Pedagogika Przedszkolna i Wczesnoszkolna
Vol. 1 2/2013
pp. 73–85

Tutor: Anna SZKOLAK
Erasmus Student: Ana MARTÍNEZ LÓPEZ
Uniwersytet Pedagogiczny im. KEN
Kraków

Creative Teacher of Early Childhood Education

Abstract

In the article Anna Szkolak and Ana Martínez López deal with the problems connected with the debate of teacher condition in the situation of the education systems and new challenges which it faces. The particular role in this process plays an early childhood education teacher and I pose the questions on how this teacher is equipped as far as his or her creative competences are concerned. In the end of article there is a statement there is no "one right way" to help young children to achieve their creative potential. Teachers will need to continue to experiment and test alternatives to see what is effective in their situation.

Keys words: competences, creative competences, early childhood education teacher

Słowa kluczowe: kompetencje, kompetencje kreatywności, nauczyciel wczesnej edukacji

1. Introduction

Each child is a unique individual and all children are born with the ability to learn. Children have amazing capabilities and indicates that it is through the unity of thinking and feeling that young children can explore their world, represent their ideas, and communicate with others at their highest level. When educators fully understand how exploration, representation, and communication feed one other, they can best help children to achieve this potential.

Teachers have to do their best to draw pupil's attention, so they will have to design creative activities according to the necessities of each child in order to keep interest levels high in the classroom. This work can be difficult if you are not able to identify what pupil's like doing, which has to be incorporated and used as teaching resource to maintain their attention. In this sense, teach-

ers have to adapt their method of teaching according to pupil's motivation and provide suitable conditions to maintain high levels of motivation. There is little chance for creativity when pupils work long hours, when they have a little active input, when the results are controlled and prescribed or when complex topics are taught in superficial ways. What a creative teacher needs in early childhood education is time to explore, experiment and play with ideas. And we have to provide the right conditions for creativity to flourish.

If we achieve this aim children will become enthusiastic learners, which means that they will be active and creative explorers who are not afraid to try out their ideas and to express own thoughts. To achieve this aim it is really important to be a creative teacher.

Before explain what a teachers should do to overcome the routine and catch pupil's attention I will start by showing what does creativity mean according to some contemporary authors and then we will have to put into practise these theories.

2. Definitions of creativity (author's opinions)

According to some authors, the meaning of being creative can be different, but they agree that creativity is a process that can be learnt so if you practice your creativity using different exercises or methods you can improve your capacity to think and act in a creative way. I have selected some authors that I have considered relevant to take into account.

Edward de Bono on creative thinking

Edward de Bono invented the concept of lateral thinking. A world-renowned writer and philosopher, he is the leading authority for developing children's thinking skills. His methods have been adopted in countries and schools around the world.

De Bono asserts that creativity is a learnable skill, not just something innate. He also claims that creativity adds value; it is not simply prizing difference for its own sake, but developing ideas that are useful. He emphasizes that creativity requires thinking d i f f e r e n t l y, a process which requires changes.

One of his books, *Teach Your Child How to Think*, demonstrates the difference between intelligence and thinking and provides a step-by-step method for helping children to develop a clear and constructive thinking pattern (how to make decisions, take initiatives, and become more creative). According to this author, thinking is the most fundamental human skills but education does very

little about it. The belief that intelligence and thinking are the same has led to some unfortunate conclusions:

— Students with high intelligence are automatically good thinkers;
— Students with low intelligence can never be good thinkers;
— The more information you have the smarter you are;
— Wisdom can't be taught... it comes with age and experience.

Edward de Bono's "CoRT programme"[1] is the most widely used international method of direct teaching of thinking in schools. You can watch a video in which the own Dr. Bonos explain his theory: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjSjZOjNIJg.

Erica Mcwilliam and others. What is creativity?

McWilliam claims that part of creativity is "unlearning" certain habits. According to that, teachers become irrelevant when their pedagogy is limited to inculcating routines of thinking because creativity is the defeat of habit by originality. To know more about what creativity is, you can watch this video http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-fL1_H6wuc

She explains that "Big-C creativity" — the idea of an individual artist who changes culture — is giving way to the idea of "little-c creativity", the idea that creativity is a process, more social, open to risk-taking, which drives economic development.

In broad terms, we have seen two traditions of thinking about the nature of the processes that make for more creative capacity — that it is either an outcome of individual processes of intuitive, subjective ideation, or an outcome of social processes with generic applicability.

