

Enhancing creativity in art education through brainstorming

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Abstract

Enhancing creativity is as important as teaching art and design principles and elements of art. Creativity has to be developed and constantly exercised. The purpose of the research reported in this image text was to experiment with ideas in the literature about creativity in art learning contexts and new theories about short-term, highly performance-based brainstorming lessons. In this research, brainstorming techniques were used with two different age groups. For the younger students, brainstorming helped them express their ideas quickly and freely. For the university students, a brainstorming lesson carried out in parallel with practice and theory lessons had a strong effect on their performance in long-term projects. Brainstorming sessions can be useful therefore in keeping creativity alive.

Keywords

creativity
brainstorming
art
education

Creativity

The word 'creativity' has been used synonymously with 'discovery', 'originality', 'invention', 'innovation' and 'intuition'. According to Boden (1996, p. 75), creativity means 'bringing into being or producing something out of nothing'. But creative products should have value. Another definition is 'forming associative elements into new combinations', or 'imagining something that is unimaginable'.

Creativity is not a talent or a gift. It is like a muscle that is strengthened when it is used. Creativity is a state of mind that has to be nurtured and exercised. According to Walberg (1998, p. 342), creativity depends on talent, but persistence can overcome initial deficits, handicaps and disabilities. The most important requirement for creativity, however, is being aware of problems and the ability to explore alternative ways of solving them.

According to Sternberg (1988, p. 434), some of the characteristics of creative people are that they are articulate and verbally fluent, are imaginative - metaphorically speaking, flexible and can employ a range of concepts, categories and images. Creative people are skilled decision-makers who have the capacity to make independent judgements, cope well with novelty, take risks and find order in chaos; they question norms and assumptions, are alert to gaps in knowledge, prefer non-verbal communication and visualize things internally.

Creativity and art education

Before we dwell on ways in which art education can trigger creativity, it is of great importance to have a brief look at what blocks it. Barriers to creativity may be self-imposed, such as a fear of looking foolish, adherence to conventional patterns of thinking, prejudice, a tendency to evaluate ideas too quickly or a desire for conformity. Kirisoglu (2002) has found that an inadequate art curriculum or learning environment (for example, one with no visits to galleries or museums, no specialist equipment, the classroom is crowded or extreme perfectionism is the goal) can block creativity.

However, creativity can be enhanced through art education, and art teachers can encourage more spontaneous, fearless and innovative ways of thinking among students. Successful in-class experiments can be carried out through activities such as writing short poems, staging improvisational drama or imagining the ordinary in extraordinary ways. It is important that the classroom atmosphere is not repressive. The teacher should keep track of individual students' ideas and the experimental results that emerge from their thinking; these ideas can then be extended through whole class discussion.

Art educators can assist creative growth by helping students in other ways as well; for example, by showing appreciation of their personal ideas and potential, respecting unusual ideas, rewarding originality, motivating them and acknowledging their creative potential.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a creativity-enhancing technique. It is a wide-ranging and far-reaching activity, aimed at generating new ideas (Rawlinson, 1989, p. 35). It involves assembling a group of people to find as many solutions to a problem as possible. One person's idea stimulates others, and new connections and correlations are discovered between unrelated things.

Brainstorming has been used successfully in advertising, sales, production, management and in research and development; in fact, in any activity in which the generation of new or different ideas is the goal (Parnes & Harding, 1962, p. 287). But in art education, brainstorming can be a means for generating ideas and increasing creativity. It can be used at the beginning of a practical project or just to trigger the creative mind. I have found that groups of primary-school children can expand on their ideas in very short periods of time using this technique. When brainstorming sessions are regarded merely as 'throwing out ideas aimlessly' results are poor, but with the right type of structure they can be very productive.

