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Resource Guide
Reference Radio Show on 2/15/26

Creativity vs. Performance

Are We Teaching Kids to Think — or Just to Produce?

Exploring the difference between **performative creativity** (producing something that *looks* creative) and **problem-solving creativity** (thinking, questioning, iterating, and improving ideas). The conversation examines how educational structures, incentives, and time pressures may influence how creativity is practiced — and how families, mentors, and communities can help cultivate deeper critical thinking.

Defining Creativity

What do we really mean when we say "creative"?

Core Distinctions

Performative Creativity

- Decorative or presentation-focused
- Final product emphasized
- "Does it look right?"
- Completion-oriented

Problem-Solving Creativity

- Idea-focused and process-driven
- Iteration emphasized
- "Does it work better?"
- Exploration-oriented

Reflection

- When have you felt most creative — during brainstorming or during presentation?
- Do we reward polish more often than process?

Perspective from Research

Large international education assessments increasingly define creativity as the **ability to generate, evaluate, and improve ideas**, not simply artistic output.

Reference: OECD – *PISA 2022 Creative Thinking Assessment* (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)

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What Critical Thinking Looks Like

Key Question: *What habits actually build creativity?*

Observable Behaviors

- Asking *why* and *what if*
- Testing multiple solutions
- Connecting ideas across subjects
- Revising rather than finishing quickly
- Comfort with uncertainty

Discussion Points

- **Outcome-Driven Mindset:** "Did I get the right answer?"
- **Process-Driven Mindset:** "What did I learn by trying?"

Studio Parallel
In design, the first concept is rarely the final one. Iteration is not failure — it is refinement.

Perspective from Research
Education policy research has suggested that highly standardized or test-pressured environments can sometimes **narrow curriculum breadth and reduce opportunities for exploratory learning**, even when intentions are positive.

Reference: Au, Wayne (2007). *High-Stakes Testing and Curricular Control: A Qualitative Metasynthesis.* **Educational Researcher.**

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The Impact on Young Minds

Key Question: *What happens when creativity becomes performance?*

Observed Shifts

- Hesitation to take risks
- Increased fear of being wrong
- Preference for instructions over invention
- Viewing creativity as a "talent" rather than a practiced skill

Concept: Creative Muscle Memory
Creativity strengthens through use. When opportunities for open-ended thinking decrease, confidence and cognitive flexibility can weaken.

Broader Context from Research
Long-term creativity research has raised questions about whether children consistently receive enough opportunities to practice **divergent thinking and idea development**. These studies do **not** point to a single cause, but they highlight patterns worth discussing.

Reference: Kim, Kyung Hee (2011). *The Creativity Crisis.* **Creativity Research Journal.**

Additional perspective on transferable thinking skills and adaptability in modern economies:
Reference: National Research Council (2012). *Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferable Knowledge and Skills in the 21st Century.* National Academies Press.

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Moving Forward: Building Thinking Spaces

Key Question: *What can we do — today — to encourage deeper creativity?*

Simple, Practical Actions

At Home

- Ask open-ended questions:
  - "What else could we try?"
  - "How would you improve this?"
- Celebrate drafts and revisions
- Encourage redesign challenges: improve a room corner, reorganize a closet, rethink a routine

In Classrooms & Mentorship

- Reward reasoning as much as results
- Invite multiple solution paths
- Create time for brainstorming without grading

In Professional Environments

- Value experimentation
- Allow space for prototype thinking
- Encourage collaborative problem solving over competition

Perspective from Research
Educational psychology research and multiple meta-analyses suggest that **Project-Based Learning (PBL)** and **Problem-Based Learning** environments are often associated with stronger engagement and improved critical-thinking development when thoughtfully implemented.

Reference: Hmelo-Silver, C. (2004). *Problem-Based Learning: What and How Do Students Learn?* **Educational Psychology Review.**

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The Design U Framework

Educate • Empower • Elevate

Educate

Teach *how* to think — frameworks, questioning strategies, and iterative processes.

Empower

Provide autonomy and permission to experiment, revise, and explore uncertainty.

Elevate

Celebrate originality, resilience, and improvement rather than perfection.

Conversation Starters for Families, Teams, or Classrooms

- "What problem did you solve today?"
- "What did you change after your first idea?"
- "What would you do differently next time?"
- "What question did this project raise for you?"

Suggested Weekly Practice

Choose one activity this week where the goal is **not** to finish perfectly, but to **improve something through iteration.**
Document the first idea, the revision, and the insight gained in between.

Closing Perspective

Creativity is not simply expression — it is **applied curiosity.**
The goal is not to produce perfect answers, but to cultivate confident thinkers who understand that creativity is not decoration — it is **problem solving with personality.**