

## Creativity

### What is creativity?

Creativity is about expressing ourselves. It is about trying new things and new ways of being. Creativity involves being imaginative and original.

It is sometimes thought that only certain people are 'creative', and that to be creative you need to have an unusual talent. However, this is not the case - each one of us is capable of expressing ourselves creatively in some area.

It is also often thought that creativity is limited to the 'arts' - for example, music, drama, art, craft, dance, writing, etc. But these artistic areas are not the only ways we can express creativity - and you certainly don't have to be good at art to be creative. Creativity is a way of thinking and being which can be expressed in many areas of life, for example, science, business, maths and cooking. We can all be creative in our own way.

Creativity is the ability to challenge, question and explore. It involves taking risks, playing with ideas, keeping an open mind and making connections where none are obvious.

Victoria and Albert Museum of Childhood

Creativity has been defined as having four characteristics:

1. It involves thinking or behaving *imaginatively*.
2. The imaginative activity is *purposeful* - it is directed at achieving a goal. For example, you might imagine a baby polar bear feeling the cold, but this is just an idea - turning this idea into a story, or a poem or a picture or even just a conversation, is being creative.
3. The creative process is *original* - it involves ideas that are new to the person being creative. The ideas may also be new to others.
4. The outcome of creativity is of *value* - it provides a solution to a problem or it is useful or it provides enjoyment to the creator or to others.

Some people may make a more obvious difference to the world than others through the products of their creativity (like great actors, cooks, writers or scientists). But creativity is often more about the *process*, rather than the actual product. The creative process is useful for many reasons, including: developing confidence in ourselves; developing good relationships with those we are being creative with; finding out what our talents and strengths are and increasing our positive emotion. In short, the creative process helps us flourish by teaching us about who we are, what we love and what we can give to the world.

With children, it is useful for us to focus on the purpose and importance of the creative *process* as opposed to the *outcome*. The goal is the process of writing a story or coming up with an invention or creating a picture, etc. The outcome of a creative project does not have to be worthwhile for anyone else to read or look at, although of course it may be very worthwhile!

## What are the benefits of creativity?

Why should we all use our creative power? Because there is nothing that makes people so generous, joyful, lively, bold and compassionate.

Brenda Ueland

Being involved in creative activities is fun and absorbing for children. Evidence suggests that it helps children to have positive experiences and develop important characteristics and abilities such as:

- Appreciation of different ways of looking at the world
- Collaboration – being keen to work together as a team
- Communication – developing better communication through talking, listening, writing or pictures
- Concentration – focusing on what they are doing
- Developing good relationships – working together and making new friends
- Discipline – developing self-control through a requirement to practice (for example: some artistic activities, such as playing a musical instrument, need practice)
- Emotional intelligence – being able to express emotions
- Empathy – understanding what it can feel like being someone else (particularly through role play drama activities)
- Imagination – bringing ideas to life and adding excitement to their world
- Independence of thought – discovering things for themselves
- Interaction – being involved in a group and having peer support
- Intrinsic motivation – participating in something for pleasure rather than external reward, so wanting to do it for themselves
- Language – increasing vocabulary, reading and writing skills
- Open-mindedness – being open to new ideas
- Physical activity – participating in activities that encourage movement
- Positive emotion – having fun and enjoying what they are doing
- Problem-solving – being able to explore different solutions.

These characteristics and abilities have been shown to lead to:

- A sense of purpose
- Achievement
- Confidence
- Development of strengths, talents and interest
- High aspirations
- Self-respect
- Sense of belonging.

These outcomes are what flourishing is all about.

### Case study



A series of creative arts projects in English schools with pupils aged 11-16 years had a positive impact on the learning and behaviour of the pupils. The projects involved creating graffiti art works depicting cities in the future, recording rap music in French and creating a selection of artwork and performances related to VE day or Japan. The main outcomes were:

- improved language and literacy skills
- an increase in motivation
- a decrease in behavioural problems
- increased confidence and desire to learn
- a greater awareness of opportunities available to them after school
- an improvement in self-confidence, especially among the less able pupils.

One pupil said: "I really liked this week because it made me realise that learning can be fun."

Furey, B. (2006). Can creative projects improve the language and literacy skills of our pupils? Research Summary from the Teacher Research Conference 2006.

Below are examples of the benefits of two specific areas of creativity: music and messy play.

### The benefits of music

Where words fail, music speaks.

Hans Christian Anderson

A number of studies have outlined specific benefits of music for babies', children's and young people's wellbeing. For example:

- Music can build powerful connections between parents and babies. The joy experienced as they share the music helps strengthen their bond.
- Young children are attracted to musical patterns and structure. Music introduces children to the sounds and meanings of words and helps strengthen their memory skills.
- In adolescence, music makes a major contribution to the development of self-identity and is a useful source of support when young people are feeling troubled or lonely.

- Playing a musical instrument can lead to a sense of achievement and increased confidence, persistence in overcoming difficulties and self-discipline.
- Singing has particular benefits on the immune system, due to deep breathing, good posture, improved mood and stress reduction.

