On May 4, 2017, we had an amazing *Creative Power Day,* engaging almost 600 students in Vancouver, Mill Valley, San Francisco, Oakland, Cleveland, Boston, Cork, Oslo, and Mumbai.

Our goal was to show young people that building their creative power would make them better at everything they tried – from schoolwork, sports, and the arts, to being better friends now and being stronger leaders in the future. We conducted 22 workshops in 5 countries to help students see connections between disparate concepts, develop an openness to new ideas, and building resilience through experimentation. The response was incredibly positive from students, teachers, and families!

Check out some of the comments about Creative Power Day from our participants!

WHY DOES CREATIVITY MATTER?

Sir Ken Robinson describes creativity as "the process of having original ideas that have value." This is a powerful definition, but creativity is not only about the process or the ideas, it's about the authors. When we nurture the creative mindset in an individual – particularly in young people – we're building a life-long ability to see the world for what it *could* be, not what it is now. This is one of the most important investments we can make in the next generation.

When have you ever heard of anyone being "against" creativity?

Creativity is the number one most desired trait in classrooms, board rooms, startups, and society. Leaders around the world continuously cite creativity as a key strategic vector for success. The reality though is that when confronted with creative ideas, people habitually diminish, disparage, and discredit the authors of those ideas. Studies have surfaced a "bias against creativity" – the systematized and often unconscious manner by which creative ideas and the people who espouse them are penalized. Amazingly, the very organizations that call for creativity are often unwittingly squelching it, and unfortunately this bias against creativity starts as early as elementary school. [See citations in the Resources section.]

WHERE DO WE START?

After spending 20+ of my career as a creative problem-solver, I firmly believe we need to radically change this bias and behavior. Unlocking natural creativity is our best hope in solving the tough challenges we face around the global and in our local communities.

There are many different ways we can try to tackle this issue of the bias against creativity, from corporate program and teacher support, to diversity and inclusion policies. While many interventions are needed at all ages and all situations, we chose to focus initially on elementary school students (8-11 year olds) because this is an impressionable developmental time both emotionally and intellectually. From a social perspective, it's a time when young people are acutely aware of the judgement of their peers, and this is when they start to self-censor. We believe that we can imbue a lasting sense of self-efficacy and resilience by building Creative Power in these young people.

Future plans

Our goal is not to cultivate budding designers or artists (although that would be a plus!). Instead we are trying to encourage students to ask questions, think differently from the status quo, and learn how to hear and accept new ideas in ourselves and others. While the focus is on students now, our hope is that we will bring about a general awareness of the unconscious bias against creativity to the teachers, administrators, parents and guardians, and students who take part in *Creative Power Day*. We believe that even through this light-touch intervention we can have a positive influence.

We don't have all the answers, but we have a lot of great questions!

Facilitators should use the content, activities, and time allotments outlined below as a guide for leading their Creative Power workshop.

In our 45-60 minute workshop, we are trying to strengthen three main skills:

- Seeing connections between disparate concepts
- Developing an openness to new ideas
- Building resilience through experimentation

Each of the 3 activities help to do this, but the way you actively engage the students in conversations throughout will be the best reinforcement of these important concepts.

OPENING

5 minutes

- *Introduce yourself.* Your first name, you live in the community, and you are here because you are a [parent, designer, activist, etc] and you believe in the idea that helping kids [like you!] learn to use their Creative Power will make them better at everything they try, from school work and sports, to becoming leaders in business, or government, or the arts, or in anything they want to be.
- *What is Creative Power?* Creative Power is about learning to open your mind to hearing new ideas, and getting better at coming up with new ideas. Creativity is not just for the best artist or the smartest person. Everyone has creativity inside them. The reason we build those creative muscles in ourselves and our communities is so we can solve big, tough challenges that we all face in our world.
- *Today is Creative Power Day!* In countries around the world, hundred of students just like you are participating in their classrooms in *Creative Power Day*. You are going to be the next generation of leaders in the government and in businesses. You might create the next really cool startup that makes a cure for cancer, or build a new technology that stops the earth from getting warmer, or design a new kind of house that ends homelessness. All of you have the Creative Power to make the world a better place!
- *What we're going to do today.* Today, we're going to do 3 activities to start building your Creative Power.
- *Thank you.* Thank the teacher and school for the invitation to do this workshop, and thank the students for spending the next 45 minutes (or an hour depending on the size of the group) working with you and each other on building their Creative Power muscles.

