

What is creativity?

You will have your own ideas about what it is but for me creativity involves first imagining something (to cause to come into existence) and then doing something with this imagination (creating something that is new and useful to you). It's a very personal act and it gives you a sense of satisfaction and achievement when you've done it.

Creativity is difficult to define and it is rarely articulated as an explicit learning objective in the academic curriculum. In contrast, many top companies train their graduate employees in creative ways of thinking in order to sustain innovation and remain competitive.

Every HE teacher will interpret the idea of creativity in his or her own way. HE teachers think it involves:

- ❑ newness - novelty or originality for an individual or group of individuals;
- ❑ excitement - its stimulating because it is different;
- ❑ useful - it works, at least at present;
- ❑ pleasurable - gives a sense of satisfaction;
- ❑ moral - results are constructive;
- ❑ hard work - what you get out reflects what you put in.

'Creativity is the ability to look at things in different ways, to find satisfaction in making or creating something and persevering with it until the end product. It involves hard work...'

Teaching for creativity

Being creative is, for the most part, a subconscious act. HE teachers do not sit

down and think.. oh its Tuesday I'm going to be creative today! Yet **teaching is an inherently creative act.** Creativity in teaching is about using your imagination and helping students to use their imaginations to work with problems and challenging learning situations. It is about fostering intrinsic motivations for learning - something we seem to have forgotten in our over-assessed world.

We live in an infinitely complex, dynamic and unpredictable world. Although we rarely admit it, being able to work with it creatively is an essential capacity for success and for the sense of happiness that derives from being creative and successful.

How do I develop my teaching to nurture creativity?

Nurturing creativity in student learning through teaching and effective curriculum design is the central goal of the imaginative curriculum project. We are trying to *create* knowledge to help teachers develop their understanding and practice. This guide is no more than a stimulator. If you would like to know more about creativity please read the more detailed guide we have produced.

Academics feel that there are certain conditions that stimulate their creativity when they *create a course*:

- ❑ existing knowledge of the discipline;
- ❑ enthusiasm for the discipline;
- ❑ an interest in students and a concern for their learning and
- ❑ a problem or issue.

They also think creativity is associated with:

- the ability to make connections and linkages between the formerly unconnected and
- intuition - *that little imaginative spark*.

There are strong similarities between the perceptions of academics of their own creativity and what they perceive are the characteristics of creativity in students' learning.

Creativity in students' learning

While different disciplines recognise and value different forms of creativity, research studies recognise a range of intellectual attributes, attitudes and behaviours associated with creativity. DeWulf and Baillie (1999 p14-15) identify three characteristics.

The ability to visualise ideas - holistically, spatially, metaphorically and to be able to transform ideas through imaginative manipulation (complements reasoning). Flexibility, fluency and adaptability are important to the transformation of ideas.

The effective use of memory - for previously learnt knowledge and the ability to make connections and associations with and through this knowledge.

Convergent and divergent thinking - academic ways of thinking tend to value convergent ways of thinking - logic, reasoning, analysis, objectivity, judgement. Divergent thinking brings in to play the right hand brain which is associated with openness, subjectivity, feeling, intuition, emotion, sensory and imaginative processes. Convergent thinking focuses on one answer while divergent thinking produces alternative possibilities and solutions. Creativity involves both convergent thinking

(focused, analytical, judgemental and detailed thinking) and divergent thinking (diffuse, free flowing, associated, perceptual and imaginative). It involves the extended abstract (EA) outcomes of learning like hypothesising, reflecting, generating ideas, applying the known to 'far' domains, working with problems that do not have unique solutions

Creative performance also requires positive attitudes and high levels of motivation (passion) evidenced by persistence and willingness to work hard. Such attitudes derive from personal beliefs that obstacles can be overcome (self-efficacy). So learning processes to foster creativity must develop self-confidence and self-esteem, encourage risk taking in safe environments and help students to work with messy/complex and unpredictable situations where there are no right and wrong answers. Working with complexity in a self-sustained and determined way is a fact of life helping students to use their intellectual abilities in complex open-ended learning situations is a worthwhile enterprise for higher education.

Figure 1 attempts to show typical creative learning processes and the role of the teacher and students in such processes. If you would like to find out more please read the extended version of this guide.

Further reading

- Jackson N J (2002) Designing for creativity: a curriculum guide. www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre
- Dewulf S and Baillie C (1999) CASE Creativity in Art Science and Engineering: How to Foster Creativity. Department for Education and Employment. (Republished in 2002 as part of the Imaginative Curriculum Project).

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Figure 1 Aspects of the teaching system (what the teacher does) and the learning system (what the student does) at each of the typical stages of a creative learning process. The image should be used heuristically to give a sense of direction and vision rather than a checklist.