These traditions of thinking are reflected, in turn, in two "generations" of understandings held by contemporary teachers. Research into the beliefs of award-winning academic teachers shows that many teachers hold a mixture of "first generation" (individualistic) and "second-generation" (social, pluralistic) understandings, with the latter providing a more useful platform for developing and documenting effective teaching and learning strategies[2].

---

[1] More information: http://www.cortthinking.com

[2] Table 1 in: R. Fisher, *Values for Thinking*, Oxford 2001; in Spanish: *Valores para pensar*, Barcelona 2005.

3. Gestalt

Creation and creativity from the perspective of Gestalt therapy

Thanks to the practice of enhancing conditions for learning, it has been consistently revealed that students are more prone to respond positively to an invitation to learn than if they are ordered, coerced, or have to pay for learning. Learning from desire and from internal motivation is far superior than mandated and forced learning, and studying that is based on fear. Gestalt pedagogy, ideally, involves a statement of trust in the inherent ability of the organism/student to know his or her own needs, the way to go to satisfy these needs, and the order in which they should be dealt with. Like dialogical contact and experimental engagement of Gestalt therapists with clients, authentic Gestalt pedagogy is a trust-based endeavor. It involves the belief that the process will support the investigative procedure and that learning will occur.

According to some students of Gestalt therapy:

Connection: is the essential ingredient of creation and of Gestalt therapy;

Rationality: involves mutuality and reciprocity, essential elements of dialogue;

Experiment: is bringing attention to the now, action to the content, theory to life;

Awareness: is the key process for attending to the obvious in the here and now;

Trust: is an initial objective in creating a cohesive learning environment;

Inclusion: is essential to develop a trusting and authentic classroom experience;

Visualization: is important because a picture is worth a thousand words;

Individualize: is necessary to meet every student where she/he is to make contact;

Taoism: is the heart-beat of Gestalt therapy — living in the present moment;

Sensing: is the "what and how" of initiating awareness and contact;

Learning: is accomplished when students are able to integrate their knowledge;

Theory: is the essential foundation for understanding Gestalt interventions.

4. Competences of creative early childhood education teachers

Educators understand that children learn best through meaningful play, therefore, an important competence of a creative teachers is to provide a child a program which reflects the integration of physical, cognitive, social-emotional, language and self-help skills. The best way to afford it is using creative techniques that allows children to express themselves using different methods.

As far as I am concerned, young children are developmentally capable of classroom experiences which require higher level of thinking skills, including analysis (dividing material into component parts to understand the structure, to see similarities and differences); synthesis (putting parts together to form a new whole, rearranging, reorganizing); and evaluation (judging the value of material based on definite criteria).

Children want and need to express ideas and messages through many different expressive avenues and symbolic media. Young children form mental images, represent their ideas, and communicate with the world in a combination of ways. They need to increase competence and integration across formats including words, gestures, drawings, paintings, sculpture, construction, music, dramatic play, movement, and dance. Through sharing and gaining others' perspectives, and then revisiting and revising their work, children move to new levels of awareness. Teachers act as guides, without imposing ideas and beliefs upon the children.

Besides, young children learn through meaningful activities in which different subject areas are integrated. Open-ended discussions and long-term activities bring together whole-language activities, science, social studies, dramatic play, and artistic creation. Activities that are meaningful and relevant to the child's life experiences provide opportunities to teach across the curriculum and assist children in seeing the interrelationships between things they are learning.

5. The multidisciplinary approach

The integrated curriculum allows pupils to learn in a meaningful way, enjoying the learning of different subjects at the same time and they do not realize how much they are learning because it is done in a natural way.[3]

There are many different ways to create multidisciplinary curriculum, and they tend to differ in the level of intensity of the integration effort. Integrating reading, writing, and oral communication in language arts is really common

[3] http://www.thecreativelearningjourney.co.uk

and it is used in different situations. For example, the arrival of a new brother or sister is a useful occurrence. Teachers might ask parents of children from their class to contribute photographs of the children as infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, so that the children who are interested at such activities can make scrapbooks. If such photos are unavailable, the children can draw or cut pictures from magazines, or dictate stories about foods, toys, or bedroom furnishings they remembered. Such activities, designed to help a child to deal with a new baby, also help them to use spoken and written language and to select and organize materials.

