

Thinkpetizers: Small Mental Bites of Creative Thinking

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ABSTRACT

A fast-paced hands-on workshop introducing the concept and practice of Thinkpetizers. The workshop presents the underlying philosophy and a ‘recipe’ for successfully creating Thinkpetizers, along with how they used as building blocks for creating multi-hour workshops, sessions and events. The Thinkpetizers support the step that precedes (digital and analogue) fabrication, i.e., coming up with creative and innovative ideas. They can also be used for refreshing one’s mind and creative powers throughout the whole creation process. Furthermore, they can be used in a classroom setting as a means for triggering (creative) thinking and setting the mood for conducting any type of activity, but also as an engaging way for approaching any learning subject. The workshop is targeted to anyone interested in supporting creative thinking in a formal/non-formal/ informal learning environment. Participants will experience a design philosophy, as well as, a series of practical activities and will have a lot of FUN!

CCS CONCEPTS

K.3.2 [Computers and Education]: Computer and Information Science Education – computer science education, curriculum.

KEYWORDS

Creative Thinking; Creativity; Hands-on activities; Fun.

1 INTRODUCTION

The word *Thinkpetizer* is a complex word formed by combining the words *Thinking* and *Appetizer*. A *Thinkpetizer* can be described as a small mental bite, meant to work up one’s appetite for creative thinking, but not make them feel full.

A *Thinkpetizer* may coach any aspect of creative thinking (e.g., open-mindedness, inventiveness, unconventionality, ignorance, nonsense) and is usually brief, lasting 3-5 minutes. Thus, it can be

easily introduced at the beginning/end of a class or a meeting, or even during a short break.

Any number of Thinkpetizers can be combined to form multi-hour workshops, sessions and events. The basic “recipe” for creating Thinkpetizers (see Figure 1) comprises the following steps and ingredients:

1. *Inspiration*: A brief introduction aiming to stimulate creative thinking. It may be directly relevant to the activity, or just provide some (philosophical or practical) insight.
2. *Activity*: A “problem” to be solved, a question to be answered, an action to be enacted. It may require writing, drawing, speaking, singing, moving, constructing, etc.
3. *Music*: During (almost all) activities, music is played to support the creative process and give participants inspiration and new imaginative ideas. Additionally, short musical “stings” are employed to punctuate significant moments, such as the beginning or end of an activity, an *Irrelevant*, etc.
4. *Sharing*: Presentation, exchange and discussion (but not critique or, judging) of the ideas produced.
5. *(More) Inspiration*: Presentation of interesting creative results produced for this (or similar) activity by others (previous participants, famous creators, kids, etc.), and stimuli for further thinking, or even a new insight that contradicts and undermines the value and validity of the results created during the activity.

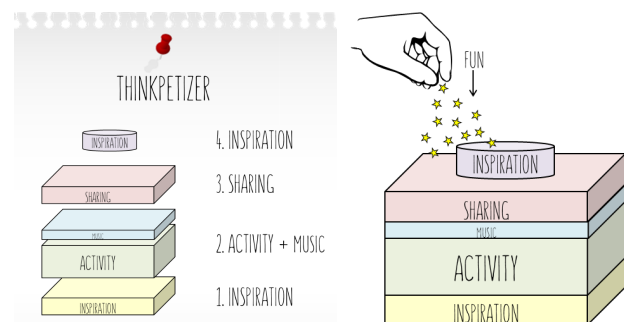


Figure 1: The basic recipe for creating a Thinkpetizer

As with any other recipe, one may create variations by omitting, substituting or multiplying some of the ingredients. Still, in order for something to be a Thinkpetizer it has to - at least -

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FabLearn Europe '19, May 28–29, 2019, Oulu, Finland

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ACM ISBN 978-1-4503-6266-5/19/05.

<https://doi.org/10.1145/3335055.3335075>

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include some form of activity in which participants actively engage.

An important “meta-ingredient” used to spice up Thinkpetizers in order to amplify the effect of all other ingredients is FUN. There is considerable scientific evidence supporting the fact that when people are in good mood are more open-minded and tend to think in a more divergent way. Also, humor can promote divergent thinking, while a supportive atmosphere provides freedom and security in exploratory thinking. Additionally, when discussing the creative results of the activities, humor can be employed to dampen any criticism that may arise.

The Thinkpetizers support the step that precedes (digital and analogue) fabrication, i.e., coming up with creative and innovative ideas. They can also be used for refreshing one’s mind and creative powers throughout the whole creation process. Furthermore, they can be used in a classroom setting as a means for triggering (creative) thinking and setting the mood for conducting any type of (creative) activity, but also as a fun and engaging way for approaching any learning subject.

2 ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

The Thinkpetizers is a 2-hour fast-paced hands-on workshop aiming to introduce the concept, practice and value of creative thinking through an engaging and fun participative experience, which even large multigenerational groups can enjoy together. To this end, the Thinkpetizers ‘borrow’ concepts and practices from popular events such as recreational sports group exercise, music concerts and stand-up comedy. Participants are allowed to discuss freely during the activities or even to copy from each other, since copying is often a good starting point for igniting idea generation. Participants mostly work in pairs and, occasionally, in groups of 3 or 4. Overall, the workshop’s spirit can be epitomized by the phrase: “I am not interested in competing with anyone. I hope we all make it.”

The workshop is targeted to anyone interested in supporting creative thinking in a formal/non-formal/ informal learning environment. Participants will acquire and experience a design philosophy, as well as, a series of several practical activities, for sparking and coaching many different aspects of creative thinking. They will also take away their own ideas and artefacts created during the workshop. And they will have a lot of FUN!



Figure 2: Indicative workshop materials

All activities use commonplace and inexpensive materials (Figure 2), such as blank or printed sheets of paper, paper napkins, aluminum foil, spaghetti, etc. Beyond the obvious impact on cost, the use of such materials has another important effect - it makes people realize that creativity does not presuppose any special resources or conditions. It can be achieved with anything, anywhere, anytime.

The workshop embraces the philosophy of Stupidity, Ignorance, and Nonsense as Tools for Creative Thinking [1; 2] and of the Future Designers activity [3; 4]. It also builds upon the ‘1 + 1 = blue: Creative Thinking Gymnastics’ workshop which was held at FabLearn Europe 2016 and FabLearn Stanford 2016, and the “Thinkpetizers” workshop held at SOU Creativity Conference 2018. Up to now, the concept and practice of Thinkpetizers have been employed in more than 50 workshops (Figure 3) with a total of about 3000 participants, in venues ranging from small classrooms to auditoriums and audiences from 10 to 300 people, including students of all ages, parents, educators and the general public. For the needs of these workshops, more than 70 different Thinkpetizers have been created and employed.





Figure 3: Introducing the Thinkpetizers: (top) SOU Creativity Conference 2018, US; (bottom) mixed-age large audience, main amphitheater FORTH, Greece (with a live jazz band)

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