

insights

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Fostering Creativity in Students

Principle 8 of the *Top 20 Principles From Psychology For PreK–12 Teaching and Learning*, published by the American Psychological Association in 2015, states that “Student Creativity Can Be Fostered”. But why should educators and parents care about fostering creativity in children?

A good deal of the early research on creativity focused on the achievements of extraordinary people, especially those with artistic talents like Mozart and Leonardo da Vinci. But it has become increasingly clear in our rapidly changing world that there is a critical need for individuals who can approach

21st century problems with imagination and innovation. In recent years, researchers have embraced the idea that creativity is not just about exceptional people generating big ideas, but is also about ordinary people finding novel solutions to problems of everyday life.

In his recent TED Talk, “The Failure of Success”, Dr. George Land explains that his research

“Imagination is more important than knowledge”

– Albert Einstein

on creativity began in the 1960’s when he was approached by NASA to develop a test to identify highly creative individuals to work on its problem-solving teams. The test was so effective at predicting creativity that Dr. Land decided to use it to investigate whether creativity was an inherited or a learned characteristic. He began his landmark 1968 study by testing 1600 five-year-olds, who he later tested again at 5-year intervals. He found that 98% of his 5 year old subjects tested at the creative genius level. By age 10, only 30% of the same youngsters qualified as creative geniuses, and by age 15, that percentage dropped to 12%. Even more astounding, only 2% of 280,000 adults who were tested qualified as a creative genius.

Dr. Land explains that our current educational model was developed during the Industrial Revolution when the need was to train a large workforce to carefully follow rules and instructions, rather than to innovate or generate novel solutions. He proposes that “to enter the future with hope”, our educational system needs to help individuals unlearn

non-creative thinking and behavior. He argues for an imagination-based culture that generates many possible solutions, instead of a knowledge-based culture that emphasizes replicating the “right” answer.

There are a variety of strategies for teachers looking to foster creativity:

- Dr. Land notes that we typically try to teach students both divergent and convergent thinking at the same time, but argues that we need to teach these different thinking strategies separately. Divergent thinking involves generating imaginative ideas without judgment (e.g., a typical brainstorming exercise), while convergent thinking involves critically evaluating information in order to make judgments and decisions.
- Highly creative students are often viewed as disruptive, but teachers can use these students to foster creativity in peers by allowing them to assume leadership roles for group problem-solving activities.
- Teachers can craft assignments that focus on challenging prevailing beliefs, making unusual connections, and envisioning radical alternatives, using words such as create, invent, discover, imagine if, and predict.
- Teachers can discuss with students when it is appropriate to focus on getting one right answer versus when to pursue creative approaches. ■

Reference:

TED Talk by Dr. George Land, “The Failure of Success”

American Psychological Association, Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education. (2015). *Top 20 Principles From Psychology or PreK–12 Teaching and Learning*. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/ed/schools/cpse/top-twenty-principles.pdf>.

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