

Department of imagination

“Our subject is inherently a mystery. It cannot be fully expressed in words because it concerns the deep preverbal levels of spirit. No kind of linear organization can do justice to this subject; by its nature it does not lie flat on the page. Looking at the creative process is like looking into a crystal: No matter which facet we gaze into, we see all the others reflected.”

Stephen Nachmanovitch

The Department of imagination

in The University of Bristol is an assembling community which surfaces at different times and places with shifting members and collaborators.

Its purpose: to support the University community to embed creativity and imagination into its practices.

The department's first 'appearance' in June 2024 was an immersive three-day gathering with researchers from different fields and at different career stages, alongside professional services staff.

Its ethos centred around imaginative collaboration - that many minds and bodies being creative together can solve more problems, feeling more motivated and connected than when working alone.



Imagination provocations and invitations were brought to the gathering by six creative devisors – Hannah Broadway, Megan Clark-Bagnall, Amy Creech, Bec Gee, Pete Judge & Holly Thomas.

We painted blue skies, danced with clay, made shrines to our imaginations, wrote Dadaist poems, conducted our own sound scores, and rested with intention.

This e-booklet serves as a reminder or introduction to some of the creative principles used by The Department of Imagination so far. They are concepts which support our imaginations and many of them come from well-established creative practices. They are in no particular order and there are many more of them up the department's sleeves!

**To get involved or find out more please e-mail:
dep-imagination@bristol.ac.uk**

This illustration was created as a response & record of the first gathering of the department of imagination, HB →

Let's collaborate
let's use our collective
joy to make
an artwork



CUT IT
UP &

REIMAGINE IT!

STAMP
dramatic &
all imagination

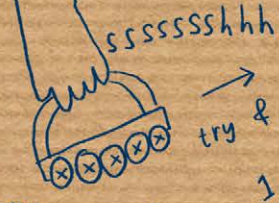


BE GENTLE,
HAVE AN OPEN
HEART

WORK S L O W

WORK
FAST

a shrine
for your
imagination



try & pass
the bells

1 2 3 4 5 6

T W E E T

buzz z z z z z z z z

LISTEN



around the circle without making a sound

WELCOME

AND LEAD

to
DEPARTMENT
OF
IMAGINATION

I'm conducting
a band of
imagineers.



this is invisible!



this feels nice

LET'S
REST



I'm
going to
read
this
book.

I'll be outside in the sun

I'm
going to
savour it ALL

GORG
EOUS

LET'S DANCE
WITH CLAY



YES
AND...

SQUISH
IT, TWIST
IT, STICK
IT



mix them up

PANTOUM TIME

WRITE
READ
+ SHARE



PLAY BACK
LET'S WATCH...



silver linings,
spun sugar clouds
& the encouragement
group



let's write continuously about
our creatures keep going
listen to the prompts
some bits you can
HIGHLIGHT

HIYA!



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1

**Playing Yes and...
to enter the unknown**



2

Mistakes : creating mistake-ful spaces



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Cut & Stick



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Embodied Play



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Fixed & Free



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Press Pause



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Credits & References



An illustration on a dark grey background showing two hands building with colorful blocks. A hand at the top holds a pink block, while another hand on the left places a light pink block on top of a stack. The stack consists of a red block at the bottom, followed by a green block, a yellow block, a blue block, and the light pink block. To the right, another structure is partially visible with a teal block on top of a yellow block, which sits on a light pink block. The entire scene is set on a light brown wooden surface.

1

PLAYING YES and ... to enter the unknown

'Yes and...' is an often-used principle by performers and improvisers to support collaboration and to get ideas to grow and take new directions. Criticality can get in our way if we make 'No but...' our habitual response to offers from those around us. Our 'No but...' unpicks someone else's starting point rather than using it as a jumping off point.

The exercise of repeating 'Yes and...' to each other's ideas and suggestions can lead us to unexpected places and new ideas we would never have found otherwise.



This principle should not be read as a didactic stance to always say 'yes'. There are always times when a clear boundary of 'no' is required.

The practicing of 'Yes and...' nurtures a co-operative rather than competitive culture, celebrates others' ideas and can develop the creative muscles to feel more comfortable responding playfully rather than blocking the unknown – which is essentially where our imaginations will take us.

"Normally we try and convince ourselves that we have some chance of making things turn out how we planned, but this mastery is mostly illusory."

