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FOSTERING CHILDREN'S CREATIVITY IN PRESCHOOL INSTITUTIONS

Abstract: *Alongside family, preschool institutions present the most important factor of preschool children's growth and development. They are places where children live, grow, learn and play. The preschool institution's curriculum has to be flexible, open, adjusted to children's needs and abilities, and founded on creativity. Children's creativity can be fostered and developed through all activities in preschool institutions: play, music activities, art activities, drama, kinesiological and many other activities. A significant role in fostering children's creativity falls upon the preschool teachers who, in order to successfully develop creativity in children, need to be aware of its importance and themselves work in an environment that supports creativity.*

The goal of this work is to raise awareness about fostering and developing children's creativity and creation since the earliest child's age as one of eight key competences for lifelong education.

Keywords: *creation, creativity, open curriculum, preschool institution, preschool teacher*

HISTORICAL AND PRESENT-DAY VIEWS OF THE CHILD

The view of the child and his/her position in the social community has been changing with the development of societies throughout history. In Ancient Greece, children's upbringing differed significantly in Sparta and Athens. Spartan education was well known as strict and military, with the goal of strengthening the body

and spirit, and forming future warriors. The boys were raised in families up to the age of seven, after which their upbringing was taken over by the state. The accent was put on physical education, and only the basics of reading and writing were learned. Girls also had military instruction, but not as strict as the boys, and they remained in their families. Athenian education was much more gentle and versatile. Alongside physical education, children were taught the basics of art, natural and social sciences. The educational goal was harmonic development of body and spirit (Zaninović, 1988). The children were raised in the family, but the state supervised them to make sure they were doing it properly (Miljković, 2009). The father was the bearer of education and he decided whether a new-born was to be accepted or rejected (Fass, 2004). Ancient Rome was more appreciative of education, and the goal was to raise a good orator and the citizen loyal to the Republic (Zaninović, 1988). Generally speaking, we can conclude that children of that time were propriety of the father, who decided about their fate and was allowed to punish them cruelly, sell and kill them.

In the Middle Ages great influence on children's upbringing was in the hands of the Catholic Church. Unconditional obedience, moderation and work were expected of the children. Discipline was strict, and the main educational method was harsh physical punishment of the child (Žlebnik, 1955). The view of the child and upbringing changed significantly in the times of Humanism and Renaissance. The striving of the time was to appropriate education to the individual characteristics of a child; wholesome children's development (physical, intellectual and moral) and avoiding physical punishment were advocated (Zaninović, 1988). In the 18 century, Jean Jacques Rousseau, a well-known French philosopher and pedagogue, places the child in the centre of educational activity, stressing the importance of children's activity in doing so. Natural upbringing was advocated, i.e. nurturing children in accordance with their innate characteristics. He considered that children are born good by nature and they needed to be raised in accord with this nature (Žlebnik, 1955).

In the 19 century (the time of the Industrial Revolution) children lived in harsh conditions and were exploited. They worked in mines and factories up to 14 hours a day. Employers gladly hired them because they were cheap and obedient work force. Children's work presented a significant source of the family's income (Fass, 2004). Before the end of the 19 century, children's working hours were limited and minimal age for legal work was prescribed, and with that children's living conditions improved.

In the 20 century the view of the child and his/her position in society changed, with children being more protected. Ellen Key (1849 – 1926) wrote her famous work named *The Century of the Child* in which she presents her reflections about the child, his/her upbringing and education. The author stresses the importance of

returning to children, criticises the exploitation of children and underlines their right to care, home and education (Fass, 2004).

Children nowadays grow up in a socially complexed, technically and technologically very highly developed, culturally abundant and diverse world (Šagud, 2015a). Contemporary society creates a new image of the child and childhood. Childhood is perceived as a period of life development in which children are actively engaged in daily activities, while the child is viewed upon as a subject of personal growth and development (Kellett, 2010). Child is an active, curious and competent being with diverse interests, possibilities and knowledge, and is guided by innate curiosity, exploration of the world within and outside oneself. The child is also a social being that enters various purposeful interactions with his/her environment since birth (Muraja, 2012). Along the lines of these new views of the child, his/her role in the family changes. The child becomes an equal member of the family entitled to expression of own ideas and thoughts and participation in making family decisions in accordance with his/her age-appropriate and psycho-physical abilities. Jurčević-Lozančić (2005) warns that, besides having to provide existential conditions for the child, parents nowadays need to satisfy his/her psychological needs for love, care, belonging, fun, freedom, and provide the child with the support and help in self-realisation. Doeck (2004, acc. to Pećnik & Starc, 2010) notes that the child, besides having the right to care, security and protection, has the right to upbringing that respects his/her individuality.

