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## Nurturing Creativity And Critical Thinking In Students: The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

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### ABSTRACT

21st-century learning is a shift in education from the traditional methods to a more modern approach. It focuses on preparing the students for the future by teaching them the skills like critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration etc. rather than memorization or recitation. It is about preparing the students for the real world, not just for a test. These skills are required to enable an individual to face the challenges like globally-active, digitally transforming, collaboratively moving forward, creatively progressing, seeking competent human-resource and quick in adopting changes. Creativity enables them to think outside the box and tackle problems from different perspectives. It is not so much about what students know but rather is about how they apply, suppress, and adapt with that knowledge (Lavin T.P et al., 2023). On the other hand, critical thinking is a mode of thinking, in which the individual improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully taking charge of the formation inherent in thinking and imposing intellectual values upon them. It is not an impulsive capability but rather a required high level cognitive skill that must be developed and controlled (Celuch & Slama, 2002). Study also reveals that when students think critically, they actively engage in different processes such as communication, analysis, synthesis, problem-solving, evaluation and reflection (Mansbach. J, 2015). Fostering both these skills, creativity and critical thinking should be integral components of the curriculum to prepare students to face future challenges. Furthermore, students who possess these skills are better equipped to flourish in a fast-changing world. A curriculum that fosters both these skills keeps students engaged and motivated to learn. Incorporating creativity and critical thinking into the curriculum prepares students for success not only in their professional careers but also in their personal lives, allowing them to become adaptable, innovative, and responsible citizens in a world where technology and industries are rapidly evolving.

**Keywords:** creativity, critical thinking, 21<sup>st</sup> century learning, curriculum

## **Introduction:**

The 21st-century learning is more than just an update to traditional education. It represents a fundamental shift in how we see and prepare children for the future. It is required for students to succeed in a constantly changing global economy. It encompasses more than just the 3Rs (reading, writing, and arithmetic), emphasizing the necessity of critical thinking, creativity, cooperation, and communication skills for students to prosper in the twenty-first century. All 21st century learners are expected to read, write, and communicate effectively, as well as apply higher order thinking skills to solve difficult problems and successfully use media and technology. Creativity and critical thinking should be incorporated into the curriculum to ensure that children are ready, prepared to negotiate careers, technology, and global concerns with resilience, ethical awareness, and adaptability.

## **Nurturing Creativity in Students:**

Creativity is now becoming more vital in modern culture (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014; Richardson & Mishra, 2018; Yeh et al., 2012). Creativity is typically defined as an individual's ability to develop new ideas (Amabile, 1996; Liu, 2017; Tsai et al., 2015). It allows students to express themselves uniquely. It also allows for self-discovery and expression, promoting an identity based on uniqueness. This not only boosts their self-esteem, but also forces them to consider their own perspectives and ideas. Guilford (1950) defined creativity as the ability to solve problems, think creatively, take inventive ways, and enhance knowledge in certain academic or practical disciplines. Student's creativity is defined as "novel and meaningful thinking that emerges during the internalization and externalization phases of learning." As students are the future citizens, it is important for instructors, educators, policymakers, and researchers to foster creativity among students. Since creativity requires various types of knowledge and information (Amabile, 2012), improving student's creativity is based on knowledge management, which involves the process of converting knowledge and creating new knowledge (Hooff & Ridder, 2004), as well as the process of sharing relevant information, ideas, suggestions, and expertise with others (Bartol and Srivastava 2002). Knowledge sharing can encourage student's creativity as shared knowledge can enhance their capacities to develop new knowledge, refine old knowledge, and synthesize additional knowledge in the future (Yeh et al., 2012).

A conducive environment provides students with opportunities, such as classroom interaction, student's engagement in activities, and so on can boost their creativity and teachers play an important role in this regard. A number of studies have shown that environmental influences can enhance creativity

(Kozbelt et al., 2010). Teachers act as facilitators, encouraging students to generate new ideas from different perspectives and solve problems in novel ways.

