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CULTIVATING LITTLE-C AND MIDDLE-C CREATIVITY IN FUTURE ENGLISH TEACHERS

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Abstract

Creativity can be taught, and teacher education should develop the everyday (little-c) and professional (middle-c) kinds, not the rare world-changing (Big-C) kind. This article sets out a framework for developing creativity in future English teachers. It also offers a model, the Creative Pedagogy Pathway (CPP), and a rubric for assessing it.

We use the definition of Plucker et al.: “creativity is the interaction among aptitude, procedure, and the environment that allow a person or group of people generates a perceptible product that is simultaneously novel and useful as defined within a social context” (Plucker et al., 2004, p. 90).

We treat creativity as a lifelong, developmental construct. Everyone has the capacity for it, and it can be fostered from an inclusive, democratic standpoint (Craft, 2001). Teachers play a crucial role in bringing creativity into the heart of formal education.

Theoretical framework: the four Ps

We examine creativity through Rhodes’ four Ps paradigm, which treats it as a process with four linked dimensions (Rhodes, 1961). Table 1 summarizes the dimensions and the theories we used for each.

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Table 1. The four Ps of creativity and the theories used to study each

Dimension	What it covers	Theory used
Process	The steps involved in producing ideas or results	Amabile's componential model (Amabile, 1983, 1996)
Person	The unique qualities of the creator	Amabile's intra-individual factors (Amabile, 1983, 1996); flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996); investment theory (Sternberg & Lubart, 1991, 1995)
Press	The external environment where creativity happens	Teaching resources and social environment (Amabile, 1996); collaborative design
Product	The usefulness and originality of the result	Expert judgement of utility and originality (Amabile, 1982; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Sternberg & Lubart, 1995)

Amabile's componential model is a verified theory that defines a five-stage sequence (Amabile, 1983, 1996). Each stage is shaped by the other dimensions of creativity.

Table 2. The five stages of the creative process

Stage	What happens
1. Problem or task identification	The person realizes what has to be done or what issue needs resolving
2. Preparation	The person gathers the information needed to complete the work
3. Response generation	The person generates possible solutions or responses
4. Response validation	The person assesses how viable each response is
5. Outcome	The result is assessed and the response is communicated

We looked at the intra-individual factors Amabile identified as influencing creativity (Amabile, 1983, 1996), plus traits from flow and investment theory.

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Table 3. Personal factors that influence creativity

Factor	Description	Source
Domain-relevant skills	Expertise, specialized skills and talent in the field	Amabile (1983, 1996)
Task motivation	What a person will do and how; people are more innovative when driven by the work itself (intrinsic) than by outside pressure (extrinsic)	Amabile (1983, 1996)
Creativity-relevant processes	Personality traits, cognitive styles and work habits: using heuristics such as analogies, keeping options open, delaying judgement, tolerating ambiguity	Amabile (1983, 1996)
Flow components	Passion, interest in the topic, access to the domain	Csikszentmihalyi (1996)
Individual resources	Overcoming obstacles, taking sensible risks, accepting uncertainty	Sternberg & Lubart (1991, 1995)

We examined how the teaching environment affects creativity.

Table 4. Environmental (press) factors in teaching

Factor	Elements examined	Source
Resources	Time, materials, and digital tools that support the design process	Amabile (1996)
Social environment	Students, colleagues and the educational institution	Amabile (1996)
Collaborative design	Group members: profiles and shared background. Group procedures: rules, task allocation, management, communication, relationships and group flow	Source to be confirmed

Product

We judged product creativity by the usefulness and originality of results, using the opinions of subject-matter experts (Amabile, 1982; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Sternberg & Lubart, 1995). We considered all levels of creativity but gave most weight to little-c (Craft, 2001) and middle-c (Moran, 2010).

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Levels of creativity

Little-c and middle-c creativity suit education best, because every learner can reach them and teaching can develop them step by step. Big-C creativity matters to culture but is too rare to be a teaching goal. Table 5 compares the three levels, building on the distinctions drawn by Kaufman and Beghetto (2009).

