



Dr James Kaufman,  
Keynote Speaker



## Helping the “Little C” To Grow

# Conference Highlights Importance of Creative Thinking

**Creativity, far from being a luxury in the province of artists, is one of the most useful skills students can develop as they advance through the school system and head into the job market.**

That was the message of experts who gathered in Qatar in mid-March to speak at the SEC’s second annual symposium, this year entitled “Developing Creativity in Students”. The symposium, attended by some 850 people, featured speakers from Qatar, the United States, Britain, and Turkey.

Experts divide creativity into two types: “Big C” creativity, a rarely found ability to create objects or solve problems in a highly unique and possibly world-altering way, and “Little C” creativity, the sort of everyday creativity that can be put to constant use in school, at work and at home. “It’s creativity that isn’t going to change the world but it will change your world,” said James Kaufman, the event’s keynote speaker and an assistant professor at California State University, San Bernardino.

“Little C” creativity is at the heart of

the teaching and learning practices of Qatar’s Independent Schools, an emphasis that experts from here and abroad say is crucial to producing students who are better prepared for the future.

The good news is that this sort of thinking may be encouraged and put to use at any age. Its usefulness cuts across almost all disciplines. Its development need not involve programs requiring enormous sums of money. As Günseli Oral, assistant professor at Akdeniz University in Turkey, said: “Creativity is not so much dependent on money. Of course money is important, but more important is the human factor.”

Dr. Kaufman notes that while much of the research on creativity has been done in the U.S. and Europe, other regions of the world such as the Middle East are now realizing its importance and catching up. “I think that it (the Middle East) is still discovering in a way a lot of the views and importance of creativity,” he said.

The bad news is that societies may not come to value creativity on their own, and that doing so

often requires consistent efforts by many players -- educators, parents, the community, policy makers and researchers -- over time. Results of efforts are apparent only over the long term. While the body of research on developing creativity is extensive, here are 10 ideas and recommendations from the experts in Doha:

**1. Get an early start.** Many experts believe children are born creative, and that socialization and other influences chip away at the quality as the child grows. They recommend encouraging creativity from the youngest age and in the simplest of ways – sitting with children while they draw pictures or listening to them as they tell stories.

**2. Provide a home advantage.** Parents should encourage creativity in children, celebrating their creations. More affluent families may pay for special instruction – piano lessons or ballet classes – but that’s not essential to generating a creative environment at home. Later, parents should become their child’s advocate at school – particularly if a creative child shows somewhat disruptive

behavior in the classroom -- so that home and school become partners in creativity.

**3. Develop school staff.** Train teachers to handle creative students who may sometimes, although not always, be more complicated to deal with in class. Help teachers reinforce -- rather than punish -- creative children through specific discussions on the subject and teaching strategies, and by providing support on specific cases.

**4. Develop school curriculum.** There are different approaches to curriculum development; while some schools integrate creativity into the existing curriculum others hold specific modular courses on the subject to be applied to other classes. Either approach is valid, according to the experts, as long as they are adapted to meet each school's needs. Schools may also need to develop some of their own materials and other resources.

**5. Incorporate the hard sciences.** Creativity means something different

in the hard sciences than in the humanities, but it can be equally as important in both areas, the experts say. Developing "Little C" creativity is not only about encouraging students to take art and creative writing courses, since creative thinking is equally as important in areas such as physics and information technology.

**6. Adapt to cultures.** Adapt creativity programs to make them culture-specific, since super-imposing ideas on cultures rarely works. Different cultures value the creative process and outcomes differently -- some placing more emphasis on individual achievement, others focusing more on collective results, for example -- and it's important to recognize that.

**7. Experts not needed.** It's not necessary to be an expert to recognize and foster creativity. Any peer opinion -- coming from another student, a teacher, a parent -- is valuable. What's important is to spend the time giving a child feedback.

**8. Environment matters.** Physical surroundings are important: children lined up in individual desks in rows creates a different atmosphere than students seated in small groups around tables. The architecture and furnishings of a school are significant, as are simple details such as displaying students' achievements on the walls.

**9. Community counts too.** Bring in people from outside the school to visit schools and support creativity efforts. Those can be specialists in a particular area, parents who have skills and are willing share them, or organizations willing to make long-term commitments to a school.

**10. Government policy needed.** Supportive government policy can make a big difference in giving a boost to creativity initiatives, particularly in areas such as providing funding for specific training programs and financing research. It is important that such policy be consistent over time, rather than changing with each change of government.

## Why does creativity matter?

**James Kaufman**  
**California State University, USA**

One of the reasons why I think creativity is important is because in general people who are more creative tend to be happier. They tend to do better in their jobs. They tend to get more leadership positions. They tend to do better at problem-solving tasks. They tend to be more likely to open up a business and basically be successful in life. In addition to the impact that it has on the person who's creative, I think that creative products is what drives us forward as a species in a way. If you look at all the advances that we make either as nations, as cultures, or as mankind, all of it is derived from basic creativity.

**Gunseli Oral**  
**Akdeniz University , Turkey**

Creativity makes people happier and more successful in their life. This is what the universal research says. But personally one of the major reasons I deal with creativity is that countries, especially developing countries, are faced with many problems. And they need new generations who are able to solve problems in a creative way because routine ways of facing and solving problems are not enough. We are living in a competitive world. We have to be much better every single day.

**Anna Craft**  
**Open University, UK**

We live in a rapidly changing world. The world is changing in terms of

the economy, in terms of social matters, social relations, social structures, relationships, geography. We have a much more mobile population and roots become disconnected from where they began. We also have rapid technological change which both demands creativity and offers opportunity for developing it. All of this adds up to immense uncertainty. Even in the economic sphere, governments are concerned to maintain economic competitiveness. One of the directions in which the global economy is moving is toward the notion of knowledge itself as a product. Which means that we need to foster the capability of our young people not only to survive this uncertainty but to thrive in it.