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Creative Schools Teaches Capabilities for Work and Life

A Case Study by:

Dr Mathilda Marie Joubert
Creative Schools Evaluator
Adjunct Research Fellow,
University of Western Australia

Laura Motherway
Strategic Creative Learning Manager
FORM Building A State of Creativity



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39 Guger Street
Claremont, Western Australia, 6010
E: mail@form.net.au
T: +61 8 9385 2200

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Our websites:

www.form.net.au

www.spinifexhillstudio.com.au

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Cover image: CARE School student participant, FORM's Creative Schools reflective journaling workshops, WA, 2021. Photograph by Edwin Sitt.



There is growing consensus internationally that literacy and numeracy alone are not sufficient to prepare young people to effectively navigate the increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) nature of modern life. They also need to master capabilities for work and life, such as collaboration, creativity, problem-solving, persistence and communication. These capabilities for work and life, also known as complex competencies or general capabilities, are often described as ‘soft skills’, but in fact they end up being the ‘hard currency’ that enables individuals to thrive in their future living, working and learning lives.

Creative capabilities are at the heart of the Creative Schools program. Creativity can be defined as the ability to develop original ideas that have purpose and value (Joubert, 2023). The 2023 World Economic Forum Future of Jobs report identifies creativity as the second most needed skill for success in the world of work in the future, after analytical skills. The same report also determines that creativity is the skill that is growing more rapidly in importance in the world of work than any other skill.

Creativity has been recognised in one of the two overarching goals for Australian education since the Melbourne Declaration of 2008 and maintained in the vision of education for all Australians encapsulated in The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration in 2019: “All young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.” General Capabilities have been included in the Australian and Western Australian curricula since 2012 and the 2024 Pathways to Post-School Success Expert Panel Report identified the importance of assessing complex competencies.

However, despite the recognised importance of capabilities such as creativity within education, the teaching of

these capabilities is still not well embedded in classroom practice. Research suggests that it remains a lottery whether students attend a school where general capabilities are explicitly taught. The Australian Department of Education and Training concluded in 2018 that, “despite general capabilities having a prominent place in the curriculum since 2012 in Australia, teachers continue to struggle with recognising, assessing and teaching such skills.”

Over the past eight years, Creative Schools programs have been instrumental in nurturing the development of crucial, critical employability capabilities within children and young people that are essential for succeeding in the ever-evolving modern world of work. The development of these future-focused life skills has been facilitated by the intentional focus in Creative Schools sessions on developing capabilities in, and reflecting on, the Creative Habits of Learning framework developed by Lucas, Spencer & Claxton (often called the creative wheel by students), which encompasses five sets of inter-related capabilities: being inquisitive, imaginative, collaborative, disciplined and persistent.

