

Fostering Original Thinking

Helping students develop their creativity is a worthwhile goal if for no other reason than personal enhancement. A poem that is only read by the poet, an idea to make housekeeping more efficient, an insight into the world around us, may not be known to anyone, but still has the power to make life more meaningful and more pleasurable. Teresa Amabile (1983) argues that anyone with normal intelligence can aspire to be creative in some area, and everyone benefits from the “excitement and color” (Nickerson 1999, p. 400) these creative accomplishments add to our lives.

In the 21st century, however, creativity is more than an enhancement to life, it is an essential component. As technology becomes more powerful and accessible and as life becomes more complex, creative individuals will be needed to find solutions for problems related to health, the environment, education, and business.

Many teachers do not feel confident assessing the creative processes and work of their students. This is understandable since, by its very definition, creative work is unpredictable, unusual, and surprising. Creative processes can be encouraged, however, and some aspects of creativity can be assessed. Students can also be taught to assess the merit of their own work, a key component of creativity.

Any project can offer students opportunities to be creative and explicit instruction and assessment of creative processes can be included in almost any student-centered work. In *Monster Swap*, one of the exemplary Unit Plans in *Designing Effective Projects*, Ms. Welch’s 2nd graders create monsters no one has ever seen before. She uses the Creativity Fluency Checklist from the *Assessing Projects* library to identify those skills that she will specifically address during this project. She models the following creative behaviors as she creates her own monster:

- Thinking of many different ideas
- Looking at things from different points of view

Then she puts students in groups to help each other create their monsters and tells them that she is going to be listening to see how many different ideas they can think of before they decide on the ones they want to use. While they are working, she takes anecdotal notes on their fluency at thinking of ideas. She notices that some students are still having difficulty thinking of more than one idea, so she puts them in a subgroup and works with them on that skill. At the end of the activity, she asks students to write in their learning logs responding to the following prompts:

1. Did I think of a lot of different ideas?
2. Did I think about my monster from different points of view?