A practical example

I have incorporated brainstorming into lessons for children aged 6 to 9 years old from different schools. I created a learning environment in a little amphitheatre located between two children's parks in the housing complex where I live. Thus, I was able to organize the time schedule for my research with the children and their parents, who are my neighbours. I decided to carry out the study during weekdays after 4 p.m., assuming that they would

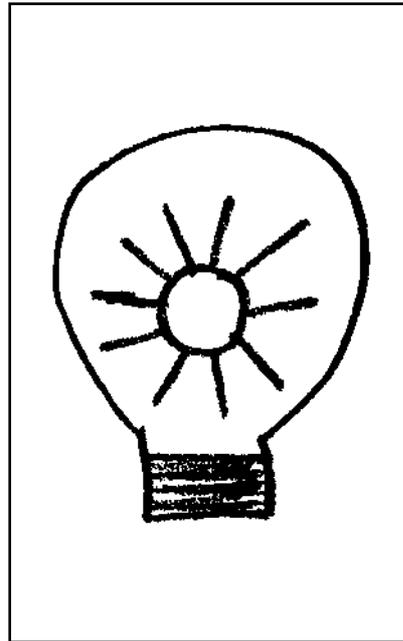
be more motivated and needing to relax after school and before doing their homework. Over two weeks I conducted six hour-long lessons. I gave each of the children a sketch book and black pen to help them focus on ideas and drawings. The first step was to define creativity as a group. I offered some general definitions and asked them to define it in their own words. They defined it as 'finding a treasure', 'discovering unknown things', 'talking with nature', 'doing different things from other people', 'inventing something', 'having many organs like eyes, ears and a mouth', etc. Then I asked the children to draw (make a picture of) their ideas about creativity. Afterwards, I asked them which drawings were creative and why. The adjectives they used to describe the most creative pictures were 'original', 'different from the others', 'illogical', 'funny', 'exaggerated' and 'individual'.

In the next study I asked the children to make a second drawing about creativity and a creative person. An important result of this second study was that the children reflected on the ideas generated by the group by looking at drawings from the previous lesson. In this study the ideas generated began to intermix and develop more rapidly using the brainstorming guidelines of 'cross-stimulation', 'suspending judgement' and 'freewheeling'. The image-text featured in this article shows that their understanding of creativity was very similar to the ideas in the research previously discussed.

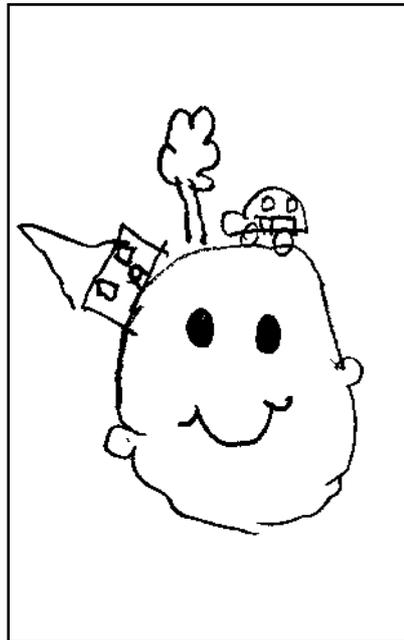
Note

This image-text is an abridged version of a paper called 'Enhancing Creativity in Art Education and Brainstorming in Lessons', presented at the InSEA European Regional Conference in Istanbul in 2004. Readers can access more detailed information about the techniques of brainstorming used in the experiment by contacting the author.

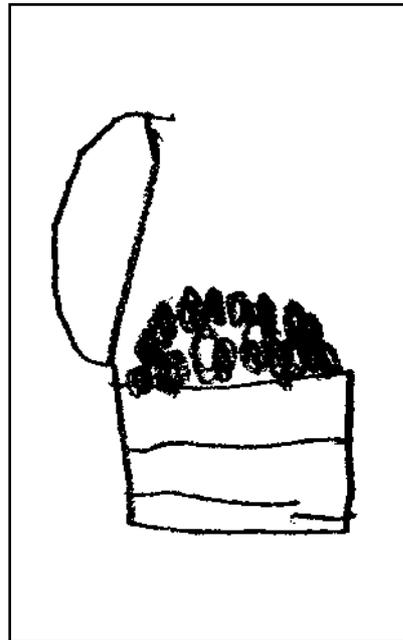
Creativity is...



