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| Title        | Teacher roles in promoting creativity       |
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| Source       | <i>Teaching and Learning</i> , 19(2), 42-51 |
| Published by | Institute of Education (Singapore)          |

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# **T**eacher Roles in Promoting Creativity

Tan Ai Girl

*The essence of human knowledge and understanding is that it \*is shared. Every generation in every society builds upon the cultural foundations of previous ones, and every new discovery only really comes into existence when it is communicated."*

*Mercer 1995: 66-67; \*italic in the original text*

*What a teacher thinks teaching is ... determines the direction, tone, and styles of the teacher ... has a great influence on how teachers teach: their conceptions of what they would like students eventually to become.*

*Fernstermacher & Soltis 1986: 5-6*

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## INTRODUCTION

Teachers' beliefs and educational philosophy influence their instructional approach and hence, the pupils' learning. A teacher defines his/her role, and accordingly selects suitable pedagogical approaches, materials, and activities.

A role is a person's function, the part taken by someone in life or in any activity. If a person decides to adopt a role, and develops an identity related to it, he/she is likely to be motivated to perform well according to the role-identity that he/she defines. According to the role-identity theory (McCall & Simmons 1978), a person acts as occupants of particular social positions or roles based on how he/she likes to see himself/herself and how he/she likes to be seen by others. Role identities determine a person's interpretations of the people, situations, and event that he/she encounters in various social situations. If a person selects the role as a teacher and associates the role with the identity creative, he/she will possess the role-identity as a creative teacher. The individual whose role-identity is a creative teacher would like to be seen

as someone who is creative. The positive affect associated with a role-identity constitutes the motivational power or strength to perform. A person with a 'creative teacher' role-identity would like to engage in performances that are unconventional such as employing non-traditional texts and conducting innovative projects (Petkus 1996). Role-identities of a person may change according to social situations. In order to maintain the consistency of a role-identity, a person needs role-support. Role-support manifests in words and/or behaviours, intentionally or unintentionally, confirms the contents of a role-identity.

A person can have more than one identity associated with a given role, and can have more than one role associated with a given identity (Petkus 1996). A teacher, for instance, can possess multiple identities such as creative, friendly, caring, flexible, strict, and serious. He/She can also have multiple roles attached to the creative identity. A teacher can be a creative classroom manager, a creative mentor, a creative administrator, and a creative disciplinary master. Multiple role-identities are structured according to the relative importance of various role-identities over the long-run or short-term situational contexts. Factors that influence the creative behaviours related to the role-identities in the classroom context are discussed in this article.

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## THE SYSTEMS VIEW OF CREATIVITY

A lesson is conducted in a classroom that consists of a teacher and 25 to 40 students. Students' contact persons in a classroom setting are teachers and their classmates. The immediate social institution is the school, whereas examples of distant social institutions are tuition centres, community centres, self-interest clubs, and ministries. A pupil interacts with other pupils and subject-related teachers. Outside the classroom and in the school, pupils also interact with other teachers, fellow senior and junior pupils, as well as the administrative staff. Pupils' social contacts may extend to other social institutions such as tuition centres, clubs, and language centres. Social institutions that do not have direct contact with them, but exert influence on their learning environments are those such as the Ministry of Education and the Civil Service Department. Pupils' behavioural and thinking styles are also influenced by their culture.

In the classroom context, teachers and pupils are two interdependent systems that interact with each other, and with other systems such as social institutions and culture. The systems view

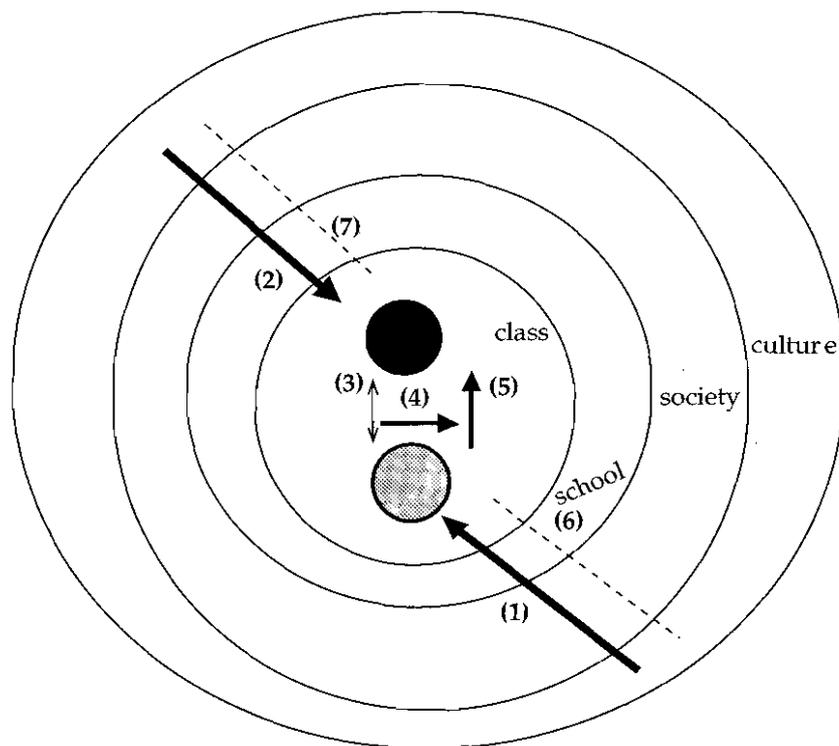
suggests that “no act or product with claims to creativity can exist without an input from each of the subsystems” (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 200). Each system performs a specific function. The individual, the society, and the culture are three systems that interact, and bring about creative objects or behaviours (Csikszentmihalyi 1988).

