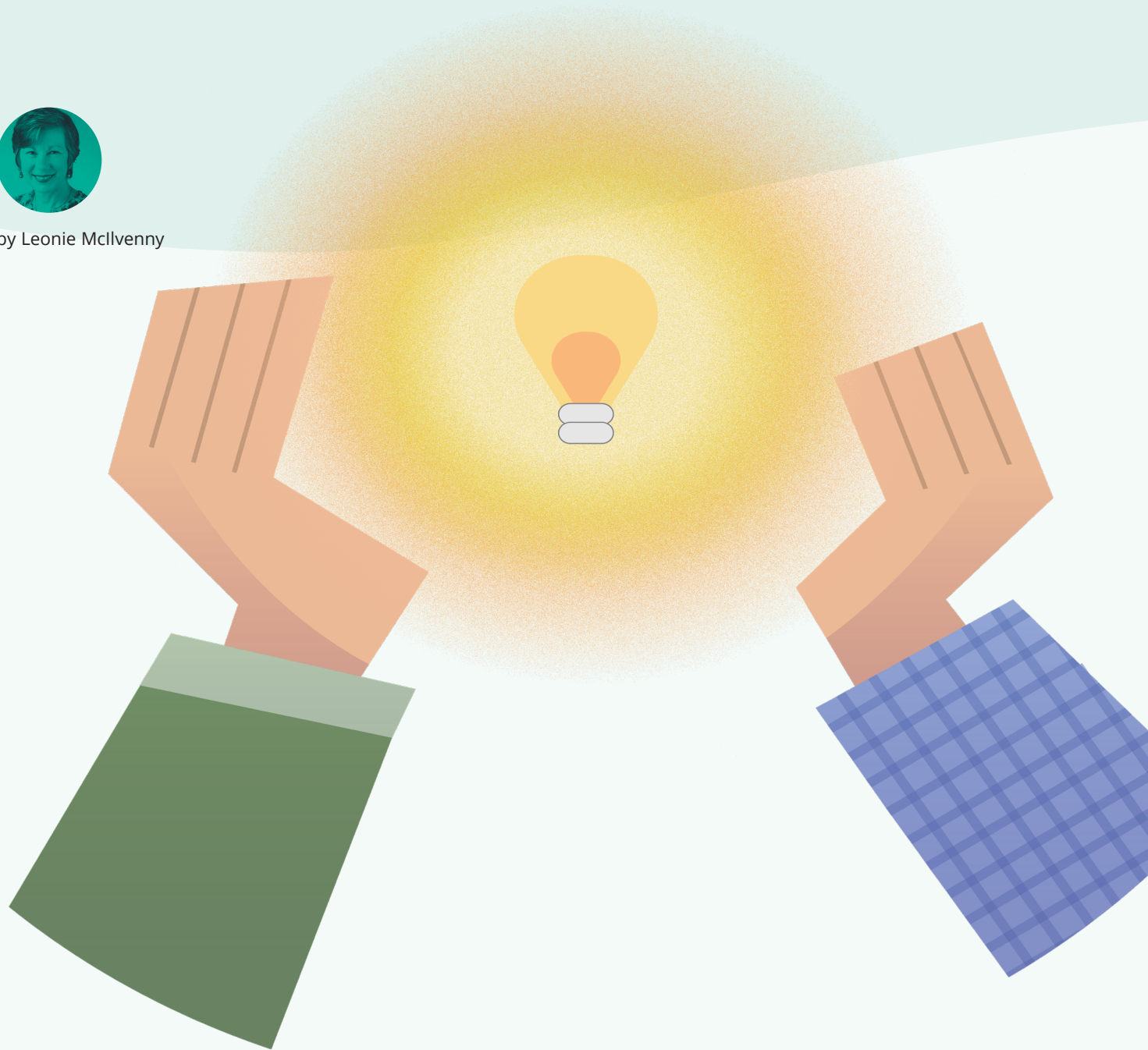


in depth

From theory to practice: A discussion on creativity and the curriculum



by Leonie McIlvenny



‘We all have the potential creativity to contribute, individually or collectively, to the survival, advancement and wellbeing of our society of human beings’

