

The ability to generate novel and useful ideas is reportedly one of the most sought-after skills among new hires, yet students may not be graduating with the level of skills needed to succeed on the job. Education researchers at Pearson teamed up with the Partnership for 21st Century Learning to conduct a review of the research literature on the importance of creativity skills for academic and professional success, as well as to investigate how to teach and assess creativity in K-12 and higher-education classrooms. What follows is a summary of the most significant findings.

Why Is Creativity Important?

Creativity is increasingly identified as an important educational outcome. The P21 Framework for 21st Century Learning includes creativity as one of the four Cs, along with collaboration, critical thinking, and communication. Research suggests that a focus on developing creativity is important for several reasons:

- Evolving social, economic, and scientific problems facing the world today and in the future will require more flexible thinking and novel solutions.
- Creative individuals may demonstrate higher academic achievement.
- Employers seek job candidates with strong creativity skills.
- Individual employee creativity is linked to organizational innovation, and work teams using more creative practices tend to exhibit higher performance.

What Creativity Skills Do Learners Need?

There are many different approaches to defining creativity. However, creativity is commonly understood as the ability to produce novel and useful ideas. There is a developmental progression of creativity ranging from novices to eminent creators. Beginning creators typically spend more time mastering creative-thinking strategies, processes, and behaviors, whereas more mature creators tend to shift their focus to the novelty and usefulness of their creative outputs.

Is There a Creativity Skills Gap?

As the types of problems companies face continue to evolve—ranging from figuring out how to reduce their carbon footprint to designing a digital product that is intuitive to use—creative thinking will continue to be an important skill for future generations of workers. Accordingly, recent large-scale surveys of employers reveal that creativity and innovation are among the most important employability skills for new hires. For example, as many as 81 percent of senior executives in one survey identified creativity as “very important” for four-year college graduates to possess, yet, on the same survey, only 21 percent of respondents rated these candidates as having “excellent” creativity and innovation skills.

How Can Employers Support Skill Development?

A person's creative potential depends on their:

- level of expertise in a given subject;
- ability to engage in unconventional or divergent thinking;
- intrinsic motivation to engage in creative activities;
- personality factors, such as a tolerance for ambiguity and a preference for risk-taking.

Creative potential also depends on the level of support within the creative environment, which can include a person's home, school, or work.

To ensure coherent and consistent teaching of creativity-related skills that are relevant in the workplace, stronger alignment is needed between K-12, higher education, and employer stakeholders. Thus, funding for partnerships that help build bridges between K-12 and college educators and business leaders should be considered. Employers can engage in outreach to educational institutions to forge both formal and informal partnerships. Formal partnerships might include industry leaders working with four-year institutions of higher education and community colleges to help establish alternative

college-education programs that are tightly aligned to the specific innovation needs of that particular business sector. Other ways of formal partnering might include sponsoring competitive innovation challenges organized around specific disciplines, such as hackathons.

Less formal partnerships could include supporting internships or apprenticeships for both high-school and college students and tailoring those experiences to ensure that participants get to exercise and receive feedback on their divergent thinking abilities. Support could even be as simple as having business leaders participate in "career day" events at local schools, leading students through a brainstorming or creative problem-solving exercise.

Employers should also align their recruiting, hiring, and compensation strategies to reward workers who demonstrate high levels of creativity and innovation. For example, applicants can be asked to submit work products that are indicative of the novelty and usefulness of their ideas. Once on the job, employers can encourage employee creativity by establishing an environment that is conducive to innovation, which may involve giving employees greater autonomy, incentivizing experimentation in low-risk contexts, and providing plenty of opportunities for collaboration and playfulness. Companies can also introduce creative-thinking frameworks, such as design thinking, into professional development opportunities and culture-building initiatives.