“30 Ways to Promote Creativity in Your Classroom”

The concept of teaching creativity has been around for quite some time. Academics such as [E. Paul Torrance](http://www.coe.uga.edu/torrance/about/e-paul-torrance/), dedicated an entire lifetime to the advancement of creativity in education.

Torrance faced much opposition in his day about the nature of creativity. Creativity was considered to be an immeasurable, natural ability. Torrance called for explicit teaching of creativity. He advocated that it was skill-specific, requiring intentional instruction. His life’s work ultimately led to the development of the Torrance tests and gifted programs throughout the world.

In recent times, there has been a shift towards the increased acceptance of valuing creativity for all learners. A 2003 TED talk by Sir Ken Robinson discussing this subject reached over 5 million viewers. It discusses how our current school systems suppress creativity. He proposes that our current model leaves little room for divergent thinking.

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It relies on teaching to the correct answer. An innovative thinking model is needed. Robinson recently tweeted [an article](http://www.adobe.com/aboutadobe/pressroom/pressreleases/201211/110712AdobeEducationCreativityStudy.html) about a new study that suggested 80% of educators surveyed preferred creativity to be included as part of learning standards.

In the same way, [David Hughes](http://www.pnwbc.com/PDF/Add_Creativity_to_Your_Decision_Processes.pdf), founder of Decision Labs and professor at UNC Chapel Hill, argues that innovation is an essential skill for our global economy. In talking about creativity in schools he says, much of the blame for a lack of creativity, and therefore innovation, can be traced to our traditional educational systems.

Most of the practice of creative methods is being done outside the traditional educational institutions by consulting firms and by persons in companies who have been trained in creative problem solving methods. In universities not much has changed since 1950, when the distinguished psychologist J. P. Guilford in his inaugural address as president of the American Psychological Association stated that education’s neglect of the subject of creativity was appalling.

Adding to this sequence of events is the fact that textbooks are at least three years out of date when they are published and . . . educational systems were the slowest adopters of innovation. Thus, we see that educational institutions need a strong dose of creative problem solving.

**What are some ways then as educators that we foster creativity in our classrooms?**

**1. Embrace creativity as part of learning.** Create a classroom that recognizes creativity.  You may want to design awards or bulletin boards to showcase different ways of solving a problem, or creative solutions to a real world scenario.

**2. Use the most effective strategies.** Torrance performed an extensive [meta-analysis](http://cpsb.com/resources/downloads/public/TeachingforCreaTorrance.pdf) that considered the most effective ways to teach creativity. He found that the most successful approaches used creative arts, media-oriented programs, or relied on the Osborn-Parnes training program. Programs that incorporated cognitive and emotional functioning were the most successful.

**3. Think of creativity as a skill.** Much like resourcefulness and inventiveness it is less a trait and more a proficiency that can be taught. If we see it this way, our job as educators becomes to find ways to encourage its use and break it down into smaller skill sets. Psychologists tend to think of creativity as Big-C and Little C. Big C drives big societal ideas, like the Civil Rights movement or a new literary style. Little C is more of a working model of creativity that solves everyday problems. Both concepts can be included in our classrooms.

**4. Participate in or create a program to develop creative skills.** Programs like [Odyssey of the Mind](http://www.odysseyofthemind.com/) and [Thinkquest](http://www.thinkquest.org/en/) bring together students from around the world to design creative solutions and bring them to competition.

**5. Use emotional connections.** Research suggests that the best creativity instruction ties in the emotions of the learner. In the “Odyssey angels” program students can devise a solution to help their local community, such as helping homeless youth. This topic is worthy of more discussion by itself. A [blog post](http://newsroom.opencolleges.edu.au/trends/holistic-teaching-20-reasons-why-educators-should-consider-a-students-emotional-well-being/) by fellow blogger Julie DeNeen gives some valuable information about this type of teaching.

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**6. Use a creativity model.** The Osborne-Parnes model is oldest, widely accepted model.  It is often used in education and business improvement. Each step involves a divergent thinking pattern to challenge ideas, and then convergent thinking to narrow down exploration. It has six steps.

* Mess-finding. Identify a goal or objective.
* Fact-finding.Gathering data.
* Problem-finding. Clarifying the problem
* Idea-finding. Generating ideas
* Solution-finding. Strengthening & evaluating ideas
* Acceptance-finding. Plan of action for Implementing ideas

**7. Consider how classroom assignments use divergent and convergent thinking.** Standardized tests do a great job of measuring convergent thinking that includes analytical thinking or logical answers with one correct response. Divergent thinking considers how a learner can use different ways to approach a problem. It requires using association and multiplicity of thought. We should design assingments that consider both types of thinking models.

**8. Creativity flourishes in a “congenial environment”.** Creative thinking needs to be shared and validated by others in a socially supportive atmosphere. Researcher Csikszentmihalyi (1996) coined this term, to explain the importance of reception from others.  Others consider how to create [communities](http://l3d.cs.colorado.edu/%7Egerhard/papers/ccmcd2001.pdf) that foster social creativity to solve problems.

**9. Be aware during discussions.** You know that student who often asks the question that goes a bit outside the lecture? Well, engage him. Once a week, intentionally address those questions. Write them down on an assigned space in the board to go back to later. Validate their creativity.

**10. See creativity in a positive light.** In his [blog](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/headcase/201005/creative-teaching) in Psychology Today, Eric Jaffe talks about research that suggests see creativity in a negative light. If we are teaching to creativity, we need to embrace it too. Reward students for thinking of problems in varied ways by recognizing their efforts.

