Whether an idea is novel and useful to you depends on the purpose of your creation. Sometimes it's just to fix your own shoe or some contraption so you can read in bed a bit better. My stepfather, Julien, had amazing ideas every day and he put them to good use. He never worked, was a practising Zen Buddhist (his own version) and he never touched money. Julien would only eat, read or play with what he found each day and he was a recycling genius. He also was a true pioneer against Global Warming. Back in 1970 he was marching up and down Hampstead High Street and Downing Street wearing his home-made sandwich board on which he had written: 'The ice caps are slowly melting. We are all in grave danger.'

I'd go visit him and he would be sitting on the floor wearing a paper Xmas hat playing electronic chess with himself and eating salami, all three things he had just found thrown away locally on his morning stroll. But I was more fascinated with some of the things he invented out of these discarded objects. He would struggle home with old chair legs and coat hangers, 500 door handles, all sorts of stuff, then the next time I went to see him (he lived with my mum around the corner in Maida Vale in London) he had turned these bits and pieces into fantastic inventions, some of which would have



sold like hotcakes if they went into production, and he had already built the prototype.

Most of these prototypes were built out of necessity, as he was quite lazy and had bad vision so he wanted things to come to him as opposed to getting up to get them — my favourite was his Aphrodisiac Bedside Lamp. He had found a female dummy's leg that they use in shop windows to display nylon stockings and he had then found a light bulb, a cord and plug and a lampshade. A brand new pair of stockings and, hey presto!, in a few hours he had it all working. He said, 'Just imagine, now every night to turn out the light I have to reach my hand inside a lady's skirt, touching her stocking, and grope around for the switch.'

Now that is better than any pill on the market today! You see, Julien was using creativity to solve every one of his problems and to satisfy all his wants. He lived like a king on creativity, and he didn't ever need to even cash a cheque!

they build and they destroy and the next minute they do it all again. As we get older, things get in the way of our creativity. We learn rules. We have to go to school. We get a job. We fit in and conform. And, little by little, we forget how to do it. Evan Williams, co-founder and CEO of Twitter, told Business Playground about his experience of school in rural Nebraska: 'At grade school my parents were told by my teachers I would come up with the right answers but the wrong way. Even if I knew the answer I didn't want to get to it the way they wanted me to get to it.' He says, 'I definitely think people can learn how to be creative, but I think for the most part people unlearn how to do it.'

Creativity and education expert Sir Ken Robinson writes¹² and talks about the amazing creative abilities of children and the confidence they have in them before they are often knocked back by the adult world. In a speech at a recent TED conference¹³, an organisation founded around big ideas, he tells the story of how a little girl has much conviction in her own imagination and ideas. She is busily drawing away in class and her teacher asks her what she's drawing, and she explains that it's a picture of God. The teacher tells her that nobody knows what God looks like. 'They will in a minute,' the little girl says. In fact, data shows how as children get older they lose their ability to think divergently (see Chapter 2), which is a key component of creativity: 98 per cent of three- to five-year-olds tested showed they could think in divergent ways, but by the time they were 13 to 15 years old, only 10 per cent could think in this way. And when the test was used with 25-year-olds, only 2 per cent could think divergently.14

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 $^{^{\}rm 12}Out$ of Our Minds: Learning to be Creative, Ken Robinson, Capstone Publishing Limited, 2001.

¹³http://www.ted.com/index.php/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.htm

¹⁴ Creative thinkers wither with age', Elizabeth Bule, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 25 March 2005.

Multi award-winning film and theatre director, Matthew Warchus (he won the 2009 Tony award for Best Direction of a Play for *God of Carnage*), told Business Playground about his experience at school:

'I've often thought that the arts are a great recycling centre for people who've got certain aspects in their personality that might be seen as dysfunctional in other areas,' he told us.

'But, if you bring them to creative arts they find a fantastic role. My slight dysfunction is that I've always been a bit of a loner and an outsider and I can remember most of my time at school being spent on the outside, looking in, listening to other people talk and behave together and not really being in the middle of anything.'

Fortunately Matthew found a career that was based on his ability to step back from things somewhat: 'Someone like me is used to being on the outside and having an overview of things, and is able to see patterns in behaviour and life and the interactions between people. In conversations you see patterns that you wouldn't notice if you were on the inside of the conversation. And that kind of person doesn't make a very good actor, for example, nor a very good orchestral instrumentalist, and that could an unfortunate type of person to be if there wasn't a great job for that type of person, which is being a director.'

CAN CREATIVITY BE REDISCOVERED?

If we don't make use of our creative skills they become weaker. But are they still there when we're older?

The Moon and Sixpence¹⁵ is a short novel by William Somerset Maugham, based on the life of painter Paul Gauguin. The story is about Charles Strickland, a stockbroker who, like Gauguin, leaves

Until a certain age children are not hampered by self-doubt. My daughters Kaya (10) and Indya (8) are constantly solving stuff through creative 'brainsailing'. To them everything is easy peasy.

Recently Kaya was in the car coming home from school and she was saying that the teacher was telling them that there needs to be more awareness about recycling and everyone should try to 'go green'. As she was telling me this we were stopped at a traffic light on red. When the light turned green Kaya immediately connected the dots and said, 'Why don't they write recycle on every green traffic light!'



So simple, and a brilliant way to brainwash everyone on the planet, plus it would be cheap and easy to do. In fact, after I write this I'm going to approach Mayor Villaraigosa in Los Angeles to ask if we can do a test in a small area.

his family to purse a passion for painting. After a number of years living in poverty in Paris, Strickland makes his way to Tahiti where he eventually dies from leprosy (oops, sorry, we just gave away the ending). His greatest work of art is the one he paints on the walls of the hut in Tahiti in which he lives. But because he has no visitors to his remote part of the island, thousands of miles from civilised society, nobody from the outside world ever gets to see it. Following his instructions after he dies, his Tahitian wife burns down the hut leaving no trace of his life's work. The creativity was there in Strickland throughout his dull life as a stockbroker and eventually it broke free.

¹⁵The title of Maugham's book is thought to come from an earlier novel he wrote, *Of Human Bondage*, in which the main character is described as 'so busy yearning for the moon that he never saw the sixpence at his feet'. For both the fictional character, Charles Strickland, and for Paul Gauguin, the real artist Maugham based the story on, the desire to create was more powerful than the comfort and security of family and a steady job. Both went for the moon instead of the sixpence.

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