

ABCDE Framework for Creative Teaching Strategies (CTS)-Based Classes

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Abstract

Creative Teaching Strategies (CTS) are widely discussed in education, yet a clear and comprehensive definition remains elusive. To address this gap, the authors propose a definition for CTS using the ABCDE Framework, which consists of five features: Aims (defining clear lesson objectives), Blueprint (developing detailed lesson plans), Creativity (introducing creative and engaging learning activities), Display (providing immediate opportunities for students to showcase their work), and Evaluation (assessing outcomes using concrete rubrics). This definition takes a practical approach, addressing the input part (lesson planning), the process part (execution of learning activities), and the output part (learning outcomes). The article demonstrates the application of the ABCDE Framework through the teaching of the traditional Chinese text *A Man from the State of Zheng Buys Shoes* (鄭人買履) at the senior primary level, showcasing how CTS-based classes can transform lessons into engaging, innovative, and purposeful learning experiences that enhance students' creativity, learning motivation, and overall effectiveness.

Keywords

Creative Teaching Strategies (CTS), ABCDE Framework, Drama-in-Education (DiE), AI-supported Teaching Strategies

Introduction

Despite extensive research on applying Creative Teaching Strategies (CTS) in the teaching of Chinese language in the primary school level, a clear and comprehensive definition remains elusive. While many scholars have emphasized the importance of CTS, its definition often remains vague and open to interpretation. Some define CTS solely by its outcomes, mainly on teaching strategies enhancing students' learning motivation, learning effectiveness, and creativity. While CTS can indeed lead to such outcomes, some may doubt if there are other teaching strategies may also achieve similar results, making this perspective insufficient.

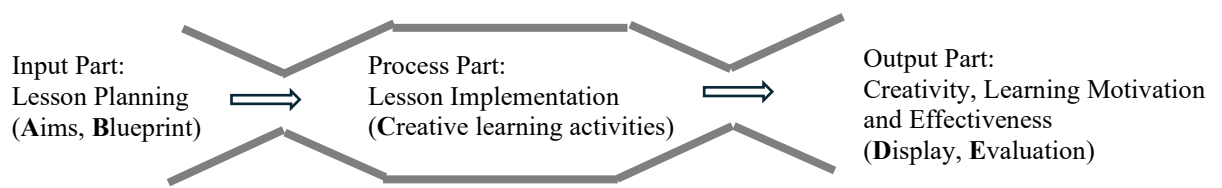


Figure 1: Three Parts of a CTS-based classes

The authors of this article propose a more practical definition of CTS through the ABCDE Framework, which organizes its features across three key components of CTS-based classes (see Figure 1).

On the **Input Part**, lesson planning involves teaching strategies that emphasize and align with the **Aims** of the curriculum, as well as lessons that adhere to a detailed and structured **Blueprint** for implementation. On the **Process part**, lesson implementation includes diverse and **Creative** learning activities. On the **Output Part**, CTS focuses on enhancing students' creativity, learning motivation, and effectiveness, while providing opportunities for students to immediately **Display** their creative works. An essential feature of CTS is the need to **Evaluate** students' displayed works using clear rubrics, enabling students to assess their own learning throughout the process.

A clear and practical definition of CTS is important for two main reasons: first, it helps identify teaching strategies as CTS if they meet the five features outlined in the framework; second, it allows educators to gain a deeper understanding of the nature and implementation of CTS, ensuring its effectiveness in fostering creativity and engagement in the classroom.

Below, the ABCDE framework is explained in detail using the traditional Chinese text "*A Man from the State of Zheng Buys Shoes*" (鄭人買履) as an example at the senior primary school level (Education Bureau, n.d., under the "Recommended Text" section, item 3).

A – Aims

The aims of a curriculum is crucial—they serve as the guiding direction for teachers in every lesson and must be consistently kept in mind. Aims are often outlined in curriculum guidelines published by the Education Bureau (Curriculum Development Council, 2023, Section 2). While some teachers may overlook these documents, they

are essential tools for maintaining the focus of teaching and measuring learning outcomes.

However, many teachers lose sight of their aims by either rigidly adhering to step-by-step instructions or placing excessive emphasis on student engagement. While engagement is important, it is often mistaken for effectiveness. The true measure of a lesson's effectiveness lies in whether the learning aims are achieved (Curriculum Development Council, 2023, Section 5.2). Without clear aims, lessons can become directionless, with activities that may be engaging but fail to fulfill educational aims.

