FOSTERING CREATIVITY IN OUR CLASSROOMS

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‘Creativity is as important as literacy’ — Sir Ken Robinson (2006)

The path to the creative society of the future goes straight through the classroom. When students have been taught the essential skills and knowledge of each subject they develop a deeper understanding of the material and are able to go beyond existing knowledge and transfer this knowledge to new situations. All of the research demonstrates that creativity only happens with sustained hard work, skill, and the confidence needed to take risks.

According to Collard (2012), ‘Creative skills aren’t just about good ideas, they are about having the skills to make good ideas happen.’

Rufus Black (2012 IBSC) challenges the notion that creativity is just about divergent thinking and originality. He promulgates that creativity flourishes when there is a specific goal, with clear guidelines, action-oriented, relevant and time-bound tasks.

Students develop capability in critical and creative thinking as they learn to:
- generate and evaluate knowledge
- clarify concepts and ideas
- seek possibilities
- consider alternatives
- solve problems
- use reason, logic, resourcefulness, imagination and innovation.

Research shows that we can foster creativity, and ensure that our students move towards achieving academic excellence through the following:

1. Ensuring that we have taught explicitly the essential skills and knowledge of our subjects.
2. Teaching our students how to communicate fluently and confidently.
3. Using strategic questioning that uncovers the learning, such as the ‘What if...?’ and ‘How?’ questions that stretch understanding. The Williams’ model and Socratic questioning are excellent tools for designing questions that stretch the learning.
5. Connecting our students globally to students and experts in other places. Singh (2010) asserts that culture is an excellent vehicle for inspiring creative thinking and collaborative problem solving. When students share ideas and strategies with students from other countries they are encouraged to think divergently and develop innovative approaches.
6. Enabling our students to have a choice in what they learn and how they demonstrate the learning.
7. Balancing traditional and authentic assessment. Torrance promulgates that when learning is connected to the real world this will ‘Create the desire to know’.
8. Making meaningful connections between disciplines through integrated assessment.

Creativity cannot be taught or measured but as teachers of English we can foster the skills, knowledge and understanding that enable our students become confident, creative individuals who are able to take risks. Torrance’s extensive research into creativity supports this assertion.

Uncovering the learning

To foster creativity and academic excellence when programming remember the following:

a. Adopt a conceptual approach to programming. To ascertain the concept/s and the content of the programs ask the following questions:
   - What do my students need to learn?
   - Why does it matter?
   - What do they already know?
   - How will they demonstrate learning?
   - How will they get there?
How can they use technology to get there?
How well do I expect them to do it?
b. Build the field of learning by backward mapping.
c. Ensure that the essential skills and deep knowledge are identified and teach explicitly the literacy demands.
d. Integrate assessment for, of and as learning.

The Classroom Environment

Csikszentmihalyi (1996) stated that creativity flourishes in a ‘congenial environment’. Creative thinking needs to be shared and validated by others in a socially supportive atmosphere where the teacher has high expectations of all students and provides learning opportunities that build confidence and support risk-taking. According to Raffini (1993) ‘Students internalise the belief teachers have about their ability; they rise and fall to the level of expectation. When teachers believe in students, students believe in themselves.’ Therefore, a positive, supportive and stimulating environment creates a culture of academic excellence. This environment can be further enriched through strategic questioning.

Systematic Teaching

• Have a clear understanding of the skills and knowledge that need to be taught.
• Plan an appropriate sequence of activities.
• Use a repertoire of teaching strategies to cater for and engage all students.
• Break learning into meaningful chunks or scaffold the learning.
• Identify the literacy demands of the content and the tasks.
• Monitor students’ progress.

Enriching Creativity and Learning Outcomes through Strategic Questioning

‘If children aren’t asking questions, they’re being spoon-fed. That might be effective in terms of getting results, but it won’t turn out curious, flexible learners suited to the 21st century’ (Guy Claxton, 2006, ‘Expanding the capacity to learn: A new end for education’).

Questions not answers have the power to enrich the learning of our students. Just as we plan our teaching programs, we should be designing the questions we need to ask in our classrooms. When you plan your lessons, consider using a range of approaches and models to create meaningful questions, such as:

• Langford’s five whys — http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5_Whys
• Scamper – https://www.ocps.net/cs/services/cs/currrareas/read/IR/bestpractices/SZ/SCAMPER_RSM.pdf
• Starbursting – http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newCT_91.htm

Our students must be encouraged to generate the questions. The quality of their questions reveals the depth of their understanding. Get your students to use the above models to design their own questions. Students need to take responsibility for their own learning. One way to do this is by flipping the learning. Instead of providing content and teacher generated questions, the students could be provided with a short teaching videos or links to a range of relevant sites, and asked to create questions that reflect what they need to know. An entire lesson could be spent on questions that are answered by the teacher and the students.

Assessment of, for and as Learning

“The quality of teaching and learning provision are by far the most salient influences on students’ cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes of schooling – regardless of their gender or backgrounds” (Rowe, 2003).
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If assessment is to foster creativity and academic excellence it needs to be designed deliberately to inform the learning and the design and direction of teaching, and be engaging, challenging and student-centred. Assessment needs to take the following forms:

- **Pre-assessment**: This can be informal but it is important as it informs teachers what the students know so that teaching and learning can be differentiated to suit the learning needs of the students.