### The benefits of messy play

We can encourage very young children to be creative through messy play. Messy play, (e.g. sand pits, paddling pools, finger paint) has been found to be very beneficial for babies and young children's development of thought and creativity. In particular it helps to develop concentration and problem-solving, conversation skills, curiosity in the world, imagination and cooperation.

Play is our brain's favourite way of learning.

Diane Ackerman

Messy play does not usually have a focus on making something. This leaves the child free to explore all possibilities and enjoy the creative process. It is important for us to watch and listen to the child's explorations and inventions as this promotes a sense of security. It also gives the child greater confidence to take risks if they know we are nearby.

### Case study - Creativity in Scottish Schools



Creativity Counts was a project aimed at supporting and fostering the development of creativity in classrooms in Scotland. The report, Portraits of Practice, describes 18 projects in schools across Scotland, giving details of the ages of children and aims of the project; how the project was organised and what happened; reflections on how creativity was encouraged; and the benefits of creativity found.

Examples of projects included: 'Our Ideal School' where children collaborated to think about, plan and build a 3D model of their ideal school, and 'The Cool Project' where children were encouraged to think about healthy eating and create an exciting and original healthy ice cream.

Some of the benefits of the projects were:

Pupils:

- showed motivation, enthusiasm and enjoyment
- gained confidence in using their imagination
- showed a positive attitude towards the project
- achieved success, with the understanding that mistakes are an inevitable and important part of learning.

Teachers:

- found significant changes in classroom dynamics
- were able to model creative behaviour
- enjoyed themselves.

Learning and Teaching Scotland & the IDES Network (2004). Creativity Counts - Portraits of Practice. Glasgow: Learning and Teaching Scotland.

## How to encourage creativity in children

Remember, everyone can be creative in their own way - they don't have to be good at art or play a musical instrument, etc.

### Encouraging creative thinking

- Be a creative role model. Be creative in the way you think about things and do things. This means being open-minded and not being afraid of trying new ways of doing things. It also means being spontaneous and not always sticking to the same routines. Although it's generally important to have a routine, it is also important to show you can be flexible.

I think my securities far outweigh my insecurities. I am not nearly as afraid of myself and my imagination as I used to be.

Billy Connolly

- Show children what you are interested in or enthusiastic about and do it with them, for example, if you love painting, paint with them; if you love cooking, cook with them. Focus on the fun of the activity, rather than on the result. By doing this you will encourage them to develop their own creative interests and passions.
- Allow plenty of free time for creativity. Unplanned time lets one thought build on another until the child has created something entirely new. Organising too many structured activities may cut into the important time a child needs to let their mind relax and explore.
- Don't stifle creativity with too many rules. Children need boundaries and rules to give them a sense of order and security, but they also need unstructured, free time to use their imaginations and be spontaneous.
- Encourage children to take risks when doing creative activities. To do this, begin by taking an interest in what they are doing. Let the child know there are no wrong ideas and that people make things no one has ever made before. Let them know it's ok if what they are creating didn't work out the way they thought it would. Point out something positive about it, to give them confidence to carry on.
- Help children to see the value of mistakes, and that they give us a chance to find alternative solutions to problems.
- Allow children to ask questions. They have a great sense of curiosity, because they want to think about things and learn new things. They don't just ask questions to annoy you! Answer their questions if you can, but don't worry if you don't know the answer – you can always get them to look it up on the internet!
- Appreciate and encourage their imagination. Don't feel that you have to keep them grounded in your sense of reality. For example, a cloud may look like a blanket or even a train to a young child. They may imagine that there are fairies living at the bottom of the garden. Discuss what the world looks like to them and encourage their creative ideas. Encourage their make-believe games too.
- Creativity involves the ability to come up with new and unusual answers to problems and questions. So praise children for unusual answers and unusual questions to encourage this kind of thinking. Praise surprising and unexpected ideas or ways of doing things.

The world is but a canvas to our imaginations.

Henry Thoreau

- Being creative with school work, when possible, will encourage children to develop a love of learning which will set them up for life more than just getting good grades. Give them plenty of opportunity and encouragement to explore subjects on their own, looking in depth at what their particular interest is.
- Allow children to challenge what you say! This shows that they're being creative.
- Keep an open mind – don't have expectations about how you think a child should solve a problem or present a project. Try not to jump in with your ideas. Children need to be encouraged and supported to find their own ways of doing things, not given solutions. There is rarely one right answer or one way of doing things.
- Encourage children to think critically about what they're doing. So ask questions like "is this going to be helpful?" or "will other people understand this" or "how could we make this even better?"
- Encourage brainstorming activities in groups to promote creative thinking.
- Creativity is brought alive when a child has an intense experience with something new in their world. Encourage this by watching educational documentaries with children or, if possible, by organising outings or field trips and real life observations of objects, plants and animals.
- Create a safe environment where no one makes fun of new ideas. If a child is worried about being teased, they are less likely to step out of their comfort zone and behave creatively.
- Offer opportunities for children to talk about what they are interested in by asking open-ended questions, like "What was the best thing that happened to you today?" or "How do you feel about that?" or "Why do you think that happened?"
- Have high, but realistic, expectations of what children are able to achieve. This will help them believe they can be creative and they will try harder.

