



RESEARCH ARTICLE

DIVERGENT THINKING SKILLS AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN JAMMU:
PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL

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ABSTRACT

The present research was conducted to study the perception of primary school teachers regarding the importance of divergent thinking skills for children. The sample for the present study comprised 100 teachers (both male and female) of 200 children who were categorized as HP (High Performer) and LP (Low Performer) on the basis of their performance on Divergent Production Ability Test (DPAT). A Self devised Teacher Perception Questionnaire was used to assess the views of teachers regarding divergent thinking ability of children. The results of the study revealed that almost all the sample teachers were in favour of providing freedom of expression to children. It was observed that a large number of teachers showed acceptance towards multiple ideas of children and appreciated original ideas of their students. Opportunities in the form of material and activities were provided to children through brainstorming, word games, sharing activities with children. The teachers were of the view that these activities help in enhancing creative thinking of children. Most of the sample teachers appeared to be positive in their perception about divergent thinking. The positive perception of teachers for divergent thinking skill can be constructively used to harness this skill among children in the class room situations. The study has implications for children, parents, teachers and professionals in the field of child development and can be used to provide inputs for enhancement of divergent thinking skills among children.

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INTRODUCTION

School system has a great influence on a child's creative expression, as it may either stimulate or inhibit creativity, depending on the attitude and expectations that teachers place on the creative behavior of their pupils/students. Rogers (1993) found that the younger the pupils are, the more susceptible they are to the influence of a teacher's behavior towards them. The type of school climate available to the child affects the development of divergent thinking. Performance and behavior at home and school are often problems for divergent thinkers (Lovecky, 1991). Researchers who study creative expression in the classroom posit that many schools fail to operate as environments that encourage the development and expression of creativity in individuals (Treffinger *et al.*, 1968; Sternberg and Lubart, 1991; Collins and Amabile, 1999; Moneta and Siu, 2002; Cheung *et al.*, 2003). Creative spirit is suppressed through also competitiveness, strict structure, expository teaching, and emphasis on extrinsic factors that the traditional

educational environment promotes (Spinks, Yi-Ku, Shek, and Bacon-Shone, 1996). The classic school model encourages students to adopt fixed mental models of how things work, discouraging creative thinking and problem solving. Mastering other people's mental models seems to kill an individual's ability to think divergently and wonder creatively (<http://Divergent thinking.timesofmalta.com> retrieved on 15/09/12). Divergently thinking children find many organizational schema difficult to understand. The thoughts, impressions and feelings of divergent thinkers are interconnected. Some have trouble with organizing thoughts or starting a project just because they cannot set priorities since everything is interconnected. This makes step-by-step learning, the type of learning expected in most schools difficult for these young people. Since they cannot turn off their thinking to conform to the teacher's way of doing things, they are less apt to get good grades than other children even if they are extremely intelligent. In a regular school academic program, these children feel as if they are being fed one blade of grass at a time. In addition, the divergent thinker in school, particularly in the upper grades, has trouble with analysis of material. Often this skill is taught in junior high and high school by

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having the student read a work and find the parts the teacher thinks are important or that the curriculum guide has selected as valuable (<http://www.grcne.com/divergent-thinker.html> retrieved on 23/3/13). Cropley (2001) argued that schools cannot simply rely on the traditional teaching practices of relaying information to students because such content will become obsolete in the near future. Rather, Cropley (2001) suggested that teachers need to help students to be flexible, adaptable, and be open and courageous to the unknown. It is, therefore, necessary that teacher should design activities that will allow children to come up with new and original contributions and that will stimulate creative, divergent thinking since the essence of creative teaching resides in permitting each pupil to contribute something personal, valuable and innovative to the learning process.

The above review of literature reveals the crucial role of the teacher educator in development of divergent thinking skills. Although many studies have been conducted in the field of divergent thinking ability but, a study to assess the perception of teachers regarding the importance of divergent thinking ability among children has not been conducted in Jammu District (J&K). In this context, the present research was designed to provide data about teachers' perception related to development of divergent thinking skills among young school going children. The study is being conducted on aspect which has practical implications not only for policy makers, welfare workers but parents, teachers and school children themselves. The present study will help the school administrators in framing educational objectives, teaching strategies and administrative practices for promoting development of divergent thinking skills among children. The study will be helpful to know how much importance and emphasis is being given to develop favourable conditions by teachers for developing divergent thinking ability of students. This research will contribute to theoretical database and will also help in providing insights into the selected research aspect.

