



PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO DEVELOPING CREATIVE THINKING IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN: A NARRATIVE REVIEW

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Abstract. This thesis reviews practical approaches to developing creative thinking in preschool children (about 3–6 years old). Drawing on early childhood guidance, two practitioner articles and a recent pilot study, it describes four approaches: guided pretend play, open-ended materials and process art, dialogic storytelling, and small inquiry projects. Each gives children a chance to propose varied ideas, adapt plans and explain choices through play. Based on these practices, a four-step classroom cycle is proposed: ask, explore, share, revise. Brief observations of talk, gestures, drawings and changes of plan can guide the next activity. The paper is a narrative review; it reports no original intervention or child-level data and makes no claim about measured effectiveness.

Keywords: preschool education; creative thinking; guided play; process art; storytelling; inquiry learning

Introduction

Preschool children express new ideas through play, movement, speech and the objects they make. In this paper, creative thinking means generating ideas that are both original and suited to the task [1]. In early childhood, originality is best judged against the child's own earlier ideas rather than an adult standard. Vygotsky [4] described play as a leading source of development in which children, with adult support, act beyond their everyday level. UNICEF describes play as a setting for independent and shared learning and gives educators the task of preparing inviting materials and supporting children's ideas [2]. The OECD likewise treats play and early learning as mutually supportive [3]. The approaches below can be aligned with Uzbekistan's national preschool curriculum (Ilk Qadam), although this paper does not analyse that curriculum.

The aim of this thesis is to review practical approaches for developing creative thinking in preschool children and to propose a simple cycle for using them in the classroom. Here, "effective" means an approach that creates repeated, accessible opportunities to generate, test and improve ideas; it does not imply that one approach works equally well for every child.



Review approach

This is a focused narrative synthesis of UNICEF and OECD guidance, two practitioner articles from Teaching Young Children, and a 2026 pilot study on project-based STEAM learning [2, 3, 5–7]. Sources were selected for their direct relevance to preschool activities and for the clarity of their practical implications. No database search or systematic screening was carried out, so relevant studies may be missing. The synthesis develops teaching suggestions rather than estimating an effect size for preschools in Uzbekistan.

Approaches for classroom practice

Guided pretend play. A familiar scenario such as a market, clinic or building site allows children to negotiate roles and imagine alternative actions. The educator provides a few props, observes the plot and asks a question when play stalls: “What else could the customer need?” or “How could we solve this problem?” Children retain control of the story while the question widens their choices. Free play and adult scaffolding can be combined without turning the activity into a script [2, 4].

Open-ended materials and process art. Blocks, cardboard, fabric, clay and safe recycled pieces can be assembled in more than one way. Instead of asking every child to reproduce the same model, an educator can invite several designs and let children change materials after testing an idea. Process art values the exploration and explanation of a work as well as the finished object; it can support expression, conversation and reflection [5]. Materials must be checked for age-appropriate size and safety, and children should be free to explain their work in a language or mode comfortable to them.

Dialogic storytelling. After a short story, the educator asks children to invent another ending, change a character’s decision or describe a new use for an object. Open-ended questions encourage children to share ideas and reasons rather than produce one expected word [6]. Puppets, drawing and movement can offer additional ways to take part for children who are less ready to tell a full story aloud; this is a practical suggestion rather than a finding of the sources reviewed. The educator can repeat a child’s idea, invite a peer to add a different possibility and then return to the story to compare the proposed endings.

Small inquiry projects. A concrete challenge, such as making a bridge for a toy from paper and blocks, gives children a reason to plan, build, observe what happens and revise. A pilot study of 69 children aged 3–4 compared a project-based STEAM curriculum with a theme-based curriculum and reported greater improvement over time in the project-based group; however, adjusted between-group differences were not



statistically significant [7]. The results are therefore preliminary. They give a reason to try inquiry activities in preschool, but the small, non-randomly assigned settings do not establish a causal effect. For a short classroom activity, the important feature is a real opportunity to change a first design after feedback.

A classroom cycle: ask, explore, share, revise

The four approaches share a common structure, which can be used as a simple cycle for planning an activity:

1. **Ask.** The educator poses one open question or concrete challenge.
2. **Explore.** Children try ideas through play, materials or a story.
3. **Share.** Children show or explain what they did in words, gestures or drawings.
4. **Revise.** Children change a first idea after feedback, and the educator notes what changed.

This cycle is a synthesis of the practices above and has not itself been tested.

Observation and implementation

The educator can prepare one inviting question, several safe materials and enough time for children to revisit an idea. Brief notes or photographs may record whether a child proposes different uses, shifts strategy, explains a choice or combines a peer's idea with their own. These observations are prompts for planning the next activity, not a ranking of children. Individual differences in language, mobility and interests call for multiple ways to participate. Families can reinforce the same approach through everyday questions such as "What other way could we make this?" [2, 6].

Conclusion

The reviewed sources point to a practical principle: offer children meaningful choice, varied materials, a problem worth exploring and adult questions that extend thinking. Pretend play, process art, storytelling and inquiry projects work through different means (role play, materials, language and investigation), so educators may combine them; this is a pedagogical suggestion, not an empirical finding. The main limitations of this review are its small number of sources, its reliance on practitioner guidance and one pilot study, and the absence of local data. Future work in Uzbek preschool settings should document implementation and compare children's experiences over time before making claims about measured effectiveness.

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