Except in the family, the child also has a new position in society. Over the years numerous documents have been instated concerning protection of children and their rights. One of these documents is the UN's *Convention on the rights of the child*, an international document ratified at the General Assembly of the UN on 20 November 1989. *The Convention* primarily defines the obligations of adults with regards to children. It is important to stress that the *Convention on the rights of the child* is a legal act with the power of law and it is binding for all states who adopted and ratified it. The Republic of Croatia adopted the mentioned *Convention* in October 1991 and in doing so obliged to guarantee the rights entailed by it for every child:

- Children must not suffer any type of discrimination.
- Children have the right to live and develop in all aspects of life (physical, emotional, psycho-social, cognitive, social and cultural).
- In making decisions or expediting procedures regarding the child, children's welfare has to be most important. It pertains to family as well as government decisions, and the decisions made by legislative bodies.
- Children have to be provided with the possibility of active participation in solving all matters that effect their lives. They must have the opportunity to express their views, which have to be regarded seriously.

Furthermore, it is also important to mention the following documents, as they intend to protect the child and secure for them a better position in society: *World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children (1990)*; *Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (2007)*; *Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on child-friendly justice (2010)*; *Recommendations of the Council of Europe on the Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment (2018)*; *The Council of Europe's strategy for the rights of the child (2016-2021)* etc.

Unfortunately, despite the existence of numerous documents protecting the child and his/her rights, the United Nations Children's Fund constantly warns they are frequently and harshly disrespected on a daily basis worldwide.

THE CHILD IN PRESCHOOL INSTITUTIONS

The early childhood period is the one of intense growth and development of the child in which he/she is the most vulnerable and the most sensitive to external influences. Garcia et al. (2016) indicate the importance of investing in the early childhood period because this is an investment which later effects the quality of an individual's life (health, education, employment, reducing crime) and the overall society's development. Hariawan et al. (2019) call it *the gold moment* of children's development never to be repeated, so it needs to be used for providing the best education and care in the child's environment.

Great majority of children spend more time in preschool institutions than in their families, so these institutions need to provide children with the overall support in development and realisation of their strengths and potentials. Preschool institutions should be safe children-appropriate places in which children will feel welcome; freely express their thoughts, ideas and feelings; and develop their intellectual, communicative and social skills. They should be places that teach children tolerance, mutual respect, help, cooperation and compassion. Numerous challenges lie ahead of preschool institutions, and one of those challenges is the development of children's creativity and creation.

Contemporary approach to developing children's creativity can be considered in the frame of the mindset concepts which entail the growth mindset or fixed mindset (Dweck, 2007). According to the mentioned concepts, the perception of one's own abilities has the key role in motivation and achievement. Individuals who believe their talents can be developed put more effort into learning and worry about looking smart less (Dweck, 2016). If we apply the stated concept to the field of creativity, it would mean that the child who believes his/her own creativity is predetermined will be surpassed by the child who believes he/she can develop his creativity because she is ready to face challenges and shortcomings which she overcomes and works hard in order to achieve the desired outcome (Dweck, 2007).

The child and the preschool institution are in mutual interaction – the preschool institution influences the child, helps growth and development, enriches knowledge and abilities. Along the same lines, the child, with his/her behaviour, action and creation, affects the preschool institution actively (with adults) and participates in building its culture. Thacker (2001) defines culture as the frame of basic presumptions which are created by a certain group in developing the external activity of an institution and by learning to work together on achieving their goals. Organisational culture entails values, beliefs, standpoints, behavioural norms, ways of work, communication and problem solving (Čulig, 2004, acc. to Vujičić, 2008). By participating and engaging in various programmes and cultural activities, in his/her process of self-realisation, an individual (the child) becomes the creator of culture himself/herself, i.e. the creator of social and personal identity, the builder of culture (Eagleton, 2002).

A quality preschool institution can be observed through the prism of three parameters (Arkan & Ozturk, 2019, acc. to Cobanoglu & Sevim, 2019):

- human resources;
- curriculum for preschool institutions;
- spatial-material environment.

