

# Capture Art and Creative Projects

**Making Thinking Matter 2006/7**



[www.makingthinkingmatter.org](http://www.makingthinkingmatter.org)

## About Capture

Capture are three artists: Deb Astell, Brigitte Parusel and Claire Doyle who have been working in education and the arts since 1997, in April 2005 we set up Capture Arts and Creative Projects as a not for profit company limited by guarantee. Capture has a governing body of trustees and we work in London.

Capture has developed an innovative and imaginative approach to creative learning with young children in Early Years which we have called **Making Thinking Matter**.

Making Thinking Matter acknowledges the need for Early Years Practitioners and parents to be trained in the skills to create a nourishing continuum of exploration in which the child can develop their innate creativity and problem solving skills. We have created an imaginative and flexible system through three very successful and extensive projects and now wish to take our pioneering findings to a wider audience. Our aim is to have a lasting influence on education policy and practice at a national level.

Capture secured Arts Council England funding in May 2006 for three people to attend a residential training course with Atkey Solutions, an organisation endorsed by Edward De Bono, to become accredited De Bono trainers for education using the Six Thinking Hats method®. These thinking tools had not as far as we know been used with under 5's before and we were interested to see if by providing thinking tools for practitioners, parents and children we could help develop and nurture creativity and encourage divergent thinking. The Six Thinking Hats® method is essentially a way of organising ones thinking in order to enhance creativity and problem solving.

We create innovative and exciting education workshops and creative thinking tools are now at the core of our education programme, facilitating the creation of artworks with children, adults and members of the community.

***“Perhaps the most important benefit from teaching thinking is the increase in self esteem and self confidence of those taught. A youngster taught thinking feels in control of his or her life – instead of feeling like a cork carried along by the stream of life and controlled by the currents”***  
***Dr Edward de Bono***



We believe that there has never been a better time for embedding creative thinking tools with art in education and we are well placed to be pioneers in this process, at present working in early years development with children aged two to five years old.

Our unique approach is in the active engagement of parents and practitioners as well as children with the creative process. Indeed, from the evaluation of our projects, we discovered that adults play a key role in this process by asking the right questions at the right time. In this sense, the Six Thinking Hats® method we employ develops a synergistic relationship between adults and children, creativity being a process in which both parties are engaged.

It is clearly not enough to provide the materials and leave the children to work alone. We enrol adults in creative thinking techniques at the beginning of each project with an INSET and parents' workshops.

Our collaborative projects in early years are revealing more about how we think and how crucial the quality and thoughtfulness of the adults' interactions with the children are to make **thinking** matter.

## **How do we know there is a need for our work?**

'Nurturing Creativity in Young People', the independent report of July 2006, jointly commissioned by the Department for Education and Science (DfES) and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) states:

**'Supporting creativity in the early years provides a cornerstone for successful lifelong learning.'**

The findings propose:

**'A greater focus on the development of creative behaviours in the early years'**

and

**'A scheme of recognition and sharing of best practice'**

And indicates:

**'The importance of linking this to workforce development (including the involvement of *creative practitioners*) [our italics] and show how creativity can be a powerful underpinning for parental/family support.'**

('Nurturing Creativity in Young People', pp 18, commissioned by DfES & DCMS, July 2006).

## **The UNICEF report on childhood in industrialised countries (February 2007)**

This report for the first time measures and compares overall child well-being across six dimensions: material well-being, health and safety, education, peer and family relationships, behaviours and risks, and young people's own subjective sense of their own well-being.

The UK ranks in the bottom third of the country rankings for five of the six dimensions reviewed.

The government is currently looking into ways to embed creativity and creative thinking throughout the curriculum. ('Every Child Matters', DfES 2004 [www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/publications](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/publications)).

