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THE ROLE OF SOCIETY IN CREATING CONDITIONS FOR PROMOTING CREATIVITY IN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Assist. Prof. Dr. Snježana Dubovicki
Assist. Prof. Dr. Maja Brust Nemet
Faculty of Education, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Croatia

ABSTRACT
When it comes to thinking about fostering creativity in the educational context, one often focuses on the role of the teacher, the support of the principal, parents' willingness to cooperate, material availability, student motivation, and the content that needs to be presented to the students. We rarely think globally, putting the society (and its values) into the focus of the research that directly influences the (non)creation of preconditions for the promotion of creativity. The democracy of society is reflected in the innovativeness and creativity of its individuals. In the research context, our individuals are classroom teachers whom we consider to be the carriers of the value of a new and contemporary society and most likely to be creative, encourage students' creativity and are willing to offer new solutions to old and new (future) problems/challenges in education and society. Due to those reasons, the following research aims were set: to explore the teachers' attitudes towards creativity, the ability to express creativity in all subjects, in all scientific areas (artistic, technological and scientific), to determine what, in their opinion, encourages and hinders creativity. The research was conducted with the help of a qualitative methodology in which a group interview, survey and formative evaluation were used on a sample of N = 290 classroom teachers.

Keywords: social circumstances, creativity, teaching, teachers' attitudes

INTRODUCTION
Writing about the importance of creativity, many authors relied on prerequisites that were mainly related to the teaching process (directly and/or indirectly). Fewer research (especially in Croatia) include reflections on the creativity of the outcomes gained through social context. Social relations create circumstances in which human resources can more or less grow. By observing society and values those societies advocate in all spheres of life, even in education, we can easily notice whether a particular society stimulates or stifles creativity. Examples of such societies can be found in Sparta and Athens [1]. After the collapse of both, Athens was the one that left valuable works in philosophy, literature and art as well as some practical solutions, while Sparta mainly left behind solutions that related to arms and wars [1,2]. Athens is a typical example of a democratic society, and Sparta was a totalitarian society which did not consider the opinions of individuals, but developed collective consciousness. Csányi [3] wrote about the importance of the influence of non-democratic societies on the development of creativity [3] by calling them non-creative social systems. Teaching conducted in accordance with a socio-centrism approach is directed towards the encouragement of the development of collective consciousness, but that rather stifles than encourages

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creativity in teaching [4,2] because it is more focused on meeting the demands of society and less to meeting the needs and interests of all participants in the teaching process. Based on these two examples, we can see that a society which promotes divergent thinking, freedom, innovation and creating new ideas, a society that would be much more successful in dealing with emerging problems/challenges in the future. Rogers [5] claims that societies based on values in which the state and tradition are above all, and people are kept under control, have no future. The same author states that social progress is possible if the characteristics of people belonging to that society are: openness to new ideas, innovation, aspiration for personal development, critical thinking about problems and science, aspiration to develop all aspects of human personality and sensitivity to other people's problems. Suchodolski [6] also warns about the weakness and instability of the position of creativity in modern civilization, which is best illustrated by the education in which all social dogma and hope are held and united. Toynbee [7] analyzes the birth, growth and decay of twenty major civilizations and concludes that the decline of civilization is not related to the loss of control over the environment but to the so-called "creative minority" that cease to be able to cope with new challenges. It is necessary for societies to move forward and advance by using creativity for progress, not for the devastation of society.

For these reasons, the Commission of the European Communities [8] highlighted the need to develop more complex skills and adaptability, also listing themes that extend through all eight key competences for lifelong learning, which include (among other things) critical thinking, creativity, initiative and problem solving. Encouraging/stifling creativity depends largely on social climate, creativity in the sphere of broader context, and individual values. Accordingly, this paper examines the attitudes of classroom teachers towards creativity, the ability to express creativity in all teaching subjects, scientific, artistic and technological areas, and identifies what encourages and obstructs creativity.

