Earlyarts Pocket Guide No.3

10 Great Techniques to Make Your Teaching More Creative

Earlyarts UK

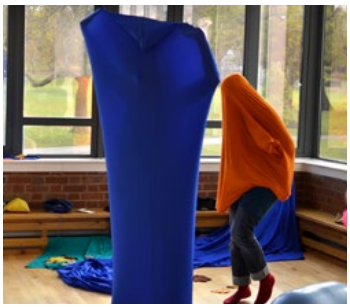
Earlyarts
nurturing children's creativity

10 Great Techniques to Make Your Teaching More Creative

Contents

Technique #1

Be inspired



Inspiration is the springboard for creativity and well-being, according to Scott Barry Kaufman, of the University of Pennsylvania.

Wouldn't it be great to have a new creative experience; one that is unusual, or one that you have been dreaming of for ages but not yet got round to? Why not just go ahead and book tickets to see some contemporary dance, music or theatre at your local arts venue? Or join the pottery or knitting class at your local adult education centre? Maybe you would enjoy supporting a sewing project with children in your local primary school, or joining a choir in time for a good old Christmas sing? Perhaps you would prefer doing something from home such as taking an online drawing course, or even learning how to juggle or walk on stilts?

These activities may involve an outlay of time, and perhaps even money. But you will be able to immerse yourself in something inspiring and special, with tremendous rewards for you, and lots of creative ideas and experiences that you can take back into your setting.

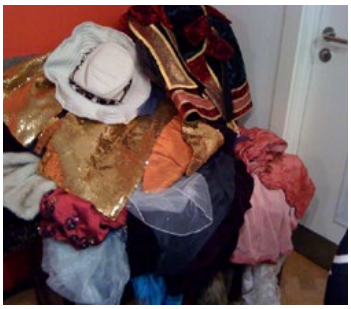
If you become passionate about it, set aside an hour after each event to do some research into your creative experience and keep a journal of what you find. This might be a simple album of images that you keep on Pinterest or print off the internet or a more descriptive log of the key elements that interest you. It doesn't have to be at all lengthy, in fact, the simpler the better. Present your findings to your children (Pinterest or Instagram makes this really easy), and see what interests them about your experience or what questions they have. It will become a passionate and meaningful discussion on both sides.

Here's some ideas to get you twinkling and sparkling all over:

- Access Arts
- Pottery courses
- Knitting and Crocheting
- Crafts Courses
- Design courses
- Guardian guide
- What's on around Europe – Lab for Culture
- Culture portal

Technique #2

Rejuvenate your Resouces



Have a clean out of your old resources that always get taken out time and time again to play the same games. Replace them with something that simulates a completely different set of responses; that takes your children's imaginations beyond the usual role play and into the unknown where a bench becomes a dinosaur and the nursery fence becomes a magnificent tapestry of ribbons.

The theory of 'loose parts' was first proposed by architect Simon Nicholson in the 1970's, who believed that it is the loose parts in our environment that will empower our creativity. Loose parts are any objects or materials in the environment that can be collected, played with, transported, combined, adapted, constructed, deconstructed, taken apart and put back together in different ways. In short, they are open-ended materials that can be used alone or in combination with other materials, in ways that are entirely determined by the child rather than predetermined by the designer of the object. In this way, the child stretches their imagination and world of possibility, and reaches much deeper levels of learning, discovery and connections.

Parts should be chosen for their 'intelligent' properties, such as their ability to be adapted and made into many different things (such as clay), or their particular unique design sparking off some really fascinating thinking (e.g. a bicycle gear hub). They should also be stored in an accessible way and replenished regularly to avoid becoming boring or predictable.

Loose parts can include natural, man-made or recycled materials, such as: stones, balls, logs, sand, gravel, big pieces of fabric, smaller strips of fabric such as ribbon, string ropes, wood, pallets, buckets, baskets, crates, cardboard boxes, flowers, shells, twigs, feathers, seedpods, pine cones, grass, straw bales, cushions, blankets, dressing up hats and clothes, paper, foil, masking tape, hoops, old tyres, nuts and bolts, bottle tops and caps, key-rings, springs, cardboard tubes, wires,

Technique #2

Rejuvenate your Resouces

Here's some resources we recommend - I can feel a clear-out coming on already!

- Remida
- Scrapstores UK
- House of Objects
- HOB Blog
- WEAVE
- Ribbons & Buttons & tapestries on Pinterest
- Loose Parts (Video):
- Kuttlefish – Recycled objects for sale (and great ideas!)

Technique #3

Adopt an Art Form

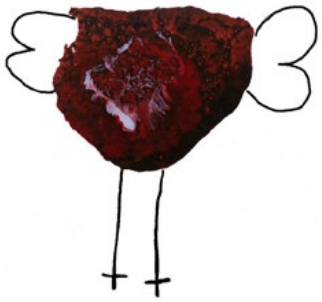
Looking at life through different lenses (or in this case, media) can give us a new perspective on things. This is what artists are so good at doing, because they are trained to observe things from a different perspective. They observe through all their senses – kinaesthetic, auditory, touch, sight and smell – just as children do. Artists can often see completely different aspects of what a child is doing or saying than we are able to see as educators because we tend to operate on more cognitive than sensory levels.

So, let's try putting different glasses on and see what happens! Take any one of the art-forms below and adopt one approach per fortnight or month to use as the main medium for your children's learning, whether its maths, science, language or literacy. Spend half an hour in your planning time each week to research various images or toolkits (see links below) that demonstrate different ways of using each medium, and make a top-three-list of the ones would most suit your children's needs and interests, your teaching style, their learning objectives and your environment for that fortnight. Focus on approaches that have an interesting process rather than produce an interesting (in our adult eyes) product.

