

CHAPTER 16

CREATIVITY

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Standards linked to this chapter include...

2. Promote good progress and outcomes by pupils
 - guide pupils to reflect on the progress they have made and their emerging needs
 - encourage pupils to take a responsible and conscientious attitude to their own work and study.
4. Plan and teach well structured lessons
 - impart knowledge and develop understanding through effective use of lesson time
 - promote a love of learning and children's intellectual curiosity

- reflect systematically on the effectiveness of lessons and approaches to teaching
- contribute to the design and provision of an engaging curriculum within the relevant subject area(s).

Introduction

What emotions does the term ‘creativity’ evoke in you as a beginning teacher? If someone asked you to do something creative would it excite you or scare you? Many teachers find the idea of being creative in their teaching a challenging concept. It is difficult enough to become an effective classroom practitioner so why put yourself under greater pressure to do something that may be risky or take you outside of your comfort zone? In this chapter we are going to consider the value of developing a creative mindset – that is a practitioner who sees the significance in developing a creative approach to teaching and learning. We will look at how you can develop skills and strategies and habits of mind that will support you as a teacher to develop your own creative capacities and most importantly those of your pupils.

A creative mindset

A starting place is to consider how we think and feel about being creative. Carol Dweck (2007) has undertaken seminal research into the importance of mindsets in learners and teachers. Her research has centred around the differences between growth and fixed mindsets held by learners and teachers and the impact this belief can have on learning outcomes. Dweck argues that some people believe that intellectual abilities are basically fixed, i.e. that people have different levels of ability and nothing can change that. In contrast, others believe that intellectual abilities can be cultivated and developed through application and effort. Her research suggests that it is crucial that teachers not only have growth mindsets but also work to develop them in their learners to ensure everyone grows traits of perseverance, resilience and hard work. These are the critical skills and attitudes needed by learners to develop their full potential. It is the fixed mindset in the teacher and learner that creates a powerful invisible barrier to achievement. We can build on Dweck’s notion of mindsets and the importance of removing invisible barriers to achievement to the idea of creativity. If we have a fixed mindset in relation to creativity we would not believe it is possible for a person to develop their creative capacities, whereas if we adopt a growth mindset we would believe that everyone has the capacity to become more creative in their thinking and actions.

A thought

Figure 16.1 shows the two ends of a continuum. In reality most people will lie somewhere in between and may move forwards and backwards depending on changing circumstances. Where do you think you stand?

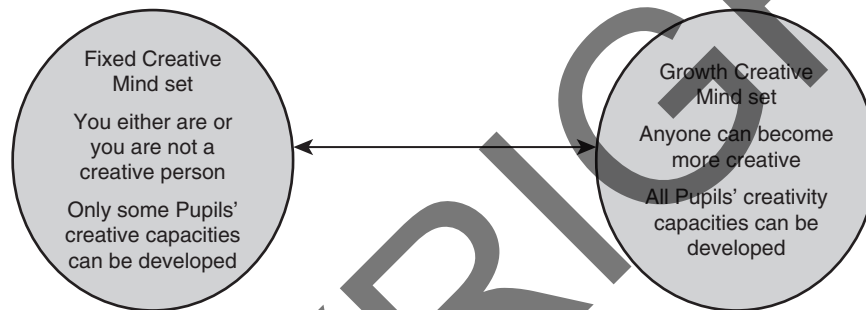


Figure 16.1 The creative mindset continuum

Subject knowledge

There is a link to confidence and subject knowledge in terms of where we may sit on this continuum. Teachers who are secure in their subject knowledge are more likely to have the confidence to take risks and to adopt more creative strategies for their learners. Teachers who are not secure may be much more likely to lock down the learning, avoiding open-ended approaches which could expose their own limitations. Thus depending on the familiarity with the topic or subject area you are teaching you may be more or less likely to teach it in a creative way. This is not inevitable – some teachers do not fall into this trap and take the opportunity to teach something new as an opportunity to innovate. It is important to be aware of the need to continually develop your own subject knowledge, because not only is there always more to learn but it will also support more confident and creative teaching.

Closely linked to the depth of subject knowledge is the potential to view some subjects as naturally more creative than others. The terms 'creative subjects' or 'creative arts' are frequently used to describe subjects such as music, art and drama: the natural inference is that other subjects such as the sciences and mathematics are not creative subjects. A danger of such an interpretation is that teachers may fall into the trap of developing less creative approaches in some subjects. You must be careful

not to reinforce this false polarity and recognise the creative potential for teaching and learning in all subjects.

