

Being a Teacher of Creative Thinking



Why? How? What?

A lot gets said in educational literature about philosophical backgrounds to pedagogical approaches, as well as the teaching toolkits that help to put these approaches into practice. In other words: “*Here are the reasons why this approach to teaching works*” and, “*Here is a toolkit of things you can do to make it happen.*”

Both of these aspects of education are hugely important, and large parts of this blog will focus upon them. But a crucial further dimension lies between the two. If you think of the philosophical background as the question, ‘Why approach teaching like this?’ and the teacher toolkit as, ‘What activities can I do to put this into practice?’, this middle dimension can be thought of as, ‘*How do I approach teaching when using this model of education?*’

This is risky territory to go into. Telling anybody how to approach teaching can come across as patronising (and being patronising is something that literature about teaching tends to be quite good at). Given that being a teacher is about making use not only of your knowledge and skills but also your personality, and given that a personality is something that can function healthily in a myriad of different ways, it seems clear that there must be a myriad of ways to answer the question, ‘How should we approach the role of the teacher?’

For the purpose of this blog entry, the broad-brushstroke *'How do I approach this?'* will be given below in the form of some signature questions and phrases that can be of use when helping young people to generate ideas.

Between stereotypes

First, though, a more general point. In our blog post on 'Knowledge-Rich Creative Thinking' we explored what we proposed to be the false dichotomy between 'knowledge' and 'skills'. There is a similar, closely related dichotomy in the way teachers are sometimes stereotypically portrayed. On the one hand we hear about the strict, highly disciplined teacher who, at their best, gets excellent results and commands respect. On the other we have the stereotype of the fun, spontaneous teacher who, at their best, inspires young people to care and learn deeply about their subject.

To teach a knowledge-rich version of creative thinking successfully, both of these approaches are useful. There needs to be structured practice and assessment of the background knowledge and creative thinking skills that students learn. There also needs to be an open-endedness and a focus on students working on projects that are meaningful and absorbing, with space for individual student development at their own pace.

Signature Phrases

Based on the 'between stereotypes' model, the following list offers five signature questions and signature phrases that might be of help when working out how to approach being a teacher of creative thinking:

“What are your aims?”

“Come back to me when...”

“Which skills are you applying?”

“How can you frame this in terms of X and Y?”

“I can see you're thinking hard...”

Then why questions are important...