CREATIVITY AND CREATIVE INDIVIDUALS – EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Creativity was initially viewed as something mysterious. The concept of creativity or imagination can be found in records from ancient Greece and Rome. According to the ancient Greeks, creativity literally meant a gift from the muses, a deity that was present in all major forms of human creativity. After the Enlightenment, and especially after new knowledge in the field of science, creativity began to be seen more as a naturalistic phenomenon [9,2]. Treffinger, Young, Selby & Sheppardson [10] explored more than 100 different definitions from various literature. Aleinikov, Kackmister and Koenig [11] proposed 101 contemporary definition for both children and adults. To sum up, we can say that there are almost as many definitions of creativity as there are the scientists who have dealt with it. But all those definitions are united in one mission: the development of critical thinking and the creation of something new, but also the importance of creative individuals for society both in the present and the future. However, looking back, we know that creative individuals were not always accepted in society (psychoanalysts) [1]. Namely, creativity first appeared to be a disorder in society. Pünto [12] examined the frequency of mental disorders that were much more frequent in creative individuals than in other "non-creative" population. Accordingly, Maslow's [13] suggests that creative people do not desire the world as it is, but wish for a different one. Unlike psychoanalysts, humanists point out the importance of creative
individuals in society in a matter of responding to social crises that should be more frequent the future [5,13]. During social crises, individuals who would offer an original and efficient solution for a better and more successful solution for the lives of most people were always the ones that would "come to the surface". Those ideas were the motifs of many creative works that are nowadays recognized as great acts [2].

Jenlink [14] notices that society and social epistemology within the postmodern context is conceived as a reflection on the dimensions of social creativity. To develop the ability of young people in new visions of society, it is necessary to deal with alternative future possibilities of a democratic society [14]. By analyzing the relevant literature, Reimeris [15] describes the phenomenon of creative society by comparing it with the information society, and the knowledge society and concludes that the creative society is actually the expansion of the two previously mentioned societies. The development of a creative society depends largely on the development of all its segments that have their roots primarily in the creative economy, innovation and education, and are aimed towards meeting the needs of a particular social environment adapted to a particular culture and its values.

At the time of today's crisis, creativity is once again being put into the focus of occupations of almost all areas, especially when we talk about education. That motivated us to deal with the issue of promoting creativity in all areas, and accordingly all teaching subjects.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Procedure

The research was conducted in 2017 within the Inter-County Meetings for Class Teachers from Osijek-Baranja, Virovitica-Podravina and Požeško-Slavonska County. The theme of the meeting was "Development of divergent thinking among younger school children". Within the aforementioned topic, participants could learn how to encourage divergent thinking in the curriculum; incentives and distractors that affect the development of students' creativity by influencing the quality of teaching, and the importance of divergent thinking and specific ways of developing divergent thinking through creative activities¹.

Participants

Research consisted of N = 290 class teachers. Teachers were divided according to gender, into male (f = 15, 5.17%) and female (f = 275, 94.83%). All teachers volunteered to participate in the research (and in recordings during the interviews via mobile phones and dictaphone), respecting the ethics of the research. The participants will be presented with the results of the published research.

¹ More detailed information can be seen on following websites:

https://doi.org/10.5593/sgmsocialF2018/6.3
Instruments

The research was conducted with the help of qualitative methodology through a semi-structured group interview, survey and formative evaluation. The combination of these research tools was used to increase research objectivity.

For the purpose of group interviews, participants were divided 3 times into 10 groups, each group having 9 to 10 members. The interview was semi-structured because the group interview was intended for "detecting" the real problems "within school" and then through other activities and research methods, to explore their desires and possible ideas as solutions to the mentioned problems.

After the interview, the authors constructed a survey with the help of previous results (group interviews), which consisted of 10 questions each of them relating to one of the observed "problems" that teachers have mentioned earlier. During the pilot research, the survey was adjusted and reduced to 8 questions and as such used in the main research. The questions asked in the survey related to: teacher's attitudes on the importance of promoting creativity in teaching; teachers' attitudes on creators' incentives and disadvantages, as well as teachers' attitudes on the possibilities of promoting creativity in the artistic, scientific and technological area.

Kahoot (on-line tool) was used for evaluation, and we proved that modern technology (cellphones) can be used for teaching purposes.

Research aims and tasks

Research aims and tasks are directed towards: researching the incentives and obstructions of creativity, researching teachers' attitudes towards the necessary prerequisites that contribute to the development of creativity, and researching teacher attitudes on the ability to stimulate creativity in all areas (artistic, scientific and technological). In relation to the set aims and tasks, the following research questions were asked:

1. Is creativity equally possible in the artistic, scientific and technological field?
2. What encourages and what obstructs creative activities?
3. Is creativity equally possible in all teaching subjects?
4. Do teachers have limited opportunities to express their creativity?

RESEARCH RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

First research method – group interviews

The results of the first part of the interview show teachers' attitudes towards creativity. These views were of utmost importance for the creation of the continuation of the research, and they also provided an insight into the perception of creativity in the context beyond the education that was important for us to explore the influence of society on creativity and creative individuals.

