

The Teacher and Creative Impact

“Creativity is the power to connect the seemingly unconnected” (William Plomer).

Objectives

At the conclusion of this course the learner will be able to:

1. List several barriers to creative thinking.
2. Analyze chief culprits to creative thinking.
3. Assess their attitude towards creativity.
4. Explain how they know they have creative potential.
5. Recall four ways in which they can develop their creativity.
6. Summarize the need for creativity in their teaching.

Introduction

Bill McNabb and Steven Mabry tell the following story in their article “Awaken Your Students to Scripture: “A woman read somewhere that dogs were healthier if fed a tablespoon of cod liver oil each day. So each day she followed the same routine – she chased her dog until she caught it, wrestled it down, and managed to force the fishy remedy down the dog’s throat.

Until one day when, in the middle of this grueling medical effort, the bottle was kicked over. With a sigh, she loosed her grip on the dog so she could wipe up the mess – only to watch the dog trot to the puddle and begin lapping it up. The dog loved cod liver oil. It was just the owner’s method of application the dog objected to.” (www.youthspecialties.com)

How are we teaching the Word of God? Feel like you are in a wrestling match for the learner’s attention? If so, this lesson is for you. God’s Word is inspired, thus life-changing. It’s exciting and relevant, ready to meet the needs of the learner. Howard Hendricks cautions us in *The 7 Laws of the Teacher*, “Whatever you do, don’t bore people with the Word of God.”

Keep in mind, just because you value the Word of God does not mean the learner does – although most people do want to know more about the Bible. We, as Christian educators, do ourselves an injustice not to take advantage of all the research that has gone into how

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and what motivates people to learn. So, glad you're here! Let's discover how creativity can impact your teaching.

Barriers to Creative Thinking

In his book *A Whack on the Side of the Head*, Roger von Oech identifies several barriers to creative thinking. Read the following list on the left and place a check beside any that reflects your attitude. I know it makes you nervous but go ahead and read the counteracting statements by John C. Maxwell.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. <input type="checkbox"/> That's not logical. | 1. Listen to your intuition. |
| 2. <input type="checkbox"/> Follow the rules. | 2. Think results. |
| 3. <input type="checkbox"/> Be practical. | 3. Be outrageous. |
| 4. <input type="checkbox"/> To err is wrong. | 4. To err and learn from the mistake is to be one step closer. |
| 5. <input type="checkbox"/> There's one right answer. | 5. The possibilities are endless. |
| 6. <input type="checkbox"/> Play is frivolous. | 6. Play is refreshing. |
| 7. <input type="checkbox"/> Avoid ambiguity. | 7. Explore ambiguity. |
| 8. <input type="checkbox"/> That's not my area. | 8. Be a no-limit thinker. |
| 9. <input type="checkbox"/> Don't be foolish. | 9. Take a leap of faith. |
| 10. <input type="checkbox"/> I'm not creative. | 10. I am creative – I was formed in God's image! |

"But that's just not my personality," you say. Hmm...take fear out of the picture and then what would you do?

Howard Hendricks in *Color Outside the Lines* suggests five chief culprits who discourage creative thinkers.

- Parents
- Culture
- Teachers
- Television
- The Aging Process

Do you agree? Why or why not? Take a few moments to brainstorm.

The Call to Creativity

It all began with God. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). With His words, the world came into existence. Light penetrated darkness giving us day and night. Waters were divided and gathered together to form oceans, seas, rivers, and streams. Dry land appeared at His bidding and upon it He placed a carpet of grass, herbs and fruit trees. God saw that it was good. He continued by hanging the sun, moon and stars. Birds of the air and creatures of the sea took their place. All colors, shapes and sizes were

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represented in a grand and glorious display. Our God is a God of impact! So much so, that thousands of years later men and woman are still devoting their life to studying one small aspect of God's inexhaustible creation.

"And God said; Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Genesis 1:26-27). "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7).

Man...God's great finale. Of all the creatures God created, this one stood alone in the image of the Maker. One plus one equals two – a fact easily understood. If we are created in His image...there is no denying His creative powers.

"Now wait a minute," you say, "Are you implying that we have the ability to create?" No. The ability to create lies only with an omnipotent God. However, Spirit-filled believers do have a responsibility to exercise that creative Spirit that lies within. Anyone who relies totally on his own abilities will not produce impacting results in the Kingdom (John 15:5).

Paul said it this way, "So everywhere we go we talk about Christ to all who will listen, warning them and teaching them as well as we know how. We want to be able to present each one to God, perfect because of what Christ has done for each of them. This is my work, and I can do it only because Christ's mighty energy is at work within me" (Colossians 1:28-29, TLB).

Let me illustrate...you are in a large room. A friend is leaning on the opposite wall. He blows with all his might. Will you feel it? Not likely. You both move a little closer and he blows again, letting a big gust of air billow forth. Yuck, you think. Feeling it yet? Probably not. Now you are standing very close. He once again blows – this time right in your face. You most definitely feel it! This would be a very gross illustration if not for the spiritual application. That "friend" is none other than the one who sticks closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24).