According to Beghetto and Kaufman (2014), teachers must have strong facilitation abilities, as well as classroom involvement, good behaviors, and attitudes can foster creativity among students. Students learn and acquire information from each other when they involve in activity that are performed in group. When students learn in groups or in the classroom, their interactions with one another may be embedded in larger social networks and hence, the ties among students within social networks can boost the quality of knowledge acquired. Network ties; depict student's relationships with their teachers and classmates in an academic context influences student's outcomes (Chow & Chan, 2008). The physical and socio cultural environment influences creativity and the classroom space is a special environment that contains both physical and socio cultural elements (Hong & Song, 2020). Therefore, school environments that support and actively accelerate student's creative expression might encourage student's participation in creative activities (Davies et al., 2013; Tsai et al., 2015). Furthermore, the living environment of the students plays a significant role in fostering creativity. The way their workspace is built and organized, and even the atmosphere can spark new ideas and boost productivity. Almeida (2022) revealed that the living environment might give unique stimuli for youngsters, encouraging their curiosity and creativity. Psychological research also indicates that sensory stimuli and perceptual systems can influence creative behavior. Environmental changes in the hippocampus lead to the reorganization of active neuronal ensembles or remapping of place cells, and brain systems and neural pathways play a crucial role in regulating creative cognition and drive (Khalil et al., 2019).

Autonomous motivation is a prerequisite for creativity development (Deci et al., 2008). When the classroom environment is dynamic, students create attachments to their surroundings, which increase their eagerness to learn and leads to engagement motivation, thereby enhancing creativity. Teachers, taking on the responsibility of guiding students through constant brainstorming, develop more autonomy and passion in student's learning, therefore fostering an environment conducive to the generation of more innovative ideas.

### **Nurturing Critical thinking in Students:**

Critical thinking skills are vital in education because they allow students to successfully analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information effectively. Development of critical thinking is a multifaceted process that includes analysis, argumentation, questioning, evaluation, decision making, and taking a position (Dominguez et al., 2024). According to Facione (2015) the core of critical thinking are interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation. These skills enable students to address challenges, issues, and concepts with clarity, logic, and creativity. In an increasingly complex and interconnected world, critical thinking abilities are required for success in both academic and

professional contexts. They prepare students to negotiate ambiguity, solve issues imaginatively, and adapt to quickly changing contexts. Educators play an important role in developing critical thinking abilities among student by designing curriculum and teaching practices that encourage inquiry, analysis, and reflection. Some successful ways to foster critical thinking in the classroom include encouraging open-ended inquiry, promoting discussions, creating chances for collaborative problem solving, and providing constructive feedback.

A flexible classroom layout promotes collaborative learning and group discussions, enabling students to engage in critical thinking. Divergent thinking is an important aspect of critical thinking as it involves generating multiple solutions to a problem. Teachers can encourage this by using brainstorming techniques, mind maps, or role-playing exercises.

Critical thinking is not restricted to one perspective; it requires considering multiple viewpoints. Educators foster student's ability to think critically by allowing them to explore other perspectives and solutions. Teachers can incorporate debates, case studies, or stimulations that require students to examine and argue from various perspectives. Incorporating an interdisciplinary approach also helps students develop critical thinking skills.

Interdisciplinary learning enables students to connect diverse domains of knowledge, encouraging them to use a broader range of information and abilities to solve challenges. Effective feedback and assessment play an important role in encouraging critical thinking. Constructive feedback enables pupils to realize where they may grow and refine their thoughts. Incorporating real-world problem-solving scenarios into the curriculum can provide students practical experience with critical thinking. These issues might range from scientific experiments to ethical quandaries, encouraging students to evaluate situations, analyze evidence, and make sound conclusions.

### **Conclusion:**

Nurturing creativity and critical thinking skills in students is essential for their both personal and professional success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Integrating creativity and critical thinking skills into the curriculum and by adopting the teaching strategies, educators can empower students to thrive in an increasingly complex and dynamic world. These skills prepare students to understand and navigate the world in a thoughtful and educated way. Nurturing these skills in students can have a long-term impact on student's educational journeys and life beyond school.

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