



Nurturing creative thinking from an early age

Spontaneous, creative thinking comes naturally to very young children – it's as they grow older that they become more inhibited. In the second of a two-part series, Marcelo Staricoff explains how to capture that early creativity and embed a lifelong love of thinking and learning.

In **the first article in this series**, I described how, at Hertford Infant and Nursery School in Brighton, we have worked towards developing a 'Joy of Not Knowing' (JONK) approach to teaching and learning, which is based on shared values and lifelong learning attributes to encourage children to develop a love of learning and a high level of self-esteem.

We have found that the JONK approach is particularly efficient at removing any worry associated with feelings of 'not knowing it' or 'not being able to do it'. Enjoying not knowing, however, has to be taught, and teaching the whole curriculum through the JONK approach requires specific time to be set aside.

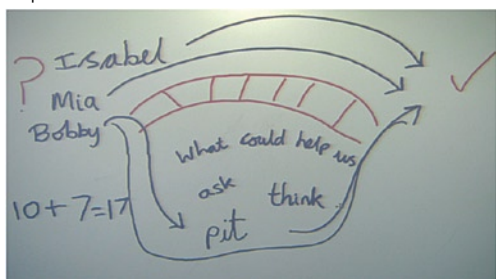
We now devote the first week of every academic year to what we call a 'Learning to Learn Week', during which we equip the children with all the tools and strategies that will enable them to access their learning throughout the year and make them feel successful as individuals and as learners. See the box 'Our Learning to Learn Week' for an overview of how we structure the week.

Into the Pit!

An excellent way of launching a Learning to Learn Week is to begin by sharing with the children 'The Pit Model of Learning' (@James Nottingham), which demonstrates very clearly that learning involves 'not knowing' first. The model encourages children to view the concept of not knowing as something positive, rather than something to be feared or be worried about.



The premise of the 'The Pit' is that learning always starts with a question – with something we want to find out about, with a problem that we need to solve or a task that we have been asked to try and do. This is referred to as 'Q' or '?' as shown in the diagram below. It is very interesting to take children through this model by creating a huge 'Pit' on the floor or in the playground so that the children can sit and walk around it and experience it as it is being explained.



The children are then asked a question they definitely know the answer to. For example, we might ask them, what is one plus one? When they say the answer is two, they feel good about knowing the answer and they are allowed to jump across the pit to the tick or 'A' (Answer) on the other side.

The children are then asked something much more complicated, something that they are not able to immediately 'know' – this is where they are encouraged to go into the Pit. Once in the Pit, they are then encouraged to use the values and the lifelong learning skills to ask the right questions, to use specific tools and thinking

Our Learning to Learn Week

The Learning to Learn Week presents us with a wonderful opportunity to share with the children the initiatives that accompany the JONK approach. The plan below shows how a Learning to Learn Week can be structured, where each day focuses on a different aspect of learning.

1. The Joy of Not Knowing
 - a. Learning models
 - b. Personal learning models
 - c. Whole-school Models
 - d. Should I know everything?
2. Start them thinking and keep them thinking
 - a. Thinking skills starters
 - b. Thinking blackboard
 - c. Home learning
 - d. Image of the Week
 - e. Poem of the Week
 - f. Blogging
3. Making thinking visible
 - a. Mind mapping
 - b. Concept lines
 - c. Fortune lines
 - d. Traffic lights
 - e. De Bono's Hats and PMI's
4. Philosophical enquiry
 - a. A philosophical approach to the curriculum
 - b. Philosophy at home and at school (Why? Books)
 - c. Open-ended challenge (Investigations)
5. Becoming a Lifelong Learner
 - a. Lifelong Learning dimensions
 - b. Lifelong Learning partners
 - c. The dimensions solve all problems
 - d. The dimensions linked to animals and to values

We end the week by sharing with the children the stories we've written to explain how each of the animals became particularly adept at one learning characteristic, and to place the whole JONK approach and school infrastructure in perspective. For more information on the ways we use the animals and the lifelong learning dimensions, please see the first article in this two-part series, **The joy of not knowing**.

Publication Preview

Please contact us for the
full publication