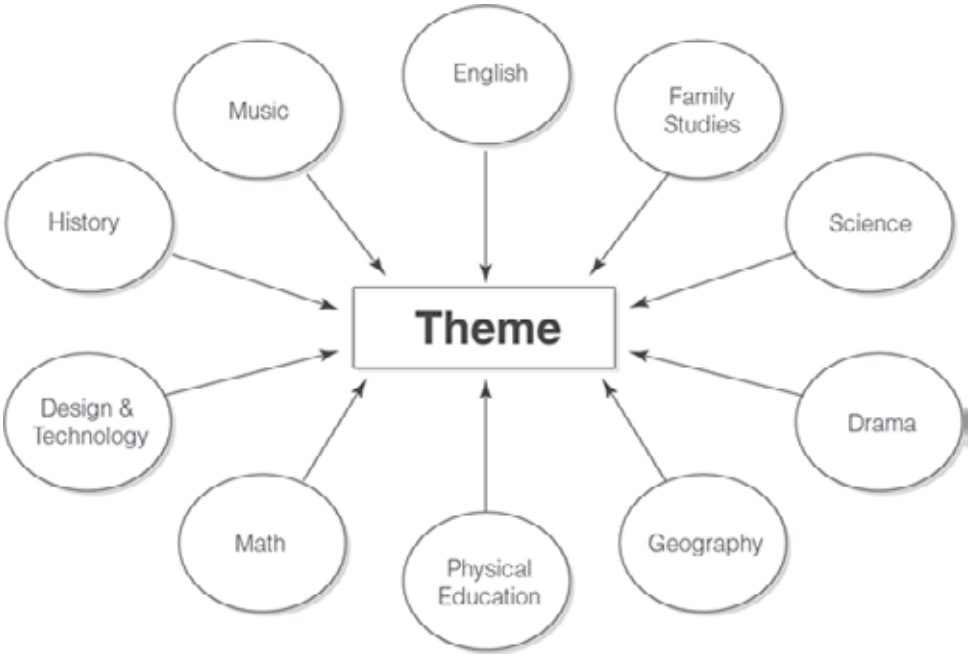
When the subjects are integrated the results are better because children are much more interested at them as far as they do not realize that they are learning. It has also really positive effect on teachers because they also need to be creative and to have enough flexibility to adapt their classes according to the challenge to every child. Teachers who use the multidisciplinary approach organize standards from the disciplines around a theme. As we can see below, it shows the relationship of different subjects to each other and to a common theme.

6. Some examples on integrated curriculum

In public schools in Asheville and Buncombe, North Carolina, students learn math skills through clog dancing and explore the solar system through modern dance. In these schools teachers deliver the core curriculum through the arts. This approach is based on the research report *Champions of Change*: *The Impact of the Arts on Learning.*[4] This report offers clear evidence that sustained involvement in particular art forms — music and theater — being highly correlated with success in mathematics and reading. Furthermore, at-risk students do particularly well both academically and personally in these types of programs.[5]

Students participate in a microsociety in an after-school program at Amistad Academy in New Haven, Connecticut. This program prepares middle school students from a poor minority population for colleges, careers, and citizenship. They attend traditional classes during the regular school day, and after school, for a few hours a week, they belong to a microscociety-holding jobs, paying taxes, running businesses, making laws, and punishing lawbreakers. The purpose of the program is to make school more relevant and fun while building transferable life skills. The school raised its average test scores two and a half levels in math and one and a half levels in reading. In 1998 a study

[4] R. Fisher, *Games for Thinking*, Oxford 1997; in Spanish: *Juegos para pensar*, Barcelona 2002.
[5] B. Rankin, *Displaying Children's Work*, "Scholastic Early Childhood Today" 2005, pp. 34–35.



of 15 microsociety schools in six states found that at two-thirds of the schools students posted gains on standardized reading and math tests that were as much as 21 percent greater than those of their peers.[6]

In these examples student achievement is a primary focus. Teachers maintain accountability while designing learning experiences that are relevant to student interests. Interestingly, two of the schools serve populations of diverse students. In each case teachers have developed intriguing curriculum that pushes beyond the boundaries of traditional disciplines to produce positive results. Comprehension, for example, is comprehension, whether taught in a language class or in a science class. When students are engaged in learning, whether they are taking part in the arts or play role in a microsociety, they do well in seemingly unconnected academic arenas. These are only a few of the countless examples of students involved in interdisciplinary studies at all grade levels. The examples highlight the potential of integrated curriculum to act as a bridge to increase student achievement and engaging, relevant curriculum.

It is also important to maintain a home-school connection and provide an environment where parental participation and assistance is welcomed and community involvement is encouraged.