Remember – you don't have to be the expert here, just the facilitator. If you start with a simple concept, then you'll leave the pathway wide open for children to build in their own complexities. This is not dumbing down. It is adventurous, open-ended teaching that puts faith in your young learners to come up with the exceedingly good ideas that they only they can. It's much harder to start with a complex idea and then try to break it down in ways that everyone understands in order to achieve a high level of learning.

Technique #3

Adopt an Art Form



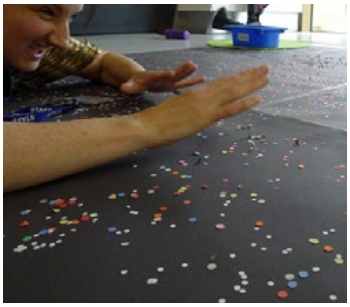
Be prepared to try your chosen approach a few times before something clicks and works well. Don't be afraid to move on to something else on the list if the one you thought would work really well simply doesn't. Unless you are assessing children to find out where they might need more support, don't try to over-analyse why some methods do or don't work well for different children. Sometimes there are numerous reasons to do with what's going on at home, whether or not they've had a good breakfast, enough sleep, too much aspartame in their juice, or their trousers are too tight. Sometimes it just comes down to the fact that it simply doesn't connect with their interests, or stimulate them in any other way. More often than not, even though they may not know why, young children will still be able to express their disengagement; some very vocally and physically, others just with a look or a slight turn of the head.

That's absolutely fine. We all learn in different ways, on different levels, at different times. When the conditions are right and everything in our life seems to be aligned, our brain opens up 'windows of plasticity' making us more receptive to learning and progression than we are at other times, even with exactly the same subject matter. You are not in control of your children's brains so, in your role as an effective learning facilitator, try to spot when it's not happening for these children, and have an alternative activity ready that is significantly different so as to trigger their engagement and pique their interests using different parts of their brains and bodies, e.g. one activity based on an active physical approach, and one based on a more cognitive, visual approach.

- Dance and Movement
- Storytelling and Role play
- Clay Play
- Den Building
- Puppetry and Masks
- Music Making
- Making Mini-Museums
- Scrap Modelling
- Tree Dressing
- Singing and Soundscapes
- Large Scale Painting or Drawing
- Percussion and Rhythm
- Weaving and macramé
- Video, Photography & ICT
- Cardboard Construction

Technique #4

Embrace Chaos (or make some space)



There are lots of ideas about why chaos stimulates the imagination.

Author Malcolm Gladwell talks about tidiness being one of the biggest obstacles to engaging in deeper levels of creativity. He believes that, whenever we clear up our space, we clear out the stores of ideas that fuel our imagination. For some of you this may be true. For others, the constant reminder of outstanding work from the increasing piles of stuff may become a little overwhelming, and for you it may be important to clear the space just so that you have room to think creatively.

Painter Amadea Bailey says, 'I thrive on making order out of chaos. I love taking the irrational world of my emotions, hopes, fears, dreams, desires and idiosyncrasies and sculpting and re-arranging them in myriad ways until order is found. And paradoxically in this process my mind becomes still. I open myself up to something much bigger than myself.' As we discussed in Chapter 2, a good spring clean (and replenishment of intelligent resources) can certainly stimulate some cracking new ideas.

Whether you veer more towards Gladwell or Bailey, there's certainly much to be said for enabling children's (and our) imaginations to flourish and grow through continuous provision. This is where the principal of free-flow play combines with the practice of having a constantly available supply of materials and resources that children can access for their learning and development. Continuous provision enables children to choose materials most suited to their purpose, and continue their learning over long periods of time dictated by them, rather than having everything cleared away in time for snack. This can be challenging for settings who have limited space, but I would say it essential to allocate spaces – both indoors and out - where continuous play can take place.

The benefits for children are that they can develop their ideas, connections, imaginations and emerging knowledge over space and time, which is how they learn naturally. Plus they can become totally immersed in their experiences, which can often lead to much deeper levels of thinking, sustained and detailed enquiry into ideas and skills they want to explore and master, which is an essential part of their cognitive, physical, social and emotional development.

Technique #4

Embrace Chaos (or make some space)

Professor Tina Bruce believes 'wallowing' to be an essential element of 'free-flow' play, which she describes as an equation: 'Free-flow play = wallow in past experiences + technical prowess, competence, mastery and control acquired'. The Excellence of Play edited by Janet Moyles, p193.

Children often take breaks from their play – they may be distracted by something else they want to investigate, have more than one idea at a time, remember something they thought of earlier, or simply need to restock their fuel or sleep. During these breaks (which can sometimes be misinterpreted as them having got bored or given up on what they were playing with), children may reflect on an entirely different approach to their play. But if we have cleared away their previous play journey, no matter how messy or unstructured it may have appeared, they will never gain have the chance to test out those additional thoughts or ideas.

The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Project refers to this concept as 'sustained shared thinking'. This is 'where two or more individuals work together in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate an activity, extend a narrative, etc. Both parties must contribute to the thinking and it must develop and extend the understanding.' In order to achieve this, the adult needs to engage in active listening, which is a skilled approached to hearing, interpreting and responding to the needs of a child in ways which have the appropriate amount of support and challenge. More details on this in Chapter 5.

