



THE CREATIVE PROCESS: FROM IMAGINATION TO INNOVATION

The creative process is a holistic view of the DI learning experience and is the educational focus of the Destination Imagination Program. Teams begin by imagining the possibilities and throughout the process work to develop an innovation, the solution to their selected Challenge. In a nutshell, the creative process identifies the elements involved in solving a Challenge as a team. The creative process is not a checklist of steps for teams to go through, but an identification of the skills developed through solving challenges. It is important to note that the creative process is not linear. Teams will find themselves returning to various stages of development while developing a solution. Our goal at Destination Imagination is to give students the chance to learn and experience the creative process from imagination to innovation and have fun doing so. The creative process is about thinking and doing in no prescribed order. Some people “do” first and then think about what they have done, while others “think” first, then initiate action. Below are the components of the creative process that our participants experience while solving our Challenges.

RECOGNIZE

This stage of the creative process emphasizes the creation of the team and the development of teamwork. Identifying the key elements of a selected Challenge is also an important step within the Recognize portion of the creative process. During this stage the team also reads the Rules of the Road for an in-depth understanding of the expectations of the Challenge Program that relate to all Challenges.

Teams that effectively work through the Recognize stage develop healthy social skills and find themselves open to new challenge opportunities. One essential learning goal for team members is that in order to best explore new opportunities, they must establish routines which contribute to their mental alertness and peak performance. Team members should learn the value of nutrition, exercise, sleep and social engagement as important factors in the ability to think and learn at a high level. Team Managers should contribute to this learning by providing experiences that reinforce this concept. Healthy snacks rather than sugar-laden candy, activities that involve fun and movement and using team experiences to help define the expectations of team members are all excellent ways to reinforce the development of positive brain-health routines. When the Team Manager helps create fun shared experiences for team members, the team as a whole will benefit from the enhanced collaboration abilities of the group.

The Recognize stage also involves recognition of individual contributions and self-esteem. By using activities such as the Individual Specialties Inventory (Roadmap pg. 22), team members can identify those interests and talents unique to them and recognize the collective strength of the team as a whole. Team Managers should help foster this sense of strength-in-unity by asking guided questions of team members that help lead them to value unique specialties rather than simply acknowledging differences. By establishing a “safe place” for team members to share thoughts and ideas, the Team Manager will allow team members to open their minds and express ideas that may be off the wall, but lead to innovative solutions to the Challenge.

When members of a team operate in the Recognize stage, they identify goals for their solution by exploring new and exciting possibilities. After identifying their goals for the solution, the team is able to plan a to-do list for their solution. This list helps provide checkpoints for self-evaluation as well as opportunities to celebrate successes. A positive attitude and readiness to accept a challenge allows teams to explore newer, more creative solutions. Since DI is both self-directed and inquiry-based, the Recognize stage is one where the team will likely spend a considerable amount of time. Team Managers should allow the team that time to explore along with providing an environment that encourages team members to get to know each other. Team Managers should also look for the team that gets “stuck” in this stage so that they can help the team move on to the next stage in order to progress toward a final solution.

IMAGINE

The Imagine stage of the creative process involves thinking about the Challenge and the experiences and knowledge that team members have that may contribute to an innovative solution. Once a team has Recognized the Challenge and its individual components, they come together to generate ideas for potential solutions. Teams in this stage of the creative process are looking for novel ways to approach Challenge solutions. They utilize divergent thinking to expand the possibilities while refraining from judgment. Teams also learn to value the different individual strengths in how they can contribute to a solution. Teams should establish guidelines for how they share ideas, including their expectations for respect and withholding judgment during idea generation.

This stage is characterized by a team spending time developing fluency in idea generation through the use of various creative thinking tools and activities. During idea generation activities, it is not uncommon for teams to also spend some time engaging in “team-building” activities and conversations as they learn to freely offer and accept, without judging, ideas within the team. It is important for Team Managers to be aware of the potential for Interference in this stage as Team Managers can inadvertently insert themselves in the generating process. Team Managers should also remind parents and caretakers of the Interference rules, as they also apply to them.

INITIATE & COLLABORATE

These two stages go hand in hand. Initiation is about beginning the process of developing the solution. Teams make use of idea directing tools, like the Choice Helper (Roadmap pg. 87), to objectively evaluate the ideas and reach a team decision and path to follow. Teams should also begin to examine other elements of the Challenge, including material and resource needs, budget planning, organizing and setting priorities. Team Managers should work to help team members understand these concepts, and should contribute to their knowledge of communication skills, critical thinking and defining success. It is important that the risk-taking be encouraged throughout the creative process and highlighted in the initiation stage. As teams begin to direct their ideas into a solution, they may shy away from ideas that involve risk or the unknown, but often these ideas could contribute to a truly innovative solution. When encouraging team members to take risks, Team Managers should also prepare team members for failure. If Team Managers introduce the idea of failure and the many learning benefits of failure early in the process, teams will be less likely to be sidelined by small failures along the way. If failure is not introduced and to some extent encouraged, then teams will not be willing to take the necessary risk inherent in developing innovative solutions.

