

Creativity in the Classroom

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Note: This Brief was created during a workshop led by Dr. Ron Beghetto. The workshop focused on better realizing creative potential; both in teachers and with their students. Dr. Beghetto has published more than 60 scholarly articles and chapters and is considered an international expert on creativity. During the session he challenged teachers to resolve some of the tensions between teaching with and for creativity while keeping up with rigorous standards and assessment; creativity within constraints.

It seems with the national movement toward standards and accountability, creativity has been left by the wayside, but there has been a recent resurgence of interest in bringing creativity back into the classroom. However, we can't legislate the teaching of creativity. We can't deliver a *No Child Left Uncreative* mandate.

"You are probably already being creative"

Barriers to teaching with and for creativity might include, at times, administrators, parents, and even students themselves; In the classroom, a lack of resources, lack of time, and close alignment of curriculum with standards and standardized tests can present barriers. On the surface, there seems to be a fundamental conflict between our standards and assessment driven system and teaching with and for creativity. But, that isn't really the case. Creativity can live within constraints; indeed, it thrives within constraints, because that is where it is most needed. Teachers need to challenge this core assumption – about this seeming disconnect between creativity and curricular constraints.

Teachers don't need to radically change the way they are doing. Teaching with and for creativity probably means a 10% change in what you are doing, and a 90% change in the way you think; a change in the teaching mindset. We should begin by challenging our own definition of creativity.

"If you are alive you have creative potential"

Creativity lies on a continuum, from interpretive creativity (mini-c), to little creativity (little-c), to professional creativity (pro-c), to legendary creativity (big-c).

Mini-c creativity happens when someone has a creative moment, and every time it happens it leads to learning. It is a hard-to-notice

creativity, and might happen when there is a problem that needs solving, or where the answer is perhaps not apparent or singular, and it is arrived at personally. Focusing on narrow expectations when teaching leads teachers to miss out on many mini-c moments.

Little-c is everyday creativity, and likely does not get any special attention. Little-c is easily incorporated into classrooms with teaching strategies like problem based learning or Socratic seminar.

Pro-c is a level of creativity reserved for those who have gained unique insight into a particular problem or field, one typically gained though many, maybe about ten, years of experience and thought.

Legendary-, or *big-c*, refers to a person's purpose and sense of direction – and how they direct themselves toward that purpose. Big-c is widely and easily recognized and praised in public circles.

In all cases, creativity is personal and meaningful, and depends on the individual.

“Context influences our creativity”

If creativity is personal, then it is also dependent on the context surrounding the need to be creative. Teachers can build classroom environments that are encouraging, but can also, inadvertently, create those that are not.

“You can't kill creativity unless you kill the child”

Teachers probably can't kill creativity, but they can kill a child's willingness to take risks and experience creative moments.

Monitoring and surveillance leads to the feeling of being judged, that it is wrong to make mistakes, and diminishes creativity.

Comparison, competition, or expected evaluation can lead to a student feeling inadequate, and diminishes creativity.

Expected rewards can strip away intrinsic reasons to engage creatively with a task, and leads to conformity type behavior.

To encouraging creativity, teachers need to create spaces where students can believe in their own ideas. Where they feel safe to share new ideas, ones that may only be new to them, personally (mini-c). In a classroom, the creative process involves expressing original ideas and then converging based on constraints.

Mini-c can grow into little-c. It is in the small, throwaway moments (micro-moments) of everyday interactions with students where teachers need to stop and think. By cultivating an appreciation for these moments, teachers might better recognize and avoid stifling creativity.

“Find a way to be more present in your everyday life”

Teachers can miss these micro-moments for many reasons.

Our **cognitive wiring** makes us particularly efficient at blocking things out, when we feel the need to focus. This can lead to lost micro-moments.

A **lack of mindfulness**, paying attention to our surroundings because we are busy or distracted can lead to lost micro-moments.

When teachers are determined to achieve **predestined outcomes** in classrooms, for example a daily math objective, micro-moments can be lost.

“Be mindful of your discourse with students”

When teachers ask questions to which they already know the answer they communicate to students that they are interested in a single answer, and not a divergent and creative response. The stereotypical Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) in which teachers ask a question and choose single students to respond, followed closely by praise or redirection, can create a classroom dynamic in which students simply seek to provide the answer the teacher wants, and does not foster creativity. When students are not sure they are right, they stop taking risks, and will not raise their hand to offer a response.

Instead, teachers can add the idea of exploration back into their rhetoric; the idea that different students can each respond with different ideas that can be explored more deeply. Teachers can approach curricular surprises with curiosity, and encourage students to explain their reasoning for novel responses. This need not happen all the time; teachers need to build skill in knowing when to focus on students understanding them, versus knowing when to focus on understanding students. Knowing when to step in and knowing when to step out of the students' way lies at the core of teaching for creativity.