

# Time for creativity

Why innovative thinking is not just for kids

BY JESSICA MEYER

**T**here is no denying how important imaginative and creative play is for our children. As a freelance teaching artist for Lincoln Center for the past 15 years, I lead hands-on experiential music workshops to get children and adults ready to see particular concerts. I have seen firsthand time and time again how students interact more effectively with the world around them, after engaging in activities where they are making artistic decisions.

We learn our first lessons about the world around us by tinkering with how things work and imagining what could be. Children learn about how other people work by inventing games on the playground, role-playing, or collaboratively building with whatever they can find. However, when they make art, they get to take things one step further. By virtue of taking different sounds, shapes, lines, colors, words, movements, or objects and transforming them into

something else, they are processing (consciously or subconsciously) how they themselves work.

The workplace is catching on — recruiters are starting to seek out innovative thinkers with Masters of Fine Arts rather than Masters of Business Administration. Why is this? Because the muscle that gets strengthened the most during creative play is our capacity to endure and process the unknown. We live in a time where we can find out almost anything in just a matter of seconds. Whether it's information to feed a curiosity or distraction to help escape from life for a while, it's only a couple of clicks away. School curriculum has also fallen prey to sacrificing long-term benefits in favor of short-term results: students all the way through college have spent the last decade being shown that preparing for the test far outweighs the ability to think independently and imaginatively.

However, there are plenty of articles out there that talk about what we can do for our children to help them be more creative and connected beings. What about us parents?

There are very good reasons for “putting your oxygen mask on first before putting it on your child,” as the card tucked into the back of every airline seat instructs. With a seemingly endless checklist from work, family, friends, and society of what we should and should not be doing with our lives, it is increasingly hard to find time to authentically process, acknowledge, and celebrate what matters to each of us as individuals. Without this time to process, being truly “there” for your children becomes a challenging, if not downright impossible, task.

I found this out the hard way about five years ago. I was struggling to balance career, motherhood, and marriage, all while trying to maintain (or attempting to find) my

own sense of self. I spent much of my childhood making up songs on the piano, before then switching to the viola, and ultimately studying at Juilliard and becoming a professional musician. We were trying to find an appropriate educational setting for my son, and I just could not emotionally process all that I was feeling. I found myself looking for a piano for our small apartment, remembering what a companion it was through my angst-ridden teenage years. As a musician and composer, I learned that I was just a better version of myself when I had that small period of time every day to make stuff up, instead of just finding distractions to escape from all that I was feeling.

We tend to think that making art should be reserved for those who show a particular talent — which is typical for the outcome-oriented world we live in. But, what if the resulting “stuff” was not as important as just being part of the process? Our bodies thrive during times when we are fully in the zone, have no sense of time, and making choices on the fly. Regardless of the medium — food, fabric, flowers, whatever — engaging in a creative activity helps you process not only what you are experiencing at the time, but also builds the mental and emotional muscles needed for when something way more serious gets thrown in your path.

If we can find the requisite 20 minutes a day to take care of our bodies, we can certainly find another 10 to 20 minutes a day to genuinely take care of our souls. So do something every day that makes you come alive, and go get lost in the process — and you may very well find what you, and your kids, really need.

*Jessica Meyer is a violist and composer who just released her first solo CD titled “Sounds of Being,” in which she turns her viola into an entire orchestra of emotion to embody a different state of being for each piece: joy, anxiety, anger, bliss, torment, loneliness and passion. Call (212) 989-9319 for her next performance in New York City at Cornelia Street Café [29 Cornelia St. between Bleeker and W. Fourth Street in the West Village].*



The author leads a hands-on music workshop.