---

[6] C. P. Edwards, K. Springate, *Inviting Children into Project Work*, "Dimensions of Early Childhood" 22 (2003), pp. 9–12, 40.

7. What creative teachers can do

From an early age children are naturally curious. They want to explore because they are discovering new things every day and they really want to know more about them so they are always asking questions such as: how does it work, why is it there, how is it called... Around every corner there is an experience just waiting to surprise and excite young growing minds.

Primary teachers have to take advantage of this point stimulating innate capability of curiosity. The best way of maintaining or increasing motivation in students is to plan creative and imaginative lessons. All they need is a small amount of direction and a large amount of freedom, which means that pupils have to know how to do a particular task or activity, and once they have it clear, they need to have enough freedom to express themselves.

A creative task motivates participants, so it is necessary to think in an imaginative way and stop planning sessions in a mechanical sense, because our main objective is to plan a task to encourage our pupils.

At the beginning of the course it was presented the "C-wheel". It is a flexible tool that could be applied to many different teaching and learning contexts. "Around the wheel are eight segments showing key ingredients, all beginning with the letter 'C', which help us to work towards creating optimal conditions for learning."[7]

Planning lessons is the first point that a teacher is supposed to design, and it has to include the objectives, contents, material, procedures, assessment and the activities that are going to be realized. The most important of this planning is to design it being aware of pupil's necessities and encouraging pupils to think creatively. But how pupils can think in a creative way? To answer this question the responsible of transmit knowledge to their pupils has to be able to make it possible.

8. Teaching strategies to support creative thinking across the curriculum

Any lesson can develop creative thinking if it involves pupils generating and extending ideas, suggesting hypotheses, applying imagination and finding new or innovative outcomes. Teachers have to try to include "situations" that develop creativity during the lessons they teach:

— using imagination,
— generating questions, ideas and outcomes,
— experimenting with alternatives,

[7] C. Read, http://carolread.wordpress.com/2010/01/28/c-is-for-c-wheel/

— being original,
— expanding on what they know or say,
— exercising their judgement.

These are some strategies that can be applied to a wide range of curriculum areas:

Use imagination

Think of new ideas, speculate on what might be possible and apply imagination to improve outcomes.

Question cues:
What might happen if... (if not)?
Can you imagine...?
Suggest an improvement on...

Generate more ideas

Generate many responses, encourage thinking of alternatives and the asking of questions.

Question cues:
How many kinds of... can you think of?
List all... that could be used for...?
What questions could you ask?

Experiment with alternatives

Be willing to change one's initial ideas, see things in another way, experiment with alternative approaches.

Question cues:
How else might you...?
Think of five ways of/questions to ask about/reasons for...
List ten things you could do with... (a shape, picture, object, photo, story etc.)

Be original

Think of novel ideas, unique solutions, and design original plans.

Question cues:
Design a game for...
Invent a way to...
Think of a way to improve... (an object, game, story, plan etc.)

Expand on what you do and know

Elaborate on what you know, build on a given situation, make it more interesting.

Question cues:

What might we add...? (e.g. to a word, phrase, sentence, story, picture, design)
What might we change...? (e.g. to make it different, more interesting)
What is another way to...? (e.g. solve problem, investigate a mystery)

Exercise your judgment

Assess what we have thought/done, evaluate the process and judge the outcome.

Question cues:
What criteria should we use to judge whether...?
What is good/could be improved/is interesting about...
What could/should you/we do next...?

Creativity cannot be left to chance, it must be valued, encouraged and expected — and seen as essential to all teaching and learning. So get creative

Fortunately, active and meaningful learning, rather than listening and repeating automatically, reflects the learning preferences of the present generation of learners, who are more likely in informal environments to try things out rather than follow instructions "from above". If teachers can understand the value of being "usefully ignorant" about learning options and possibilities, at the same time as they are expert in their disciplinary field and their pedagogical practice, who are active and inventive in the classroom, if they support children, if they do not make things too easy, and if they are not the only source of authority, who use processes of discovery, critique, argument and counter-argument effectively, if they enjoy learning themselves and do not rush to rescue their students from complexity — such teachers will contribute immeasurably to the creative capacity of their students now and in the future.

9. Teaching in a creative way with the approppiated conditions

As we have seen children have an amazing competence to express visions of themselves and their world. Thanks to the unity of thinking and feeling that young children can explore their world, represent their ideas, and communicate with others at their highest level. When educators fully understand how exploration, representation, and communication feed each other, they can best help children to achieve this potential. Teachers can also support children's emerging creativity arranging aspects that involve the classroom and that will provide an opportunity to improve inherent children's creativity.

