



Fighting Words as a Model of Creative Space:

Researching the Physical,
Emotional/Social and Critical
Dimensions to Recreate the
Model in a School Context

Francesca Lorenzi & Irene White

Dublin City University, Ireland

Arts in Society Conference

Rome 2014

Current?



The aspiration



The compromise ?



No Room for Creativity?

The Issue

- PISA OECD Creative Problem Solving Report 2012: assessing 15 year old children's ability to implement creative problem solving skills in real life situations puts Ireland 22nd place of the 44 examined countries (Table V.A)

“My desire to venture for the mainland increased rather than decreased, as the means for it seemed impossible. This at length put me on thinking whether it was not possible to make myself a canoe... even without tools... of the trunk of a great tree.. This I thought not only possible but easy” (Defoe, 1919)



Little 'c' creativity as '*Possibility thinking*

'refusing to be stumped by circumstances but being imaginative in order to find a way around a problem'

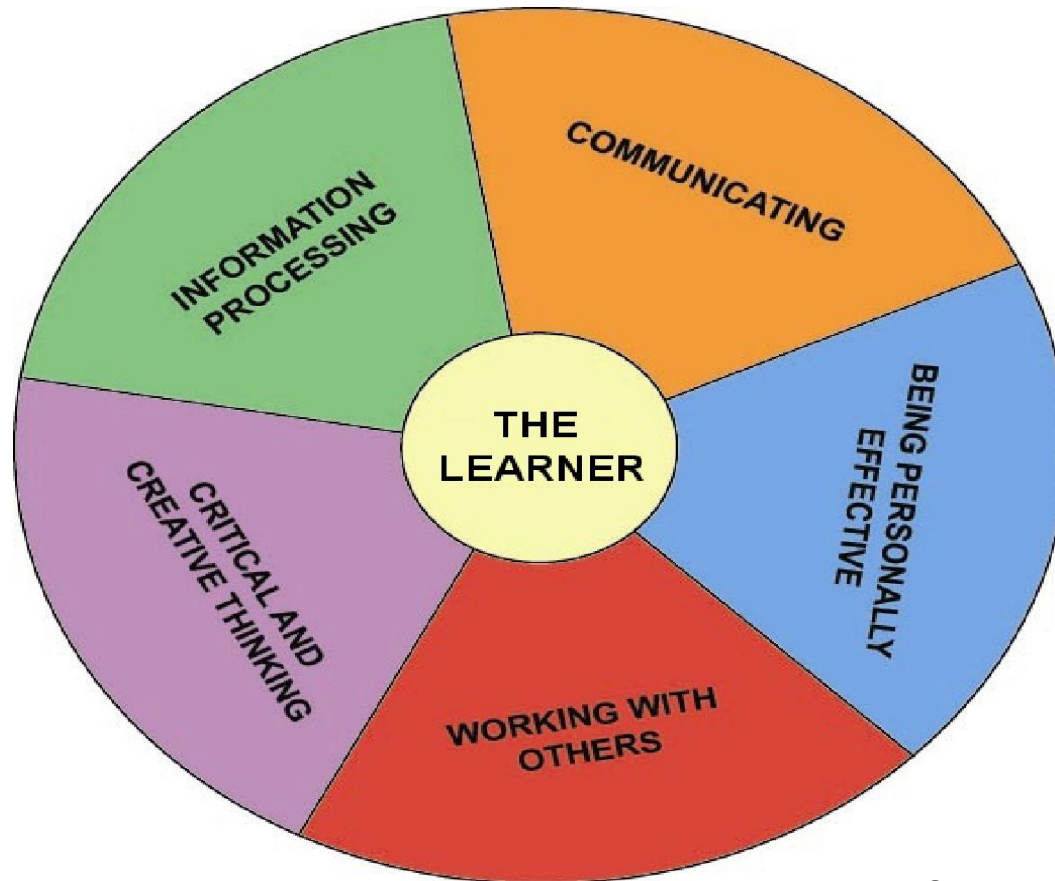
(Craft 2000, pp. 3-4)

No Room for Creativity?