Table 5. Big-C, middle-c and little-c creativity compared

	Little-c	Middle-c	Big-C
Definition	Everyday problem-solving, personal reflection and imaginative engagement in ordinary situations	Creativity recognised as such within a professional or semi-professional field	World-changing achievement by eminent people
Key features	Novelty, personal meaning, new ideas in familiar situations; "possibility thinking" (asking "what if?")	Consistent creative work, field-specific knowledge, recognition by a community	Rare; depends on exceptional talent and the right historical moment
Key author	Craft (2001)	Moran (2010)	—
Example	A student invents an original story in an English lesson	A trainee teacher designs a new lesson plan	Einstein, Shakespeare
Role in education	Basis of daily creative growth	Bridge to professional readiness	Not a primary educational goal

Little-c creativity in the classroom

Table 6. Developing little-c creativity

Teaching conditions	What it looks like in a foreign language class
Asking questions with no single right answer	Students make up their own sentences or stories
Allowing more than one way to do a task	Students read texts from their own point of view
Encouraging risk-taking and tolerance of uncertainty	Students talk to each other without planning ahead
Encouraging student independence	

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These activities build divergent thinking, a core part of creativity, and help students stay motivated.

Middle-c creativity in teacher education

Middle-c creativity is especially relevant in higher education and teaching practice. There, students start to show creativity within structured, disciplinary frameworks.

Table 7. Developing middle-c creativity

Traits of middle-c creativity	What it looks like for future English teachers
Combining knowledge with new ideas	Designing new lesson plans
Thoughtful, purposeful creativity	Developing new teaching methods
Collaborative, socially grounded output	Creating cross-curricular learning materials
Growing sophistication and complexity	

Middle-c creativity shows that a student is ready for work and can apply creativity in real classrooms.

Practices to avoid

Educational institutions should avoid practices that suppress creative potential (Figure 1). Instead, the emphasis should be on process-based creativity, where acquiring knowledge is itself a creative act.

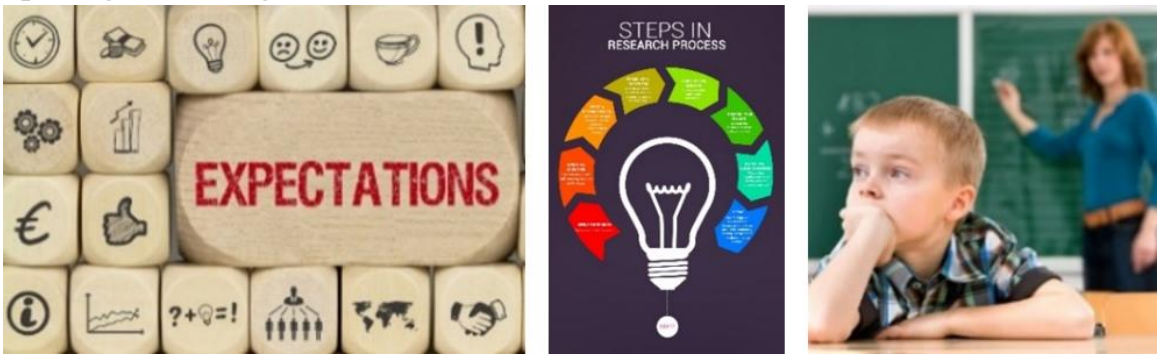


Figure 1. Critical instructional practices to be avoided in fostering student creative potential

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Learners' creativity can be developed along a continuum, from little-c towards middle-c.

Table 8. Creativity levels, educational focus and teaching strategies

Level	Educational focus	Teaching strategies
Little-c	Personal meaning, idea generation	Open-ended tasks, brainstorming, storytelling
Middle-c	Applied creativity, professional skills	Project-based learning, CLIL, problem-solving
Big-C	Eminent innovation	Not a primary educational goal

Our CPP model adapts Csikszentmihalyi's creativity triangle to explain how students turn academic learning into professional teaching skills through CLIL. However, in Csikszentmihalyi's systems theory, creativity comes from three interacting elements (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; see also Ferrari et al., 2009), shown in Figure 2.

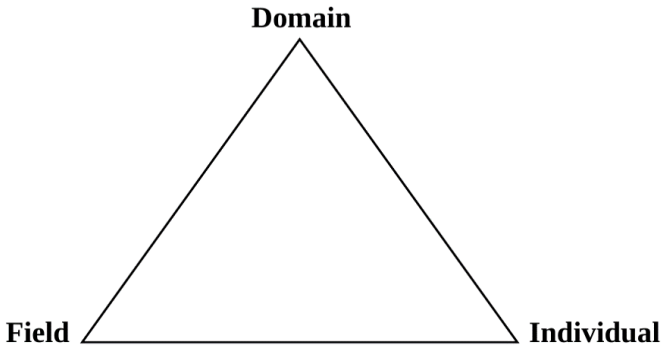


Figure 2. Csikszentmihalyi's creativity triangle.
Adapted from Ferrari et al. (2009).

