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## Creativity and Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Education in the Reggio Emilia Approach and Philosophy

Kreatywność i zaangażowanie rodziców we wczesną edukację dzieci w podejściu i filozofii Reggio Emilia

### KEYWORDS    ABSTRACT

children, creativity, parents' involvement in education, preschool education, Reggio Emilia educational philosophy

In the article the authors discuss the importance of parental creativity and involvement in early institutional education of a child on the example of Reggio Emilia educational method. Among the main aspects of this involvement are the quality of education, child support, cooperation between teachers and parents as well as a positive feedback. The authors of this paper also deal with one of the main aspects of early education—creativity and its importance for a child's psychosocial development. The preschool curriculum has been designed for children of the preschool educational institutions to provide them with a rich learning experience and to help them to develop properly. Creative education starts at an early age, therefore kindergartens and families play a very important role in supporting and developing creativity in child's everyday routine. It is stressed that being creative is primarily about taking initiatives and innovative behavior. These are the qualities required in contemporary society, especially by employers in private and public sectors. However, the process of involving

parents in their child's education starts at the preschool stage and plays the most important role in child's socialization. It is also emphasized that if children feel the support of both educational subjects (teacher and parents) in the process of preschool education, they feel safer, more comfortable, and much more confident.

## SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

dzieci, kreatywność,  
zaangażowanie  
rodziców  
w edukację, wczesna  
edukacja, filozofia  
edukacyjna Reggio  
Emilia

W niniejszym artykule autorzy omawiają znaczenie kreatywności oraz zaangażowania rodziców we wczesną edukację instytucjonalną dziecka na przykładzie metody Reggio Emilia. Głównymi aspektami takiego zaangażowania są zapewnienie jakości edukacji, wsparcie dziecka, współpraca nauczycieli z rodzicami oraz pozytywna informacja zwrotna. Autorzy tego artykułu zajmują się również jednym z głównych aspektów wczesnej edukacji dziecka – kreatywnością i jej znaczeniem dla rozwoju psychospołecznego dziecka. Program nauczania przedszkolnego został opracowany dla dzieci w placówkach edukacji przedszkolnej, aby zapewnić im bogate doświadczenie edukacyjne i pomóc we właściwym rozwoju. Edukacja kreatywna rozpoczyna się od najmłodszych lat, dlatego przedszkola i rodziny odgrywają bardzo istotną rolę we wspieraniu i rozwijaniu kreatywności w codziennych sytuacjach rozwojowych dzieci. Podkreśla się, że bycie kreatywnym polega przede wszystkim na podejmowaniu inicjatyw i innowacyjnych zachowań. Są to cechy wymagane we współczesnym społeczeństwie, zwłaszcza przez pracodawców w sektorze prywatnym i publicznym. Jednak proces angażowania rodziców w edukację dziecka zaczyna się już na etapie przedszkolnym i odgrywa najważniejszą rolę także w socjalizacji dziecka. Podkreśla się również, że jeśli dzieci czują wsparcie obu podmiotów wychowania (nauczyciela i rodziców) w procesie wychowania przedszkolnego, czują się bezpieczniej, bardziej komfortowo i dużo pewniej.

## Introduction

Many scholars and practitioners would stress the fact that up to 65 percent of children currently in grade school will one day work in a job that does not yet exist. By this we mean that in order to prepare kids for these jobs, children need to be creative, adaptable problem-solvers, ready for anything in the near future to come (Davidson 2011). According to Loris Malaguzzi (1998), famous Italian educationalist and pedagogue, who originated and developed Reggio Emilia method, every child has a hundred ways (i.e. languages and hands) to express him/herself and these ways may appear very different and unique. Thus, one of the main principles of this learning

philosophy says that children get to know the world and close surroundings through their senses: touching, seeing, smelling, hearing, tasting and acting as an independent explorer. Therefore, the child stays in the very center of education and all the other supportive factors (i.e. community, environment as the third pedagogue, teachers, family, arts & craft, project activities, children experiences, philosophy, light-color-action, children's work documentation, etc.) serve as the assisting measures in order to assure the quality of learning and two-way communication as well as collaboration between family and teaching staff (Malaguzzi 1998; Markevičienė 2010, 2012; Cadwell 1997; Gandini, Etheredge, Hill 2008; Lindsay 2015).