Second level curriculum in Ireland:

- Junior Cycle presently under reform
- Senior Cycle under ongoing review since 2002
- Overemphasis on summative assessment:
 - “the curriculum must place a strong **emphasis on developing skills** and competences associated with **creativity, problem solving and decision making**... for many learners, the senior cycle experience is too often based solely in the absorption and understanding of existing, received knowledge” (NCCA, 2002, p34).
- Shift towards key skills
- Recognition at policy level of need for critical and creative thinking
- Translation to subject specific syllabi somewhat limited
 - Even in subjects with an artistic content

Key Skills – Senior Cycle



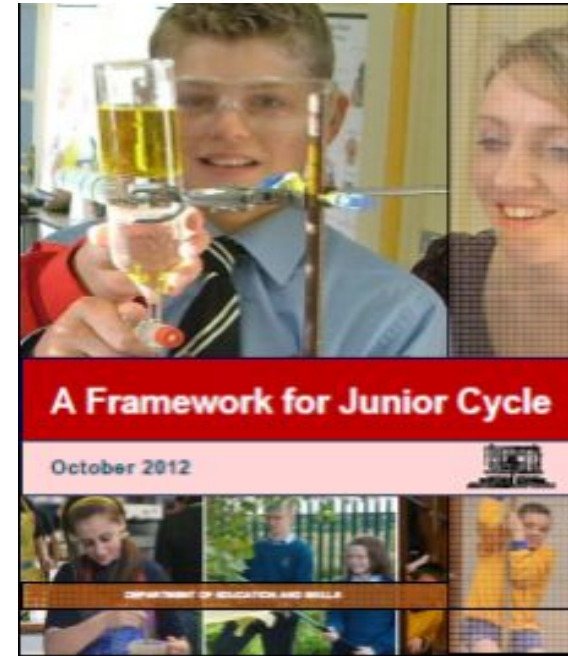
Source: NCCA, 2009

Subject		Creativity	Creative
Art	Syllabus	0	1
	Guidelines	No Guidelines available	
Biology	Syllabus	0	0
	Guidelines	0	0
Business	Syllabus	0	0
	Guidelines	0	0
Chemistry	Syllabus	0	0
	Guidelines	0	0
Design & Communication Graphics	Syllabus	2	14
	Guidelines	1	3
Engineering	Syllabus	1	0
	Guidelines	No Guidelines available	
English	Syllabus	0	4
	Guidelines	1	8
French	Syllabus	0	0
	Guidelines	3	6
Geography	Syllabus	0	0
	Guidelines	0	1
Maths	Syllabus	0	5
	Guidelines	No Guidelines available	
Music	Syllabus	4	0
	Guidelines	1	6



Opening a Door to Creativity?

- **Curricular developments** in second level education in Ireland
- October 2012, the Irish government launched **A Framework for Junior Cycle**
 - emphasising a broad and balanced approach to learning
 - better use of assessment
 - greater school autonomy
- **Eight key principles** for Junior Cycle education
- Explicit inclusion of **creativity** as one of the key principles and **being creative** as one of the key skills



Creativity in the Revised Junior Cycle

As a Principle:

Creativity and innovation

Curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning provide opportunities for students to be creative and innovative.

As a Key Skill:

Being Creative

- Imagining
- Exploring options and alternatives
- Implementing ideas and taking action
- Learning creatively
- Stimulating creativity using digital technology

Research Approach

Methodology

A qualitative case study.

