

PECULIARITIES AND METHODS OF STUDENTS' CREATIVE PROJECT ACTIVITIES

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“Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep”.

Scott Raymond Adams

Artist and cartoonist (USA)

Abstract

The aim: To analyse the factors that reveal students' creativity in the project activities.

Project activities promote students' responsibility, cooperation and creativity. Each project faces certain constraints, including scope, goals, and available resources. Working within a specific and defined project activity format, students look for ways and opportunities to reveal and express their ideas within a specified period, using particular materials, in order to achieve the goals set. The article presents insights on how to help students collaborate and engage in the creative process and methods how to encourage, motivate and unleash everyone's potential. The article analyses the peculiarities and methods of creative project activity, and the role of the teacher in involving and encouraging students to cooperate, work towards common goals, delegate tasks, and take responsibility.

Keywords: *project, peculiarities, methods, creativity.*

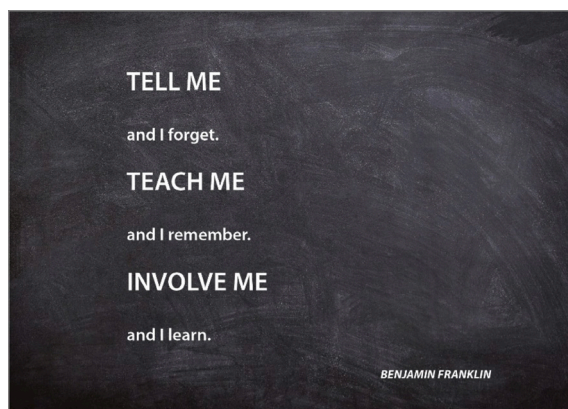
The concept of creativity and prerequisites for developing creativity

Creativity can be defined as the ability to generate new ideas, think 'out of the box' and independently, adapt oneself to new environments or conditions, address challenges and make appropriate decisions that open up new possibilities. Creativity is an essential individual's characteristic, an anchor for adapting to a rapidly changing modern world. From a psychological perspective, many people are creative, yet creativity manifests in the context of appropriate conditions for special education and development.

Art and creativity are inseparable. According to Fromm, one of the most famous humanists, psychologist and philosopher of the 20th century, it is necessary to provide the following five conditions for creativity to unfold:

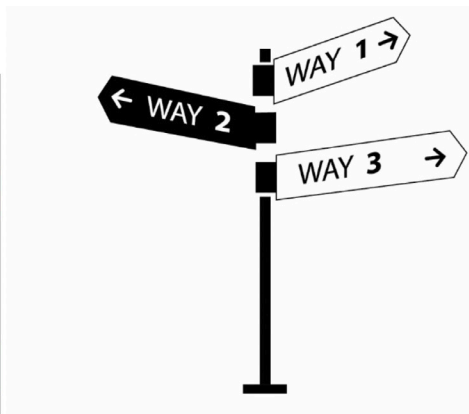
- The main condition. The *capacity for surprise*, the beginning of discovery.
- The second condition. The ability to *concentrate one oneself*, to perceive oneself *as the real one*, who can create, go beyond one's personality, merge with others, and feel unity with the entire world.
- The third condition. *Personal experience*. A sense of self that is the true centre of the world and the initiator of action.
- The fourth condition. The ability to accept conflict and tension without avoidance or evasion. Tension is a condition of human existence, essential for the development of spiritual strength and creative imagination.
- The fifth condition. *Courage and faith* allows one to trust one's experience and enables any new experience to emerge. To be brave means to allow the known to disappear, to dare to be different than others, and endure isolation. Without certainty and faith, creativity is impossible. As stated by E.Fromm, learning to be creative is learning to live.

Based on the above-mentioned theory, creation is considered a process, in which the individual's relationship to the environment or the existing reality is crucial. From a study perspective, the teacher and the student become partners, with the older and more experienced person helping the other to understand themselves and the environment. With the increasingly growing flow and a variety of information sources, it's the teacher's role to retrieve/extract information appropriate to student's abilities and to turn it into valuable knowledge.



The importance of project-based activities for creativity development

Project work is an important factor of creativity in the study process. Project work requires not only theoretical knowledge but also practical skills, taking the initiative and acting in a real work process, making decisions, planning and evaluating an intermediate or final result. In the course of the project activities, students cooperate with teachers and other people to analyse and address specific issues without being detached from social reality. The role of the teacher is to act as an initiator, to define the scope of the project, and moderate, motivate and supervise students throughout the entire project from the beginning to the implementation, from generating ideas to the final product. All the conditions for creativity mentioned by Fromm can be observed in the project activities, thus it is important to involve as many as possible students in the project. A ‘project’ is usually defined as ‘a joint activity to solve a problem’. An elementary project scheme is “one problem + a group of people who solve that problem”.