### Encouraging creative activities

- Some children may need help and encouragement to develop their skills in creative activity. For example, one child may not engage in creative thinking because they lack self-confidence. Or another child may be anxious when given an open-ended task because it has several possible solutions. Through observation and conversation, we can try to find out what is causing the child's difficulty and encourage them to work through it. For example, you could explain that there are no right answers and that sometimes it is useful to make mistakes to learn how to come up with better ideas.

To live a creative life, we must lose our fear of being wrong.

Joseph Chilton Pearce

- One of the key ideas in encouraging creativity in children is to make sure their learning and play involves as many of the senses as possible. Creativity is about shifting learning away from just processing information visually. A child is more likely to learn and remember more effectively if the learning or play activity involves touch, smell, hearing or tasting, as well as seeing.
- Offer young children lots of materials to make musical instruments, e.g. cereal packet drums, paper towel roll horns, rice-filled plastic bottles.
- If you are caring for a baby, sing or hum to them. No matter how you think you sound, the baby will love it! This shared experience will help strengthen your bond.
- Music is everywhere – in the clap of hands, the sound of the wind in the trees, in your voice. No special lessons or fancy equipment are necessary to enjoy music. It's all about hearing the sounds of the world around us. You can encourage babies and children to listen to the sounds of the world and to enjoy making sounds of their own.
- Try to ensure that children have physical space and time to play and work creatively.
- Encourage messy play with young children. Dig in sand and soil, make sandcastles and mud-pies, splash in puddles and paddling pools, use finger paint, and whatever else you can think of that's messy and fun!
- Encourage children to help you in the garden or when cooking. These activities will engage all their senses and can help them learn how to create meals from ingredients and beautiful plants from seeds or seedlings.
- Be tolerant of noise and mess, at least some of the time. Creativity is generally not neat and tidy! It's a good idea to ensure that only one creative project is happening at a time, which has to be cleared up before the next one starts. You can also designate creative areas in your house or classroom which are allowed to be messier than other areas!
- Supply materials for creative activity, for example: dressing-up clothes, musical instruments (or pots, pans and spoons!), paper, pens and paints, etc.
- Display creative art and craft work, but avoid excessive evaluation. The end result is not the important part of creativity.
- When looking at children's art work, genuinely take an interest in what they are doing and encourage them to talk about it. You don't have to say it's a great piece of art unless you think it is! But you can make positive comments to show you're noticing what they're doing, like, "what bright colours" or "that's an interesting shape."

## Activities

Here are some activities to help children and young people get creative:

## Creative thinking



Ask children thought-provoking questions to help them to think creatively, for example:

- "what would happen if dogs could talk?"
- "what will our homes be like in 100 years time?"
- "can you make a list of things you can't do in this country?"
- "what are the similarities between a telephone and a lion?"

Ask 'how many different ways' questions. For example, ask "how many ways can a button/paper cup/piece of plasticine be used?" Then hand round the object to help the children come up with ideas.

## Ideas for creative activities for young people aged 11+



These links are pdfs and each will open in a new window.

A Picture Tells a Thousand Words  
A Poem for Today  
Collage of Style  
Dance Creation  
Fairytale for the 21st Century  
Junk Sculpture  
Where am I?  
Word Wall

These activities are taken from 'ArtSmart: developing and accrediting young people's creativity' (2010) with permission from UK Youth.

## Invent a machine



Invent the machine that your family, class or group (and probably many other people) have always needed! 'Dragon's Den' here we come!

What you need:

- Large sheets of plain white paper
- Pencils and erasers
- Felt-tipped pens, crayons and other art materials.

What you do:

- Think about a machine that your family, class or group really needs, but no one has invented yet! Maybe you could use a making-packed-lunches-machine, a helping-children-go-to-sleep-machine, or a finding-things machine...
- What would your machine look like and how would it work?
- Scribble all of your ideas down on the edges of a large piece of paper, or the back

- of an envelope. Doodle some of your ideas, like a real inventor.
- Then bring your best ideas together to design your machine.
  - When everyone has finished designing their special machines, show each other what you've created and talk about how your machines will work.

Some things to talk about together:

- What will you call your special invention?
- What difference would this machine make to your lives?
- If you can't have this machine, what other things could you do as a family, class or group to help solve the problems? Write or draw your ideas around your machines.

Other ideas:

- Instead of using paper, make a model of your machine using construction-type toys, like K'nex or Lego.
- Or use all kinds of boxes and plastic packaging to build your machine out of junk. Include things like elastic bands, paper fasteners, string, and paper-clips and maybe you could find a way to make your model really move.
- Watch a funny film together about inventing – like one of Nick Park's 'Wallace and Gromit' stories. What kind of machine might Wallace make for your family, class or group?

## Drama Games



See [www.dramaresource.com](http://www.dramaresource.com) for ideas of drama games activities.

## Resources

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/z8k487h>

This BBC website article is about the importance of creativity and includes ideas for activities.

<http://www.fusionyearbooks.com/blog/creative-classrooms/>

This blog gives 20 Ideas to Promote More Creativity in Your Classroom