Developing Future Ready Learners

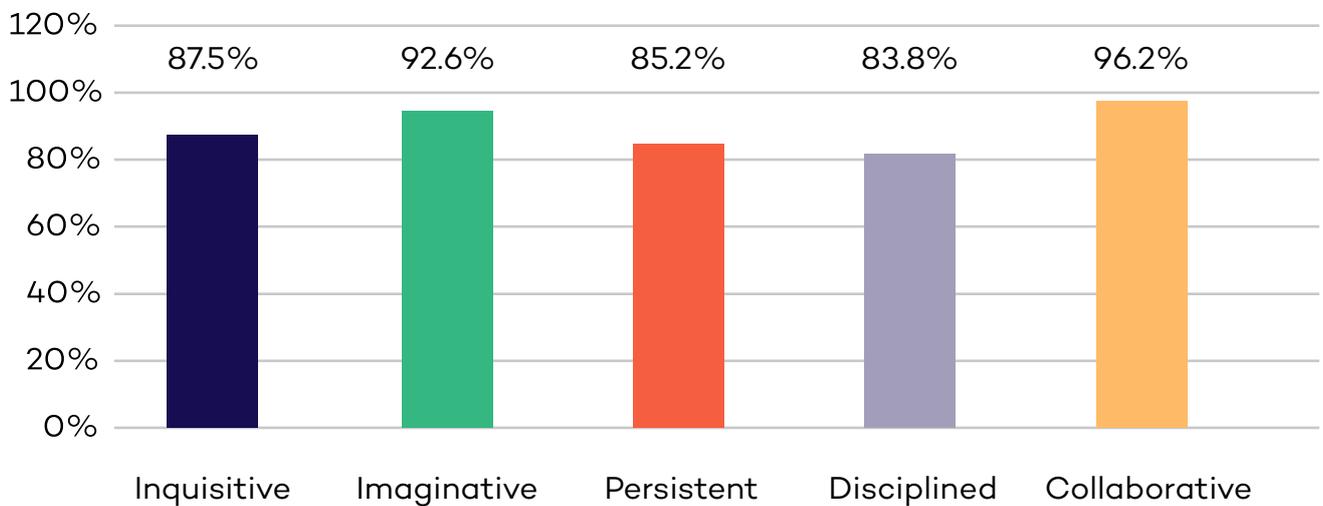


Data was collected for seven years to track improvements in each of the Five Creative Habits of Learning capabilities from five stakeholder groups: teachers, school leaders, creative practitioners, parents, and the students themselves. A positive impact on developing skills for the future has been observed by all five stakeholder groups, for seven years in a row, and right across the age range from Pre-primary to Year 10 students who were involved in the program.

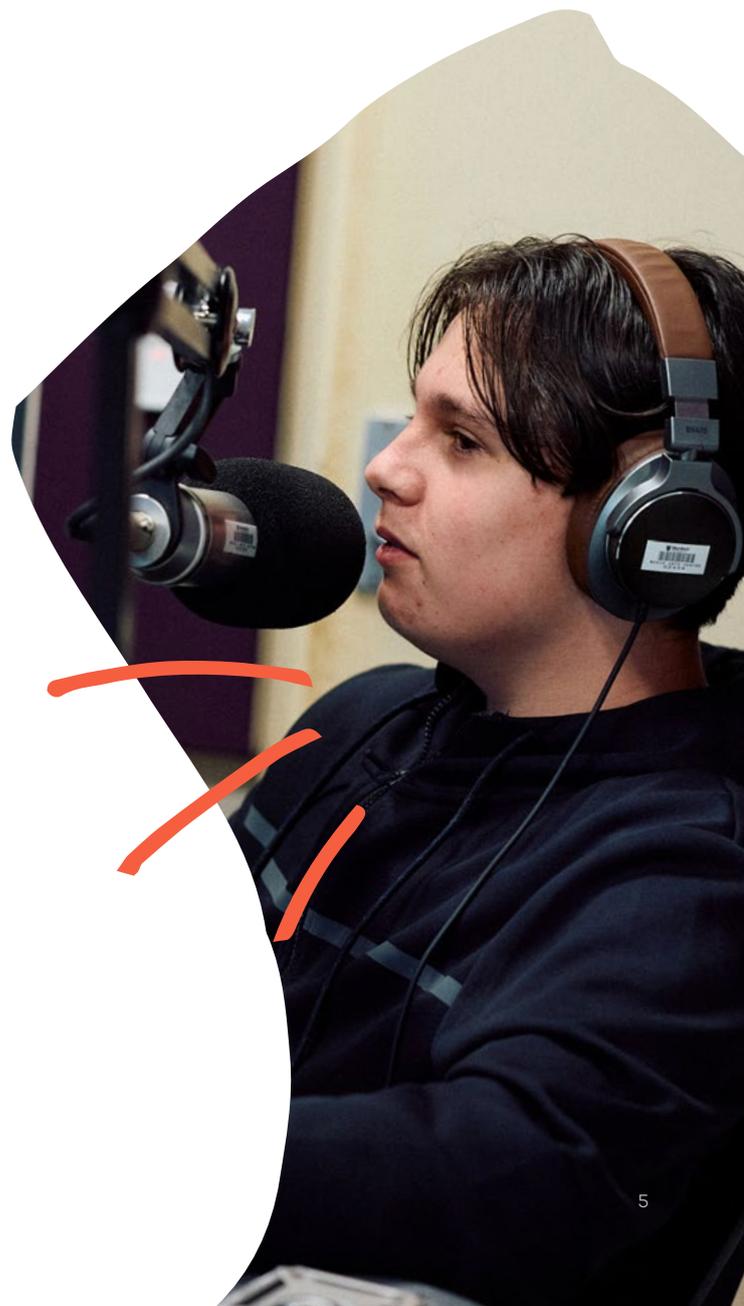
Consistently, **over 90% of teachers observed a positive impact** on student learning or development with regards to knowledge, skills, capabilities, attitudes, behaviour, effort and/or engagement in the classroom. When the data from the different stakeholder groups is combined, we can see how many stakeholders observed improvements in students in each of the five creative habits.