Creativity as such is mainly identified through the following elements: *creative person* (we usually accept it as the aftermath of other external and internal factors that lead to being creative), *creative result* (it has to be: smart, simple, well crafted, familiar, shareable, resonant, original, flexible, challenging), and *creative process* (this part remains most significant one as it consists of many different variables, such as: action, creative thinking skills, knowledge, motivation, personality, lateral thinking, divergent thinking, environment, etc.). Moreover, excellent ways of developing children's creativity with the participation of parents can be found, among others, in the publication by Teresa Amabile (1989). Putting all this into other words, we do not learn from experience, but we do learn by reflecting on our experience.

Having in mind parents' engagement in child's early education and collaboration activities between family and educational institution, a few very significant features should be revealed. First, parents are children's *first and most enduring educators* (according to the UNICEF,<sup>1</sup> being engaged in child's education is even both fundamental right and obligation of adults). Then it is worth to have in mind that parents and what they do have a *powerful effect on children's learning* (their attitudes, values, actions at home are equal to what the child will get and become in the near future). Also, when families and educational institutions work along, they undoubtedly *benefit the child* as both sides become equally responsible for the education and child's psychosocial development. Another rather important aspect of involving parents into children's early education is *enhancing quality* in early childhood education and care (hereinafter ECEC). This mainly means that engaging families in children's education remains one of the main five policy levels (accordingly to OECD<sup>2</sup>). Finally, through being involved into ECEC, parents get a positive support/assistance from the kindergartens as well, as they are taught, advised, guided, and mentored by the professionals. All this leads towards

<sup>1</sup> See more at: <http://www.unicef.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> For more see: <http://www.oecd.org/>.

lifelong learning activities consequently developing a positive parenthood idea and its implementation in real life contexts.

Thus, the main goal of this paper is to describe and discuss the meaning of creativity and the collaboration between families and educational institutions in early child education processes.

The methods of this research encompass the interpretation and analysis of scientific, educational, and philosophical literature.

## Creativity in Early Child's Education

As Sir Kenneth Robinson (2014) would point out, creativity is as important now in education as literacy and we should grant it the same status. By saying this, the fact of child's unmeasurable abilities is indicated. Thus, within Reggio Emilia philosophy (see more Santín, Torruella 2017: 50–56), every child is perceived as:

- having unlimited potential,
- wayer to interact with and contribute to the world,
- driven by curiosity and imagination,
- delighted in taking responsibility for his or her own learning,
- able to listen and listened to,
- having an enormous need to love and to be loved,
- valued.

Another important variable for creativity education is *environment*, which has a significant place in Reggio Emilia philosophy and educational practice, as the environment is seen as the third most important teacher. For creative activities on the educational light table children use sand, paper, glass stones, leaves, transparencies, etc. Projectors and light tables encourage exploring light penetration. Mirrors allow children to see themselves and their creations from all sides.

Therefore, it is worth to point out that playing with all the above-mentioned instruments creates rather a magical experience for children and adults alike. Besides the light, soft boxes (puzzles) and other measures undoubtedly serve for developing:

- social skills,
- language competence,
- cognitive competences,
- self-expression.

Even Jean Piaget found out that 3–4 hours per day of learning and playing on the light table increases the IQ of children, their innovative memory, and creative potential (Shaffer, Squire Halverson, Gee 2005; Dere 2019; cf. also: Babakr, Moham- edamin, Kakamad 2019: 517–524). In such creative activities not only children or

pedagogues are involved in education, experiments or inventions, but also parents get the possibility to know closer their children's achievements, communicate and share ideas of education and child's upbringing with others, also get the feedback from the creative results about things where the child is strong and something about what still needs to be developed or requires more attention (Malaguzzi 1998; Markevičienė 2012). Putting it in other words, through education and creative processes the kindergarten community together with families creates safe and open environment for children's positive socialization. An educational institution becomes a place of creativity, learning, development, and sharing for all.

Yet, on the other hand, Stanisław Popek (2016) points out in his works on modeling creativity and psychological interactions that social reality nowadays is characterized by rapid scientific and technical progress, the disappearance of simple activities in favor of mentally and practically complex activities, which entails the need for creative people. Under these conditions, it is necessary to change educational strategies at all levels of education (Popek 2016). Therefore, his works outline the theoretical model of human personality, in particular special and creative abilities and talents in a systemic, holistic and interactive approach. It is also a model that takes into account individual differences of the human *psyche*, which makes the structure of these abilities and talents varied, and at the same time it is far from the traditional scheme based on the theory of intelligence (Popek 2016). The outlined model of the *psyche* shows the necessity of rebuilding the didactic system, i.e. departing from the strategies of providing and reproducing knowledge (i.e., the traditional school system) in favor of polymethodic strategies (i.e., the modern school system based on the interaction of individual differences).

