

The competition leading to more creativity education essay



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This chapter presents an objective analysis and discussion of the findings generated in the research. This Chapter reports on the findings that emerge from this research.

Perceptions of Teachers

The teachers I have interviewed conveyed their views regarding competition and there is a general consensus among them that schools and colleges are the places where competition is most prominent. 60% of teachers fervently feel that competition at school prepares students for the complexities of the modern world. Without competition students would get a misleading conception of what the world is really like. They would misunderstand that there is no need to be more assiduous than others since everybody would be receiving the same rewards anyway.

When an atmosphere of competition prevails in schools, students develop the attitude of “ well, I didn’t do so well on this test but next time I’ll make more efforts and do better”. Academia likes competition because there is the need for education to create an adaptive and flexible workforce in the ever-changing modern world.

When asked about the reasons why competition should not be eliminated, most of 60% of teachers came with the idea that eradicating competition from schools would imply not recognizing good or excellent performance, and that would be conveying a message to students not to bother trying because they will not win whether they win or lose. And the losers would be getting the message that they do not have to try because they are not going

to have their feelings hurt and they will not have to deal with any kind of losing feelings no matter what they do.

One teacher affirmed that “ Not grading students would be unfair to students who work really hard to become talented or to become knowledgeable and skillful. Their efforts would not be paid off”.

Hence, eliminating competition is viewed as an unwise attempt at ensuring that no one’s self-esteem gets crushed. Self-esteem is believed to be enhanced by achieving small ‘ victories’, and that is where competition serves a purpose. “ The right dose of competition can help to spur students to do more than they knew they were capable of”, a teacher stated.

Teachers agreed that the feelings experienced by students who meet constant discouragement could be overwhelming and stressful for them but, with every goal comes a struggle. Moreover, the teachers argue that the increasing competitiveness is believed to be the product of a meritocratic system and at the same time it actualizes the values of meritocracy. While the competitive education pushes the future ‘ elite’ to their limits, it also keeps most other students on their toes.

The remaining 40% of teachers did agree that competition has become part of everyday life yet they presented dissimilar views regarding the worth of competition. It was argued that competition is useless and damaging and it leads to ‘ acidic attitudes’ between competing students. This argument goes in line with Kohn’s (1987) statement that competition breeds an atmosphere of hostility. One teacher claimed that if we sit back and reflect, competition can be quite ‘ arbitrary’. She was insinuating that if we try to think a lot
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broader, we might reflect on the issue of what is a good life. It is affirmed by the teacher that the goodness of people's lives should not be measured by their ranks or titles. It was strongly argued that instead of encouraging competition, there is the need for teachers to train students to understand the blessings in their lives and understand how profound those blessings are so that they do not just tie themselves to winning or to more status and prestige. As rightly pointed out by a teacher, " There is more to life than just being the ' first' or the ' best' always and we should not let just a title drive the whole identity formation process". Here, Gandhi's rejection of competition and his emphasis on other aspects of life like cooperation, mutual love and service to others appear very relevant.

Perceptions of Students

COMPETITION AND MOTIVATION

As depicted in the pie chart, only 36% of the students in the sample population supported competition. According to them, competition plays a constructive role by encouraging them to learn how to be the best of the bests, thus enhancing learning process. It is claimed by the learners that since ' everyone cannot win a prize or a scholarship at the end of the academic year', competition acts as a powerful stimulating factor which promotes enormous efforts and maintains ' high standards'. In the focus group interview, it was said that the purpose of competition is to create winners and losers and this is how the education system aims to reward achievement, induce effort and evaluate students' progress. These findings comply with Lawrence's (2004) arguments that competition encourages active learning and boost students' motivation.

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Students argue that they do their homework, study hard for exams and tests, and work for weeks on projects not because they love to learn but because the competitive atmosphere motivates them to do so. When asked to indicate the precise factor that keeps them motivated to thrive, they mentioned about winning scholarships, being ranked at national level, gaining teacher's appreciation and prizes. It is noteworthy that what makes the reward desirable is the fact that many students are vying for the same rewards.

