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**DEVELOPING THE CREATIVE POTENTIAL OF STUDENTS
THROUGH GROUP ACTIVITIES**

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Abstract

The belief that a new, original product can be generalized exclusively by a unique, brilliant mind is no longer a certainty. History has proved to us that most of the time the novelty appears in work teams, because of the group effort. In addition to declarative knowledge and cognitive skills, the current context requires several other soft skills that include the dimension of developing creativity and teamwork skills. In this paper we aim to identify modalities to develop creative student's skills by integrating them into activities that can be performed in groups. These approaches must be compatible with the particularities of the groups in the class and adapted to the curricular requirements, if they are implemented within the formal activities. But this idea can also be integrated into extracurricular activities. The big challenge for teachers is to emphasize the role of group activities and the benefits they have on the development of students' personality, and to put them in the context of activating creative potential.

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1. Introduction

Creativity is one of the most popular concepts used in the latest educational papers. Many authors aimed at analysing and studying this human capacity in every possible way. Therefore, we can find many definitions of creativity as a cognitive capacity or as a process. We choose one of the latest definitions of creativity – that of being “the ability to reinterpret something by breaking down into its elements and recombining these elements in a surprising way to achieve some goal” (Kounios & Beeman, 2015, as cited in Starko, 2022, p. 13).

Lucas (2016) highlights the recent years contributions on some authors for developing school creativity field by using the concept of “little c creativity,” the kind of “ordinary creativity that we can all show across a range of domains” (Lucas, 2016, p. 280) in contrasts with big C creativity that we might expect only for the genius. That type of creativity can be learned and is cultivated, therefore, it can be provoked in the school environment. Runco (2014) states the importance of the following process:

The educational practice of looking for creative potential in all students, not just those who express their originality in socially-recognized products and performances. Education for creativity should focus on the fulfillment of potential (...) and is not expressed in an award-winning product. (p. 132)

Little *c* creativity is by far the most important focus for education. All creativity starts with little *c* creativity. Little *c* is the individual's production of a new and useful idea or solution and at some point that idea, product or reflection can be shared with others and generate one big New Something.

Other complex definitions integrate next to creativity more concepts like creative imagination or *creative potential* when is related to children or young schoolers.

Creative potential involves the ability to be creative and to reflect something from personal feelings, emotions and experiences. We like to promote one of the best syntagma that illustrates the future of the creativity concept: “the new smart” (Roberts, 2019). The profiles of the creators will be framed like that: (1) They will blend multiple intelligences in a way that might be described as synthetic or even symphonic; (2) They will be ambitious and focused without being self-obsessed; (3) They will value asynchrony and even seek it out; (4) They will use their own marginality to generate novel perspective and new work; (5) They will exhibit a steadfast resilience in all phases of life; (6) They will be measured by what they produce over the course of their lives, not by any static notion of capacity or quotient (Roberts, 2019, p. 21).

2. Research Questions

For our study we intent to answer this question: how creative potential can be boosted by group activities? Is it possible to establish a creative environment in the classroom by using collaborative tasks for activities with young students?

3. Research Methods

For this paper we aimed at integrating the ideas from a series of studies related to the connection between creativity and activation of the creative potential and group activities or teamwork. Also, we identify and propose examples of this kind of ideas that can be materialized in educational practices.

4. Findings

Because we intended to highlight the benefits of group tasks in activating the creative potential of students, we identified some authors who emphasize the importance of collaboration in that field, and we made some proposals for the activities that can be integrated in primary school's classrooms.

4.1. Promoting Creativity in The Classroom

Is creativity for everybody? What do teachers do to cultivate a creative environment? The collaborative classroom may be the answer to these questions. Teachers must have a creative approach of objectives and goals and they must project strategies that involve collaboration: "Be intentional about designing the types of learning that not only meet the needs of your students, but also engage them in creative thinking and collaboration" (Maslyk, 2019, p. 114). The author also points out the importance of classroom culture and the presence of trust in any learning groups. Teachers must build trust in the classroom by recognizing the individual abilities of each student and the benefits of the different points of view in opinions or visions. In other words, the teachers are the promoters of the collaborative or competitive tasks. They set up the conditions that lead the entire activities.

So, if there is a safe space for personal expression and development, the pupils are rather challenged to engage in tasks that requests new ideas. Knowing the fact that there is no undesirable consequence of their expressions, the students will be open to mix their own ideas or the pair's ideas and share them to the group, no matter how funny they may seem. The experiences children have during their first years of life can significantly enhance the development of their creativity on long-term. For this reason, it is important for children to have the best opportunities to reveal their self. And sometimes that revealing can be easily expressed through the agency of the pair (partners).

