

Creativity for Teachers

Part III: Tips on Creative Teaching & Teaching for Creativity by Paul K. Fox printed in *PMEA News* Page 1 of 5

Warm-up

“Creative thinking” riddle of the month:

An ordinary American citizen, with no passport, visits over thirty foreign countries in one day. He is welcomed in each country, and leaves of his own accord. How is this possible? (Answer printed at the bottom on this article.)

The final segment of this three-part series for all educators addresses many of the “how-to” aspects of using imaginative approaches to make learning more interesting and effective (teaching creatively) and strategies of teaching that are intended to develop students’ creative thinking or behavior (teaching for creativity).

25 Ways to Develop Creativity

Probably one of the best resources I found in my research on creativity is the book *How to Develop Student Creativity* by Robert J. Sternberg and Wendy M. Williams (ASCD 1996). Sternberg and Williams provide a detailed guide with personal experiences on instructional techniques in creativity, including how to choose creative environments, expose students to creative role models, identify and surmount obstacles to creativity, direct students to question assumptions, generate new ideas, and promote self-responsibility.

Sternberg and Williams refer to “the investment theory of creativity,” which asserts that “creative thinkers are like good investors – they buy low and sell high. Whereas investors do so in the world of finance, creative people do so in the world of ideas by taking a unique, typically undervalued idea, and convincing other people of its worth.”

Their 25 tips “in a nutshell” are:

1. Modeling Creativity
2. Building Self-Efficacy
3. Questioning Assumptions
4. Defining and Redefining Problems
5. Encouraging Idea Generation
6. Cross-Fertilizing Ideas
7. Allowing Time for Creative Thinking
8. Instructing and Assessing Creativity
9. Rewarding Creative Ideas and Products
10. Encouraging Sensible Risks
11. Tolerating Ambiguity
12. Allowing Mistakes
13. Identifying and Surmounting Obstacles
14. Teaching Self-Responsibility
15. Promoting Self-Regulation
16. Delaying Gratification
17. Using Profiles of Creative People
18. Encouraging Creative Collaboration
19. Imagining Other Viewpoints
20. Recognizing Environmental Fit
21. Finding Excitement
22. Seeking Stimulating Environments

Paul K. Fox
1564 Hastings Mill Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15241
(412) 854-3459 or (412) 596-7937
paulkfox.usc@gmail.com



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- 23. Playing to Strengths
- 24. Growing Creatively
- 25. Proselytizing for Creativity

Hands-on Ideas for Building Creative Learning

In *Teaching Creatively and Teaching for Creativity*, presented by the British Council (Eltec/Jordan), United Kingdom's international organization for cultural relations and educational opportunities, the task for teaching "for creativity" is defined as:

- *Encouraging* – Highly creative people are driven by strong belief in their abilities and a positive self-image.
- *Identifying* – Creative achievement is driven by "a person's love of a particular instrument, for the feel of the material, and for the excitement of a style of work that catch the imagination." We must help students find their creative strengths
- *Fostering* – "Creativity draws from many ordinary abilities and skills rather than one special gift or talent." Therefore, "the development of many common capacities and sensitivities can help to foster creativity."

"Creativity itself is a mode of learning," a combination of three features:

1. *It involves a thoughtful playfulness – learning through experimental 'play.' It is serious play conjuring up, exploring and developing possibilities and then critically evaluating and testing them.*
2. *It involves a special flexibility in which there may be a conscious attempt to challenge the assumptions and preconceptions of the self – an unusual activity in which there is an active effort to unlearn in order to learn afresh.*
3. *This process is driven by the find, introduce, construct or reconstruct something new. It seeks actively to expand the possibilities of any situation. In this sense the learning of creative thoughts is not neutral; it has a bias towards the innovative.*

The British Council proposes many tips for building creative learning:

- Start simply, and build progressively.
- Find easy ways in to creative learning. Start with the classroom environment. Move on to how pupils and staff use speech and questions. Keep it manageable, keep the focus tight. Show and share tangible changes. This will develop confidence to go further.
- Be a 'creative advocate.' Create a presentation or materials that you can use both within your school to convince colleagues and out of school. This will help to build a whole-school ethos around creativity.
- Focus on one area at a time, for example, in developing more creative learning in math, and use this to raise awareness and encourage staff to think about applications in other subject areas and spaces in the school.
- Organize an enquiring minds-type project where pupils have an opportunity to negotiate the aim of the project and are instrumental in designing how it is carried out (resource: www.enquiringminds.org.uk).
- Set-up an inventor's club after school.
- Transform one small area in the school as a space designed for creativity and imagination.
- Make sure that the pupils have some ownership of the project.

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Return to the “Best of Bonk”

More hands-on tools and ideas can be found at the aforementioned website of Indiana University of Bloomington Professor Dr. Curtis Bonk’s (but, let me warn you, you can truly get lost perusing all of his class materials for the course *Instructional Strategies for Thinking, Collaboration, and Motivation*): http://www.indiana.edu/~bobweb/r546/modules/creativity/bob_handouts.html. He is very generous in sharing his materials. It is worth exploring his class notes and lecture presentations (PowerPoint) posted at the “Best of Bonk” website.