Lederach (2005)

20
21

dialogs

IN DEPTH

The importance of creativity as an essential twenty-first century skill has gained momentum since the European Parliament and Council identified it as a ‘key competence for lifelong learning’.¹ As indicated in the report on ‘transversal competencies in education policy and practice’,² it has been introduced in the curriculum documents of many countries, such as in Scotland³ and Australia.⁴ Creativity also features prominently in several global initiatives, such as the Partnership for Twenty-First Century Skills,⁵ which identifies ‘creativity’ as one of its 4Cs; the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), which identifies ‘creativity and innovation’ as one of the six domains of its NETS-S (US National Standards in Technology) for students;⁶ and the 2021 Delphi Expert Report on ‘critical thinking and creativity’, which puts the spotlight on the importance of creativity in an educational environment.⁷ To consolidate the importance of creativity development, the OECD programs for international student assessment (PISA) ‘2021 Creating Thinking Framework, 2022 Creating Thinking Assessment’,⁸ and the 2012 ‘Creative Problem Solving Assessment Framework’ highlight the growing importance being given to creativity in education systems internationally.

WHAT IS CREATIVITY?

Definitions of creativity abound. Ken Robinson⁹ defines it as ‘imaginative processes with original and valuable results’. The OECD Strategic Advisory Group¹⁰ states that it is ‘the process by which we generate new ideas that require specific knowledge, skills and attitudes’.

Regardless of the definition, some common themes around creativity are as follows:

- It is a complex and dynamic process.
- It involves generating original ideas.
- It is often triggered by the need to find a solution to something.
- It is an interaction between nature and nurture, in which innate dispositions are nurtured through structured opportunities to engage in creative activities.
- It can occur either spontaneously (unconsciously) or strategically (consciously).

THE CREATIVITY QUADRANT

Much of the thinking on creativity derives from the work of Craft,¹¹ who suggested two contrasting ways of viewing creativity: one as an individual or collective phenomenon,

and the other as domain-specific versus domain-free. Craft also describes creativity as ‘little c’ or ‘big C’, depending on the context and purpose of the creative exercise or activity. ‘Little c’ creativity could be considered more spontaneous, individual efforts compared to the ‘big C’, which combines creative thinking with key disciplines such as science and the humanities for a more conscious and reflective process.¹² The Creativity Quadrant attempts to merge these ideas graphically.

