

# What Educators and Parents Need to Know About Fostering Creativity

**Jonathan A. Plucker - Editor**

*...there are two lasting and important gifts we can give our children, one is roots and the other is wings.*  
– Hodding Carter

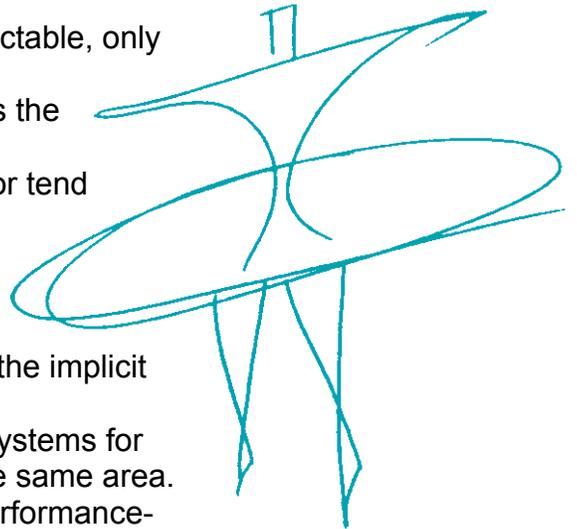
Practitioners' Guide - A9507

## Implications for the Home and Classroom

Recent research shows that creativity is present in all children, regardless of their age, race, socioeconomic status, and learning differences. Listed below are typically asked student questions followed by creativity-fostering suggestions for dealing with them:

### “But why isn’t this the right answer?”

- Emphasize curricula and activities that avoid predictable, only one correct response outcomes.
- Try not to suggest (even implicitly) that your way is the best or only way.
- Be tolerant of children who exhibit nonconformity or tend to do things their own way.
- Allow children to take risks, challenge existing ideas, have time to reflect, and have time to “do their own thing.”
- Monitor your expectations and actions, especially the implicit ones.
- Reward early, creative performances and set up systems for positive feedback for continued performance in the same area.
- Use alternative methods such as portfolios and performance-based assessments to assess creative potential.
- De-emphasize grades as the “goal” of learning. Accentuate the joy of learning and creating.



### “Can’t I work alone? Can’t we do “something else?”

- Allow independent work, even if it requires some additional effort and planning.
- Strive for balance between structured/unstructured tasks, independent/small group work, rich/open stimulus environments, and convergent/divergent tasks.
- Use concrete reinforcers instead of verbal reinforcers.
- Encourage the use of various learning and cognitive styles in all children.

- Use materials and techniques which require children to use various learning styles (e.g., hands-on, visual, aural, written) and content from different domains (e.g., music, math, physical education).
- Teach children the steps of revising, reworking, and refining their creative ideas, since creating an original idea is only the first step.

### **“Can I explain? I’d like to show it to the “class/my friends.”**

- Encourage children to share their creative work with other children and adults both within and out of school.
- Allow children to utilize divergent thinking skills, ask questions that require them to defend their reasoning, and expose them to constructive criticism.
- Ask children to describe their creative process and motivations if they give unexpected answers or complete unusual projects. Sometimes a seemingly incorrect or strange answer is achieved using an insightful, exciting approach.

### **“I can’t think of anything.”**

- Provide environments that stimulate and encourage creative ideas. Reward a broad range of creative behaviors.
- Be a mentor to a child who displays interest in your particular domain or field of expertise.
- Teach students creativity enhancement techniques (e.g., SCAMPER, brainstorming, synectics, attribute listing) to use with their science fair projects, art activities, and writing assignments to design a more creative product.
- Expose your child to various types of tasks and activities, emphasizing variety in music, family and/or field trips, TV viewing, reading material, hobbies, toys, etc.

### **“But I’m not doing this at home/school.”**

- Reinforce creative behaviors at home and at school. Teachers, let parents know what their child is doing at school and explain how parents can help at home. Parents, let teachers know what you’re doing at home with your child and ask teachers how you can reinforce the creative behaviors being taught in school.
- Discuss the concept of “creativity” with children—have them utilize fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration.
- Recognize that creativity incorporates a variety of processes (problem finding/solving, divergent/convergent thinking, self-expression), domains (arts, sciences, humanities), and motivational and personality factors (self-concept, self-confidence, intrinsic motivation).

## **Research Facts**

- Children can be taught to be more creative (Torrance, 1987).
- Some researchers believe that all children possess the skills and processes necessary to produce creative work (Runco, 1993; Weisberg, 1986).
- People tend to underestimate the originality of the work of others (Runco, 1989).

- Children tend to be less creative when outside constraints are placed upon their creativity (Hennessey & Amabile, 1988).
- Eminent creators such as Einstein, Picasso, and Martha Graham exhibited a high degree of self-promotion and lack of conformity (Gardner, 1993).

## References

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The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented

2131 Hillside Road, Unit 3007

Storrs, CT 06269-3007

Tel: (860) 486-4826 Fax: (860) 486-2900

Web: <http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/nrcgt>