

Creativity Celebration: A Bizarre Bazaar, GAGC Convention, March 8, 2007
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Handout: Problem Finding, Synectics, and Random Input

Encouraging the types of behaviors that make children explorers and questioners!

Strategy: ***Synectics***: "Making the *strange* familiar"

"To make the strange familiar, you combine something familiar with a new problem or situation to solve the problem or come to an understanding. To make the familiar strange, you also combine something new or strange with something familiar, this time to gain new insights into or perspectives on the already familiar idea" (Starko, p.224-226).

Activity: Participants work together in small groups to select things from a varied group of unrelated objects (such as cards, yarn, markers, beads, paper, plastic shapes, and candy), and determine the criteria for selecting objects that fit into their framework. Each group shares their emerging theme and rationale for the inclusion of each item. (There are no wrong answers!) Participants generate ideas for using this activity to engage their students in their content area. "How can you use this activity in a way that illustrates a math problem or a science principle, generates ideas for a painting or a story, or examines a current events issue or social problem?"

Strategy: **Random Input**

- To stimulate lateral thinking by encouraging students to make connections between a problem and an unrelated word.
- To use when student has no ideas or when ideas start to sound the same.
- To find new perspectives.
- Practice, using 5 minute activities with problem or issue from course content, school problems, or current events. For example: "The problem is....and the word is.....; what ideas does this bring us? (Starko, p. 212-214)

Activity: Participants open a dictionary, choose a random word (*nouns* work best), write the word on a slip of paper, and place the paper in a Random Word Box. Participants consider a curricular problem where they are feeling stuck or looking for a new approach to a unit of study, matched with a random word selected from the box, and attempt to force a connection where no connection naturally exists, in order to see the problem from a new vantage point.

Starko, A. J. (2005). *Creativity in the classroom: Schools of curious delight* (3rd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Let's experience together the process of Problem Finding!

Teachers should provide students with the opportunity to identify and frame problems, to independently investigate answers to questions that interest them, and to explore their own ideas. Good lessons do not simply impart the teacher's knowledge to the students, but allow students to experience the life of a contemporary artist, scientist, writer, or historian. Alane Starko, in *Creativity in the Classroom* (2005, p. 267), divides the process into four parts: exploring the environment, investigating ideas and materials, recording ideas, and experimenting with production.

1. **Exploring the environment** (purposefully, to identify individual interests):
 - Exploring with interest; helping students begin to look.
Artists: search for materials, tools, ideas
Writers: look for scenes, moods, characters, conflicts, and struggles
Scientists: look for patterns, variables that might be related, unexplained occurrences
Mathematicians: look for patterns, quantities, relationships, correspondences
 - Structuring students' explorations of the world outside the school, in an effort to find intriguing questions (homework assignments):
Find something interesting that fits in your pocket, a character from the neighborhood that might have had an adventure, dates on local buildings or grave markers, plants that grow naturally in different places in the neighborhood, colors in clothes stores and food packaging, or a magazine picture that incites curiosity.
 - Modeling the process of exploration by sharing teacher's own efforts and interests (Share how *you* explore the world in ways that interest you.)
 - Structuring the classroom environment by **putting out materials**, objects, and posters, etc. "to invite students to explore an area of general concern, to raise questions, and to investigate and experiment" (Starko, p. 268).
2. **Investigating Ideas and Materials** (playing with ideas)
 - Experiment with combinations of materials, sketch, generate hypotheses
 - Experience **shared creative experiences**
 - Explore with class **discussions**: "What did you observe that was interesting? What do you wonder about this? What made you curious? What would you like to investigate?" (p. 269)
3. **Recording Ideas** (format for capturing-questions; a space for trapping the ideas)
 - Inventors' notebooks, writers' journals, artists' sketchbooks
 - Students record good and bad creative ideas; problems solved and pending
 - "The expectation that some ideas will work and some will not, that learning takes place in all experimentation, and that every idea need not become a final product is both basic to the creative process and essential to the attitude of risk taking associated with creativity" (p. 270).
4. **Experimenting with Production**
 - Write/draw a lesson introduction in **Creativity Journal**
 - Creator-teachers model the process by sharing our own efforts
 - Study the notebooks of creative individuals