

Australian Thinking Cap Could Unleash Our Hidden Genius

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Scientists in Australia are developing a thinking cap that could unlock our hidden genius, by switching on and off certain sections of the brain. Researchers at the University of Sydney think their experiments show that we all have hidden creative talents. From Sydney, Phil Mercer reports.

Imagine a cap that could make us smarter and more creative.



Professor Allan Snyder at the University of Sydney is developing just such a device.

He thinks we all have hidden talents, but we have trouble tapping into them.

His research is in its early stages. The idea is to switch off parts of the brain to help unlock the genius that lies dormant.

"The two things that drive me - I'm passionate about understanding the architecture of thought," he explained. "Why are we wired up the way we are? Not how we are wired up but what is the master plan, the architectural plan.

And the second thing, of course, I'm fascinated by wanting to have a true vision of the world. I mean, we make hypotheses of what is out there. Wouldn't it be nice to see what really is out there?"

He is working on device that is based on research into savants who have extraordinary talents as well as severe mental disability. They appear as if one part of the brain has been subdued so that the other can be more dominant.

The aim is to make a thinking cap that could unleash creativity when it was needed, such as when we are tired or under pressure and lack inspiration.

The cap uses tiny magnets to change the process by which we think. Tests have shown that it can improve artistic and mathematical ability by turning off the part of the brain that controls our innate view of the world.

The magnets let the brain experience raw sensory information, untainted by preconceptions - just as a child might see the world.

Researchers think that this technique, known as trans-cranial magnetic stimulation, could also be useful in treating depression.