

Teaching Tips: Creative Thinking Principles

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Introduction:

Using the creative thinking principles described below will help students achieve a more successful Public Achievement Experience. In addition, these thinking skills will be useful to them in other areas of their lives. As coaches and teachers teach and apply these to the Public Achievement Projects, they also may ask students how they these principles might be used in other areas of life.

1. **Attitude:** attitude is a key component of success in any endeavor. If a member of the team has a negative attitude, it can affect the entire group. [talk about how attitudes matter]
2. **Challenge Assumptions:** Consciously and unconsciously, we have beliefs that prevent us from solving problems creatively. These beliefs block us from taking action. For example, a fifth grader may assume that she is too young to contact the mayor's office. If left unexamined, she probably will not make the call. If this assumption is brought to consciousness and challenged, often, it may be discarded. When solving any problem, it is very helpful to list all assumptions students make about the problem. Examine these and see which are not true and can be set aside.
3. **There is Always More Than One Right Answer:** In school we are taught that there is only one right answer. In reality, there are often many more than one and, often, the first answer discovered is often the least creative. Encourage students to come up with more than one answer so they can choose among them for the best answer.
4. **Defer Judgment:** Prematurely judging ideas is a sure way to block creativity. It is important to separate the idea generation phase of creativity from the judging phase. Judging too soon kills the creative spirit. Coaches can teach students to suspend judgment so that all ideas can be explored. As groups work together, coaches must recognize and reward new ideas and watch for any behavior that discourages a student's contributions.
5. **Break the Rules:** Of course, we can't break all the rules, but in problem solving it is important to challenge the rules -- especially when the rules represent our habit bound way of thinking. As Emerson said: "Consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." So we should examine the rules we follow carefully to see if some of them should be abandoned.
6. **Don't be Afraid to Make Mistakes.** Ms. Frizzle, the wacky school teacher in the popular book series, *The Magic School Bus*, frequently says, "Take chances, make mistakes!" In school, much of what we teach our children is to find the right answer and stick to it. Discovery comes from risk taking, yet we discourage this in our children. Public Achievement coaches can model risk taking and discovery to children.