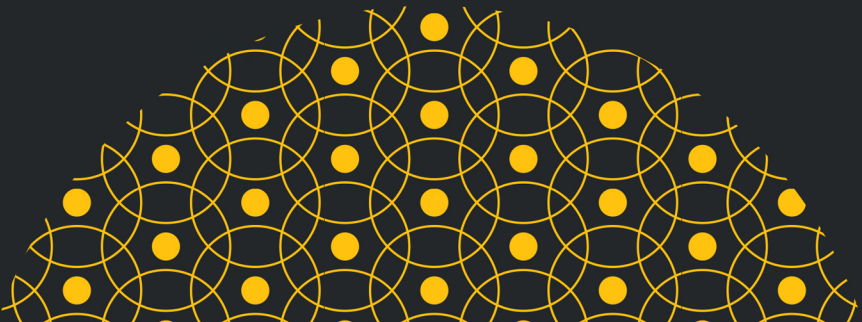




EMERALD POINTS

**CREATIVITY
AND CRITICAL
PEDAGOGY IN
EDUCATION**

**UPASHA KUMARI
ARPAN YAGNIK**



CREATIVITY AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN EDUCATION

Creativity and Critical Pedagogy in Education is a timely and inspiring guide that challenges us to think bigger and teach deeper. The CritiCreative Communication Framework and Creative Aerobics offer a beautifully human, whole-brain approach to learning that ignites curiosity, empathy, and purpose. This book doesn't just aim to inform educators – it empowers them to shape a generation of thoughtful, socially conscious changemakers. A must-read for every teacher who believes that education should open minds and change lives.

—*Gavin McCormack*, Montessori Australia
Ambassador & Co-founder of Upschool.co

The book is a compelling read, presenting a strong argument for result-oriented reforms in revamping the present education delivery system. It is high time the educators, policy makers, and all stakeholders responsible for designing curriculum, content and teaching methods revisit their conventional approaches and reorient the fertile minds of the young generation with the long-term goal to create a better society. A MUST-READ for all educationists.

—*Professor Rajaram Panda*, Senior International Relations
Specialist with expertise in Japan's politics, security,
strategic affairs, culture, and society

The book masterfully presents the CCCF model – rooted in Indian philosophy and aligned with NEP 2020 – blending creativity and critical pedagogy with innovative tools like Creative Aerobics to cultivate socially conscious, empathetic, and critically aware individuals.

—*K. Jaya*, Senior Humanities Facilitator,
Convent of Jesus & Mary School, New Delhi

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*Upasha dedicates this work to her family, teachers,
and students who have always believed in her, and to the
enduring Indic spirit of knowledge and learning.*

*Arpan dedicates this work to his trailblazing co-author,
Ms. Upasha Kumari. May this mark the beginning
of a luminous and compassionate journey.*

*He also dedicates it to all teachers, students, and lifelong
learners who form the heart of the Indian educational ecosystem.*

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FOREWORD

The modern age is a testimony to both human ingenuity and human greed that inform social practices. Acknowledging this paradox of our times – punctuated by crisis at an accelerated pace – Upasha Kumari and Arpan Yagnik set out to retrieve human ingenuity to recast our social being and practices away from greed (and its discontents) that masquerades as rational self-interest legitimized, via the trickle-down theory, as benefitting the collective. Its title notwithstanding, this is an ambitious book that goes beyond the classroom as the authors argue that education is not a discrete enterprise, it is both a means to an end – economy, nation building, society – and an end in itself. They propose a model that jettisons the either/or approach by recalling the insights of philosophers of yore, 20th-century political leaders and activists, and indigenous practices. The model seeks to revive the thrill of curiosity, discovery, and invention (creation) in the act of learning and establishes these as behaviours and practices innate to human existence – our right as homo faber(s) in order to construct a congenial and humane social, political, and economic environment. The macro goals are realized via a process set in motion in the classroom wherein reside education’s micro entities – the teacher(s) and the student(s). The adoption and confluence of two technologies – creativity and critical pedagogy – wither away the banking system of knowledge to construct a new classroom. In this unmaking and making anew, the *raison d’être* of education is elevated where its stakeholders build knowledge together never losing sight of their simultaneous responsibilities as citizens and human beings. Admirably, in this synergy of multiple grand identities, the education practioner – student and teacher – sidesteps the trap of being reduced to a mere resource, a mere means to grandiose ends – without abdicating social responsibility. In an economy where education is also being appropriated as a lucrative business enterprise, it is no mean achievement to make a case for the ‘intangibles’ that cannot be verified as useful by the market. It requires wisdom, courage, and, of course, creativity; Upasha Kumari and Arpan Yagnik are most suited for this task. Arpan Yagnik is an expert and coach on how to be creative and defeat fear. Upasha Kumari, whom I have known since 2016 – when she joined Lady Shri Ram College for Women – as a

