Creativity in the Classroom Coda: Twenty Key Points and Other Insights

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As you have seen, chapter authors approached the assignment in several different ways. Some of them (such as Baldwin; Hennessey; Piirto; and Richards) talked about their personal journey in discovering creativity in the classrooms. Others used specific, concrete examples of creativity-nurturing curriculum and activities (such as Craft; Fairweather & Cramond; Niu & Zhou; Skiba; Tan, Sternberg, & Grigorenko; and Stokes). Some discussed actually teaching courses on creativity or developing programs to encourage creativity (such as Halpern; Piirto; Plucker & Dow; and Renzulli & de Wet).

One recurring theme in the book is the list of numerous (often unintentional) ways in which creativity can be (and has been) discouraged in the classroom. Nickerson offers a marvelously engaging tongue-in-cheek recipe for how the classroom can be a creativity stifling experience – in a way, his chapter serves as a synthesis of key points from the past literature. Our authors proposed a series of specific ideas and practices that can be used to increase student creativity. These range from tips for good practice to cautions to advice on how to use available resources for your advantage. We now offer our own synthesis of twenty key points that personally resonated with us as educators. We then highlight some other important themes and ideas that recur in these chapters.

Our list of the twenty key points:

1. The benefits of keeping up with amazing advances that are happening every month in technology that can help in supporting creativity, specifically discussed by Halpern as she talks about the prevalence of virtual worlds in which people learn in vastly unique settings from a wide array of “teachers.” These technologies also include video games specifically designed to enhance learning and thinking, software that promotes the use of visual imagery, and online communities that foster the sharing of creative ideas (see also Baldwin and Renzulli & de Wet).
2. The power of being able to learn and share classroom ideas with other cultures. One example of this, from Niu and Zhou, is China’s concept of
the “Good Teacher” in which the teacher occupies a high place in society and is given societal support and confirmation of the importance of his or her work (see also Halpern and Stokes).

3. The necessity of being aware of limiting and creativity stifling myths and misconceptions. The chapters by Plucker and Dow and Richards highlight (and dispel) several false myths pertaining to creativity being inextricably linked to madness or the view that there is a necessarily disruptive or dangerous component to being creative (see also Beghetto & Kaufman).

4. Baldwin’s argument that nurturing creativity is particularly urgent for underserved and marginalized groups, such as students from minority and low socioeconomic backgrounds. This argument is particularly important given the trend of high-poverty “underperforming” schools, which typically serve minority students, turning to increasingly narrow and even scripted curricula. All students deserve opportunities to express and develop their creativity as part of the regular curriculum (see also Beghetto & Kaufman).

5. The importance of developing domain-specific knowledge, as Baer and Garret argue, as a means to prepare students to be creative in that specific area – rather than use general creativity techniques and tactics (see also Niu & Zhou and Stokes).

6. Hennessey writes of the benefits of supporting students’ intrinsic motivation and enjoyment while learning and highlights the potential negative effect of rewards on student creativity (see also Niu & Zhou; Piirto; Renzulli & De Wet; and Sternberg). Baer and Garrett also consider how the need to give feedback and rewards can be balanced with the need to enhance intrinsic student motivation.

7. The importance of acknowledging everyday creativity. Both Richards and Beghetto and Kaufman say that most people and activities can be creative, not simply the elect or elite (see also Craft and Plucker & Dow), and argue for the inclusion of creativity in the everyday curriculum.

8. Just as improvisation enhances ensemble musical comedy or theatrical performances, Sawyer argues, so too will creative classroom teaching come from the allowance of unplanned and seemingly tangential thoughts and ideas (see also Baldwin, Piirto).

9. Craft discusses the need to view creativity from a wisdom-oriented perspective in which there is a focus on creativity and wisdom working together to link personal concerns with cultural and ecological priorities that is essential to incorporate into our educational system (see also Richards and Sternberg).

10. Runco outlines the tactics of challenging assumptions and considering opposite possibilities (see also Daniels & Piechowski), including the importance of (1) providing immediate and remote models of creative behavior, (2) regular opportunities for students to practice creative
thinking, and (3) appropriately reinforcing creative thinking and behavior (see also Piirto).