The following data collection methods were used for triangulation purposes:

Interviews:

- Manager and founder of *Fighting Words*, Séan Love
- Artistic director and founder of *Fighting Words*, Roddy Doyle.
- Chief Executive Officer of National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)
- 6 principals of schools
- Radio extracts of interviews with various FW stakeholders

Questionnaires:

- 256 students
- 7 teachers
- 41 *Fighting Words* volunteers

Observations:

- 6 Workshops
- 1 Tutor Training Session

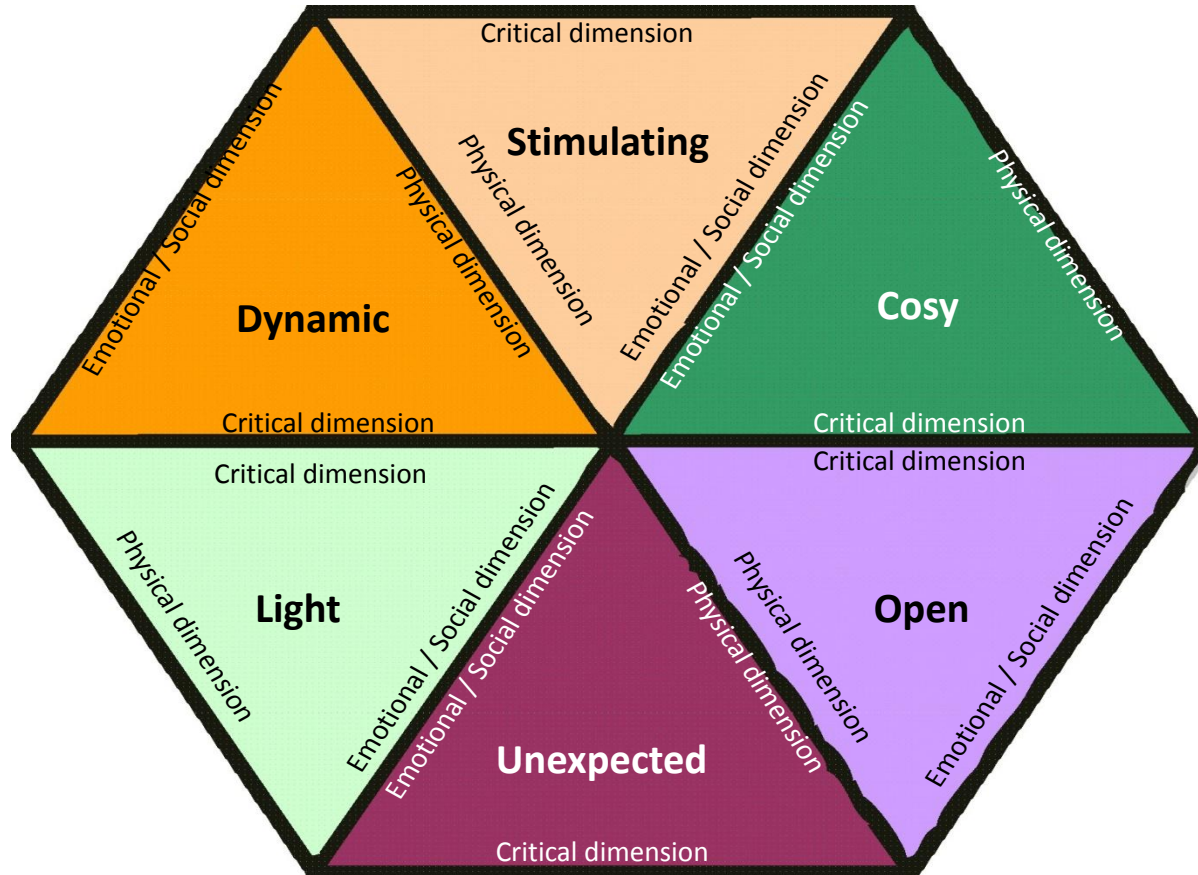


Fighting Words video

A Matrix for defining a creative space

		Dimensions		
		Physical	Emotional/Social	Critical
Facets	Open	No physical barriers	Non-Judgmental	Originality/Imagination
	Light	Bright	Light-hearted/ Playful	Experimenting with ideas
	Stimulating	Room space conducive to creative work	Eliciting engagement/ Motivational/ Stimulating resourcefulness	Maieuticity/Generativity
	Cosy	Comfortable	Supportive/ Non- Threatening/Generating resilience	Expressivity
	Unexpected	Unusual use of space	Encouraging divergence	Encouraging resourcefulness
	Dynamic	Multi-purpose/ Allows for flow of movement, interactivity	Allowing for progression	Encouraging restlessness of creative thinking

