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The Imperative for Integrating Creative Thinking into Higher Education: A Call for Transformation

Kirpal Singh, Distinguished Professor

Centre for Educational Leadership at Training Vision Institute, Singapore

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ABSTRACT

Introduction The rapidly evolving technological landscape, notably with the advent of Generative AI, necessitates a transformative shift in education and thinking. Traditional analytical approaches have often stifled in-depth comprehension of complex issues, leading to adverse consequences such as increased depression and distress among younger and older generations. **Methods** A comprehensive review of current educational paradigms and their impact on students' mental well-being was conducted. Surveys were analyzed to understand the relationship between traditional analytical pedagogy and creative problem-solving in tertiary institutions. Additionally, the need for a shift towards creative thinking was explored through a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. **Results** The analysis revealed that traditional educational models prioritize conformity over creative thinking, which has led to significant mental health issues. Surveys consistently showed that students thrive in environments that encourage creativity. The demand for creative thinkers has increased with the new millennium, prompting the emergence of innovative pedagogical approaches and technologies. **Discussion** The findings underscore the necessity of a new way of thinking to address the challenges of survival and progress effectively. There is a growing emphasis on creative problem-solving in tertiary education, highlighting the limitations of conventional analytical methods. Concerns about unrestrained creativity were acknowledged, yet the importance of fostering creativity to overcome societal challenges was emphasized. **Conclusion** The article advocates for the introduction of Creative Thinking as a subject in universities and the establishment of a dedicated School of Creative Thinking. This shift will foster genuine innovation, ensuring academic institutions produce forward-thinking individuals capable of addressing the complexities of the modern world.

Keywords: Creative Thinking; Higher Education; Pedagogy; Innovation; Generative AI; Educational Reform; Traditional education; new creations.

1. INTRODUCTION

As humanity stands on the brink of unprecedented change, driven by the rapid advancements in technologies such as Generative AI, there is a growing recognition of the need for a fundamental shift in how we think and operate. This paper argues for the urgent necessity of incorporating Creative Thinking into educational curricula, particularly in higher education, to address the challenges of our rapidly evolving world (Mohan, 2023a; Zakaria, 2024).

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The current educational model, deeply rooted in analytical and logical methodologies, has become increasingly inadequate in fostering the innovative and adaptive skills required in today's dynamic environment. The resistance to change within educational institutions stifles both imagination and reason, creating a breeding ground for anxiety and distress, particularly among younger and older generations (Mohan, 2023b; Robinson, 2006; Watson, 2019).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative insights from educators and students with quantitative data from surveys assessing the impact of creative thinking curricula on student performance and well-being. Random and targeted surveys were conducted across various educational levels to compare the effectiveness of traditional analytical approaches versus creative thinking methodologies.

4. FINDINGS

The data reveal a clear correlation between the encouragement of creative thinking and improved student outcomes (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Zakaria, 2024). Environments that foster creativity not only enhance academic performance but also contribute to better mental health and overall well-being. These findings challenge the traditional emphasis on analytical thinking and highlight the need for a more balanced approach that integrates creative problem-solving skills (Amabile, 1996; Mohan, 2023a).

5. DISCUSSION

The resistance to adopting new pedagogical approaches is a significant barrier to progress. However, as industries increasingly demand innovative and adaptable thinkers, the imperative for educational institutions to evolve becomes undeniable. The transition from a predominantly analytical focus to a more creative one is essential for preparing students to navigate and succeed in a complex, rapidly changing world (Sawyer, 2006; Watson, 2019).

6. CONCLUSION

The integration of creative thinking into educational curricula is not merely an option but a necessity for survival and progress in the 21st century. Establishing dedicated programs and schools for Creative Thinking within universities will provide the foundation for a more innovative and resilient society. By embracing this shift, educational institutions can better equip students to meet the challenges of the future, fostering a generation of thinkers capable of driving meaningful change (Mohan, 2023b; Robinson, 2006; Sternberg, 2003; Watson, 2019).

Recommendations

1) *Curriculum Development*: Universities should develop and implement courses focused on Creative Thinking, ensuring they are an integral part of the educational journey from early stages to advanced levels.
2) *Faculty Training*: Educators should be trained to foster creativity in their teaching methodologies, moving beyond traditional didactic approaches.
3) *Institutional Support*: Educational institutions must provide the necessary resources and support systems to encourage creative exploration and innovation.
4) *Research and Evaluation*: Ongoing research should be conducted to continuously assess the impact of creative thinking programs on student performance and well-being, allowing for iterative improvements.

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Biographical Statement of Author

Dr Kirpal Singh a Colombo Plan scholar, is an internationally respected poet, fictionist, and thinker. He taught English Language and Literature for over 20 years at the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University before joining Singapore Management University, where he currently teaches Creative Thinking.

Professor Kirpal Singh
Director, Centre for Educational
Leadership at TVI, S'pore

Prof. Singh has authored numerous books, including the notable Thinking Hats & Coloured Turbans: Creativity Across Cultures (2004), which offers original insights into the nature of creativity, particularly through language. He has published three collections of poetry, edited over 15 literary journals and books, and was a founding member of the Centre for Research in New Literatures at Flinders University, Australia, in 1977. He also served as the first Asian director for the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1993 and 1994 and chaired the Singapore Writers' Festival in the 1990s.

An internationally recognized scholar, Singh's research spans post-colonial literature, Singapore and Southeast Asian literature, literature and technology, and creative thinking. His critical writings have appeared in esteemed journals such as Ariel, Diogene, Commonwealth Novel in English, Literary Criterion, Quadrant, Southern Review, and Westerly. He has participated in international writers' festivals in Adelaide, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Toronto, and Kent, where he has given readings of his works.

Prof. Singh holds the distinction of being the first Asian and non-American director on the board of the American Creativity Association (ACA), where he has also served as Vice-President and Chairman since 2006. With over 150 articles and essays to his name, he is an authority in various literary fields. Currently, he is actively involved in promoting creative thinking in Singapore's undergraduate education system at Singapore Management University and shares his futuristic visions with global audiences as an esteemed Futurist.

Professor Dr. Kirpal Singh
Director
Centre for Educational Leadership
Training Vision Institute (TVI)
Singapore
E-mail: koxsing@hotmail.com

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