When asked Are you creative? and Where does your (non)creativity come from? the participants respond that they consider themselves creative (f= 230, 79.31%) in high percentage and that creativity generally comes from: resourceful people, need to do what one loves because that is what awakens creativity. The next question referred to
what promotes/obstructs creativity. Participants were not instructed to focus solely on creativity in class, but in general. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distractors and incentives of creativity according to class teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OBSTRUCTS CREATIVITY</th>
<th>PROMOTES CREATIVITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOCIAL CONTEXT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- sickness</td>
<td>- positive contents of life (movies, theater)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- lack of persistence</td>
<td>- finances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- finances</td>
<td>- motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- stereotypes</td>
<td>- talent and tendency for something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- lack of interest</td>
<td>- current mood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TEACHING CONTEXT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- time limitation</td>
<td>- good climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- noise</td>
<td>- music, dancing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- promoting convergent thinking</td>
<td>- freedom of expressing oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- weather</td>
<td>- enough time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- dominance of frontal teaching</td>
<td>- outdoor playing, role-playing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- non-creative teacher/parent</td>
<td>- self-organization (roles, tasks, presentation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- too much digital content</td>
<td>- freedom for choosing materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- being misunderstood by colleagues</td>
<td>- problem stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- inadequate space</td>
<td>- optimal use of digital content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- teacher's material lack of motivation</td>
<td>- professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- rigid schedule structure</td>
<td>- cooperation with parents and local community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- content overload</td>
<td>- team work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- non-equal family status of students</td>
<td>- teacher as positive model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- encouraging environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows all answers have been divided into distractors and incentives of creativity by dividing them within the table in relation to the social and teaching context. Participants clearly gave more arguments in the categories of teaching context, and very little relating to the social context. These results once again point to a reflection of stimulating creativity mainly relating to teaching, and very little to a wider social context. The reasons for this can be found in the fact that participants are teachers who mainly think about topics from the "teacher's point". In addition, Table 1 answers the **second research question** What encourages and what obstructs creative activities?

**Second research method – survey**

After the interview, the authors constructed a survey with the help of previous results (group interviews), which consisted of 10 questions each of them relating to one of the observed "problems" that teachers have mentioned earlier. During the pilot research, the survey was adjusted and reduced to 8 questions and as such used in the main research.

First survey questions referred to getting answers about the existence of the ability to stimulate creativity in artistic, scientific and technological fields. Also, the participants were expected to explain their responses. 72.76% (f=211) respondents said that creativity could be stimulated in the art field while others (f=79, 27.24%) wrote that it can be stimulated in other areas as well (scientific and technological). Below are some of the comments: "Scientific and technical works can achieve the same results in many..."
different ways. Using creative ideas, scientists come to the discovery by solving problems that have been present for a while". "Today creativity is increasingly represented in both technical and scientific areas, which resulted in the presence of today's modern technologies that make jobs, and life easier."

This also answers the first research question Is creativity equally possible in the artistic, scientific and technological field?

The next question referred to examining attitudes on whether creativity could be equally implemented in all teaching subjects, and in addition, participants also had to write some ideas they use as creativity incentives in individual subjects. It is surprising that 100% (f=290) of participants wrote that they believed that creativity can be successfully implemented in all teaching subjects, because earlier research shows that the situation in practice is different from the one mentioned above. The reason for this kind of results can be found in the topic of the "Development of divergent thinking among younger school children", which certainly had some effect on such results. This also answers the third research question Is creativity equally possible in all teaching subjects?

Below are the ideas for creativity in different subjects in the Republic of Croatia:

**Croatian language** - dramatization, writing and oral expression, drawing, comic books, posters, debates, teaching games, brainstorming, turning texts into lyrics, movement, drama games, humor, use of puppets in teaching, visiting libraries and cultural institutions, meeting with writers

**Art** - making dolls, scenes, masks, jewelry, greeting cards, invitations, decorations, drawing, painting, modeling, outdoor classes, exhibitions

**Music** - dancing, change of melodies, playing, musical creativity, turning lyrics into music, play, humor, movement, singing, dramatization, numerals

**Mathematics** - task assignment, game design, modeling, graphics, quiz, math story, games that encourage the development of divergent thinking

**Natural history** - posters, field and outdoor lessons, mental maps, experiments, research, time measurement in different ways, nature calendar, word puzzle, crossword puzzles

**PE** - games, competitions, dance, imitation, rhythmic movements, imitation of natural phenomena

**Homeroom class** - educational workshops, posters, games, research

The ideas that teachers use in particular subjects really show that creativity can be promoted in all subjects through various teaching methods.

