IS THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX 21ST CENTURY CODE FOR IMAGINATION, INNOVATION, CREATIVITY, CRITICAL THINKING, INTUITION?

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Abstract:
It is the authors' contention that there is no such thing as "thinking outside the box." However, the term has become an iconic phrase for a generation. The discussion presents the authors' thoughts on why there is no box in which to think outside. If there is a box, then accidental learning would never exist for students. [ABSTRACT FROM AUTHOR]

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IS THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX 21ST CENTURY CODE FOR IMAGINATION, INNOVATION, CREATIVITY, CRITICAL THINKING, INTUITION?

It is the authors' contention that there is no such thing as "thinking outside the box." However, the term has become an iconic phrase for a generation. The discussion presents the authors' thoughts on why there is no box in which to think outside. If there is a box, then accidental learning would never exist for students.

Key Words: Thinking outside the box; Creativity; Critical thinking; Imagination; Ingenuity; Innovation; Intuition; Problem solving; Reflection; Schemas.

McGuinness (2008) states 'Think outside the box' (TOB) is one of the biggest creativity cliches. Today "Thinking Outside the Box" is a common term in our lexicon. It is so common that "Wheaties Is Thinking Outside The Box." (Bronson, 1999). The authors did a literature search using five data bases within EBSCO host. There were 224 listings on "Thinking Outside the Box".

A large number of articles figuratively used the term in relation to architecture and interior design, (Welsh, 2007); artists, (Crafts 'n Things, 2006); assistive technology (Martin, 2006); curriculum McElfresh, 2003); dentistry (Meskin, 2000); designers of buildings (Flint, 2006); education reform (Brady, 2006); engineering. (SciTech Book News, 2005); health care (Wilensky, 2003); leadership (Ayers, 2002); Marines (Glasgow, 1998); medicine, (Greenberg, Peak, and Browne, 2007); recruitment of teachers (Fleming, 2004); terrorism, (Marquis, 2003); Training (Abernathy, 1999); and writers, (Brill, 2004).

Others used the term literally regarding football [area on football field between tackles], (Pompei, 2005); car manufacture’s [mini vans and pickup truck beds], (Corbett, 1999 and Maynard, 2003); packaging industry [paper boxes], (Laabs, 2001 and Higham, 2006); sound and vision [TV], (Aspan, 2007); box score (Will, 2004); hockey [crease], (Gardiner, 2003); pizza [edible box], (Abrahams, 2000); retail sales [big box stores], (Chain Store Age, 2001 and Turner, Clare 2007); wine making, (Begun, 2003); and mortuary [coffin] (Better Nutrition, 2003).

When addressing this topic, we must first define the box and determine what is in the box. Other questions to address are: What is "thinking outside the box"? and Have we "boxed" ourselves in?

Defining the box

When we hear the term "thinking outside the box", what do we mean? Since this term is used in many contexts, it is important to know what area is utilizing the phrase in order to understand its meaning. In this article we will focus on how this phrase is used in an educational context. After completing extensive research the authors believe the most appropriate meaning for education is Blendinger's and McGrath's (2000) "defined as a problem-solving power that everyone possesses when thinking differently from conventional thought." Frequently students are asked to think outside the box when presented with real life problems and asked to find a solution. As an example, pre-service teachers are instructed to think outside the box when writing lesson plans, developing learning activities, or designing authentic assessments.
Increase Brain Power, (n. d.). defines the "box" as the normal way of looking at things, doing things, and all the assumptions that almost everyone involved is making. Your best way to start thinking out of the box then, is to identify and challenge all the assumptions that make up the thinking inside the box.

To think outside the box suggests you know what thinking inside the box is. What is in the box? Is it a person's knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience? As an example, what pre-service teachers bring with them to their educational studies is what they have always experienced in their own educational experience. This takes on many different forms based on what type of teachers they have encountered in their elementary, secondary, and university experiences. But is there really a "box"? Have we created a mystical, illusive object that causes frustration and feelings of inadequacy when we are unable to "think outside the box?" It is the authors' thoughts that the box does not exist. We are the only ones who create the illusion of a "box" by our limitations of either knowledge or willingness to try something new. Many times we limit ourselves by our own insecurities or fears to fail by doing something unconventional to our personal experiences. We can confidently state that the "box" in which we are thinking is only what we create it to be. Very successful people never appear to have a "box" in which they operate. When we think about a box we think about something that is confined to a finite space. So "thinking outside the box" means we have to stop thinking in a finite space but open our minds to infinite space which encompasses an "open mind".