curious student who gently but firmly upended received wisdoms of texts and richly contributed to making my class a dialogic space. Upasha Kumari's choices and her 'becomings' in her subsequent journey are no surprise as she commandeers her labour, mind, and passion to interrogate the 'noble profession's' forgotten promise and potential. But these are no ivory tower musings, in making a case for a transformative pedagogy, she along with her co-author answer both the why and how questions in a most lucid language and engaging style. They propose creativity as 'natural, social, human right, and practice'. How beautiful is that!

It is, indeed, a delight to write the foreword. I see the book going into multiple editions and translations.

—Rina Kashyap
Professor,
Department of Political Science,
Lady Shri Ram College for Women.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is the result of a deeply enriching and collaborative journey, and we extend our sincere gratitude to those who have contributed to its development in both visible and invisible ways.

We are indebted to our families, whose unwavering support, quiet patience, and constant encouragement made it possible for us to immerse ourselves in the work of thinking, writing, and revising. Their presence sustained us during late nights and long stretches of writing.

We extend heartfelt thanks to our mentors, peers, and students, who have continuously challenged and inspired us. Their questions, feedback, and lived experiences helped sharpen our ideas and deepened our commitment to creating an inclusive and critical discourse on education. A special note of gratitude to the educators who practice creativity and critical pedagogy every day, often against the odds, your work has been our motivation.

We gratefully acknowledge our alma maters and the academic institutions that have shaped our intellectual journeys. We appreciate the many scholars whose work has laid the foundation upon which we have tried to build thoughtfully and respectfully.

To the team at Emerald Publishing, UK – thank you for your belief in this manuscript and your support throughout the editorial and production process. A special thanks to our editor, whose guidance and sensitivity ensured that this book took its final shape with care and clarity.

As co-authors, we express deep appreciation for one another's strengths, commitment, and spirit of collaboration. This book has emerged not only from shared ideas but also from shared values of democratic learning, imaginative courage, and an unrelenting belief in education as a transformative act.

To all our readers, may this book offer questions, provocations, and possibilities and never final answers. We are grateful for your engagement with our work.

— Upasha Kumari & Professor Arpan Yagnik

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Chapter 1

TWO RIVERS THAT MUST MEET

Imagine two great rivers flowing side by side through the vast landscape of education. Each one is strong and important, but they come from different places and move in their own unique ways. The first river is Creativity. It has been celebrated for centuries by people who study how we think and learn. Creativity is about coming up with new and valuable ideas, seeing the world in fresh ways, and connecting things that might seem completely unrelated. It's the spark that drives invention, art, and self-expression. Thinkers like Guilford, who talked about divergent thinking, and Csikszentmihalyi, who described the feeling of being 'in the flow', showed us that creativity is not just a one-time moment but a process full of imagination and discovery. When Rabindranath Tagore penned the poem 'Where the Mind is Without Fear', he envisioned the role of creativity in eradicating fear and instilling freedom (Tagore, 2005). The act of creating something is an act of shackling one's chains to achieve their higher self.