Drapeau (2014) suggests teachers to make creativity a habit by practicing creative thinking in classrooms. But first, one must establish the classroom climate, that include "a safe environment where the teacher supports unusual ideas, provides choice, uses creative strategies, encourages multiple interpretations and solutions, and provides constructive feedback" (p. 9).

The sense of community is very important in the creative classroom because the students learn to value others colleagues' skills better when they work and learn in collaborative groups. Drapeau (2014) identifies three types of groups where creativity can be promoted: ability groups based on the student's ability in a specific content, cooperative groups based on the students' interest, and flexible groups formed and re-formed by the students' needs and preferences.

Lucas (2016) elaborates a model of creativity that reunited five creative habits of mind (CHoM): imaginative, inquisitive, persistent, collaborative, and disciplined. For the collaborative component the author integrates the following abilities: sharing the product, giving, and receiving feedback and

cooperating appropriately. It is important to establish a creative environment in classroom. That includes some habits easy to follow and to maintain: (1) Creativity can be promoted through all school subjects; (2) Influence creative thinking through well-designed learning spaces; (3) Increase the use of open-ended questions; (4) Engage learners in meaningful and authentic activities; (5) Collaboration enhances creativity; (6) Make efficient use of educational technologies; (7) Allow for mistakes and sensible risk-taking; (8) Learn how to assess and reward creativity (Kampylis & Berki, 2014, as cited in Lucas et al., 2021).

The social dimension of the creative process is recognized as a phase of the creativity once again. It is important for the students to know every idea or thing is appreciated and has value. The students learn to express not only their thoughts like in the brainstorming activities, but their feelings, emotions, cares, or anything that can enrich the process that aims the creative product. They also learn to cooperate appropriately and to use empathy in actions. The students may act like a team and work like one: if some of them lack any important ideas at a certain time, there will be for sure some others who will save the team through their own ideas.

We tend to believe that the creative personality is more orientated to the individual work, but the inspiration may reveal when they work with others. Roberts (2019) describes some essential facts in creative schools:

- 1.the opportunity for students to work in teams as well as individually;
- 2.the assessment is ongoing rather collaborative then standardized.

The results of the students play or work and the process of that must count equally, because “the novelty of the performance is the true measure of their commitment and inspiration” (Roberts, 2019, p. 112). One of the key elements to having creative schools is including all students in the design of that educational strategies, not only the gifted ones.

4.2. Modalities to Develop Students' Creative Potential Through Group Activities

There are many ways in which imagination and creative potential can be stimulated in children. Among the active methods that stimulate creativity thinking, based on students' own experience, but also develop communication and relationship skills, mental deliberation and aim to form an active attitude, we mention brainstorming, role play games, project-based learning or debates. School is not the only place where the child learns. When they come to school, the little schoolers already have a certain experience which they continue to enrich. The teacher must find the place in a process that has its own dynamics and continuity. So, educating the creativity on young students can be achieved by using some specific games, most of them organized in peer groups. In primary grades, the students' thinking is trained gradually, systematically, by solving exercises and problems, by using interesting and entertaining mathematical activities. In this case, it is necessary to request the intellectual qualities of the child, to stimulate intelligence, the spirit of observation and creative potential in finding solutions. In this context it is worth mentioning the importance of including specific activities through the arts classes because multiple forms of creativity include visual arts and fundamentally the creativity is associated with arts. And most of the pupils love the crafting or visual art programs.

The following statement “An education in creativity lies in the sweet spot between unstructured play and imitating models” (Eagleman & Brandt, 2017, p. 217) lead us to including in our paper suggestions for primary teachers to involve pupils in free play (this type of play is exclusively associated with the kindergarten activities). Catalano (2018) suggests that it is necessary also for the primary teacher to allocate some free time during the daily program, because they have time even in the given teaching-learning-evaluation activities (duration being approximatively 30 minutes in the Curricular Cycle of Fundamental Acquisitions, preparatory- II classes), not only in recreational activities. Thus, in the remaining time, the teacher should provoke pupils to use some space and the materials in the classroom especially designed for an optimal performance of the play, to exclude injuries or accidents in classroom. In fact, the children are creative in their games and creative play is a big part of the learning process.

The joy of playing can be obturated for a creative mind by the rules of the game. The teachers can suggest the aims of the activity for the students’ groups without putting the boundaries for the subject, objects or even time for the game, just suggesting being for one hour, for all school day or even for the entire week. We suggest the name for this kind of activities: *The free rules game*. The big provocation for the students being to find the best possible game that can be play in their groups or with their pairs. The pupils can play by their own rules, can invent some magic formula for playing etc.

The imitation is also so valuable, not enough appreciated or encouraged by the students. But the models can provoke the change, the old can generate the new. Even the most gifted students cannot start anything from zero. They need a point of inspiration or maybe a confirmed model to be the root of the creative products of their minds.