THE PRESCHOOL TEACHER'S ROLE IN FOSTERING CHILDREN'S CREATIVITY AND CREATION

Since preschool teachers spend much time with children in preschool institutions, their role is paramount in nurturing or suppressing children's creativity. In order to foster children's creativity, preschool teachers must be aware of its importance. Runco (1990) states that the preschool teacher's implicit theories of creativity based on his/her personal belief system play a crucial role in approaches to teaching as well as in their expectations from the children. Besides, preschool teachers themselves should work in the environment that is supportive of their creativity. According to the results of the implemented research, the creative preschool teacher is described as a person highly motivated for work, open-minded, flexible, ready for lifelong learning, industrious and self-confident (Bramwell et al., 2011), but also caring, interesting, imaginative and friendly (Hamza & Griffith, 2006). Preschool teachers who foster creativity encourage children to independently interpret knowledge, processes and phenomena, seek new information and believe in children's strengths and abilities (Alencar, 2002; Runco, 2003). They motivate children for unusual ideas, allow their imagination to *take sway*, gradually lead them to original ideas and encourage them to take a step further from mundane and common solutions (Cvetković-Lay & Pečjak, 2004). The role of preschool teachers and teachers who possess the growth mindset is reflected in the fact they do everything in order to foster children's learning and development, but sadly, despite the fact many of them are declamatory about supporting children's mind

growth, in reality they act just the opposite (Dweck, 2015). People characterised by the growth mindset are directed to the process and less so to the result, hence the creative activity itself will be more important than its product.

Art and art activities affect the holistic growth of the child and support his/her creativity. The extent and the way of children's involvement in art activities depend on the preschool teachers. Preschool teachers with a personal interest in visual art will probably implement more visual art activities with children, whereas those teachers who are personally interested in music will motivate children to participate in music activities. To successfully implement art activities (visual art, music), preschool teachers should have developed artistic competences and know the appropriate teaching methods that support children's creativity and influence their holistic development (Bačlija Sušić & Županić Benić, 2018).

Creativity is commonly associated with art and art activities, but it can be fostered, especially in early preschool age, through all fields of children's learning: mathematics, reading, oral expression, learning about the environment (science). The preschool teacher best motivates the creativity of the preschool child through play. By playing, the child will acquire basic mathematical concepts (number, shape, volume, space), develop mathematical skills (add, subtract, measure, divide), and seek solutions to mathematical problems. The correct solution is important, but often the wrong one can also be useful and lead children towards better understanding, observation and creativity. By reading stories, fairy tales and fables to children, and motivating them to make up their sequel, change the ending, introduce new characters, preschool teachers motivate imagination in children and enrich their vocabulary. In nature, they can introduce children to natural phenomena and motivate children to research and take cognisance of them.

Šagud (2015) accentuates that preschool teachers have at their disposal a wide array of interventions in activities with children. They can directly or indirectly support responsible behaviour, foster playful behaviour, model play, directly participate in it, instruct children into new play-like situations, make the play more challenging and alike.

The trust the preschool teacher has in the child is key in developing creativity. Besides, preschool teachers should provide children with the opportunity to express their ideas without fear and motivate them to view situations and objects from different perspectives. Eckhoff (2011) states the results of research according to which preschool teachers who consider children capable of thinking in an original and imaginative way, and motivate children to creative expression, associate creativity with more content domains (art, science, reading, mathematics). This is very significant because it has a motivating effect on children and learning.

Many preschool teachers seek the formula for motivating children's creativity. Such formula cannot be given because it doesn't exist. What they can get are some ways of thinking or certain strategies. The most important is that preschool

teachers realise and believe that creativity is not narrowly defined as part of art education, but is possible to find and nurture in every field of learning. Preschool teachers cannot make children creative. However, the preschool teacher can create an environment that supports creativity and prepare appropriate activities and materials for those children who want to explore and creatively express themselves. The lack of the aforementioned can hinder creativity (Smith, 1996).

THE CURRICULUM FOR PRESCHOOL INSTITUTIONS

Changing the perception of childhood, and with that the child itself, established new approaches in researching children's learning. The child foremost learns naturally, by doing, but also playing with other children (Bašić, 2011). New perceptions of the child and childhood have become the foundation of shaping the early and preschool education curriculum. The development of the curriculum for preschool institutions is a continuous process. The curriculum centres on the child, his/her needs and interests; each participant of educational work considers organisation, strategy and method of realisation of the set goals and tasks. It empowers the child to construct one's own knowledge through constructivist learning based on personal activities and experiences, with the support from other children and adults. The curriculum includes a high level of flexibility of the educational process, which primarily excludes strict activity planning focused on content or time. It means that contents are not the starting point of children's education and learning, but are in the function of their realisation. *The National Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care* (2014) is directed towards the overall development of the child and preserving and developing national, spiritual, material and natural heritage. The fundamental values it is built upon are:

- knowledge – provides a child with the possibility of critical thinking, dealing with new situations as well as success in daily life and all later stages of education;
- identity – prepares the child for becoming *the citizen of the world*, but in doing so save his/her national identity and culture;
- humanism and tolerance – it pertains to accepting and respecting others, compassion, giving support, understanding one's own rights, obligations and responsibilities, and the rights, obligations and responsibilities of others;
- responsibility – it entails promoting responsibility for general social welfare, nature, oneself and others;
- autonomy – it pertains to the development of the child's independent thinking, decision making and acting;
- creativity – it entails capacitating the child for recognising and initiating creative activities and finding the original approach to solving different problems.