Right beside Creativity flows the river of Critical Pedagogy. At its heart, critical pedagogy is not just a teaching method, but it is a way of looking at education as a tool for transformation. First articulated by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970), this approach challenges what he called the banking model of education, where teachers simply deposit information into students, who are expected to receive it passively. Instead, critical pedagogy emphasizes dialogue, mutual respect, and the idea that both teacher and student learn from one another. In this model, learning becomes a shared journey, rooted in lived experiences and open-ended inquiry. It encourages students to question what they are taught, to examine power structures, and to reflect on their own role in society. Freire believed that true education should awaken a critical consciousness, empowering individuals not just to understand the world but

to act upon it. Through discussion, reflection, and collective exploration, education becomes a process of liberation—one that prepares learners to challenge injustice and imagine equitable ways of living and learning. Freire’s concept of critical pedagogy emerged as a powerful response to rigid and hierarchical education cultures that prioritize rote memorization over genuine understanding. He believed that education should be a practice of freedom, not a method of control. In his view, learning happens best when students and teachers engage in a meaningful dialogue, building knowledge together rather than one simply delivering information to the other. Traditional models often treat students as empty containers to be filled with facts, leaving little room for sparking curiosity. Critical pedagogy challenges this idea by creating space for learners to think, to reflect, and to connect with their life. This approach is especially relevant in today’s hyper-globalized world, where classrooms reflect a wide range of cultural, linguistic, and economic diversities. A one-size-fits-all model simply cannot work. This perspective about education came to life especially through the work of Paulo Freire, who believed education should help people understand the world around them, question unfairness, and take action to make things better. Critical pedagogy is about more than memorizing information. It encourages learners to think deeply about power, justice, and the rules of society. It helps students become active participants who can change their communities for the greater good. Henry Giroux and Bell Hooks expanded these ideas, reiterating that classrooms should be places where everyone’s voice matters and where education becomes a path to freedom and fairness (Giroux, 1997; Hooks, 1994).

Both these ‘rivers’ have their own strengths. Creativity inspires new ideas and personal growth. Critical pedagogy helps us see clearly and act ethically. When these two come together, they create a powerful force. They move us beyond just learning facts to truly understanding, imagining, and shaping a better world. This is the kind of education we need, one that encourages us to be both bold creators and thoughtful citizens.

This book invites you on a journey to explore how these two vital currents—creativity and critical pedagogy can come together to transform education and, ultimately, our lives. It will guide you through ideas, stories, and practical approaches that show how learning can become a richer, more meaningful experience. You will discover how education can nurture not only knowledge and skills but also imagination, character, and a deep sense of social responsibility.

As these two rivers flow through the terrain of our modern world, they encounter a daunting challenge, a crisis that threatens the very ground

they nourish. This challenge is the crisis of character. It is subtle but relentless, quietly eroding the foundation upon which all human progress rests.

This crisis of character is not a distant or abstract problem. It is visible in the headlines and the lived realities of people across the globe. Violent conflicts continue to devastate lives and displace millions, often fuelled by intolerance, greed, and unyielding power struggles. Corporate greed pushes profit to the forefront, sidelining concerns for workers, communities, and the environment. Powerful military-industrial complexes wield influence that often perpetuates fear and instability rather than peace. Even robust democracies are being challenged by lobbyists and special interests that erode the voice of the people. Societies are increasingly polarized. Division based on race, religion, gender, and political ideology deepen breeding suspicion and hatred. This animosity is weakening the social fabric, undermining the possibility of unity and cooperation. Consumption-driven mindsets foster dissatisfaction, always craving more but never feeling fulfilled. Technology, which promised to connect and enlighten, is sometimes weaponized to spread misinformation and disrupt trust. In all these threads, the common denominator is the weakening of character which comprises the qualities that bind us as human beings, such as integrity, empathy, fairness, courage, and humility. Character is the foundation of trust. And trust is the foundation of any lasting progress, whether in families, communities, nations, or the world. This book begins by shining a light on this crisis. Naming it clearly allows us to understand its depth and the urgency to act. It also prepares us to explore how education can be a powerful force for rebuilding character, renewing hope, and inspiring action.