Do you realize that breath, spirit and wind all come from the same root word as creativity? "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you" (James 4:8). It is only when we draw close to God that we are able to feel that creative breath. It is only then that He is able to speak to our spirit and give us that creative idea that will solve our situation. He crowns our human effort with His supernatural impact.

We all want to teach with impact. "God-breathed" creativity is the key.

As Christians, we are called to creativity. Marlene D. Lefever in *Creative Teaching Methods* said, "It's a gift that we have from God, and it's a gift that we can give back to Him." Without it we will be an incompetent servant, at worst, or handicapped, at best (Read Matthew 25:14-30).

Developing Your Creative Potential

“They’re just not getting it,” you silently groan, “Why does it have to always be this hard?” Imagine the Sermon on the Mount in this light...

Then Jesus took his disciples up onto the mountain and, gathering them around him, he taught them saying,

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are the meek;
Blessed are they that mourn;
Blessed are the merciful;
Blessed are they that thirst for justice;
Blessed are you when persecuted;
Blessed are you when you suffer;
Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is great in heaven.”
Then Simon Peter said, “Are we supposed to know this?”
And Andrew said, “Do we have to write this down?”
And James said, “Will we have a test on this?”
And Philip said, “I don’t have any paper.”
And Bartholomew said, “Do we have to turn this in?”
And John said, “The other disciples didn’t have to learn this.”
And Matthew said, “Can I go to the bathroom?”
And Judas said, “What does this have to do with real life?”
And Jesus wept.
(Bill McNabb and Stephen Mabry, “Awaken Your Students to Scripture”)

Obviously this is not the biblical account, but it sure does remind us of some situations we have found ourselves in. Jesus was the Master Teacher. Let’s learn from Him. Dorothy Sayers once said, “The people who hanged Christ never...accused Him of being a bore – on the contrary; they thought Him too dynamic to be safe” (Hendricks, p.14).

The age old question arises, “Can creativity be taught or are we born with that special gifting?” True, there are those born with an added measure of creative genius, talents, and motivational drive. However, it is just as true that one can develop their personal, God-given, creativity beyond its present level.

Want to develop your creativity? Ready or not...here we go!

- *Break Away!*

I admit - I’m a creature of habit. It’s something I have to battle against. I even like assembly line work! It doesn’t matter which restaurant we go to, I already know what I’m going to order. I figure if I like it, why try something new? Talk about a creativity squelcher!

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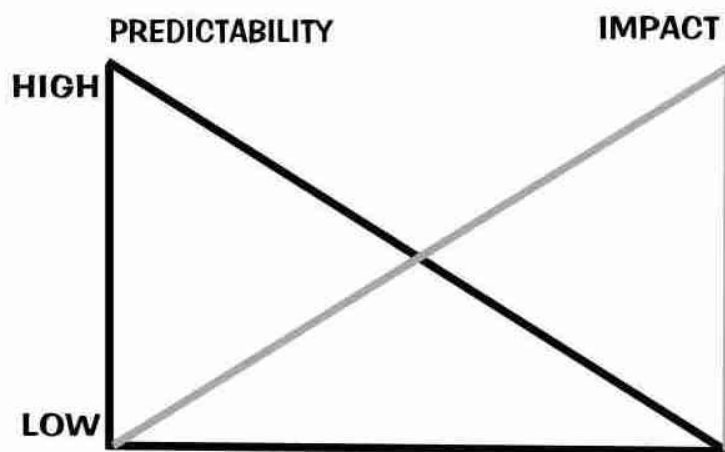
I'm convinced this fear of breaking patterns has more to do with laziness than the reassurance of the familiar. How many times have we heard it said, "But we've always done it this way." Uh huh...and we'll always get the same results too!

"The old patterns seem so much more right. Yet, they might not be; they might be just more familiar" (Lefever, p.16). In order to stir up your creative powers you must be willing to look beyond the "always done" and see new possibilities. Join me in stepping out of your comfort zone. Try a new method of teaching. Add the element of surprise. Adopt the idea of "failing forward."

He failed in business in '31. He was defeated for state legislator in '32. He tried another business in '33. It failed. His fiancée died in '35. He had a nervous breakdown in '36. In '43 he ran for congress and was defeated. He tried again in '48 and was defeated again. He tried running for the senate in '55. He lost. The next year he ran for vice president and lost. In '58 he ran for the senate again and was defeated again. Finally, in 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected the 16th president of the United States. (*Dare to Soar*, Byrd Baggett)

Having said all that, remember in our efforts to be more creative, we sometimes accept an idea too soon. Ask yourself, is this idea helping fulfill my lesson aim? If not, keep thinking! Don't give up – Break Away!

Study the following chart adapted from *Color Outside the Lines* by Howard Hendricks. What exactly is being inferred?



