

# Developing Creative and Critical Thinking Skills via Counseling Approaches

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**How to cite this paper:** Fong, W. K., & Bakar, A. Y. A. (2023). Developing Creative and Critical Thinking Skills via Counseling Approaches. *Creative Education*, 14, 1014-1021.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2023.145064>

**Received:** March 25, 2023

**Accepted:** May 26, 2023

**Published:** May 29, 2023

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## Abstract

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has required a specific set of skills to be implemented in the process of teaching and learning at all levels, especially in the school environment. While focus and attention were given more to science dimension, it cannot be denied that social science also has its own approaches to inculcate or develop creative and critical thinking skills among school students. This paper discusses that process using the counseling approaches, particularly in group setting. Role-play and guiding/group activities were described as two main activities that can effectively contribute to this developmental process. The discussion stresses the importance role that can be served by guidance and counseling teachers at school.

## Keywords

Counseling, High Order Thinking Skills, School, Malaysia

## 1. Introduction

Learning can be defined as permanent changes in behavior induced by life. According to experiential learning theory, learning is described as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Coffield et al., 2004). Learning theories describe the conditions and processes through which learning occurs, providing teachers with models to develop instruction sessions that lead to better learning. Dunn and Dunn (1993) described that these theories explain the processes that people engage in as they make sense of information, and how they integrate that information into their mental models so that it becomes new knowledge. Learning theories also examine what motivates people to learn, and what circumstances enable or hinder learning.

The models and processes that learning theories describe tend to apply across

different populations and settings, and provide us with guidelines to develop exercises, assignments, and lesson plans that align with how our students learn best (Carmo et al., 2006; Eggen & Kauchak, 2001). Concomitantly, learning theories may be useful to help students and educators understand how to improve the way they learn and teach, respectively (Carmo et al., 2006). With a basic understanding of learning theories, we can create lessons that enhance the learning process. This understanding helps us explain our instructional choices, or the “why” behind what and how we teach. As certain learning theories resonate with us and we consciously construct lessons based on those theories, we begin to develop a personal philosophy of teaching that will guide our instructional design going forward (Eggen & Kauchak, 2001).

Generally, theories suggested that cognitive skills in children responsible for learning and problem solving skills can be divided in two buckets: 1) memory and recall skills, also known as Lower Order Thinking Skills, and 2) comprehension, critical thinking, creative thinking and logical thinking, also known as Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). Edward de Bono is widely considered the father of modern creative and critical thinking, whereby he pioneered numerous practical thinking tools, used worldwide in schools and businesses. Creative and critical thinking skills can be considered one of the key competencies for the 21<sup>st</sup> century that allow individuals to remain flexible and provide the capacity to deal with the opportunities and challenges that are part of the complex and fast-changing world. Both skills occur when students get new information, retain and remember, organize, and relate it to existing knowledge; extending it to achieve a goal or offer solutions for complex situations. The increased focus on innovation combined with recent reports of decrements in creative performance brings attention to the need to develop creative and critical thinking skills at both the educational level.

## **2. Differentiation between Creative Thinking and Critical Thinking**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is especially important to have higher level thinking skills and to have intellectual capacities developed to highest potential. Applying thinking skills in teaching and learning is very essential in keeping with our country’s aim to embrace the knowledge economy. Creative and critical thinking are two important components of high-level thinking which involve broadly and deeply using skills, behaviors and dispositions such as reason, logic, resourcefulness, imagination and innovation. **Table 1** illustrated the differences between these both high order thinking skills (HOTS).

## **3. Counselors’ Engagement in Creative and Critical Thinking Skills**

Both of these HOTS components (creative and critical thinking skills) require not only a knowledge of logic, including how to avoid logical fallacies that lead