A multifaceted and multidimensional concept of Creative Space



Light

THE LITERATURE

- Sensory qualities in learning environments – **light, colour, sound, micro-climate** – are important influences on children’s and young people’s perceptions of how creative they can be (Vecchi, 2010).
- Cumming’s (2007) study of primary poetry lessons found that **humour** and **enjoyment of language** were an important element of the teacher/student relationship.
- Bringing more **‘playful’ or ‘games-based’ approaches** into classrooms at all ages can support the development of creative skills (Cremin et al., 2006; Cumming, 2007; European Commission, 2009; Halsey et al., 2006; Jindal-Snape, Baird, & Miller, 2011; Miller, Hudson, Miller, & Shimi, 2010).
- When children and young people are given some control over their learning and **supported to take risks** with the right balance between structure and **freedom**, their creativity is enhanced (Burgess & Addison, 2007; Cremin, Burnard, & Craft, 2006; Ewing, 2011; Gandini et al., 2005; Grainger, Gooch, & Lambirth, 2005; Hall et al., 2007; Halsey et al., 2006; Wood & Ashfield, 2008).

THE DATA

- “The setting is superb. ... I remember being blown away the first day going into that first reception space walking through *the wall of books* into the other **nice bright space**” (Interview - Principal)
- In *Fighting Words* when we are given a group of kids to work with they are already excited and they’re already out of their class environment...we get a great reaction because we can write a story and the character in it can let a big fart and **they don’t do that in school so we already have them giggling and laughing**. (Radio extract- interview with tutor)
- “We’d give them scenarios that they could act out and we’d type up these brief dialogues, it worked without fail, no matter who the students are, once they see it become real, written up on the screen, they start to edit it, they **take ownership** of it.” (Interview - Séan Love)

Open

THE LITERATURE

- Jankowska & Atlay (2008) argue that **openness, brightness and minimal use of physical barriers** promotes creativity.
- Jankowska & Atlay (2008) also highlight the importance of atmosphere and suggest that in such emotional space the **atmosphere** is personal, less bookish and makes students feel **open to comment honestly**.
- Chandler (1999) argues that the process of participating in a group writing project enables individuals to access self, **imagination** and **voice**.
- **To imagine** is to envisage **a possible world** (Lipman, 2003, p. 245)

THE DATA

- “We’re taken out of that into a **space that’s much freer**, quite different, we interact with different kinds of adults, they’re not teachers who tend to be a particular class, type, so they interact with different...that experience of coming out of school into a different kind of space where everything is different, **there’s no desks...the organisation of the space is different**” (interview with NCCA CEO)
- “FW offers a **non-judgmental space** alternative to school that **allows students to make mistakes**” (Tutor Questionnaire)
- There were **no right or wrong answers** (Student Questionnaire)
- “I could have **my say**” (Student Questionnaire)
- “FW develops **imaginative skills**” (Teacher Questionnaire)
- “It got me to think **outside the box**” (Student Questionnaire)
- “I was **free** to write what I wanted” (Student Questionnaire)
- “There is a **sense of freedom** generated by being allowed to write their own stories” (Teacher Questionnaire)