Teachers in many situations are predecessors who are experienced and who possess domain specific expertise. In the classroom, the teacher identifies appropriate resources that match the pupils’ cognitive, affective, behavioural, and linguistic competence. He/She employs various strategies to unfold complex information, and present it to the pupils in a systematic way. When information is presented, the teacher will attempt to consider pupils’ learning styles, thinking styles, behavioural styles, and linguistic competence. He/She will try to translate abstract concepts to action or verbal expressions.

Interaction among students is essential because classmates could serve as contemporaries, partners or rivals who usually possess a similar repertoire of mental elements (e.g. methods, questions, etc.). Ideally, among students, there should be a consensus on linguistic, logical, and mathematical codes. To ensure a smooth transfer of information, it is important that students acquire communicative skills for the purpose of disseminating new ideas to their contemporaries. The contemporaries who support the new ideas will further disseminate them to other people. In a multicultural context, it is important to consider students’ and teachers’ variations in terms of racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds, language use at home, and gender differences. Individual variations in relation to personalities, thinking styles, learning styles, behavioural styles, physical appearance, and language competence should also be taken into account. Teachers help students discover implicit messages of verbal and non-verbal communication in various social and cultural frameworks. Students gain their awareness of and competence in formulating and expressing ideas that are suitable for local and international audience. Through active interactions with members of various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, students are able to assess the validity of their ideas.

We attempt to understand the relation between two systems in the classroom, the teacher and the students, from the perspective of information flow between them. If the teacher and the students adopt the creative identity, we may assume that the direction of information flow between the teacher and the students as well as among the students is multilateral and non-hierarchical. Information is transmitted through verbal and non-verbal communication. The teacher and the

students acquire knowledge and receive information, independently, from various existing systems such as school, society, and culture (Figure 1, paths 1 and 2). Information exchange takes place in the classroom. The teacher attempts to find out the level of understanding and the needs of the students. The students try to discover expectations of the teacher (path 3). The teacher disseminates the information that is suitable for a group of pupils at a particular time frame, and for a specific content (paths 4 and 5). To facilitate an efficient information flow, students and teachers are likely to take initiatives to interact during instructional activities. The teacher and the students will select information that they need from various existing systems (paths 6 and 7).



Note:

● Teachers; ● Students

- (1) Information flows to teachers (before meeting students)
- (2) Information flows to students (before meeting teachers)
- (3) Interaction (exchange of information)
- (4) Information flows to students selectively, after interaction
- (5) Teachers share information with students (instructional activities)
- (6) Teachers select information needed from the systems (after meeting students)
- (7) Students select information needed from the system (after meeting teachers)

**Figure 1:** Teacher-Student Interaction and Information Flow

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## TEACHER ROLES

There are numerous aspects to consider for creativity education. In discussing the role of task motivation, researchers acknowledge other significant components such as domain relevant skills and creativity-relevant skills (Amabile 1983a, 1983b; Hill & Amabile 1993). Whilst highlighting the teaching of creative skills, ways to integrate the skills into the subject learning are emphasized (Montgomery 1997). Feldhusen (1995) examines creative thinking and production from three aspects — metacognitive processing, the knowledge base, and personality variables. Clark (1997) and Slabbert (1994) investigate creativity education from the perspectives of creative products, creative processes, creative personality, and the role of a facilitative environment. The author discusses the importance of multiple teacher roles as one of the alternative arguments, highlighting teacher roles in motivating creative thinking. Teaching is regarded as a process of sharing, processing, and applying information. The teacher role can decide how a piece of information is shared, processed, and applied. Though the author focuses the discussion on teacher roles, she does not deny the existence of other ways that can foster creative thinking in the classroom. The author will elaborate on four teacher roles — creator-innovator, leader-manager, cultivator-mentor, and facilitator-counsellor and acknowledges the importance of other teacher roles.

