

# What You Value, You Will Get!

by Joyce E. Juntune

As a young classroom teacher, I was fortunate to teach for a principal who brought in people from around the country to ignite the flames of creativity and imagination within our school. Though I am currently teaching at the university level, I have never forgotten the lessons learned there on how to make creativity a part of the lives of students and teachers. How did it happen then? How does it happen today? It can be captured in the paraphrase of the philosophy of Plato that I learned from that principal and later adopted as a motto for my classroom: "What I value, I will get." What does the valuing of creativity look like in a school?

1. The **principal uses creative thinking strategies as a regular part of faculty meetings** and during problem solving and decision-making sessions. It was common to have small groups of faculty members creating lists of ideas for improving discipline, building better communication networks with parents, nurturing the love of reading and developing independent learning in our students. We used fluency, originality, evaluation, and decision-making techniques to come up with solutions that were accepted by all faculty members. We used planning and creative problem-solving strategies to develop action plans and examine possible problems that might arise.

2. The **classroom teacher uses creative thinking skills as tools for content comprehension and review.**

- o How many things do you already know about prime numbers? List them.
  - o Compare the desert and the mountains. What is unique to the desert? What is unique to the mountains? What do they both share? Can you list at least 10 things for each area?
  - o Use this wooden spoon to describe a fairy tale.
  - o Describe at least 15 causes for and 15 effects of the popularity of the Oregon Trail. Every teacher had at least one section of a wall or bulletin board devoted to on-going content-based creative thinking activities that students could add to during the week. These areas were changed weekly!
- Every teacher had at least two creative thinking activities that were a part of the regular content instruction shown in weekly lesson plans.
- Every teacher brought samples of the student's thinking as well as regular work

samples to the Parent/Teacher Conference time. Both were discussed.

3. **Questions that encouraged creative thinking appeared on tests and quizzes** on a regular basis. The following are my favorite questions for encouraging thinking. The students never knew which of the three would appear on any given test or quiz so prepared for all three!!!

o What was one of your A-HA's during this unit? (Briefly explain)

o What question should have been on this test, and its answer?

o What question do you still have about \_\_\_\_\_ (unit topic) to which you do not know the answer?

4. Regular communication to parents included **thinking activities parents could do at home**. The strategy was explained for parents and several sample home activities were given.

5. Every teacher had one **content-related creative thinking goal** each year. "I will use creative thinking with science once a week this year."

Over the years as I have traveled to various school districts, I see schools that value creative thinking and schools that wish the teachers and students would become more excited about creative thinking in the classroom. As long as creative thinking is seen as fluff, an extra, or something that occupies your time when all required assignments are completed, its strength within a school will be minor and weak. ***When creative thinking is a part of the way teachers teach, principals conduct meetings, and teachers communicate to parents, it moves from the outskirts of the classroom to center stage.*** Only then will creative thinking be viewed as a necessary life skill by the students. Periodically, I run into former students. Without a doubt, they mention the creative thinking skills they learned in my classroom and relate to me the ways they are still using these skills in their job today.

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in the classroom, in the home and in the workplace!

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