

Investigating Connections Between Dialectical Thinking and Creative Problem Solving

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The purpose of this study was to explore the connection between the way college students think and how creatively they can problem-solve. We hypothesized that older adult college students (50+) would use more dialectical thinking and creative problem-solving skills than their younger-aged (18 to 24) peer counterparts. We wanted to see if students can creatively problem-solve and if their capacity to do so links with their ability to look at a problem from multiple points of view before arriving at their decision. Students' perceived creativity levels may impact the ability to develop solutions to a problem while using dialectical thinking may lead to indecisiveness that affects decision-making ability and may inhibit the ability to problem-solve. We have distributed a questionnaire to obtain at least 50 college-aged students' responses. The survey has a demographics section, the Social Paradigm Belief Inventory (SPBI), and an option to complete four problem-based scenario questions. We measured levels of post-formal thought on a spectrum of absolute thinking, relativistic thinking, or dialectical thinking through participants' completion of the SPBI in conjunction with creative problem-solving abilities through a content analysis of the scenarios with the select participants from each age group. Most participants from the 18 to 24-year-old group were dialectic in their thought processes, and the 50-year-olds and older group generally had a higher "relativistic thinking" score. The highest level of problem-solving creativity came from the participants classified as dialectic thinkers. Due to the unanticipated small sample size, these results only give preliminary insight into how dialectic thinking connects to creative problem-solving skills. Further research into this area is necessary to validate our findings, which would improve how human resources are applied in an educational or business setting when creative problem solving is vital.