**Table 1.** Common differences between creative thinking and critical thinking.

	<b>Creative Thinking</b>	<b>Critical Thinking</b>
<b>Definition</b>	Creativity is a process to search and explore various alternatives; hence, creative thinking involves the effort to explore something new and valuable that others have never thought of yet.	Critical thinking is the mental ability and capacity to assess the truth and the untruth of an idea as well as the strengths and weaknesses of an argument. This includes making logical judgements.
<b>Characteristics</b>	The ability to expand and develop one's imagination, creativity and innovation with the aim of getting a new idea or an original creation. Creative thinking produces and generates innovative ideas or inventions, such as creating metaphors, analogies, or definitions.	The ability to interpret and evaluate data, ideas and information in order to find meaning or to solve problems. It covers skills such as comparing and contrasting, summarising, making decisions, analysing, making inferences and solving problems.
<b>Roles in Learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. have an ability to synthesize and present problems and solutions in new ways</li> <li>b. seems to have future-oriented ideas that use past and present ideas to generate new solutions or ideas</li> <li>c. can quickly see the link between ideas and enjoy giving unique and innovative ideas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. can help prevent students from becoming too influenced by the ideas or opinions of others and help students take actions against biases and prejudices</li> <li>b. enables students to accept change and also be willing to change opinions</li> <li>c. assists students to identify and distinguish between facts with opinions, ask critical questions, makes observations in detail, avoids assumptions, and adopts a rule-based logical thinking</li> </ul>
<b>Strategies for Teaching</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Brainstorming—This strategy is often used to identify new ideas or alternatives. It is a strategy to create and produce many ideas in a short period of time. It can work well if group members know each other and have trust among each other.</li> <li>b. Mind Mapping—A mind map is a way to represent ideas graphically. It is a visual thinking tool in order to help students to structure information.</li> <li>c. Use Questions—Some question cues can help students think creatively. Examples of question cues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) What might happen if/(if not)?</li> <li>2) Can you imagine?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Building Categories—This strategy helps students categorize information by discovery rather than memorizing facts. Such active learning results in better understanding of the concepts and related materials</li> <li>b. Finding Problems—Some of the problems presented in the classroom (especially in Mathematics and Science) are different from the way problems exist in real life. This strategy is a way of putting problems in such a way that students use skills to solve the problems they may face in real life.</li> <li>c. Enhancing Environment—The layout of the classroom can encourage students' use of critical thinking. In this way, the signs emphasize the idea of transfer by showing that many of the same thinking strategies and skills apply to different topics and problems.</li> </ul>

to unsupported conclusions, they also require certain character traits, such as discipline, that are necessary to implement the skills. For example, a relationship counselor who cannot control—or even understand—his or her compulsion to direct clients towards a solution, will likely not be able to provide a proper counseling service. Inevitably, it is far more beneficial to guide a client towards a solution by employing the client's own thoughts and resources, than it is to simply tell a client what to do. This takes both creative and critical thoughts. An article in the Wall Street Journal published in 2013 was an alarm bell for all future and many present counselors. According to the article, “many counseling

students cannot recognize reasoning when they encounter it. They have little grasped of the difference between merely ‘saying something’ and constructing an explanation or forming an argument.”

Why do creative and critical thinking skills are important during counseling sessions? First and foremost, without clear creative and critical thinking skills, counselors will not be able to properly conceptualize clients’ issues. Secondly, counselors will be unable to discern between over hundreds counseling theories as to which are effective and appropriate for which type of clients and issues without both skills. Lastly, people who come to counselors are expecting to receive clear and unemotional guidance; therefore, if counselors do not possess the skills for clear and unemotional thinking, then how can such counselors help their clients effectively?

Moreover, it is observed that many professors often present all types of information as equally valid, and do not teach students how to distinguish between creative ideas and empirically supported counseling interventions (Jacobs, 2013). Ideally, professors should ensure that students are provided with the general knowledge required for scientific thinking, as well as how specific scientific principles should be applied to counseling. Therefore, counselors must understand scientific thinking. Such skills, applied diligently throughout a career, will allow the counselor to obtain valuable science-based ongoing education from journals and seminars, and to avoid the various feel-good but scientifically unsound fallacies that unfortunately seep into the popular culture and then make their way into the psychotherapy arena. Counselors with honed critical thinking skills will be the ones that become known for providing their clients with the best empirically-based interventions, rather than pop culture smoke and mirrors.

