Why creativity should be central to a teacher's toolkit?

Many early years teachers tell us of their amazing classroom spaces, which are often significantly different from a primary or secondary classroom. In these spaces, exploration and play are key principles because it is through play that we learn about our surroundings.

Unfortunately, the creativity that's found there is later eschewed and replaced by 'serious learning', possibly as a result of more rigorous terminal assessment and the need to prepare learners so they achieve academic success in formal assessment.

However, given the desperate need of industry, governments and research departments for divergent thinkers to solve global problems 'creativity' should be one of the top 10 skills for school leavers as the World Economic Forum (2016) points out.

As Harris (2014) states "developing creativity in 21st century learners is vital", because the world needs knowledgeable, confident and successful young people who can think beyond current parameters. Only then will we be able to design the energy-efficient homes that we need, develop new medications, find cures for diseases, create the next level of the internet, and ensure we live sustainably and in ways that enable us to help save the planet for future generations by meeting UNESCO's Global Goals for 2030.

According to Sir Ken Robinson (2009), "creativity is as important as literacy' and just like any skill, it must be exercised, practised, developed and honed.

So, if we are to find solutions that haven't yet been thought then we need learners to be increasingly creative, which means challenging them at every opportunity whether they are writing poetry, music and prose, designing graphics or clothing, or developing lines of computer code.

That requires making creativity a regular feature of the classroom which is then interwoven through everything giving learners the chance to synthesise knowledge and apply it in different ways.

By doing this, students will forge powerful links between prior and new knowledge, skills and understanding which in turn will develop their independence and boost their confidence and self-esteem by encouraging the self-expression that produces unique solutions to set tasks.

Remember, creativity is all about inventing, experimenting, growing, risk-taking, breaking rules, making mistakes and having fun, all for the love of learning. Creativity promotes curiosity, banishes passivity, improves engagement and increases productivity as well as deepening knowledge and comprehension.

When seeking to introduce creativity into your classroom consider following Lucas' model of the five creative dispositions (2013).

1. **Curiosity and inquisitiveness** – encourage learners to pursue a range of interesting and worthwhile questions.
2. **Play and manipulation** – allow learners to break apart, discover and synthesise ideas and thoughts so as to stimulate fresh responses and new learning.
3. **Persistence and resilience** – encourage learners to 'stick at it' in your classroom no matter how challenging a task may seem by promoting risk-taking and divergent thinking.
4. **Discipline** – keep learners focused on overcoming challenges by encouraging reasonable risk-taking and the development of innovative strategies and techniques to evaluate and refine work.
5. **Collaboration** – let learners work together. Collaboration deepens knowledge, improves oracy and discussion techniques as well as boosting self-esteem and confidence.

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Five more fantastic ideas for teachers to try

Find a piece of music that represents your lesson topic then play this at the start and encourage learners to listen. Provoke thought by asking them to relate what they hear to the lesson objective, specific outcomes, the topic or prior learning.

Collect images of people, historical items, scenery and nature, then ask learners to find the link between them. Use closeups where you can see lots of detail as well as full-size images to promote further thought and discussion as to what the link might be. You can use this idea at any stage and for any subject.

Represent an idea or concept through poetry, music, drama, dance or song. Again, you can do this for any subject, though you may want to drop certain aspects if they are already covered. So use drama, rather song, in a music lesson.

Model it. Encourage learners to literally create a model from found resources that represents their thinking and understanding. You could impose a spending limit or get them to upcycle items to focus their efforts.

Use 30 Circles. This can be used to recall knowledge, extrapolate ideas or just to see how creative learners can be. Hand out the #UKEDChat 30 circles sheet (https://ukedchat.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/30circlesPDF.pdf) then present a topic and ask students to fill each circle as creatively as possible without repeating themselves. This produces some fantastic results that are often works of literary or visual art.

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Watch out for...

- Thinking that creativity is just for creative subjects or what are traditionally regarded as 'expressive arts'. Aspects of creativity can be harnessed in every classroom and every subject.

- Not allowing learners enough thinking or planning time to be creative. So, set up tasks carefully as some learners will feel they need to be told what to do and will require your support and encouragement to arrive at a solution themselves.

- Not offering up sufficient ideas to get learners going but expecting them to 'just do it'.

- Destroying creative momentum by belittling a task through the use of negative language (verbal or non-verbal) about it.

Further reading

https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/the-10-skills-you-need-to-thrive-in-the-fourth-industrial-revolution/

https://www.creativitycultureeducation.org/publication/creative-partnerships-kulturskolen-as-evaluation-report/

https://theconversation.com/what-creativity-really-is-and-why-schools-need-it-81889

Harris, A. (2014). The creative turn: Toward a new aesthetic imaginary. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301219732_The_Creative_Turn_Toward_a_new_aesthetic_imaginary

Lucas, B., Claxton, G., & Spencer, E. (2013). Progression in student creativity in school: First steps towards new forms of formative assessments. OECD Education Working Papers.
http://www.oecdilibrary.org/education/progression-in-student-creativity-inschool_5k4dp59msdwk-en

https://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity?language=en

https://chartered.college/event/creative-spark

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Four steps to success:

1 Consult

Only by fully understanding a school can you properly evaluate and determine its unique set of needs. It is our deep consultation process that enables us to deliver solutions that focus consistently and effectively on enabling pupils to achieve their full potential.

2 Tailor

Because all schools are different, a 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate, which is why each of our programmes can be personalised to fit your school's exact requirements and objectives.

3 Train

Experienced expert consultants assigned to deliver bespoke programmes with carefully devised timetables that allocate training over an agreed period.

4 Reflect

To ensure that learning is fully embedded, we provide follow-up material that enable on-going exploration of subjects beyond the initial training days along with guidance and tools you need to assess the impact of the training.

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