Through project-based activities, students learn to cooperate, work towards a goal and produce a final product, and the whole process is characterised by independent responsibility and self-awareness, respect for others and the contribution of different perspectives. Project-based cooperation is bidirectional, oriented “to students” and “from students”. For project activities, it is important to make a team of different group members, as grouping students with different level of knowledge, skills and abilities help to foster positive interdependence and accountability. Diverse perspectives and experiences lead to higher competencies and provide experience for all students, both low and high achievers. When grouping students into mixed teams,

teachers have to consider the following factors such as working style and personality aspects. Grouping students with different character traits such as a shy student and brave one, or a risk-taking and cautious one, etc. works well. However, the teacher has to be sure, whether each student sees the value of the “opposite” contribution and how the student moves outside his or her comfort zone to try another character’s role. Group work can be appealing for students when specific roles are shared. This makes each member of the team more involved and challenged. Which role to take may be assigned by the teacher or the students themselves. As the project progresses, the roles can be rotated and each student can try out a different role, allowing them to experience different roles and demonstrate their skills in various fields. The main roles are as follows:

Leader. In this role, the student facilitates the success of the team by assessing progress and keeping the team on track. The leader is responsible for the participation of each member. In addition, he has to ensure that each member of the team understands the concept and has the information required to implement the project.

Registrar. In this role, the student collects and shares information. He or she takes notes, summarises and describes the steps of the project: discussions and debates, and decisions are taken. The registrar is responsible for keeping copies of each member’s work and preparing material for the final project submission.

Promoter. While a promoter, the student motivates his team members by attentively listening and inspiring students to generate new ideas, and building relationships and connections based on emotions and feelings.

Checker. In this role, the student has to ensure that each member of the team understands the given instructions and tasks, the specifics of the task and scope, when the task has to be completed and the goal of the team.

Timer. In this role, the student’s responsibility is to ensure that the team meets the deadline and can complete the project promptly.

Runner. While a runner, the student finds a subject or an object that will help to answer the question or find appropriate resources the team needs to implement the project.

Correspondent. While a correspondent, the student’s role is to pose a lot of questions to his/her team members in order to challenge prevailing ideas, generate new ideas and facilitate the team to move in new directions.

YOUR TEAM

is a gift. Like a gift, you may not have asked for it. Even so, always show your appreciation for it.

Gifts are fun, so don't forget to play! But if you break it, do your best to fix it.

Sometimes the best gifts are those you didn't want. It may take time to see your gift's value.

LOOK. LISTEN. EXPERIMENT.
Share your ideas, skills and passion. Take risks, work and be a friend.

Wait and keep an open mind, give it a chance.

The surprise is half the fun. Enjoy what you discover TOGETHER.

The roles should be further clarified taking into consideration the specifics of each project (Pic. No. 1). In addition, it is possible to combine roles or assign more students per role, depending on the number of team members. The academic achievements of the students are not the key factor to determine the team's success. On the contrary, the team's ability to cooperate in order to achieve common goals has a significant impact on the project's outcome. The success of a project depends on how well the team members distribute the tasks and assignments and how communication progresses during the project.



Fig. 1 The great team of luminaire design project "Talking light", Kauno kolegija HEI, Faculty of Arts and Education.

Different working styles influence how members of the team interact with each other. Understanding a student's working style will help facilitate communication between team members, encourage conflict handling and support the successful completion of the project. Working style can be determined by an individual's choice to tackle issues. A student's working style undergoes certain changes over time. Moreover, it depends on the task or project and often reflects the working styles of team members. There are four major working styles: *driver's*, *expressive*, *sociable* and *analytical*. The driver wishes to commit and lead the team. Expressive students share ideas and information for free. Sociable team members do the tasks delegated to the team. Analytical members determine the scope of the project and evaluate the performance. When students are asked to take certain roles in the team, it is important take into consideration whether their roles correspond the specific working style. For example, to be effective in the "Leader's" role, the student has to maintain the driver's working style. To fulfil "the Checker's" role, the student has to adopt the analytic working style. Drivers help their teams to achieve goals. Expressive members motivate their team members. Sociable members help other students to manage their work in the course of the project. Analysts have to ensure the proper implementation of the project tasks. Each working style may have a negative impact on the team's performance. Drivers can give orders about what the team should do. Expressive members may be willing to continue discussions avoiding decisions. Sociable members may withhold their opinions in order to maintain a good atmosphere. Analysts may focus too much on details and minutiae, missing deadlines and team objectives.

To achieve maximum results, the team needs to properly maintain every working style from the beginning till the end of the project. In many cases, these roles can be taken by the same person (Fig. 2). It is important to be able to identify different working styles as knowledge help all team members to evaluate each other's contribution to the project implementation as well as to overcome obstacles when working styles contradict each other.

Major learning standards in the digital age are cooperation, critical thinking, creativity and communication. Project-based activities engage students in the real-world environment and provide them with more tools to compete in the 21st century global marketplace. These activities enable them to be more responsible, independent and competent.



Fig. 2 The results of luminaire design project “Talking light”

Conclusions

A project-based learning environment encourages students to pose questions, analyse, evaluate and draw conclusions, make further plans and generate ideas to take them to a higher level of thinking that requires feedback and assessment beyond grades and numbers.

Project-based team activities provide conditions for creativity, the joy and wonder of discovery, the ability to focus and experience initiative, accept conflict and tension, and foster courage and faith.

Project-based activity provides students with the conditions to experience an “authentic assessment”, when not only knowledge of the content is assessed but also additional skills including creativity, cooperation, problem solving and innovations.

Summary

The article analyses creativity and conditions which help reveal individual’s creativity, the teacher’s role in project-based activities; and explores tools for developing a creative learning environment for students and methods how to motivate students develop their creative potential. The article presents the benefits of the project activity in terms of creativity education.

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