It is not only the subject content and the nature of the topic which may affect your creative confidence, it may also be your particular group of learners. For example, some teachers develop more creative approaches when working with lower attaining pupils, thinking they will require more varied learning strategies to maintain engagement and support understanding. There is a danger in both primary and secondary teaching in what are high stakes examination years, such as Year 6 and Y11, that lessons become limited to a restricted range of teaching and learning strategies. This is particularly the case with high attaining groups where expectations and assessment pressures can be particularly acute.

A thought

Thinking of a class you know, which children do you anticipate will embrace creative learning activities and who will resist? How could you use this insight to inform your planning and teaching?

Defining creativity

In deciding how to view creativity and if you have a creative growth mindset it is necessary to consider and clarify what is meant by the term. This is not easy as there are many different interpretations. There are many writers and theories surrounding the concept of creativity and creative teaching and learning (Craft, 2001, 2003; Perkins 1993; Robinson, 2001). In its introduction the NACCE (National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education) report 'All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education' (NACCE, 1999) noted how elusive the term is to define and how different contexts give rise to different interpretations. It provides a democratic description which it argues recognises everyone's ability to be creative. It defines creativity as 'Imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value' (NACCE, 1999: 30).

This statement is followed by a more in-depth explanation of the different elements. The meaning of imaginative activity is explained in terms of generative activity, namely thinking outside of the box and coming up with new approaches and alternative ways from the usual routines. This aspect is certainly achievable for beginning teachers as you will not have had the time to establish well-worn routines! Bringing fresh approaches to the teaching of topics will be a natural consequence of teaching many topics for the first time. This does not mean that you will not

benefit from asking more experienced teachers for their ideas and strategies – very often existing approaches can be the inspiration for new creative insights. As the NACCE report notes, originality is relative to the person and their own previous work and output. It is not always possible or desirable to create something that is completely unique, but it is always possible to be novel and innovative. The final characteristic of value is an interesting aspect to defining creative activity, and the NACCE report sets out why this facet is essential. It is linked to the notion that creative acts stem not only from generative thought processes but also from evaluative thinking. Not every original idea can be of value – it may be a dead end, too bizarre or flawed. For the imaginative activity to qualify as a creative idea, the outcome must have some value in relation to the purpose of the task undertaken. Judging the value is not necessarily straightforward and there are many different criteria which could be applied: for instance aesthetic appeal, ability to satisfy, an ability to be enjoyable, as well as the degree of usefulness and effectiveness. Sometimes, the report notes, the value is not immediately recognised. Although this aspect is difficult it is an important aspect for teachers to remember. Developing evaluative skills is a key aspect of creative education, and guiding learners to understand and manage the interplay of the two aspects of generative and evaluative activity is a fundamental role for the teacher.

A thought

Think about how often you intervene when groups of pupils are working together. By being too keen to do this, you can stifle the creative process. Instead, stand back and, if it is necessary to take part, do so by asking open-ended questions; why do you think that will work ... what makes you say that ... what if ... ?

Creative endeavour

The democratic notion of creative endeavour being within the reach of all is echoed by Anna Craft's research (Craft, 2001, 2004; Craft and Jeffrey, 2008) which differentiates between big C and little c creativity. Big or high C creativity is that which is the extraordinary work of a few elite creative geniuses, but little c creativity is the everyday creativity required to navigate through the changing social and economic times of an increasingly technologically demanding world. This definition acknowledges the creative powers of everyone and sets a challenge for you to be aware of, and take account of, this latent ability in all of your pupils. As teachers we must all create the

conditions to harness these creative capabilities. This challenge has two aspects: you need to be creative in your teaching, but most importantly you must teach with the aim of developing pupils' creative powers. These two dimensions are linked but there are different considerations to both aspects.

Application to secondary teaching: case study 1

St Ambrose Barlow Roman Catholic High School in Salford, England, has been described as 'one of the top ten creative schools in the world' (Kelly, 2012). Arguing that 'creativity is what makes us outstanding', head teacher Marie Garside was awarded a CBE in December 2014 for leading this outstanding school. Since establishing a holistic approach to creative education, teachers at the school report that children are more engaged in their learning, are enjoying learning, and that they are making better progress. The increase in attainment is not just evident in those subjects traditionally considered 'creative' but is also evident in the rise in mathematics and English scores at Key Stage 4, with a significant increase from 59% A–C in 2008 to 82.5% in 2014.