Ferre Laevers developed the Experiential Education approach based on the value of connectedness in order to promote deep-level learning, that is, children making connections with their previous experience, with each other and with the learning environment and the stuff that they find there.

When children are immersed, or wallowing, in their play, they reach what Vygotsky called a 'zone of proximal development', where the level of challenge is just at the right level to take learning forward. In this place, says Laevers, children find a perfect dynamic that both fuels their play and bounces energy back to the teacher.

Csikszentmihayli described this as the 'state of flow'; the intense personal satisfaction that comes from the drive to explore how people and the world work through a series of personal experiences.

Technique #4

Embrace Chaos (or make some space)

So, whether you decide to embrace the chaos or simply create more space for your children's creativity, the process of doing so will provide the conditions for learning that we want to achieve in our 'enabling environments' where our children are deeply involved, engaged and inspired.

Take courage in embracing your creative chaos from these resources:

- Creative types: embrace chaos
- Is a more disorganized brain a more creative brain? -
- Interview with Experiential Education founder, Ferre Laevers, on how to encourage deeper level learning

Technique #5

Create a Learning Laboratory!

Children learn naturally through encounters and enquiry. Every experience impacts their understanding of the world and the way everything connects. Every time a child learns something new, the brain rewires itself based on the child's understanding within that experience. So how about we help them to really stretch their investigative experiences and have a lot of fun at the same time?

Set up an action research or laboratory space where real life conundrums, risks and challenges can be solved by your children. Source some imaginative role play costumes and props for scientists and explorers (e.g. magnifying glasses, microscopes, lab coats, silicone lab gloves, chunky tweasers, test-tubes, beakers, stethoscopes, cameras, picture encyclopaedias, atlases, map of the local area on the wall, passport-size photos of each child). Establish the rules of the game that all children can follow, e.g.

a. If you have a question about how things work but can't find the answer, put your photo on the Laboratory Investigation board and ask an adult to write down your question to go with your photo while you can remember it.

b. Each afternoon we will ask everyone the question to see if anyone knows the answer.

c. If no-one knows the answer, we will start an Action Research Investigation.

d. Adults are not allowed to answer the question but may provide extra resources to help the children find the answer.

This will stimulate children to think about their questions and not just put up ones that they think will be answered easily, as they will all want to be the subject of an investigation. If there are lots of good questions, you could have a vote to see which one you focus on each afternoon. You might want to split children up into small groups to investigate the whole question, or parts of the question, then bring their findings back together afterwards.

Technique #5

Create a Learning Laboratory!

Action research should take the form of

a. Clarify the specific question being asked and break it down into sub-questions if necessary.

b. Identify the facts or understanding that you already have.

c. Find out more facts and knowledge about the subject matter.

d. Decide if you have enough facts to work out the answer and, if not, go back to c.

Teachers should facilitate by asking open questions that help their children think about what other questions they need to ask themselves in order to research the answer.

Very often, children will veer in all sorts of odd directions (such as role play or story building about particular objects they learn about) which appear to take them further away from answering the question. That's fine! Whilst it may be important for the questioner to have their puzzle solved, this is not always as important for other children. The process of investigation will enable other children to retain and connect up so much new knowledge that they will make huge leaps in their learning, all whilst having a lot of fun investigating this question. You can avoid the groups becoming competitive by offering them different aspects of the challenge to solve. The sense of collaboration when reporting back on their findings is tremendous.

Some questions will not have an easy answer (such as, Why is water see-through? or Why do I have five toes and fingers?) and some questions you may simply not be able to answer at all. But the question itself will still be important to the child and will give rise to lots of interesting knowledge for all children (e.g. what the skeletal structure of fingers and toes looks like, how many bones make up each finger or toe, what the job of fingers and toes is in our bodies, what couldn't we do if we didn't have them, what would happen if we had more than five, etc.). So it's still worth investigating it, even if the final answer is 'We don't actually know!'. More often than not, children will find an answer they are happy with, and they are usually very intelligent ones (e.g. 'We have five fingers and toes because if we had any more or less, we couldn't get our gloves and shoes on').

Technique #5

Create a Learning Laboratory!

Don't worry too much about reaching the most 'accurate' answer. The objective of the Learning Laboratory is to help children think creatively, develop critical thinking and research skills, work collaboratively, build confidence in expressing their views, and enjoy their learning. Many accurate facts will arise during the investigations so it's fine to have lots of imagination thrown in for good measure, as long as any distinctly inaccurate facts are questioned in a positive way by the adults. If we were all right about everything we knew, life would be pretty boring!

You may also hear questions that reveal personal feelings or fears (such as, Why do I feel sad at bedtime? Or Why do Mummies sometimes cry?). You will need to exercise strength and sensitivity in scaffolding these questions - always give children the respect and space to investigate these sorts of issues in their own way, and facilitate ways to bring it back to things they can understand (e.g. shall we make a list of the things that sometimes make us cry and find out why?). These are some of the most meaningful sessions children can have together, as they learn so much about themselves and each other through investigating the reasons why another child feels the way they do.

As an alternative to enquiring about knowledge, you can encourage your children to investigate unusual or interesting objects using the Visible Thinking approach:

What do you see?

What do you think about that?

What does it make you wonder?

Investigate these links to find out more laboratory ideas for yourself:

Values and characteristics in developing environments of enquiry

Inquiry-based learning

Pedagogy of Listening

Listening to Children

Active Listening

Technique #5

Create a Learning Laboratory!

