



Building parent-school partnerships

WORDS Jenny Brockis

Creating creative kids

Dr Jenny Brockis explains the 4 main ingredients for creativity and why it is so important for whole brain development in kids.

"If you're not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything original." Sir Ken Robinson - author and advisor on education in the arts.

Creativity and imagination help us to better understand our world. A creative mind looks for ways to do things differently; we see things with a fresh pair of eyes.

Creativity adds value to and enriches lives and our kids have wonderful fertile minds just brimming with ideas. The problem is we can stifle that creativity, particularly during those upper school years when sticking to the demands of a busy curriculum takes increasing priority.

Research tells us that those kids who continually access creative outlets are the more successful students, because creativity is linked to whole brain development. Brain wise, creativity is important for the development of language, problem solving, reasoning skills, understanding and learning.

Being able to think "outside the box" is what makes for a better brain. Rather than pushing your child to spend hours doing their piano practice, spending some time in unstructured creative play may pay far

greater dividends in the form of them being better at problem solving and finding alternative ways of doing things.

Encouraging curiosity matters, and we as parents and educators can do much to promote the engagement, fun, focus and perseverance required to provide an innovative environment.

There are four main ingredients required for creativity:

- Mess
- Mistakes
- Make-believe
- Mucking in together

Creativity is messy

So the kitchen looks like a bomb has gone off, the lounge suite has been completely disassembled and the dog is wearing an outfit that looks mysteriously like your best jacket! But, all that activity has resulted in that first cake being made, the princess's castle being refurbished and the dog being an active participant in a rehearsal for that very important play.

Creativity is full of mistakes

If we don't get things wrong, how can we tell when they are right?

There is no room for perfectionism in creativity. Allowing our kids to get things wrong and discover what doesn't work is just as important as discovering what does. It teaches them to deal with failure and to realise that finding out the wrong answer matters far more than never starting to look in the first place.

It was Thomas Edison the inventor of the light bulb that said, "I have not failed. I've just found 10 000 ways that won't work."

Creativity is make-believe

Stories are a great way to transport our children's minds to far off and magnificent places. It allows them to create their own visual images of the people, characters and places. Manufacturing creative artistry allows saucepan lids to become cymbals, modelling clay to become teacups and saucers, boxes and tin foil to become knights on horseback, and colourful artworks the latest masterpiece destined for the fridge door.

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... Creating creative kids ...

It's not about a pretend reality; kids know the difference. Their make-believe world allows them to explore possibilities and options.

Creativity is mucking in

Creativity can be a solo performance but is often a collaborative piece. Joining young minds together amplifies the creative process.

Mucking in is about using an array of different (and sometimes unusual!) materials that can be repurposed or used to create new objects.

Whether your child is six or sixteen, managing their creativity starts with sharing the value we hold for the arts and new ideas. It's about taking trips to an art gallery, a science show or museum. It's about travelling to different places, trying different foods and learning about different cultures. It's about reading and sharing books, and talking to our kids to encourage an ongoing sense of wonder and curiosity about their world.

Top tips for fostering creativity:

- 1 Give permission for freedom of expression** It's not about you or what you think is the right way to create something. Encourage your child to explore, and create on their own terms while having fun.
- 2 Encourage play** Encourage active unstructured play that takes them away from the TV, tablet or computer for a while.
- 3 Celebrate your child's creative expression** That's what fridge doors, corkboards, and mantelpieces are for! It's not to reward the masterpiece itself (that's a quick way to stymie any future creative activity!), but to celebrate the process of exploration and discovery.
- 4 Foster originality by being accepting of difference** While some rules are important to keep our children safe, being allowed to do things their way when developing ideas, is what helps shape their individuality.

Jenny Brockis

Dr Jenny Brockis is a Medical Practitioner, speaker and author. She specialises in brain health and the science of high performance thinking. Her new book *Future Brain* (Wiley) is available in all good book stores and online. www.drjennybrockis.com



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