Willie Horton (2009) contributes to this argument by stating, "Do you think that Bill Gates thinks there's a box? Or Warren Buffet? Do you think that Muhammad Ali thought there was a box? What about Sir Richard Branson? How do you think Tiger Woods or Roger Federer would feel if they thought that they had to operate inside 'the box'." Walt Disney was told he had no talent as an animator. What if he had believed the person who told him that? In 2008, Disney had revenue of over $38 billion dollars. Was that not "thinking outside the box"? Do we believe that we have boxed ourselves in? Have we allowed local, state, and federal initiatives to control our thinking about how we should teach and assess our students? If we are not in a "box", we can creatively design instruction and assessments that meet all the diverse needs of our students within the context of the rules and regulations placed on the classroom teacher.

What is thinking "outside the box?"

Using Blendinger's and McGrath's (2000) definition of the box, putting TOB into practice requires these three steps: (1) asking the right questions; (2) testing assumptions; and (3) making creative leaps." Bernacki (2002) says to define outside the box you must first define inside the box which he says is "thinking that accepts the status quo." He also states "thinking outside the box requires different attributes that include:

- Willingness to take new perspectives to day-to-day work.
- Openness to do different things and to do things differently.
- Focusing on the value of finding new ideas and acting on them.
- Striving to create value in new ways.
- Listening to others.
- Supporting and respecting others when they come up with new ideas."

Porta (2000) maintains that brain development is dependent on challenging learning experiences and on providing experience and interactive feedback.
Have we boxed ourselves in?

However, "the box" (and not just its metaphorical sense) does not exist, so "thinking outside of the box" is a flawed concept; simply THINKING will suffice. There is no need to clutter it with boxes and other concepts that are not anchored in reality.

Many of the attributes presented would be found in persons who are deemed to be critical thinkers. We generally hear the phrase of thinking outside the box when we are encouraging creative thinking in solving problems. Thinking outside the box really means developing new schemas from existing schemas. So is this really "thinking outside the box"? The authors say "no".

When we are asked to "think outside the box", we are being asked to think creatively, critically, and innovatively. Before we thought outside the box, we utilized imagination, innovation, creativity, critical thinking, intuition, and novel solutions in problem solving. Has something changed? Is this not what we really want our students to do? Have we not always encouraged students to think beyond their own ideas and principles in solving problems? Isn't our country known for its innovations in making the world a better place in which to live? When you "teach" thinking outside the box you are speaking to innovation, reflection, critical thinking, ingenuity and intuition ... none of which is outside the box.

What do we really expect students to do? Why do we use that phrase? What other ways could we express what we really want students to do? How does this affect the field of education? Pre-service teachers will all be required to teach a diverse population of students. Diversity in this sense does not mean only ethnicity, but also refers to learning styles and levels of ability to learn, as well as student interests. As teachers we should give our students things that are a little out of their reach and make them stretch for them.

There is no box — other than the box we create for ourselves. From a very early age, society and education fashion a box for us — and because we're all in the box together, it seems OK. "Get yourself a good education" (Bill Gates dropped out of university) or "Get yourself a good job" (Richard Branson left school when he was sixteen and started Student magazine).

So what type of "box" have we created for ourselves and what type of "box" have our students created for themselves? So how do we get students and ideas out of the box which does not even exist? How do we get students, parents, teachers, and administrators to follow their interests to become their own person unencumbered by a limited space?

The box is the brain and what we "deem outside the box" is each individual's frame of reference. According to Jason (2009), "Lastly, even if we think and act "outside the box" aren't we, by definition, just creating another box? Sure, it may be a much nicer box, but a box just the same. Then, how do we know when we need to start thinking outside of "that" box? To really change the world, we have to quit using clichés like "we need to think outside the box" and start saying "we need to be comfortable with perceived failure." Gina (2009) comments: "But yeah, good question ... what IS in that box? I especially love this line: we have to quit using clichés like "we need to think outside the box" and start saying "we need to be comfortable with perceived failure." The authors agree that we should call it what it REALLY is and recognize that we will always be in some kind of box, even if we are not yet aware of the parameters. But at least we get a brief period of space and wiggle room. So, in essence, with this
observation, you are thinking outside the 'thinking outside the box' box. Therefore, you are thinking inside it.

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