ACTIVITY 1: SHIFT PERSPECTIVE

5 minutes

The Big Idea:

1. If you changing how you look at something, it helps you understand people or ideas that are different from your own. This is called empathy.
2. You can come up with new ideas to solve problems or get inspiration if you change your perspective.

Detailed instructions here

ACTIVITY 2: CHANGE HABITS

5 minutes

The Big Idea:

1. Changing our habits can be uncomfortable or awkward but that's usually a sign of growth and learning.
2. The initial little bit of discomfort you feel when you experience something new goes away quickly. This exercise shows you that it's easier than you think to become open to new ideas.

Detailed instructions here

ACTIVITY 3: ZIGZAG

15 minutes

The Big Idea:

1. If we can let go of what we think is the "right" answer, we can come up with really amazing, fresh ideas.
2. Constraints — not total freedom — help us create great solutions.

Detailed instructions here

DISCUSSION

10 minutes

Why do you think that we did these activities?
How did each of them make you feel?

What do you think creativity is?
Why do you think it's important?
Why do you think we have this conversation at school?

Why do you think we need Creative Power Day?
What do you think you can do differently now with your stronger creative muscles?

CLOSING

5 minutes

Distribute comment sheets and Creative Power Day swag

Reinforce main points:

- Seeing connections between disparate concepts
- Developing an openness to new ideas
- Building resilience through experimentation

Thank you!

ACTIVITY 1: SHIFT PERSPECTIVE [5 MINUTES]

The Big Idea:

1. If you changing how you look at something, it helps you understand people or ideas that are different from your own. This is called empathy.
2. You can come up with new ideas to solve problems or get inspiration if you change your perspective.

Instructions

Step 1: Ask everyone to stand up and hold a pencil.

Step 2: Have them hold the pencil straight up in the air, and pretend to draw a circle on the ceiling, in a clockwise direction. Tell them to keep drawing the circle and looking up. (Do a quick visual check that everyone is going clockwise.)

Step 3: Act out the motion with them and say, "Now slowly continue to draw the circle clockwise, bring the pencil down a few inches at a time until it is in front of your face. Continue to circle the pencil, and slowly bring it down until you are looking down on top of it. Continue to draw the circle while looking down on it."

Step 4: Ask the group, "What direction is the pencil moving?" (It will be a counter clockwise direction at this point. If people say "clockwise," ask them to try it again.)

Note: Some people lose the integrity of the circle as they bring it down. If you notice this ask them to start over and encourage them to practice "drawing" the circle on the ceiling several times before moving down.

Debrief

Ask the group, "so what happened?" The initial responses tend to range from the insightful ("what changed is my perspective") to the incredulous and funny. After people have had a chance to try it again, most of them will see that what changed as they brought the pencil down was not the direction of the pencil, but their perspective or vantage point. Have the students share examples about when they were able to shift perspective and see something from a new vantage point.

In relationship to Creative Power, the exercise illustrates how:

1. Changing your perspective is often simpler than we might imagine. Seeing problems from multiple perspectives is essential when we are trying to solve hard problems.
2. Having empathy is a sign of strength and self-awareness. Also by shifting the way we see something, we are able to come up with much more interesting new ideas.

Exercise adapted from the Systems Thinking Playbook
by Linda Booth Sweeney and Dennis Meadows (2001). The book is available through Chelsea Green Publishers. For an educator's discount, contact: linda@lindaboothsweeney.net

ACTIVITY 2: CHANGE HABITS [5 MINUTES]

The Big Idea:

1. Changing our habits can be uncomfortable or awkward but that's usually a sign of growth and learning.
2. The initial little bit of discomfort you feel when you experience something new goes away quickly. This exercise shows you that it's easier than you think to become open to new ideas.

