

The Environment Conducive to Creativity

To speak of a creative situation is to imply that creativity is not a fixed trait of personality but something that changes over time being facilitated by some conditions and situations, and inhibited by others. (MacKinnon, 1978)

- Provide freedom to try new ways of performing tasks; allow individuals to achieve success in their own areas and ways.
- Permit tasks, activities, projects, and assignments to be varied for individuals; support and discuss the importance and value of individual differences.
- Support and encourage unusual ideas and responses of individuals while engaging in critical and creative thinking; establish an atmosphere of open-ness in which the principles of deferred and affirmative judgment are observed.
- Encourage individuals to express preferences, make choices, and to be involved in goal-setting and decision-making; promote a feeling of individual control ("ownership") over what happens and how it might best be done.
- Let everyone get involved and demonstrate the value of involvement by supporting and helping to develop or refine plans, ideas, or solutions for problems and projects; use Creative Problem Solving methods to address problems together.
- Provide an appropriate amount of time for the accomplishment of tasks.
- Communicate confidence in the individuals with whom you're working; work with them, rather than against them, in a non-punitive environment.
- Hold high, but attainable, standards and expectations that call for engagement in thinking and learning; model the use of appropriate methods and techniques in your own thinking.
- Make deliberate efforts to recognize people's previously unrecognized and unused potential; challenge individuals to solve problems and to work on new tasks.
- Respect the individual's needs to work alone, with a partner, or with a small group on various tasks; encourage self-initiated projects.
- Tolerate complexity and disorder, at least for a period of time; even the best planning and organizing requires some degree of flexibility.
- Help individuals use mistakes as starting points for learning and change; encourage revisions and modifications to meet acceptable standards in a supportive atmosphere; provide constructive feedback (pointing toward

improvement and change) and explicit evaluation criteria and procedures.

- Criticism can be destructive—use it carefully and in small doses; use encouragement and help to reduce concern over failure.
- Allow time for individuals to think about and develop their responses and creative ideas; “probe” to draw out their thinking and to clarify and enable others to share and contribute. Remember that innovation does not always occur immediately or in a final or polished form.
- Work to create a climate of mutual respect and acceptance in which individuals will be encouraged to share, develop, and learn cooperatively; encourage a feeling of interpersonal trust.
- Be aware that creativity has many dimensions—not just “arts and crafts!”
- To encourage divergent thinking, provide space, time, and resources, and use questioning to provoke thinking beyond the “recognition and recall” level. Don’t try to control every element of the task in a prescribed, step-by-step fashion, but permit individuals with opportunities to explore, invent, or design the tasks.
- Listen to individuals and acknowledge their messages; don’t hesitate to laugh with them. A warm, supportive atmosphere provides freedom and security in exploring and “playing with possibilities.” Laughter is not necessarily indicative of lack of intensity or purpose!
- Use strategies that move discussion and questioning beyond the level of convergent, reproductive thinking in which individuals recite “right” answers on request.
- Minimize expenditures of time on routine tasks that could be handled more economically in other ways (i.e., avoid unproductive note-taking such as copying from a screen or board, or dictating long lists to be copied by group members—photocopy the list in advance and distribute it).
- Promote sharing and cooperation, but don’t avoid challenge; deal openly and supportively with conflict, confrontation of ideas or emotions, paradoxes, different viewpoints, and the expression of individuals’ ideas and feelings.

Adapted from: Isaksen, S. G. (1983). Toward a model for the facilitation of creative problem solving. *Journal of Creative Behavior*, 17, 1, 18-31.