Table 9. Elements of Csikszentmihalyi's creativity triangle

Element	Role
Domain	A set of rules, procedures and assessment standards
Individual	Brings a new variation through motivation, personality and cognitive processes
Field	Gatekeepers (professionals and academics) who decide which variations are kept in the domain

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From systems model to CPP

Based on this triangle, we built our own: the Creative Pedagogy Pathway. Students develop creativity-based teaching skills through CLIL methodology. This turns academic learning (ISCED) into employability skills that match professional standards (ISCO).

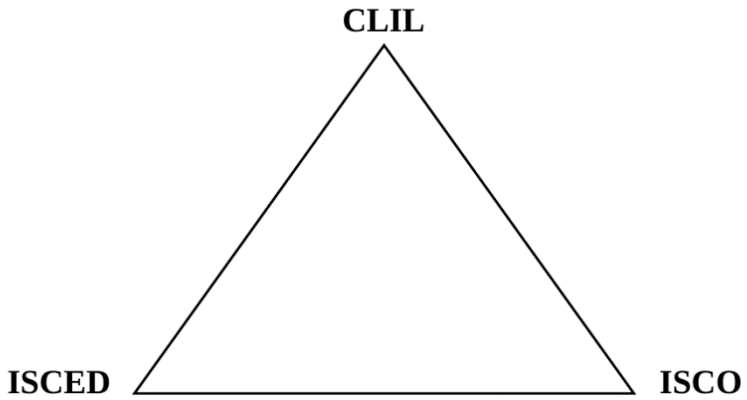


Figure 3. Conceptual model of the Creative Pedagogy Pathway (CPP).
(Adapted from Csikszentmihalyi (1999)).

Table 10. The three corners of the CPP triangle

CPP corner	Role in the model
CLIL	The methodology through which creativity-based teaching skills are developed
ISCED	Academic learning outcomes, as defined by the International Standard Classification of Education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012)
ISCO	Professional employability standards, as defined by the International Standard Classification of Occupations (International Labour Office, 2012)

Theoretical and empirical analysis shows that professional creativity needs a specific set of competencies. The CPP arranges them in three tiers (Figure 4, Table 11).

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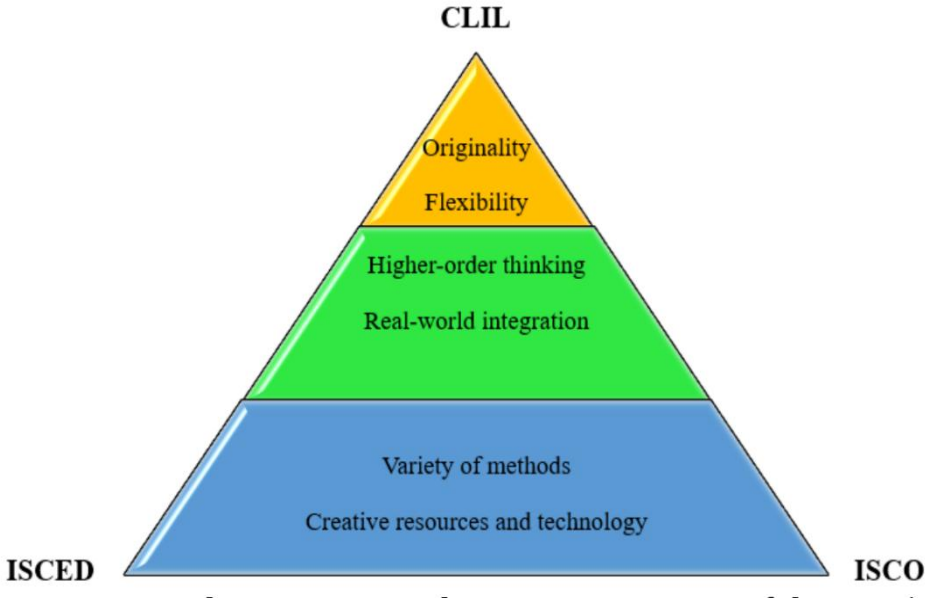


Figure 4. Structural components and competency content of the Creative Pedagogy Pathway (CPP)

Table 11. Structural components and competencies of the CPP

Tier	Competencies
Top (near CLIL)	Originality; flexibility
Middle	Higher-order thinking; real-world integration
Base (between ISCED and ISCO)	Variety of methods; creative resources and technology

Table 12 links each creativity criterion to an ISCED-6 (bachelor's level) learning outcome and an ISCO employability skill.

