



Preschool teachers' perceptions of creative personality important for fostering creativity: Hong Kong perspective



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ABSTRACT

Given the growing awareness of the importance of cultural-specific studies in creativity, the purpose of this study was to develop a rating scale (Creative personality Questionnaire, CPQ) to elicit Hong Kong Chinese preschool teachers' perceptions of creative personality and to determine the factor structure of the CPQ. Items for the CPQ were generated using literature search and interviews. Participants comprised of 564 Chinese preschool teachers. A series of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis revealed a 20 items, five-factor model (cognitive abilities, discipline, motivation, inventiveness, personal properties) for the CPQ. While most of the personality characteristics in the CPQ were congruent with those suggested in the literature, characteristics relating to well mannered, honest, cautious, and need for recognition in the discipline domain reflects the influence of Chinese culture. The core creative personalities perceived by the Hong Kong Chinese preschool teachers were found to be similar and these characteristics generally aligned with the western views. This study expands the availability of reliable tools for assessing preschool teachers' perception of creative personality and leads to further studies on examining how the teachers' personality affects classroom practices and children's creative learning.

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1. Introduction

In today's knowledge-based economy, fostering creativity has gained prominence in education (Craft, 2007). The study of creativity has drawn the attention of professionals and researchers in both western countries and eastern countries, e.g., the United States (Fiske, 2002), the United Kingdom (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2004), Singapore (Ministry of Education, 1997), and Hong Kong (Curriculum Development Council, 2001). There is now considerable evidence that a teacher's personality influences students' creativity in the classroom. Teachers are creative role models in the classroom and students learn from a teacher's creative personality and behaviour (Cropley, 1994), and creative teachers are effective in fostering students' creativity development (Fryer & Collings, 1991).

In an earlier study, Barron and Harrington (1981) proposed a list of attributes common to creative people. These attributes include high valuation of aesthetic qualities in experience, broad interests, attraction to complexity, high energy, independence of judgement, autonomy, intuition, self-confidence, ability to resolve antinomies or to accommodate apparently opposite or conflicting traits in one's self-concept, and a firm sense of self as 'creative'. In another study, Feist (1998) concluded that, in general, creative people are more open to new experiences, less conventional, more self-confident, self-accepting, driven, dominant, hostile, and impulsive. In relation to personality characteristics of creative teacher, Simplicio (2000) found

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creative teachers are willing to change and welcome new experiences; they are not afraid to go off the main track or step into the unknown. [Craft \(2000\)](#) described the most common characteristics correlated with teachers' creativity as high curiosity, questioning, a broad range of interests, preference for complexity, high valuation of aesthetic qualities in experience, independence of judgement, high energy, autonomy and intuition. Extant literature of creative personality suggests that the core characteristics of creative teacher are similar to the core characteristics of creative people.

While most of the early studies on creative personality were conducted in Western societies, recent emphasis on the development of creativity in many Asian countries has also drawn researchers' attention to study creative personality in Eastern sample. [Rudowicz and Yue \(2001\)](#) found that Hong Kong teachers view being innovative, observant, imaginative, changeable, curious and flexible as important creative personality characteristics. [Qian and Plucker \(2010\)](#) extended earlier creative personality research, which listed characteristics of creative teachers, to establish the construct validity of creative personality. The results produced a 9-item, three-dimension scale reflecting an internal factor (self-confidence, norm-doubt, internal motivation, and persistence), external factor (curiosity, risk-taking, openness and independence) and self-factor (self-acceptance).

Although previous findings suggests that a set of core and general creative personality characteristics were shared among the Western and Eastern sample, culture differences were extensively discussed in the field of creativity. [Niu and Sternberg \(2002\)](#) concluded that, in Western cultures, creative personalities were more intrapersonal, and Eastern cultures emphasize more on social and moral aspects. [Rudowicz and Hui \(1997\)](#) pointed out that perceptions regarding creativity could be culturally different and stressed the important of cross-cultural studies. Such studies can promote an understanding of universal trends (etic) and culture-specific variations (emic) in creativity. This type of research would allow a synthesis of conceptions across cultures, thus leading towards a deeper understanding.

1.1. Educational context of creativity in Hong Kong

Hong Kong provides an interesting context to study creativity. Being a former British colony with English and Chinese as its principal languages, Hong Kong has gained the reputation as a "East–West meeting point" ([Mok & Cheung, 2011](#)). However, whereas it is claimed as an international city and its education structure and policy are in line with global trends, Hong Kong also has been shaped by Chinese influences from the earliest times. It has a strong Chinese culture that stresses collectivism. The society treasures conformity, discipline and obedience to authority ([Lau, Hui, & Ng, 2004](#)). As in China, the education system in Hong Kong puts an emphasis on examination results and ranking beginning at an early age ([Hong Kong Design Centre and the Asia Case Research Centre, 2007](#)). Because of the highly competitive educational environment, schools favour academically-oriented and difficult curricula.

Even in early childhood education, Hong Kong teachers put a strong emphasis on academic success, rote-learning of factual knowledge, drilling of isolated skills and memorization ([Chan & Chan, 2003](#); [Li & Wong, 2008](#)). [Chan \(2007\)](#) indicated that teachers in Hong Kong endorse the view that teaching involves the transmission of knowledge and they retain an approach that centres on teacher-directed and expository teaching. These features seem to run counter to the methods for fostering creativity that are recommended in Western education, which emphasizes the child's expression of opinions, freedom of thinking, independence and human rights. Indeed, Hong Kong teachers appear to view creativity development in terms of intellectual training, rather than as something to be pursued in its own right. [Chan and Chan's \(1999\)](#) study of 204 primary and secondary school teachers found that teachers viewed creativity as highly associated with intellectual functioning such as being quick in response, liking to think, and having high intellectual and verbal ability. Their work also revealed that teachers in Hong Kong were overly concerned with students' academic performance, and so they focused more on students' intellectual functioning than on creative development.

Because recent trends in education have focused on meeting the challenges of globalization and highlighted the important of developing creativity, the Hong Kong Government announced its commitment to developing Hong Kong as a city of creativity in the region ([Tsang, 2007](#)). The inclusion of creativity development in the curriculum has been acknowledged and embarked on education reforms ([Curriculum Development Council, 2001](#)). A 2001 curriculum document entitled "Learning to Learn: The Way Forward" identified creativity as one of the three most significant generic skills across all subject curricula, spanning from pre-primary to lifelong learning. Because early childhood education is the foundation for formal education and the early childhood years are also critical years in the development of creativity ([Gardner, 1993](#)), the [Curriculum Development Committee \(2006\)](#) has made creativity an important aims in the pre-primary curriculum framework and set out important curricular elements related to creativity. For example, the framework recommends that teachers stimulate children's creative and imaginative powers and encourage children to enjoy participating in creative work; plan various activities to suit children's abilities and interests; motivate children to learn; and provide children with opportunities to explore independently and develop social relationships.

Despite a growing awareness of the importance of creativity in early childhood education, the issue of developing creativity in school is challenging for preschool teachers. Recent studies have found that preschool teachers in Hong Kong still reflect the influences of the social and cultural context that endorsed the transmission of knowledge and a teacher-centred teaching approach. [Cheung \(2012\)](#) revealed that the teaching approach used by preschool teachers was mainly teacher centred, with most teachers providing explanations and instructions. The teachers tended to be more concerned with factual knowledge and teaching students to be well-mannered. Control seemed more important than creativity. [Chien and](#)

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