Jon Davidson

**Creating
mistake-full
spaces**

2

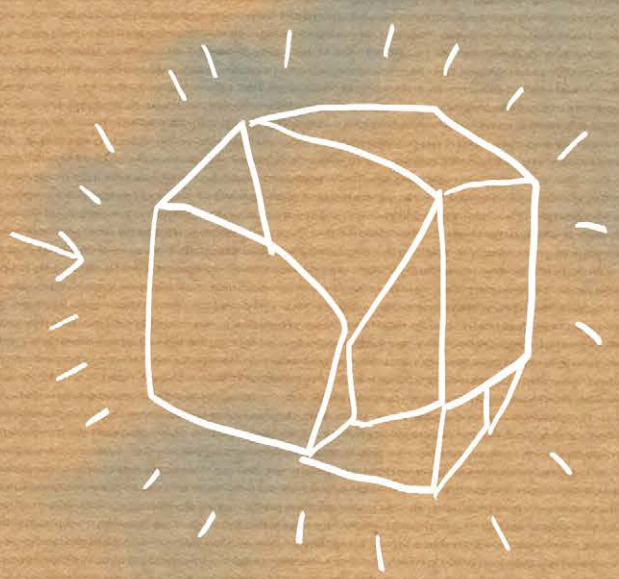
MISTAKES

Imagination often requires putting our inner world into the outside world, and this is undeniably a vulnerable process.

If we create spaces where mistakes are seen as valuable rather than a weakness we support ourselves to express ideas and take more creative risks.



Look a
gem!



If we feel safe enough to put 'rubbish' or 'silly' things out there on the table, we will eventually find a gem. But if we expect polished ideas and perfection from the get-go many of us just feel too vulnerable to ever bring any ideas out.

"Creative expression in all of the arts tends to be all about not knowing the end at the beginning, and this characteristic is what makes it so challenging for people accustomed to thinking through what they are going to do before they do it."

Shaun McNiff

"Do not fear mistakes. There are none."

Miles Davis

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3

CUT + STICK

Messing with the status quo and shifting things about - literally cutting something you've made or found up and sticking it back together is always good fodder for the imagination, particularly when we feel stuck.

This can be thought of as playing with unpredictability and choice.

Allowing arbitrariness to bring about new configurations of things we haven't planned (cutting) alongside playing with composition and intentionally choosing where to place what (sticking).



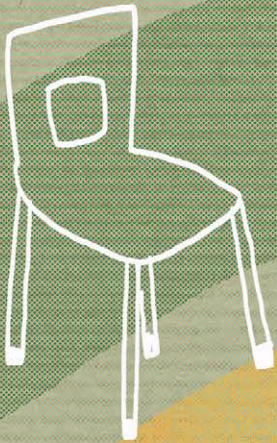
"Creativity is the ability to take what exists and change it into something new through unique responsive acts. It happens by building or simply altering relationships. The creative act involves doing things differently, sometimes even in unthinkable and illogical ways...Creativity puts imagination into action. It rocks the reigning order."