WHY CHARACTER MATTERS NOW MORE THAN EVER

Throughout history, civilizations have risen and fallen, often because their shared vision and virtues eroded. Take the example of the Greeks and the Romans. Ancient Greece was a cradle of creativity (Cartledge, 2002). It gave the world philosophy, democracy, theatre, and a deep curiosity about life's biggest questions. Walk through the ruins of Athens today, and you can almost hear echoes of Socrates challenging people to think for themselves, or artists carving stories into stone. It was a place where thought, beauty, and civic life came together in extraordinary ways. Rome, on the other hand, was a marvel of order, structure, and power. Where the Greeks laid the groundwork for ideas, the Romans built roads, aqueducts, and legal systems that stitched together an empire. Their sense of discipline, engineering brilliance,

and ambition turned a city into a global force. But both these civilizations, for all their greatness, eventually stumbled. Not because they ran out of resources or intelligence, but because something shifted inside; they lost the shared sense of purpose and virtue that once held them together. The reliance on slavery corroded the moral fabric of these societies, undermining the very principles of justice and equality that had once sustained them. Their stories remind us that even the most brilliant societies need more than brilliance to survive. They need heart, character, and a common vision of what truly matters.

Today, the scale and speed of change amplify this challenge. The choices we make now will shape the future for generations to come.

Moral character is more than a personal trait; it is a social glue. It allows us to live with others in peace and cooperation. It underpins the rule of law, justice, and democratic governance. Without it, corruption, injustice, and conflict grows.

In the modern world, the crisis of character manifests in many ways: environmental degradation driven by short-term gain, rising inequality despite technological progress, and political systems captured by narrow interests rather than the common good. The erosion of civility in public discourse, the spread of hate and intolerance, and the breakdown of community life all point to a moral vacuum.

Long before the modern world began debating education reform, artificial intelligence, or global citizenship, the philosopher Plato offered a profound insight into the role of character in human life. In *The Republic*, he presents an allegory of the cave as a mirror to the soul. To build a just society, Plato argued, we must first cultivate just individuals. And to do that, education must aim not merely at filling minds, but at shaping character (Plato, trans. 1992).

Plato's vision of education was not about information delivery. It was about forming the soul nurturing wisdom (*sophia*), courage (*andreia*), discipline (*sophrosyne*), and above all, justice (*dikaiosyne*). In Book IV of *The Republic*, he famously proposes that justice in a city arises when each class—the rulers, auxiliaries, and producers—performs its proper role guided by virtue (Plato, trans. 1992). But this civic harmony is only possible when individuals have learned to govern themselves through reason, spirit, and desire in balance. A person whose soul is ruled by greed or irrational desires, no matter how technically skilled, cannot contribute meaningfully to the good of the whole.

Plato writes: 'The object of education is to teach us to love what is beautiful' (Plato, 1992, Book III). This beauty was not merely aesthetic, but moral and intellectual – a harmony between thought, feeling, and action.

Now, fast-forward over 2,000 years. We live in a world of unprecedented access to knowledge, yet often struggle with clarity of purpose or virtue in leadership. Plato's concern was prophetic: without moral education, societies

lose their equilibrium. We produce clever strategists but not wise leaders, skilled labourers but not empathetic citizens.

What makes *The Republic* still relevant is not its utopian structure, but its foundational claim: that **character is not an accidental byproduct of education; it is its very purpose.**

Today's educators, in a world of VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity), may not agree with Plato's ideas, but they can still take inspiration from his core insight – a society cannot be more just than the individuals who compose it. And those individuals must be shaped not only by curriculum but also by conscience. Education, as a powerful social institution, must respond not only by imparting knowledge and skills but also by nurturing character. This means cultivating qualities such as responsibility, empathy, critical awareness, and creativity. Character and creativity together form the heart of resilient and thriving societies.