What started with one teacher providing a catalyst for change has now resulted in the evolution over twelve years of a highly creative school with a whole-school approach supported by the entire staff. As an active participant in the national Creative Partnerships programme, Bernie Furey (Assistant Head) was aware of the potential benefits of creative teaching and learning for young people's education. Inspired by the pioneering work of Linda Nathan in Boston, Bernie and her head teacher visited the Boston Arts Academy, MIT and Harvard to investigate different models of creative education in the USA. This visit informed the creative school that St Ambrose Barlow RCHS is today. The creative school took time to develop in incremental stages, allowing teachers to embrace new ways of working over time. There are now six key elements that underpin the school's approach:

- **Personal commitment of the teaching team** to creativity is considered a most important element in the school's current success. This is a key aspect within the recruitment of all new teachers at the school, regardless of their subject discipline or years of experience, and features in every job specification.
- **Developing the curriculum** with a vision for growth over time.
- **Continuing professional development for all staff** is generated through yearly projects. Staff work in collaborative research groups to initiate and develop a project that must have a creative focus to last the academic year.

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Each year new groups are formed to allow new teams to form. Beginning teachers at the school have training sessions every week and benefit from a school culture of developing creative pedagogy.

- **The school council** is given a significant status in school and student voice drives change. For example, the school council was asked to create a poster on 'what makes good teaching and learning' that has informed teachers' practice and the agenda for staff appraisal.
- **Working with outside partners** has become a core part of the curriculum. £20k is set aside each year to fund collaborative teaching and learning with external creatives. These collaborations provide experiences for staff and pupils that are aspirational, providing unique opportunities that bridge the world of school and cutting edge practices in the wider world.
- **The learning environment** is a key component in the learning experience and it is teachers' responsibility to make creative use of potential spaces to inspire learning.

This school requires everyone to have a commitment to the value of creativity. At an outstanding school such as Ambrose Barlow you could be asked questions such as the ones below. What would your answers be?

- Can you give an example of a creative lesson you have taught?
- Can you outline the advantages of a creative curriculum?
- How would you contribute to developing creative learners?

Teaching creatively

Teachers who teach creatively are more likely to provide the environment which allows creativity to flourish in their learners. This may seem an obvious statement but it is easy to forget the power of teacher modelling. In your classroom how you choose to operate will have a huge impact on how learners think and act. The opportunities you create can explicitly support creative learning, but how you act and engage will have an implicit influence on your learners. Cremin (2006) argues that in order for teachers to support the creative development of their pupils they themselves should be engaged in creative endeavours. Her research working with primary teachers showed benefits for those teachers who were given extended opportunities to engage artistically and creatively as writers themselves. By engaging in some degree of risk taking and experiencing what Boler (1999) termed a 'pedagogy of discomfort', the

teachers developed personally in terms of their own creative outcomes and became better placed to support their pupils. Enacting a creative process, in this case through engagement with developing their own writing, allowed the teachers to empathise with their pupils' creative enterprise. They could recognise the difficulties and hurdles in undertaking creative activity and support and encourage risk taking. Learners will model their own practices on those they see demonstrated in their classrooms. As Jeffrey and Craft (2004: 84) note, "Teaching for creativity is more likely to emerge from contexts in which teachers are teaching creatively".

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

Recognise your practices in relation to creativity and in particular reflect on your questioning and "thinking out loud" strategies. These are important elements of the modelling habits you want to develop in your learners. The use of skilful questioning to establish a creative learning environment is a key aspect of being a successful beginning teacher.