Take the traditional Chinese story "*A Man from the State of Zheng Buys Shoes*" as an example. One aim could focus on teaching the words, phrases, and the entire passage of the text (textual analysis). Another aim might be to convey the story's overarching message: the importance of flexibility and the dangers of rigidly adhering to meaningless rules. In the story, the man from Zheng fails to buy shoes because he insists on using a string measured for his feet at home to verify the size, instead of trying the shoes on directly, demonstrating how rigid adherence to rules can lead to missed opportunities.

For the latter aim, the teacher may encourage students to think of a modern-day scenario in their school where some classmates fail due to inflexibility and then role-play the situation. If students have no idea, teachers may ask them to consult AI told and then adjust on their own. Below is an example form AI tool with adjustment from students:

Anna always took the Number 9 bus to school. When a new MTR station opened nearby, offering a faster route, she refused to switch, insisting, "I've always taken the bus." However, with the new MTR service, the bus now ran less frequently, causing her to be late for school repeatedly. Despite suggestions from her teachers to take the MTR, Anna stuck to her routine. As a result, her repeated lateness caused her to miss out on a good conduct award.

This activity would simultaneously enhance language skills such as speaking, listening, reading comprehension, and writing (e.g., scriptwriting), as well as foster a deeper appreciation of Chinese culture and values. Additionally, generic skills such as creativity, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving can be effectively developed through role-play activities. Such role play activities enable students to internalize the story's moral lessons and values while simultaneously

developing essential skills, ensuring that the lessons are both meaningful and impactful.

Some teachers have pointed out, "Do teachers really need to keep so many aims in mind during the teaching process? It seems very difficult!" According to the authors' experience, keeping all the aims in mind is indeed necessary but not difficult. Many teachers can confidently and effortlessly recall and articulate all the aims because these aims are interconnected. Remembering one aim naturally leads to the next, and eventually, all the aims can be covered.

On the other hand, it's hard to imagine how a teacher could walk into a classroom without keeping the aims in mind. Without clear aims, how could they possibly achieve them?

B – Blueprint

To effectively achieve the aims of a lesson, teachers need to draft a blueprint or lesson plan that organizes their teaching step by step. A well-thought-out blueprint includes careful time management and, most importantly, ensures that each part of the lesson aligns with students' abilities, while also challenging them to ultimately achieve the course aims.

The blueprint should provide the teacher with detailed steps for the learning activities. Consider a role-playing activity in a lesson exploring "*A Man from the State of Zheng Buys Shoes*" as an example. Teachers might divide students into small groups and ensure that students in each group understand the characters from the story they are to portray. High-achieving students might allocate roles independently, allowing for greater autonomy. For students with weaker abilities or those unfamiliar with role-playing, the teacher might need to offer more detailed guidance as follows.

In the opening part of the story, where the man from Zheng measures his foot with a string at home before going to the market to buy shoes, the teacher could preassign characters for groups. These characters might include:

1. The man from Zheng,
2. His wife,
3. His son,
4. His mother, and
5. His neighbor.

For even weaker students, the teacher may provide pre-written dialogue templates for some or all characters. For examples:

1. The man, “I want to buy a pair shoes. Let me measure the length of my feet.”
2. His wife, “Be quick, I’ll cook and write for you.”
3. His son, “Father, your shoes are too old.”
4. His mother, “Be quick, we shall wait for you.”
5. His neighbor, “I am very hungry, can I have something to eat first.”

The blueprint should also specify key details such as preparation and performance times. For example, students might be given 10 minutes to prepare their role-play and 1-2 minutes to perform. Teachers should also outline the sequence of events for students to act out. In this case, the events could include

1. The man from Zheng measuring his feet at home,
2. His conversation with the shopkeeper when he realizes he has forgotten to bring the string,
3. His rush back home to retrieve the string, and
4. His inflexibility in insisting on bringing the string, which ultimately causes him to leave the market without shoes.

Providing such a detailed blueprint does not necessarily mean it must be in written form, as this depends on the teacher’s experience. Experienced teachers might not write out a detailed blueprint but instead carry a detailed plan in their mind. However, experience and seniority do not always correlate. CTS-based classes are genuinely student-centered, and many senior teachers may not be accustomed to this approach. Therefore, a written blueprint should still be detailed for them. For less experienced teachers, a detailed written blueprint is even more necessary.

In any case, teachers must ensure that the activities are clear, manageable, and achievable for all students. This level of planning enables students to focus on their creativity and performance without feeling overwhelmed, ensuring the lesson is both engaging and effective.