Time. Creativity does not follow the clock. Children need extended, unhurried time to explore and do their best work. They should not be asked to move to a different learning center or activity when they are still productively engaged and motivated by a piece of creative work.

Space. Children need a place to leave unfinished work to continue it the next day, and a space that inspires them to do their best work. Children's work is promoved by a space that has natural light, harmonious colors, comfortable and child-sized areas, examples of their own and others' work (not only their classmates, but, as appropriate, also their teachers' and selected adult artists), and inviting materials.

Materials. Without spending great amounts of money, teachers can organize wonderful collections of resource materials that might be bought, found, or recycled. These materials can include paper goods of all kinds; writing and drawing tools; materials for constructions and collages, such as: buttons, stones, shells and seeds. These materials are used most productively and imaginatively by children when they themselves have helped to select, organize, sort, and arrange them.

Climate. The classroom atmosphere should reflect the adults' encouragement and acceptance of mistakes, risk-taking, innovation, and uniqueness, along with a certain amount of mess, noise, and freedom. This is not a matter of chaos, or tight control, but something in between. In order to create such a climate, teachers must give themselves permission to try artistic activity and consider mistakes as a part of the learning process.

Occasions. Children's the best and the most exciting work involves an intense or arousing encounter between themselves and their inner or outer world. Children find it hard to be creative without any concrete inspiration. Instead, they prefer to draw on the direct evidence of their senses or memories. These memories can become more vivid and accessible through the teacher's provocations and preparations. For example, teachers can encourage children to represent their knowledge and ideas before and after they have watched a show, taken a field trip, or observed and discussed an interesting plant or animal brought into class. Teachers can put up a mirror or photos in front of the children in the art area, so children can study their faces as they draw their self-portrait. Teachers can offer children the opportunity to check what they have drawn against an original model and then let them revise and improve upon their first representation.

10. Conclusion

As we have seen children have amazing capabilities to learn, and the best way of promoting and motivating their knowledge is through creativity, which also means the unity of thinking and feeling thanks to which young children can explore their world, represent their ideas, and communicate with others at their highest level. When educators fully understand how exploration, representation, and communication feed each other, they can best help children to achieve this potential.

The main objective of a creative teacher is that pupils learn in a motivating way, so we have to design activities to achieve our aim. In my opinion it is important that pupils interact with each other to create a favourable climate in the classroom to enhance their learning, and now we know different techniques to afford it. We can try to put into practice in class, and maybe we will have to change some of the points according to children's necessities because every child is unique.

I have found an interesting resource *Learning to Play and Playing to Learn*: *Getting Ready for School.*[8] This is a booklet for parents, and it talks about the importance of playing in the childhood to acquire some basic competences unconsciously, to give enough freedom to enable pupils to learn autonomously. As the article says, pupils should be given enough freedom to practise and learn from their mistakes because it is more effective to prompt pupils into discovering their own mistakes and to help them to find the right solution for themselves. I think that it is also really important to cooperate with families, because it has no sense to work on some values in the classroom if then children are learning in the opposite way in their own houses.

Finally, there is no "one right way" to help young children to achieve their creative potential. Teachers will need to continue to experiment and test alternatives to see what is effective in their situation.

Bibliography

Edwards C. P., Springate K., *Inviting Children into Project Work*, "Dimensions of Early Childhood" 22, 2003, pp. 9–12, 40.
Fisher R., *Games for Thinking*, Oxford 1997; in Spanish: *Juegos para pensar*, Barcelona 2002.
Fisher R., *Values for Thinking*, Oxford 2001; in Spanish: *Valores para pensar*, Barcelona 2005.
Rankin B., *Displaying Children's Work*, "Scholastic Early Childhood Today" 2005, pp. 34–35.
Read Carol, http://carolread.wordpress.com/2010/01/28/c-is-for-c-wheel/

[8] http://www.beststart.org/resources/hlthy_chld_dev/pdf/school_readiness_english_fnl.pdf

http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/eecearchive/digests/1995/edward95.html
http://www.beststart.org/resources/hlthy_chld_dev/pdf/school_readiness_english_fnl.pdf
http://www.celt.iastate.edu/creativity/techniques.html
http://www.cortthinking.com
http://www.thelearningcenterpreschool.com/kindergarten-readiness-skills