How to Develop Student Creativity
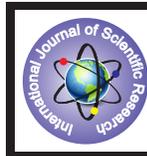
Technology & Innovation

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Introduction: Theory of Creativity

A"Alice is brilliant, but she doesn't have a drop of creative talent."

"Barbara is wonderfully creative, but she does poorly on standardized tests."

"Carlos always has interesting approaches to problems, but he just doesn't fit into the traditional school environment."

How many times have we, as teachers, administrators, researchers, or parents, heard remarks like these? And how many times have we concluded that abilities are etched in stone, inexplicable, and unchangeable? You can learn and teach creative thinking by using the 25 strategies that we describe in this book. Use these strategies to develop creativity in yourself, in your students, and in your colleagues and staff members. Our strategies are based on the investment theory, a psychological theory of creativity, but any one strategy is consistent with many other theories. Read about other views of creativity to see how different views lead to similar recommendations for developing creativity.

Buying Low and Selling High

The investment theory of creativity (Sternberg and Lubart 1995) 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. Creative people generate ideas that are like undervalued stocks (stocks with a low price-to-earning ratio), and both are generally rejected by the public. When creative ideas are proposed, they are often viewed as bizarre, useless, and even foolish, and are summarily rejected, and the person proposing them regarded with suspicion and perhaps even disdain and derision.

Creative ideas are both novel and valuable. Why, then, are they rejected? Because the creative innovator stands up to vested interests and defies the crowd and its interests. The crowd does not maliciously or willfully reject creative notions; rather it does not realize, and often does not want to realize, that the proposed idea represents a valid and superior way of thinking. The crowd generally perceives opposition to the status quo as annoying, offensive, and reason enough to ignore innovative ideas.

Evidence abounds that creative ideas are rejected (Sternberg and Lubart 1995). Initial reviews of major works of literature and art are often negative. Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* received negative reviews when it was first published, as did Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*. The first exhibition in Munich of the Norwegian painter, Edvard Munch, opened and closed the same day because of the strong negative response from the critics. Some of the greatest scientific papers are rejected by not one but several journals before being published. John Garcia, a distinguished biopsychologist, was summarily denounced when he first proposed that classical conditioning could be produced in a single trial of learning (Garcia and Koelling 1966).

From the investment view, then, the creative person buys low by presenting a unique idea and attempts to convince other people of its value. After convincing others that the idea is worthy, which increases the perceived value of the investment, the creative person sells high by leaving the idea to others and moving to another idea. Although people typically want others to love their ideas, immediate universal applause for an idea usually indicates that it is not particularly creative.

Foster creativity by buying low and selling high in the world of ideas—defy the crowd. Creativity is as much an attitude toward life as a matter of ability. We routinely witness creativity in young children, but it is hard to find in older children and adults because their creative potential has been suppressed by a society that encourages intellectual conformity. We begin to suppress children's natural creativity when we expect them to color within the lines in their coloring books.

Balancing Analytic, Synthetic, and Practical Abilities

Creative work requires applying and balancing three abilities that can all be developed (Sternberg 1985, 1988b; Sternberg and Lubart 1995).

- **Synthetic ability** is what we typically think of as creativity. It is the ability to generate novel and interesting ideas. Often the person we call creative is a particularly good synthetic thinker who makes connections between things that other people don't recognize spontaneously.
- **Analytic ability** is typically considered to be critical thinking ability. A person with this skill analyzes and evaluates ideas. Everyone, even the most creative person you know, has better and worse ideas. Without well-developed analytic ability, the creative thinker is as likely to pursue bad ideas as to pursue good ones. The creative individual uses analytic ability to work out the implications of a creative idea and to test it.
- **Practical ability** is the ability to translate theory into practice and abstract ideas into practical accomplishments. An implication of the investment theory of creativity is that good ideas do not sell themselves. The creative person uses practical ability to convince other people that an idea is worthy. For example, every organization has a set of ideas that dictate how things, or at least some things, should be done. To propose a new procedure you must sell it by convincing others that it is better than the old one. Practical ability is also used to recognize ideas that have a potential audience.

Creativity requires a balance among synthetic, analytic, and practical abilities. The person who is only synthetic may come up with innovative ideas, but cannot recognize or sell them. The person who is only analytic may be an excellent critic of other people's ideas, but is not likely to generate creative ideas. The person who is only practical may be an excellent salesperson, but is as likely to sell ideas or products of little or no value as to sell genuinely creative ideas.

Encourage and develop creativity by teaching students to find a balance among synthetic, analytic, and practical thinking. A creative attitude is at least as important as creative-thinking skills (Schank 1988)—just ask a teacher for a self-description. I've never heard a teacher self-described as a suppressor of creativity. The majority of teachers want to encourage creativity in their students, but they are not sure how to do so. Those teachers and you can use the 25 strategies presented in this book to develop creativity in yourselves, your students, and others around you.

Using just a few of our 25 strategies based on the investment theory of creativity (Sternberg and Lubart 1995) can produce results in yourself as well as in others. Although we present the strategies in terms of teachers and students, they apply equally to administrators working with teachers, parents working with children, or people trying to develop their own creativity. The strategies are easy to use and are outlined it.

Ways to Develop Creativity
The Prerequisites
1. Modeling Creativity
2. Building Self-Efficacy]

Basic Techniques
1. Questioning Assumptions
2. Defining and Redefining Problems
3. Encouraging Idea Generation
4. Cross-Fertilizing Ideas

Tips for Teaching
1. Allowing Time for Creative Thinking
2. Instructing and Assessing Creativity
3. Rewarding Creative Ideas and Products

Avoid Roadblocks
1. Encouraging Sensible Risks
2. Tolerating Ambiguity
3. Allowing Mistakes
Identifying and Surmounting Obstacles Add Complex Techniques
1. Teaching Self-Responsibility
2. Promoting Self-Regulation
3. Delaying Gratification

Use Role Models
1. Using Profiles of Creative People
2. Encouraging Creative Collaboration
3. Imagining Other Viewpoints

Explore The Environment
1. Recognizing Environmental Fit
2. Finding Excitement
3. Seeking Stimulating Environments
4. Playing to Strengths

The Long-Term Perspective
1. Growing Creatively

2. Proselytizing for Creativity

REFERENCE

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