Stimulating

THE LITERATURE

- An important feature of the visual environment to stimulate pupils' creativity is **displays of work in progress** (Addison et al., 2010).
- Interesting, motivating and relevant projects with **exciting starting points and stimulus materials** develop and open pupils' minds (Gkolia et al., 2009; Rutland and Barlex, 2008)
- Halsey et al.(2006) identify the importance of the **'authenticity'** of the task
- Opportunities for **working collaboratively** with their peers (Burgess & Addison, 2007; Dillon et al., 2007; Halsey et al., 2006; Rutland & Barlex, 2008; Wood & Ashfield, 2008).
- Dialogue and interpersonal exchange spark creativity (Gandini et al., 2005).
- Ross (1996, p13) argues that "collaborative story writing seems to **unleash** the creativity locked inside many of the students".
- Creative thinking not only is a stimulus to satisfaction, pleasure, joy, and delight in others, but it in some cases **stimulates others' creativity**. (Lipman, 2003, p. 246)

THE DATA

- Moving to an adjoining space energises students and signals a change from collaborative to individual work and provides students with **time and space to think, imagine and create** (Observation)
- Scenarios of immediate **relevance and interest** (Observation)
- "Rather than trying to get them to start working individually from the beginning, when they come in...eh...no matter what age they are, they **work as a group** and we use the screen we don't hand them a blank sheet of paper for the first half hour or an hour and what we discovered, really what this did was, **it opened the door for not just teenagers but older people** as well, it got them over the fear of the blank page – they don't know how to start (Interview - Séan Love)
- Students more likely to **approach teachers with new ideas** (Questionnaire - Teachers)
- While we offer a **broad curriculum the syllabi are very constraining so the imagination of a child is very constrained**... generally they are reminded to regurgitate the facts, the facts, the facts and sometimes there isn't space for expression aside of the facts... generally they don't get the opportunity... it is very, very important and it's something that is **not encouraged enough** at second-level and it's something that should be cherished... (Principal C)

THE LITERATURE

- The C-space (creativity space) as “**clean, nicely furnished/decorated**... [and which] doesn't feel like a classroom” (Jankowska & Atlay, 2008, p. 275).
- Holaday (1997) suggests that **coaching rather than judging** is more likely to help students to develop writing skills and confidence in their writing ability.
- Peters' (2010) study on the benefits of **mentorship** in an art field highlighted that the personal mentor-mentee relationship **increases confidence and self-esteem** in young people and contributes to their overall development.
- Regularly practiced **dialogue** can support and sustain **a culture and community that thinks together**, whilst the most favourable situation for creativity seems to be **interpersonal exchange**, with negotiation of conflict and comparison of ideas and actions being the decisive elements (Gandini et al., 2005).
- Pupil creativity is closely related to opportunities for **working collaboratively with peers** (Burgess & Addison, 2007; Dillon et al., 2007; Halsey et al., 2006; Rutland & Barlex, 2008; Wood & Ashfield, 2008, Miller et al., 2010).

THE DATA

- “**Leaving the classroom traits behind**” and “**letting go of control**” improved teacher-student relationships (Questionnaire - Teachers)
- Tutors are fundamental to the creation of a **safe and supportive emotional space** (Interviews, Questionnaires and Observation)
- The tutors themselves highlight the importance of their often arduous motivational role in helping students to build **self-reliance and resilience**. (Questionnaires)
- Tutors are seen by principals and teachers as essential in motivating students to **endure through a lengthy writing process**. (Interviews, Questionnaires)
- “Allowing students space and freedom to express themselves” (Questionnaires – Teachers)
- “They were **so eager to get up and talk** and vocalise and one girl, they were saying, never stopped talking ,ye know, just talk, talk, talk, talk, talk . We're always saying 'be quiet', 'settle down' so I think that's **a different type of dynamic** (Interview - Principal B)

Unexpected

THE LITERATURE

- What worked best for the disaffected young people in four of the five projects in the study by Halsey et al. (2006) was an approach that was **different** to formal education, was **flexible, informal**
- In order to stimulate creative responses from pupils, activities need an element of **novelty** (Gkolia et al., 2009; Rutland & Barlex, 2008).
- According to Winner, Goldstein and Vincent-Lancrin (2013, p.19): **The arts** allow a different way of understanding than the sciences and other academic subjects. Because they are an arena without right and wrong answers, they **free students to explore and experiment**.
- The meaning of originality lies in its consequences, and surprise is one of those consequences, when the originality is not merely novel but fresh. Although theoretical thinking seeks understanding, **creative thinking** defies it, thereby **generating astonishment and wonder**. (Lipman, 2003, p. 246)