Shaun McNiff

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EMBODIED PLAY



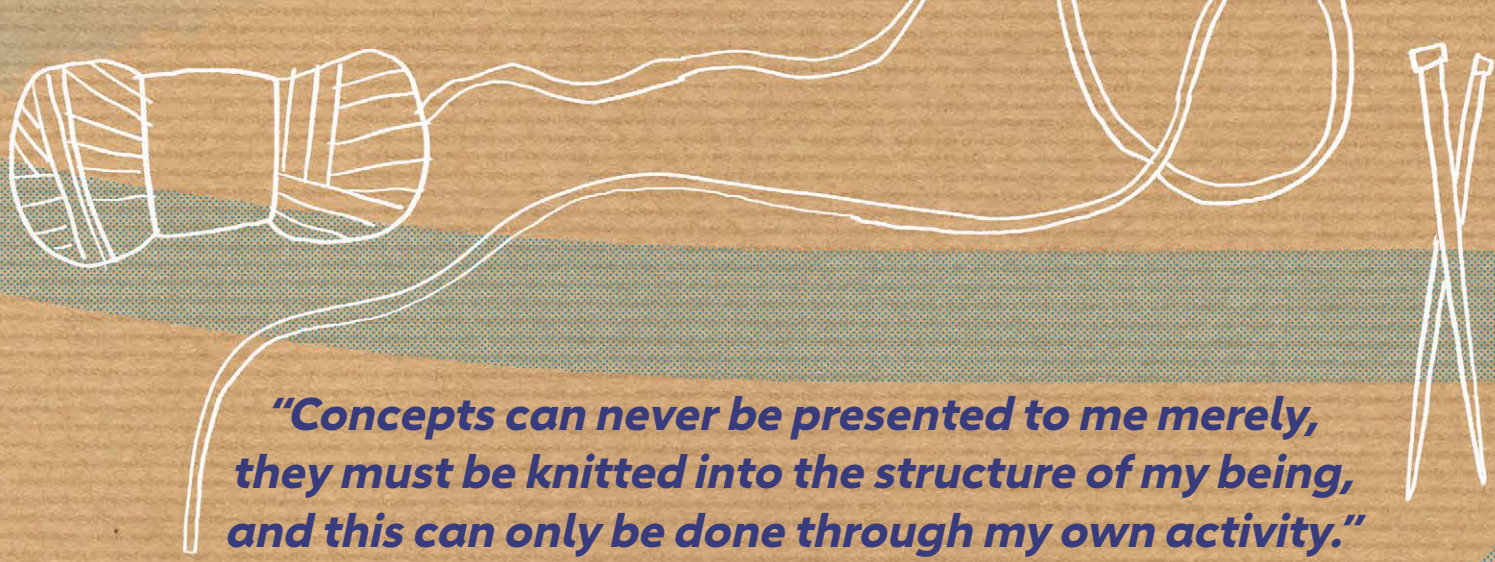
Imagination is so much harder when we sit still.

When we get up and move, connect with our bodies, senses, voices and environments things flow.

Finding ways to bring ideas or communication alive with activity and our senses is a shortcut to firing up our imaginations.




LET'S DANCE WITH CLAY!



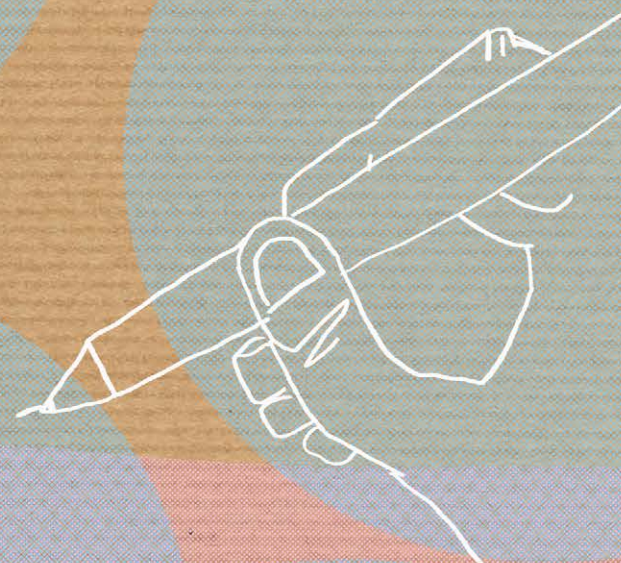
"Concepts can never be presented to me merely, they must be knitted into the structure of my being, and this can only be done through my own activity."

M.P. Follett



"To be creative we have to do something, not just think or talk about doing it. Creativity is embodied. It is physical, not abstract. You can't be creative just by thinking. Even for mathematicians, the physical act of writing equations on the board is important."

Robert Poynton


$$\frac{xy}{a} = f^2 + f^3 + x$$

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FIXED

One of Chris Johnstons 'six polarities', this principle asserts that sometimes the more structure and restrictions placed on a task the more our creative energies and imaginations can bounce around, freeing them up.

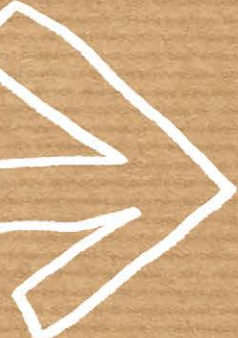
Rules and fixed points in exercises and activity, be they time, materials, form, or instructions, can give us the reassurance to set our imaginations free.

"We can enjoy our freedoms more because we know where the boundaries are. We feel safer – therefore, paradoxically, we can start to take more risks."