Practical steps to developing creative teaching

- **Develop an environment of enquiry in your classroom.** Creativity requires a questioning stance, and possibility thinking. As a beginning teacher you will need to establish a habit not only of questioning your pupils but also of questioning by your pupils. You will need to engender the 'what if?' question, ensuring your pupils know that not only is it okay to ask questions but it is actually important to do so. A safe environment where risk taking and thinking out loud are encouraged is an important nurturing space for creative activity. Together with your learners you can establish an environment in which ideas are generated from imaginative thinking considering all the possible answers to unexpected questions.
- **Vary teaching activities.** There are many great resources available to support good and outstanding teaching. Many websites offer free resources and materials to spark your own ideas. A danger is that there are just too many, and it is easy to be lured by a great looking activity which looks as if it will engage your pupils but which is not actually relevant to the learning objective you have set. Always stay focused on what you are expecting the learning outcomes to be for the lesson and look to use resources which will help you achieve these in novel and creative ways. The pupils can provide their own creative 'resource' through using their imagination, for example, tackling a mathematical investigation or a scientific experiment using their own designs. The key element is that you are clear about

what you are aiming to achieve, and then look for supporting stimulus rather than an attractive looking resource leading the learning.

- **Identify a creative coach and buddy.** Everyone needs encouragement and inspiration, particularly when starting in the teaching profession. Hopefully you will be lucky in finding plenty of support and encouragement from colleagues, but this does not always happen without some proactive help. There will always be cynics in the staffroom who have done and seen it all before and will tell you not to bother. Avoid these people! Creativity feeds off enthusiasm, passion and energy, so you will need to look for other teachers who have this and talk to them. They may not be someone you work with closely in your year group or department, but they will be positive and encouraging of your ideas and can act as a sounding board. Actively search for a creative buddy, someone who will get excited about trying out a new idea or approach with a class, maybe even undertaking a joint project. If this proves difficult look to the internet – there are many great blogs and sites to join and discuss latest education thinking which can inspire some innovative teaching.
- **Model risk taking.** Claxton (1997) identified a common trait of creative teachers as their ‘confident uncertainty’, i.e. they were sufficiently confident in their subject and pedagogical knowledge to allow space for the unknown. As your confidence as a teacher increases you should increase the space for uncertainty; allow space for your learners to surprise you and for you to surprise yourself. Taking risks with an idea you are not certain will work is an exhilarating experience. However it is important to be prepared for the inevitable fact that it will not always work – even though it will always be a valuable learning experience. This can prove particularly vital during your training. If you don’t try new approaches, how will you ever find out which will work?

GROUP ACTIVITY

Work with a small group of fellow trainees to generate positive creative learning opportunities. Map the skills that you have already developed that could be helpful in developing a creative curriculum using a creative tool like a mind-map. Discuss what further skills you need to develop and add them on.

Teaching for creativity

- **Scaffold learner-centred activities.** Part of teaching creatively will be to include strategies that engage learners to think and act in autonomous ways. A key tool to nurture creative thinking is the use of ‘what if?’ questions. Your pupils need to

become active agents in the learning process; considering different possibilities and explanations will support the development of those problem-solving skills that are needed to think creatively. This process aspect of creativity is as important as the creative product. Providing learning experiences in which there are choices and lines of enquiry open to allow the learner opportunities to make decisions is an important feature to build in to your teaching repertoire. Pupils need opportunities to take ownership of their learning, thus increasing their autonomy and engagement.

- **Create opportunities for peer interactions and group work.** Learners need to be able to play with ideas in increasingly skilful ways and this is helped by social interactions. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) argues that creativity does not happen inside the head of the individual alone but when these thoughts interact with others on a socio-cultural context. Thinking out loud and bouncing ideas off others can help the generative processes and the evaluative aspects of creativity. Make sure that you scaffold opportunities for these interactions and that this, in turn, scaffolds and supports the development of reflective and evaluative skills in learners.

Application to primary and early years teaching: case study 2

A three-year longitudinal research project in the North West of England investigated the understanding and implementation of creativity in education by beginning and newly qualified teachers from 2009–2012. Over 1,200 beginning teachers took part in a survey from five universities, including primary teacher training and secondary education students. Following the survey, 36 volunteered for an extended participation to track their teaching experience of creative education from their final training year through to the end of their second year of teaching. The aims of this research project were as follows:

- To investigate what trainees, NQTs and recently qualified teachers (RQTs) understand by national policy on guidelines on creativity.
- To understand if perceptions change over time, and if so in what ways.
- To know how trainees, NQTs and RQTs enact creative practices in the classroom.
- To identify the institutional (schools and training providers) conditions necessary to ensure beginning teachers can be creative in their classroom teaching.
- To know which steps schools and training colleges need to take to ensure creative practices are sustained.