Japan sets a great example in this regard. Early years education in Japan does not have the provision of exams, tests, and grades until they reach around the age of ten. For many people, especially in countries where school is all about tests from day one, this might seem strange. How can a school function without exams? But in Japan, the focus during these first few years is much deeper than tests – it's about building the child's character.

Instead of rushing to see who can answer the most questions or get the highest marks, teachers spend a lot of time helping children learn how to behave with kindness and respect. The classroom isn't a place for memorizing facts. It's a place where children understand how to be part of a community. Every day, the kids take part in cleaning the classroom. They sweep the floors, wipe the desks, and take care of their space. It's not just about keeping things tidy, but it's about teaching responsibility and teamwork. When children look after their classrooms, they learn to value their environment and each other. This practice was widely followed in the Gurukul system in ancient India, where students lived with their Gurus (teachers) in ashrams or sacred residential places to gain knowledge and master skills.

Recess is an important opportunity for learning life skills in Japan. Instead of lunch being served by cafeteria staff, the children serve food to one another. They learn to share, to wait patiently, and to appreciate the delicacies on their plates. Eating together with their teachers helps create a strong sense of belonging and respect. The children bow to each other and to their teachers every day, a small but powerful way to show gratitude and humility. The heartwarming book *Totto-Chan: The Little Girl at the Window* beautifully captures the spirit of joyful, child-centred learning. One particularly memorable moment is the ritual encouraged by the school's kind and visionary

headmaster, where children were asked to bring a mix of ‘land food’ and ‘sea food’ in their lunchboxes. Land food included items like vegetables and meat, while sea food referred to fish and other offerings from the ocean. This simple yet thoughtful practice wasn’t just about ensuring optimum nutrition, but it was about connection- with others, one’s food, and oneself. As the children sat together, they would share stories about what they were eating, where it came from, and sometimes even how it was prepared at home. Lunch became more than a meal; it became a time of discovery, laughter, and cultural exchange. In these small, everyday moments, the school nurtured empathy, curiosity, and a sense of community among learners. The Japanese word *kokoro*, meaning heart or spirit, captures what these early years are really about. Teachers encourage qualities like patience, kindness, cooperation, empathy and self-awareness in the classroom. They learn that success is not just about winning or being the best but about working together and caring for others. By the time these children start formal testing at age ten, they have already built a strong foundation. They have learned to be thoughtful and responsible. They are ready to face challenges with a calm mind and a kind heart. Tests no longer seem like scary obstacles because the children have grown into confident, caring individuals. This approach teaches us something very important. Education is not just about what we know; it is about who we become. When schools focus on building character first, students become not just smart learners but wise human beings. They learn to use their knowledge with kindness and confidence.

EDUCATION TAXONOMY 4.0: RETHINKING LEARNING FOR OUR TIMES

We live in a time of profound change. Technology is advancing at an unprecedented pace. Social and environmental challenges grow more urgent every day. In response, the World Economic Forum has put forward Education Taxonomy 4.0, a bold and necessary call to rethink education from the ground up and empower students for Industrial Revolution 4.0. This new framework insists that education cannot remain stuck in old ways that focus only on memorizing facts or preparing for narrow job skills. Instead, it asks us to recognize that learning is about cultivating the whole person. It is about developing knowledge alongside values, attitudes, and the capacities to act with purpose and responsibility. It emphasizes the need for inclusion of Global Citizenship Skills, Innovation and Creativity Skills, Technology Skills, and Interpersonal Skills in the curriculum. It also suggests innovative pedagogies such as personalized

and self-paced learning, accessible and inclusive learning, problem-based and collaborative learning, and lifelong and student-driven learning. Education Taxonomy 4.0 directly connects with the global goal of providing quality education to everyone. It insists that learning must build Socially Conscious Individuals (SCIs) who understand their relationship with others and with the environment. These learners are encouraged to think critically and creatively. They are prepared to lead efforts towards positive social change rather than simply accept existing conditions. This framework challenges us to rethink not only what we teach but also how we teach and assess learning.