Instructions

Step 1: Ask the group to stand up and do the following: "Fold your arms the way you would if you were bored, with one arm naturally falling on top of the other. Look at your arms and notice which one is on top. Notice how this feels. Is it comfortable? Does it feel normal?"

Step 2: Now ask the group to uncross their arms and fold them again, the other way, with the other arm on top. "How does that feel? What do you notice?"

Here people may comment that the second way of folding arms feels "uncomfortable" or "awkward."

Debrief

Talk about the physical feeling of discomfort when we cross our arms in the second way as being like the emotional and cognitive experiences (the feeling) we have when we are learning something new. Have the students share examples of when they got over feeling uncomfortable when they tried something new.

In relationship to Creative Power, the exercise is meant to show that:

1. Sometimes our need/desire for feeling comfortable and our tendency to avoid feeling awkward sometimes gets in our way of learning.
2. But that feeling will pass quickly and often those moments when we get outside our comfort zone are when we come up with our best ideas.

Exercise adapted from the Systems Thinking Playbook
by Linda Booth Sweeney and Dennis Meadows (2001). The book is available through Chelsea Green Publishers. For an educator's discount, contact: linda@lindaboothsweeney.net.

ACTIVITY 3: ZIGZAG [15 MINUTES]

The Big Idea:

1. If we can let go of what we think is the "right" answer, we can come up with really amazing, fresh ideas.
2. Constraints — not total freedom — help us create great solutions.

The goal of this exercise is to illustrate three main ideas:

- You always are influenced and dependent on other people whenever you make something – no creative acts happen in isolation! (This is illustrated when your neighbor passes you their paperclip.)
- You can create really original, fun ideas even when you have a lot of constraints. In fact, sometimes those constraints make your output even better because they force us to think of things that don't already exist. (The paperclip, time, and challenge questions are the constraints.)
- Visualizing your ideas helps you think and communicate better. It doesn't matter if you're "good" at art — it's about experimenting and explaining your ideas! (It's helpful to have each child describe their work at least once in this exercise.)

Supplies needed for this exercise:
- Any kind of regular size paperclip
- Standard blank white notecards (3"x5" or 4"x6" will do, not lined, ideally not colored)

Amount needed: For a classroom of 20 students, you need one paperclip and one notecard per student for each "challenge." You'll do two rounds so the students have a change to morph the paperclip twice. Multiply the number of students by the number of challenges – you'll have time for 3-6 challenges in 2 rounds, so 2 paperclips and 60-120 notecards for 20 students. It's a good idea to bring some extra paperclips and notecards though!

Instructions

Step 1: Form groups of 3 or 4. Ideally, the students are already sitting in grouped desks. To save time, try not to move the students around too much. Each student gets one paper clip and one notecard for each "round." Each round has one challenge question.

Step 2: Ask each student to bend their paperclip into whatever shape they want but it has to be flat, not 3 dimensional. (Don't tell them what comes next until they have finished this step.)

Step 3: Everyone passes their paperclip to the person on their left, and receives a paperclip from the person on their right. Rotating clockwise.

Step 4: Instruct everyone that their job is to draw their solution to the challenge question on their notecard. They first need to trace the shape of the paperclip and then build on/draw around that shape. Give them only about 1 minute for each challenge.

Step 5: Repeat at least 2-3 more times, with the paperclip rotating to the next person each time. Students get a fresh notecard for each challenge.

Step 6: After 2-3 challenge questions, ask the students to take a fresh paperclip and bend it again. You can decide to reverse the direction they pass the paperclip if you want, or have them keep their paperclip. Ask 2-3 more challenge questions.

