



## PEDAGOGICAL PHILOSOPHY

*by* Soonrita Sahasrabuddhe  
The First Three Institute for Child Development

## PHILOSOPHY

We commonly identify 'creativity' as the act of coming up with uncommon ideas and turning these imaginative ideas into reality. Creativity is characterised by the ability to perceive the world in new ways, to find hidden patterns, to make connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena, and to generate solutions. Richard Foster, a researcher at the Yale University, differentiates creativity from discovery and innovation. Though these three terms are often used interchangeably, Foster believes that creativity is different than innovation and discovery. Only creativity, he says, is about making something new, rather than merely applying or discovering something new. According to Atkinson, Mayor and Starko, most definitions of creativity have two components in common- novelty and appropriateness. However, we get introduced to this concept much earlier in life - a lot before we get to its formal definitions.

Children enter this world with their curious spirits, wanting to make sense of this enchanting place called the world! Naturally, when we are on this journey we love to traverse a number of different roads. Some roads we follow through and some roads- well, we leave them alone! As we connect the seemingly unrelated dots, we try to understand the world, we try to understand who we are. At different points in time, a renewed sense of self lets us look at the world from a different perspective. The known world suddenly makes sense in a completely different way or at times it poses questions that we never stumbled upon before! The journey within is the same journey that lets us travel farther outwards. The more we dive deeper, the more we get closer to accessing concepts that were once alien to us.

As we grow up, the societal norms start establishing a stronger grip over us. The previous generations expect us to follow their paths and stick to their formulas as they've been tested for ensuring survival. We are fooled into believing that there are no other ways for us to explore the world than the ones where we already see footprints of those who walked before us! As George Land says, "as we grow up, we are expected to learn to be uncreative." The experiences we get in this journey of life, determine whether we find the courage to listen to our inner voice or not.

The School of Creativity has designed the unique programme '***Creativity for Education***' that offer children meaningful experiences that help them nurture the connection with themselves. Such experiences can facilitate this process that allows us to be creative. This is the very process that allows us to be brave enough to set our own pace, the process that allows us to be true to our own quest and the process that lets us be comfortable with the atypical. The German philosopher Hegel put the idea in a beautiful way: we are creative, he said, when we "strip the world of its stubborn foreignness and adapt it to our needs." Creativity is not necessarily a dramatic activity, it very well can be a subtle action that takes us a step further from where we stand. What is key, however, is that we invest in the process wholeheartedly.

## Using the Arts as a Catalyst of Transformation

The work at the School of Creativity aims to offer children and adults enriching opportunities that help them create a strong bond with their inner selves as well as create ties with the outer world. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, says that 'creativity doesn't happen in our heads but in the interaction between our imagination and our social context.' The process of being creative involves being able to see associations among elements that seem radically different. It requires us to be open to the new experiences.

As Foster rightly points out, this process is iterative and not linear. It requires participants to be curious and willing to see connections that are not obvious. The programmes at the School of Creativity are designed keeping these learnings at heart.

The creative process involved in expressing oneself artistically helps participants work on their emotions and understand others' perspectives. It plays a crucial role in helping them tackle unresolved issues and helps improve coping skills. The School of Creativity does not aim to create artists but rather plays a key role in helping the participants become better versions of themselves- a more 'human' self.

The coursework ensures that all the developmental domains are taken into account and are custom made for a wide age range. The programmes are designed to encourage participants to indulge in a number of cognitive tasks such as concentration, problem solving, critical thinking, persistence, making choices, implementation and evaluation. The design also ensures ample opportunities for sensory integration as the participants get busy with various kinaesthetic activities. It creates spaces for the participants to identify, process and express emotions.

The material provided to the participants, as part of the programme, is hand crafted and actively avoids a 'factory finish' look. It welcomes children to the world of imperfection, allowing them to develop a more organic bond with the different elements of the programme.

The programme allows multiple opportunities for the participants to observe and understand the beauty of interdependence in the world. Most importantly, the programme makes the participants privy to the labour and joy of constructing their own answers, finding their own destinations and owning their journeys!

Scientific research in the past few decades has shown us that the benefits of such activities are not limited to the honing of artistic skills and techniques, but rather they lay a foundation for acquiring crucial life skills that permeate through all realms of life. A recent meta-analytic study found that creativity-based learning (CBL), problem-based learning (PBL), and differentiated instruction (DI) on creativity, all three methods, have a positive effect on children's academic performance. A study by Drake and Winner talk about how children use drawings to regulate their emotions. The findings from the Paul et al. study support a theory that everyday creative behaviour is both a cause and an effect of positive psychological processes. In this context, the work at the School of Creativity holds a significant position as it strives to incorporate the most recent scientific findings in its programmatic design.



