

## Teaching for Creativity

*Robert J. Sternberg*

Creativity is a decision. Teaching creatively means encouraging students to (a) create, (b) invent, (c) discover, (d) imagine if..., (e) suppose that..., (f) predict. Teaching for creativity requires teachers not only to support and encourage creativity, but also to role-model it and to reward it when it is displayed. In other words, teachers need not only to talk the talk, but also to walk the walk. Consider some examples of instructional or assessment activities that encourage students to think creatively.

(a) *Create* an alternative ending to the short story you just read that represents a different way things might have gone for the main characters in the story. [Literature]

(b) *Invent* a dialogue between an American tourist in Paris and a French man he encounters on the street from whom he is asking directions on how to get to the Rue Pigalle. [French]

(c) *Discover* the fundamental physical principle that underlies all of the following problems, each of which differs from the others in the “surface structure” of the problem but not in its “deep structure....”  
[Physics]

(d) *Imagine if* the government of China keeps evolving over the course of the next 20 years in much the same way it has been evolving. What do you believe the government of China will be like in 20 years?  
[Government/Political Science]

(e) *Suppose that* you were to design one additional instrument to be played in a symphony orchestra for future compositions. What might that instrument be like, and why? [Music]

(f) *Predict* how humans might evolve in 10,000 years. [Biology]

How can we encourage students to decide for creativity? Here are the keys:

- **Redefine Problems.** If you can't solve a problem, ask yourself whether there is a totally different way of seeing it.
- **Question and Analyze Assumptions.** Ask yourself whether your assumptions about a problem are correct. Don't just assume—be skeptical!
- **Do Not Assume That Creative Ideas Sell Themselves: Sell Them.** The more creative your ideas are, the harder you have to work to convince others of their value.
- **Recognize That Knowledge Is a Double-Edged Sword and Act Accordingly.** Knowledge can help creativity but also can hurt it. People who know a lot often get stuck in seeing things the same way, again and again.
- **Show Grit.** Creative people always encounter obstacles in their creative work. Figure out what the obstacles are and how to surmount them.
- **Take Sensible Risks.** You can't be creative without taking risks. Take intellectual risks, but take sensible ones!
- **Tolerate Ambiguity.** In creative work, things are rarely black and white. Learn to live with the fact that creative work will be full of ambiguous elements.
- **Believe in Yourself.** If you don't believe in yourself, why should anyone else?
- **Delay Gratification.** Doing creative work takes time.
- **Find What You Love to Do.** Creative people almost always do work they love.
- **Find an Environment that Fosters Creativity.** It is hard to be creative if you are constantly punished for it. Try to find an environment that encourages creativity.
- **Defy the Crowd.** Don't think the way other people do just because they think that way. Figure out who you are and be yourself!