Here, it can be seen that learners are extrinsically motivated since they strive for the ranking and their focus shift from learning and mastery of subjects and skills to performance in relation to others, in order to win the scholarships.

Furthermore, it was pointed out that the competitive nature of education and exams motivate not only them but also family and teachers who provide them with academic, financial support, as well as create conducive environment for study. Another valuable thought that students have shared is that without competition, learning would be an emotionless process. From competition emanates excitement and enthusiasm to constantly improve. Students stated that the competition that prevails within the school prompts them to acknowledge their faults, weaknesses, their areas of improvements and also find creative ways to learn more about the various subjects.

COMPETITION LEADING TO GROWTH

Students put forward that with the competition and pressure, they give the best of themselves and achieve good grades, which eventually give them a <https://assignbuster.com/the-competition-leading-to-more-creativity-education-essay/>

sense of victory and accomplishment. If there was no competition, students would simply be content with their grades or their work instead of taking pride in it. These data again correspond to Lawrence's (2004) viewpoints and Fulu's (2007) claim that the outlying outcomes of competition are that students' gain appreciation for their learning; their motivation and self-esteem are raised.

According to findings from questionnaires and focus group interview, it can be said that allowing students to feel discouraged, downcast and stressed but also triumphant and successful will help them grow and prepare them for the real world, where they might experiences these emotions often. It is a very big responsibility of the education system to engage students in the later events they will face in their lives.

COMPETITION LEADING TO MORE CREATIVITY

With competition in education, students are encouraged to be more imaginative in order to stand out from their fellow students. If students are not in a competitive environment, they might be content to have similar ideas. On the other hand, competitive environments lead students to exploit their specific strengths and intelligences, be it linguistic, kinesthetic, or musical, in order to find their creative side that would enable them to grow into more dynamic individuals. The dedication of students to give more efforts in their learning process while in a competitive setting matches what Fasli and Michalakopoulos (2005) have put forward.

COMPETITION AND UNSCRUPULOUS BEHAVIOR

Data generated from the students and teachers shows that the connection between competitive education, the system of examinations and stress seems to be a near truism. Some students candidly admitted that competition places so much importance to academic achievement that in order to bear the brunt of the ordeal, they often resort to cheating. Other competitive tactics include concealing one's own goals and interests, being hostile, denigrating or challenging others, criticizing, bullying or verbal aggressiveness. Tactics that are used to deal with competition are unquestionably unscrupulous and this is where competition can be seen to have slid into a destructive scenario. And this is when competition can prove to be more harmful than helpful as the environment that is created does not give due importance to basic values such as kindness, compassion and sincerity. These qualities are being less and less embodied in career pursuits and in personal relationships while selfish and arrogant patterns of behavior are glorified. These findings comply with Gandhi's arguments about how competition breeds egoism and immorality.

The majority of students (64%) who participated in the focus group interview and questionnaires did not favor competition, yet 55% still engaged in a competition with their friends. This is illustrated in the pie chart below. The reasons that were given for such a choice are presented afterwards.

REASONS STATED FOR ENGAGING IN ' SELF-COMPETITION'

It is worth mentioning here that 45% compete with themselves because it allowed them to stay focused in the mission of being educated; if they are ranked well, they would be happy but their aim is not to win a scholarship.

Their goal is not to sustain any kind of accolade and to enhance their self-image. They were rather oriented towards mastery and the learning process. They experience a sense of satisfaction when they feel they have learnt something new every day. For them, schooling is all about learning, growing and the chance to learn more, and do better than their last performance. They seek not to outdo others but to improve their own performance and mastery. These learners can be said to be intrinsically motivated. They believe that they would make themselves miserable if they made comparisons with others. Real happiness and satisfaction is said to be found in identifying and recognizing one's own gifts and talents rather than focusing on others' successes. The students affirmed that competition prevents individuals from developing a self-acceptance and it renders people unable to do simple and humble actions such as being nice to others or being at the service of others. It encourages them to be like everybody else or better than everybody else and students cannot be themselves.

