Stimulating the development of creativity and passion in children and teenagers in family and school environment - inhibitors and opportunities to overcome them

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Abstract

Developing students' creativity is becoming one of the important goals of educational activities. This interest stems predominantly from the need of various sectors of the economy to train future staff, who will generate new technological solutions, which will be a vital part of the economic future of many parts of the world, including the European Union. The importance of staff creativity for social development is also being increasingly emphasized.

A key role in developing the creativity of students in all ages is played by formal education. Teachers have become responsible for stimulating the creative abilities of students, shaping their personality traits and attitudes conducive to creativity, as well as for teaching students the skills of creative thinking and creative problem solving. School and family environment should “develop skills and install the spring which will elevate the student to a higher level of his development.” In order to do this, it is necessary to: take children’s work and efforts they put into their own education seriously; elicit the knowledge acquired by students; convey knowledge which is a necessary raw material for creative activity; organize meetings with people whom students can see as excellent role models of creative attitude; and, finally, teach students how to take up efforts and persevere in their work, because creativity requires perseverance and long-term commitment.

Therefore, it is worth knowing the inhibitors of creativity and ways to overcome them. This is a challenge parents and teachers have to face up to. It is difficult but not impossible.

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Developing students' creativity is becoming one of the important goals of educational activities. This interest stems predominantly from the need of various sectors of the economy to train future staff, who will generate new technological solutions, which will be a vital part of the economic future of many parts of the world, including the European Union. The importance of staff creativity for social development is also being increasingly emphasised. A key role in developing the creativity of students in all ages is played by formal education. Teachers have become responsible for stimulating the creative abilities of students, shaping their personality traits and attitudes conducive to creativity, as well as for teaching students the skills of creative thinking and creative problem solving. Therefore, it is worth knowing the inhibitors of creativity and ways to overcome them. This is a challenge parents and teachers have to face up to. It is difficult but not impossible.

Undoubtedly, creativity opens a lot of doors, presents a lot of opportunities and gives hope. What is creativity, then? According to E. Landau, "Creativity is an attitude that, on the one hand, allows you to find new aspects in the old and familiar, and on the other hand, enables you to face the new and the unfamiliar and process it into a new experience thanks to the knowledge you already have." In other words, creativity is the ability to see something unusual in ordinary and common things and to create something new. It is a skill of thinking outside the box and of effective problem- and task-solving.

Fig. 1. What is creativity?

Source: http://dzieciecybazar.blogspot.com/

Next to creativity, there are also other concepts: abilities and interests. A. Gurycka believes that an interest is a mental feature which takes the form of a targeted cognitive activity of certain intensity and manifests itself in selective relation to phenomena surrounding the individual. A. Kamiński associates interests with motivation. They are some sort of an internal engine behind our mental "appetite." Interests stimulate initiative in the field of desire and will, and also activate the intellectual progress.

Both creativity and interests affect human abilities, which are the result of creative thinking and creative actions. Abilities themselves are formed by a number of factors, which are often independent of one another. Figure 2 presents the multifactor model of giftedness.
Interests of a child may manifest themselves in many different forms of activity. They develop through play, reading, watching movies, mass media, and contacts with peers, etc. Children learn different behaviours by observing and imitating their family members, other adults and peer environment. If these patterns are inappropriate, the child is in the so-called risk group.

Just as is the case of abilities, the development of interests is also influenced by a variety of factors. They can be divided into two main groups:

• biogenetic factors which include age, sex, abilities and physical development;
• socio-cultural factors which include social environment, socio-economic standing, as well as teaching programme and teaching methods at school.

The fundamental condition for the development of interests is the child's active approach to getting to know the world around him/her. The motto of educators, i.e. of parents and teachers, who want to bring up active and enlightened people, should be: children must get to know the world by themselves – we are just their helpers and guides in the process. Our efforts will have value only if we teach children how to acquire knowledge about the world by themselves, if we arouse their cognitive passion, if we evoke their deep curiosity to know everything and channel their cognitive activity so that they become specialists in certain areas.

Schools consider parents to be excellent partners in the process of shaping children's interests. Their work is particularly valuable, because it can be more individualised, tailored to the capabilities and needs of the child, and, above all, carried out from an early age.

The educational process aimed at the formation of new interests must create opportunities in which features typical of particular interests can manifest themselves and be modified in the desired direction. Therefore, the pattern of each process of interests carried out at school, at home or elsewhere must include the following elements:

1. Identifying a problem which refers to the selected content of particular interests.
2. Giving children tips on how a problem can be solved, i.e. teaching them techniques to solve similar problems, providing them with references to appropriate literature and telling them where to find necessary information.
3. Creating conditions in which children can conduct their independent research in accordance with specific instructions.
4. Taking educational care of the results of children's efforts and making their surroundings aware of the effects they have managed to obtain in their independent work.

