

Preface

To be playful and serious at the same time is possible, and it defines the ideal mental condition

—John Dewey

This book is written primarily for professional educators who want to teach more creatively. However, it will have value and interest for parents and other readers wanting to know more about how humans learn, the key factors affecting this process and how the practices of good teaching actually work, and why some practices do not work so well. The approach taken is evidence-based as this is the most valid and useful way for improving teaching quality that results in maximizing learning opportunities and attainment levels for learners. A fundamental assumption is that as we better understand how different aspects of human psychological functioning impact the learning process, including how creativity works, we can design learning experiences that result in better attainment opportunities for learners.

In writing this book, which inevitably requires the inclusion of an extensive review of the vast research literature on human learning and behaviour, I have also woven into the narrative a more informal style than is typical of work in this genre. This partly reflects my Cockney descent from growing up in London's East End, but it is also a deliberate evidence-based ploy, as humour and storytelling help to make life, including reading scientific texts, more interesting. In writing, as in teaching, if you do not get attention and generate interest, there is little of value in doing the activity in the first place.

Creative teachers, by definition, must be expert teachers in that they are able to create learning experiences that are the most effective and efficient for enhancing attainment opportunities. This is a given as all good teaching must seek to maximize attainment levels for the students involved. However, creative teachers have the added capability of what I refer to as *Creative Teaching Competence*. This enables them to create instructional strategies in novel and useful ways (creativity must involve these components) that further enhance attention and engagement,

therefore making the learning experience more interesting and meaningful to the particular learner groups. This is not always easy to do and even the most creative of teachers cannot guarantee to do this expertly on every occasion they teach. However, and remember, even the very best soccer players (and many earn more money in a year than some teachers earn in a lifetime) do not excel in every match they play, so be realistic in what you seek to achieve. What I can assure you of, though, is that this is what makes teaching such a challenging and worthwhile profession. You will rarely be bored, continually involved in meaningful learning, and in helping people (your students) to make better choices to attain important learning goals. And guess what?—It can also be good fun.

Creative teaching competence, as will be explained, illustrated and developed in this book, is not significantly different from becoming competent in any area of human capability. The reason is quite simple as all expertise is the product of the same *Core Principles of Learning*. These core principles of learning are derived from our best current understanding of how humans learn and are related to specific, though interrelated, aspects of the overall learning process. While humans may differ in many ways, such as physiology, personality configurations and cultural variations, we all learn in essentially the same way. There is no such thing as learning styles. People have preferences in terms of the context of their learning, which may include aspects of the physical environment, time of day or even having some music playing. However, these are personal preferences, not systemic neurological structures determining our learning configurations. Without acquiring relevant content knowledge, making the right connections and building understanding through good thinking and, where necessary, developing expertise through appropriate practice, we are unlikely to do particularly well in the learning stakes. There is, of course, much more to learning than this quick summary, otherwise the preface would be the book—if only! To explore the human learning process fully, as it pertains to effective learning and the practices of teaching, you will need a careful perusal of the various chapters in this book.

To be a creative teacher and achieve expertise at the highest level takes time, and there is much to learn, but that is true in every professional field. However, it is much easier to achieve a particular goal (e.g. creative teaching) when you have a clear sense of what it looks like, sounds like and feels like. It further helps if you know where to look for it. This is what I have attempted to do through a synthesis of what constitutes the best evidence relating to human learning and the practices of teaching, and most importantly, how to use this to be the best teaching practitioner one can be—a Creative Teacher.

Therefore, I hope you find the book an interesting read, apart from being a practical and useful resource for your professional development. I have tried to incorporate the essence of another quote I like in this context, one by Charles Mingus:

Making the simple complicated is commonplace; making the complicated simple, awesomely simple, that's creativity.

Creative Teaching

An Evidence-Based Approach

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