The Creative Professor

The College Creativity Conundrum

Are college professors equipped to be creative in the classroom?

As we verge ever closer to a world reliant on technology, as Mark Cuban recently said, creative thinking becomes our most valuable human commodity. But, why isn't creative thinking in abundance? In the most widely viewed TED Talk of all time, Ken Robinson posited that we are educated out of creativity by virtually every education system in the world. In the same talk, however, Sir Ken concluded that "the whole purpose of public education throughout the world is to produce university

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professors." This presents a true conundrum as the workplace calls upon college professors to better prepare graduates for creative thinking endeavors.

If university professors navigate through our creativity robbing education system with the greatest aplomb only to enter the academy with little to no preparation to teach within their discipline, they will undoubtedly adopt practices with which they are familiar and with which they have experienced success. We can no more expect a history professor to teach biology than we can expect a traditional academician to foster creativity in their classroom without training and a significant shift in mindset.

The Beginnings of The Creative Professor
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Thank you for joining me on this journey to foster creativity enhancing college experiences.

While the workplace demands have morphed since the turn of the millennium, our education practices, for the most part, have not. As faculty, parents, and students, we must heed the call and rise to the occasion.

We can make a true difference in student learning and preparation if we join together in this endeavor. Please consider sharing my website and creating the call to university administrators to integrate creativity training into faculty development and curriculum.

Thank you! Risa

Consider Brené Brown's perspective on university faculty: "Very early in our training we are taught that a cool distance and inaccessibility contribute to prestige, and that if you're too relatable, your credentials come into question." However, as Dr. Brown goes on to describe in her book, *Daring Greatly*, "there is no creativity and no innovation without failure". A cool distance and inaccessible demeanor negate any possibility of establishing a classroom environment fostering creative confidence.

Thus, we perpetuate a system that disavows creative thinking. Nevertheless, the calls continue, often in vain, for the professorate to instill creative confidence and to develop creative pedagogical approaches. So, we do our best and try to incorporate exercises we consider creative. The result is often analogous to teaching an actor to phonetically deliver lines in a language other than his native tongue. It may be convincing for a while, but it is not sustainable and not nearly as effective as employing a fluent speaker.

The need for creative thinkers will not cease, however. For the next generation to take the necessary risks involved in innovating a brighter future, they must develop creative confidence and creative thinking skills. College students have immense potential, yet we squander it by failing to reignite their dormant creativity. They leave with a vast fund of knowledge but robbed of the opportunity to develop novel approaches to solving society's greatest scourges due, in part,

to faculty out of touch with their own creativity and thus unable to revive, nurture, and exploit students' abilities to think creatively.

For students to reach their potential, university faculty must approach teaching and learning from a new perspective. To deliver a truly creativity-provoking educational experience, students need to be empowered in the classroom. Faculty must help them appreciate the ways in which the pieces of the liberal arts puzzle fit together and they will most effectively do so in classroom environments that nurture creative thinking.

College administrators, who were often once faculty, should recognize the call for action and facilitate faculty rediscovery of their core creative beings. We all have them. They may be deeply repressed, but they exist within us all. Perhaps, we need creativity boot camps for professors that focus equally on creativity boosting pedagogical strategies and creating comfort with vulnerability and risk-taking. But, to encourage and sustain such a focus will entail shifting recognition and rewards for risk-taking in the classroom, and support for modeling and creating classroom milieus that foster and nurture comfort with vulnerability and failure.

But, it is now an imperative. It is not enough that creative pursuits contribute to overall wellness and quality of life, the workforce demands are clear and it is the responsibility of faculty to rise to the challenge and equip themselves to prepare students.

A Reflection on Play

Why Play is Important to Creativity

The typical collegiate experience involves a large dose of serious studying and an often heavier dose of serious partying. But, partying does not always equate to play. And, although some creative behaviors emerge from partying, few have the potential for exacting benefit for humanity. When I ask my students about the last time they played, most can't remember. Not that they are concerned, of course, play is for children. "But, why?" I ask them. Consider the creative output of play. The creation of castles from cardboard boxes and musical instruments from random kitchen utensils. Is it any wonder that advanced medical instruments and space technology in the early prototype stage often resemble something created by a 10-year-old? We need play to stimulate our minds, to loosen connections, and to lower the frontal lobe filters than keep us locked onto the ordinary. I've blogged recently about **play** in the classroom. Here are a few more resources I'd encourage you to examine.

- Let's Stop Calling Them Soft Skills – All the skills the business world requires, we practice at play.
- Your Brain has a "Shuffle" Button – Here's How to Use it – Play scrambles the connections between neurons that leads to the creation of unique ideas.
- Tales of Creativity and Play – TED Talk from IDEOs Tim Brown.
- The Transformative Power of Play and Its Link to Creativity – An interview with neuroscientist and LEGO Foundation CEO, Dr. Randa Grob-Zakhary.
- Ideas are Born in Fields of Play: Towards a Theory of Play and Creativity in Organizational Settings – A scholarly article examining the positive impact of play in organizations.
- When We Were Kids – A motivational and inspirational video on the importance of recapturing the playfulness of youth.

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