## The Flagship programme

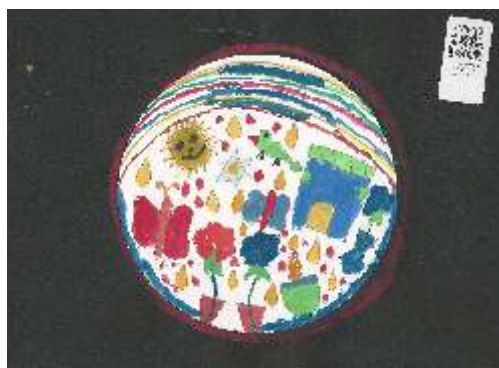
The School of creativity runs its flagship programme 'Creativity for Education' for school children. The activities in this programme are spread across nineteen interlinked categories, namely:

1. Backgrounds
2. Freeplay
3. Colouring within borders
4. Stencils
5. Discovering the part whole relationship
6. Patterns
7. One-to-one correspondence
8. The world of puppets
9. Observation and analysis
10. The beauty of creation
11. Decoration
12. Visual language
13. Individual interpretation
14. Understanding perspectives
15. Working together
16. Tracing
17. Origami
18. Sense of rhythm
19. Improvisation

### KEY ELEMENTS : A Sneak Peek

#### Playing with Backgrounds

Backgrounds play a significant role in defining the composition that is built on it. As children play with colours on various backgrounds like newspapers or toned paper, they get to see the subtleties of different colours and get to play with the illusion of shades. As the background colour peeps through the tiny gaps left while colouring, it offers a sense of unity and cohesiveness crucial to an art piece. These exercises also require participants to listen to what the background has to say about the composition. It nudges the participants towards acknowledging the not so obvious key contributors to their art work.



## Freeplay

Children use the canvass as a safe space to process their experiences in the world. With no restrictions set on the topic and medium, children use this space in multiple ways. May it be splashing colour across the paper or a detailed drawing of some incidence, children benefit from these experiences as it results in a heightened awareness of self and others.

## Colouring within borders

Preschoolers are constantly working towards establishing a better control over their bodies. This developmental stage is characterized by refined wrist & finger movement & decreased elbow & shoulder movement when it comes to finer activities like these. Activities that ask the children to colour within the lines put forth a developmentally appropriate challenge that helps children improve their fine motor skills.

## Stencils

As children explore working with stencils they understand some important rules of physics. They understand the properties of the stencil and see what rules colours follow. For younger children, it is no less than magic to see a shape appear on the paper without them actively making that shape!

