacher ridiculed her for not being able to define a horse. He blamed her of ignoring the smallest facts of a very

commonest animal that is a horse. He asked then one of the boys to give the definition of a horse and it is hard to believe how the boy Bitzer described it, it is almost a dictionary that speaks: *"Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth."* "Now girl number twenty" said Mr Gradgrind "you know what a horse is" (2) The authority of the teacher as "professeur" is unquestionable in this case.

Widdowson draws two portraits of a teacher. The former is a teacher as "professeur", the later is a teacher as "enseignant". The exercise of authority differs deeply in the sense that the later, that is teacher as "enseignant" is granted an authority which is based fundamentally on his professional qualifications, his dominance is derived from his ability to teach. Knowledge is the meeting point between learners and teacher and empathy is no more than a result of a transaction. "In this case there is no claim of right but a claim to knowledge: not 'Do this because I tell you and I am the teacher' but 'Do this because I am the teacher and I know what's best for you.' Transactional exercise of authority, therefore, is more or less authoritative." (88)

To provide a non-authoritarian presence is a matter of teacher's endowment, his personal talent to make his students feel at ease as if they are in safe hands. Learning is stimulated by the student's need to attain knowledge, to accomplish his own goals,

without the feeling of being commanded and ordered to do things. Can we say that the learner in this case is completely independent? The ideological tendency in western civilisation in comparison to eastern civilisation is in the direction of a less authoritarian teaching, it is more or less assumed that this is indispensable, or the crucial key to an open society, therefore the learner-centred activities become more fashionable since they create a sort of collaboration in the classroom, the learner feels more liberated, he sets his thoughts free but always within the frame of controlled conditions of learning.

The difference between authoritarian and authoritative teaching is significant, especially when we analyse the process of creativity within these two perspectives of teaching. Creativity incorporates all the linguistic tools that could be used in education; it serves to expand and extend our capacities: cognition, reflection and memorisation. Creativity extends the senses by granting further knowledge. It provides new meanings and new understandings. It helps the learner to discover things for himself.

In *Hard Times*, we have seen Bitzer's answer about the signification of a horse; he gave a scientific description, a technical definition. An authoritarian teacher compels his students to learn by heart, while reducing unintentionally the size of creativity. The dictionary in this case is materialized as something we handle forcefully, further as put in Leech's words "*the dictionary comes to be looked on as legislative organ, to which one turns for a standard of 'good' as opposed to 'bad' usage. This attitude is indeed encouraged*

by the phrase 'the dictionary', with its misleading similarity to 'the bible'." (Leech 1990: 205)

Let's just imagine that Sissy Jupe in Dickens's *Hard Times* has answered Mr Gradgrind in this way:

"The horse is a very elegant animal, while he is well dressed, and marches with regular steps of equal length as in a ceremonially march, a tuned demonstration he is simply pleasing to the eye. When he is gnashing his teeth, he is simply angry, so he has a steady march, as if he faces the enemy, even so he is also graceful. When he is frightened he rides as a full gallop with all four feet of the ground at each stride over the fields, he is more than smart. His hair as well as his tale is now and again in plaits and at times it is liberated, flying from side to side like a skirt of a fresh lady in the winds. He is simply my tower, at what time I mount it up; I feel my head and my shoulders above the earth"

Is it possible for Sissy Jupe to use creativity with an authoritarian teacher like Mr Gradgrind? The answer is almost obvious, Mr Gradgrind could have been puzzled, confused to be confronted to pupils of this kind, who are somehow indecipherable, unable to read. It is especially hard for an authoritarian teacher who have a precisely standardize set of perceptual tools with which to value his fellow humans to deal with pupils of this type. One can imagine the most unpleasant probability whereby Mr Gradgrind would have perhaps sent this girl to the House of Correction as an outrage, indignation to his rational thinking.

Sissy Jupe's imagined answer is in a poetic way differs absolutely that of Bitzer's, there is a simile between the hair of the horse and the skirt of a fresh lady. There is also a metaphor between the horse and a tower that stretches her definition further than its elastic limit, besides the mood of the horse when he is frightened, or angry that adds more liveliness, to become a moving picture in the imagination. Bitzer's definition of a horse is inanimate, whereas the imagined definition of Sissy is animate. We can only notice that there is an aspiration for the prose ideal. It is a kind of extension to the communicative resources, as well as the accompanying of feeling. It is a sort of break with the conceptual bonds with which language imprisons its users. It is undisruptive for an authoritarian teacher to keep the minds under lock and key. Two alternatives remain then for creative pupils: either to find the key and unlock the door, or keep with thoughts buried in the mind; that is to survive or to die.

In chapter fourteen from *Hard Times*, we feel that Mr Gradgrind is disappointed with Sissy Jupe, he said to her: *"The course you pursued...according to the system- the system- and there is no more to be said about it. I can only suppose that the circumstances of your early life were too unfavourable to the development of your reasoning powers, and that we began too late."* (Dickens 1995: 95)

In this novel Dickens attacks those who see the world through statistics. It is observable from the opening words in his book *"Facts alone are wanted in life."* (9) and through his metaphor *"Plant nothing else, and root out everything else."* (9) The mind is

assimilated to a container of facts that discards any kind of imaginative manifestation, uproot facts, inhale facts, to blow out facts. Imagination is kept under control. Dickens draws our attention to “a range of imagination in most of us, which no amount of steam-engine will satisfy.” (Dickens: 2013: 175) *Hard Times* grows as a picture for the hard times of flexible thoughts. Dickens shows in this novel the danger of authoritarian teaching, the risk of conformity and the nearly impractical creativity within this type of teaching.