THE DATA

- “The setting is superb. ... I remember being blown away the first day going into that first reception space walking through **the wall of books** into the other nice bright space” (Interview - Principal)
- **The building itself is quite magical** and I think the space is an important part of what we do...We are lucky to have a magic door at *Fighting Words*...[it]is a bookcase that opens up so when the kids are ready to go through they come up with a **couple of magic words** (Radio extract interview– Volunteer co-ordinator)
- “I could have **my say**” (Questionnaire - Student)
- I learnt that **no idea is bad or stupid** (Questionnaire - Student)
- Being **surprised** at my own ability (Questionnaire – Student)
- “I had a good story in my head and **I did not know about it**” (Questionnaire – Student)

Dynamic

THE LITERATURE

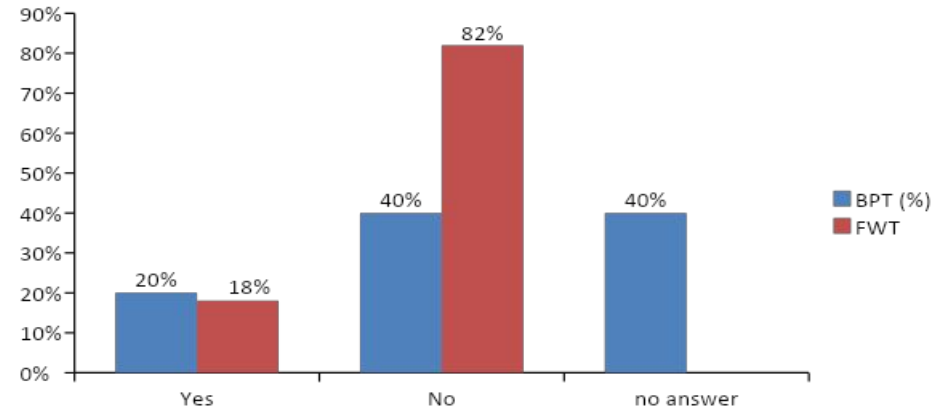
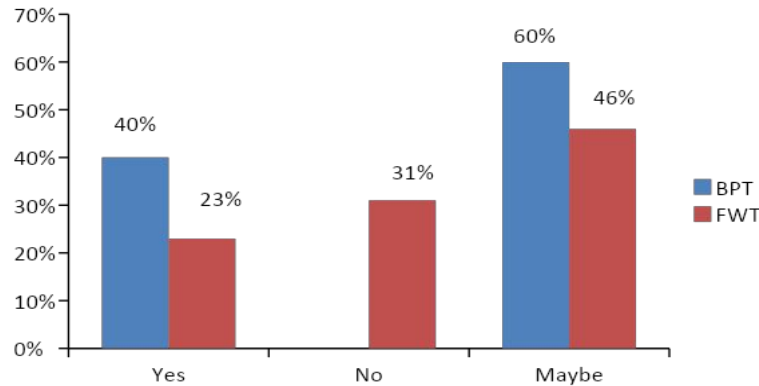
- The space within a classroom should be capable of being used **flexibly** to promote pupils' creativity (Addison, Burgess, Steers, & Trowell, 2010; Bancroft, Fawcett, & Hay, 2008; Jeffrey, 2006).
- Success in writing boosts students' self-esteem (Nicolini, 1994), **can contribute to the mental, emotional, and social development** of the writer (Chandler, 1999) and offers students opportunities to develop civic awareness and responsibility through the exploration of social and moral issues (Howell, 2008).
- The **restlessness of creative thinking** reveals itself in a **striving to go beyond the previous level**. ...Not to endeavour to go beyond previous achievements is to risk engaging in a form of inquiry that lacks integrity (Lipmann, 2003, p. 246)