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Table 12. Creativity criteria cross-referenced with ISCED-6 learning outcomes and ISCO employability skills

Creativity criterion	ISCED-6 learning outcome	ISCO employability skill
Originality	Design innovative lesson plans	Instructional design competence
Flexibility	Adapt teaching to diverse learners	Problem-solving and adaptability
Real-world integration	Apply knowledge to practical contexts	Workplace relevance and task design
Higher-order thinking	Promote analysis, evaluation, creation	Critical thinking and decision-making
Variety of methods	Use diverse teaching strategies	Training delivery competence
Creative resources and technology	Use digital and AI tools in teaching	Digital competence (ESCO-aligned)

A 100-point rubric turns the CPP criteria into measurable indicators for preservice teachers. University supervisors and researchers can use it to grade, track and statistically analyze students' creativity during teaching practice.

Table 13. Diagnostic rubric for preservice teachers' pedagogical creativity

Criterion	Weight (points)	Level 5 (Excellent)	Level 4 (Good)	Level 3 (Satisfactory)	Level 2 (Basic)	Level 1 (Poor)
1. Originality of lesson design	15	Highly innovative, unique approach, no reliance on templates	Some originality, modifies existing ideas creatively	Limited originality, partially adapted	Mostly traditional, minimal innovation	Fully copied or traditional
2. Flexibility and adaptability	15	Fully differentiated, multiple pathways for diverse learners	Some differentiation and adaptability	Limited differentiation	Minimal adaptation	No differentiation
3. Real-world integration	10	Strong real-life/SDG integration, authentic tasks	Clear real-life connection	Some real-life references	Weak connection	No real-life relevance
4. Higher-order thinking (HOTs)	15	Strong focus on analysis, evaluation, creation	Includes some higher-order tasks	Mostly comprehension and application	Limited thinking skills	Only recall and memorisation

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Criterion	Weight (points)	Level 5 (Excellent)	Level 4 (Good)	Level 3 (Satisfactory)	Level 2 (Basic)	Level 1 (Poor)
5. Variety of teaching methods	10	Wide variety, highly interactive and student-centred	Good variety of strategies	Some variation	Mostly one method	Only lecture or traditional
6. Creative resources and technology	10	Innovative use of technology, AI and resources that enhance learning	Effective use of tools	Basic use of tools	Minimal use	No resources used
7. Student engagement and motivation	15	Highly engaging, motivating, student-driven	Engaging, with some interactive elements	Moderately engaging	Low engagement	Passive learning
8. Coherence and lesson flow	10	Excellent structure, smooth logical flow	Clear structure with minor gaps	Basic structure	Weak organisation	Disorganised
Total	**100**					

Table 14. Score ranges and quality levels for the CPP assessment

Level	Score range (out of 100)	Meaning
5 – Excellent	86–100	Highly creative, innovative, fully student-centred
4 – Good	71–85	Creative with minor gaps
3 – Satisfactory	56–70	Acceptable but limited creativity
2 – Basic	41–55	Weak creativity, mostly traditional
1 – Poor	0–40	No creativity, ineffective lesson design

Five strategies help teachers develop these forms of creativity.

Table 15. Instructional strategies and what they develop

Strategy	What it develops
Problem-based learning (PBL)	Hypothesis generation, critical thinking, creative problem-solving
Content and language integrated learning (CLIL)	Interdisciplinary thinking; applying knowledge in authentic contexts
Digital storytelling	Multimodal creativity and narrative competence
Collaborative projects	Social creativity and peer learning
Reflective practice	Metacognitive awareness and self-regulation

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Conclusion

Modern education should shift from idealizing Big-C creativity to cultivating little-c and middle-c creativity. These forms are teachable, developmentally appropriate and essential for preparing future teachers for changing professional settings.

