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COLLEGE

LEARNING AND GROWING TOGETHER
TO BE THE BEST WE CAN



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THE 4Cs

**CREATIVITY
CRITICAL THINKING
COMMUNICATION
COLLABORATION IN SCHOOLS**

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1. Communication

TALK THE TALK: MASTERING COMMUNICATION

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Communication originates from the Latin word *communis*, meaning “to share” or “to make common”. It refers to the process through which individuals create and exchange meaning via verbal, written, or non-verbal messages (Pearson & Nelson, 2000).

Effective communication requires a sender, a receiver, and a shared understanding of the communication channel. It is both a dynamic process, characterised by continuous feedback loops, and a collaborative effort to achieve shared meaning. The concept of active listening, first introduced by Rogers and Farson in 1957, involves full attention, reflection of both content and emotion, and empathic feedback to support the speaker’s self-exploration (Rogers & Farson, 1957/2015). Interpersonal qualities such as empathy and assertiveness enhance communication by promoting clarity, authenticity, and trust (Adler et al., 2018).

THE SILENT POWER OF COMMUNICATION: A PICTURE’S WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

SPEAK EASY: CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES YOU NEED TO KNOW

1. Blind Drawing Exercise

The Back-to-Back Drawing activity highlights the importance of clear verbal communication. In pairs, one participant (the “describer”) is given an image and must explain it to their partner (the “drawer”) without using direct object names. The drawer then attempts to recreate the image based only on verbal instructions. After a set time, pairs compare their drawings and reflect on challenges and misinterpretations. This exercise demonstrates how communication gaps can occur and helps develop precision in verbal instructions.

<https://www.icebreakerspot.com/activities/back-to-back-drawing>

2. Follow All Instructions Activity

This activity teaches the importance of reading instructions thoroughly before acting. Participants receive a list of steps, with the first instructing them to read everything before starting and the last telling them to ignore all previous steps and simply write their name at the top. This often sparks discussion on the importance of careful reading and attention to detail.

3. Telephone Game

Participants sit in a circle and pass a whispered phrase around. By the end, the instructor compares the original phrase with the final version, revealing distortions in communication. This fun activity demonstrates how easily messages can be altered and emphasises the need for clear, precise language.

4. Fists Exercise

In pairs, one person is instructed to keep their fist closed, while the other must get it open. However, the fist will only open if the request is made politely and assertively. Many initially try force, highlighting the tendency to overlook simple, effective communication. The debriefing discussion explores assertiveness and how language influences behaviour.

5. Find It Together

In this teamwork activity, one participant is blindfolded and must retrieve specific objects with verbal guidance from their partner. The challenge increases with multiple teams competing simultaneously, requiring strong listening skills, trust, and the ability to filter out distractions. A discussion afterward explores strategies for effective listening and communication.

<https://positivepsychology.com/communication-activities-adults-students/#7-games-and-activities-for-middle-and-high-school-students>

DECODE YOUR STYLE: WHAT'S YOUR COMMUNICATION SUPERPOWER?

Explore your communication style through interactive quizzes:

- Communication Style Quiz: <https://edworking.com/tests/communication-style-quiz>
- Communication Style Questionnaire: <https://pdst.ie/sites/default/files/Communication%20Resource%20Bundle.pdf>

REFLECTION

“The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said.”

PETER DRUCKER

Adler, R. B., Rosenfeld, L. B., & Proctor, R. F. (2018). *Interplay: The process of interpersonal communication* (15th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Pearson, J., & Nelson, P. (2000). *An introduction to human communication: Understanding and sharing* (6th ed.). McGraw-Hill. (Definition cited in *Business Writing for Success*)

Rogers, C. R., & Farson, R. E. (1957/2015). *Active listening*. Martino Fine Books.

2. Creativity

CREATIVE SPARKS: IGNITING INNOVATION

Creativity is the ability to generate novel and appropriate ideas, solutions, or expressions (Runco & Jaeger, 2012). It involves imagination, originality, and problem-solving (Amabile, 1996), contributing to holistic development and well-being. While traditionally overlooked in education, creativity is essential in the 21st century. Despite challenges, its benefits make it a priority, preparing participants for an evolving world. Creativity fosters adaptability, meaningful learning, better decision-making, and social skill development. By incorporating creativity and playfulness, educators can enhance student engagement, helping learners navigate academic and real-life situations effectively.