It is evident that there were significant improvements in all five capabilities, in the following order: being collaborative (96.2%), imaginative (92.6%), inquisitive (87.8%), persistent (85.2%) and disciplined (83.8%).

Average improvement ratings across all stakeholder groups (teachers, school leaders, creative practitioners, parents, and students)



Qualitative comments from all stakeholder groups also support these statistics and indicate that significant improvements were evident for students of all ability ranges in the Five Creative Habits of Learning areas. Improvements were also observed in complex capabilities extended beyond the five creative habits, including capabilities such as communication, problem-solving, connection-making, reflection and determination. The growth in complex capabilities often had an immediately observable positive impact on student academic learning outcomes.



“I found that all kids improved in their ability to make connections to a text in reading. The degree of improvement varied, though even the weaker readers improved. Whether it was reducing their cognitive load, having these real hands-on experiences they could refer to as a way to base their text level connections on I can’t be certain but in some ways this is how it felt.”

Year 6 Teacher, Merriwa Primary School

“The student metacognition improved dramatically from my observation of the year 4/5 class. Their ownership of each project/task was apparent, and this formed positive attitudes to the work, school life and a stronger bond with each other as learners. Their understanding of the creative habits of mind has heightened their learning.”

Creative Schools Coordinator, Churchlands Primary School

“In Creative Schools we did a lot of big challenges and activities. There were lots of fun activities, but my favourite was the marble run. We used Persistence because it was hard, but really fun. It was so difficult, but we fought through

our problems and finished it! It looked so magnificent.”

Year 4 Student, Winthrop Primary School

“We get to build stuff from scratch that teaches us things that we can use when we leave school one day. It teaches us about discipline and collaboration and imagination and how to solve problems. It teaches us for when we are older and have our own jobs.”

Year 7 Student, Yule Brook College

“I am learning the skills on the creative wheel. These skills really matter. You never know when you are going to need them. You can use them in lots of different situations in life.”

Year 9 Student, Bob Hawke College

“I love the creative habits. It is helping the children to become self-reflective learners. They were using it in other lessons all the time. It has helped the quiet students to have a go.”

Pre-primary teacher, Merriwa Primary School

“My students with ADHD and ASD have developed persistence and resilience and are better at collaborating, although



they found many warmup activities extremely challenging. I now feel they can go off and problem-solve something themselves. They have learnt to think for themselves. It gives me as a teacher confidence for their future.”

**Year 4 teacher,
East Victoria Park Primary School**





Teacher, Darlinda Singh, from Westfield Park Primary School identified the power of Creative Schools to engage disengaged learners and develop their persistence:

“We are a trauma-informed school and I became really interested in the connection between creativity, engagement, behaviour and learning. The biggest transformation was in one of my students that is often disengaged from learning and struggles with his behaviour towards others. At the start of the sessions, he was totally disengaged and wasn't interested at all. As the weeks went by, he became interested and started to join in, often needing a lot of adult support. By the end of the sessions, he was leading his group!”



Creative Schools Fosters Interconnected Capabilities



One school leader captured the interconnected nature of these skills clusters aptly by identifying how all of these essential skills for future life have been developed in young people involved in Creative Schools in their school:

“Our school’s involvement in Creative Schools has had a profound and positive impact on the cultivation of General Capabilities, often still referred to as 21st Century skills. These essential skills encompass a range of abilities that go beyond traditional academic knowledge and are vital for success in today’s rapidly changing world. For instance, students engaged in Creative Schools

have demonstrated remarkable teamwork and collaboration.

They’ve had to work together in diverse groups, combining their unique strengths to tackle complex challenges. This collaborative spirit extended to problem-solving, where students learned to think critically and adapt to unexpected obstacles, fostering resilience and adaptability. Furthermore, the program placed a strong emphasis on creativity.