Exploring Children's Fascinations

Hands-On Science for Young Children

The Project Approach to Learning

Visible Thinking

Technique #6

Think Upside Down

As we know, it can be very easy to slip into learned behaviours, old ways of thinking or familiar ways of seeing the world. This is because the synapses that carry facts across the brain become stronger with regular use, and the synapses that are underused become weaker and, eventually, pruned away to leave more room for the stronger ones to grow. Therefore, the more we adopt the same approaches in our teaching, the stronger the synapses that are predisposed to those ways of thinking become, and the harder it becomes to do or see things differently! So if any of your colleagues have moaned about you being stubborn or inflexible, now you have a good reason as to why!

It affects all of us differently, and is as much influenced by our DNA which makes us predisposed to certain traits, as by our experiences and environment. But the good news is that we can absolutely do something about it. I would suggest that the very fact that you are reading this book says that you are at least willing to explore alternative approaches. That's great, and this chapter is dedicated to helping you retrain your brain with a simple exercise that will help to strengthen other synapses to help you see things differently.

If you have particular bits of your day that you find challenging, a little overwhelming, or just downright boring, I would encourage you to think about them differently by drawing upside down…. Drawing Upside Down is a technique we use to help educators observe differently by using a different part of their brain than the part that is constantly used to teach. By forcing your brain to look at something upside down, you remove the ability for it to revert to preconceived ideas of what something should look like or be. The technique was first published by Betty Edwards in her book, Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain (see resources below), and is a really amazing way to loosen up the brain parts that get a bit stuck. Here's the exercise in five easy steps:

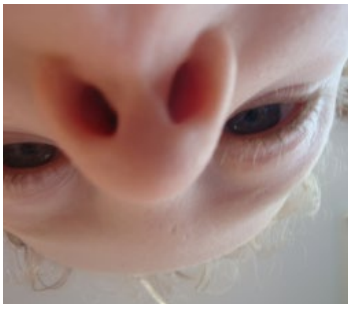
1. Grab a piece of white paper and draw a rectangular border about the size of your mobile phone to give you a line against which to measure the lines in the drawing.

2. Place the image from the next page next to your paper. IMPORTANTLY do not be tempted to turn the image or your drawing around until you have finished.

3. Observe the lines, shapes and spaces in the image, and start to

Technique #6

Think Upside Down



reproduce them onto your own paper.

4. Use your pencil to measure the distances between the lines, shapes and spaces.

5. Take your time and don't rush – this is not about artistic skill but about observation.

6. When you have finished, turn the images the right way up and compare your copy.

Nine times out of ten, our educators surprise themselves with how accurate their drawings are. Most would have said 'I'm not creative' or 'I can't draw', at the beginning. Then, when they remove the bit of their brain that tells them this based on the complexity of a drawing, they are amazed at actually how good they are at observation.

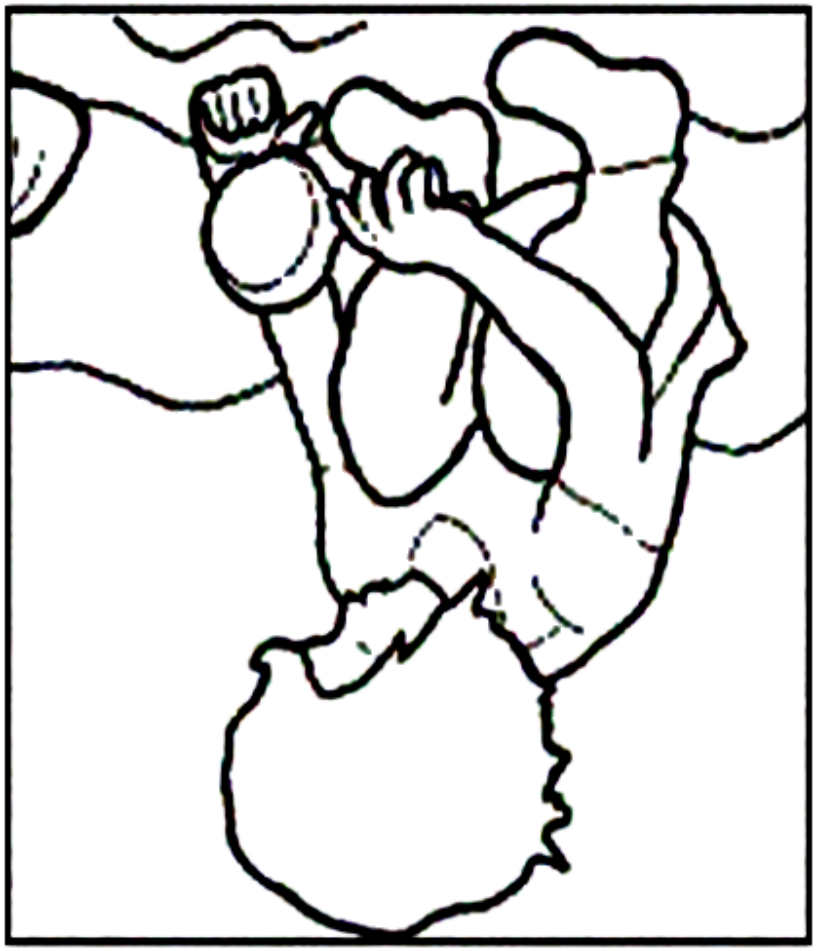
This exercise is a great one to do when you want to think about a difficult problem or challenge. Do an Upside Down Drawing first, and you will find it easier to think with a different part of your brain and see the problem before you as it really is, rather than as you might have perceived it beforehand.

