



Developing creativity and imagination skills

CULTIVATING CREATIVITY AMONG STUDENTS IS WIDELY ACKNOWLEDGED AS AN ESSENTIAL PREREQUISITE FOR 21ST CENTURY SUCCESS. AMY LIGHTFOOT DISCUSSES HOW TEACHERS CAN HELP FOSTER CREATIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM.

What do you think of when you hear the word 'creativity'? Do you immediately think of the skills you need for the arts – music, painting, and drama? This is a common association. In fact, creativity is useful in all subject domains and is an increasingly important skill for our students to develop.

Whether young people end up pursuing a career in engineering, nursing, retail or even as a driver, the use of creativity and imagination can help them to be successful and effective in their role. It's also useful in our day-to-day lives. Developing skills in this area contribute to problem-solving and innovation – having ideas and finding new approaches that can improve the way we and others do things. It is closely related to other core skills such as critical thinking and can enable people to be more entrepreneurial in a variety of ways.

In the 21st century, these skills are more important than ever. With many jobs becoming automated, what makes us stand out is our ability to innovate, create and come up with things that are new and better than before. Being creative and having an active imagination is how we solve problems

and we are able to make the world a safer and fairer place.

So what can teachers do to help learners develop these vital skills? How can we foster creativity and imagination in the classroom? Providing meaningful and complex tasks and projects for them to work through is a great approach. Teachers use multiple techniques in various combinations to promote creative thinking. Projects can be undertaken in any subject, encouraging students to investigate a variety of options in order to present a viable solution to a problem that has been presented.

Many projects can be multidisciplinary. For example, if students are asked to plan a journey to another part of the country, they'll need to use maths to calculate their budget and modes of travel, language to discuss and write up their plans, geography to identify locations, social studies to consider aspects of culture they will encounter, and so on.

There are a number of general strategies that can be deployed to promote creativity and imagination in the classroom.

- 1. Get students working in small groups** – working individually can be useful but working in groups means that students can bounce ideas off each other. Four or five learners in one group is a good size – if there are too many people in a group, some of the less confident students might not get a chance to speak and share their ideas. If a group is too small, they might run out of ideas more quickly.
- 2. Encourage lots of ideas** – at the beginning of a project or task, go for quantity and get as many ideas as possible on the table. The learners can select and reject those that might not work at a later stage.
- 3. Build on each other's ideas** – many of the best ideas are ones that have been developed collaboratively. Working together and suggesting extensions or variations of an idea can often lead to creative solutions. If you've got learners working together in groups, after some initial discussion they can swap their lists of ideas and try to build on these new ones.
- 4. Find new ways of looking at things** – when your students start running out of



ideas, a simple change can help to refocus and kickstart some new ones. Ask your students to start working while standing up instead of sitting down, or close their eyes and take ten deep breaths before continuing.

5. Encourage imagination – tell your learners that you want to hear the craziest and strangest ideas possible to encourage them to come up with different ideas beyond what immediately comes to mind. Impossible ideas can often be shaped into something that can work.

6. Challenge your students to think differently – as they are working, move around the classroom and ask open questions to encourage the learners to think in different ways. This is particularly useful if they seem to be thinking narrowly, without much imagination. Ask questions such as ‘What if ...?’, ‘What else ...?’ and ‘Is there another way to ...?’

7. Encourage students to take the lead – practising creative thinking is a great way for your students to take the lead while you become the guide. It’s important that they feel they have ownership over the process and that they have the freedom to develop and evaluate their own and each other’s ideas. Try not to over-guide them – give support where needed but aim for the learners to provide the content to complete the project or task, not you.

8. Develop logical thinking skills – once they’ve generated lots of ideas, ask your learners to decide how they are going to evaluate them. What criteria can they use?

They might need to think about factors like cost, the time needed to implement, whether they have the tools or resources that are needed, and whether they’re going to be able to do it well enough for it to succeed. Sometimes making changes to an existing idea or plan can lead to the best solution.

9. Let students follow their emotions – sometimes it’s quite easy to tell which ideas are the best, as they’re the ones the students get the most excited about. Remember, exciting ideas can almost always be reshaped into something that is more realistic, but it’s much more difficult to make an average idea great. If a decision needs to be made about which ideas to pursue, you can ask your students to vote on them. One way of doing this is by sharing the lists of possible ideas and asking each student to vote for their three favourites.

Developing skills in creativity and imagination can help our learners to find solutions to problems at school, at work and in their personal lives now and in the future. These skills can also help to drive forward our cultural practices – developing both traditional and contemporary art forms for our enjoyment, reflection, and learning.

More than ever, encouraging the development of 21st century skills is an important area of focus for teachers. Nurturing inquisitive minds with a positive attitude toward problem-solving is likely to have a positive impact on the future of these individuals and wider society. **T**

AUTHOR

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LINKS

Interested in learning more? Try the British Council’s new online game – a ten-minute challenge for teachers focusing on developing learners’ creativity and imagination skills. <https://www.britishcouncil.in/teach/resources-for-teachers/exploring-creativity-imagination-game>

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