THE ART OF THOUGHT: CREATIVITY IN EVERY COLOUR

IDEA STORM: INTERACTIVE TOOLS FOR CREATIVITY

The following activities help develop observation skills, encourage reflection, build connections, and foster empathy. They also stimulate creativity and engagement.

1. Drama – Shape Roleplay

Participants embody different shapes (e.g., circle, triangle, square) through movement and interaction.

- Circle: Moves smoothly in curves, rolling effortlessly.
- Square: Structured and stable, making sharp turns.
- Triangle: Dynamic, balancing between angles.

Discussion: How does each shape interact with others? What role does a square play in organising a scene? This activity can be adapted to specific learning goals.

2. Creative Writing

- Automatic Writing: Create a story using a given set of words in various styles (e.g., humour, horror, detective).
- Letter to Myself/Future Self: Encourages introspection and personal growth (futureme.org)

3. Game: “Tell Me About...”

Groups create and present stories, poems, sketches, or short performances based on prompts like “A world without colours” or “A world without gravity.”

4. Art Remake

Participants recreate artworks (e.g., Czech art) and discuss their interpretations.

5. Chrome Music Lab: <https://musiclab.chromeexperiments.com>

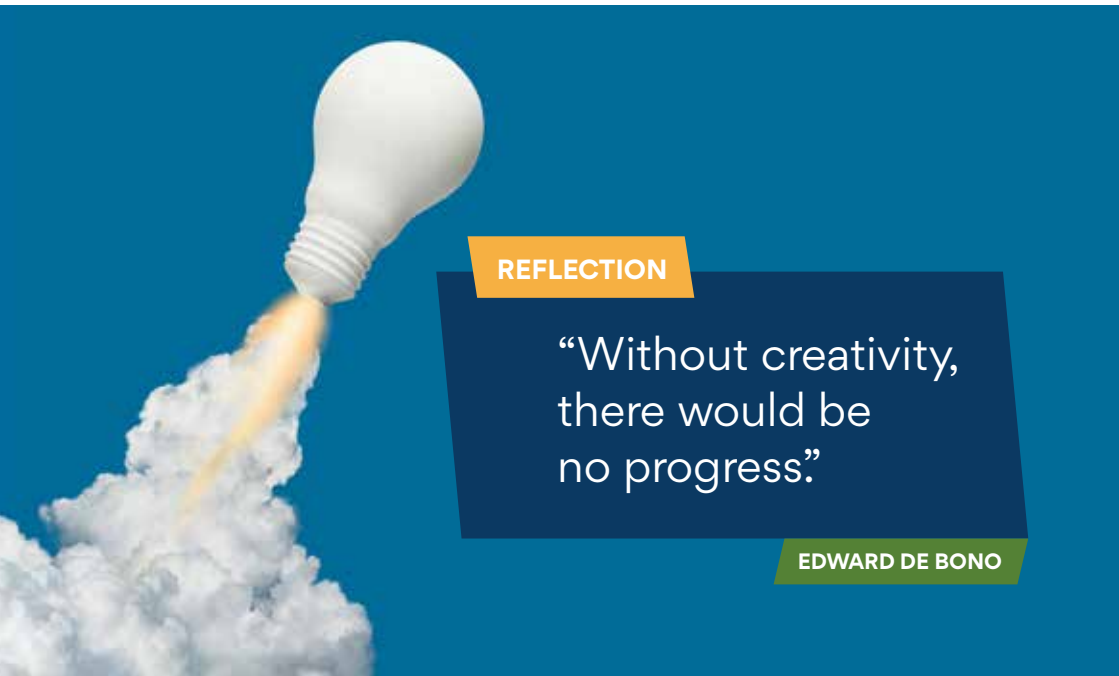
An interactive tool for exploring music and its connection to science, art, and emotions.

6. AutoDraw: <https://autodraw.com>

A fun AI-assisted drawing tool for enhancing creativity.

ARE YOU THE CREATIVE TYPE?

Discover your creative type: <https://mycreativitytype.com>



REFLECTION

“Without creativity,
there would be
no progress.”