Sample challenges questions in increasing difficulty:

- Imagine something that would give you the power to fly
- Imagine your dream home
- Imagine a new kind of sport or musical instrument
- Imagine a way to save water in a drought
- Imagine a new kind of food that could feed everyone on the planet
- Imagine a way that could help people get along better

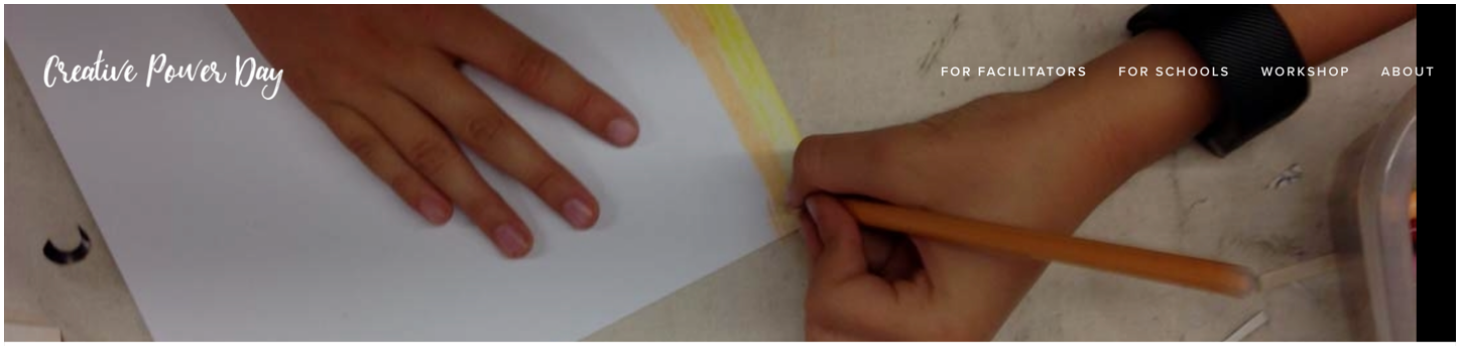
Debrief

Ask the students to volunteer to explain their drawings after each challenge question. Ask leading questions to get them to reflect on their process.

Talk about the influence of constraints. Constraints make you more resourceful and that helps drive creativity. How did the outline of the paperclip influence the drawings? Even though it was surprising at first, did it make you faster and freer in coming up with solutions? How did it feel that you weren't in control of the original shape?

In relationship to Creative Power, the exercise is meant to:

1. Illustrate how constraints force you to think beyond the usual solutions.
2. The exercise shows the interdependencies between people undertaking creative acts.
3. The constraints are designed to create a help students fluidly create without self-consciousness or fear.



Information for workshop facilitators

OVERVIEW

INFORMATION FOR FACILITATORS

Creativity is not reserved for art class, and it is not limited to the "talented." Creativity is a muscle that everyone has and it is the essential characteristic needed for making stronger decisions every day and a better world in the future.

BACKGROUND

Creative Power Day was created to reach students at a critical time in their development and help them build important skills to solve the really tough challenges they will face now and as they get older – things like climate change and social inequality. The Creative Power workshop curriculum blends approaches from design thinking, systems thinking, and growth mindset, and is meant to be conducted in an interactive 45-60 minute workshop for students aged 8-11.

THE ASK

1. **Spread the word!** This is a grassroots effort and we rely on people like you to spread the message about Creative Power, and how your local schools and network can participate on *Creative Power Day*.
2. **Save the Date**: You will be conducting your *Creative Power Day* workshop in a local public school during school hours (~8am-3pm) on *Creative Power Day*. Your exact time and location will be confirmed the month before. The workshop is designed to take about one hour, and you should plan to arrive 20 minutes before the workshop to check in with the school's administrative office and locate the classroom.
3. **Practice and Prepare**: Please review and internalize the materials on this site, and also call-in for one of the preparation/training conference calls.
4. **Document**: We ask that you take a few photos during your *Creative Power Day* workshop, and also fill out the short survey we will send via email afterwards.

