

Summary

Creativity can be increased by understanding how ideas occur and using techniques to stretch or change perception as any other skill it can be improved with practice. This advice sheet is aimed at parents of high learning potential children to support them in developing creative thinking skills.

Introduction

We spend every waking minute thinking, but how often do we think about thinking? Intelligence doesn't automatically make people creative thinkers. Intelligent people tend to be good at logic and learning things, but creativity often comes from a change of perception.

Busted myths about creativity

- *Our thinking skills will naturally get better* – A two finger typist may get better as a two fingered typist, but won't ever become a touch typist.
- *If you are intelligent you are a good thinker* – Intelligence is the potential of the mind. Just as a powerful car can be driven badly, so intelligence can be used poorly. Studies show there is no relationship between intelligence and creativity above a certain IQ level.
- *Creative thinking is based on logic* – Every valuable creative idea is logical in hindsight, but can't always be reached by logic in the first place. In fact, sometime the craziest ideas lead to the best solutions. In practice, 85% of ordinary thinking is perception but often we jump to use logic before exploring perceptions.
- *Creativity is mysterious* – Important aspects of the creative process are now well understood and some of the basic rules that govern the generation of ideas have been discovered.
- *Creativity can't be learned* – Everyone can learn to express greater creativity. The key is to develop simple techniques and skills to enhance your creativity.

Creativity is a numbers game

The Nobel Prize winner Linus Pauling said, "The best way to get a good idea is to get a lot of ideas". If you think of lots of ideas, you'll have more choice to choose the best ones to develop. So how can you generate lots of ideas?

Go for a burst! Go for an intense burst of ideas concentrating on quantity over a short time. Don't try to qualify or judge them – capture any ideas no matter how silly or bizarre.

DEVELOPING CREATIVE THINKING SKILLS

Here's an exercise to practice this. Come up with as many uses you can think of for a bottle in 2 minutes; as sensible or wacky as you like. Add up your answers and divide by 2 and compare with the results on the right from many groups around the world. No one has ever scored more than 17! *Try it now.*

Did you start to run out of steam after a minute? Have a look at the following techniques and see how many more ideas you can come up with easily.

Change something in the problem

- *Reverse the problem* – think about what can't it be used for; you'll find it probably can (a bottle as a friend, in an advert, as a food source, a sweet).
- *Change its size* – suppose it was enormous or tiny.
- *Change the material* – suppose it was wood (ten pin bowling?) or ice or magnetic!
- *Change its shape* – after all what is a bottle: a container with an opening?
- *Change the number* – suppose there were millions or just two. What possibilities does that open?
- *Add something or take something away* – suppose it was cut in half or sliced in sections or stuck onto something else.
- *Think of each attribute of your bottle* (material, shape, top, size, etc.) and think of alternatives for each, for example, material: wood, metal, glass, plastic, clay, etc. What ideas does that lead to?

No. of uses	Participants	
0–3	5%	
4–6	60%	normal
7–8	20%	more creative than normal
9–10	10%	
10–18	5%	

Change your perspective – look through other eyes; a child, an animal, a camera, the mirror image. If you have been generating ideas based on its function (such as its use as a container) change your perspective to another function, for example, an art object, a painting, a cultural icon, an archaeological treasure.

Recognise and challenge assumptions – our thinking falls into habits and you will find you start repeating round the same thoughts. To generate ideas you need to break out of habits and challenge your assumptions. What is a bottle normally used for? To contain something. Suppose, then, it was used to keep something out, such as air. This might lead you to think of a bottle as a light bulb.