Objective of the study

To study the perception of teachers regarding the importance of divergent thinking skills for children.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The sample for the present study comprised 100 teachers of 200 Primary school children who were categorized as HP (High Performer) and LP (Low Performer) on the basis of their performance on Divergent Production Ability Test (DPAT). To collect the information from the teachers, the researcher first visited the schools and explained the purpose of the study to the school authorities. For the selection of teachers, a list of teachers was taken from Head of institution and then from that list 5 teachers from each school were picked up randomly. A Self devised teacher Perception Questionnaire was used to assess the views of teachers regarding divergent thinking ability of children. The categories covered in the Questionnaire are as follows: Background Information about teachers, views regarding Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Questioning and Experimentation, Acceptance of childrens' Ideas, Provision of materials/ opportunities to explore with material for children, teachers' involvement in activities with children, Evaluation of Childrens' Creative Expressions. The entire data collection was completed within a period of six months.

The data obtained were subjected to both qualitative and quantitative analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Background information of Teachers

A total of 100 teachers (both male and female teachers) in the age group of 21- 46 years were selected for the present study. They had qualification from higher Secondary to Post graduation. It was also seen that more than half of the teachers were having 1-5 years teaching experience.

Teachers perception regarding the importance of divergent thinking skills

The teachers were questioned about the following aspects of Divergent thinking

Freedom of Expression of ideas

Freedom of expression is central to all other freedoms. As change in our communities becomes more constant and as ideas, technologies and people are moving more rapidly within and among countries, our work promotes the right of all people to connect more deeply with others and find novel ways to participate. It was evident from the figure 1(a) that majority (79%) teachers stated that they always provided liberty to their student to express their ideas regarding anything. Most of the teachers said that young children have lot of ideas in their mind as their brain develops more during this period. They need freedom to share or express ideas which is very important now a days. So, the teachers always encouraged their children to express whatever was there in childrens' mind. Results also showed that half of the teachers mostly reported providing full freedom to their students in deciding games and recreational activities without any restriction. It was also seen that one fourth of the teachers were of different views as some of them said that after knowing about the type of games or activities of children, they decide accordingly. The ability to think differently develops in children when they are surrounded by adults who allow them to actively pursue their interests. When teachers were asked whether they allowed their children to follow their interest or not, most of the teachers (48%) said that they always allowed their children to follow whatever they wished to do. 28% teachers were of the view that it was mostly dependent upon the type of students' interest and only the genuine type of interest of students (those activities which were considered right by the teachers themselves) were encouraged by the teachers (Fig 1c).

Acceptance of students Ideas

Teachers can alleviate many of the students' fears by creating an atmosphere of acceptance in their classes. Evidence has suggested that students who perceive their teachers as caring, accepting, interested in them, courteous, and professional are more likely to express their creativity (Tighe *et al.* 2003). Acceptance is reflected in teachers' openness in behavior, positive reinforcement and lack of critical appraisal. It was seen from the Figure 2 (a) that a large number (62%) of teachers told that they mostly accepted multiple ideas of their students as most of the teachers had the view that now a days life has become too complicated. There were lot of problems and in order to cope up with these problems, one has to deal with them through multiple perspectives.