If a teacher adopts the role of a creator-innovator, he/she will view himself/herself as a practical thinker. He/She is likely to design, modify, and refine materials that will interest and challenge the learners cognitively. The innovator will create a learning environment that promotes a sense of excitement and feeling of adventure to learn and express new ideas. He/She is likely to assign activities and strategies that match various abilities of the students. Task differentiation is an important element in motivating students of various levels of competence, presented in the same physical learning environment. When a student gains joy and satisfaction from a task, he/she is likely to be committed in learning and thinking. The innovator will encourage the teacher to be receptive to various dispositions such as risk-taking, being different, being creative, and being ready to take up new and challenging tasks. In a creative environment, there is intensive information flow between the teacher and the learners, and among the learners. The direction of the information is likely to be multilateral and non-hierarchical. The innovator teacher is likely to appreciate and

challenge students' opinions. Students are likely to be exposed to resources beyond the curriculum or textbooks.

If a teacher accepts the role of a leader-manager, he/she embodies the qualities of leadership. The teacher is likely to view himself/herself or be viewed as a good manager in establishing clear expectations and realistic rules, appropriate guidelines, and manageable suitable tasks and activities. The dominant mode of information flow between the teacher and the students, and among pupils is interpersonal. Take, for example, an experience of a student-teacher teaching literature to average secondary one and two students. Adopting the role of a leader, the student-teacher spent time with the students, eliciting opinions from them on how much more can be learnt and what can be done to make the class more enjoyable. The 14-year-old students appreciated the opportunity to voice their views, and contributed ideas actively. They became dynamic participants in an interactive sharing and learning environment that afforded them the freedom to define some of the pedagogical boundaries. On many occasions, they managed to overcome linguistic difficulty in the text, and demonstrated their understanding through drawings, diagrams, and drama plays.

The role of a cultivator-mentor is associated with the perception of a teacher as a senior who possesses rich experience in his/her areas of expertise and in life, and who believes in nurturing and cultivating lifelong creative thinkers. Often, the mentor delivers instructions about the content of the study and how things should be carried out. The students regard themselves as juniors in experience and/or age. The mentor is perceived as the role model. Information flows from the mentor to the students, from senior students to junior students, and among students of the same age. There are intensive and frequent interactions between the mentor and the students, and among students under the same mentor. The student is likely to have a strong, long-term, affective relation with the mentor, and with the colleagues under the same mentor. Teachers who teach young children and primary school pupils are likely to take up the role of a mentor.

The teacher's role as a facilitator-counsellor is associated with the characteristics of a good communicator, listener, and adviser. Recognizing the fact that students today are prone to stress, the role of a counsellor is presented. The counsellor is perceived as a professional who possesses skills and strategies with regards to interpersonal and intrapersonal domains. Taking the role as a counsellor, the teacher can be viewed as a confidant, an acquaintance, and a friend. The

relationship between the counsellor and the students can be personal, but there is no expectation for a long-term interpersonal commitment. The teacher poses questions, and encourages students to discover possible causes of a problem. The students are encouraged to generate solutions independently or in a group. Discussion and sharing are frequent activities between the counsellor and the students. There is no fix schedule as to when a student must consult a counsellor. If students possess the ability to solve a problem, they are encouraged to find the solution independently. Students are encouraged to use various problem-solving strategies, and evaluate their findings critically. Information flows, laterally, from the teacher to the students and vice versa, and among students.

During instruction, teachers change and adopt various roles according to the needs and reactions of pupils. The selection of a role is bound to the influence of the type of content, instructional activities, assessment, resources, and current educational policies (Figure 2). During a lesson, a teacher can adopt one role or more than one role. When delivering a new concept, for instance, he/she is likely to be a mentor. During a group discussion, he/she is likely to be a leader who empowers the responsibility. In a multiple-roles setting, when creative drawing is introduced, he/she is likely to be an innovator who introduces creative techniques and skills, a leader who organises exhibitions and competitions, and a mentor who demonstrates the use of various instruments. It is important that a teacher recognizes flexibility in adopting various roles to cater to a broader range of students' needs, and consequently he/she can design a variety of instructional activities.

