

## **Brainstorming in classrooms**

Your children should often be coming home from school stating that they have been involved in a 'brainstorm' in class. You may have been left wondering what the 'storm' was about and whether it made any difference to the learning. Brainstorm activities at school can be in many forms, but most often children are given a challenge activity to think about, relate personal experiences to or use their imaginations to come up with ideas. For example, in teaching children to write creatively, teachers will often engage the children in a brainstorm exercise prior to the writing. This is seen as an essential stimulus prerequisite for creating the imagination and flair we are looking for in a creative piece of writing. A quality brainstorm session should inevitably trigger quality inquiry and learning. A brainstorm session prior to writing will assist children to think creatively and give them the confidence to pick up the pen and write a first draft.

Brainstorming can develop lateral thinking and mind mapping skills that help children process, edit and reshape ideas. It is particularly good for problem solving and exploring options for creative oral and written language. Further, in highly creative classrooms many of the mathematics, science, technology and social science teaching experiences on offer will be enhanced by this technique as a means to help the children find better solutions and make better decisions about their learning. Sports coaches also use brainstorm techniques to create an important competitive edge over the opposition.

Brainstorming, particularly with primary aged children, needs good facilitation. It is the adult guided learning conversations and the motivational triggers involved in the brainstorming that will spark the creativity and solution solving activity. Good guidance assists the children to develop the techniques of thought expansion, comprehensive listening and creative exploration. It will also help to breakdown some of the myths held about the limitations to a child's capability. While some of the ideas that emerge from a brainstorm may well be a little crazy at first, these can be reshaped towards some stunning and original thoughts and solutions. Rather than being stunted, teachers need to be able to expand the child's thinking at this point, or run the risk of 'creativity' drying up.

There are of course situations where children can be more creative when left alone, and different techniques to develop their ideas need to be taught, such as mind mapping strategies. However I am suggesting that if there's no "storm" in a brainstorm, the learning to follow risks becoming dull and dreary. If children are left to independently brainstorm, creative spark may be untapped, unnoticed and un nourished.

At home parents can practice brainstorming by asking questions of their children that encourage them to expand on their ideas, visualize outcomes and explore possibilities. So, have that brainstorm with your child and get involved in the thoughts and creativity that will emerge by being there. It's a fun way to learn and it opens up the creative mind of your child.

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