#### Creativity and Authoritative Teaching:

An authoritarian teacher can consider creativity, in education as pathology, because an enormous amount of energy is poured to results into artefact. Creativity is the trophy of a lively imagination fulfilled in a linguistic way. It comes like a dream, it is order out of disorder. It helps to renew our view of life, to renovate nature in a perplexed and bewildered style. Creativity is sometimes an intentional distortion, or a means of disguise, however it requires active involvement from both teacher and learner. Mr Keating is probably the best example of authoritative teaching. He is a teacher in the movie “Dead Poets Society” which is a commemoration of the victory of free will, independent thinking and the growth of personality. Robin Williams is the English teacher (John Keating) who brought enthusiasm to the class of young scholars. Keating’s way of teaching contrasts deeply Gradgrind’s. Keating is what educational psychologists call now an

authoritative teacher. Here is one of the opening moving reflections of the movie:

*(Keating is standing on his desk)*

John Keating: Why do I stand up here?

Dalton: To feel taller!

John Keating: No!

(Dings a bell with his foot)

John Keating: Thank you for playing Mr. Dalton. I stand upon my desk to remind myself that we must constantly look at things in a different way.<sup>1</sup>

It is not easy for educators to see and bring the best in every child. It is even more difficult to recognise the potential embedded in each and every one of them. Keating in this movie encourages his students to believe in themselves, in their dreams. He respects them as individuals who are to find their own unique voices in society one day. He is that exceptional teacher, a visionary who sees beyond the students for who they are now. He introduces them to such great writers and philosophers as Thoreau, Frost, Emerson, and John Keats. Keating quotes Henry David Thoreau to stimulate his students to venerate life, to suck the essence of life. *"I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common*

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.scifiscripts.com/msol/dead\\_poets\\_final.txt](http://www.scifiscripts.com/msol/dead_poets_final.txt)

*hours.”(Thoreau 201) Once more, Keating quotes Thoreau who said in “Walden” “If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; That is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.” (201) Keating is so much concerned with his learners. He invites his students to write a poem; accordingly they get ready to let it known, except Todd, the most inhibited of all his students; however the surprise with him was the greatest and the whole class keeps speechless.*

*TODD*

*M-Mumbling, "Truth. Truth is like, like  
a blanket that always leaves your feet  
cold."*

*KEATING*

*Forget them, forget them. Stay with the  
blanket. Tell me about that blanket.*

*TODD*

*Y-Y-Y-You push it, stretch it, it'll  
never be enough. You kick at it, beat  
it, it'll never cover any of us. From  
the moment we enter crying to the moment we leave dying, it  
will just cover your face as you wail and cry and scream.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.scifiscripts.com/msol/dead\\_poets\\_final.txt](http://www.scifiscripts.com/msol/dead_poets_final.txt)

This is a strong creative moment in the movie. Todd is making an analogy between truth and a blanket. He is trying to put in plain words the shortage or the deficiency of the word TRUTH in metaphoric thoughts. He portrays truth as a blanket that one forces down to cover the whole body, however it covers only the face. The thirst for truth marks a great frustration, from the moment one enters crying that is birth, to the moment one leaves dying that is death. Todd portrays frustrations by the three words one more significant than the other “wail”, “cry”, “scream”, to finally assume that truth is something inaccessible and difficult to get wholly.

Widdowson invites every teacher of literature to reconsider the function of creative writing in the teaching of language. He recommended stylistics as a bridge that could help making a connection between language and literature. He says:

*“It seems to me that we urgently need an attitude to literature, and a teaching approach based upon it, which, while acknowledging that literature is strange and mysterious and an object of reverence, also recognises that it is a use of language; and so comparable with other uses of language; and that it is only one of the strange and mysterious ways in which human beings manage to communicate with each other.” (1988: 124)*

Authoritarian education is strongly related to the development of social economy. In this case education becomes more concerned with production. It is concerned to make students more suitable to the societal necessity whereas authoritative teaching is strongly related to the individual. It is a kind of cure and

the teacher in this case is the creator of a context in which he facilitates the progress of knowledge. Encouraging creativity helps in the acquaintance of a foreign language. It offers patterns in linguistic data, which may help, build solid semantic mappings of lexis in the learner's brain as opposed to rote learning (that is learning by heart) and learning from lists. Creativity helps the student to reinforce the input, to overcome the insufficient time of exposure to the foreign language.

A society creates itself through education, as soon as it enhances a pedagogy that encourages creativity. It is contributing to a democratic society. The teacher in this case is contributing deliberately to the improvement of democracy in his country. Aesthetics helps students to develop capacities and capabilities to imagine a better society, because if creativity does not help in the betterment of a society what does it help for?

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