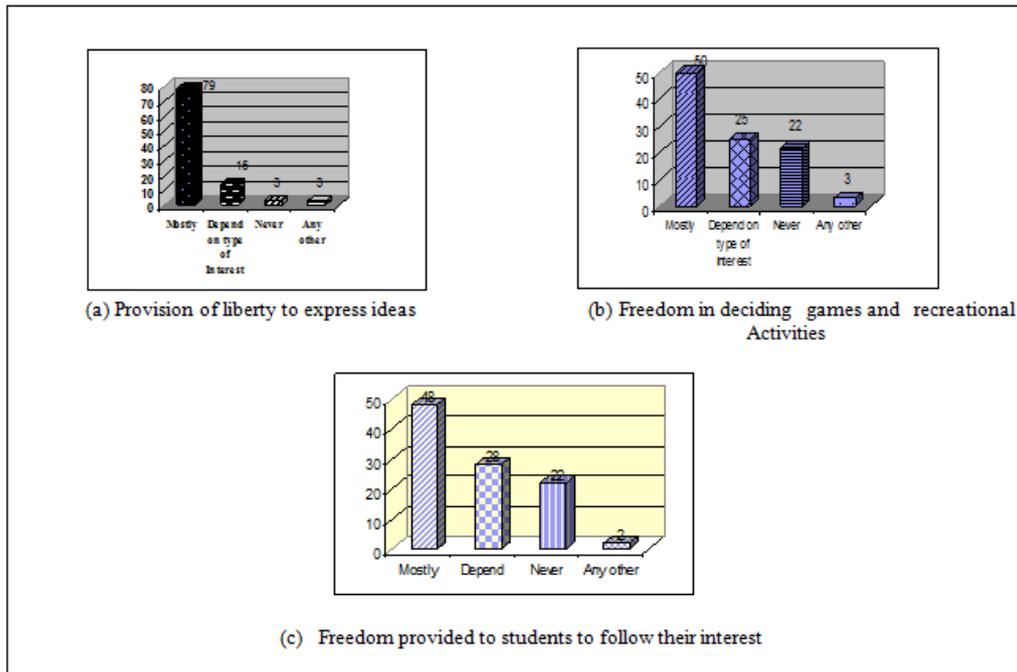


Figure 1. Teachers views regarding Freedom of Expression of ideas

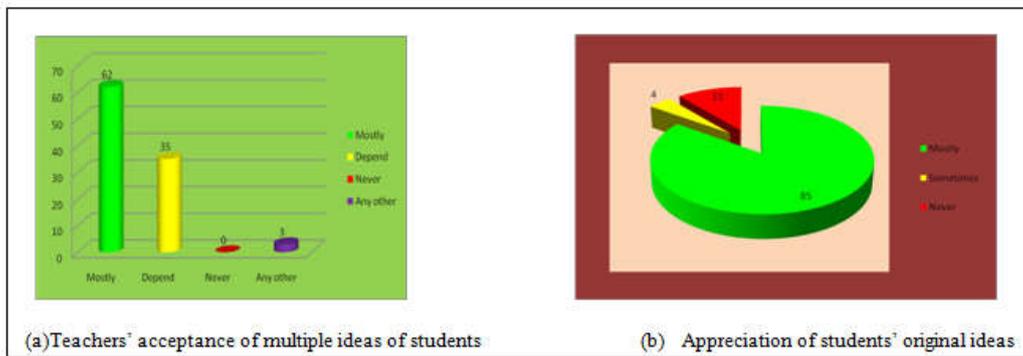


Figure 2. Teachers' acceptance of multiple ideas of students

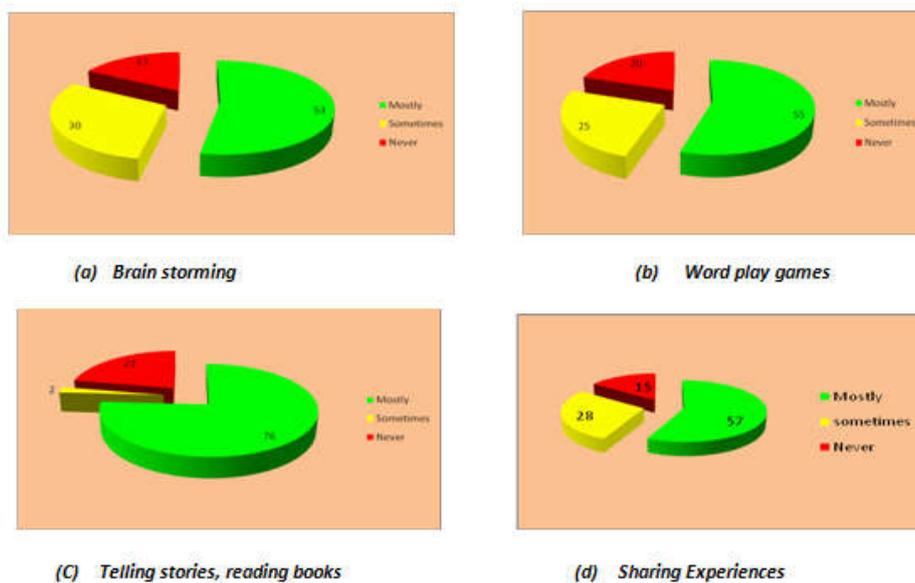


Figure 3. Teachers' participation in various activities

So, it is necessary to encourage multiple types of ideas of students. It was revealed that majority (85%) teachers stated that they always appreciated original ideas of their students. They responded that they felt proud if their students expressed unique /exceptional ideas while 11% teachers told that they did not appreciate their students original ideas Fig 2 (b). They were of the opinion that their students were too young to express unique ideas. Similar findings were found in the study conducted by Torrance (1983) who pointed out that a misconception about young children's inability to think productively has led to an overemphasis upon the recall and reproduction to the neglect of problem solving, creative thinking and decision making in the early years.

Teachers' involvement in activities with children

Brainstorming activities, word games, storytelling are some of the useful tools for many creative endeavors and can assist children as well as adults in using the idea-spurring questions that can help them generate diverse ideas, and on future problem solving. The teachers can employ these diverse ideas in molding the young buds into colorful blossoms who are solely responsible to create the society more modest where we can live pleasantly. Figure 3 depicts teachers participation in various activities. Regarding the brainstorming activities (fig 3a) more than half of teachers mostly involved themselves with their students in brainstorming activities as they were of the view that through these activities, the creative ideas of students will be enhanced. Some of the teachers mentioned that they were not able to participate in brainstorming activities with children due to certain limitations such as lack of time, pressure of completion of syllabus, lack of resources, lack of funds etc.

It was also seen from the figure (3 b) that more than half of the teachers said that they mostly played word games with their students as according to them these games enhance the vocabulary of the students through which students become able to express different ideas. It was evident from the data (fig 3 c) that majority of the teachers (76%) mostly engaged students in storytelling and reading book activities whereas 22% teachers did not engage students for storytelling and reading books as they felt these were time consuming activities. More than half of the teachers (fig 3d) also told that they shared experiences with their students and also encouraged students to share their experiences. They had the opinion that through sharing experiences, students got a medium for expression of their ideas and outlet for their emotions. It was also seen that some of the teachers did not participate with their students as they said it was difficult for them to conduct these activities with large number of students and to complete syllabus within a given time period.