Here are a few of my favorite excerpts from his handouts:

Ten+ Creative Thinking Ideas

1. Brainstorming: More ideas/wilder the better, no evaluation, combo to improve (examples – How to study better? How to raise test scores? What are better teaching techniques)
2. Reverse Brainstorming (examples – How to study worse? How to lower test scores? What are worst teaching techniques)
3. Creative Writing and Story Telling (examples – object obituaries, tell a tall tale, cartoons, jokes/quips, story starters, wrap-a-round’s, forced responses, newsletters, object talking, etc.)
4. Idea-Spurring Questions, Checklists, or Cards (e.g., Osborn’s SCAMPER method): How do we substitute, combine, adapt, modify/max-min put to other uses, eliminate, reverse/rearrange?
5. Six hats (wear different color hats for different types of thinking)
6. Free Writing/Wet Inking (write without lifting pen for 3-5 minutes on, e.g., best teacher ever had)
7. Checkerboarding, Attribute Listing, Morphological Synthesis (analyze or combine 2 key variables/components in grid/matrix; e.g., CT & CR)
8. Analogies, Metaphorical Thinking, Synectics, or Forced Associations (This school is like a ____; An good presenter is like a ____?)
9. Semantic Webbing/Chaining/Linking/Mapping of Ideas, Free Association Activities (What is a greenhouse effect? What is a good curriculum? What is effective teaching?)
10. Simulations and Role Plays (Computer simulations, act out plays or literature, simulated games or performance)
11. Other techniques
 - The Second Best Answer, What else, > 1 Right Answer (What else applies)
 - Elaboration/Explanation (Another reason is)
 - Diaries, Personal Journals (When in the field, I want to jot down...)
 - Just Suppose/What If Exercises (What if we had cooperative exams?)
 - Creative Dramatics/Improvisation (imagine hearing, seeing, feeling)

Bonk provides an exhaustive set of creative thinking techniques, including activities in visual thinking, idea listing, writing, group interactions, and process-product oriented.

More Resources

Too comprehensive to list here, but an excellent summary, the *TeachThought* “101 Ways for Teachers To Be More Creative” at <http://www.teachthought.com/teaching/101-ways-for-teachers-to-be-more-creative>, posts ideas for finding creative inspiration, capitalizing on the creative spark, inspiring students, the creative classroom, creative activities, sharing and collaborating, and educate yourself.

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Check out the Iowa State University Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching website section entitled “Techniques for Creative Teaching” at <http://www.celt.iastate.edu/creativity/techniques.html>!

On the *Friendship Circle* blog, “How to Teach Creative Thinking to Concrete Thinkers” shares ten ideas from a parent’s perspective at <http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2013/05/02/how-to-teach-creative-thinking-to-concrete-thinkers>.

Numerous music education specific sources are available. One of my favorites, *Teaching Music Creatively* by Pam Burnard and Regina Murphy (Routledge 2013), offers a comprehensive approach in the delivery of a creative music curriculum. Key topics included:

- Creative teaching, and what it means to teach creatively;
- Composition, listening and notation;
- Spontaneous music-making;
- Group music and performance;
- The use of multimedia;
- Integration of music into the wider curriculum;
- Musical play;
- Cultural diversity;
- Assessment and planning.

Finally, from my favorite issue of the ASCD *Educational Leadership*, February 2013 “Creativity Now,” the starting point for much of the research for this three-part series, I recommend reading Danah Henriksen and Punya Mishra’s article “Learning from Creative Teachers,” who provide insight and practical applications from “outstanding teachers who share how they teach creatively in an age of scripted lessons and accountability.” You can find the text online at (<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/feb13/vol70/num05/Learning-from-Creative-Teachers.aspx>). They discuss these areas:

1. Connect Your Interests with Your Teaching
2. Link Lessons to Real-World Learning
3. Cultivate a Creative Mind-Set
4. Value Collaboration
5. Take Intellectual Risks

Arrival of the New National Music Standards!

No discussion on creativity would be complete without embracing our national music standards. The National Coalition for Core Arts Standards launched the Core Arts Standards on June 4, 2014 after extensive public review. You are urged to go to their new “official” website <http://www.nationalartsstandards.org/> (as of July 2014, they were transferring material from their former website <http://nccas.wikispaces.com/>, which currently retains much of their research and development documentation). The National Core Arts Standards are organized into four processes – *Creating, Performing/Presenting/Producing, Responding,* and *Connecting* – in order to develop a philosophical foundation and lifelong goals towards artistic literacy. The three common anchor standards include the following.

Students will:

1. Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.
2. Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.
3. Refine and complete artistic work.

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Are we intentionally doing these in our music classrooms?

Creativity vs. the Common Core? and Final Thoughts for the Future

Creativity is one of the 21st Century learning skills, and many educational visionaries declare it to be a one of the most essential for the students' future success in career and personal life. Bloom's Taxonomy and Depth of Knowledge charts put **creating** at the top level of higher-order thinking. In an article "Creativity on the Brink" (2013), Alane Starko connects creativity to deep understanding: "If we want students to master the content, they must do something with it beyond simple repetition. They must use it in meaningful ways and make it their own." *Catapult Learning* sums this up best (see <http://www.catapultlearning.com/creativity-and-the-common-core/>). "As teachers transition towards the Common Core Standards, they are certainly being asked to attend to each of the aspects expressed through creativity: increased rigor and higher-order thinking, the application and transfer of knowledge, and the ability to communicate effectively through 21st century technology tools."

Our music technology colleague Jim Frankel reminds us to define our "personal mission" in music education, to realize how important it is to remain "student-centered," and that our kids "want to **create** content in the same medium in which they consume it."

He adds, we should be focused on students "wanting to make 'cool' music/projects/websites/whatever."

What better way to teach creatively and "teach for creativity" than to use *the magic of music*?

Answer to the creative thinking riddle: The man is a mail courier who delivers packages to 30 foreign embassies in the United States. The land of an embassy belongs to that country of that embassy. [Attributed to *Visual Thinking Puzzles* by Michael A. DiSpezio (Sterling 1988)]

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paulfox.usc@gmail.com

