Creativity in a Child

A lot of people think creativity is inborn, like talent, intelligence, personality; but indeed it is proven by experts that it is possible to encourage or inhibit the development and expression of creativity, especially in young children. Creativity is not limited to artistic and musical expression; it is a key component for science, math, and even daily lives – it is essentially a form of problem solving, which is a critical skill needed when facing different aspects of life as one grows.

Creativity involves a special skill set of problem solving, one that cannot be answered by the obvious (e.g. math, logical thinking) nor taking any conventional responses; it involves adaptability and flexibility of thoughts. That is why we usually find creative people are more flexible and better problem solvers, making them able to adapt to new environments, dealing with changes and taking advantage of new opportunities easily.

In the creative industry such as writing, advertising and design, creativity means coming up with new ideas that are i) totally from scratch, or ii) improvisation of an existing idea, or iii) a combination of 2 or more existing ideas. Working in the creative industry myself, there are some tools we use to help generate ideas:

1. “What if” – magnify your imagination, go against the
   convention. Ask things that are illogical, e.g. What if boats could fly? What if your dog became a monster? What if all houses were sold at only $10?

2. Deprivation – Step out of your comfort zone. Take a substance out of the equation and come up with alternatives or substitutes. For example, imagine no phones existed, how would you communicate with Daddy in the office? Imagine there were no sun, we had to live in the dark for 24 hrs, 7 days a week, how would you get by each day? What if you didn’t have brushes but you would like to paint on a big canvas, how would you do it?

3. Role-play – if you were a certain person, what would you do? How would you dress and behave? What would you say to your friend?

4. Random words – use a random word as a stimulus, find associations, and use the association to create an idea or construct a sentence. For example, you see a “cat”. What does cat do? They pur, meow, scream, crawl, hide..., and come up with all word associations about what a cat does. You can go as crazy as coming up with a “catwoman” story!
For young children, the focus of creativity should be on the process of generating ideas. Most people nowadays argue that toys, tablets and most forms of entertainment inhibit children’s creativity, where they provide endless streams of characters, images, props that put children’s imagination at rest. They no longer need to imagine, compose or construct what an airplane is like and what makes it fly. It indeed all depends on how you cultivate the atmosphere at being exploratory, fun, and learning at home.

Things to have and do to be creative at home:
- Set a time (30 mins to 1 hr) of a day dedicated to “play”.
- Let your kids lead. Allow them the freedom to explore their own ideas and do what they want, don’t be bossy!
- Prepare plenty of tools (not toys), such as petri dishes, papers, scissors & glue, even daily necessities like empty soda bottles, toilet roll or aluminum foil.
- Encourage kids to make mistakes. Creative thoughts can be curbed by their fear of failure and judgment. Start by sharing your recent little mistake, make a little fun out of it, so that they understand it is fine to fall – and get up to explore again.
- Be adventurists together. Celebrate innovation and creativity. Explore different dimensions together like your favorite designers, musicians, scientists. Share your passion for your recent new discoveries.
- Keep asking questions, and don’t forget to try applying the above tools.
- Lastly, have fun together! Not only kids grow, we as parents can learn from kids too, day by day.

Appendix
Sources:
http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/raising-happiness/post/7_ways_to_foster_creativity_in_your_kids
http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/raising-happiness/post/back-to-school-play_and_academic_success

Writer: Anne Leung
Allison Lau (N Daisy (a))(2014-2015)