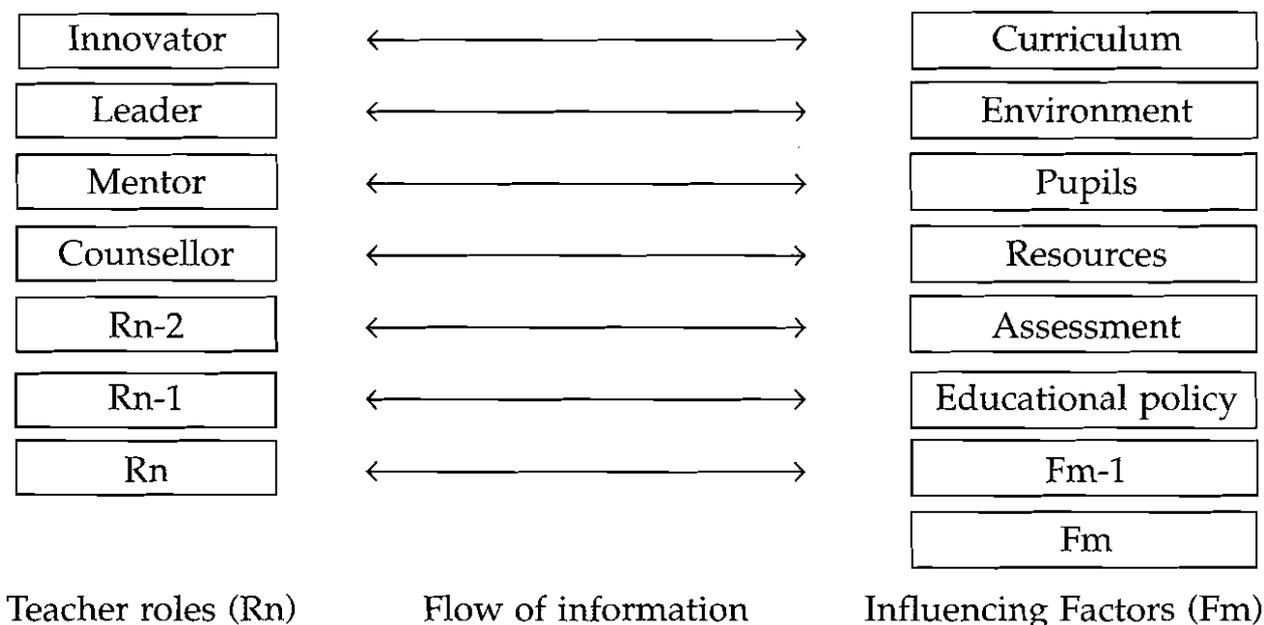


Figure 2: Factors Influencing Teacher Roles

## CONCLUSION

Creativity in the information age urges a significant change in teacher roles. First, teachers have to abandon the uni-directional (hierarchical) role, as a transmitter of knowledge. They have to adopt a multifaceted framework that allows them to adopt more than one role. Flexibility in adopting various roles and in designing various pedagogical strategies and activities may generate an interesting classroom learning environment. Second, the rapid and complex development of information technology provides accessibility to unlimited knowledge and expertise. Teachers should shift their mindset, from teaching limited content knowledge to leading pupils to explore new knowledge and construct innovative ideas. The systems view of creativity favours an intensive interaction between students and teachers, and among students.

Third, creative education considers the strengths, commonalities, and specific features of every individual, each group, and the existing systems. Considering these features, teachers should create favourable environments, select suitable strategies, and propose appropriate content and assessment. Fourth, teachers and pupils are two interdependent systems that receive information from social and cultural systems. Classroom interactions allow teachers to find out pupils' needs, and to organise appropriate instructional activities accordingly. Teachers relate classroom learning to real life, and propose challenging tasks that match pupils' competence. If teachers and pupils are active information seekers and developers, a positive climate for creative thinking is likely to be fostered in the classroom.

Fifth, accordingly to the role-identity theory (McCall & Simmon 1978; Petkus 1996), the role-identity, role-performance, and role-support function in a cyclical relationship. A person with a given role (e.g. a creative teacher) undertakes role-performances (e.g. encourages pupils to voice their viewpoints and share unconventional ideas) that are designed to elicit role-support (e.g. verbal recognition from pupils and colleagues) which reinforces the role-identity. A teacher needs support from colleagues, principals, and parents, as well as co-operation from pupils in order to sustain his/her motivation in taking a role. Sixth, creativity education is an endeavour that demands interactive conditions (Woodman & Schoenfeldt 1990; Mellou 1995). Cultivating creativity challenges the researchers and educators' efforts in looking at the effects of role modelling, genetics, and socio-cultural setting (Simonton 1983), interpersonal relationship (Simonton 1984),

opportunity and leadership (Simonton 1988a, 1988b), as well as local and foreign cultural influences (Simonton 1994, 1996, 1997).

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