"They developed the capacity to generate ideas and solutions, a skill that is increasingly valuable in a society that thrives on innovation."

Students were encouraged to think outside the box, innovate, and approach problems with a fresh perspective.

They developed the capacity to generate ideas and solutions, a skill that is increasingly valuable in a society that thrives on innovation. Another noteworthy aspect is communication. Through presentations and interactions with peers, students improved their ability to articulate their thoughts

and ideas clearly and persuasively. Also, Creative Schools instilled a sense of grit and determination in our students. Many faced challenges that required persistent effort to overcome. They learned the value of perseverance, which is essential not only for academic success but also for personal growth and achievement in any field."

**School Leader
Survey Response**

Future Ready Skills for At-Risk Youth

Creative Schools has worked with a range of Western Australian Curriculum and Reengagement in Education (CARE) Schools between 2021 and 2024 to explore the impact of creative ways of learning and innovative forms of assessing student capability. CARE schools provide education for young people at risk who have been unable to access or have significant difficulty in accessing mainstream education. At Alta-1 College, creative practitioner Amanda Kendle and teachers Renee O'Grady and Jordan Allen worked with a group of students

who suffer from debilitating mental health challenges, or severe levels of anxiety who only attend school for one or two 90-minute sessions per week. One of these sessions was run in partnership with Creative Schools, focusing on the development of student capabilities for learning and life using the five habits of creative learning framework. The creative practitioner engaged learners in a range of creative challenges to build their capabilities. Teachers reflected on the impact that this was having on the students, and on their own pedagogical practice.

“It is very collaborative, which forces the kids out of their comfort zone. It can be hard to do that – for all of us – but it is really important for our students.”

Teacher

“Doing something appearing goofy gives great opportunities for me as a teacher, to connect with the students. With one student, I had to nearly bend her arm to get involved today, but then she did, and then she enjoyed it. We had our first really good connection today. It was a real breakthrough for her and me today.”

Teacher

“The benefits for the children are that they are getting used to other people in the room, and they are

enjoying it. This is huge for our students. They are enjoying getting involved with learning. They are doing something different, which is really valuable. They are so used to structure and routine. With Creative Schools they are learning to cope with change positively.”

Teacher

“As a teacher I am realising you can use really simple things for complex tasks. For example, the creative challenge of using only their left hand in teams to do a task. We all can use activities like these to develop student thinking. Creative Schools is great pedagogical training for us as teachers.”

Teacher



CARE Professional Learning at FORM Gallery. Image courtesy of FORM Building a State of Creativity

One student, who had not left her bedroom for three years due to severe anxiety, explained the impact that Creative Schools was having on her:

“Creative learning gives us a  chance to work together and to communicate. It is valuable for our future. It is really helping me. Talking to people is becoming easier. I have real social anxiety, and I find it really hard coming to school. Talking to people has definitely become easier for me, through doing these creative activities. Creative Schools has made me turn up for school and connect with other people. It is making me want to come to school.”

Student, Alta-1 College



FORM's Creative Schools / Have More
To Say podcast program, 2024.
Photograph by Dan Macbride