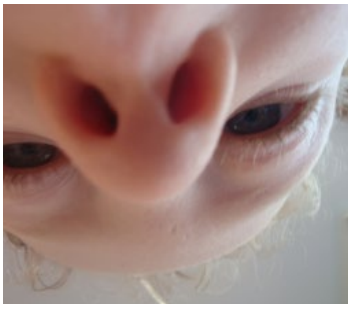
Another way to approach this is to literally reframe your thinking. Write down your challenge on a piece of paper. Then cut out picture frames from other pieces of paper and write on the top of each one the names of different people you respect in your life. These might be politicians, preachers, family or friends. As you place each picture frame over the paper with your issue written on, imagine what they would say about it, and write down the advice from their perspective.

This approach helps you to find new ways to frame a question, a puzzle, a challenge or an investigation, and can be useful with your children who are readers as well. It can result in seeing a solution or finding a new approach that you have never thought of before, and can transform complex or difficult work issues into something much more enjoyable.

Technique #6

Think Upside Down





[Peter Field demonstrates the Drawing Upside Down technique]

[Betty Edwards]

[How do creative teams work?]

[Doodle and Eat to trigger your creativity]

Technique #7

Take a DNA test!

No, not the stressful one involving needles. This is about understanding the strengths and gaps in your creative knowledge and skills. Doing a Developmental Needs Analysis (DNA) is both fun and revealing, designed to help you focus on what it is you should progress in your own professional portfolio. To start with, it's helpful to understand a bit more about different approaches to learning and how these fit with your own preferred learning styles.

In general there are four different approaches to learning, all of which are important:

- Learning about things (Knowledge)
- Learning to do things (Skills, Abilities, Competences)
- Learning to become ourselves, to achieve our full potential (Personal development)
- Learning to achieve things together (Collaborative Enquiry)

The first two approaches are the most familiar and often used in pairs such as knowledge and skills; theory and practice. The third, Personal Development, involves growing in to your full capacity and achieving your full potential. As well as intellect and skill, this includes purpose and identity. As in the EYFS, with this type of learning there are stages of development, where learning is incremental. Moving between stages is where the learning offers more of a transformation, e.g. from being a teacher to becoming a head of department. The development of the whole person is important because evidence shows that there is a strong link between individual personal empowerment and change in the wider system or organisation.

Collaborative enquiry is one of the keys to organisational learning, when learning can take place between people, and individuals co-operate in collective learning. This can also be referred to as action learning or team building, where the outcomes cannot be fully measured in terms of what individuals take away, but on what is created together. Collaborative enquiry forms the bridge between individual learning and the learning organisation

Understanding your own preferred learning styles is about understanding how best you perceive, process, re-organise and present information, in order to make it easier for you to do this in the future. Honey and Mumford (1982) became widely regarded for their

Technique #7

Take a DNA test!

self-tests which drew heavily from David Kolb's Experiential Learning theory, which itself drew from Piaget and Dewey. Honey and Mumford's model helps you identify your learning style in one of four categories:

Activist - learning best from activities which are:

- New experiences or active challenges where they can learn by doing
- Exciting, short tasks involving competitive team-work and problem-solving
- High visibility tasks such as leading meetings or giving presentations
- Opportunities to just 'have a go' rather than being a passive observer or follow instructions

Reflector - learning best from activities which offer:

- Time and space to think about or ponder activities before commenting or acting
- Opportunities to carry out detailed, rigorous research
- Time to focus on producing carefully considered analyses and reports, without pressure or tight deadlines
- Support structure within which to exchange views with other people, rather than providing immediate, intuitive responses.

Theorist – learning best from activities where:

- They can methodically work with ideas as part of a model or system, rather than from their intuition or emotions
- They can see the clear purpose and theory behind their activities
- They can identify or question the logic or interrelationships between ideas and situations, and can identify new ideas and concepts, where ambiguity and uncertainty are low
- They are intellectually stretched by being asked to analyse and evaluate

Technique #7

Take a DNA test!

Pragmatist – learning best from activities where:

- There is an obvious link between the subject matter and a 'real life' problem
- They can try out and apply practical techniques with support from a credible expert, especially when they are relevant to their own work
- They can concentrate on practical issues, such as drawing up action plans or giving tips to others, rather than going round in circles or discussing things without a point.

Assess your own learning styles here: https://www.talentlens.co.uk/develop/peter-honey-learning-style-series. Having completed the self-assessment, you can focus on strengthening areas of learning that are either underused or providing an obstacle, in order to become better equipped to learn from a range of everyday experiences.

An alternative is to consider the Index of Learning Styles created by Dr Richard Felder and Barbara Soloman in the late 1980s, which focuses more on the balance of learning styles and environments required to achieve your highest potential. The results show where you sit on the continuum of styles between Active or Reflective; Sensory or Intuitive; Visual or Verbal; Sequential or Global. These are also closely related to the Theory of Multiple Intelligences formulated by Howard Gardener.

Once you know your preferred learning styles, you can then identify what factors or environments help you to learn in this way, and how to apply this more broadly. You might want to focus on a learning experience you have had recently that created a change in the way you think about or do something. Ask yourself: What did I learn? How did I learn it? What factors helped me to learn? What changed as a result?

Similarly, think of an experience where you wanted to learn but didn't, such as ignoring feedback or resisting suggestions from a colleague or friend. Ask yourself: What did I resist? Why did I resist? What needs to change to prevent me from resisting in future?

Technique #7

Take a DNA test!

