

# Creative Thinking: Everyone does it, the OECD wants us to [im]prove it.

*by Paul Syme, Kings Local*

As teachers and principals shepherd learners to be a version of all they can be, difficult decisions must be made when it comes to balancing the priorities of teaching and administering and the imaginative freedom of learners. And, as millions of educators rise to voices like the late Sir Ken Robinson (2006), who advocated for universal creative development, or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020) that will add Creative Thinking to their 2022 PISA exams alongside Mathematics, Reading, and Science—teachers and administrators will be tasked to foster creative thinking broadly among all learners.

The good news is everyone can think creatively—though some are more effective and confident at it than others. Through creativity humans navigate change. The OECD challenges all teachers to harness and build it within themselves as well as those they lead. Simultaneously, education systems and leaders will need to set the course for how schools adapt to the freedoms that encourage creative thinking.

## A New Dawn for Creative Thinking in Public Education

Hargreaves (2020) advises educators to “Measure what you value; don’t value what you can easily measure.” The OECD (2019, April) accepts this challenge noting that creativity is “a tangible competence, grounded in knowledge and practice, that supports individuals in achieving better outcomes, oftentimes in constrained and challenging environments [and] every individual, to a greater or smaller degree, has the potential to think creatively” (p. 5). The OECD (2020) also believes that the “PISA 2021 [deferred to 2022] creative thinking assessment will provide policymakers with valid, reliable, and actionable measurement tools that will help



them to make evidence-based decisions. The results will also encourage a wider societal debate on both the importance and methods of supporting this crucial competence through education,” (p. 5). Systems and educators that adopt the above mentioned framework will also need to appreciate that,

[creative] thinking is a necessary competence for today’s young people to develop [and t]he importance of nurturing creative thinking in school also extends beyond the labour market. Schools play a crucial role in helping young people to discover, develop and define their talents – including their creative talents; increase students’ motivation and interest at school, new forms of learning that engage with the creative energies and recognise the creative potential of all students need to be developed. ... Teachers need to understand how creative thinking can be recognised, the circumstances that encourage it, and how they can effectively guide students to become more creative in their thinking. (p. 6)

Were teachers and administrators to adopt these beliefs, their understanding of creativity will still have been constructed over a lifetime of engagements with the arts, work, and media as well as the influence of peers, students, and mentors. Teachers will need to reflect upon attitudes and approaches that contribute to creaticide in learners, such as:

- (1) perpetuating the idea that there is only one correct way to do a task and only one correct answer to a question;
- (2) cultivating attitudes of submission and fear of authority;
- (3) adhering to lesson plans at all costs;
- (4) promoting the belief that originality is a rare quality;
- (5) promoting beliefs in the compartmentalisation of knowledge;
- (6) discouraging

curiosity and inquisitiveness; (7) and above all, never permitting learning and problem solving to be fun. (Nickerson, 2010 as cited in OECD, 2019, p. 16)

As a remedy, the OECD (2019) encourages educators to allow for the spaces and time to encourage “students’ idea diversity, risk taking, and working with peers in order to accomplish difficult tasks,” (p. 16).

### **Creative Thinking and the Nova Scotia Curriculum**

The 13 jurisdictions of the Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC) have committed to the OECD’s Global Competencies where Nova Scotia has already remodelled its curriculum foundations and has aligned all P-8 curricula behind it (Lane & Christensen, 2016; Nova Scotia, 2020). As this partnership continues, Canadian educational leaders will be challenged to line up creative thinking within their sites (CMEC, 2021). Policies or perceptions that place faith in creative thinkers to resolve novel problems or to uniquely express thoughts and feelings would still be subject to the array of attitudes and learning arenas posed by teachers and administrators. While Nova Scotia teachers support principles of inclusion, social justice, and sustainability, a creative pedagogy would hasten the OECD objective for student learning to be in service of the greater good – salvation over destruction and compassion over capitalism. An OECD defined creative pedagogy, therefore, would lead learners “to rely even more on their uniquely (so far) human capacity for creativity, responsibility and the ability to ‘learn to learn’ throughout their life” (OECD, 2019, p. 2). To affect teacher and learner values, attitudes, and capacities along these lines would impact the selection and allocation of teachers, time, spaces,

and resources.

Efland (1995) observes, “what people believe about art and its value is likely to affect whether it is taught or not,” (p. 25). An educator’s history with and disposition towards the arts, for example, can colour their orientation towards creativity. As creative experiences are anticipated within the arts, in their conflation, teachers and principals will likely cast a similar light on creative personalities, pedagogies, and practices (Dewey, 1938/1959; Eisner, 1994). And, when these experiences go unchallenged or are reinforced in a principal or teacher, a lasting and unwavering predisposition may crystalize (Gardner, 1993). To counter ossified values that obstruct fruitful approaches to creative development, educators may benefit from conversations that explore attitudes towards the arts, creativity, and creative education. Proponents of a creative pedagogy might hope that such a process bolsters an educator’s tolerance for dissention versus control and conformity, how they receive strange ideas, or to reconsider the places where teacher and student activities and imaginations are permitted.

### **Moving Forward:**

Other than the OECD’s plan to elevate and evaluate Creative Thinking alongside Mathematics, Science, and Reading as well as Nova Scotia’s ongoing commitments to the CCME and the OECD, the EECD has yet to offer a plan for schools, teachers, and learners. Since educators tend to take their lead from where policies, available data, and their experiences intersect, teachers and administrators are encouraged to reflect on their spaces, schedules, and practices questioning how to cultivate creative thinking throughout their learning community.

### **References:**

- CMEC (2021). Pan Canadian Assessment Program. [https://www.cmec.ca/712/PISA\\_2022.html](https://www.cmec.ca/712/PISA_2022.html)
- Dewey, J. (1938/1959). Experience and education. New York: Macmillan.
- Eisner, E. W. (1994). Cognition and curriculum reconsidered (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Efland, A. D. (1995). Change in the conceptions of art teaching. In R. Neperud (Ed.) Context, content, and community in art education beyond postmodernism (pp. 25-40). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gardner, H. (1993). Multiple intelligences: The theory in practice. Basic Books.
- Hargreaves, A. (2020, November 23). Andy Hargreaves <http://www.andyhargreaves.com/press--news.html>
- Lane, J., & Christensen, N. (2016). Know, Do, Understand. Canada West Foundation.
- Nova Scotia (2020). Nova Scotia Curriculum. <https://curriculum.novascotia.ca>
- OECD (2019). OECD Future of education and skills 2030: conceptual learning framework. [https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/skills/Skills\\_for\\_2030.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/skills/Skills_for_2030.pdf)
- OECD (2019, April). PISA 2021 creative thinking framework, third draft. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA-2021-creative-thinking-framework.pdf>
- OECD (2020). PISA 2021 integrated design. <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/PISA-2022-Integrated-Design.pdf>
- Robinson, K. (2006). Do schools kill creativity? [Video] TED conferences. [http://www.ted.com/talks/ken\\_robinson\\_says\\_schools\\_kill\\_creativity.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html)

*Paul Syme teaches Art at Horton High School in Kings Local. He has also acted as an NSTU Executive Staff Officer, Professional Learning. An Adjunct Professor at Acadia University’s School of Education, he is currently engaged in Doctoral studies in Educational Research through the University of Calgary. Follow him on Twitter @symecreative.*