[We have removed the sign-up form until we have a firm plan for the next *Creative Power Day*.]

Information for teachers and schools

SIGN UP

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS

We want every teacher to have the chance to strengthen the creative power of their students aged 8-11 for *Creative Power Day*. You can sign your classroom up below.

Review the doc that we used to communicate the goals of the 2017 Creative Power Day: One-page PDF overview.

SIGN UP YOUR CLASSROOM TO PARTICIPATE

If you would like your classroom to participate, please fill out the form below and one of our team will get back to you with details. We have not set the date for the next *Creative Power Day*.

[We have temporarily removed this form until we have a firm plan for the next *Creative Power Day*.]

"Don't talk about 'creativity,' just show us how to do it—that's creative *power*."

This is what my 10-year old son said in 2016 when I told him I wanted to help kids in his class come up with ideas for solving the big, gnarly challenges they were studying at school. Why shouldn't those kids use the same kinds of powerful creative skills I use everyday as a product maker – the ability to see connections between disparate concepts, the openness to new (often weird!) ideas, and the critical but forgiving mindset around risk and failure?

All human beings intrinsically have these abilities, but as we grow up we are steadily re-programmed by school and the workplace to treat originality with skepticism and creativity with reservation. We need to reverse this process. I came up with a simple framework (co-created with my amazing twins) for a Creative Power workshop and imagined how amazing it would be if all our fellow parents, friends, teachers, and energized change-makers could help run workshops in classrooms all around the the world. And thus, *Creative Power Day* was born.

Our goal with *Creative Power Day* is to create a movement around the concept of Creative Power, with a concentrated effort to reach young students around the world on a single day each year to jumpstart their confidence and skills around creative problem-solving. By developing their Creative Power muscles early on, we're fostering a mindset and awareness that will give them a chance to actively and positively shape their worlds.

Please help us move this vision forward by volunteering to conduct a workshop, or getting a classroom in your local school to participate. Together we can cultivate a new generation of bold leaders who are equipped with Creative Power!

Valerie Casey
Founder, Creative Power Day

* Download the one-page 2017 PDF overview here.

THE FIRST CREATIVE POWER DAY IN 2016

On May 5, 2016, we prototyped the first Creative Power Day with over 500 students in four countries. We engaged more than students aged 10-14 in seven cities: San Francisco, California; Oakland, California; New York, New York; Savannah, Georgia; Vancouver, Canada; Reykjavik, Iceland; and Cork, Ireland. Trained volunteer facilitators conducted one-hour Creative Power workshops, which included hands-on activities and discussion, and was designed to strengthen creative problem-solving and nurture natural curiosity and optimism in students.

We received really positive and constructive feedback from our first experiment, and have made some adjustment to this year's program. Here are our observations and insights to date, and what's different this year:

1. **The need is massive, and this is the right approach.**
   Creative Power workshops help students see connections between disparate concepts, develop an openness to new ideas, and understand failure as an essential part of solving problems. Our hypothesis was that we could blend hands-on activities with discussion, and short lessons with longer group collaborations to connect students to these core ideas. Our first prototype in 2016 showed that the cadence of the workshop and its diversity of activities strongly reinforced our main messages. We have the great principles from systems thinking, design thinking, and growth mindset to thank.

2. **Examples enliven these concepts, especially at this age.**
   The classroom teachers were great allies through the process, and gave us solid feedback to improve the workshops next year. Several of the teachers suggested that we provide more visual examples of prototypes and real-life stories to support our verbal messages. They advocated for a "multi-modal scaffolding" to help bring new ideas into sharper relief.

3. **The messenger is the message.**
   The role of the facilitator is always critical to the success of a workshop, but perhaps even more so with our 10-14 year old audience. Several of our advisors suggested that we recruit older students (aged 16-18) to run workshops with the 12-14 age group. We have explored this but the logistics – training, permissions, transportation – will be too challenging to coordinate at scale this year. We are still interested in pursuing and will try to arrange a few sessions like this.