Chris Johnston



FREE



However, this does not mean attempting to control or predict any outcomes, its more about creating a container for something unknown to happen within.



An illustration featuring a hand holding a black remote control with a red power button. The hand is wearing a black and white striped sleeve. In the foreground, there is a white mug with a blue grid pattern, filled with brown coffee. The background is a collage of textures and colors, including a red and white plaid pattern, a brown textured area, and a blue textured area. The text 'PRESS PAUSE!!' is written in large, white, stylized letters across the top. The number '6' is inside a blue circle in the top left corner. The text '...take care' is in the top right, and a paragraph of text is on the right side.

6

PRESS
PAUSE!!

...take care

Awareness (of ourselves and others) is a key to supporting our imaginations. Environments and activities which encourage us to slow down and take notice can create the conditions to get imaginations to flourish.

“Rest disrupts and makes space for invention, imagination, and restoration. Rest is an imagination tool because it makes space to simply be.”

Tricia Hersey

“It is necessary to relax the dismissive judgment and the more general lack of self-confidence permeating the creative process... Reflective pauses enhance appreciation and sustain the flow of expression. The key is to concentrate on becoming more aware and mindful of what you are doing rather than judging it...”

Shaun McNiff



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What if?

You put on this Department of Imagination playlist and doodled to it? LINK below

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/32rbkm64lbKttEqCwzd-f0U?si=0a6359e7f2244523>

All meetings started by going for a 10-minute walk together round the block?

There was a stash of creative materials in the kitchen cupboard?

You found a spot to sit in, closed your eyes and just listened for 5 mins?

We put budgets towards bringing imagination specialists to help us rethink our roles?

Teaching sessions always started and ended by playing a game together?

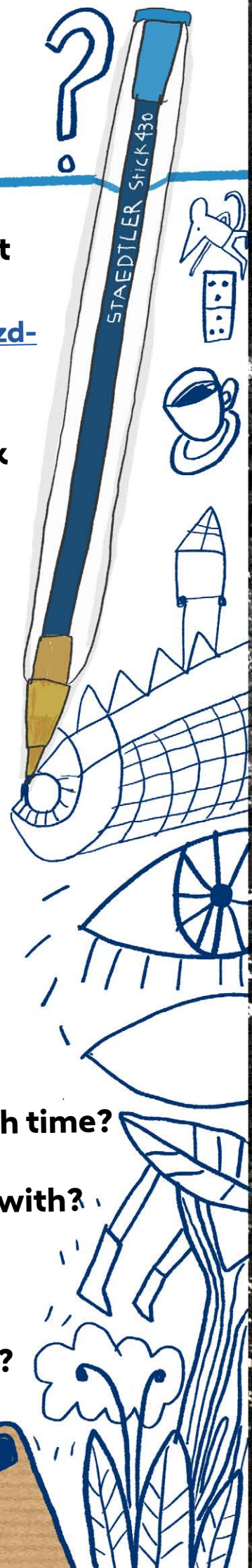
We had imagination development days?

We had play/imagination gatherings during lunch time?

You had an imagination community to test ideas with?

Away days had a section to re-imagine our work?

We had an imagination corner in common rooms?



***“It is the imagination,
above all, that powers all
the processes of rational
and creative action that
make up social living, and
the transforming power
of the imagination that
makes change possible.
Without it there can be no
learning and no morality.”***

**Tony Coult & Baz Kershaw on Welfare State International –
‘Engineers of The Imagination’ whose archive can be found in
The Theatre Collection, University of Bristol.**

<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/theatre-collection/explore/theatre/welfare-state-international-archive/>

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Credits & REFERENCES →

**The Department catalysts and drivers are:
Tom Allport, Mireia Bes Garcia, Giovanni Biglino, Bec Gee,
Dave Jarman, Viv Kuh & Pen Williams.**

**With warm thanks to all who have generously brought
their imaginations and played so far...**

**Sian Aggett, Pete Bennett, Clare Brophy, Kaltun Duale,
James Ferreira Moura Júnior, Maca Gomez-Gutierrez,
Will Hunter, Ishani Kar-Purkayastha, Catherine Lamont-Robinson,
Elizabeth Mamali, Ola Michalec, Emily Pitt, Theo Richardson-
Gool, Matimba Swana, TJ Taiwo & Valentina Vezzani.**

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