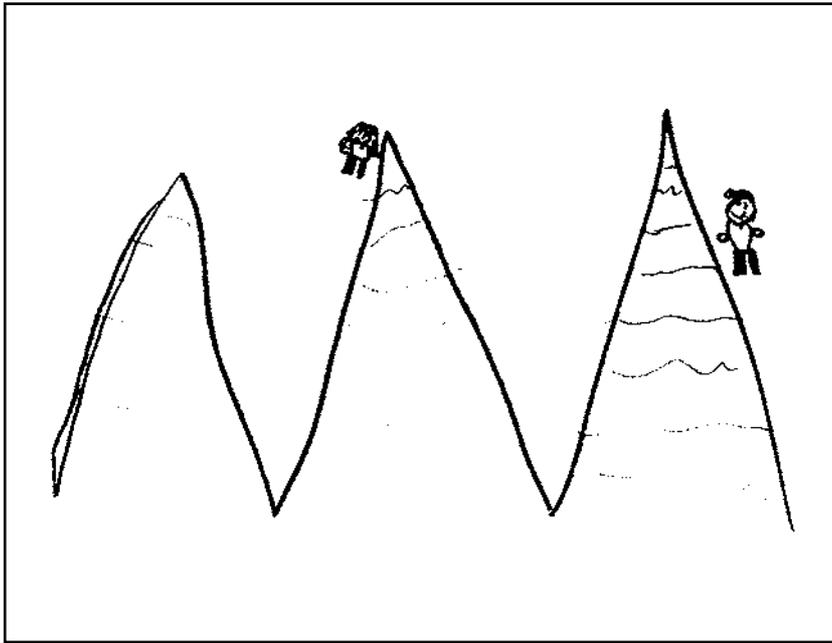
Putting the sun in an electric bulb



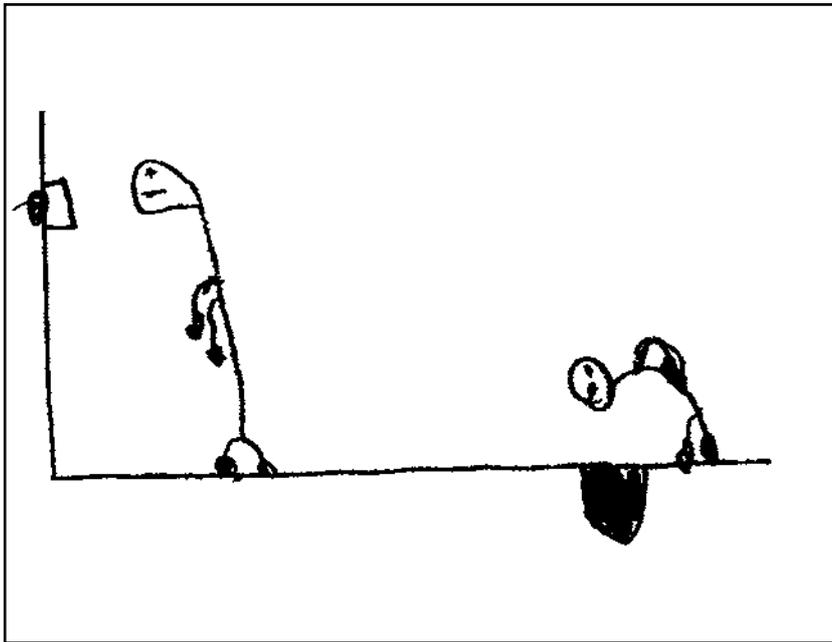
Having many things on the head



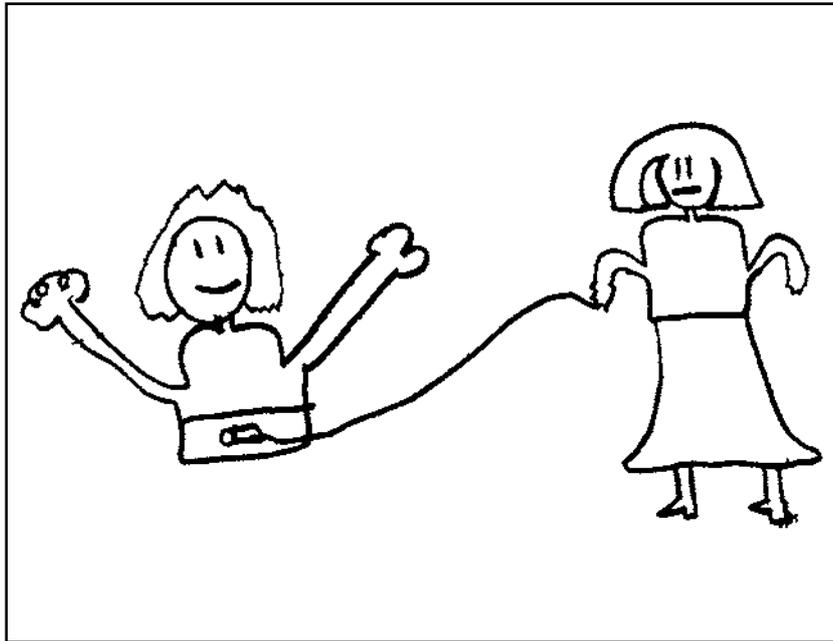
Finding a treasure



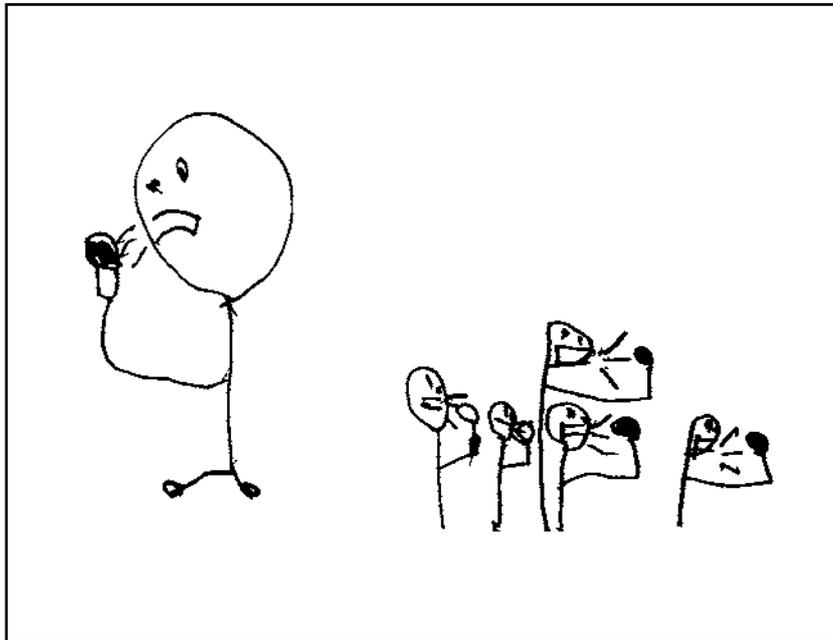
Being top of a mountain