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The research showed that many trainees and RQTs initially lacked confidence in their own abilities to be creative, and what helped them to improve was a good mentor or colleague who could inspire and encourage. Interestingly, being observed was also useful in developing creative confidence. One primary NQT in the research project noted:

The assistant head [teacher] came to observe me teach the other day because I am an NQT ... and at the end of the lesson she said, "You do so many things that I don't think you really realise ... you were saying "I wonder what the artist was thinking when he made that", "I wonder what was going through his head", "I wonder how that is going to affect what you draw"." And she could see the [children] just kind of tilting and scratching their heads thinking.

In this case the NQT had not been aware of the impact of her 'thinking out loud' strategies on the pupils and on the atmosphere this helped to form in her classroom. The assistant head teacher had helped her start to see that she was beginning to establish a creative learning environment by encouraging possibility thinking and giving her pupils lots of opportunities to participate and share ideas.

Not every beginning teacher found their placement school was supportive of developing creative approaches to learning, and one beginning teacher discovered difficulties when she did not negotiate her intended approach with the class teacher first. This student teacher commented:

When I used creative thinking techniques such as mind-mapping on placement the class teacher took them off the wall and threw them away as she thought they were scruffy.

In contrast another student teacher had found a creativity week placement had been a particularly 'valuable experience' that 'allowed my capabilities to grow'. Misunderstandings are more likely to occur where there is a lack of communication and agreement between all those investing in children's education. Team planning was a regular feature of NQTs' practice that reduced the chances of misunderstandings like those reported by the trainee teacher above, but often there was a need to compromise within.

Many of the NQTs participating in this research reported that their interest in teaching for creativity was informed by their life experiences before becoming a teacher. Common features included a love of learning new things, being engaged

in interests and hobbies outside of education, and an ability to draw upon these experiences to enrich children's learning.

Children's attitudes towards creative education was a strong theme in this research and beginning teachers consistently recorded that high attaining children were often the most reluctant to try unfamiliar creative learning activities. They found the children who most often exceeded expectations through creative learning opportunities were those who underachieved or were considered less able within more conventional teaching methods.

It is important that children in primary and early years settings can learn through play. Describe how you could harness types of play to make learning more creative and more effective.

The TED talk by Sir Ken Robinson (2006) on the importance of creativity (www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity?language=en) is an interesting discussion of the state of creativity in education. His conclusion is that 'creativity is as important now in education as literacy and we should treat it with the same status'.

Conclusion

If the purpose of education is to prepare young people for adult life, to develop their ability to shape their world, and to overcome the challenges that face them in order to be fully functioning members of the wider community, then teachers need to develop resourceful and autonomous learners. One of the legacies of objectives-led teaching over the past two decades in the UK has been the tendency to limit children's opportunities to develop creative thinking in what is often called a 'spoon feeding' approach to teaching. As a beginning teacher you may have experienced a rich educational experience where your creative potential was fostered. On the other hand, you may find that in order to embrace creativity in your teaching practice you will need to challenge the pedagogy that is familiar to you before you can foster creativity in your classroom. Developing opportunities for open-ended learning, child-centred engagement and teamwork (see Chapter 5) is part of any outstanding teacher's toolkit and essential for all creative teachers. Understanding the difference between open-ended learning and simply unplanned teaching is dependent on the teacher's grasp of what is meant by creativity in education. As a beginning teacher the key to success will be careful preparation, but planning and allowing opportunities for pupils to contribute to learning and surprise you will lead to exciting and creative teaching.

Summary

- Developing a creative mindset is important in overcoming the barriers to achieving creativity in teachers and learners. Don't assume that all teachers and learners have an innate creative mindset, and be prepared to nurture this in yourself and your pupils.
- There are multiple definitions of creativity. The way you conceptualise creativity will influence the values and attitudes that inform your practice.
- Teaching creatively should not be confused with teaching for creativity. These are related but not synonymous.
- Practical steps to developing creative teaching include: the development of a flexible and evolving teaching repertoire; establishing a coach or buddy to support you as you develop a creative pedagogy; and modelling risk taking for your students.
- Scaffold learning – creative education does not mean that it is unstructured or unsupported.
- Develop opportunities for peer interaction and group work and be prepared to develop children's social interaction skills over time.
- Communication and collaboration are key to developing positive working relationships in every context, and even more important where there is an element of unpredictable outcomes (for teachers and learners).

Key reading

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