Finally, you can start to identify what learning gaps you have in terms of skills and knowledge, or creative dispositions, and identify the most effective ways of addressing these to fit with your learning styles. This might include doing any one of the following:

- Distance learning with a tutor
- Online Learning via the web
- Interactive workshops
- Learning with a mentor
- Training seminars
- Attending College
- Job shadowing
- Part time study
- Full time study
- Short specialist courses

Here's a few interesting articles on improving your learning styles:

Kolb D A (1984) Experiential Learning: experience as the source of learning and development Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall

Gardner H (1993) 10th edition Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences New York: Basic Books

Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire

Design a learning campaign for your classroom

Technique #8

Organise a Creative Cauldron

Judge Oliver Wendell Holmes Jnr said, '*Many ideas grow better when transplanted into another mind than in the one where they sprang up.*' He understood and harnessed the power of teamwork as he wrangled with many complex cases in the US Court of Justice.

Ask your colleagues to give you their top three ideas for staying creative and see what they come up with. It may not be as easy as you think! Many offer Brainstorming as a good way to come up with several creative ideas, but it's not my favourite recommendation as it often doesn't make the best use of a team's knowledge. Thinking 'outside of the box' like this can often result in lots of ideas that have little to do with the context of your challenge, and are difficult to make sense of. People's ideas are sparked better in response to a specific focus which helps to structure and shape their thoughts 'inside the box', such as a project plan or a specific challenge or line of enquiry to explore. Otherwise ideas can very quickly get lost and become meaningless or overwhelming.

A creative cauldron could consist of you and a friend, family member or colleague whose ideas and opinions you trust. In fact, it's often more useful to ask someone who doesn't work in your field how they might approach your challenge or plan. They will be able to bring a fresh perspective and a new set of eyes to the situation, or perhaps see it in their own context and be able to apply a more unique or creative solution that those who regularly face the same challenge in your field.

Better still, ask your children. Their minds are buzzing and fizzing with creative ideas about the world, and everything in it. If your challenge is too complex, break it down into its component parts and ask the children how they would approach each one (keeping it anonymous), or what would happen if…. You'll be surprised at how clearly they can see solutions or at least stimulate your own thinking towards reaching the best one.

Technique #8

Organise a Creative Cauldron

If you don't have access to a willing group of children just at the right time, use your best teaching skills to scaffold your own creativity by asking yourself expansion questions. Write your challenge down then expand on it by asking, 'What if…?' or 'What else…?' or 'What then…?'. To every different answer you come up with, ask yourself, 'Yes, and…?' in order to keep your thinking developing in a certain direction. You will very quickly find yourself unlocking a realm of ideas previously stored away in drawers labelled 'bonkers' or 'impossible'. Keep going with the expansion questions until your tacit knowledge becomes visible and tangible, and you'll find that these bonkers or impossible ideas suddenly become both sensible and possible.

For groups of slightly older children or adults, ideas can easily be generated using Brainwriting. Creativity trainer, Arthur B VanGundy, commandeered this term of Brainwriting which is the silent, written generation of ideas in a group. Dr VanGundy proposed that each person in a group writes down an idea (which could be in response to a challenge) on a Post-It note and passes it to the person on their right. The person receiving this idea then can do one of three things:

a. use the other's idea as a stimulus for a new idea, and pass it on to the next person;

b. use the other's idea to think of a modification, and pass it on to the next person; or

c. just pass the idea on to the next person without any addition or modification.

At the end of a set period of time (e.g., 10 -15 minutes), you collect the ideas, organise them into common themes or groups, and evaluate them either by yourself or in the group.

To make it more fun, VanGundy suggests writing ideas on the wings of paper airplanes (on different coloured papers) and inviting group members to exchange ideas by flying them to each other. Pick one up and use it as a stimulus, write down another idea on the plane, and throw again on command. Or write an idea on a larger piece of paper, tape it to your back, and then walk around a room with others who have done the same. You read someone's idea and then add any new ideas by writing on the paper on their back.

Technique #8

Organise a Creative Cauldron

Dr VanGudy's research indicated that brainwriting always resulted in more ideas than brainstorming, because the number of ideas generated increased in proportion to the opportunity for sharing them. I.e., brainstorming produces limited ideas and stimulation as there is often only one opportunity to respond to an idea.

Therefore it is hard to justify the term, 'That was my idea!' as it is clear that ideas offered by one person often don't take on their full value until they have been captured, interpreted, modified and applied in different ways by others. So get you creative cauldron bubbling away today and try out some of these fab ways to increase your own (and others) creativity!

- Dr Arthur B VanGundy's Brainwriting
- http://www.teachthought.com/teaching/10-team-building-games-that-promote-critical-thinking/
- http://99u.com/articles/7034/developing-your-creative-practice-tips-from-brian-eno
- http://creativesomething.net/post/77190582174/three-ways-to-develop-your-creative-expertise

Technique #9

Start a Curiosity Collection

There's no escaping the fact that children love to collect interesting objects. They like to look at and play with them for days and months afterwards, using all their senses. Whilst this may seem a bit whimsical, there are good reasons for these collective behaviours which apply just as much to us as adults.

Collecting natural objects such as insects, pine cones, stones, leaves, flowers, feathers or seed pods gives children an opportunity to connect with their tactile and visual senses in ways that might not be available to them through the smooth, single textured objects often found in the setting or at home. Objects that are prickly, furry or rough to the touch, that look or smell strange, that might be fragile and hard to capture, that deteriorate over time (and therefore change colour, size and smell) and therefore appear to be alive, have the most alluring qualities for a youngster who is trying to discover how the world works. These changeable qualities mean that the finder is not necessarily in control of what happens to the object – it is full of surprises, and therefore definitely not boring!