C – Creativity

The **Creativity Stage** is at the heart of CTS-based classes, as it encourages students to create and produce original work. Engaging in the creative process nurtures many skills in students, such as:

- Cultivating interest and curiosity about the things around them, thereby enhancing their *sensitivity* to their surroundings.
- Encouraging students to generate an endless stream of ideas (*fluency*).
- Helping students think of diverse and entirely different categories of ideas (*flexibility*).
- Enabling students to come up with unique and extraordinary ideas (*originality*).
- Fostering students' drive to refine their ideas, especially encouraging them not to fear abandoning useless old ideas and having the perseverance to start fresh with new ones (*elaboration*).

When implementing CTS-based classes, teachers must always keep the goal of developing students' creativity in mind.

Creativity can manifest in various forms, such as dialogues, monologues, gestures, tableaux, drawings, or written texts. Students can use these mediums to express their understanding of the lesson in unique and meaningful ways.

Group work is particularly effective in fostering creativity, as it enables students to collaborate and learn from one another. Environmental factors are crucial in this process, especially in cultivating a mindset that delays judgement and encourages acceptance and openness to innovative and unconventional ideas. Students can support one another, fostering mutual growth and building a sense of teamwork.

For example, in a lesson on the traditional Chinese text “*A Man from the State of Zheng Buys Shoes*”, teachers may ask students to work in groups to create a short, 2-minute play illustrating the consequences of rigidity in a school setting. Currently, the education sector advocates for the use of AI tools in learning. Therefore, teachers may encourage groups to generate ideas using AI tools, refine the outputs, and then act them out.

Below is an example from the AI tool POE, amended by students:

Peter is a primary six student who loves reading, especially adventure books from the library. One day, his Chinese teacher, Mr. Chan, asked the class to choose a book they liked, read it, and submit a reflection within a week. Peter immediately thought of a book he had always wanted to borrow, The Great Adventure.

After school, Peter rushed to the library, only to find that the book had already been borrowed by someone else. The librarian, Ms. Cheung, said: “Peter you can check out other adventure books. There are plenty of great options, like The Mysterious Forest or Ocean Journey.” However, Peter shook his head and said, “No! The teacher said to choose a book I like, and I only like The Great Adventure.”

A week passed, and the book was still not returned. Peter failed to submit his assignment.

Teacher may give 10-15 min for students to practice, ensure the group can divide the roles to play, and then act it out within 2 min.

This learning strategy can deepen students’ understanding of the text’s relevance to daily life. Encouraging students to create fosters deeper engagement and promotes a more thorough exploration of both the text and its meaning. The collaborative process not only enhances creativity but also develops essential interpersonal skills, such as communication and collaboration.

D – Display

In CTS-based classes, **Display** is a crucial step where students showcase their creative products. The display should be immediate, occurring shortly after the creative process, within the same lesson. While creating a text or composition can be a creative process, it becomes less engaging if the product is simply handed to the teacher, marked, and returned weeks later. To meet the criteria of CTS-based classes, the creative product must be displayed promptly. Typically, multiple displays take place during a single lesson, allowing classmates to view and engage with each other’s work. This approach fosters shared learning, collaboration, and immediate feedback.

If only a few good works are displayed long after the lesson, while others are ignored, this does not satisfy the **Display** step. For example, while compositions involve creativity, they are often displayed weeks later, such as on classroom bulletin boards. This lack of immediacy in the display fails to meet the requirements of a CTS-based class. Experience shows that such delayed displays neither enhance the learning atmosphere in the classroom nor make the lesson more engaging.

Displaying work in the same lesson allows for real-time engagement. For instance, role-playing activities enable students to perform immediately after 10 minutes of preparation. Similarly, after students create a piece of writing, teachers can ask them to upload their work to an online platform like Padlet, where classmates can view and interact with each other's creations. Teachers can also select a few works to display on a smartboard and provide feedback to the entire class. This immediate sharing and discussion of student work makes the lesson more interactive and engaging, fulfilling the objectives of the **Display** step in CTS-based classes.

One important consideration is that immediate displays can create pressure for students. Teachers must be mindful of this, especially in role-playing activities. For example, teachers could have all groups display their work simultaneously and then invite one or two groups with stronger psychological readiness to present their role-plays to the whole class. Many teachers worry that having all groups display simultaneously might disrupt classroom discipline. However, this is often not the case. Similar to physical education classes, where the entire class participates in activities simultaneously without chaos, students in CTS-based classes are usually focused and engaged in the activity. Teachers are encouraged to try this approach before concluding that it will disrupt classroom discipline.