The team then works together to take the selected ideas and carry them out using their specific skill sets. At this point, the team commits to a solution, and works to bring that solution through to innovation. Teams should identify tasks and develop task lists with goals and timelines. Teams are collaborating to delegate tasks and make decisions regarding their solution. During this time team members also spend time learning new techniques as well as sharing information and skills they may possess with the rest of the team. The social element of collaboration is the crux of teamwork and group-learning, which is an essential part of the creative process. Teams in the collaboration stage do not necessarily work on everything together, but are working toward completing elements of the team’s solution. A team that struggles with collaboration can sometimes revert back to the Recognize phase as a way to overcome the hurdles involved with learning about each other’s social needs and expectations. It is important for the Team Manager to be prepared for team members to have minor disputes over the course of the Collaborate stage. The Team Manager should guide the team through these times while taking care not to interfere with the team’s solution. It can be very tempting to cast the “deciding vote” as Team Manager, but doing so inserts the Team Manager’s ideas into the solution while also circumventing opportunities for team members to learn and grow in their collaboration and interpersonal skills. It is also important for the Team Manager to ask guiding questions of the team that help them identify the strengths of their solution that result from valuing differences among team members. By having students reflect on the experience often, the students will internalize the ability to collaborate and team solutions will benefit from enhanced collaboration.

ASSESS

Assessment is an ongoing stage within the creative process. As a team completes elements of its solution, it is important to celebrate these small successes. By revisiting the tasks identified in the Recognize stage, teams can not only stay on-track to completing their solution, they also find inherent points of celebration. When a costume is finished, the team can celebrate this moment by checking it off the to-do list. As the team reaches each milestone, they will continue to be encouraged by their progress. These moments also allow the team to recognize the things they are doing well, especially if they have been faced with recent setbacks or conflict. Team Managers should use these opportunities for celebration as shared experiences for the team, which can continue to encourage effective collaboration.

Teams should also consistently review their ideas and work for quality, originality and sometimes plausibility. Not only should the Challenge solution be creative, but the solution should also address all elements of the Challenge. If a technical element is not working properly, or if the story of their Presentation has lost cohesiveness with the intent of the Challenge, a team should review their process to enhance their solution in relation to the Challenge. Sometimes a solution seems perfect at first, but as teams progress through collaboration and begin to produce the elements of their solution, they find that the solution does not work or no longer solves the Challenge. At these times, teams should be willing to admit failure, and then return to a prior stage of the creative process to move forward with developing a valid solution. It is important for the Team Manager to reinforce that failure is a normal part of the creative process and should be used as a learning opportunity. Remind team members that innovation does not occur without failure. A failure does not define the team or its solution, but how the team responds to the failure often does. Sometimes the team will simply need to make minor changes that result in a workable solution. Yet other times, a team may need to begin the process anew, from the beginning of the Imagine stage. Team Managers should help the team learn to deal with this frustration and progress forward in developing their solution. Teams that are proficient in assessing their solutions will not spend long in this phase, but will return to this phase repeatedly. Often the Team Manager may need to encourage assessment, without offering their own assessments which alter the solution. While it is not Interference for a Team Manager to help the team understand the rules of the Challenge, teach a new skill, or provide access to a resource; it is Interference for the Team Manager to assist the team in solving elements of the Challenge.

EVALUATE

At various times throughout the creative process, the team will learn valuable lessons. It is important the Team Manager helps to highlight these lessons for the team and encourage them to evaluate the process that helped achieve the new understanding. The creative process is, at the very least, an approach to learning 21st Century Skills, and the team and Team Manager should keep this in the forefront of their minds as they progress through the Challenge Program.

Teams should also take time after tournaments are completed to look back over the year and evaluate the growth of the team as a whole as well as the knowledge gained by each individual. Teams should celebrate this learning regardless of placement at tournaments. The most important aspect of Destination Imagination is in the entire creative process from imagination to innovation, not simply the solution product. But as learning is lifelong, so too is developing the creative process. Teams should continue to find opportunities to grow in their knowledge and understanding of the 21st Century Skills: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. And of course, teams should look forward to the next year, when the Destination Imagination Challenge Season begins again.