Non-natural objects such as foil, milk bottle tops, buttons, fasteners, pieces of material, ribbons, cellophane wrappers or even stamps, are just as exciting for other reasons, such as their malleability, their visual beauty, their feel, or other open-ended possibilities.

Collections give children valuable opportunities to nurture their curiosity, critical thinking, problem solving and fine motor skills. Children can use their collections to make comparisons, learn mathematical concepts (more than, less than, length, distance, shape, function), find out stories about the objects' past, select and sort objects into different categories and build a huge range of vocabulary in discussing all the possibilities that their collections present. They give rise to so many creative opportunities in the gathering, preparing, sorting and displaying of collections, not to mention the opportunities for shared experiences when communicating the properties and stories of their collections to others.

In the same way collections can be extremely valuable for us adults. They help us focus on, grow and share a particular interest. They enable us to preserve memories or feel more rooted to a particular place, event or time. Or they can simply provide an opportunity to collect and create things of beauty that make us happy. Why not start your own collection?

Technique #9

Start a Curiosity Collection

Here's a few ideas of natural and non-natural (but open-ended) materials to get your collection started:

- Insects (avoiding any protected species such as butterflies)
- Pine cones
- Stones and pebbles
- Leaves
- Flowers
- Flower Collecting and Pressing
- Feathers
- Seed pods
- Fossils
- Buttons
- Phillumeny (Match books and boxes)
- Keys
- Boxes
- Paperweights
- Mini-books
- Artist Trading Cards
- Photos of other cultures

Technique #10

Love your Creativity

Artists and teachers both report that they have creative spurts when work becomes easier and altogether more fun. Often these can get blocked – especially for those of you working to constant deadlines where the fun of the job is all but a distant memory! In order to avoid those blocks (which at best can lead to boredom or frustration and, at worst, can lead to meltdown), it's important to recognise what it is that sparks our creativity, and how to love and sustain this.

In an analysis of 12,000 daily diaries, the authors of The Progress Principle, Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer, researched what makes people happy, motivated, productive and creative at work. They found that the most common factor affecting people's happiness was their ability to make progress on one single, meaningful piece of work. They call this the 'progress principle.' It's not so much about making massive changes like finding a cure for cancer or painting the Sistene Chapel, but about making changes and progress in small things that make a difference on a local level. They found that small wins that are of value to you can really boost your inner work life and spark your creativity.

Why not write down the one thing where you have made significant progress today, no matter how small? Identify the factors that have enabled that progress to happen; it might have been encouragement from colleagues, careful planning, or a motivating environment that made it easier to progress. Or it could have been something as simple as having the right sort of snacks or a short walk around the block to get some fresh air.

Fuel for the body is also fuel for the brain. If you take care of the basic needs of your life (remember Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs?) like the right sort of food, drink and short periods of exercise, you will free up space in your mind and body to focus on the more complex, creative and exciting stuff. This is because food and exercise both release nutrients such as glucose or hormones such as adrenaline into the body which increase the amount of oxygen in the blood. This increase in oxygen enables your synapses to connect more easily and fire electrical impulses between the neurons, which is how information is carried across the brain. So, the more of the right food, drink and exercise you take, the more active and creative your brain can become, without it feeling like such a slog. It's not rocket science, but our basic biology.

To sustain this level of progress, identify what you can do tomorrow to

Technique #10

Love your Creativity

recreate those factors. Also identify where things have inhibited your progress, motivation or creativity and aim to get rid of them, as much as you can, one by one. Write down your plan, keep it simple, then you're more likely to act on it.

By the way, I'm starting from the premise that we are all creative, as I believe we truly are. Whether you're focussing on lesson planning or dance workshops for your children, a creative approach can be embedded in to everything you do. Very often, when the balance of the creative and the mundane is right, the job becomes much more enjoyable, meaningful and fulfilling. You can easily employ some simple creative techniques to spice up the way you approach your work (such as writing down your ideas for lesson planning on post-it notes whilst you walk around the block, then they will be much easier to formulate into a structure when you sit down at the laptop; or start with any one of the exercises in this pack to stimulate your thinking on a different level).

However, some of you will persist in the belief that you are not creative. This is what I would call a limiting belief. Although we are all born creative, at some point along the way, we build up enough inhibitions or lose enough self-esteem to believe that we are no longer creative. For the record, I'll just clarify that you don't need excellent artistic skills to be creative. Sometimes these can help, depending on what creative activity or approach you want to undertake, but skills can always be learned so there's no reason for this to be an obstacle that can't be overcome.

More often than not, whether we have artistic skills or not, the problem rests in our minds. Perhaps someone has led us to believe that we couldn't draw, or our dance moves were awful, or our craft creations were rubbish. Imagine if we said that to our children!

Or, in this image-conscious society of advertisers trying to make us constantly dissatisfied with what we already have and who we are, we are presented with images of trained experts against whom we compare ourselves and decide we couldn't possibly be like them. Well, on the one hand, we're right – we can't be like anyone else. We can, and should, be ourselves. However, that absolutely doesn't mean we can't nurture our own creative skills and passions.

Just as with our children, we should all believe in our own creative potential, and remove any limiting beliefs that inhibit this. Focus on one

Technique #10

Love your Creativity

or two things you are very creative at. It might be a craft such as baking or sewing. It might be construction, DIY or gardening. It might be that you have a real eye for colour, can turn a few steps on the dance floor or can hum a mean Christmas carol! Everyone has something they can be proud of. Focus on your creative strengths and find ways to introduce these into your teaching.