The above process should be repeated by teachers and parents many a time until they notice the first signs of a newly-aroused interest. The most important signs are children's questions, i.e. independently formulated problems aimed at further research endeavours. It is then when an educator should limit his own actions in this area and allow the young to independently determine problems and thus mark out a course of their further actions. An educator should also gradually reduce the range of provided instructions, giving children greater freedom of exploration.

Parents or teachers should therefore be able to use problems and questions, not statements and axioms. Instead of formally eliciting the facts children have memorised or skills they have acquired, they should reinforce the research endeavours of children and teenagers, making them want to explore and try more.

The selection and orientation of the youth's interests must be properly synchronised with the entire developing personality and serve to achieve multilateral educational goals. In order to arouse new interests, problems must be formulated so as to incite students' cognitive anxiety and make them work hard before they arrive at solutions. When presenting a problem, it must be selected and formulated in a way which makes it interesting to children, even the youngest ones, and for parents. The answer cannot be a simple reproduction of the already-possessed information; the mere yes/no answer must be impossible. Problems-puzzles make children think. What is important here is the type and range of instructions given to a child before he/she starts his/her independent work, and also determining the conditions and time of the child's independent work aimed at solving problems initially presented by a parent. It is worth noting that creating conditions which are favourable to children's independent work is the best way to shape their interests.

Parents who want their child to have particular interests must necessarily find time and place in their domestic schedule and enable children to pursue their passions. If it is completely impossible in the house, if parents do not feel sufficiently prepared for this type of contact with the child, or if they do not have the time, they have to provide the child with access to institutions that can take on the responsibility for shaping children's interests.

It is extremely important to create an atmosphere of respect for the child's efforts.

A good way to develop creativity is drawing/painting; it also enhances the child-parent communication. However, it should be noted that the manner of drawing interpretation should be discussed with a psychologist.

Activities which might seem dull at first might also turn out to be very creative. One of them is being bored. Studies confirm that children who are allowed to do nothing from time to time are the most imaginative and creative. A child needs to feel bored at first to discover new layers of creativity.

In order to develop creativity in a child, it is necessary to create opportunities for action, for creative problem-solving and for discovering new things. Children learn to memorise and use facts.

Below, there are a few tips on how to help a child develop his/her creativity:

1. Do not suggest ready-made solutions. Let your children try new things, make mistakes and reach the essence of the problem on their own. Let your children create their world by themselves! When giving your children toys they have not seen before, do not show them how to play with them right away. Let them work out their own ways to play with them.

2. Allow your children to ask questions and ask questions yourself. Questions are a prelude to creative thinking. An ability to ask the right questions makes it easier to find the answer. Questions are signs of curiosity about the world around us and problems. If you want your children to develop their creative thinking, ask unconventional questions, e.g. What does a rose smell like? or How many flavours does a vegetable salad have? If you don't know the answer to some questions, just admit you don't know and check.

3. Read. All of us know that images served by TV do not stimulate imagination. But the opposite is true for reading books. Although it is obvious, we often forget about it, being busy with our everyday routines. However, during our spring walks or on our way back home from a kindergarten or school, we might look up at the sky and try to guess if a cloud we see is a lamb, or maybe a bear. Ask your child to tell you what he/she considered the most interesting during today's classes, what questions he/she asked and why.

4. Inspire and reward. Children need motivation and support to play in a creative way, that is why you should not criticise their ideas even if you know they are not the best ones. Let your little ones find it out by themselves and look for other solutions. Show your interest in what your children are doing. Appreciate their efforts.
5. Support. If your child has an unusual hobby and collects some knick-knacks, e.g. bottle caps or little stones, do not criticise it even if you think it is unnecessary. Let him or her do it. Praise your child when he/she is doing something that is difficult for him/her.

6. Stimulate all senses. Remember to stimulate the development of all the child's senses (vision, hearing, touch and taste) during play. Make the play broaden your child's horizons.

The second half of the twentieth century, and, more specifically, its last decades have brought a new look at the methods of children and youth education. The pedagogy of creativity became triumphant and was possible only with the active cooperation between students and teachers. Interesting views on the education of a small child were presented by prominent musicians and educators of the 20th century – Emil Jaques-Dalcroze, Carl Orff and Zoltan Kodaly. They proposed pedagogical methods focused on activeness, creative expression and freedom of imagination. They emphasised that the best results are achieved when learning goes hand in hand with experience and one's own actions.

How can teachers help students develop their creativity?

Here are some practical tips:

1. Let creativity be one of the objectives of education! Prepare classes which value creativity.

2. Designate space for creativity. During some of the classes, you can prepare a special table for creative discussions, a stage to play out some topics in the form of drama, or a colourful area on the floor where students can or have to break certain patterns, etc.

3. Join or form a special programme aimed at developing the skills of creative thinking! Such programmes (e.g. Odyssey of the Mind, EXPLORY) enable young people to meet and compete in finding solutions in a creative manner.

