

# KIDS education

## Creative Brain Food – Games to Build Your Mind

BY HEIDI SMITH LUEDTKE



### ONLINE RESOURCES

Get creative with sage advice and examples.

Read creativity coach **Dan Goodwin's** blog for inspiration and education.

[coachcreative.com](http://coachcreative.com)

Fuel your brain for optimal performance

[www.livescience.com/health/090107-brain-food.html](http://www.livescience.com/health/090107-brain-food.html)

Laugh at these creative uses for ordinary objects

[lifehackery.com/2008/01/23/99-extraordinary-uses-for-ordinary-objects/](http://lifehackery.com/2008/01/23/99-extraordinary-uses-for-ordinary-objects/)

### Your brain is like a muscle,

it gets stronger the more you use it. Studies of musicians, artists, and athletes all demonstrate that brain organization and the density of interconnections between cells are affected by early and repeated training. With an average of 21 billion brain cells, we have – biologically speaking – a lot to learn.

Neurons communicate through a chemical and electrical process. Repeated communications cause cells to form networks in the brain. That is the

physical representation of learning. Over time, connections that are used repeatedly are strengthened, while unused connections are lost.

You can (and should) flex your mental muscles in a variety of ways. Though it may be tempting to focus only on developing your unique talents, research shows the brain benefits from cross-training. Expand yourself by expressing your creative nature, even if you feel like you are out of your element. "Being creative is not simply something you learn to do; rather it is a way you learn to be," encourages

Stephen Eiffert, author of *Cross-Train Your Brain: A Mental Fitness Program for Maximizing Creativity and Achieving Success* (1999). Read on for eight ways to jump start your creative energies.

**Flip flop.** Break free of your analytical worldview by turning a picture upside down and sketching what you see. This and other techniques from the book *The New Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain: A Course in Enhancing Creativity and Artistic Confidence* (Betty Edwards, 1999) will strip away your preconceptions about what you see and allow you to suspend judgment about your artistic abilities.

**Cross cultures.** Repeat a recent culinary challenge from the television show *Hell's Kitchen* and challenge yourself to create fusion cuisine. Combine Mexican and Italian ideas to make Mexican lasagna or meatball tacos. Make a twist on tiramisu by soaking ladyfingers in caramelized sugar and using flan in lieu of mascarpone. Pick two cuisines and let imagination be your appetizer.

**Make music.** Create primitive instruments with your toddler by banging pots and pans and shaking bottles of beans. Tap, shake, and sing yourselves silly. Sing in the shower or in your car. Go high tech and download a music-making app for your phone. Trust me – playing piano is way more fun when your mom isn't making you practice.

**Move it.** Like mood and memory, creativity improves after exercise. Schedule your workout before creative work sessions to take advantage of the two-hour boost in brainpower. Studies published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences show exercise increases neural connections in the brain and actually grows new brain cells. Now that's creative.

**Word up.** Build your linguistic flexibility and express your emotions with

word magnets that allow you to wax poetic on the refrigerator. Buy word sets for adults or kids at [www.magneticpoetry.com](http://www.magneticpoetry.com) or play with word kits online and submit your poems for others to enjoy. Warning: refrigerator poetry may cause fits of laughter or tears.

**Get out.** Play games that require you to manipulate objects in the game space to accomplish a goal. Chess, checkers, and the Rubik's cube are classic examples. Get Unblock Me or Subway Shuffle apps for your smart phone to challenge spatial skills while you wait. Rotating objects in your mind's eye is a real brain builder.

**Dress up.** Get together with friends for a closet swap. Each person brings three items of clothing they no longer wear and goes home with three items friends gave away. At home, challenge yourself to create three new outfits incorporating each of the three pieces you scored – you'll have nine new looks that cost you nothing but creativity!

**Repurpose rejects.** The Unusual Uses Test of creative thought requires you to think of as many uses as possible for a brick. Test your own divergent thinking by listing as many uses as possible for unused items in your home. Maybe you'll solve a design dilemma by turning woven placemats into window valances or old books into plant stands. HGTV has nothing on you.

As you tap into your creative potential, you may experience *vuja dé*. That isn't a typo. *Vuja dé* (a creative rearrangement of *déjà vu*!) is experiencing something you've experienced a hundred or a thousand times before in a way that it seems new and exciting. And that makes creative risks immensely rewarding. [wfm](http://wfm.com)

*Heidi Smith Luedtke is a freelance writer who believes creative kids are more important than a clean kitchen. Read her blog on parenting and leadership at [www.leadingmama.com](http://www.leadingmama.com).*

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