You might ask your older children to sing their science homework to the tune of 'we wish you a merry Christmas', or that you use colour mapping to identify different mathematical concepts, or large-scale chalk drawing on the playground to explore concepts of space and travel. There are several ideas for creative approaches to teaching early years and primary children in Earlyarts 'Nurturing Young Children's Learning' series. In the meantime, have a think about your creative strengths, and identify where you could use those more in the classroom.

The more you introduce them, the more confident you will become in using them on a daily basis, and the more your creativity and inspiration will grow. You'll find your own teaching will become much more enjoyable, and your thoroughly engaged children will learn more easily and quickly. That's got to be worth trying! Finally, you might find these five principles useful in becoming a Pioneer of Change in both your own and your children' creativity.

Take a look at these resources for further reading on developing your creativity:

Sir Ken Robinson on compassion for our creativity (excusive for Earlyarts)

www.schaefersblog.com/10-ways-to-develop-your-creativity/

Born Creative

David Kelley on How to build your creative confidence

Sir Ken Robinson on why schools kill creativity

Thanks for reading

Special Offers

Discover the Power Of Play

Become an advocate for play with our online training course and help make play valuable in your setting

20% off for readers of this guide

You have really challenged my own way of thinking and made me critically reflect on my own practices in the types of play that I include in my current program and what I can further implement. Thank you
Julie Trembath, Early Years Educator. Melbourne, Australia

The Nurturing Young Children's Learning Collection

All our 20 guides to help you transform your creative classroom

20% off for readers of this guide
use coupon code **10TIPS20**

Resources that are accessible and speak in plain English are really valuable for educators who are just looking for the right starting points to try out and build on their creative confidence. The booklets do just that and I'm absolutely thrilled to be able to use them to support my students practice
Gai Lindsay, PhD Candidate and Lecturer, Bachelor of Education: The Early Years, University of Wollongong

About the Author

Ruth Churchill Dower

As Director of the award winning, national network for the arts and early childhood sectors, Ruth established Earlyarts in 2002, and scaled it up to having a national footprint in 2009.

Earlyarts' vision is to enable hundreds of schools and nurseries to embed creative approaches to teaching and learning that help young children achieve outstanding results and fulfil their incredible potential. To achieve this, Earlyarts works in collaboration with early childhood professionals, artists and cultural organisations who, together, have a hugely positive impact on the lives of over 20,000 children and families.

In 2009, Ruth won the Ogunte Women's Social Leadership Awards for her work in building Earlyarts to make real change happen in young children's lives. Ruth also works closely with Baroness Estelle Morris of Yardley (former Secretary of State for Education – 2001, and Minister for the Arts - 2002) on leadership development, and with Sir Ken Robinson, who are both Patrons of Earlyarts.

Through Earlyarts consultancy practice, Ruth has worked with major national clients such as the Independent Schools Association, Al Jalila Cultural Centre for Children, INCERTS, Futurelab, Arts Council England, Arts Council Ireland, CAPE UK, Department of Education, Department of Culture, National Museums Liverpool, Youth Music, and many nurseries, schools and Children's Centres. Ruth has also been a visiting lecturer at Huddersfield University, the University of Hertfordshire, the University of East Anglia, and Norwich School of Art and Design.

Ruth is a prolific writer and media commentator, bringing insight and debate to key issues in creative early education through her blog. Ruth's most recent publications can be read freely at: Creativity or Play? Why early arts professional should not have to choose (2012, The Guardian), Born Creative (2010, Demos, ISBN:978-1-906693-54-1); Cultural Entitlement in a Nutshell, (2010, Lulu, ISBN:978-1-4092-8587-8), Imagination for Life and Learning (2006, Arts Council England, ISBN: 0-7287-1191-5), International Creative Practice in Early Years Settings (2004, Arts Council England, ISBN: 0-7287-1063-3),

About the Author

Ruth Churchill Dower

Ruth is a fellow of the RSA, a founding member of the Cultural Learning Alliance and the national Early Years Strategy Group for Youth Music, a member of the Social Enterprise Coalition, an associate member of Small Size, an accredited Relational Dynamics Coach, and a qualified Mountain Survival First Aider.

Ruth lives in Yorkshire with her two children and spends any free time in the hills and mountains paragliding, climbing, biking, playing her violin, puddle-splashing and generally having as much fun with her children as possible before tea.

Please feel free to get in touch and discuss how we can help meet your needs. Have a look at our work at http://earlyarts.co.uk .

Enjoyed this guide?

There's a lot more to discover. Take a look at earlyarts.co.uk/whats-special to see what's in each wonderful pack. Purchase and download your pack and start using them today!

- Baby Dance and Mirrors
- Butterfly Printing and Wellies
- Carving and Floating
- Clay Worlds
- Den Building
- Flour Dance and Action Drawing
- Indoor and Outdoor Story Spaces
- Mark Making with Charcoal
- Movement through Body Doodles
- Movement through Stretchy Bodies
- Musical Lycra and Scarves
- Photography of the Environment
- Pigments and Pebbles
- Playful Singing Voice
- Projections and Painted Flags
- Story Building
- Tissue play and puppetry
- Towers and Bunting
- Sensory Spaces and Shoe Box Worlds

Published by Earlyarts UK Ltd
This document is available in both electronic and print versions
Copies can be obtained from www.earlyarts.co.uk