

# Creativity Building for Every Classroom

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## 1. What is creativity?

Scholars and thinkers have attempted to pin down a standard definition of *creativity* for generations, to no avail. Some define a creative idea as one that is simultaneously new, innovative, and valuable—or, put another way, one that is original and effective (Runco and Jaeger 2012, Boden 2005). Some believe that timely practicality, usefulness, and surprising variation on a common theme or knowing makes something creative (Mumford 2003, Helson 1999, Bruner 1962, Barron 1955). Some add the caveat that a creative idea must be realistic and acceptable for the context in which it is presented (Stein 1953). Still others perceive a distinction between creativity, creation, and creator, and that not all creativity must lead to a creative product or outcome nor be created by an overt creator (Walia 2019).

My own definition of creativity and the ways I implement it into learning and teaching draws from the work of Chetan Walia and Liz Lerman whose views on creativity include the following elements: 1) that creativity is an act, 2) that creativity is newness marked by imaginative production—not reproduction, 3) that creativity emerges out of equilibrium and past experience and knowledge, and 4) that creativity responds to a sensed need for change (Walia 2019, Lerman 2014, Lerman and Borstel 2003).

## 2. Why should I integrate creativity into my class?

Creativity, long considered one of the most important employability skills to companies and organizations around the world, supports critical thinking and individual and group development. Creativity helps us learn how to adapt to rapidly changing dynamics and limitations, fosters independent thought and problem-solving skills, and encourages collaboration. Evidence supports that instilling creativity-driven activities into classroom environments enhances engagement and motivation and supports making cross-disciplinary connections. Creativity is not just a skill for the classroom and the career, though. People who regularly engage in creative practices or activities develop their personal self-expression and are more likely to consider learning a lifelong endeavor.

## 3. How can I integrate creativity into my classes?

Whether you teach in the arts, STEM, business, or the humanities, there are ways to integrate creativity into your class activities, assignments, and student interactions that can enhance student experience and expand your ideas about how and what you teach. In the following, I outline in-class activities that can be completed individually and in groups and can be easily adapted to fit most any course content. These activities were derived from research and

workshops offered at the American Dance Festival at Duke University in 2023 by Liz Lerman and Leah Cox.

### Individual Activities

- Creative Journaling
  - This assignment can be done once, multiple times at significant points of reflection in content, or consistently throughout a semester. Students are offered prompts that ask them to creatively reflect on what you are covering in class. One prompt idea: Use crayons, markers, or paint to make a page of colors that show how theory A and theory B relate to each other. Another prompt idea: Find and write down an existing song's lyrics that connect you to the ideas we have discussed in this unit and then write a paragraph or two about what connections you make. And a third prompt idea: Write a haiku about how the work of scholar A contributes new knowledge to your understanding of this unit's content.
- Re-assignment
  - This activity involves students and faculty collaborating to align an assignment with individual needs and interests in mind. After developing a loose structure of guidelines and grading scale for an assignment, ask students to re-assign it for themselves. This could involve the students weighing one particular component of an assignment as heavier than the other in terms of content development or grading weight, making changes to the assignment's outcomes or products (creating a podcast episode or presentation instead of a paper, for example), or creating an entirely new assignment based on that unit/module's content and goals. The student proposes their re-assignment to the instructor for approval or continued questions or negotiation.

### Group or Partnered Activities

- Walk n' Talk
  - At the start of class or immediately after introducing a new concept or assignment, ask students to partner up. You will direct students to walk and talk together about specific topics that you prompt them with; one partner will have 30 seconds to talk, responding to the prompt, and then you'll tell them to switch and the second partner will then have 30 seconds to talk as well. You can repeat this as many times as you'd like with new prompts. You can also follow up each walk 'n talk round with a follow-up activity. In dance, I may ask students to face back-to-back immediately after their exchange and create a short movement phrase based on what they heard their partner say. Then, they can show each other what they heard in movement. This is a great way to have students think through ideas, reimagine their preconceived notions, and think of new ways to consider a topic or issue at hand.

- Grids
  - Placing things in new relationships with each other often brings new ideas to the surface. This grid exercise asks students to draw a grid with an x and y axis. The axes should each represent something broad, like “Structure” vs. “Desires,” or “Themes” vs. “Requirements,” or “Parts of the assignment” vs. “Discussions and activities we’ve done in class.” Then, students fill in the boxes of each axis, providing even more structure. Then, they find the center of each set of axes and fill in each box with whatever they believe is relevant to that pairing. These could be single words, images they draw, tasks to complete, or goals. The creativity of the grid comes from the students’ assignment to create their own structure and then fill in missing pieces of it. They define what is important.
- “Bad Dance”
  - In this activity, students are specifically asked to create something badly or to make a bad version of it. Whether an art work, an essay, or a presentation, students can compete to make the “baddest” of the bad. Asking students to complete a task badly also gives them freedom to explore new territory that they may have otherwise felt was out of context, unpopular, or unappealing to their professor or other students. This also helps students to find good from the bad, to enjoy the process of creating, and to explore play within the bounds of an academic assignment.

#### 4. Conclusion

All of the examples of possible activities to include in a classroom include opportunities for students to actively merge imagination with previous experiences and knowledge in order to problem-solve. They are designed for any discipline, topic, or class size and may be adapted in any way that makes sense within the structure of certain disciplines or modalities. Creativity is intended for every discipline, not just the arts. By leaning into new forms of inquiry and curiosity through creative activities, course content can be enhanced to provide more complex ways of thinking and doing and to offer play and enjoyment as connected to learning.

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