Impact on Teachers



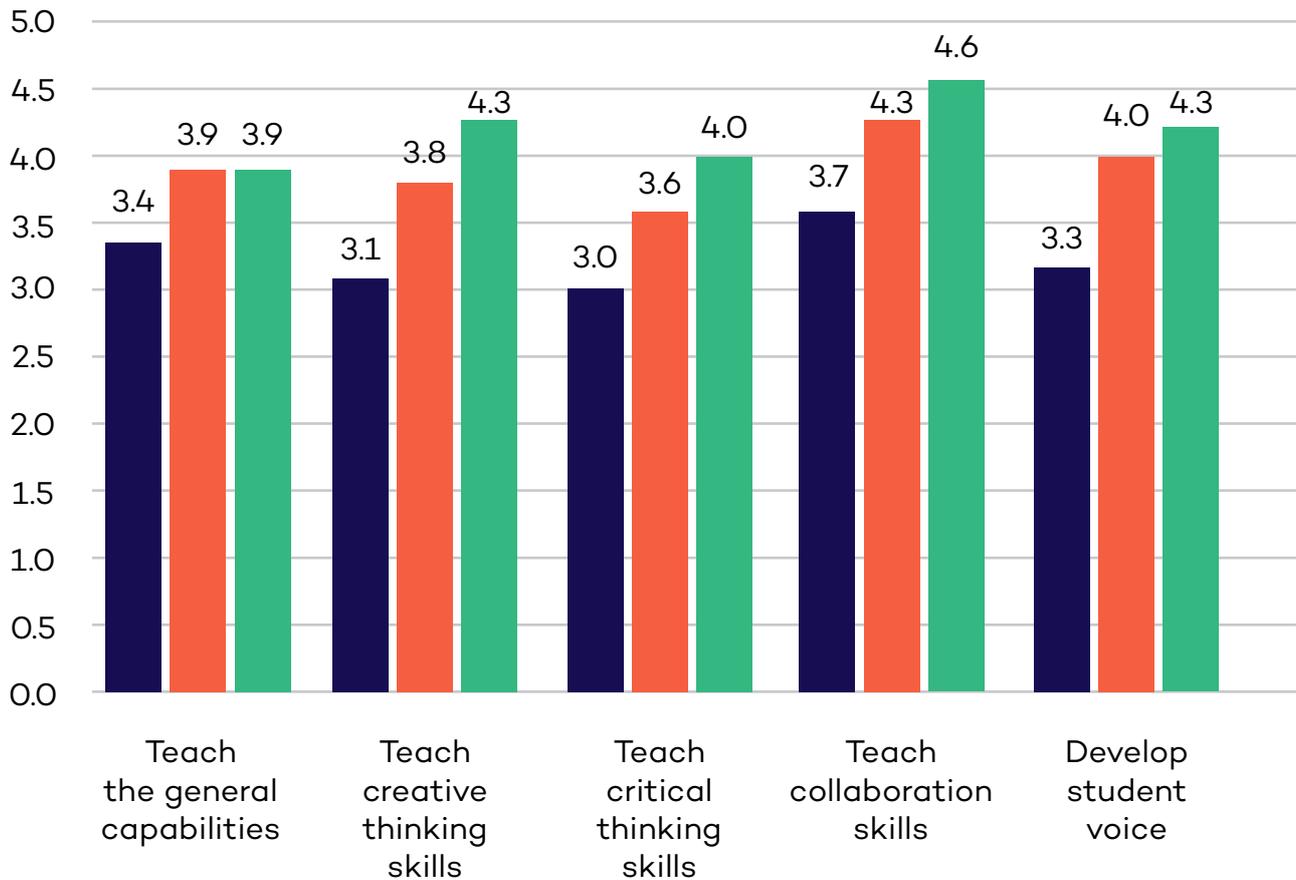
The use of a structured framework to teach complex capabilities in Creative Schools and the classroom-based collaboration between teachers and creative practitioners, has had a significant impact on teacher abilities to teach complex capabilities. Each year, teachers demonstrate positive growth in their abilities to teach a range of complex capabilities. For example, over the past seven-year period, **92% of teachers have reported enhanced capabilities in teaching creative thinking skills.** Teachers report becoming more intentional in teaching the General Capabilities and learning how to engage students in metacognitive reflection around their use of capabilities.

Teachers also experimented with a range of methods to formatively assess progression in capabilities within classroom contexts. Past participants of the program continued to be surveyed each year to assess whether the impacts on teacher pedagogical practice lasts. The latest data include teachers who completed the program up to six years ago, with **95% of past participants reporting that they continued using the activities and lessons from Creative Schools and 100% of past participants believing the program had lasting impact on their pedagogical practice.**



CARE Professional Learning at FORM Gallery. Image courtesy of FORM Building a State of Creativity.

Teacher pedagogical skill confidence level (averages out of 5)



“Seeing the curriculum through a different lens has been the most rewarding part of this whole experience. I have loved watching my students start using the 5 Habits of Learning language when talking about their learning experiences and how this has filtered into other learning areas and lessons I teach as well.”