Dere (2019) considers each contemporary curriculum for preschool education has to be particularly directed toward fostering and developing children's imagination and creativity. Children have to have the possibility to express themselves in unique and different ways in conditions appropriate to their needs and learning styles. In order to realise this, children need to be provided with appropriate possibilities. The precondition for realising creative activities in preschool institutions with preschool age children is the availability of appropriate learning techniques and abundant spatial-material environment (Wyse & Dowson, 2009).

SPATIAL-MATERIAL ENVIRONMENT AS AN INCENTIVE FOR CHILDREN'S CREATIVITY

Material conditions are one of the components of the preschool context. The preschool context encompasses a safe, stimulating spatial-material and social environment in which children realise permanent interactions, construct individual and co-construct joint knowledge with peers and adults, experience emotions and express them, try out social skills and develop physical abilities. According to Petrović-Sočo (2007), the context of the preschool institution is a „living organism“, a complex, dynamic system, an interactive network of social, cultural and physical relationships through which the child is in constant interaction because the context affects the child and vice versa.

It is important to stress that the spatial-material environment should be directed to the child because in such a way his/her natural curiosity, interests and needs are respected, freedom of choice is provided, and the child is stimulated to take responsibility for his/her own choices and behaviour (Slunjski, 2011). Spatial-material environment is one of the paramount factors which mostly determines whether the child's creativity will develop or remain hindered (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014). Environment in which children can learn in through exploration and problem solving will nurture and develop their creativity (Barane et al., 2011).

Diamond and Hopson (2006) state several characteristics of enriching spatial-material environment important for creativity's development. Such environment entails a constant source of positive emotional support, stimulates all senses, knows no unnecessary pressure or tension, and provides numerous new challenges which are neither too easy nor too difficult for the child at that developmental stage. In such environment, the development of a wide range of skills and mental, physical, aesthetic, social and emotional interests is stimulated. Furthermore, the child is provided with the opportunity to freely choose his/her own activities, estimate the results of own endeavour, engage in a pleasant atmosphere which motivates research and fun in learning and allows the child to be an active participant, as opposed to being a passive observer.

The importance of spatial-material environment especially comes to the forefront in *Reggio*, *Montessori* and *Waldorf* approaches to early childhood education.

Reggio approach perceives the child as a competent and capable individual who knows how to express one's own opinion, make decisions and cooperate with others. The task of adults is to empower children to construct their knowledge (Thornton & Brunton, 2014). Children learn through interactions with other children, preschool teachers and parents. The space is organised to encourage meetings, communication and establishing friendships. It has the role of the third preschool teacher because it influences the way children feel, think and act. The space should provide the children with the sense of freedom and pleasant companionship, but at the same time encourage them to explore and solve problems (Gandini, 1998). Malaguzzi (1998) describes it as a sort of aquarium which reflects ideas, values and culture of those who occupy it. With its organisation and wealth of materials and equipment, the space plays an important role in determining the ways in which children learn. Rinaldi (2006) stresses that the environment should be a place in which children can: be creative, explore, think, communicate, but also be alone.

According to the Montessori approach, the child attains knowledge of the outside world with sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell; and all the mentioned senses need stimulating in order for the child to optimally develop. The space in which the child resides should be of bright and cheerful colours and stimulate children's positive behaviour. Special attention is given to didactical tools made of the finest natural material utilised by children in acquisition of experience. Materials on the shelves are accessible to children who use it to get to know the connections and relationships in the world (Montessori, 2003).

The Waldorf approach perceives a child primarily as a sensory being and, in order to provide the child with the optimal development, it is necessary to secure spatial-material environment which will nurture all the senses. For the right nourishment of the senses, the most important is the original, natural surroundings, hence great attention is given to natural materials for play (wood, silk), being outdoors, working in the garden and alike (Steiner, 1995).