THE DATA

- Minimal use of physical barriers and flexible seating arrangements allows easy transition between activities and encourage less formal types of interaction (Observation)
- They were so proud of themselves to have their book launched, to be sold, to become writers, published writers – a lot of those girls - their **self-esteem has just blossomed** and they hold their head up high and they're kind of **role models** now to the other students." (Interview Principal F)
- Students who were involved in *Fighting Words* in fourth year are generally the ones who **put themselves forward for things** like mentoring in fifth or sixth year or the student leadership team; I think that presenting their work, working with groups gives them skills that students who haven't been involved mightn't have... one of the writers is now the head girl, most of them actually are now in **leadership positions**. (Interview Principal E)
- I think **it's more than just short story writing**, I think **it's about developing the creative skills, the mind-set** (Interview Principal)
- *Fighting Words* experience is different from what students might usually encounter in school. **Students learn to be more creative or at least open a door to their creativity"**(Principal)

Building 'the space' in the curriculum

'creativity is not always expressed in school-appropriate ways' (Starko, 2005, p.11)



- Can the Fighting Word model be transferred to the formal school environment without compromising the integrity of the model?

(Teachers and Volunteer tutors' responses)

- Can the *Fighting Words* model be transferred to the formal school environment without modifications? (Teachers and Volunteer tutors' responses)

'Much of the beauty of it is difference from the norm of school... so maybe a specific 'creative room' would need to be set aside in the school so that students don't view it just as another class.' (Questionnaire, Volunteer tutor)

Building 'the space' in the JC curriculum

The dimensions	The FW model	The challenges to transfer	Revised JC principles
Physical	Bright, Open, Cosy space Out of school space	Unavailability of resources to recreate a suitable space	[dependent on schools resources]
Emotional & Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Volunteers rather than teachers • Non-hierarchical structures •Out of school experience •Almost individual support building confidence •Relaxing environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Teacher as assessor •Students as unequals • Limited level of individual attention afforded impinging on development •Often chaotic environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Students learn to work together in a collaborative process •Seek out different viewpoints and perspectives and consider them carefully •Curriculum, assessment, teaching and learning enables students to build on their learning to date, recognises their progress in learning and supports their future learning •The student experience contributes directly to their physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing and resilience. •Learning takes place in a climate focused on collective wellbeing of school, community and society.
Critical	Not judgmental Dialogic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment fostering convergence • Culture of Summative Assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Think creatively and critically •Look for new and different ways of answering questions and solving problems •Students develop their creativity and imagination and an appreciation of their ability to be creative •Try out different approaches when working on a task and

A compromise?





....To Conclude

Contact Us:

Francesca.Lorenzi@dcu.ie

Irene.White@dcu.ie

**School of Education Studies
Dublin City University
Glasnevin
Dublin 9
Ireland**



Useful References

- Addison, N., Burgess, L., Steers, J., & Trowell, J. (2010). *Understanding Art Education: Engaging reflexively with practice*. London: Routledge.
- Bancroft, S., Fawcett, M., & Hay, P. (2008). *Researching children researching the world: 5 × 5 × 5 = creativity*. Trentham: Stoke-on-Trent.
- Burgess, L., & Addison, N. (2007). Conditions for learning: Partnerships for engaging secondary pupils with contemporary art. *JADE*, 26.2, 185–198.
- Chandler, GE. (1999) A Creative Writing Program to Enhance Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy in Adolescents. *Journal Of Child & Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 12, (2),70-78.
- Cremin, T., Burnard, P., & Craft, A. (2006, November). Pedagogy and possibility thinking in the early years. *Thinking Skills & Creativity*, 1(2), 108–119.
- Cumming, R. (2007). Language play in the classroom: Encouraging children’s intuitive creativity with words through poetry. *Literacy*, 41(2), 93–101.
- Department of Education and Skills (2012) *A Framework for Junior Cycle*. Dublin: Department of Education and Skills.
- Dillon, P., Craft, A., Best, P., with Rigby, A., & Simms, K. (2007). *Turning Peases West Inside Out: Flexible Educational Environments for Developing Possibilities and Pedagogies*. Creative Partnerships Durham Sunderland.
- European Commission. (2009). *Creativity in schools in Europe: A survey of teachers*. <http://create2009.europa.eu>
- Ewing, R. (2011). *The arts and Australian education: Realising the potential*. <http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/AER-58.pdf>
- Gandini, L., Hill, L., Cadwell, L., & Schwall, C. (Eds.). (2005). *In the spirit of the studio: Learning from the Atelier of Reggio Emilia*. New York: Teachers’ College Press.
- Gkolia, C., Brundett, M., & Switzer, J. (2009). An education action zone at work: Primary teacher perceptions of the efficacy of a creative learning and collaborative leadership project. *Education 3–13*, 37(2), 131–144.
- Grainger, T., Gooch, K., & Lambirth, A. (2005). *Creativity and writing*. London: Routledge.
- Hall, C., Thomson, P., & Russell, L. (2007). Teaching like an artist: The pedagogic identities and practices of artists in schools. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 28(5), 605–619.
- Halsey, K., Jones, M., & Lord, P. (2006) <http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/NES01/NES01.pdf>
- Holaday, L. (1997) Writing students need Coaches, Not Judges *IN Tchudi, S., Alternatives to Grading Students Writing*, Urbana: NCTE, 35-46

- Howell, B. (2008) Literacy, subjectivity and the gender divide: the freedom of writing implies the freedom of the citizen (Sartre, 1948). *Gender and Education*, 20 (5), 511-525.
- Jankowska, M. and Atlay M. (2008) Use of creative space in enhancing students' engagement *Innovations Education and Teaching International* 45, (3) 271-279
- Jeffrey, B. (2006). Creative teaching and learning: Towards a common discourse and practice. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 36(3), 399–414.
- Jindal-Snape, D., Baird, L., & Miller, K. (2011). A longitudinal study to investigate the effectiveness of the Guitar Hero project in supporting transition from P7-S1. Report for LTS. University of Dundee, Dundee.
- Lipman, M. (2003) *Thinking in Education*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Miller, D. J., Hudson, A., Miller, A., & Shimi, J. (2010). Nintendo project: Report for LTS. Dundee: University of Dundee.
- National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (1999) *All our futures: Creativity, culture and education*. Report to the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education. London: National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education.
- NCCA (2002) *Developing Senior Cycle Education Consultative Paper on Issues and Options*. Dublin: NCCA
- Nicolini, M.B.(1994) Stories Can Save Us: A Defense of Narrative Writing Author(s) *The English Journal*, Vol. 83, (2) 56-61
- OECD 2013, , *PISA 2012 Results: Creative Problem Solving (Volume V) Students' Skills in Tackling Real Life Problems*. Available: <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/PISA-2012-PS-snapshot-performance.pdf>
- Peters, D.M. (2010) Passing on: The old head/younger dancer mentoring relationship in the cultural sphere of rhythm tap *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 34 (4), 436-438
- Ross, C. L. (1996) Collaborating for confidence in basic writing *College Teaching* , 44 (1) , 13.
- Rutland, M., & Barlex, D. (2008). Perspectives on pupil creativity in design and technology in the lower secondary curriculum in England. *International Journal of Technology and Design Education*, 18, 139–165.
- Sagan, O. (2008) 'Playgrounds, Studios and hiding places: emotional exchange in creative learning spaces', *Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education*, 6 (3) pp. 173-186
- Vecchi, V. (2010). *Art and creativity in Reggio Emilia: Exploring the role and potential of ateliers in early childhood education*. London: Routledge
- Wood, R., & Ashfield, J. (2008). The use of the interactive whiteboard for creative teaching and learning in literacy and mathematics: A case study. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 39(1), 84–96.