11. Both Sternberg and Richards write of the importance of supportive mentors and environment. Renzulli and de Wet say that one way to encourage creativity is by finding students a wide variety of resources – including mentors who will connect them to potentially meaningful subjects or topics and offering a chance for students’ creative ideas to reach an audience.

12. Broadening conceptions of creativity in classroom by exploring potentially limiting self-beliefs about the nature of creativity is particularly important for prospective and practicing teachers, students and parents (Beghetto & Kaufman). This point is in alignment with Plucker and Dow’s idea that examining one’s own beliefs about creativity (and identifying misconceptions) is a necessary first step toward creating conditions for creativity enhancement.

13. Stokes discusses the value of constraints for creativity. Rather than thinking of constraints placed on classroom tasks as merely a limitation that undermines creativity, Stokes argues that such constraints can actually support students to think in novel ways – often in ways opposite to what they are accustomed (see also Plucker & Dow).

14. Hennessey says that at a time when it may be especially difficult for teachers to highlight creativity, it is even more important for individual teachers to support creativity at a “grass-roots level” (see also Beghetto & Kaufman; Richards; and Sawyer).

15. When assessing academic and creative ability/potential, Sternberg writes, educators need to be very careful to use the best possible assessments – many of the most commonly used assessments are not the best ones available (see also Baer & Garrett and Sawyer). Skiba, Tan, Sternberg, and Grigorenko underscore this idea by stressing the importance of approaching the assessment of creativity in multiple ways (highlighting several compelling and cutting edge examples of creativity assessment).

16. Daniels and Piechowski discuss the importance for educators to understand overexcitability in relation to some students’ experience of creativity. Overexcitability is a multidimensional and often overwhelming perception of the world that can be manifested via psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginational, or emotional ways (see also Richards’ views on the behavior of some gifted and creative students).

17. Piirto argues for the need to help students develop strong self-discipline, which can both increase creative productivity and enhance persistence in following a creative idea (see also Sternberg). Piirto also stresses the important point that nurturing creativity in the classroom results from a partnership between educators and their students – helping to ensure that creativity becomes a meaningful part of students’ and teachers’ lives.
18. Sawyer proposes that creativity should go beyond arts education and be present in all types of curriculum (including math and science) via the fostering of learning environments that emphasize active learning and knowledge building (see also Fairweather & Cramond).

19. Skiba, Tan, Sternberg, and Grigorenko stress the importance of teachers’ developing a clear understanding of what creativity is, why it is important, and how it can be taught. This involves identifying potential barriers posed by implicit theories of creativity and, as Beghetto & Kaufman also discuss, the universal possibility for students’ creativity to be nurtured in almost any context and subject area.

20. Fairweather and Cramond write about how to weave critical and creative thinking skills in the classroom by using a variety of engagement and problem solving techniques (see also Baer & Garrett and Halpern).

Many other themes can be found throughout these pages, such as discipline and methodological diversity (Craft and Niu & Zhou), the importance of imagination and exploring possibilities (Baldwin; Craft, Daniels & Piechowski; Piirto; and Sternberg), the need to specifically tell your students that you want and encourage creative behavior and be ready for that to happen (Halpern), the use of games (Niu & Zhou), creative potential (Beghetto & Kaufman; Runco; and Skiba, Tan, Sternberg, & Grigorenko), the importance of using examples (Runco), the importance of telling students exactly what is expected of them (Fairweather & Cramond and Stokes) and emphasizing that creativity is important and is welcome in the classroom (Beghetto & Kaufman, Richards, and Sternberg), the need to tolerate unique or wild ideas (Daniels & Piechowski and Runco), the multiple ways to teach, learn, and assess creativity (Renzulli & De Wet; and Skiba, Tan, Sternberg, & Grigorenko), the importance of curricular reform (Baldwin; Craft; and Hennessey), and the sad truth that most educational systems do not like change (Hennessey).

We hope that this book was as enjoyable, provocative, and fun to read for you as it has been for us to edit. We would also love to hear stories of teachers coming up with new ways to be creative in the classroom (and, indeed, we are working on a future volume filled with best creative practices) – feel free to e-mail us at beghetto@uoregon.edu or jkaufman@csusb.edu.