## Discovering the part whole relationship

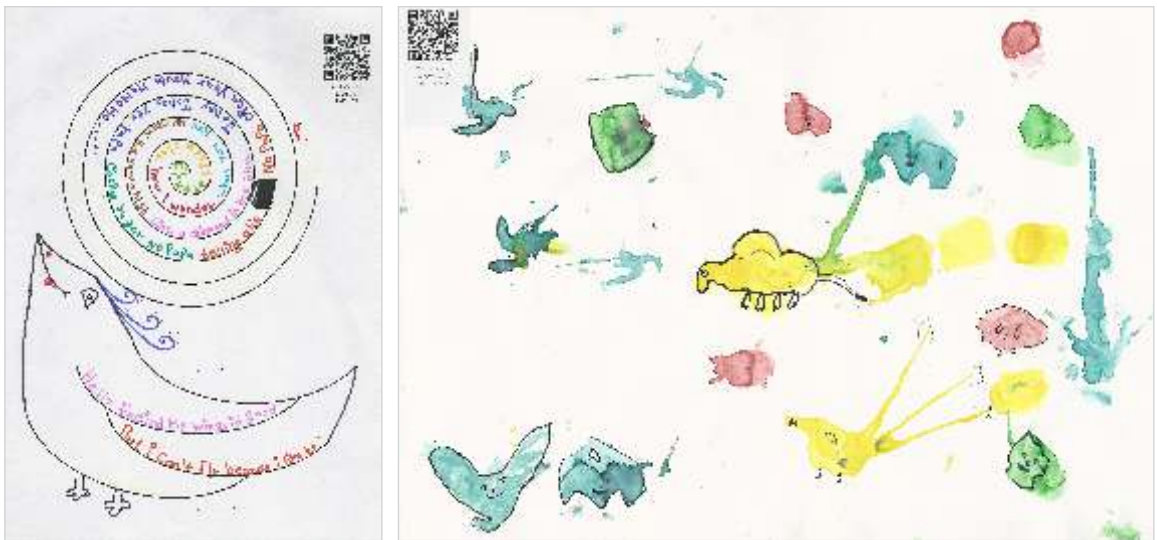
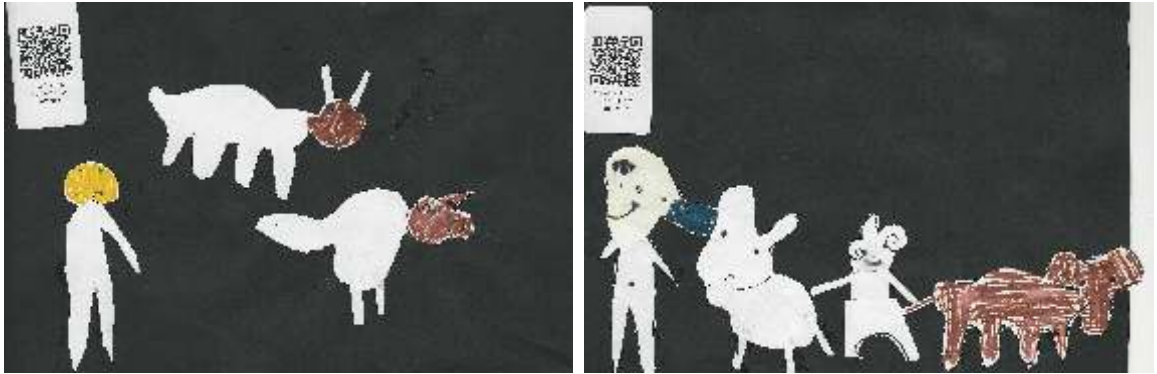
While understanding the world around, children start to form associations. The 'part whole relationship' activities help children see that an entity consists of a lot of smaller parts. This thinking contributes to their analytic skills as well as later math skills. Being able to divide a complex idea into smaller chunks is a key skill required for any kind of problem solving task.

## Patterns

The activities revolving around patterns help children develop logic and spatial judgement. Let us take an example. This activity with paper strips offers participants an opportunity to handle an important geometric shape. As they mould it, twist it, fold it, tear it to suit their desire, they understand the shape in its entirety. They also understand how the same piece can seem smaller or larger when put in context with two other strips of varying lengths. An extremely important activity that boosts spatial development. Here we see compositions by Tanishka, Gayatri and Pratigya that let us peep into their world, their perceptions and the influences they carry at a young age of six.



As a part of the learning process we are constantly looking for connections between a new experience and an old experience. It sometimes allows us to attribute meanings to not so obvious experiences. When we associate abstract shapes and designs to something specific from our world, we attribute a meaning to the so far abstract shapes. In this particular exercise, children mix and match odd shapes till they perceive some meaningful creation taking shape.



Older children are given activities where they have to challenge their set patterns. An activity that encourages them to experiment with the direction of writing, also allows them to experience the possibility of questioning the conventional.

### **One-to-one correspondence**

One to one correspondence is the ability to match an object to the corresponding number and recognise that numbers are symbols that represent a quantity. Through these sets of activities, children get introduced to an important mathematical concept as they get busy with clay modelling and other fun activities!

### **The World of Puppets**

This set of activities help children create puppets and lets them build these characters with their imagination. As children play with different characters they attribute them various roles and emotions. At times, they also develop a connection with puppets and treat them as important beings in their own socio-emotional world.



## Observation and Analysis

The programme creates various connection points where participants are encouraged to draw inferences from their observations, and allows them to have the space to process their observations too. In this drawing by Aryan, we see him connecting to the experience of being in the rain while remembering the emotions as well as understanding the laws of physics. We see here his understanding of what exactly must be happening as the rain pours down on the umbrella.



The direction of the drops, the curve at the end and the small puddle on the ground do not only talk about his artistic skill but rather they also highlight his efforts of understanding a very important phenomenon in his immediate world. The detail of the kid in the picture trying to feel the raindrops on his palm shows us that the child has been able to connect to this experience on an emotional level too. On the other hand, Hitakshi's memory seems quite different than that of Aryan. The lightening has clearly made a mark on her mind, and the experience seems to have left her equally happy, yet different marks on her memory.

## The beauty of creation

The fun with watercolour series allows children to paint freely, with sponges, brushes and fingers. Multiple scientific researches have proven the link between young children getting opportunities to paint without restriction and a healthy self-esteem in later years. These activities inspire a growing understanding of spatial concepts and artistic elements such as colour, shape, size, texture and directionality. Young children are masters of the moment- they love to experience how it feels to spread the colour all over the paper and are not necessarily headed towards a specific design or composition. In all the programmes, the School of Creativity ensures that the design of the programme fiercely protects such spaces for the participants where they can be true to the process of exploration.