E – Evaluation

The **Evaluation** stage is one of the most engaging parts of CTS-based classes, as it emphasizes reflection and feedback. As an integral part of learning and teaching, evaluation serves different purposes, which can be categorized into three types: Assessment of Learning, Assessment for Learning, and Assessment as Learning. Assessment of Learning helps teachers gauge the level of achievement students have reached. Assessment for Learning allows teachers to identify the strengths and weaknesses of students in their learning journey, enabling them to make continuous improvements while also adapting the curriculum and enhancing teaching methods to meet students' needs. On the other hand, Assessment as Learning focuses on helping students recognize their own strengths and weaknesses during the learning process, fostering their ability to develop self-directed learning skills (Curriculum Development Council, 2023, Section 5.1).

While all three types of assessment are important, the third—Assessment as Learning—is particularly crucial in CTS-based classes. It ensures both relevance and immediacy and allows teachers to monitor the quality of the evaluation process

effectively. For evaluation to be effective, a clear rubric is essential. This rubric should be communicated to students before they begin their creative work, serving as a guide for their preparation. With a clear understanding of the rubric, students can refine their work continuously and even anticipate their potential score before the evaluation takes place. This process not only enhances the quality of their work but also fosters a deeper engagement with their learning.

For the role-play “*Peter Borrows a Book*” mentioned in the above section “C-Creativity”, the rubric should align with the specific requests and focus areas outlined by the teacher. Below is an example rubric:

(1: Big room to improve, 2: Satisfactory; 3: Good; 4: Excellent)

Content	1	2	3	4	Comments
Relevancy of the story to the theme					
The roles are well designed					
All roles speak 1-2 lines					
Speech, loud enough					
Speech, clear					
Body movement					

Evaluation can be Evaluation can take several forms, including self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and teacher evaluation. After students perform or display their creative work, the teacher can facilitate a discussion where students reflect on their work and provide feedback to their peers based on the rubric provided beforehand. Teachers can guide this process by asking targeted questions from the rubric, encouraging constructive criticism, and identifying strengths and areas for improvement.

Evaluation is not just about scoring or assessing performance through a rubric; it is also an opportunity for students to reflect on their learning process, celebrate their achievements, and identify ways to improve. By engaging in real-time evaluation, students are more likely to internalize feedback and apply it to future tasks. This makes the Evaluation step a critical component of CTS, fostering growth and deeper learning.

Conclusion

The **ABCDE Framework** for CTS-based classes provides a practical definition of CTS. The framework emphasizes that educators must first focus on setting clear **Aims**. This involves creating a thoughtful **Blueprint** for the lesson, ensuring that

learning activities actively engage students in **Creativity**, and requiring students to **Display** their creative products promptly to the class. Throughout the process, rubrics for **Evaluation** should be carefully designed to align with the lesson's aims.

From the aforementioned example of the learning of traditional Chinese text “*A man from the State of Zheng buys Shoes*,” CTS-based classes not only help students master learning content with enhanced motivation and effectiveness but also foster a wide range of generic skills, including creativity, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and, most importantly, the development of core values through education.

While it is true that CTS-based classes often involve drama activities—commonly referred to as Drama-in-Education (DiE) teaching strategies—DiE is just one highly effective and important component of CTS. We recognize DiE as a powerful tool, and effective CTS-based classes frequently incorporate DiE strategies. However, CTS serves as a broader framework that encompasses a variety of teaching strategies beyond DiE, including innovative approaches such as AI-supported teaching strategies.

That said, incorporating DiE strategies into CTS-based classes remains an important, effective, and impactful choice, as drama naturally aligns with the principles of CTS and enhances student engagement. At the same time, integrating other CTS methods, particularly those involving AI tools, is equally critical in expanding the possibilities of teaching and learning.

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Remark: The "ABCDE Framework" presented in this paper synthesizes years of experience in Creative Teaching Strategies (CTS) from Hong Kong scholars and

practitioners. The authors initially participated in the Drama-in-Education Seed Project launched by the Education Bureau in 2000. In 2006, the authors took part in a territory-wide drama-education survey and research project funded by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council. Between 2009 and 2011, the authors launched a Quality Education Fund project, organizing teacher-training programs on creative teaching strategies. Following the completion of the program in 2011, the Hong Kong Teachers Drama Association brought together scholars and frontline teachers to establish the Hong Kong Creative Educators Organization, which organizes three symposia annually to promote CTS among education professionals. The framework is built on academic research by local CTS scholars and the practical experience of educators. It not only provides research directions for CTS scholars but also serves as a training guide for teachers. It establishes standards and lays a significant academic and practical foundation for CTS scholars and practitioners as a whole.