During the course of the project we discovered the following research by Sir Ken Robinson, now senior educational advisor to the J. Paul Getty Trust in Los Angeles

- Of 1,600 children aged 3 to 5 who were tested to see if they thought in a divergent way, 98% showed they could think in a creative divergent way
- By the time they were aged 8 to 10, 32% could think this way.
- When the same test was applied to 13 to 15-year-olds, only 10% could think in this way.
- And when the test was used with 200,000 25-year-olds, only 2% could think creatively
- Education is driven by the idea of one answer and this idea of divergent thinking becomes stifled.'
- Creativity is the 'genetic code' of education and it is essential for the new economic circumstances of the 21st century

All Our Futures' (2001), the report of the NACCCE commission also recommends:

**'Provision of creative and cultural education in early years should be further developed, in particular through provision for the arts.'**



# **Making Thinking Matter**

## **How it all began**

In 2006 Capture Arts, Greenwich Early Years Service and the Art in Perpetuity Trust (APT) decided to collaborate to develop an art and creative thinking project. We decided to give pre school children aged three to five an opportunity to work in an open ended way using art as a vehicle and underpinning the workshops with the de Bono Six Thinking Hats system.

Capture delivered a series of workshops in four early years settings in Greenwich. We discovered that when art and the creative thinking tools were combined it enabled children to think openly and creatively with very little adult intervention. We realised that these findings were very important and that we wanted to develop the project further.

Greenwich Early Years Service and Capture Arts decided to collaborate together again to build on the discoveries and develop the ideas that had resulted from the first project, we wanted to discover how pre school children think, and how their ability to think in a divergent way could be nurtured and developed further. We wanted to study the thought processes, then to evaluate the milestones and outcomes.

We undertook the second phase of the project in Greenwich at The Robert Owen Early Years Centre

This time we worked more extensively with practitioners and parents, offering a parents' workshop and a more in-depth inset for practitioners that included an introduction to the thinking methods of Edward de Bono and a practical art and problem-solving workshop.

The project focused on the children but also studied how practitioners and parents used language, both directly and indirectly, to steer the outcomes of the children's creative processes and what they expected the outcome of these processes to be.

An important part of the workshops was that before embarking on a task children were taken through a series of questions about the properties of materials, what they knew about a particular subject, how they felt about a task, theme or material etc. This created an atmosphere of anticipation and excitement before the children undertook the practical task. It also gave the children increased confidence as they had been thinking about ideas and information before the task. When children began the practical side of the workshop, we discovered that they were more thoughtful, concentrated more and created very meaningful work. They stayed on task three times longer than usual and needed very little support from adults; even in large groups the children appeared calm and focused. We noticed in particular the willingness of boy's to stay on a creative task and undertake the workshop without any problems or desire to be doing anything else!

We decided not to use glue, sticking materials or scissors during the second phase of the project.

Following this we continued the MTM programme with Merton Early Years Service with funding from Merton Council and Unltd.

We worked in five nursery settings and for the first time worked with children as young as two.

What became very apparent during this project was the need to work more extensively with practitioners to enable them to build their confidence in using the thinking tools and develop creative ideas about their settings, including free flow play, how to organise thinking sessions for children and, how to engage parents etc.

We need to support practitioners in learning how to develop an atmosphere of open-ended exploration, self-discovery, freedom of expression and cultivation of ideas.

We have been given funding from Unltd to develop a prototype toolkit for the Merton settings that will be left with each of the practitioners after the workshops.



## Why do we do this work?

During our projects we discovered that there is

- A lack of support for children for divergent thinking
- Lack of ability, training, skills and confidence with adults / practitioners

We have decided to continue with this work because we have observed some basic educational failings in the responses of many adults to our creativity workshops. A lack of confidence with children in creativity was expressed by the inability to draw a bird, for example. This suppression of a natural ability in a child's confidence would seem to have developed through a failed interaction with adults who are unaware of creativity as a life skill and for problem solving, adults are very often working within a system that is driven by results.

We have discovered through our workshops that children who participated often gave very different responses dependent on the adult interaction around them. Our observation is that children are in a synergistic relationship with the adults working with them and that it is crucial to develop a continuum of creativity in which the children can flourish. Therefore, a primary aim of future work is to embed the creativity tools and workshop system of Making Thinking Matter to early years staff and parents. Fear of failure can be overcome by increasing the skills and confidence of adults.