Space in kindergartens can be organised in the form of various activity centres, i.e. workshops equipped with diverse materials specific for each individual centre. Hence, the kindergarten includes many centres such as the building and construction centre, initial drawing centre, art expression centre, music centre, mathematics centre, thematic centres (doctor, hair-dresser, baker...), relaxation centre, seclusion centre. The space organised in such a way provides a child with a choice of activities according to his/her personal interest. The centres motivate communication between children, exchange of ideas and joint learning. At these centres children develop their abilities and become active participants in their development.

Besides the inner space, the importance of the outer environment's organisation for the development of children's imagination and creativity should also be stressed. The outside environment should provide children with the possibility of play with no structured materials which allow them to be in contact with nature and

stimulate their imagination, because children learn about themselves and the world precisely through this type of authentic play (Wilson, 2012). Environment filled with intriguing natural materials incites creative play inspired by children's imagination, as opposed to ready-made toys which often make children act according to the already foreseen and predictable scenarios. It is wrongly believed that efficient way of fostering children's creativity is with toys in which the creator already made everything. Prepared props for dramatic play do not provide the challenges and opportunities created when children need to find natural objects they can use in order to present what they imagined. Natural objects such as sticks, logs, leaves, sand and snow can be all children desire them to be (Kiewra & Veselack, 2016).

CHILDREN'S CREATIVITY AND CREATION

Creativity is an important skill that helps children to function better and find their way in the uncertain future that lies ahead (Craft, 2011). It is an integral part of day to day human experience (Torrance & Gupta, 1964), i.e. the way of reacting to objects, ideas and situations (Isenberg & Jalongo, 1997). Creativity can be said to represent the inner latent strength of an individual. It is a process which includes certain characteristics such as flexibility, multidimensional thinking, sensitivity, interest for humans and environment, ability of swift thinking and acting, originality, and the ability to come to various and different conclusions (Aral 1990; Tuna 2000; Çakmak & Baran 2005, acc. to Barane et al., 2011). In general, creativity is considered a process and all individuals are born with various personality traits (e.g. self-confidence, curiosity, tolerance, motivation and alike) and experiences, which makes them more or less capable of expressing their creative potential (Hamza & Griffith, 2006; Sternberg et al., 2004).

There are many definitions of creativity entailed by scientific and expert literature. Kay (1989, acc. to Eckhoff, 2011) describes creativity as a process in which an individual finds, defines or discovers an idea or a problem that is not predetermined by a situation or task. Robinson (2011) sees creativity as a type of imaginative process resulting in original and worthy actions. Creativity can also be defined as creating something novel that has not been achieved or created before (Isbell & Raines, 2007).

Čudina-Obradović (1990) warns that creativity is a concept with two meanings. Firstly, creativity is creation (creating new and original art, scientific or technical creations), and secondly, it is a characteristic or a group of characteristics that enable creation, i.e. productivity. Vygotsky (2004) regards every human act leading to something new an act of creation, regardless of it being a physical object, mental or emotional construct. The mentioned author stresses that human behaviour and activity can be divided into two basic types: reproductive and creative. Reproductive activity is closely linked to memory and in its basis entails a person reproducing or repeating previously developed and mastered behavioural patterns.

However, only this activity and behaviour enables a human to adapt to mostly familiar environmental conditions, while all new changes in his/her environment not previously experienced would not cause the appropriate adaptive reactions. Hence, besides the reproductive, a human possesses one other kind of activity in his/her behaviour which can be called combinative or creative activity. All human activity resulting in not reproducing previously experienced impressions or actions, but in creating new ones is an example of combinative or creative behaviour. Man's creativity directs him/her to the future; we create it by changing our present. Creative activity is founded on our brain's ability to combine various elements, which is called imagination or fantasy in psychology. In everyday life imagination or fantasy indicates to things that are not true and do not correspond with reality, and accordingly do not possess a more serious, practical meaning. However, in reality, as a basis of all creative activity, imagination is an important component of all aspects of cultural life supporting art, scientific and technical creation.

One of the first declarations about children's creativity can be found in the Hadow report from 1933 (GBBECC, 1933, acc. to Craft, 2003) which states the guidelines and recommendations for protecting early and preschool age children. The report accentuates the need for adjusting and appropriating education to the small child as well as the significance of providing context for children's self-expression. This report was an important predecessor to the Plowden report (CACE, 1967, acc. to Craft, 2003), and together they can be regarded as *the wave* of political recommendations and activities in fostering early and preschool age creativity. This first wave connected creativity with the child-centered pedagogical approach. The stated reports have significantly influenced the development of more liberal thinking about children's education. Plowdenski report also suggests the way of encouraging children's creativity. The report defines creativity as:

- benign;
- at the centre of all ways of teaching and learning;
- primarily associated with play.