4. **It's not just about the prototype.**
   While the culminating moment of the 2016 Creative Power workshop was when small groups demonstrated their prototypes, the true value of the workshop was everything that led up to that point: students collaborating, actively shifting perspectives, getting comfortable with hearing new ideas, and learning by building. Also, the debrief was critical. We didn't allocate enough time for discussion, and were concerned that the concept were not as firmly entrenched as they could be. This year we changed the Activity 3 to a shorter and different exercise to make room for more conversation with the students.

5. **Having students briefly record their experience concretizes learnings.**
   In half of the workshops conducted on Creative Power Day, we asked students to take a few moments at the end of the session to jot down what they learned. We've heard anecdotally that students who documented their thoughts tended to tell their parents and friends about what they learned at a higher rate than those who didn't record what they learned. This step will be incorporated into all workshops this year.

6. **Competition can be productive.**
   Throughout the workshop, we continuously emphasized that there is no "right answer" in creativity, and that there isn't a "winner" of the workshop. However, we found that when we gave multiple small groups the same challenge card – instead of each group having a separate challenge – the groups focused more quickly and pushed their ideas further. The competition idea doesn't translate as clearly this year with the new Activity 3, but we will be monitoring different behaviors in the group activity.

7. **It's always an experiment.**
   It's evident that we will continue to iterate the process, and that with every new instance we can learn. As will last year, we are testing out new additions and versions all the time with young people.

The activities and script for the first Creative Power Day in 2016 are archived here.

CREATIVITY

Your plastic brain and how it affects creativity
http://creativesomething.net/post/40618576283/your-plastic-brain-and-how-it-affects-creativity

Why Dot-Connecting Is the Key to Creativity
https://www.brainpickings.org/2013/05/23/uncommon-genius-stephen-jay-gould-connections-creativity/

The Creative Stereotype Effect
http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0142567

5 ways to maximize your cognitive potential
http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/you-can-increase-your-intelligence-5-ways-to-maximize-your-cognitive-potential/

Testing kids for "grit" is a big mistake
http://qz.com/628645/testing-kids-for-grit-is-a-big-mistake-says-the-worlds-foremost-authority-on-it/

Will the Push for Coding Lead to 'Technical Ghettos'?
http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/02/will-the-push-for-coding-lead-to-technical-ghettos/471300/

GROWTH MINDSET

Carol Dweck Revisits the 'Growth Mindset'
http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2015/09/23/carol-dweck-revisits-the-growth-mindset.html

The Creativity Mindset
https://usergeneratededucation.wordpress.com/2015/03/15/the-creativity-mindset/

Growth Mindset Fuels Creativity
http://www.rootsofaction.com/growth-mindset-fuels-creativity/

CREATIVITY RESEARCH

The Bias Against Creativity: Why People Desire But Reject Creative Ideas
http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1457&context=articles

A Bias against 'Quirky'? Why Creative People Can Lose Out on Leadership Positions
http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/a-bias-against-quirky-why-creative-people-can-lose-out-on-leadership-positions/

Creativity: Asset or Burden in the Classroom
http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/s15326934crj0801_1?journalCode=hcrj20

Feelings of Entitlement Enhance Creativity
http://www.psychologicalscience.org/index.php/news/minds-business/feelings-of-entitlement-enhance-creativity.html

SYSTEMS THINKING

Thinking in Systems: A Primer
http://www.chelseagreen.com/thinking-in-systems

Systems Thinking Playbook
http://www.chelseagreen.com/the-systems-thinking-playbook

DESIGN THINKING

Virtual Crash Course in Design Thinking
http://dschool.stanford.edu/dgift/

Design in the Classroom from Cooper Hewitt
http://www.cooperhewitt.org/education/school-programs/designk12/

Ideo.org Design Kit
http://www.designkit.org/resources/1

Design Thinking for Educators
http://www.designthinkingforeducators.com/toolkit/

45 Design Thinking Resources for Educators
http://www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/features/45-design-thinking-resources-for-educators/