

## CREATIVITY IN (AND OUT OF) THE CLASSROOM

Creativity seems to be at the forefront of many educational initiatives and discussions about the essential skills required for the future. While some may consider creativity intangible and mysterious, reserved only for certain artistically inclined people, more and more evidence points to creativity being an innately human endeavor, one that can be observed, nurtured, and developed. In our increasingly complex and intertwined twenty-first-century world, creative thinking regularly comes up as a prerequisite to success—how often do we hear the phrase “think outside of the box”? As educators, it is our responsibility to deliver instruction that is relevant for twenty-first-century citizens, and creativity is front and center.

### DEFINING CREATIVITY

Experts in various fields have attempted to capture the essence of creativity and creative thinking. Educators associate the feeling of the creative act with problem solving and expressive qualities, as Dr. Betty Edwards suggests:

Creativity is the ability to find new solutions to a problem, or new modes of expression; thus it brings into existence something *new to the individual* and to the culture.  
(Emphasis added)

Psychology professor and writer Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes the profound human need for the creative process. He states, “First, most of the things that are interesting, important and human are the results of creativity.” He also discusses the intense physical enjoyment of the creative process:

...creativity is so fascinating...when we are involved in it, we feel that we are living more fully than during the rest of life. The excitement of the artist at the easel or the scientist in the lab comes close to the ideal fulfillment we all hope to get from life, and so rarely do.

The new modes of expression to which these thinkers allude are embodied in the work of the artists included in this packet. Pablo Picasso and Frida Kahlo mastered

traditional forms and then reinvented them to find new ways of expressing grief, Vija Celmins made the familiar seem strange, and Edgar Degas and Utagawa Hiroshige experimented with composition across different mediums. All of these artists were immersed in their domain of knowledge, the visual arts, gaining the language and skills with which to experiment in order to create challenging new art.

### THE CREATIVE PROCESS

According to Csikszentmihalyi, there are five stages to the creative process. The first is *identification* of a problem that needs to be solved. This problem usually comes from personal experience (you personally experience a problem or situation that you feel needs to be addressed), the requirements of your area of expertise (you encounter something within that domain that you feel needs to be solved), or social pressures (society has a problem that needs to be solved).

Once you have identified the problem, the next step is the *incubation* period. Your mind thinks of ways to solve the problem, either consciously or unconsciously. This incubation period can take minutes or years, as in the case of Hiroshige, whose greatest innovation came at the end of his nearly fifty-year career. Incubation leads to the third step, a unique *insight* into the problem—the “aha! moment” when you come up with a potential creative solution to the problem. The next step is *evaluation*—is this insight worth pursuing? The final step is *elaboration*; the hardest and longest step in the creative process requires transforming thought or insight into being. As Edison noted, creativity is 1 percent inspiration, 99 percent perspiration.

As the creative process is better understood, even the widely used teaching and assessment tool Bloom’s Taxonomy has been revised. During the 1990s, a group of cognitive psychologists led by Lorin Anderson (a former student of Benjamin Bloom) updated the taxonomy to reflect its relevance to twenty-first-century learning. In the updated taxonomy, students reach the pinnacle by demonstrating their ability to “create”—to use their learning to make something of *their own individual design*.

## BLOOM'S REVISED TAXONOMY



### SO WHAT CAN YOU DO TO FOSTER CREATIVITY?

**PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR MASTERY** Teachers can provide rich and stimulating experiences for students. Exposure to the arts, the social sciences, mathematics, literature, and scientific inquiry allows students the opportunity to develop an interest in any of these areas, an interest that should be stimulated and nurtured. Once students have expressed an interest, teachers should actively teach students the critical analytical or technical skills necessary to become competent in that domain. Picasso was liberated to pursue different forms and ideas because he had a strong foundation in representational art and art history. As noted earlier, creativity can only happen once a person gains competence within their domain. By becoming conversant in a field, one can begin to question, experiment, change, and further knowledge in that field.