Later, at the turn of the 21 century, on the basis of the implemented research, numerous studies on motivating early and preschool age creativity emerge (Craft, 2003; Saracho, 2012; Sternberg & Kaufman, 2018; Vygotsky, 2004).

In order to better explain the concept of creativity, Csikszentmihalyi (1996) distinguishes between *Big-C creativity* and *Little-C creativity*. *Big-C creativity* is rare and pertains to the creativity of geniuses (e.g. Nikola Tesla, Albert Einstein, Isaac Newton etc.), while *Little-C creativity* entails creativity in daily life.

Little-C creativity is the most appropriate for researching small children's creativity during their daily activities. When considering *Little-C creativity*, it is important to stress that in evaluating the novelty of a certain outcome or product, knowledge and experience of an individual are always considered (Boden, 1992; Ripple, 1989). Craft (2003) notes that *Little-C creativity* encompasses personal

effectiveness, resourcefulness in life, ability to foresee and overcome obstacles and solve problems. We can develop it in little children by motivating their resourcefulness as well as encouraging them to reflect on and apply alternative possibilities in different contexts, including play, interhuman relationships and joint activities. *Little-C creativity* is not necessarily connected with the material product since it entails exercising imagination.

It is necessary to start developing creativity in small children as soon as possible – as soon as early childhood. Most theories about children's development view children as exceptionally creative, but at the same time stress that this sense of creativity can be stifled if not developed and if children do not have enough incentives for its development in their environment (Hui et al., 2015). Creative development encompasses art, craft and design, and various forms of dramatic play and expression, with all the stated forms making up a core of early childhood. A great role of imagination is highlighted and the importance of developing diverse ways in which children can express their ideas and convey feelings (Craft, 2003).

In order to stimulate children's creative potential, it is necessary to develop children's senses. Grown-ups need to create the conditions in which children can touch objects and feel their warmth, softness, coarseness, smell various flowers, listen to diverse sounds in nature, experience multiple tastes. The child should be encouraged to perceive and think, discuss with others and cooperate. They need to be motivated to solve problems through research, experiment and apply various ideas. The child needs encouragement and motivation in finding the answers to the questions of why, how and for which purpose?

Maybe Gardner (1993) best explains why small children are more creative than adults in stating that they do not mind inconsistencies, departing from conventions, which ultimately results in unusual combinations. In fact, significant number of experts believe that children are the true incarnation of human creativity (Glaveanu, 2011).

Children's creativity is mostly difficult to assess because it manifests itself in play and children's spontaneous participation and expression through diverse forms of art activities.

PLAY, CREATIVITY AND CREATION

Play is an integral part of children's lives in which it plays a special and significant role. There is no single definition of play. Researchers mostly state its characteristics: voluntary participation, it is fun and gives a sense of pleasure, behaviour in play loses its usual meaning, the process and not the product is important, it is spontaneous, it is a purpose in itself and has no agenda, it is played according to the rules which organise it, but also make it more interesting (Eberle, 2014; Lillard et al., 2013). It is an activity in which children enjoy and always gladly come back to. Play is an arena for acquisition and perfection of numerous life skills such as

making and maintaining friendships, mutual respect and support, sharing, giving help, upholding the rules. In play, children imagine, pretend and experiment. Play is an arena in which children can express themselves and their creativity. Duran (2011) underlines play as the only activity where different possibilities are tried out spontaneously and without the sense of failure. Play is the power which leads the child into new discoveries and to a higher level of development (Rajić & Petrović-Sočo, 2015, p. 605). It is the natural integration of all key developmental segments of the child and the most efficient and extremely productive medium of his/her advancement (Šagud, 2015, p. 94).

Children's play is important for research because it includes numerous cognitive and emotional processes recognised in creative adult individuals. It is important to familiarise children with play and creativity in the early age because understanding the way in which play motivates creativity and socio-emotional growth and vice versa is paramount (Moore & Russ, 2008).

Creative processes in children of early and preschool age are especially noticeable in play. A child sitting on the shelf and pretending to ride a horse, a girl playing with a doll and imagining herself as her mother, a boy becoming a pirate, soldier or a sailor in his play - all these children presented examples of the most authentic, true creation in play. Children's play very often presents an echo of what children saw or heard adults do, but these elements of their previous experience are never reproduced in play the way they actually happened in reality. Children's play is not a reproduction of what they experienced, but a creative transformation and compilation of their impressions. Children combine those or use them in constructing new reality, the reality in accord with their needs and desires (Vygotsky, 2004). Play motivates and unleashes creative thinking because in it children exercise thinking with the use of toys and objects in order to represent various objects and roles in different scenarios (Singer & Singer, 1990).

