3.2.4 Onion Rings

Brief description, and rules of the implementation of the learning activity

The Onion Rings learning activity is a structured, movement-based creativity exercise in which students stand in two concentric circles ("rings") facing a partner. When the teacher gives a prompt, the pairs respond together by co-creating ideas, solutions, comparisons, or imaginative scenarios. After each prompt, one ring rotates, creating new partners and new creative combinations. This activity transforms a simple movement structure into a rich creative thinking process, where students explore multiple perspectives, generate ideas quickly, adapt to new partners, and express their imagination in flexible and collaborative ways.

Skill focus

- **Primary Skill Focus**
  - Creativity
- **Complementary/ Secondary Skill Focus**
  - Curiosity, sense of wonder and openness
  - Flexibility
  - Connectedness
  - Empathy

Age group	Student number	Duration
6-7 years old	Whole class working in pairs or small groups	45-60 minutes

Proposed step by step implementation of the learning activity

1. **Warm-up:** Moving into creativity. The teacher sets up two circles of students, an inner and an outer ring. Students face a partner. Light warm-up: "Turn to your partner and show a creative gesture about how you feel today."; "Invent a handshake no one has seen before." This sets a playful, safe tone for creativity.
2. **Exploration phase:** Idea generation with partners. Pairs respond to open-ended creative prompts, such as: "Invent a new animal by combining yours and your partner's favourite animals."; "Create an object that solves a problem at school."; "Imagine a place where both your favourite foods grow on trees, what does it look like?" They share aloud and quickly sketch or mime the ideas. After each prompt, the outer ring rotates one step, creating new combinations.
3. **Guided activity:** Deepening creative reasoning. Now the teacher introduces prompts requiring explanation, not only idea generation: "What could your combined creature be used for?"; "What rule would exist in the world you just invented?";

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"How would your object change everyday life?" Pairs justify their ideas using: imagination; storytelling; playful reasoning. The aim: reasoning behind creativity.

4. **Main activity:** Creative partner mash-ups. Students rotate partners every 1–2 minutes after each creative challenge. Possible challenge types: 1. Mash-up: Combine two unrelated words (e.g. mushroom + bicycle). 2. Transformation: Turn an object into something else (e.g. "How can a spoon become a musical instrument?"). 3. Problem solving: Invent a creative solution based on combined ideas. 4. Story spark: Create a 1-sentence story together using the two prompt words. The teacher encourages: multiple possible answers; building on a partner's ideas; accepting unexpected or unusual thinking. This is the core creativity-development phase.
5. **Creative extension:** Students choose their favourite partner-created idea and: draw it; act it out; write a mini-story; create a "title" and tagline for it. This consolidates creative thinking into a visible product.
6. **Whole-class closing reflection:** Students gather in a circle and share: what idea inspired them; what surprised them; how their creativity evolved through partner change.

Indoor/Outdoor Classroom layout notes

The activity works both indoors and outdoors. A flexible space is ideal: two circles formed safely; students can rotate and move freely; sketching stations available around the area; materials visible and accessible. The layout should encourage collaboration, communication and curiosity.

How does this learning activity develop this particular skill?

Onion Rings develops creativity by immersing students in continuous idea generation with multiple partners. The frequent rotation encourages divergent thinking (many possible ideas); flexible thinking (adapting to new partners quickly); creative communication (expressing and combining ideas); co-creation (building something new together); openness (valuing others' ideas). Students experience creativity as a dynamic process, not a fixed ability.

What do we want to achieve regarding primary skill development (student understanding and/or behaviour)?

As a result of this activity, students will:

- be able to generate original ideas together with different partners, explore multiple creative connections between concepts, and express their thinking in imaginative and flexible ways.
- understand that creativity thrives when ideas are shared, compared, and combined.
- be able to adapt quickly to new collaborative situations and build on others' suggestions.

Suggested use, and practical subject-related examples

Language Arts

- Create imaginative comparisons ("My partner's animal is like…").
- Develop short creative dialogues.
- Practice descriptive adjectives through mash-ups.

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Mathematics

- Combine shapes to create new geometric forms.
- Use number-related prompts (e.g. magical number transformations).
- Categorization and pattern creation.

Science

- Explore adaptations ("What new creature could survive in water AND desert?").
- Mix materials (wood + glass → new invention).
- Discuss systems (layers of habitats → onions as metaphor).

Social Studies

- Values blending ("Combine fairness + courage → What action shows this?").
- Role-play culturally inspired characters.
- Connecting empathy + imagination.

Arts

- Movement-based creative expression.
- Collaborative sketches.
- Designing hybrid characters or tools.

Materials and tools needed for implementation

- Prompt cards (words, pictures, questions, objects)
- Open space for two circles
- Optional sketch papers, markers
- Timer
- Music (optional)

Guiding questions

Pair / small group:

- How did you combine your two ideas?
- What made your mash-up or invented object unique?
- What new idea came to your mind after hearing from your partner?

Whole class:

- How did changing partners affect your creativity?
- Which idea surprised you?
- What did you learn about being open to others' ideas?

Tips and Tricks for dealing with challenges

- **Challenge**: Students create repetitive or literal ideas.
  Tip: Encourage "three versions" rule. Add constraints (underwater, future world, tiny size, giant size).
- **Challenge**: Students feel shy when changing partners.
  Tip: Provide clear sentence starters. Begin with non-verbal creative gestures.

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- **Challenge**: Uneven participation.
  Tip: Give rotating roles (idea starter, explainer, illustrator). Each pair must share one joint idea.
- **Challenge**: Overwhelm or confusion during fast rotations.
  Tip: Use a visual timer. Keep prompts simple and fun.
- **Challenge**: Students focus only on the product, not the process.
  Tip: Celebrate surprising questions, not "best drawings." Use mini-reflections after each partner rotation.

Difficulty level tailoring

This activity can be adapted to different levels depending on the students' familiarity with objects and their ability to use them creatively.

- **Beginner learners (6-7 years old):** Simple picture prompts. One idea per rotation. Scaffolded questions ("What could this become?")
- **Advanced learners (8-9 years old):** Abstract prompts (emotions, materials, functions). 2–3 creative explanations needed. Stronger emphasis on storytelling
- **Expert learners (9-10 years old):** Purpose-driven mash-ups (solve a societal or environmental problem). Complex reasoning behind connections. Present creations to the whole class with detailed justification

Debriefing and Reflection questions

Creativity

- What idea today felt the most original to you?
- How did your partner's ideas change your thinking?

Flexibility

- How easy or difficult was it to switch partners?
- What helped you stay open to new possibilities?

Curiosity and Openness

- Which prompt made you the most curious?
- What new question did the activity raise in your mind?

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