

# ***Preparing Young Thinkers for the Real World***

## **Enhancing the classroom curriculum for bright, creative students**

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Change surrounds us, perhaps even batters us, every day in myriad ways. Knowledge is exploding and technology is expanding at an ever-accelerating pace, and both information and products become obsolete ever more rapidly. Of one *fact* we can be certain: we do not have all the answers that our children will need. Indeed, we may not even know the *questions* for which they will need answers in their lifetime. Careers, businesses, and entire bodies of knowledge are emerging that we did not envision only a few years ago. So, how do we prepare our children to be successful in this environment of change? What types of activities can we encourage that will both supplement classroom lessons and produce creative thinking that helps students better prepare for successful life and work in a world of constant, rapid change?

There are as many ways of defining *creativity* as there are people. But the simplest way to talk about this elusive element we all share is that creativity is:

- ★ The ability of a person's mind to take ideas, facts, and/or materials and perceive them in a unique way or manner.
- ★ A different point of view, a new idea and/or a new way of looking at a problem.

Many people will tell you they are not creative, but **EVERYONE** is creative. Some are just more creative than others! Check out the great costumes from the DI team at **Stafford Elementary School in West Linn** as proof.



Everyone has his or her own style of creativity. Some are good at taking an idea and improving it and making something more useful. Others are good at discovering new or unusual solutions or ways of doing things.

Take a look around you - at the house or apartment you live in, at the furniture and fixtures in that space, etc. Take a look at the clothes you are wearing. Every manufactured item you see was, at one time or another, a thought or an idea in someone's mind. Every time you make or decide something differently from someone else, you *created* that thought/that idea. Every time you decide what to wear, what to eat, how to get to work, how to arrange something, you are *creating*.

If everyone pictured a beautiful colored flower, and then took it through the process of mentally changing some of its characteristics (its color, shape of petals, texture, etc), not one person would come up with the same image at the end of five minutes. That is because everyone would *create* a different image. Everyone is *creative*. But can this creativity be nurtured or expanded? Many educators say YES! **Creativity can be taught** through a Creative Problem Solving process.

### **What is a Creative Problem Solving Process?**

First of all, the Creative Problem Solving process (CPS) is capitalized because it is a *specific* process as opposed to speaking generally of creative problem solving. There are many different creative problem solving processes. One particularly successful program was developed by Donald Treffinger and his associates of the Center for Creative Learning, Inc., and is the process recommended by Destination ImagiNation, because it is highly effective and it is easy to introduce and teach to students of all ages. And, yes, adults can learn a few new tricks, too!

This CPS process was developed based on people's natural way of approaching issues and challenges at work, school or in their personal lives. Since the 1950's it has been used successfully world-wide by people applying it in their business and at home. To learn more about this process, read *Creative Problem Solving: An Introduction* (3rd Ed.) by Treffinger, Isaksen and Dorval (2000) or visit the Center for Creative Learning website at [www.creativelearning.com](http://www.creativelearning.com) for more information.

Parents can do creative problem solving activities as an at-home activity. However there are a number of programs that also offer these skills, such as

Future Problem Solvers or Invention

Convention. The largest extra-curricular program of its kind that utilizes this process as its cornerstone is Destination ImagiNation. You can find this Treffinger reference and

other excellent resources for CPS tools at the Destination ImagiNation, Inc. web site: [www.destinationimagination.org](http://www.destinationimagination.org).

### **What is Destination ImagiNation?**

Destination ImagiNation (DI) is a program dedicated to the idea that the future belongs to those who learn creative



problem-solving skills as children, and it coupled the activities with lessons in teamwork in a semi-structured activity leading to a goal. This extra-curricular program begins in the Fall when students form teams. The teams work, usually on weekends or after school, to create original solutions to one of 5 team challenges that will be presented at a tournament in the spring. Last year over 150 teams formed in NY. Typically, parents, past parents or teachers volunteer as team managers, but this program is also a great after-school activity because the students do all the creating and work. Team managers can show students a skill, bring in a mentor to teach a scientific concept or the principles of electricity, mechanics or stagecraft, but they cannot work on the actual solution or even suggest ideas. The pay-off for the children is rich: creative problem-solving abilities, confidence, self-esteem, and social skills are gained



while they have a lot of fun. These kids from the Lake Grove Elementary DI team in Lake Oswego created an 8 minute skit with

costumes and props in a half hour as part of the Improv challenge.

## Creative and Critical Thinking

So how is creative thinking learned in this program? When teams are taken through the CPS process to facilitate the development of a unique solution to the team's Challenge, they discover it takes more than **creative thinking**; it also takes **critical thinking**. Creative thinking occurs when the team encounters opportunities, challenges or concerns. As the team members search for meaningful new connections or expand on existing possibilities (Treffinger, Isaksen, Dorval, 2000) they *generate* options and ideas. During this process team members defer judgment and generate many varied ideas. They should accept all options and extend them to find unusual possibilities, and seek combinations among the ideas generated. The next step is to transform promising ideas into workable solutions, and then prepare students to carry out those solutions. The key word for this last component is **action**.

As the team creates its *Team Challenge* or works on practice *Instant Challenge* solutions, this same process will take place over and over again. The program offers training for team managers and team members and provides the team with tips to aid them along the way. Whether a team is in its **Creative Thinking Phase** (coming up with their ideas for a solution) or in its **Critical Thinking Phase** (deciding, implementing, and/or testing its solution), these fairly simple tips can be very useful and effective. The skills learned can be adapted to any situation and will last a lifetime for the team members.

## ***Interested in learning more about Destination Imagination?***

### **How Do Teams Form?**

Teams form through a school or school district, a club such as the Boys and Girls Club or the YMCA, or any group of students. For example, some teams form as part of an after-school activity, or as family members or neighboring kids. In other cases, one or two students decide to form a team, find a parent, grandparent, or family friend who is willing to act as the team manager and then get classmates or friends to join them.

Teams are usually made up of five to seven students, grouped by age or grade. Students in kindergarten through second grade usually participate in the non-competitive primary program, **Rising Stars™**. The other three categories are for students in grades 3-5 (elementary level), 6-8 (intermediate level) and 9-12 (secondary level). There is also a University level.

### **Program Information**

Complete programmatic information, including registration information, may be found at [www.idodi.org](http://www.idodi.org). If you are new to the program, we encourage you to go to the site.

To participate in the training and tournaments, teams must register. The New York Destination ImagiNation site, located at [www.nydi.org](http://www.nydi.org), will provide specific information related to participation in NY, as well as [links to other resources](#) to help team managers and coordinators provide a quality program for their students. Links to Regional Directors are also available on the site. Contact your regional director or Dee Urban, Affiliate Director, [deurban@adelphia.net](mailto:deurban@adelphia.net) or (716)675-7566, for additional information.