Most authors stress the importance of children's symbolic play in creativity's development. In this type of play children use imagination additionally supported by their creative potential (Ivon, 2014; Picciuto & Carruthers, 2014). Creative behaviour is defined in the frame of different thinking processes, which entails authenticity and diversity in finding different answers to the same situation. The child flexibly organises already familiar parts in symbolic play in a novel and authentic way (Ivon, 2014). In new situations individual objects lose their usual function of use and gain new identity. Things can represent everything the child conceives (Rodari, 2001, acc. to Ivon, 2014). This type of play allows children to create patterns and hypotheses by allowing them to use the ability of reflecting upon different scenarios. It stimulates and develops children's ability to judge (Gopnik & Walker, 2013). Symbolic play provides children with the opportunity to express different processes: cognitive, affective and interpersonal, all of which are important for creativity. The child can utilize symbolic play to manipulate objects or mental

images, explore an imaginary cave, practice going to the hospital, reminisce about suppressed memories, and express positive or negative emotions (Russ & Wallace, 2013).

Sociodramatic play also supports children's different thinking and cognitive flexibility, which present the basic components of creativity (Russ, 2004). Sociodramatic play or game of pretence is an important feature of early childhood. It includes creating alternative realities. In make-believe play children can portray different people, places or times, and objects become symbols of what is imagined (Fein, 1981). In sociodramatic play, a constant drama composition is present and the rules are determined by the sequence of imaginary events in the play, while in symbolic play this is not the case (Duran, 2011).

Constructive play entails manipulation of various materials for creation/building: sand, art materials (colour, clay, and paper), water, sticks, stones and alike (Wardle, 2000). In constructive play children explore, solve problems, cooperate, engage and give great attention to the process itself and the outcome of their play. All the stated activities of the child provide the opportunity for developing his/her creative potential. The outcomes of children's constructive play are usually various buildings, models, plans and sculptures which become the reflection of children's creation.

The functioning of creative imagination is very complex and depends on various factors. This activity cannot be the same in children and adults because those factors take on different forms in different phases. Hence, during each developmental phase of childhood, creative imagination functions in a certain way specific for the particular stage of the child's development. Imagination also depends on experience, and it is known that the child's experience is formed and developed gradually. The child's relationship with the environment, which stimulates the child and guides his/her process of creation with its complexity or simplicity, traditions and influences, differs from those of adults. Furthermore, the interests of adults and those of children are significantly different so it is easily inferred that the functioning of children's imagination is different from the imagination of adults (Vygotsky, 2004).

The research indicates the drop of children's creativity over the years. The analysis of the results on a standardised test of creative thinking of school-age American children in the period from 1966 to 2008 showed a significantly lower result than in 1990. A big part of this decrease of creativity happens before the end of early childhood period (Kim, 2011). Howes (2011) sees the cause of this drop in children not having the opportunity to play as much as they did before. By denying children play and by limiting it, children are left without the opportunity to develop cognitive, social and emotional skills, and with that their creativity's development is hindered.

CREATION THROUGH ART ACTIVITIES

Artistic fields create a specific environment in the preschool institution and represent a powerful means in children's education (Miočić, 2012). Numerous studies on early childhood creativity have established the connection between children's creative development and their participation in some form of art education (Bancroft et al., 2008).

Every form of creative art (e.g. movement, dance, art) is key for the child's life. When little children engage in any art activity, they learn about the world through exploration, create or simply familiarise themselves with new materials. Likewise, they interpret reality and express their thoughts and feelings. Children can also use art as a medium for creative expression which can promote their individuality and creativity (Spodek & Saracho, 1994).

Movement, as one form of kinaesthetic activity, helps children understand the structure of movement and promotes their physical skill and coordination. Little children gain experience of dancing, gymnastics and play through movement (Spodek & Saracho, 1994). Zachopoulou et al. (2009) conducted a study whose results indicate the connection between divergent thinking of preschoolers and their abilities of movement. Children who are physically more ready also have better language skills in relation to their peers (Rajović, 2017). Little children express their thoughts, feelings and ideas with creative movement.

Creative drama provides children with the opportunity of spontaneous and playful language use. It can also be said for drama that it is a strategy serving better understanding of abstract conceptions and human experiences. Different drama techniques allow children to play, explore and imagine (Hui et al., 2015). Research shows that preschoolers' participation in drama activities influence the development of their storytelling ability (Nicolopoulou & Richner, 2007).