## Decoration

These set of activities encourage students to work on the detailing bit of a drawing or an actual object. These activities take a more traditional route to encourage parents to do these activities along with their children during the holidays.

## Visual Language

Visual language is a system of communication using visual elements. In this context, the design of the programme offers key experiences to the participants by letting them play with different mediums and materials. In one of the activities participants get to have fun with semi-transparent papers of different colours. They notice how shades change with change in the intensity of light. They observe it becoming darker as they stick the pieces on to the paper. The participants also get to draw on papers with different transparency levels and get to be surprised to see how that element contributes to their composition.



## Texture Impressions

Textures are an important factor that contribute to a visual expression. In one of the activities, children place the paper on various surfaces and colour over it. The textured surfaces leave stunning impressions on the paper. Children witness a beautiful interaction between various non-living members of their surroundings as they unknowingly become facilitators of this dialogue. Trying to understand the nature of the objects around them would aide them in the lifelong journey of getting to know their surroundings and interpreting the connections. From a developmental perspective, a rich environment in terms of sensory exposure proves to be a wonderful place for learning.





In an exercise, older children work with the map of the world. They try to re-visualise the map with basic shapes. It encourages them to see the inherent simplicity hidden in complex things.



### Individual Interpretation

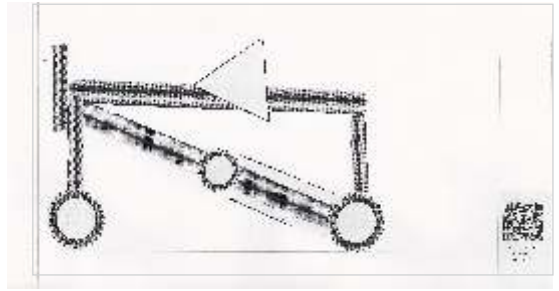
As we listen to stories, the scenes elicit an imagery in our minds. The same story 'looks' different to each one of us. To be able to put the words into pictures encourages participants to process, revisit and reconstruct their understanding of the events and relationships in the story. Giving a specific form to a story, to come up with imaginary characters is a challenging yet enjoyable task. This is a wonderful example of the interconnectedness of all domains of development- in this particular example- language, cognitive, motor and socio-emotional domains are at play.

### Understanding perspectives

These set of activities give children an opportunity to understand various physical perspectives as well as individual perspectives- an important step in gaining awareness about one self and the surroundings. Developing awareness about one's own body is an important part of the self-awareness process. In an activity like dancing dolls, the participant has to remember how it felt like when he was dancing, has to remember the bodily movements along with the emotions that enabled them, and then has to visualise them in order to put them on paper with the help of given shapes. Just like the actual act of dancing, the artwork doesn't have to be 'perfect' to be able to express the mood of the hour!



In an activity designed for older children, they are given drawings of different parts of a machine. They cut each part and paste it on another paper to create their own machine. Each child sees a different potential in the same set of parts and the entire classroom comes up with a number of innovations!



## Working Together

As participants work on their own art pieces, they develop a sense of ownership. When they get an opportunity to co-create something with their peers, they go through an enriching process of cooperation, negotiation, compromise and inspiration. The infusion of working styles has a powerful impact on the composition. The socio-emotional challenges of such activities offer meaningful learning opportunities to the participants. Theory of mind is the ability to attribute mental states—beliefs, intents, desires, emotions, knowledge, etc.—to oneself and to others, and to understand that others have beliefs, desires, intentions, and perspectives that are different from one's own. Such exercises allow participants of all ages to get ready for a variety of social interactions that they have to engage in.



## Tracing

These sets of activities help children play with the technique of tracing. As children get busy with tracing drawings, they work on their eye hand coordination, concentration and fine motor skills.

## Origami

Origami is the Japanese art of folding paper into decorative shapes and figures. Children across different age groups learn to make various shapes and figures and build an art piece around their origami creation. Being able to see the numerous things the simple piece of paper can become is an exercise in learning to see beyond the obvious.

