



Key messages

- Creativity emerges when children become absorbed in exploring the world around them.
- Directing children's attention during play often disturbs a child's flow of ideas but adults can, and should, contribute by following children's leads.
- Sharing children's thinking makes adults aware of children's interests and understandings and enables them to foster development of knowledge and ideas.
- Children discover new meanings when they explore possibilities and create new connections between people, places and things.
- Creativity fosters critical thinking by allowing children to review and reinvent.

What Creativity and Critical Thinking means

Creativity and Critical Thinking are processes that are child led but which benefit greatly from the sensitive contributions of others. The processes involve making connections between things, people or places in ways that are new and personally meaningful. They occur in all areas of Learning and Development.

Why Creativity and Critical Thinking is important

Creativity is very much a process and often there is no clearly identifiable outcome or product. Yet, the outcome in terms of children's confidence and skill in learning can be immense. In having scope to explore new possibilities and create new and exciting connections between people, places and things, children discover meanings in their worlds. They are also learning that they can transform ideas and rethink what they know. In this way, creativity can transform understanding by fostering critical thinking and allowing children to review, reinvent and make new meanings.

Babies and children are naturally creative and flexible in their play, turning anything that they can reach into something that they can investigate. Creativity emerges as they become absorbed in exploring what things are like and what they can be made to do. These self-initiated investigations help them to give meaning to the things, sounds and situations around them and they seem to have their own agendas and ideas as they play. The range of this play increases significantly from around the age of eight months when most children begin to move around. This surge in capacity for physical exploration enables them to find new things and new places to explore and increases ingenuity. For example, a box can become a hiding place, a house or a cave.

By directing children's attention during play adults often disturb a child's flow of ideas, yet they should contribute. Simply being attentive to a child's explorations and inventions is helpful as this promotes a sense of security and gives licence to experimentation and risk-taking. More purposeful contributions involve tuning in to children's ideas and helping to take them forward. Pierce (2000) speaks of play, story making and creative acts occurring in the co-constructed worlds of adults and children. Sharing and sustaining children's thinking in this way makes adults aware of children's interests and understandings and enables them to foster development of ideas and skills.

Effective practice in relation to Creativity and Critical Thinking

Making connections

- Help children to make connections in their learning by linking free play to adult-led activities. For example, read the story of 'The Three Billy Goats Gruff' and then set up a bridge over a 'river' of blue cloth in the block play area and display pictures of bridges.
- Encourage creativity and opportunities for all children to link their ideas to new situations by introducing:
 - new places, things and situations to children who have restricted mobility or who are less motivated to move;
 - materials, artefacts and spaces to children with visual impairments;
 - opportunities for children with hearing impairments to experience and experiment with sounds through physical contact with musical instruments and other sources of sound.
- Tell stories that present different possibilities within familiar situations to stimulate children to make new connections. For example, read *Way Down Deep in the Deep Blue Sea* by Jan Peck where bath-time becomes an imaginative exploration of an underwater world. This might stimulate enquiry into sea life and can add creative and imaginative dimensions to water play.
- Value what parents tell you about the things their children do at home. Find out about their games, pretend play, artefacts and stories that they enjoy at home and build on these contexts in the setting to stimulate creativity.
- Provide opportunities for children to express their ideas in a variety of ways, for example, through movement, dance, painting, imaginative play and language.
- Appreciate children's ideas and individual ways of capturing and representing them.
- Make it easier for children to make connections by giving them easy access to resources and allowing them to move materials from one place to another.

Transforming understanding

- Create conditions within which children are inspired to be creative and rethink ideas, for example, create novel spaces by moving furniture or promote new relationships by changing age groupings.
- Provide resources from a variety of cultures to stimulate new ideas and ways of thinking.

Sustained shared thinking

- Give children time to explore and develop their initiatives. Encourage them to discuss what they are doing and what they want to achieve.
- Build on children's ideas as you help them to see new possibilities in their play.
- Listen to and discuss children's ideas; offer suggestions and pose questions that extend their thinking.

References

Pierce, D. (2000) 'Maternal management of the home as a developmental play space for infants and toddlers', *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, May–June, vol.54, no.3, pp.290–99.