Discovering unknown places



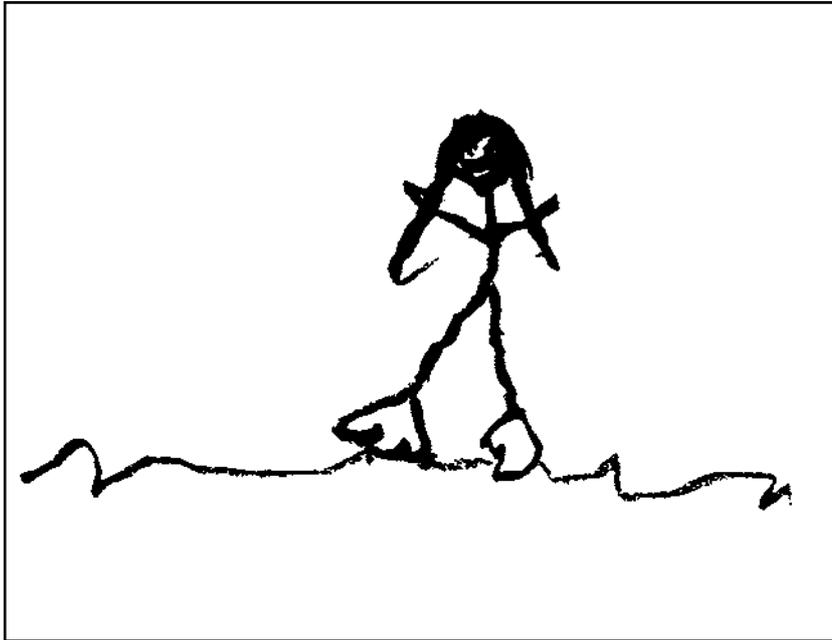
Putting a bell onto someone's belly and ringing it



Singing a different song than the others



To go away from the world



Walking on water

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