Teacher

“I have been able to apply creative habits in other areas of the curriculum. It returned me to the days before crowded curriculum

made things 'too difficult' to do and I was reminded of what I loved about teaching.”

Teacher

“The Creative Schools project was one of the most inspiring programs I have participated in. I use the language every day in my teaching and have been inspired to be a better teacher. I regularly share my experience of the project with colleagues and implement what I have learnt into my teaching.”

Teacher





FORM's Creative Schools Professional Learning Day, Perth, WA, 2025. Photograph by Ludvig Nilsson, courtesy of FORM Building a State of Creativity.

Learning Vital Skills for Success



At **Clarkson Community High School**, science teacher Dr Steven Laing and creative practitioner, Miles Openshaw, worked with a group of Year 8 students on science investigations. It became apparent that the students lacked the foundational skills that would enable them to succeed in learning in the high school environment, skills such as collaboration, persistence, inquisitiveness, imagination and discipline which can be cultivated through a focus on the Creative Learning Habits used in the Creative Schools program.

The project team decided to shift their focus to first instil teamwork and confidence in students, encouraging them to seek help

and collaborate with peers beyond their immediate social circles. These foundational skills, vital for navigating school, college, work and life, were highlighted as crucial by emphasising their importance in various life interactions. The students recognised that these skills, integral to both classroom success and lifelong learning, find application not only academically but also socially, in sports and in the arts. **The Creative Schools program has become a catalyst for transferring these essential life skills into the academic setting.**

TEACHER OBSERVATIONS

“We are focusing on the creative habits of learning in the sessions, and it is enhancing their ability to focus and be engaged, which means my curriculum coverage is quicker. Investing time in the creative skills therefore pays off. We don't lose time, we gain time. Because the student behaviour is so much better in the creative learning lessons, which is carrying over to their other lessons, I get through the curriculum content so much quicker.”

Dr Steven Laing, Teacher, Clarkson Community High School

“We have one student with autism who is normally very withdrawn. There has been a massive shift for her; she has started coming out of her shell. Last week, she presented in front of the whole class and now we're seeing a shift for her in her other classes too. This is massive.”

Dr Steven Laing, Teacher, Clarkson Community High School

STUDENT OBSERVATIONS

“I am using my communication skills with my teammates. I'm thinking more in these lessons. I'm using my mindset and my imagination more in these lessons. When I just write in a book, I don't use my mind or my communication skills. I like this style of learning more.”

Year 8 Student, Clarkson Community High School

“It is different, but I think this will help us remember things easier. Creative Schools is a more colourful way of learning.”

Year 8 Student, Clarkson Community High School

Inspiring Teachers to Bring the Curriculum to Life

Year 4/5 teacher Jordan Holloway joined Fremantle Primary School in Term 3, halfway through the project. He worked with creative practitioner Cristy Burne on a project where they blended teaching digital technology coding skills and writing skills together. After an initial escape room challenge, students wrote and then programmed their own 'choose-your-own-adventure' stories, involving looping, branching and sequencing skills. Jordan was inspired by the new approaches to bring the curriculum alive through hands-on, collaborative, creative learning activities.



“It was an immense learning journey for me. I was a bit scared at the beginning. I had to go on that rollercoaster ride. I find it amazing where we ended up, but we couldn’t see that at the start. The children’s creativity has really risen as a result of Creative Schools. When we started, the children really found collaboration hard. As teachers, we are often scared of group work, but now I know that it can work. I’ve noticed that the class got a lot better at collaborating. By the end, even other teachers, eg. the Italian teacher, noticed the improvement in their collaboration skills.

I’ve got a lot out of it. I’ve come up with very creative lessons that I wouldn’t have come up with – ever.

Learning about coding in physical ways and doing the group work. All of these creative ideas I wouldn’t have thought of. I would never have thought of teaching coding through stories. Even the reluctant writers were writing. They were all on task and writing, because they had a reason to write. It was wonderful. I will definitely use these ideas and do this project again in future. I have already started to shift my pedagogical practice as a result of Creative Schools. I have started to apply creativity more to my HASS lessons too. I’m getting more group work and agency into my teaching, and I would definitely like to keep that going forward.”

**Jordan Holloway, teacher,
Fremantle Primary School**

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