Another important reason why the students supported 'self-competition' is the fact that it induces them to set a goal and this paves the way to a certain degree of commitment and discipline. However, setting a goal does not necessarily carry success. As stated by the students, sometimes they do achieve their goal; other times they do not get the grades or the marks that they were expecting. Students assume that this is what makes self-competition healthy - competition is healthy when it is not just about winning but also learning how to deal with disappointment or losses. Hence, 'self-competition' provides students with the space to experience feelings of

triumph, and discouragement which eventually enhances the learning environment.

COMPETITION AND RELATIONSHIPS

The 55% of students who are against competition but still competing to win a scholarship laid emphasis on how competition ruptures relationships. They would prefer their mates to “ cooperate and work together”. For them, competition represents a process in which individuals directly or indirectly aim to destroy or harm other parties in order to get a desired reward. The relationships that competition fosters are not built on a mutual interest to interact. Rather, these relationships may well contain conflicts and students competing often try to avoid interaction. Students relate their own experience of peer relationships as being hostile.

One student favoring competition related how she got into a ‘ hidden’ mental non-violent type of competition with her best friend to ‘ prove’ to the latter that she could perform better and she worked extra hard to ensure the downfall of the comparative other. Even though the ‘ hidden’ conflict leads to better performance, the student admitted that the achievement was at the expense of moral values and healthy peer relationships and sound mentality. Competitive behavior can therefore often run the gamut of unpleasant, unseemly, unethical behavior.

Based on the assertion of students that competition has a harmful effect on relationships, it can be said that the argument produced by Johnson and Johnson (1989) is very relevant. Competition does act as a stumbling block in

improving relationships among students and this hinders healthy learning and healthy attitudes.

A great number of students accounted for the negative consequences of competition by emphasizing on the importance of other aspects of our lives. Their point is that it is a very good thing that people regard success in their career as important because they want to uphold a good standard of living, especially when they will be forming a family. That striving for success is driven by the idea to support to the best of their ability their family or loved ones in the future. However, this pursue causes them to enter a competitive race to succeed and this kicks them further and further from their family and forging relationships becomes a difficult task. The very thing that is being done for the sake of their future family becomes the force that currently takes them away from their kin. The students stressed on the importance of human love, human contact.

COMPETITION AND STRESS

The overheated competition for scholarships affects students even more than I thought. There is anecdotal evidence that getting a scholarship requires great sacrifice, which includes “ work on homework longer on weekends because private tuitions took a lot of time during weekdays”, “ watch less TV, have less sleep in order to spare enough time for the learning”, “ burning the midnight oil”, “ staying at home during third term and cram for exams”. Concisely, students spent all their time whetting their competitive edge for the exams. The experience of one student who participated in the focus group interview is a testimony to that lifestyle.

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While in primary school, she had to work hard for 2-3 hours per day before she could join a star secondary college. There also, she needed to achieve highly because as a student of a star school, bullying and teasing were waiting for a low achiever.

Some of the students who are really into winning claim that they actually do not enjoy the winning because they are always questioning themselves about “ what should I do to keep on winning?” This can be explained by the fact that they tend to define themselves by the status and title that they hold. However, the continuous tension of figuring out how to maintain the position and prominence eventually takes away the joy of the laurels.

As a result these competitive learners are more prone to a range of stress-related illnesses in the long-run. Issues such as attempts of suicide, panic attacks, lack of creativity, poor physical health and undue stress on elitism and school ranking are all diagnosed by the students as products of a competitive education system.

Students stated that they had to constantly ensure a steadiness in the hours they needed for perfecting their knowledge. What I presume the students were alluding here is that the preparation to be laureates or ranked after laureates is painful and the self-sacrifice is enormous. This attempts to pinpoint the source that compelled students to absorb knowledge instead of having a more enjoyable time. Moreover, the emphasis is also placed on cognitive skill that is acquiring knowledge. Competition makes schooling and teaching only exam-oriented, a system in which teachers and students cannot afford to lose any time in making the teaching-learning process a ‘

fun activity'. Classes become teacher-centered, subject-centered and the affective domain is disregarded.

Certain students are likely to compete in almost all activities, and they will feel threatened and angry if they find themselves lagging behind. One astonishing yet very interesting detail provided in the questionnaire is that students even compete on the number of friends they have on their Facebook page.