4. Try to engage students' emotions. Studies show that the most motivating situations for the development of creativity are the ones which stimulate emotions. Think about topics which are important for your local community, e.g. how to effectively help the elderly and those who are lonely.

5. While solving problems, use scientifically verified and globally applied models of creative thinking, e.g. the Osborne-Parnes model. These types of models have a very strict structure and, at the same time, encourage free thinking.

6. During group discussions, praise creative students. Creative people often diverge from the main topic, digress and ask seemingly unrelated questions. Write down questions asked by such students and show them that you appreciate them. Find time to answer those questions.

7. Think to what extent tasks you give your students require the two types of thinking which are necessary for creativity. It is important to maintain the right balance between coming up with many potential answers to a specific problem with the use of free associations and remote connections, and logical analysis and selection of the best solution.

8. Create a principle of freedom in expressing one's views. Students should feel safe and have the courage to express their opinions, which are often diverse and mutually exclusive. Be open to the coexistence of diversity.

9. Tolerate mistakes. Only those who do not learn do not make mistakes. If you want your students to learn a lot, they should have the opportunity to err and to draw meaningful conclusions from their mistakes.

10. Set aside time for questions and free exploration. During certain classes, you should set aside time for the so-called brainstorming when students can develop their curiosity and ability to question the status quo.

11. Give students space for independent thinking. Let them take responsibility for their learning process. Provide them with clearly formulated goal and access to sources. You will be surprised to see how good they are at accomplishing the assigned tasks!

12. Find ways to connect different subjects. Creativity often occurs at the interface of different fields by associating distant facts. Find ways to connect e.g. Music with Maths, Arts with History, Dance with Geography, etc.

13. Be a role model of creative behaviour. Show your students that you are open to the new and the unknown.

14. Get inspired by existing resources. There are a lot of materials about supporting and fostering creativity at school. Surf the Internet to find books on this subject; join the programme which develops creativity at schools.

In both teachers' and parents' work, it is important to motivate children to learn and be creative.
Motivation is a regulatory process which controls the behavior so that it leads to a specific effect (goal), boosts the energy to act and directs it to a specific target. Motivation organizes individual reactions into an integrated pattern and maintains the individual's activeness until the conditions which triggered the motivation become changed. The strength of motivation depends on the extent to which the goal is attractive and to which one believes he is capable of achieving that goal. A motivational process gets initiated if there is motivational tension and if a person is particularly sensitive to the stimuli able to reduce this tension.

According to Maslow's theory, there is a positive desire to grow and to meet our various needs in every one of us. Human needs create a permanent hierarchy, which determines the order in which they are fulfilled. Needs which are higher in the hierarchy actualize only when one fulfills the needs on the lower level (which are more basic).

M. V. Covington compares learning to a game with complicated rules determining the way prizes are distributed. He distinguishes between two types of motivation: race of skills and a game of equal opportunities. Race of skills is not necessarily the motivation to learn, but to compete with others in order to maintain the reputation of a gifted child with advanced skills, or the motivation based on the fear that others will do better. According to the author, these kinds of motivation have a detrimental effect on children, because they draw them away from real successes, eliminate the desire to make attempts and promote hurtful comparisons with others.

M. V. Covington proposes a positive kind of motivation to learn – a game of equal opportunities. There are five rules of equality that are conducive to excellent results achieved by a child:

- ensuring equal access to rewards;
- rewarding achievement and curiosity;
- appreciating many different skills;
- offering alternative motivations;
- proposing tasks which are engaging enough for a child to work.

The list of questions formulated by the British Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), quoted by Robert Fisher, is a potential source of inspiration for teachers interested in stimulating the creativity of their students.

Factors which curb the creative approach are sometimes called "inhibitors"; obstacles or barriers to creativity. The complex nature of school barriers to creativity is a direct result of the complexity of the school environment, which in turn stems from the interaction of psychological, social and cultural factors present at school and, finally, from the complexity of the school as an institution. Creative potential of students is inhibited because of the education system, the way the school itself is organized as an institution, the adopted teaching methods, teachers and students themselves, conditions (physical and financial) associated with their actions, psycho-social relations between those who participate in school life, and the whole atmosphere at school and the school's organizational culture.

The below-mentioned barriers co-occur in the school environment or condition one another. These include:

- immanent barriers - related to the goals and tasks presented at school, and to the features of school as an institution;
- barriers associated with the content and methods of teaching and education;
- personal barriers - associated with the person of the teacher and student;
- barriers associated with the conditions of the physical school environment of the student's activity.

School barriers to creativity, even the ones which are firmly rooted in the tradition of school education, are not an insurmountable obstacle. They may inspire us to change our perception of school education. In order for this to happen, however, the change must occur at the level of "needs." What needs to change is the way we think about the meaning of creativity in human life and about the value of creative activity in the development of the student. We must start to perceive the "need" to develop creative potential as a vital goal of school education.

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