BARRIERS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVITY IN SCHOOLS

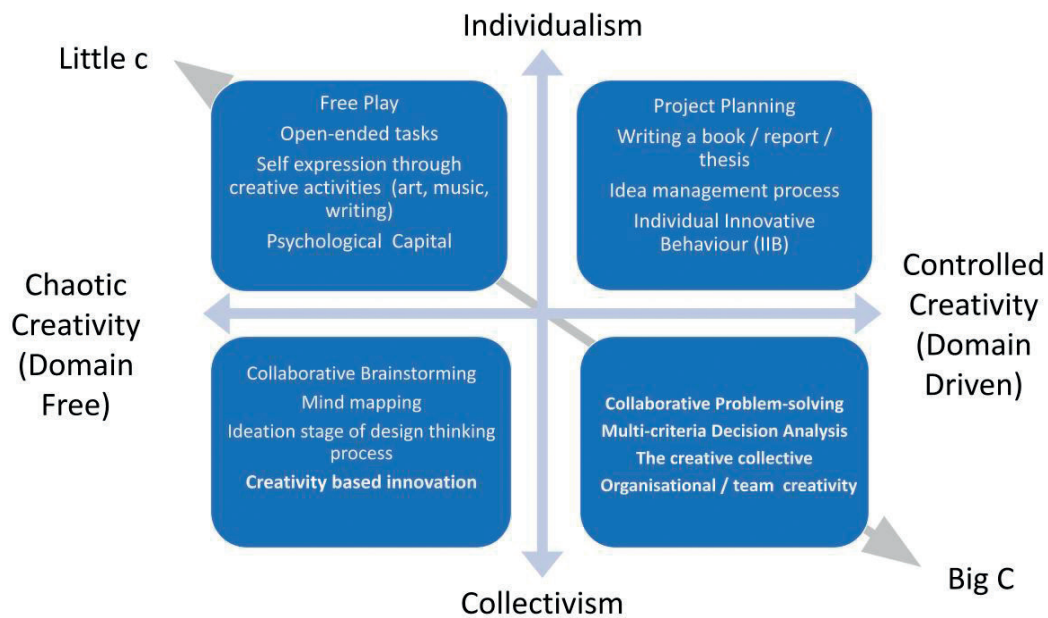
Even with the growing body of literature promoting creativity as an essential twenty-first-century skill, there are still significant barriers to its implementation within the school curriculum. The UNESCO report on ‘transversal competencies in educational policies and practices’¹³ identifies three key areas that hinder their implementation. **The challenge of a definition**, which stems from the difficulty in determining what creativity is and what it looks like in an educational setting. In other words, how do we turn an abstract concept into assessable behaviours? **Operational challenges**, which focus on its place in the curriculum and on the mechanisms put in place to assess it. In an education system that continues to separate subjects, the responsibility for developing the ‘soft’ skill of creativity has traditionally been relegated to the creative arts. As the imperative to develop a collective creative

disposition gains momentum, there is a shift toward a more strategic, expansive view of the role of creativity across a broader range of disciplines (‘big C’). This trend also highlights the need to shift the responsibility for teaching these skills from a single learning area to a more multidisciplinary approach, which requires the revitalisation and transformation of traditional curricular frameworks, pedagogies and assessment practices.

Systemic challenges include aspects such as an overloaded curriculum, pressure to achieve academic success and a teacher-centred approach to learning.

TEACHERS ARE THE KEY

Improving teachers' beliefs and attitudes about the value of creativity and developing their competence and confidence to carry out creative activities in a pedagogical way is essential to ensure that creativity becomes ubiquitous in the learning process. Gonski¹⁴ suggests that teaching and assessing creativity, particularly in an integrated fashion, is a very complex task that requires teachers to have a solid understanding of how to integrate it into their teaching. Teachers need to understand the circumstances that foster it, how they can effectively guide students to be more creative in their thinking and how creative thinking can be recognised. This transformation process requires extensive professional development and systemic support, as well as a reassessment of what education systems really value.



Creativity Quadrant (Craft, 2008)



APPLICATION OF A CREATIVE THINKING CURRICULUM

There are many approaches that can be taken to ensure that creativity is strategically placed in the curriculum. Here are four approaches: 1) The individual teacher championing the teaching of thinking skills in their own classroom; 2) Agreed-upon frameworks and tools that are used school-wide to create a common (but not necessarily scripted or assessed) language; 3) The use of an explicit programme 'outside' the subject-based curriculum; or 4) A school-wide approach where skills are strategically embedded in the curriculum, written into programmes and formally assessed (an example of this model is the general critical and creative thinking skills in the Australian curriculum¹⁵).