Embedding creativity in everyday learning (little-c) and moving gradually to applied, field-specific work (middle-c) produces innovative, reflective and adaptable people. Creativity sits alongside critical thinking, collaboration and communication as one of the "4Cs" of 21st-century skills (Figure 5).

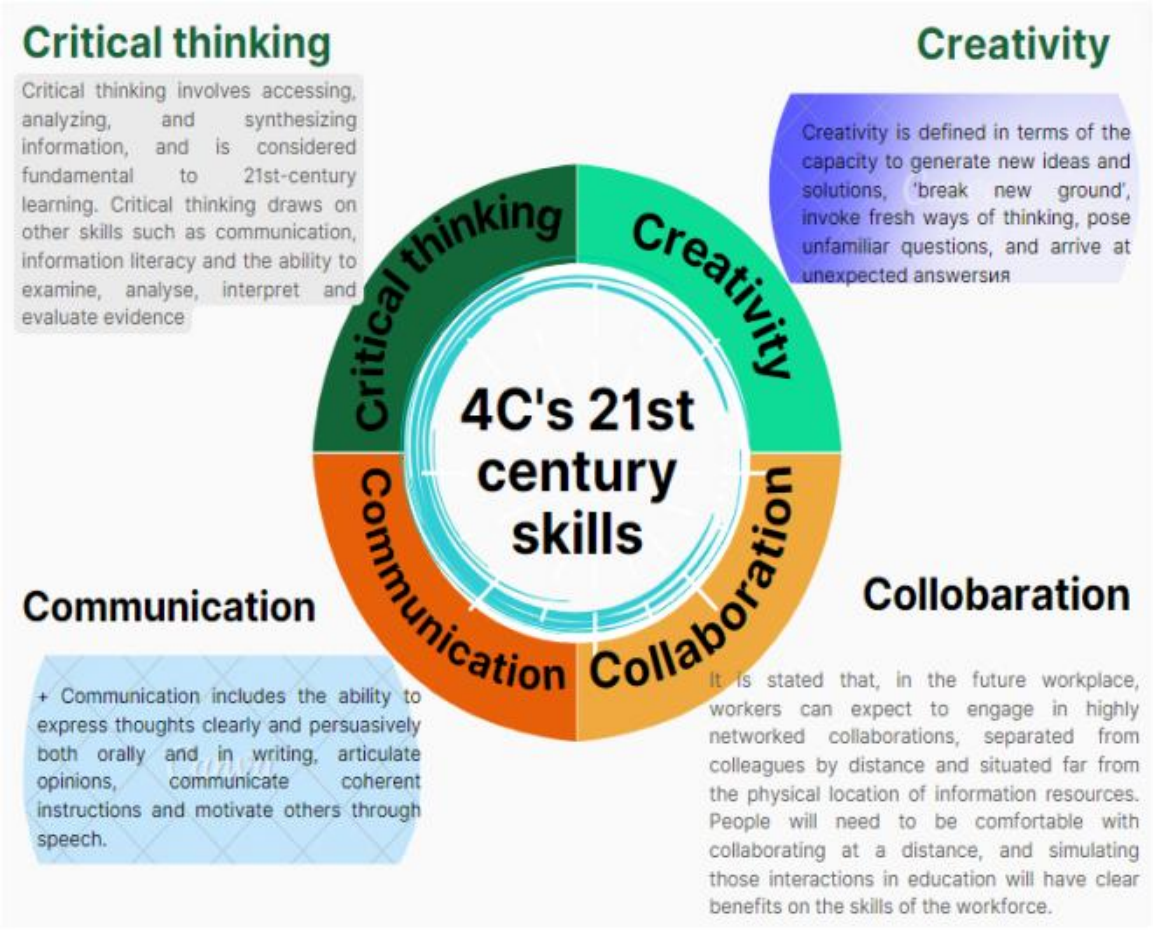


Figure 5. The 4Cs as 21st-century skills

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We favour a domain-wide approach that promotes creativity in every subject, and we focus on future English teachers. Yet institutional pressures, such as overloaded curricula and standardized objectives, keep teachers from creativity-enhancing practices. Guidance on innovative teaching methods is also scarce. Future teachers therefore need models and resources for bringing creativity into daily work. The CPP model and its rubric are designed to meet that need, supporting both academic learning and creative potential.

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