



How to Foster Curiosity, Creativity, and Perseverance Across the Curriculum

by Steve Peisch

Most teachers would agree that fostering curiosity, creativity, and perseverance in their students is more important than achieving specific goals within any particular academic discipline. "Students have to be engaged in order to learn," a politician recently told me, indicating that this viewpoint has also been adopted by some of our country's leaders.

Most teachers (and politicians!) would also agree that students who have somehow been imbued with generous portions of these three attributes will probably realize their intellectual and artistic potential while in school, which now includes doing well on state-mandated tests, and they will also enjoy a good chance of success in life.

But if we teachers were *truly* committed to developing attributes like these, why do our class activities and homework assignments focus instead on the skills specific to the separate domains of arts, English, foreign languages, history, mathematics, and science?

For a number of reasons, we teachers forget this deeper belief when faced with the daunting problem of educating young people in America, and we need to approach the challenge of nurturing these attributes with the same creativity, curiosity, and perseverance that we wish for our students.

Some teachers might respond, "Those attributes are innate – they can't be developed in school." If these teachers don't believe they can help kids become more curious, creative and persevering in their classrooms, they will, unfortunately, prove themselves correct every day they teach. Indeed, if attributes like curiosity and creativity can be *killed* in school, why can't they instead be nurtured *by changing the way we teach*?

Other teachers might respond, "If these attributes are to be nurtured, they must be nurtured in the context of developing skills in the various intellectual domains of school." So for these teachers the question then becomes, "How can students best develop these attributes *simultaneously* with the skills?" Instead, we teachers should ask "*How can we first develop the attributes that will help our students learn these skills even more independently and efficiently?*"

What would our classes look like if our primary emphasis was on fostering curiosity, creativity, and perseverance? First and foremost, the content would have to be as engaging to the students as possible, which would represent a radical departure for many teachers and students. Second, the students would need to be given an important role in designing the various pedagogical approaches; they would be asked to consider the same questions about learning that are considered by the teachers – to help solve the problems of how to nurture the attributes and how to apply them to the task of developing specific intellectual skills.

All of this has been said before in a more complete and more carefully argued way, but it needs to be said again for teachers and students interested in moving even *incrementally* in this philosophical direction -- the only course that might currently be available to them while locked in the stalemate of many American schools.

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