Conclusion

Teachers play a significant role in shaping the ideas of their students. The perception of teachers of primary school children was assessed to understand their views about divergent thinking skills and its importance for development of children. Based on the discussion above, it was concluded that majority of teachers were in favour of providing freedom to children for expressing ideas and deciding games. It was observed that a large number of teachers showed acceptance towards multiple ideas of children and they appreciated original ideas of their students.

Opportunities in the form of material and activities were provided to children as results revealed that more than half of the teachers sometimes participated in brainstorming, word games, sharing activities with children. Majority of the teachers mostly involved children in story telling activities as they were of the view that these activities help in enhancing creative thinking of children. Teachers used reinforcement in the form of appreciation, motivation, feedback etc to motivate students but there were many factors such as lack of time, societal pressure, work load, pressure of completion of syllabus due to which teachers reported that they were not able to promote the divergent thinking among children. Similar results were found in the study conducted by Newton and Newton (2010) which shows that teachers do not have adequate time to engage in divergent lessons because of various reasons. Most of the sample teachers of the present study appeared to be positive in their perception about divergent thinking.

Based on the results of the study, it was found that two major factors related to teachers play a significant role in promotion of divergent thinking among children. These include the practical day to day constraints (large number of children in class, pressure of syllabus completion and lack of resources etc.) and the perception of teachers that young children are unable to think themselves for the latter, it is important that teachers be given sufficient knowledge of child development principles. The present research, thus, found that the sample teachers were positive about development of divergent thinking ideas among primary school children and if the above referred problems are redressed, children are likely to have more positive inputs for development of divergent thinking skills.

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