

Creativity in the Classroom

Experts in education, brain research and business all agree that creativity is essential to survive, thrive and succeed in the modern world. Here, Dr Cynthia Herbert offers eight tried-and-true ways to foster creative thinking in *and* out of school.



- **Come to your senses.** All information, whether digital or not, is taken in through sight, hearing, touch and the other senses. Add a vivid picture, a stirring piece of music or an intriguing object to make your lesson more memorable and to fan the fires of creativity. Teach the SENSORY ALPHABET to give students a vocabulary to characterize the experiences: **line, color, texture, shape, movement, sound, rhythm, light, space.**

- **Raise the bar.** Rather than just memorize and repeat—ask students to reflect upon, use and extend what they learn. Creativity means going “beyond the information given.” It calls for multiple intelligences and higher levels of thinking, such as analysis, synthesis, problem solving, contemplation, evaluation and application. One simple way to do this is to ask, “How can we use what we have just learned?”

- **Opt for options.** When given options, most people choose to operate in their area of strength. Not all learn in the same way. For more students to be successful, we teachers must provide more pathways to learning. Give students choices (even if it is only two choices) for how to demonstrate their understanding or competence. The creativity of their responses may surprise you!

- **Avoid “one answer fits all.”** Instead of evaluating students by determining who knows the one correct answer, learn to structure lessons and evaluations that are open-ended. In this way, students must use their creativity to demonstrate their learning. For example, ask students to create a word problem in math that uses ideas they have been studying, or to define an important vocabulary term in their own words and pictures.

- **Multiply the media.** Not just technology, but drawing, composing, building, dancing, dramatizing and other expressions allow creativity to emerge. A student who struggles with words may be a wizard at engineering—but we will never know it if we do not provide materials that support that child’s creative thinking. Ask students not just to talk about what they have learned, but also to express learning through other media.

- **Practice creative fluency.** Yes! Creativity can be learned, and, like most things, practice leads to improvement. Ask students to brainstorm, imagine and generate ideas related to what they are learning. Encourage them to ask “What would happen if...?” and “Why?” in every subject area. Ask them to play with possibilities and tease out consequences. Look at the ordinary and imagine the extraordinary. Allow students to think (and play) on a large scale. Help them try out new viewpoints and think in new contexts.

- **Make the connections.** The greatest inventions and discoveries often occur when someone makes a new connection between different worlds or ideas. Ask students to relate school studies to their own feelings, opinions, experiences, ideas and situations. Challenge students to connect the past and present to the future. Help them visualize themselves (and practice) creating a better future.

- **Think about thinking.** Creativity is enhanced when students have opportunities to think about their own creative process, decision making, problem solving and ways of working. At the end of a unit of study, ask them not only to reflect on what they have learned, but also what they have learned about themselves as thinkers.

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