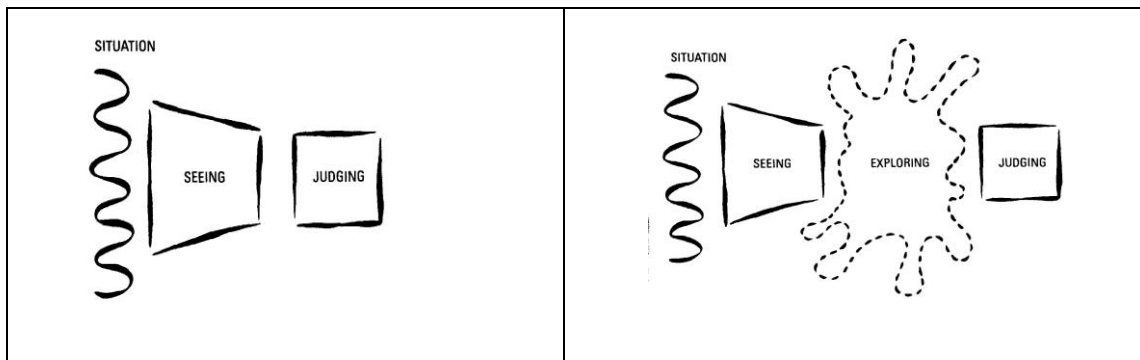
Combine with another idea – use movement to leapfrog to another idea. A bottle and a train might lead you to think of a ship in a bottle. A bottle and a tree might lead you to think of a seed germinator. A bottle and an arrow might lead you to think of a target for shooting at.

Now try the exercise again but this time coming up with as many uses as you can think of for a brick in two minutes using these techniques. Did you generate more ideas?

Logic vs. Perception

What can you dry your hair with, cut the grass with and lift a car with? (See answer below).

If we jump too quickly to judge, as illustrated by one of De Bono’s diagrams below, we don’t allow our perception to gather all the information and we filter out some of the information that is available. This limits the available solutions.



Illusions are an example of this – our eyes deceive us by jumping to conclusions too quickly. Once we ‘see’ things in a particular way we find it difficult to ‘unsee’ that perspective and see alternatives. Logic and dominant ideas can be blocks that have some similarities with illusions. Logic is the tool used to dig holes deeper and bigger, but it is not possible to dig a hole in a different place by digging deeper the same hole. If the hole is in the wrong place no amount of improvement will put it in the right place. Also it is easier to measure digging in an existing hole than to start a new one.

Dominant ideas also force the perspective of the viewer into arranging the information into known expected combinations even when they don’t completely explain the situation. Information that does not fit is excluded and ignored.

Did you work out the answer to the question above? It is a hairdryer, a mower and a jack. It didn’t say it was a single thing, but did you assume it?

Further Information

<p>www.brainstorming.co.uk/tutorials/creativethinkingcontents.html</p>	<p>Brainstorming.co.uk – Website giving tutorials on creative thinking strategies.</p>
<p>http://creativethinking.net/</p>	<p>Creative Thinking – Michael Michalko unveils the secrets of creative genius and brings life-changing creative techniques within everyone’s reach.</p>

<i>Teach Your Child How to Think</i> by Edward de Bono	Shows in a simple and practical way how any parent can develop the thinking skills of their children. This is not about winning arguments, learning facts or articulation, but about constructive thinking, making the right choices and decisions, planning and creativity.
<i>Conceptual Blockbusting: A Guide to Better Ideas</i> by James Adams	Employing unconventional exercises and other interactive elements, Adams shows individuals, teams, and organizations how to overcome key blocks that prevent us from realizing the full potential of our fertile minds, so we can embrace alternative ways of thinking about complex problems, and celebrate the joy of creativity.
<i>Problem Solving</i> by Graham Wilson	This study shows managers how to solve problems, but at the same time it helps them to understand, recognize and deal with the interpersonal difficulties that interfere with decision-making. The methods it utilizes include specific ways to: pinpoint the problem; record the data; better inform others; decide on the optimum solution; and evaluate the effect of a decision.
<i>Outside the Box: Creative Thinking Ideas to Get Your Class Buzzing</i> (5 to 7, 7 to 9 and 9 to 11) by Molly Potter	These photocopiable books are full of innovative, user friendly, exciting and unusual activities that promote creative thinking and problem solving skills kids. All the activities have been tried and tested in the classroom many times by the author who is an experienced teacher.

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