EDWARD DE BONO

Runco, M. A., & Jaeger, G. J. (2012). The standard definition of creativity. *Creativity Research Journal*, 24(1), 92–96. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2012.650092>

Amabile, T. M. (1996). *Creativity in context: Update to the social psychology of creativity*. Westview Press.

3. Critical Thinking

UNLOCKING THE POWER OF INQUISITIVE MINDS

Critical thinking is a key educational goal, defined as purposeful, problem-oriented thinking aimed at evaluating ideas and solutions (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2022; APA, 2018). It involves questioning, analysing arguments, imagining scenarios, and making informed decisions. Educators benefit from fostering this skill, helping participants develop both the disposition and ability to think critically. Critical thinking enhances autonomy, preparing participants for success in life. Its importance in education lies in its role in effective learning and decision-making, making it an essential skill for navigating complex situations (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2022).

THINK IN PICTURES: THE VISUAL MIND OF A CRITICAL THINKER

THINKTANK: ENGAGE IN PROBLEM-SOLVING

Consider the dilemma below and take some time to reflect before answering the questions that follow. Share your insights and explore perspectives from others.

The Story: The Forgotten Backpack

On her way home from an evening class, Priya, a hospital nurse, part-time student and mum, noticed a backpack left unattended on a park bench. Curious and concerned, she peeked inside to look for an ID and found a laptop, some personal belongings, and an envelope stuffed with cash.

Digging further, she discovered a handwritten note that read, “*This money is for Mum’s surgery. I’ll be back after work to collect it.*” Priya felt a pang of sympathy for the owner but also a flash of temptation. Her son’s school fees were overdue, and the stress of managing with her salary had been weighing on her for months.

Priya decided to wait by the bench for a while, hoping the owner would return. When no one came after an hour, she debated her options: leave the bag where it was, risking that someone less honest might find it; take it to the police, though she worried it might be overlooked in the system; or take the money for her own needs, reasoning that it might never find its rightful owner anyway.



As the night deepened, Priya sat on the bench, clutching the backpack, torn between her ethics, her needs, and her assumptions about what the money might truly be for.

Follow-Up Questions:

- Should Priya take the money, leave the backpack, or turn it over to the authorities? What factors should influence her decision?
- How might Priya’s personal financial struggles cloud her judgment or create bias in interpreting the note’s message?
- If Priya decides to act ethically, does she have a responsibility to go beyond simply handing the bag to the authorities? Why or why not?
- How would you act in this situation? Reflect on your own moral dilemma and decision-making How do you explain and justify your decision?

THE CRITICAL THINKER’S TOOLKIT

These strategies collectively promote critical thinking skills, equipping participants for both academic and real-world challenges:

- ‘Pros and Cons’ Debate: Participants assess a topic from different viewpoints, improving their ability to balance arguments and think analytically.
- Create Your Own Story: Designing stories with ethical dilemmas fosters empathy, creativity, and moral reasoning through group discussions.
- Problem-Solving Challenges: Participants plan real-life scenarios, developing practical problem-solving and decision-making skills.

- Design a Question: Encouraging participants to create their own questions enhances curiosity and deep thinking, promoting a culture of inquiry.
- Analysing Advertisements: Deconstructing ads develops media literacy and the ability to critically evaluate persuasive techniques.
- Debunking Myths: Researching common myths encourages evidence-based thinking and challenges assumptions.
- Decision-Making Grids: Using grids to evaluate options teaches systematic decision-making and enhances organisational skills.
- Comparative Analysis: Comparing topics or theories strengthens participants' ability to analyse, synthesise, and deeply understand content.

INTERACTIVE ELEMENT

Engage in ethical decision-making dilemmas: <https://www.menti.com/alisq87hvx1v>



REFLECTION

“Critical thinking is the key to success in learning and decision-making.”

STANFORD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHILOSOPHY

American Psychological Association. (n.d.). Critical thinking. In APA Dictionary of Psychology. Retrieved January 30, 2025, from <https://dictionary.apa.org/critical-thinking>

Hitchcock, D. (2022). Critical thinking. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2022 ed.). Stanford University. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/critical-thinking/#DefiCritThin>

4. Collaboration

COLLABORATION: WHEN MAGIC HAPPENS



Collaboration involves setting and working towards shared goals as a team, with members contributing to roles and responsibilities with the aim of accomplishing these goals. When individuals collaborate effectively, goals are accomplished more efficiently, and more can be achieved collectively than would be possible individually (Barfield, 2016). The aim is to foster effective collaboration, and the ACER Framework model proposes that, in addition to an appropriate division of tasks amongst collaborators, participants must also engage in ongoing, active discourse throughout the developmental process (Scoular, Duckworth, Heard, & Ramalingam, 2020).