The literatures related to counselors’ training clearly supports the importance to develop creative and critical thinking skills in order to become competent counselors. For instance, Fitch (2001) argues for the importance of counselors to develop proficiency in both thinking skills as a key component to influencing the counseling process and effectively motivating clients’ changes. Likewise, Yalisove (2010) emphasizes the importance of counselors being able to provide effective counseling services by demonstrating both thinking skills in their daily practices. Both Fitch and Yalisove indicate that the use of creative and critical thinking skills facilitated the counseling relationship and growth, while allowing for the inclusion of best practices methodology in this helping profession.

#### **4. Role-Play: An Activity that Combines Creative and Critical Thinking Skills**

Students immediately apply content as they are put in the role of a decision maker who must make a decision regarding policies, resources allocation, or some other outcome. This activity is an excellent tool for engaging students and allowing them to interact with their peers as they try to complete the task assigned to them in their specific role. This work can be done in cooperative

groups and/or students can maintain the persona of their role throughout the class period. Students are more engaged as they try to respond to the material from the perspective of their character. Some of the common role-play exercises that can be conducted in the classroom settings are as follow:

- 1) Mock-Up Interview—In preparation for career interviews, students can assume the role of the interviewers and/or the interviewees.
- 2) Marketing—In preparation for a class presentation, students can assume the position of a sales representative and sell a product.
- 3) Retailing—To help prepare students for a guest speaker in merchandising course, students can play the role of sales manager and sales representative to gain better insight on the responsibilities of these positions.
- 4) Counseling—In preparing for clinical practice, students can role play a family therapist whose client has revealed she has committed a criminal act.
- 5) Teaching—In preparation for job fair, students can role play the teacher and the student, or the administrator and the student, or the teacher and parents.
- 6) Debates—As a spontaneous exercise, the instructor has students briefly prepare arguments for and arguments against positions on a topic such as Logging in the Northwest and the Spotted Owl, Arab-Israeli Conflict or Airline Flight Departure Delays.

Prior to the conduct of any role-play activities, these few considerations must be prepared:

- 1) Ensure students have required background information to complete the task—Role-playing requires students to have a basal understanding of some information. Assigned reading, attendance of lecture, or guided research may be required for the students before they are ready to take on a new role.
- 2) Establish classrooms norms that promote community and exclusivity—Role-playing requires students to commit to an unfamiliar role and can push them past their comfort zone. It is important before the activity begins to talk about classroom etiquette and establish rules that promote student involvement and enthusiasm. You may consider having a longer explicit discussion in which you write out class rules on a board or you may just mention your expectations of student behavior briefly before the class begins.
- 3) If needed, distribute prompt and determine student groups—Some role-playing activities require students to prepare ahead of class as a member of a group. If this is the case, assign students their groups before class begins and give them the assignment with clear instructions on how they should prepare: Do they need to do research on a character or time? Do they need to understand specifics of a topic? Do they need to bring props or a costume?
- 4) Create a “real-world” environment—Simulations and role-playing work best when it is as close to the real-world as possible. This may mean having a particular classroom set-up or alternate location. Students may also need to wear particular clothing or refer to each other in a different tone.
- 5) Clearly define the role each student should portray—Make sure each student has a clearly defined task. If students are working in groups, establish how

they should work together. Are they working as a team? Competitors? Debating? Is there a hierarchy to roles? Do individual roles have different rules they should follow?

6) Ensure students have required information—If necessary, pose questions to the class or have a review before starting the simulation to ensure everyone is on the same page. If the task evolves with time, the information students need may change. Prepare how the information might change throughout the course of the role-playing and how the students will learn this information.

7) Keep track of time—Often, role-playing requires strict time constraints to be effective. Limit student's time depending on the role/task.

After the activities have been completed, have a moment for the student to get feedback on their performance, either from the class as a whole, their partner/groups, or from the instructor directly. Allow students to reflect on their role-playing. Some potential questions to ask are as follow:

- 1) What challenges did you face taking on these new roles?
- 2) What was harder or easier than expected?
- 3) If you had to do it again, what would you change?
- 4) How did you plan for your role? What lead to the decisions you made in your role?

All in all, role-plays provide students with the opportunity to take part in activities which mirror career-related scenarios. To help students understand the use of role-playing sessions, activities should be content-focused, match learning objectives, and be relevant to real-world situations. Role-playing exercises encourage students to think more creative and critically about complex and controversial subjects, and to see situations from different perspectives. When properly employed, role-plays can motivate students in a fun and engaging way.