### **Creativity**

There are several common misconceptions about creativity and divergent thinking. The first is that people believe that only some individuals are creative. At Capture we believe that we are **all** creative and that you can cultivate and nurture creativity and **teach** children and adults to think and develop their creative potential.

There are several issues around cultivating creativity, first is the National Curriculum and second is the ability of teaching itself.

*"It is not possible to give a child a creativity injection"*

Sir Ken Robinson

It is important for adults to be able to create an environment for curiosity and in doing this to encourage children to think divergently and get the best out of them. The current system is very target and result driven with no room for any divergent thinking or for allowing and following a creative process. There is only one answer to every question and no room to manoeuvre within these boundaries, this stifles and shuts down the ability for children to think for themselves.

What we have discovered during our research project is that many adults are afraid to think creatively, or they believe they are not creative. Pressures of meeting targets, child to adult ratios being too high, fear of failure, working in a culture of blame etc. all compound the issue, leaving many adults fearful

and demoralized. We believe our pioneering work in early years is helping to supporting adults to overcome these obstacles

Capture is developing art workshops to seed the creative thinking process within each child whilst providing a safe and open environment for this process.

Creativity and creative thinking are empowering tools for problem solving that can be applied across the curriculum and in daily life. The tools give children a structure on which to build their thinking and the confidence to approach new problems.



We have developed a workshop system that can be simply transferred and used in early years settings, it is a system that enables children to have the space to think creatively and divergently and we have a range of creative thinking tools that give practitioners and parents a system to allow this to happen.

MTM is now an ongoing programme of research and we find new discoveries with each phase of the project. Our work raises many questions that we hope to find the answers to and in doing this we can directly affect the future ability of children and adults to be true **creative thinkers**.

## **What have we learned?**

All those involved have begun to reflect on the use and success of the Capture workshop approach in the settings. Many practitioners were developing workshops but creative activities tended to be product based with each child having the same result, for example an Easter card that a group of children make and each card looks the same.

This is limiting divergent thinking and many practitioners have a very narrow view of what being creative actually is and have little understanding of how to enable their children to think freely.

A fundamental aim of the project became really looking at how we can maintain and encourage creativity in young children whilst exploring how what adults provide, do, say and expect affects it.

We also need to enable parents and practitioners to become more creative and need to consider:

- What skills do they need to teach the children?
- What support do they offer?
- What questions do they ask?
- When do they ask?
- What do they provide?
- When not to get involved in the children's creative process.

From our evaluation of the project as a whole it seems clear that there are three key points to consider:

- Organisation of materials.
- The role of the adult.
- Thinking time for children

## **Who we have worked with**

### **First Project Spring 2006**

#### **Development Partners**

Greenwich Early Years Service  
Art in Perpetuity Trust (APT)

#### **Nursery Settings**

- Brooklands School
- Brooklands Pre School
- Ferrier Phase 2 Pre School
- First Steps Nursery
- Flintmill Pre School

### **Second Project Autumn 2006**

#### **Development Partner**

Greenwich Early Years Service

#### **Nursery Setting**

- Robert Owen Early Years Centre

### **Third Project Spring 2007**

#### **Development Partner**

Merton Early Years Service

#### **Nursery Settings**

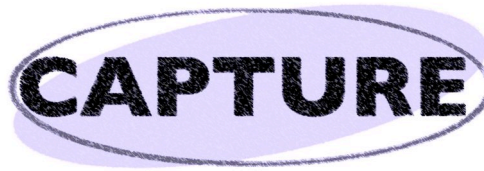
- Benedict Primary School
- Cherubs Day Nursery
- Nought to 5 Plus (Montgomery)
- Cherubs St Thomas's
- Lonesome Primary School

#### **CAPTURE ARTS**

Deb Astell, Edward de Bono consultant  
Brigitte Parusel, Edward de Bono consultant  
Claire Doyle, Edward de Bono Trainer/Arts evaluator

[www.capturearts.org](http://www.capturearts.org)  
[www.makingthinkingmatter.org](http://www.makingthinkingmatter.org)  
[info@capturearts.org](mailto:info@capturearts.org)

Funders of Making Thinking Matter 2006/7



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