This means moving away from rigid, one-size-fits-all schooling and towards flexible learning environments that centre on each learner's unique needs and experiences. It requires that schools nurture moral and social awareness just as much as cognitive skills. We must create classrooms where curiosity, collaboration, empathy, and critical reflection are just as important as reading and math. The world witnessed the devastating COVID pandemic where all societies, businesses and organizations came to a standstill. Yet, conscious efforts were put by stakeholders to keep the process of learning alive for the children. Digital classrooms then did not just impart knowledge to students but also attended to their emotions, values, and skills.

Education Taxonomy 4.0 also reminds us that learning is a lifelong process that takes place both inside and outside the classroom. It values different ways of knowing, including those found in communities and cultures across the globe. Most importantly, it calls us to treat learners as active agents in their own educational journey. In many ways, this approach echoes the ideas found in Indian philosophy, indigenous knowledge systems, and critical pedagogy. All of these traditions emphasize that education should begin with the learner's lived experience and end with the hope for a more just and sustainable future.

There is a growing realization that classrooms can no longer focus solely on content mastery. Instead, they must equip students with the kinds of skills needed to thrive in an increasingly digital, interconnected, and unpredictable world. These skills include critical thinking, creativity, communication, adaptability, and emotional intelligence. The aim is not just to prepare students for exams, but for life. To explore how teachers are engaging with this shift, Upasha, the co-author of the book, conducted a survey of teacher trainees during a three-day workshop on Action Research in Dehradun, India. The group comprised young, early-career educators who were preparing to step into real classrooms. She asked them to reflect on what creativity and critical thinking means to them, how they try to build these skills in their students, and what barriers they face in doing so. The responses were both encouraging

and honest. Many of the trainees spoke with conviction about the importance of teaching students how to think, not just what to think. One participant shared ‘Critical thinking enables children to relate concepts with real life. Without it, learning is incomplete’. Another added, ‘Creativity brings engagement and emotional connection into learning. It opens space for students to express who they are’. These are not abstract opinions. They come from lived experience and a clear sense of purpose. A few teachers described simple but effective strategies. One said, ‘I ask students to frame their own questions instead of just answering mine. It gives them ownership of learning’. Others talked about using storytelling, drama, or visual thinking tools to activate student interest. These approaches reflect what Education 4.0 aspires to build classrooms that are learner-centred, interdisciplinary, and built on curiosity rather than compliance. Yet, alongside this sense of possibility, there was also a clear sense of constraint. Most respondents pointed to systemic obstacles that limited their ability to teach in creative or critical ways. Lack of time was a common concern. One trainee remarked, ‘There’s no space in the timetable for experiments. Even if I want to try something new, the exam pattern doesn’t allow it’. Another shared, ‘We are expected to finish content quickly. So most creative ideas are put on hold’. These are not isolated complaints. They reflect a tension between policy aspirations and practical realities. This is not unique to India. Across the world, educators in countries such as the United States, South Africa, and Brazil have reported similar difficulties in transitioning to more open-ended, student-led learning models. Even when national policies embrace Education 4.0, schools often remain tied to older structures such as textbook-driven syllabi, performance-based metrics, and high-stakes testing. Without adequate systemic reform, individual teachers are left to carry the burden of transformation on their own. Some of the respondents also pointed to inner barriers. One trainee shared ‘To teach critical thinking, we must first become critical thinkers ourselves’. This insight is important. Readiness for Education 4.0 is not just about knowing the right methods or having the right tools; it is also about mindset, confidence, and the ability to reflect by the teacher. Training programmes must make space for teachers to grow not only as professionals but also as learners in their own right. The survey in Dehradun revealed something hopeful. The teachers of tomorrow are ready to move beyond rote learning. They want to create classrooms that are more meaningful, more connected, and more alive. But they cannot do it alone. If we are to take Education 4.0 seriously, then we must ensure that our systems are ready to support the very people who are expected to lead this change; this includes rethinking how schools are structured, how time is used, how