## **5. Developing Students' Participation Skills via Group Counseling Approach**

Active class participation can improve creative and critical and thinking skills. Students who participate in class have studied the material well enough to introduce new concepts to their peers. This level of thinking goes beyond simple comprehension of text, and can also improve memory. Participation can also help students learn from each other, increasing comprehension through cooperation. This can in turn improve relationships between students and between the student and teacher. Increasing student participation can have a positive effect on classroom learning environment and can help keep students engaged and focused on what they're learning.

The group counseling approach can be utilized as a technique to develop students' participation skills in the classroom. The group counseling activity establish for this specific purpose should have preparations as follow:

- 1) Classroom Setting—The seating is arranged so that the students are facing each other because the layout will encourage the students to express critical

views in discussions; include students from a wide range of disciplines and have a variety of thinking styles because a diverse group will generate more creative ideas

2) Icebreaking Activities—Any selected activities must be conducted with the intention to increase group cohesion and camaraderie among students/participants. It shall build rapport, foster a productive learning environment, and prepare them for collaborative groupwork. When a group is closer and every member feels more positive about each other and the goals of the group, it is easier for the group to be much more productive and fun.

3) Guiding/Group Activities—Activities chosen must possess the elements of encouraging students to participate actively via communication process. To illustrate, the “think-pair-share” activity will ask the students to write as many ideas about a specific problem-solving scenario, discuss them with a partner, and then share their ideas with the group. The purpose of the activity is to enhance the students’ communication skills (written and verbal) and encourage them to actively participate (in pair and large group discussions). The activity known as “guide the discussion” on the other hand, will motivate an individual’s impromptu speech skill on certain subject/topic via rotated participation. In this activity, a group led by a “monitor” will discuss the selected topic on an impromptu basis of 30 or 40 seconds per each member and no one can avoid the rotation/his or her turn to speak on any excuses.

4) Feedback—Provide feedback (after activities have been completed) about how well students have done or how to improve. Rewards can be delivered as simple as saying “Good work” or mentioning the names of the students. Both positive and negative comments influence motivation, but students are more encouraged by positive feedback and success. By working the problem with the students, they will experience a sense of achievement and confidence that will help increase their motivation to learn.

Participating in team activities actively can also help students to develop essential communication and collaboration skills while preparing them for success inside and outside of the classroom. People do not learn to speak up in a group by reading about how to do it, but rather be best developed with the practice. And it is one of those skills that develop better with feedback. Knowing that he or she will be heard, helps build a student’s self-confidence, while encouraging further participation in group activities. As a result, even the most introverted and quietest members of the team can become active participants and learn to enjoy team activities. Giving and receiving feedback may also assist students in becoming reflective practitioners. Through the feedback process, students learn to identify their peers strengths and areas for growth and communicate this information to their peers. In addition, students increase their self-awareness by reflecting upon feedback they receive and using it to critically analyze their own strengths and areas for improvement; thus, they become more engaged and take ownership in the learning process (McKimm, 2009).



## 6. Conclusion

In a nutshell, the earlier the foundation of creative and critical thinking is built the sooner children can make sense of information through analysis and problem solving skills. It has even been found that children that have an early start in cultivating these HOTS elements perform better in school, are more creative and are better at making good judgments. In other words, creative and critical thinking skills are becoming essentially critical in the present days of 21<sup>st</sup> century. This generis particularly due to the environment of huge information that mostly comes from the online sources and is very evident that there is an immense need to learn the evaluation of the things they study and hear around them and identify false information beyond superficial data provided.

Learning theories are meant to help educators understand the processes and circumstances that enable learning and, by extension, offer guidance in developing activities and environments that best support learning. In fact, the theories provide us with an empirically based understanding of how learning occurs. As one of the helping professions, counseling also plays vital role in promoting creative and critical thinking skills among school students and this can be achieved via both individual and group approaches.

## Acknowledgements

Authors are grateful to Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) that funds the publication of this article using its' internal research grant (Code: GUP-2020-103).

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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