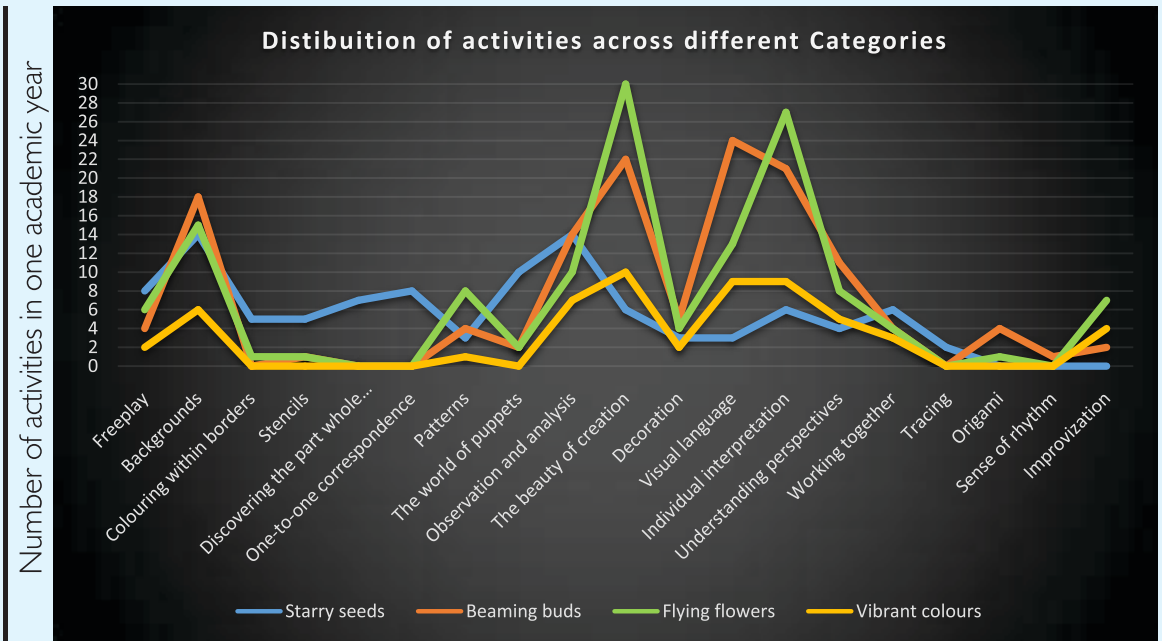
## Sense of rhythm

The world around us consists of different kinds of rhythms! May it be something as complex as the circadian rhythm or as simple as the music created by a leaky water tap. Through these sets of activities children learn to identify and create various rhythmic patterns through art.

## Improvisation

The word 'improvise' comes from the Latin word *improvisus*, meaning "unforeseen, unexpected." Children across all ages indulge in activities where they're expected to develop a theme or compose a drawing spontaneously. In this exercise, older children are presented with a meaningless shape. The process of starting work with one small part at a time, allows the shape to reveal its meaning. The child gets his space to build a relationship with the composition.

An academic year with the School of Creativity:



The Starry Seeds programme is designed for children in the age group three to five years, the Beaming Buds program for children in the age group six to nine to years, Flying Flowers programme for children in the age group ten to thirteen years and Vibrant Colours for children in the age group fourteen to fifteen years.

In this graph, we can see the distribution of activities across the different categories. The programme sets a focus on aspects like working with backgrounds, observation and analysis, creation and understanding perspectives. For each age group the programme also sets an additional focus on some of the skills. For example, the children in the age group three to five, get to do a lot more activities where they have to discover the part whole relationship or have to identify a one on one relationship. For the age group six to thirteen, the children get activities that encourage individual interpretation.

The structure of the programme demands minimal involvement from teachers and offers regular inputs during an academic year. Throughout the year, parents are invited to look at the children's work and to be a part of their creative journeys. Through these events, parents get to witness the uniqueness of the individual journey that each child has embarked on. The parental involvement opens up the possibility of these experiences staying with the children even outside the classroom.

The School of Creativity is committed to creating meaningful spaces for learners coming from all walks of life, allowing them to build and maintain a connection with their inner self- the creative self.



## THE FIRST THREE

Institute for Child Development

Soonrita Sahasrabuddhe is a Child Development Specialist and a Commonwealth Scholar, UK. She is also an Associate Fellow of the Royal Commonwealth Society. She has spent the past few years working with babies, parents and other caregivers in different settings in India as well as other countries like the US and the UK. She heads **'The First Three Institute for Child Development'** in Pune. The First Three Institute for Child development works passionately towards ensuring that all the little ones around us, that we love so dearly, get the right start in life.



SoC, 55 C, Harshu Apartments, Trimurti Nagar, Nagpur - 22, MS  
Harshavardhan +91-9823231475 | Sameer +91-9673695114  
socngp@gmail.com, www.soceducation.in