- *Start Now!*

We've all heard it said, "There's no time like the present." This is an attitude that must be adopted if one is ever going to begin the creative journey. Unlike what some people suppose, creativity just doesn't happen. It's plain old hard work! There is a saying, "Perspiration oils inspiration." Pray, pick an idea and go – start now! Sure you might fail but keep trying.

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A student once lamented, "I've tried to do everything that you have taught me but it just didn't work." Creativity is something that is developed. Boom! It just doesn't hit you and all of a sudden you are a creative person. Starting is the hardest part but from there you must continue with spiritual discipline. It's not an, "if I get around to it" kind of thing. It's a conscience effort of continually growing.

There was a very cautious man
Who never laughed or played.
He never risked, he never tried,
He never sang or prayed.
And when the day he passed away
His insurance was denied,
For since he never really lived,
They claimed he never died.
(Color Outside the Lines, Howard G. Hendricks)

A study was done where 1,000 creative achievements were examined. The average age of the creator when creativity occurred was seventy-four years. The more we use our creative abilities, the better they become. So...start now!

- *Challenge the Familiar!*

Still with me? Assuming your answer is "yes", you probably do want to become more creative. The desire is most likely there. You are on your way. That aspiration can free you to step out of your pattern and challenge the familiar.

Masaru Ibuka once said, "Creativity comes from looking for the unexpected and stepping outside your own experience."

By "challenging the familiar," I do not mean challenging the Word of God that hopefully has become a part of who we are. The Word of God is forever settled in heaven (Psalm 119:89; Isaiah 40:8). It will never change. However, how we communicate that Word in our generation changes.

In my culture growing up, door to door evangelism used to be very effective. Today, I would not open the door to a stranger due to the rise in crime. There was also a day when a twelve week Bible Study was the way to train new converts. In today's busy world you would be hard pressed to find someone who would commit to twelve weeks. I'm not saying there is anything wrong with either method, but I am suggesting that there may be a better one.

The World Future Society estimated that human knowledge would double every seventy-three days by the year 2020. Living in our generation is a challenge. The words of the Lord to Jeremiah, "If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan?" (Jeremiah 12:5, NIV). "Trust me, the days to come will find us in a footrace with

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more than just horses, and in thickets more treacherous than the Jordan's. What we face will test more than our courage; it will test our creativity" (Hendricks, p.10).

Go to God in prayer. He alone has the answer that will meet the needs of your students. I believe that answer will be different for each location, people group and student body that you are working with.

Go ahead...challenge the familiar!

- *Let Loose in God!*

Some teachers have the idea that they should simply trust God to lead them and the class concerning what should be dealt with in that particular period. True, He may change your direction but spontaneity is not God's way of working in the vast majority of situations. Paul cautioned the Corinthian church whose approach to worship had gotten out of hand, "For God is not a God of disorder but of peace...everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40, NIV).

"It's God's nature to plan. In fact, we take personal encouragement in the midst of our life struggles from this truth. We rest in the fact that God is not haphazard. He has a sovereign plan for our lives." (*Creative Bible Teaching*, Richards/Bredfeldt, p.152) Being created in His likeness, we have the tendency to plan. Don't you find yourself planning your day, planning your weekend, planning your life? Why do any less in the classroom?

"Creativity is not a synonym for unlimited freedom" (Lefever, p.20). In today's world of weird and wacky, the word "creativity" has been severely abused. We recognize as Christians that there are limits to what we do. But have we really explored excellence within those limits? Let loose those self-imposed limits. Pull yourself out of that "it's always been" mentality. S-T-R-E-T-C-H!

There is no one on the planet quite like you and there never will be. You are uniquely designed. Let loose in God and see what He does through you!

Conclusion

God-breathed creativity is the ingredient that adds "impact" to teaching. You are a potentially creative individual. Notice the word "potentially." It's really up to you. **Break away** from predictability. **Start now!** Really look at your students and see their needs. This may mean **challenging the familiar** approach. Focus on the student, not the lesson. How will they learn best? **Let loose in God...**He alone will take you places you've never been.

I close with this challenge, "Live creatively, friends...Make a careful exploration of who you are and the work you have been given, and then sink yourselves into that. Don't live vicariously. Each of us must take responsibility for doing the creative best we can with our own lives" (Hendricks, p.38).

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In Review

1. List several barriers to creative thinking. What do you think is your biggest obstacle?

2. Do you have the potential to be creative? How do you know? _____

3. What is the key to teaching with impact? _____

4. List four ways to develop your creative potential. _____

5. Can creativity be taught or are we born with that special gifting? _____

6. What is the biggest hindrance to breaking patterns? _____

7. What does Marlene Lefever have to say about old patterns? _____

8. What do you think the idea of “failing forward” means? _____

9. Predictability yields what? _____

10. What is the hardest part of creativity? _____

11. In your own words, what is meant by “challenging the familiar?” _____

12. “Creativity is not a synonym for _____.”

13. Summarize the need for creativity in your teaching. _____
