

Divergent Thinking

Facilitation Guide

What is it?

Creative activity requires the capacity to imagine and generate new ideas, a process which requires divergent thinking—or finding ideas that diverge from our own normal patterns of thought. In this small group response to a short animation narrated by Sir Ken Robinson, students imagine new possibilities for building divergent thinking into teaching and learning systems.

Why use it?

Innovation is the outcome of a creative process that requires both imagination and the crafting of solutions that create positive change for humanity. Participants in the process of Principled Innovation seek to imagine both problems and potential solutions in new ways and to project future outcomes. Asking diverse constituencies to consider the possibilities by framing them in terms of “What if...?” can spark the process of imagination, leading to creative prototypes and novel solutions. By employing the PI assets of **inclusivity** and **perspective-taking**, new thinking that “diverges” from our normal patterns of thought can emerge. In this process, hearing others’ opinions without argument—by engaging our **humility** and **civility**—can keep us open to these divergent thoughts and allow us to develop new ideas in a creative convergence of diverse thought.

In this activity, participants learn about divergent thinking and the role that schools play in either supporting or limiting divergent thought in the traditional schooling process. In their discussions, participants have an opportunity to use “What if...?” questions to practice one method for generating divergent thought.



What you need

- Time: 35 minutes
- Ken Robinson animation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHMUXFdBzik>

Instructions

Step 1: Prepare

Review the “Why use it?” section above.

Step 2: Present (5 minutes)

Share the PI Framework’s definition of creativity with the students and play the video for students:

Creativity is generating fresh and valuable ideas and possibilities by perceiving the world in new ways and making contextual connections between things that may seem unrelated.

Explaining that “divergent thinking”—finding ideas that diverge from our own normal patterns of thought—is central to the work of creativity and, ultimately, to innovation, and that the video that you will present, narrated by the late British educator Sir Ken Robinson, will talk about the effect of traditional learning systems on divergent thought and creativity.

Step 3: Discuss in Small Groups (15 minutes)

Working in small groups of three or four students per group, have students discuss the following questions, writing their answers on a private group document to later copy and paste for the whole class to view:

1. What would be one to three the implications for our society if we could preserve children’s capacity for creative thinking throughout their entire school experience? Frame each idea as a single complete sentence.
2. Think through some potential changes that could be made to learning systems to preserve and build on students’ creativity. Pose your ideas as questions that begin with the words, “What if...?” When ideas are posed, don’t critique the ideas, but instead consider ways to build upon them.
3. Using the same “What if...?” framework, consider what changes could be made to make your teaching teams more effective.

Step 4: Discuss in Whole Group (15 minutes)

Have the small groups paste their ideas into a shared Google Doc and review the ideas together as a group.