**11. Try the Incubation Model.** E. Paul Torrance designed this model. It involves 3 stages:

1. Heightening Anticipation: Make connections between the classroom and student’s real lives. “Create the desire to know”.
2. Deepen Expectations: Engage the curriculum in new ways. Brainstorm and create opportunities to solve a novel problem.
3. Keep it going: Continue the thinking beyond the lesson or classroom. Find ways to extend learning opportunities at home or even the community.

**12. Use a cultural artifact.** [Research](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022103110000648) from experimental social psychology finds that artifacts can enhance insight problem solving. Consider using an ordinary object, such as a light bulb used in the study or a historical artifact to have students think about living in a particular time period.

**13. Establish expressive freedom.** The classroom environment must be a place where students feel safe to share novel ideas. Allow for flexibility and create norms that foster creative approaches.

**14. Be familiar with standards.** Knowing the standards inside and out helps find creative solutions in approaching a lesson. Teachers can adapt them and work within the current framework. Some topics allow for flexibility and use of creative approaches.

**15. Gather outside resources.** There are some great resources to read related to creativity. The University of Georgia, provides an [array of amazing resources](http://www.coe.uga.edu/torrance/creativity-resources/) related to how to foster creativity in practical ways. It also gives a list of programs and organizations that can help with the process.

**16.** Allow room for mistakes. Sir Ken Robinson said it best when he said, “If you’re not prepared to be wrong, you’ll never come up with anything original.”

**17. Allow space for creativity.** Design some classroom space for exploration, such as a thinking table, a drama stage, a drawing table, or a space for groups to discuss ideas.

**18. Give students time to ask questions.** Organizations such as [CCE](http://www.creativitycultureeducation.org/expert-speakers) (Creativity, Culture, Education) suggest teachers incorporate opportunities for students to ask questions. Intentionally design lessons that allow for wondering and exploration.

**19. Creativity builds confidence.** Students take ownership of their own learning. Think of ways where students might design a project. For instance, for the history requirement, I suggested students of both fifth grade classes create an exhibition of their final projects. The students were so proud of their final work and learned from others presentations. Parents and community members were happy to see students take ownership of their learning.

**20. Encourage curiosity.** Consider what is important to students. Student interest are a great place to start on what drives their own thinking tank. Find inspiration from their world. Creativity is intrinsic in nature. Try to step into their viewpoint to find what motivates them.

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**21. Structure is essential.** Studies, such as a meta-analysis by Torrance suggest that creativity instruction is best with clear structure. For instance, consider the guidelines of the standard curriculum objectives and add these to the design. For example, reading considers communication, comprehension, listening, writing and reading.

**22. Observe a working model of creativity.** Visit a creative classroom or watch a video about how a creative classroom works. The “[Case for Creativity in School](http://www.tes.co.uk/teaching-resource/The-Case-for-Creativity-in-School-6082886/)” is an excellent video that educators can watch to see how creativity might play out in a classroom. This school adopted a school-wide approach to recognize students.

**23. Consider the work of current experts in the field.** Sir Ken Robinson is an internationally renowed creativity and innovation expert. His work is used to meet global challenges, renovating education, business, and government organizations to implement his strategies. His [books](http://sirkenrobinson.com/skr/) and [TED talks](http://www.ted.com/speakers/sir_ken_robinson.html) are great places to generate teaching ideas.

**24. Explore different cultures.** Culture is an excellent vehicle for inspiring creative thinking. In Thinking Hats & Coloured Turbans [Dr. Kirpal Singh](http://www.aca.cloverpad.org/Resources/Documents/singh-singapore%20_%20creativity.pdf) discusses how cultural contexts are central to creative endeavors. You can discuss how collaboration between cultures, such as in the space program, produces unique, novel ideas.

**25. Find ways to incorporate and integrate art, music and culture**. A recent report prepared for the European commission considered that creativity is a central force that shapes our culture. With the changing times we live in, the report suggested that society is enriched by cultural-based creativity.

**26. Use a collaborative creative thinking model to solve classroom problems.** For instance, read a paragraph and then have groups discuss a list of questions. Collaborative problem solving is catching on quickly. In fact, many business schools have implemented creative thinking models into their curriculum.

**27. Design multidisciplinary lessons when possible.** When teaching geometry, I designed a lesson called, “Geometry through Art”. It included works of Art to show fifth graders their application to everyday geometric concepts. The result was astounding. I never thought that the subject matter would be so successful. I designed an entire unit that focused on how different concepts rely on geometry. I even asked the Art teacher to help reinforce those concepts in class.

**28. Tapping into multiple intelligences is key.** Creativity requires us to use different parts of our brain. We often bridge connections between seemingly unrelated areas to make new concepts emerge. Allow students to use their strengths to find new ways of approaching a topic or solving a problem. You might be surprised with what they come up with.

**29. Understand that creativity is important to students’ future in the job market.** Paul Collard for Creative Partnerships, discusses how 60% of English students will work in jobs that are not yet created. In today’s market, students must largely be innovative and create their own jobs. Collard suggests teachers focus on teaching particular skills or set of behaviors, rather than preparing students for specific careers.

**30. Teach creative skills explicitly.** According to Collard, “Creative skills aren’t just about good ideas, they are about having the skills to make good ideas happen.” He suggests creative skills should include 5 major areas:

(1) Imagination

(2) Being disciplined or self-motivated.

(3) Resiliency

(4) Collaboration

(5) Giving responsibility to students. Have them develop their own projects.

Works Cited

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