- **Summative assessment**: Assessment of learning is used to provide a snapshot of what the students know at a key point in time such as half way through or at the end of a unit of work. It enables teachers to monitor and evaluate student progress, and students to demonstrate their understanding and creativity.

- **Formative assessment**: Assessment for learning is ongoing and builds the depth of students’ learning and provides valuable information to students about what they can do and what they need to do to improve their learning outcomes. It enables students to gain the confidence and courage to be creative.

- **Self and peer assessment**: Assessment as learning occurs when students are critically evaluating and assessing their own and others’ learning. The skills and understanding needed for self-assessment must be explicitly taught. Reflection and evaluation are the key to fostering creativity and academic excellence.

As much as possible plan for authentic assessment that is connected to the real world and requires students to be creators and producers! When appropriate have students present or design their work for real audiences.

The subject of English provides rich, fertile ground for fostering creativity through assessment. Our students can create multimodal texts, and remix and transform literature to create their own original texts.

**Global Connections**

When students share ideas and strategies with students from other countries they are encouraged to think divergently and develop innovative approaches. Singh (2010) asserts that culture is an excellent vehicle for inspiring creative thinking and collaborative problem solving.

- Flat Classrooms – http://www.flatclassroomproject.org/
- iLearn – http://media.ianearn.org/home
- Global School Net: Cyberfair and Doors to Diplomacy – http://www.globalschoolnet.org/
- Skype in the Classroom http://education.skype.com/
- Knox Grammar School Global writing project: WeWrite2connect

**Examples of creative tasks**

**The Writing Challenge**

In Australia, we have beautiful beaches. This is a photograph of Lennox Head on the Far North Coast of New South Wales that is famous for its great surfing spots, green valleys and rich red volcanic soil.

Each one of you lives in a unique place that is characterised by its geography, history, pastimes, culture, politics and people. Your challenge is to create an imaginative piece of writing in a form of your choice that is centred on something that is unique about your place.

You could write a poem that celebrates local food, or a short piece of prose that focuses on a pastime that is unique to your place such as surfing, or a short narrative about an important historical moment that has shaped your place.
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To add to the challenge your imaginative piece must feature the following:

- At least one metaphor – 1 mark
- At least two examples of alliteration and onomatopoeia – 2 marks
- A main colour that reflects your place. This colour should be used as a motif that threads your piece together. E.g. Blue for Australia’s oceans or red for its deserts – 3 marks.

Marking Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Skilful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploration of the uniqueness of place</td>
<td>1–2</td>
<td>3–4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging imaginative writing</td>
<td>1–2</td>
<td>3–4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control of language and structure appropriate to audience, purpose and selected form</td>
<td>1–2</td>
<td>3–4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Additional challenge:</td>
<td>1–2</td>
<td>3–4</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Metaphor</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Alliteration and onomatopoeia</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Colour as a motif</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
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To see a World in a Grain of Sand...

The English poet William Blake penned a beautiful poem ‘Auguries of Innocence’ about the wonder and beauty of the world, and how it can be appreciated on a micro-level:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.

American poet Emily Dickinson who delighted in the beauty of nature wrote, ‘Bring me the sunset in a cup.’ Japanese poets mastered the art of precision and fusion when they crafted haikus that captured a single moment in 17 syllables. Matsuo Basho was one of Japan’s most famous haiku composers. Normally the first line is 5 syllables, the second line 7 syllables and the last line 5 syllables. Basho regularly broke this rule and focused more on the image and the sound.

A writer is an observer of life with an eye for detail. They notice the little things in life like the dewdrops on a petal or a spider dancing in the breeze on a silvery web.

Your challenge is to choose an object and use it as a trigger for an imaginative piece of writing that features one or more haikus. Your object could be a shell, a locket, a teddy bear, bird, the moon, a photograph, a famous painting...the possibilities are endless. The haiku must focus on the object and reveal something about its appearance or how you feel about it. You could begin with a haiku and end with a haiku. The second haiku could further your message or convey a special insight or epiphany into the importance of the object to you or others.

Portrait of Matsuo Basho by Hokusai. Source: Wikimedia Commons
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Marking Criteria

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<th>Skilful</th>
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<td>Original use of an object as a trigger for the writing</td>
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<td>3-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engaging imaginative writing</td>
<td>1-2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control of language and structure appropriate to audience, purpose and selected form</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meaningful use of haiku</td>
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Further Resources

The following sites will enable the faculty to access current research, ideas and strategies:

- Action-learning Wikispace: http://actionlearning-knox.wikispaces.com/Creativity - research papers and practical ideas, such as how to implement strategic questioning.
- UNSW ICT wikispace: http://unswict.wikispaces.com/Module+E+Ways+Students+can+use+Technology+to+Create – a site for English method students but there are a plethora of ideas for all teachers.
- NY Times; Building a Better Teacher: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/07/magazine/07Teachers-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

Further Reading


Endnotes