



Leadership NOTES

Supporting Innovation and Creativity

Innovation: in-uh-**vey**-shuh n – noun. the act of innovating; introduction of new things or methods. (Dictionary.com)

Creativity: kree-ey-**tiv**-i-tee – noun. the ability to transcend traditional ideas, rules, patterns, relationships, etc., and to create meaningful new ideas, forms, methods, etc.; originality, progressiveness, or imagination. (Dictionary.com)

A good measure of school improvement can be attained through the careful application of known processes, procedures, and methods. This approach is undoubtedly a good starting place for school leaders. At some point in a school's improvement journey, however, it becomes necessary to break with convention and invent new approaches, methods, and practices that allow for continued growth toward excellence.

The benefits of an innovative, creative workplace are many. Success is available to more students, learning is more engaging, the work of teachers and staff is more meaningful, students and faculty become more adaptive, and talented faculty are attracted and retained.

Talented people are drawn to workplaces that are innovative, creative, and future driven. Is it that an innovative workplace attracts and retains innovative people? Or do the people in an innovative workplace become more innovative by working there? Perhaps both are true.

Creativity is not so much an individual trait as it is driven by context, culture, and environment. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, author of *Creativity, The Psychology of Discovery and Invention*, points to the spurt of artistic creativity that occurred in Florence, Italy between 1400 and 1425. He contends that this flourishing of artistic creativity could not have simply been a random concentration of creative individuals. Rather, he suggests it was fueled by a convergence of cultural and environmental factors (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

Also, according to Csikszentmihalyi, it is important to be in the right place. Information and ideas are not, even in the online age, evenly distributed. They tend to clump (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). It is still the case that for one who aspires to creativity and innovation in theater, New York is the best place to live. For screenwriting, Los Angeles; for country music, Nashville; for politics, Washington, D.C.; for educational innovation and creativity... why not your school?

School leaders can design schools to support innovation and creativity. By so doing, they benefit their schools by attracting and retaining innovative staff and by releasing the latent creativity in all staff.

Design principles that support innovation and creativity.

Nurture curiosity. Ask questions. What if...? Why not? I wonder... In many schools the teachers ask most of the questions. Break this mold (Geurin, 2017). Model curious questioning from the top. *"The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity."* Dorothy Parker (from page 69 of Future Driven, by David Geurin).

Build Trust. Innovation and creativity flourish in a culture of trust. Trust is optimized when leaders practice the trust building behaviors of reliability, acceptance, openness, and congruence (See Emerging Level MLDS Facilitation Guide, Learning Experience 5, Treatment 5: *Building a Culture of Trust*).

