

# Can you teach creativity?

Yes, you can, says Dr John Langrehr, renowned author and researcher of creative and critical thinking.

TEXT KHOO HUI SHAN & TANG MEI LING PHOTO ASK EDUCATION



**Ask your child:**  
What can't you photograph? (Creative reversal)

“If the child is exposed to creative thinking at an early stage, and the brain is taught the creative thinker's mindset, the child will continue with this pattern of thinking throughout his life – questioning the norm, exploring all possibilities, and never yielding to conformity.”  
– Dr John Langrehr, researcher of creative and critical thinking.

“I've been asked by journalists if creativity can really be taught,” says Dr John Langrehr of John Langrehr Thinking Program (JLTP), speaking at the Seminar on Developing and Assessing Thinking Abilities in Early Childhood in Singapore recently.

“And the answer is yes, you can.”

He suggests that, for example, one of the methods used to help generate unusual ideas is to simply make use of the acronym of the word 'CREATE':

- |                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| C: Combinations | A: Alternatives |
| R: Random       | T: Twists       |
| E: Eliminate    | E: Extremes     |

In fact, the JLTP has shown, in its programme successfully implemented in more than 100 preschools islandwide, that there

are effective methods to both inspire creativity and help instil critical thinking in young minds at an early stage.

**Ask your child:**  
How is a chair and a horse the same?  
(Creative similarities)

### The need to be fast, accurate and... different

With progressive changes occurring at breakneck speed in almost every aspect of the current age of near-instant information and solutions, there is a constant need to get ahead of one's peers in school, career and life.

Hence, not surprisingly, governments, educationists and parents are starting to realise the importance of the ability to break away or escape from the dominant patterns that the brain stores for us (creative thinking) and of making smart statements and wise judgements (critical thinking).

**Ask your child:**  
What are the good and bad things for having animals in the zoo?  
(Other viewpoints)

### How the brain thinks

Founded on the development of the young brain, JLTP recognises that inventiveness and inquisitiveness occur in the forebrain – and so uses special questions embedded into the dialogue of 16 stories to stimulate creative and critical thinking.

“The questions don't have a correct answer, but instead are designed to make you form more questions and create a mindset that creative thinkers need – risk taking, exploring novel ideas, having fun with ideas,” Dr Langrehr explains.

The brain works like this: when it sees enough of a pattern, the pattern becomes a mindset that becomes entrenched in one's thinking and problem solving. JLTP teaches that disposition by asking questions and exposing children at a young age to creative questions that open their minds to novel ways of thinking.

To detractors who say that creativity cannot be taught in classrooms, brain scans have revealed that the brain doubles its birth weight during a child's

first three years – a time of most rapid growth. Adults who are expert musicians, artists, writers, and athletes, have received regular one-on-one coaching in their first five years to build a complex cell network within a special memory associated with their expertise.

**Ask your child:**  
Would everyone agree that camels are more useful than dogs?  
(Fact vs. opinion)

### Eureka!

For children with short

attention spans, parents often lament that normal classroom environments are not conducive for their learning. Identifying the topics that they can relate to is integral to getting them to be more attentive. Adding everyday experiences, such as going to the zoo and supermarket, to humourous and interesting stories, coupled with activities midway into the story, is guaranteed to secure your child's attention.

For parents at home, help your child by asking them unusual, uncommon, unlearnt questions revolving around Who, What, Where, When, Why and How (5W's and 1H). This will ensure the child builds up creative thinking circuits in his brain as such questions normally have more than one answer to them. He will learn to challenge ideas instead of merely accepting them, and start to ask interesting questions himself.

**Ask your child:**  
Why do insects have 6 legs and dogs have 4 legs?  
(Analysing creative design)

For example, when looking at a magazine, newspaper, or watching a television programme, the parent can ask the child related 5W1H questions such as why newspapers are bigger than books, and what some of the unusual uses for a newspaper are.

Dr. Langrehr encourages parents to ask 5W1H questions based on the acronym SCUMPS, which stands for Size, Colour, Use, Material, Parts, and Shape of things. 

**For more information on Dr Langrehr's Early Childhood programme on Creative and Critical Thinking, check out [www.jltp.net](http://www.jltp.net) or call 6778 9331.**