**CREATE NURTURING ENVIRONMENTS** People are either inspired or defeated by the environments around them, so it is important to create an environment that nurtures and recognizes creativity, in both the physical and the emotional sense. Kahlo, despite personal struggles, was encouraged to keep painting by her husband, artist Diego Rivera, and was inspired and nurtured by her stays in Paris, San Francisco, and New York, where she exchanged ideas with and gained acceptance among intellectuals and artists like Picasso. Your surroundings can create excitement and inspire and nurture ideas. Create a classroom that is visually stimulating, thought-provoking, and student-centered. Encourage students

to collaborate, brainstorm, and be divergent thinkers by establishing a non-threatening environment. Create spaces that allow for exploration and experimentation: provide a table with different art-making materials or a table where students have the opportunity to share and discuss ideas. Experiment with the arrangement of your classroom.

Decorate your classroom with artworks and objects from around the world, and use these objects in your lessons. Objects can be used for inspiration and to expose students to different cultures and allow them to imagine different places and time periods.

**BE CURIOUS!** Curiosity is one of the most important traits of creativity. Degas was not content to depict dance in the same way as other painters; curiosity drove him to try to incorporate the influence of Japanese prints and photography. Be curious about different disciplines, and, most importantly, be curious about your students. Students should also be encouraged to find problems that they would like to solve creatively. They cannot do so unless they are curious and asking the right questions, so urge students to question. It was only through reexamining the mundane objects in her studio that Celmins arrived at her disorienting series of sculptures. Encourage students' curiosity by modeling your own; continue to wonder and be willing to be awestruck.

**ENCOURAGE FAILURE AND PERSISTENCE** Most inventors failed multiple times before "succeeding." However, each failure contributed to their knowledge and pushed them forward. Therefore, it is important to remember that

creativity is an iterative process rather than an endpoint. Picasso approached the subject of the weeping woman more than sixty times, each slightly differently, before being satisfied with the outcome. When we ask students to write, we often include drafts as part of the process; we should think of learning in any subject area in the same way. By creating “drafts” of artworks, students can learn new skills and gain new insights. Thus, we should think of failure in a more positive light—as an experience that educates, promotes resiliency and persistence, and leads to creativity.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The artists included in this packet worked hard to build their skills and produce innovative art; they failed at times, but continuously tried to problem solve through their artwork. They created unique, individual works of art that reflected their personal, lived experiences. These artworks are meant to inspire you to expand your creativity in your classroom. Schools can and should provide access to curricula and instruction that develop these elements of creativity.

## WORKS CITED

- Barron, Stephanie. *Magritte and Contemporary Art: The Treachery of Images*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2006.
- Cowling, Elizabeth. *Picasso: Style and Meaning*. London: Phaidon, 2004.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1996.
- Devonyar, Jill and Richard Kendall. *Degas and the Dance*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2002.
- Edwards, Betty. *The New Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain: Enhancing Creativity and Artistic Confidence*. New York: Tarcher, 2008.
- Freeman, Judi. *Picasso and the Weeping Women*. New York: Rizzoli, 1994.
- Herrera, Hayden. *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2002.
- Smith, Henry D. *Hiroshige: One Hundred Famous Views of Edo*. New York: George Braziller, 2000.
- Technology Enhanced Arts Learning, Arts Integration in the K–6 Classroom. From <http://www.tealarts.org>

## CREDITS

These curriculum materials were prepared by Veronica Alvarez and Michelle Brenner and designed by David Hernandez. © 2016 Museum Associates/LACMA. All rights reserved.

Evenings for Educators is made possible by The Rose Hills Foundation, the Thomas and Dorothy Leavey Foundation, the Kenneth T. and Eileen L. Norris Foundation, the Mara W. Breech Foundation, and the Joseph Drown Foundation.

Education programs at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art are supported in part by the William Randolph Hearst Endowment Fund for Arts Education and the Margaret A. Cargill Arts Education Endowment.