

Meaningful conversations and the desire to realise potential: Why does creativity matter?

A fundamental element of our teaching philosophy at Blundell's is to help pupils navigate through new, often exciting and sometimes challenging periods of their lives at school. We may at times support our pupils in boarding houses, in training sessions or dance classes, even out on Dartmoor. Often, we begin to guide them in the every-day routine: our classrooms.

In the pursuit of becoming an effective teacher, many consider that one essential role is to encourage *creativity* both inside and outside of the classroom. In learning, creativity underpins an essential basis for teaching. Incorporating it into the lives of our pupils can improve their communicative competence and self-esteem, whilst being both personally rewarding by giving them the opportunity to explore (Maley, 2015, p8). According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Koltko-Rivera, 2006/Maslow 1943, 1954), and his theory of self-actualisation, the ultimate goal of human motivation is a person's desire for self-fulfilment and realising potential. As a result, through creativity, students will be able to realise their full potential in learning.

The psychology of creativity and critical thinking

Creativity can be defined in four different ways: imaginative, purposeful, original, and valuable. Creativity has the potential to transform subject matter from fantasy to true-to-life situations, which in turn needs to be facilitated appropriately (Fehér, 2007). Therefore, as teachers our aim is to create an open classroom environment, giving opportunity for learners to be creative and take risks. The element of unpredictability in a creative classroom, from an acquisition and application of knowledge perspective, is also immensely beneficial, because students *learn* to take risks. Although risk-taking is dependent on pupils' personality, it is an essential element to progress in learning (Lightbrown and Spada, 2013). Risk-taking in an environment where the teacher has built good rapport will prepare pupils for setbacks and give them the confidence to face situations outside the classroom.

Creative thinking and critical thinking go hand-in-hand when it comes to the creative classroom. Promoting creative thinking firstly generates the learners' new ideas, but discussions through critical thinking can then be then utilised in this type of environment (Fisher, 2012). The teacher would then scaffold and facilitate meaningful discussions, to demonstrate a purposeful structure to an activity. An example of this would be if pupils are required to respond to certain aspects of each other's work, such as clarity of opinion or creative

design. Through an opportunity to respond to creative work in a safe space, pupils focus not only on another pupils' self-expression but also on the learning process itself.

Maley and Peachey (2015, p6), discuss how teachers can foster a more creative classroom by creating a space for learners to feel confident in their expression of language, rather than scrutinising error. However, despite the freedom of creative activities, errors cannot simply be overlooked. Errors have traditionally been viewed as an indication of failure on the part of both teacher and pupil but are more commonly considered a normal stage in the development of communication and expression (Littlewood, 1984). The concentration ought not to be diminishing to the student's abilities or their self-confidence as a learner. Indeed, errors are a part of risk-taking which should be encouraged to maintain an atmosphere of support.

Materials: the role of the teacher and an opportunity for the student

When working from a textbook, if materials do not give enough scope for creativity or the subject matter is not relevant enough to all pupils, this may limit enthusiasm. Teachers therefore tailor materials, making them relevant, considering their context and particular preferences. One certain limitation of this idea is that pupils are individual with different interests, and their context is likely to differ. To overcome this challenge, teachers could instead adapt materials and add flexibility for pupils to respond in their own way. Fehér (2007) proposes that adding creativity to ordinary classroom activities is successful when these activities involve a transformation or shift between elements. An example of this is the use of role-play or letter-writing, when the pupils' personalities are transformed, or their perspectives are shifted.

Teachers may consider it their responsibility alone to choose activities. Yet, in giving students a choice between materials, the time spent on preparing these can be minimised and pupil enthusiasm can be increased. Moreover, by creating materials instead of using the coursebook alone, teachers can experience ample positive emotions, such as fulfilment and gratification, which can strengthen their profession and passion (Arnold, 2014). Naturally, the limitations of this suggestion include the specific curriculum objectives to pass exams or assessments in education, and the timing restrictions of a lesson. Therefore, by making pupils aware that creativity only begins with activities during the lesson and continues outside of the class is a possible solution.

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The notion of self-efficacy and mastery experience in learning as discussed in Mercer and Williams (2014) consider these as a source of information that can influence a pupils' perceived capability to perform. It is considered that self-efficacy beliefs can be altered using activities where pupils experience success, many of which are fundamentally creative. Examples include presenting ideas in a comfortable learning environment, discussing opinions and the opportunity to share personal experiences.

Having understood the learning process from the perspective of both pupil and teacher, I believe that success in a creative classroom is highly attainable. The essence of creativity is originality, imagination and reasoning with new ideas, which learners can achieve when both the activities and working environment inspire them. In turn, this will positively influence their self-efficacy beliefs and cognitive development, to apply their competencies in the real world. Ultimately, as we prepare our pupils in the creative classroom, we stimulate an environment that inspires dynamism, flexibility and risk-taking which will set students up for the ultimate goal of learning: application outside of the classroom.

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