Collaborative learning takes place through dialogue, social interaction, and joint decision-making, all of which significantly contribute to individual and group development, as well as to co-constructed understanding and knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in Barfield, 2016). For this reason, teaching participants how to collaborate effectively is essential to supporting their engagement with peers both within and beyond the school environment.

TOGETHER WE CAN: A SNAPSHOT OF COLLABORATIVE POWER

THE COLLABORATION PLAYGROUND: BRAINSTORM, SHARE, CREATE!

Think back to your most recent collaborative experience, e.g., a team project, a brainstorming session, or even a casual exchange of ideas.

- **Step 1:** In a sentence or two, *describe* what the collaboration involved.
- **Step 2:** *Colour-Code* It by using three colours or emojis to represent:
 - What worked well
 - What could have been better
 - How you personally contributed
- **Step 3:** *Reflection:* If you had to do it again with the same team, what would you do differently or keep the same?

This mini self-assessment encourages you to pause and reflect on your collaborative habits. It can also be a great conversation starter in team meetings or training sessions. Give it a go and invite a colleague to do the same!

WINNING STRATEGIES FOR NEXT-LEVEL COLLABORATION

Like any skill, collaboration needs regular practice. It takes time to hone and master such a skill. Just as collaborators will differ, so too will the situations they face. Here are some simple, engaging activities that can support the development of collaboration in various learning environments:

1. Marshmallow Tower Challenge

In small teams, build the tallest free-standing tower using only dry spaghetti and marshmallows. This fun, hands-on activity encourages teamwork, negotiation, and creative problem-solving.



2. The Moral Dilemma Story

Present participants with a short moral dilemma story. In groups, they rank each character's actions from most to least acceptable. This fosters debate, shared decision-making, and awareness of differing values.

3. Outdoor Role-Play: Take a Step Forward

Assign each participant a role (e.g., doctor, refugee). Read out a series of life scenario statements. Participants take a step forward if it applies to their role; highlighting privilege, empathy, and perspective-taking.

4. Team Treasure Hunt

Set up a simple scavenger or clue-based hunt across the school or classroom. Teams must rely on each other's knowledge and strengths to solve the clues and reach the goal.

5. Human Knot

Form groups of 4-5. Everyone stands in a circle, reaches into the centre and grabs two other hands at random. The challenge is to untangle themselves without letting go; a physical and mental test of cooperation and patience.

CONNECT

Platforms designed to facilitate collaboration:

<https://padlet.com/> and <https://www.miro.com>

Barfield, A. (2016). Collaboration. *ELT Journal*, 70(2), 222-224. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccv074>

Scoular, C., Duckworth, D., Heard, J., & Ramalingam, D. (2020). *Collaboration: Definition and structure*. Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

REFLECTION

“Alone we can do so little;
together we can do so much.”

HELEN KELLER

THE 4Cs

CREATIVITY CRITICAL THINKING COMMUNICATION COLLABORATION IN SCHOOLS

With the growing emphasis on skills and competences that foster active citizenship and a positive workforce ethos, the 4Cs — critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration — have become indispensable for everyone. The National Curriculum Framework for All (NCF, 2012) has long recognised this need through its transversal skills approach to teaching and learning. More recently, the European Digital Education Action Plan has reinforced their importance by embedding them within the Digital Competence Framework, one of the key competences for lifelong learning, with the goal of nurturing a more digitally literate citizenry.

In line with this vision, and as part of an Erasmus+ initiative, St Ignatius College enabled its psychosocial team to receive training in these skills, ensuring they are better prepared to support schools across the college network. To maximise impact and provide a lasting reference, a concise booklet — available both digitally and in print — has been produced for educators and the wider public with online access.

On behalf of the team, I sincerely trust that this valuable resource will be put to effective use.

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