The next question regarded teachers’ attitudes about having limited opportunities to express their creativity. Most claimed that they have limited opportunities (f=218, 75.17%), and listed, the potential causes of those limitations: inappropriate textbooks, technical conditions, shift work, inadequate space (classroom sharing), school bell, timetable (especially foreign languages, RE and similar), time structure of a period for 45 minutes, being forced to ask for consent for each classroom exit, misunderstanding of parents and so on. The rest (24.82%) believe they are themselves mainly responsible for stimulating creativity in teaching, with the aid of: way of teaching, flexibility of teachers, use of creative methods, change of social forms, use of the game in teaching, motivation and the will of the teacher.
Research results also answer the fourth research question *Do teachers have limited opportunities to express their creativity?*

The last question referred to encouraging creativity in the social context, and participants presented ideas in form of suggestions as possible positive and negative influence. Society mainly understands a creative product as something tangible and relating to the music and art, but creativity also implies, i.e. successful organization (and realization) of teaching. In other words, everyone is creative (and original) in their own way (cooking, way of dressing, walking, dancing). Creativity can be expressed differently during a lifetime. The reasons for this can be attributed to the lack of free time in which we can engage in creative activities. That is why they are mostly increased in the earlier (kindergarten and lower grades of elementary school) and later age (retirement). Lesser expression of creativity, according to the participants, is mostly affected by: being anti-social, mistrust of self, and apathy.

*Third research method – formative evaluation*

The evaluation that followed showed the awareness of some of the challenges we face in teaching and life. The evaluation was done with the help of Kahoot, which helped us repeat the basic concepts related to creativity and divergent opinion in the form of a short quiz of knowledge, but also to show the participants that the evaluation of conferences does not necessarily have to be oral/written, but can also be creative with the help of modern technology (cellphones). A positive fact is that we were able to see the results of all the participants immediately, and comment them together with the participants. All participants (100%) stated that they liked interactive lectures, and the evaluation method, which is something the most of them (f=257, 88.62%) have not seen so far.

**DISCUSSION**

Encouraged by the results, but also previous research of this issue, we can say that it is evident that society has a major role in creating (pre)conditions for stimulating creativity. By expressing attitudes about what stimulates/obstructs creativity in social and educational contexts, confirms our assumption that creativity is more often considered in the educational than social context. The reason for that may be in different definitions and concepts of creativity. Teachers mainly consider themselves creative (f=230, 79.31%), so it is expected that they will encourage students' creativity in the future. Teachers' attitude about the possibility of promoting creativity in the artistic, technological and scientific field and in all teaching subjects (classroom teaching) is also encouraging. Nevertheless, the largest number of participants 72.76% (f=211) point out that it is easiest to promote creativity in the artistic field. Participants (f=218, 75.17%) state that the majority of the circumstances that distract the promotion of creativity lie in inappropriate textbooks, technical conditions, working in shifts, inadequate space, school bell, schedule, time structure of the period (45 minutes) asking for parental consent for each classroom exit and lack of understanding. The aforementioned indicates that the participants mainly focused on the educational context. The other part of the research reveals that creativity as a value is still inadequately accepted and is largely expected to be "tangible" and visible.

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CONCLUSION

It is evident that the importance of creativity within the context of society still needs to be written about and explored from all aspects in order to awaken the role of society in creating preconditions for the development of creative individuals and creative minorities, which will lead society, and hence the educational system, towards progress and new solutions. Previous attempts of researching this issue were largely stuck at detecting the state, but not concrete proposals for changing that state. In conclusion, we can say that today's intent is to grow and develop in a creative society, but we have not yet created the necessary preconditions for it. Creativity encouragement should not solely be on the shoulders of individuals, it is necessary to realize that this is also the core task of the whole society. It is necessary to deal with the alternative future possibilities of a democratic society that will build its foundations on creativity and innovation, which will have its copy in the educational system as well. Scientific contribution of the work lies in ideas related to the promotion of creativity in different subjects (Croatian Language, Mathematics, Natural History, Music, Art, PE) in the Republic of Croatia, as well as ideas related to the homeroom class. The limitations of this research can be seen in the participants who were teachers, and from whom was to be expected to consider creativity to be important in the educational and social context. It would be interesting to compare these results with participants who do not have direct contact with teaching. That context would provide easier studying of the role the society has on the development of creativity.

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