FRAMEWORKS AND THINKING MODELS

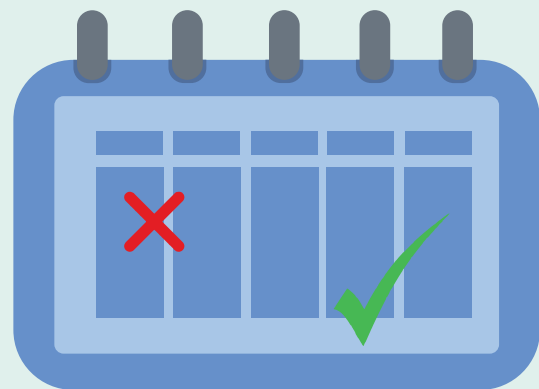
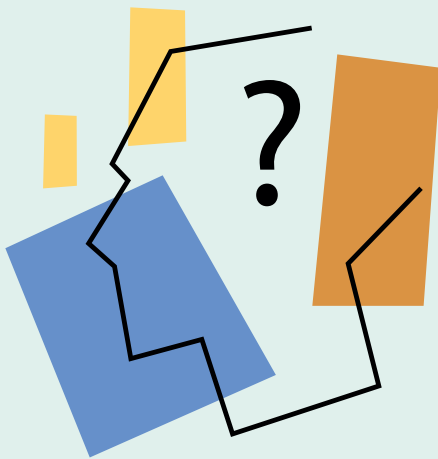
Regardless of the approach taken, there is no dearth of frameworks or 'thinking tools' that can be used:

The P21 Framework¹⁶ describes creativity in three domains:

- **Thinking creatively**, using thinking tools and strategies to create new and valuable ideas.
- **Working creatively with others** to develop, apply and communicate new ideas to others.
- **Implementing the innovation** to make a tangible and useful contribution to the field in which the innovation will occur.

Other approaches explore thinking habits. Some models of this approach are: The **Five Dimensions of Creativity Model**¹⁷ (be inquisitive, be imaginative, persevere, collaborate and be disciplined); Arthur Costa's **Habits of Mind**,¹⁸ four of which relate to creativity (Create, imagine and innovate; Question and problem pose; Think interdependently; and Think flexibly); **Bloom's Taxonomy**,¹⁹ which provides a hierarchy of six levels of

Teaching creativity is a highly complex task that requires a grasp of how to integrate it



thinking skills, the highest being Create; **Tony Ryan's Keys to Thinking**,²⁰ which promote creative thinking through different creative keys (Challenge, Inventions, Improve, Brainstorm, and Question); and finally, **De Bono's 'Green Thinking Hat'**,²¹ which addresses creativity.

One could argue that these models are an artificial representation of a very complex and dynamic process, but for educators who are new to or struggling with this complex process, they provide a bridge between the abstract and the operational, allowing creativity to be seen and applied in the classroom.

ASSESSING CREATIVITY

Conducting international assessments that seek to assess and, perhaps more importantly, understand the place of creativity in the curriculum adds status and visibility to this skill to ensure that it is integrated into

curricular documents in a strategic, transparent way. The OECD²² suggests the following potential advantages of assessing creativity in schools:

- Creative thinking is taken seriously as an important part of formal school curricula.
- Emphasis is placed on developing curricula and teaching activities that foster creativity.
- Teachers are supported in developing their capacity to be creative and facilitate creative practices in their teaching-learning programmes.
- The status of creativity as an essential life skill is growing.

Creativity assessment in schools enhances curricula and syllabi and adds status and visibility

Although we still have a long way to go to put fair and valid educational assessment practices around creativity into practice, progress continues to be made.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

Whatever steps a teacher, school or system takes to make creativity more important, it first must be defined and its purpose specified. Educators have to reconcile conflicting agendas that see an institutional imperative to collect evidence of a child's learning efforts with the idea that the very act of formalising and quantifying the creative process can clip the creator's wings and the potentiality of what he or she might create and become if left free. Is the full potential of that creativity really being captured? Or only what is determined by the limited (controlled) parameters of the learning task? Is one more important than the other, and if so, what should the objective be? The challenge, perhaps, is to do both: to help illuminate, or bring to light, the creative spark in every child and to pave alternative ways for this creativity to unfold, not only to help students become self-actualised but also to enable them to be valuable contributors to a much greater collective challenge: to make our world a better place.

In order for creativity to become more important, it first must be defined and its purpose specified

'You can't just give someone a creativity injection. You have to create an environment for curiosity and a way to encourage people and get the best out of them.'

Sir Ken Robinson

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