According to Lugomer (2000/2001), drama education does not serve only the development of drama giftedness, but also the introduction to drama-scenic expression. It has a much wider meaning: it helps the child in developing sensitivity, ability of expression, development of communicative skills, imagination and creativity. Likewise, with drama education inclinations are revealed, attitudes formed, social consciousness and its components formed: (self)criticism, responsibility, tolerance, understanding of interhuman relationships and acquiring safety and self-confidence. The purpose of drama education is preparation for living, getting the child ready to meet the real world. It is important to differentiate drama education from dramatic art: it is not the activity directed to creating a theatrical play. The basis of drama as art is dramatic expression founded on dramatic experience of the world. While in dramatic art the drama experience of the world is transformed into art, in drama education (or children's drama or creative dramatics, as drama education is also called) it is transformed into organised play.

Music is present in different ways in children's lives since early age. It represents a significant component of overall children's development. Music activities should be embedded into daily children's activities and play. Active experience of music which ensues from participation in various forms of music activities is the foundation of children's spontaneous music creative expression. In preschool institutions, it is important to give attention to those music activities which contribute to the development of children's inherent music potential (Bačlija Sušić, 2018). Besides developing children's creativity and creation, music art affirms critical and aesthetic reflection and creates the opportunity for personal refinement of the individual, as well as cultural prosperity. The aesthetic potential of the child is developed through various music experiences in preschool institutions (Pesec, 1997, acc. to Miočić, 2012). Music activities simply need to provide children with the opportunity to enjoy music (Slunjski, 2013). Music in preschool allows the culture to be experienced and lived (Petrović-Sočo, 2007).

Children's desire to draw and make up stories motivates imagination and creativity. For example, a boy who sees a man limping in the street creates a story himself – the man was riding a horse and hurt his leg on a steep, sharp rock. Now he is in search of a medicine that will make him better. In this example the act of imagination is evident. All elements of this situation are known to the child from his previous experience, but the combination of these elements is something new altogether, something belonging to the child not simply reproducing what the child accidentally saw or noticed. Precisely this ability of combining elements in order to create a new structure, i.e. combination of the old in novel ways, is the basis of creativity (Vygotsky, 2004).

Visual arts also have an important role in educating early and preschool age children. However, they foster creativity in children only when preschool teachers give them the liberty of independent experimenting with visual art expression and creation. Visual-creative activities empower children to explore the avenues for expressing their thoughts, ideas and experience from the outside world using different visual art materials and techniques. The role of the preschool teacher in preschool institutions is to prepare, encourage and motivate children to express themselves using visual art in the environment designed and organised to facilitate creative processes and support creative activities (Balić Šimrak et al., 2010, acc. to Bačlija Sušić & Županić Benić, 2018).

Creativity takes up the central place in all artistic branches where, owing to their abundant diversity, limitless and unique possibilities are provided for its development (Prentice, 2000).

Children's development can take one of two courses: towards reaching the existing forms of culture or creating new forms of culture not yet in existence, with the latter being the space for the child's actualisation (Veraksa, 2018). The contemporary open curriculum directed to the child's holistic development should

strive to the child's self-realisation. Inspiring material environment and preschool teachers who direct children's activity towards creative way of thinking and acting constitute favourable conditions for the child to become a contemporary creator of culture.

CONCLUSION

Fostering children's creativity is nowadays considered to be the paramount educational goal in many education systems worldwide (Kampylis, 2010).

Today, creative individuals present the greatest wealth of a society. They are the initiators of change, active participants of social growth and development. They should be prepared for this important role from the earliest childhood. The early childhood period is the one in which the child is most sensitive to external changes and needs to be provided with the best possible care and education. In this period, it is of extreme importance to encourage children's creativity. In preschool institutions it is achieved by immersing the child in motivating spatial-material environment and by creating flexible child-centered curriculum, and fostering his/her imagination and creativity. A significant role in developing children's creativity also falls upon preschool teachers. In order to successfully develop it in children they need to be aware of its importance, believe in the child and his/her abilities, continuously educate themselves professionally and work in an environment supportive of their creativity. By participating in creative activities, creative expression and creation, children, alongside preschool teachers, become the builders of culture in their institution. According to Ljubetić and Slunjski (2012), this culture is the essence of every community; it gives it *soul*, makes it healthy or unhealthy, desirable or nondesirable. Culture significantly determines the quality of life and learning for all members of the community – children and adults alike.

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