4.3. Proposal of Group Activities for Primary School Students

The most important thing in the elaboration of tasks that support the development of creativity in group activities is choosing the right activities. In the following, we present some ideas of activities that could be included in a program aimed to activate and to stimulate the creative potential of students.

4.3.1. Collaborative Writing

Collaborative writing is a strategy in which students work together in pairs or small groups to create a text. Through it, students develop their writing skills, reflect on this process, share ideas, think critically, and make joint decisions (Sukirman, 2016). It provides a real learning environment by stimulating students to be actively involved in the writing process.

The stages of collaborative writing, proposed by Lowry et al., 2004, are as follows:

1. Choosing the theme (by teacher or students).
2. Conceiving the design of the work and making a working plan.
3. Identifying keywords by all the members of the group.
4. Editing the text.
5. Writing the draft.
6. Final review (Lowry et al., 2004).

After completing the collaborative writing activity, students are invited to present it. Teacher gives feedback, gives suggestions, and corrects where needed.

We choose to exemplify the application of this strategy for students from 4th grade. So, at the end of a project entitled My friend, the book, students were invited to create in small groups a big book using collaborative writing and choosing a theme from the ones that the teacher proposed: Journey on a cloud, Journey in a balloon, Adventures of a boisterous balloon or The Adventures of the Ship Rim.

For evaluating the level of implication, at the end of the activities, a checklist of group interactions was given to each student.

1. Did all the group members participate?
2. Did you feel rejected, ignored, or offended?
3. Was there one person who made all the decisions?
4. Have there been any misunderstandings? How did you solve them?
5. Did each member know what they had to do?
6. Are you satisfied with your activity within the group?
7. Are you satisfied with the product obtained? (Catalano & Dologa, 2022)

The collaborative writing is very popular with students because it calls on their imagination, they work together, consult each other, choose their roles, plan their activity, and enjoy the result.

4.3.2. Numbered Heads Together

Numbered heads together represent a cooperative learning technique that holds each student accountable for learning the material, developed by Kagan (Kagan & Kagan, 2009). This involves students being divided into small groups. Each student represents a number, for example from 1 to 4 if there are 4 members in the group. The teacher asks a question or raises a problem, and the students must discuss it, then write down the answer or solution to it. At the end of the discussion time, the teacher says a number, and that student must give the answer, on behalf of the group. This strategy proves its usefulness because all students participate actively within the group, and individually.

The technique may be used at all primary school subjects. We provide an example on how to apply it for second graders.

1. Students were divided in groups of 4 members, each one receiving a number from 1 to 4.
2. The teacher asks the students to solve the following math problem: I am thinking of a number. If I add the product of 7 and 8, I get the sum 80. What number is it?
3. The students discussed each other's solution as a group.
4. Each student solved the task.
5. The teacher said a number.
6. The student in each group, who had that number, raised their hands to announce the answer, then read the solution.
7. The teacher and the students draw the conclusions.

4.3.3. Story Map

The story map is a graphic organizer that helps students place the events in a story in chronological order. Before using this technique, the story needs to be read by the teacher or by the student talking about the most important moments. Students work in pairs. Each pair of students will receive a sheet that

they will divide into three parts, numbering them. In the first part, students represent by drawing the beginning of the story, in the second its continuation, and in the last part, the end of the event. Arrows can also be drawn from one cell to another to indicate the order in which events occur (Catalano & Dologa, 2022).

After completing the drawing, students will retell the text according to it.

By using this technique, creativity is stimulated as the characters and the surroundings are designed by the students according to their own imagination.

Those practices and many other can boost the student's engagement and motivation to learn, work and play in groups and, most important, be creative together.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion we want to reinforce the following idea: the cognitive potential can be stimulated at the young schoolers by including strategies that use the group as a form of organizing the activity. Creativity promoted in classes by collaborative tasks has for students many benefits that can be followed on the long term (Martin, 2021):

1. Increases Student Engagement: Working with others is more likely to attract and motivate students to get involved. A creative teacher makes fun lessons. Having fun at school is most likely to succeed engaged student in creative activities.
2. Enhances Cognitive Skills: Engaging in collaborative tasks can be a boost for expressing and developing the students' soft skills like teamwork, leadership, confidence, empathy. Creativity requires students to develop or to change something. Therefore these activities are made to explore many options and various solutions which build and enforce their cognitive abilities.
3. Boosts Self-Confidence: In group collaboration students tend to teach one another and they gain a better sense of self-esteem. Creative tasks request ideas and new ways to solve some problems. There are no right or wrong answers to that kind of problems because the aim is to request students to think creatively. The appreciations and the recognition of their credits help students to build their self-confidence.

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