Summing up: in developing the competence of creativity involvement in the processes of artistic self-expression has a long-term impact on the abilities of a child to understand, observe, and listen. Creativity is a fundamental key element for the preschool curriculum and can be defined as a procedure of creating original things. Both preschool teachers and parents (caregivers) should provide children with materials to trigger their imagination, should provide opportunities to imagine and to explain their ideas, should appreciate children's individuality, and should encourage their different viewpoints (Dere 2019; Popek 2016). *Imagination* plays a key role in the child's search for knowledge and understanding, which in early child's education processes is more important than the results (though results are more wanted by parents and regulators, in some cases by teachers).

## Creativity and Parents' Involvement in Early Education

As stated previously in this paper, the engagement of parents into ECEC bears many fruitful outcomes. Therefore, we briefly describe and present the importance of such collaboration.

Parents are children's first and most enduring educators. This statement gives an idea and reminds all of us that family is the first child's socialization institution and that children from the very beginning learn more, create more, care more, and experience more than we could ever have imagined (Przybysz-Zaremba, Kołodziejcki 2018: 17–30; Kołodziejcki 2010: 193–207). To put it in other words, children with the active support of their parents become constructive explorers rather than being just copying individuals. This fact also has some implications for the future, as if we raise creative and free personalities from their early childhood days then we are supposed to have more smarter, richer, happier, and—finally—fewer neurotic adults (quoted from: *Quality Education for All* 2004; Lindsay 2015; Popek 2016). It is worth to state that in recent decades this fact has been “frequently accompanied with recommendations firstly, about the need to support parents in their parenting activities, including their role in supporting their children's learning and development. A second focus in policy recommendations concerns strengthening the relationship between the home and the ECEC setting and schooling order to enhance children's learning and development. In fact, throughout the international field of ECEC, good communication and co-ordinated partnership between parents and staff is seen as essential to high-quality care and education of young children” (Kernan 2012: 12–13).

Another axiomatic approach towards parents' and institution's collaboration is that parents and what they do have a powerful effect on children's learning. Based on social learning theory, children mainly learn and get to know their closest environment by watching and observing what parents (or other close people) do. Thus, it is quite important for adults to bear in mind that the way they act, speak, behave—all of that—has an undoubted effect on children's further attitudes towards themselves and the others. The way kids identify themselves and find a place in particular sociocultural contexts depends on the style they were taught and what they have observed at previous stages of life.

The next meaningful consequence of being engaged in ECEC processes would be the statement that when families and educational institutions work along, they undoubtedly benefit the child. In this situation children gain an understanding that the things they do in life are both important for the family members and educational institutions where they spend almost a half of their time while learning and playing. The child gets an understanding that family and educational institutions/kindergartens are closely related and cannot not be

seen as separate phenomena. While, on the other hand, “the notion of equal or coordinated partnership is emphasized, with each party recognizing and valuing the contribution of the other to children’s wellbeing. Within such a vision, parents and practitioners are both viewed as experts: parents as experts on their own children and practitioners as experts in caring and educating children in the context of institution or group setting. Respectful sharing of information between parents and practitioners about children’s learning and development at home and at school is viewed as being in children’s best interests” (Kernan 2012: 12).

We should also not forget quite a significant fact that through such collaboration we are all heading towards enhancing quality in early childhood education and care. One of the essential goals remains shaping the concept of quality education which is “backed by social partners (especially parents), easy for the society to comprehend, and effective” (*Quality Education for All* 2004: 26–27). Many scholars state that both quality of education and parents’ sensitivity to all those things that happen with their children have a significant impact on child’s positive development and further socialization processes as well as assure the realization of quality measures within education, especially in ECEC (*Quality Education for All* 2004: 26–27).

Yet, last but not least outcome of collaboration is this that parents get a positive support/assistance from the kindergartens. This mainly means that being positively engaged in educational processes leads towards parents’ support provided by professionals and practitioners. According to Margaret Kernan (2012), it is recognized internationally that ECEC has an important function in providing parents and caretakers with educational and social support in meeting their responsibilities in bringing up their children. ECEC can also contribute to engaging parents with related measures to improve employment, job-related training, parent education and leisure time activities.

Some other rather problematic aspects of parents’ collaboration with kindergartens must be pointed out. Margaret Kernan (2012), Gai Lindsay (2015) and other scholars in the field (*Quality Education for All* 2004: 26–27) have stressed that:

- First, parents do not mean only mothers. However, children, mothers and fathers, and practitioners all have a role to play in early learning.
- Usually, parents’ and practitioners’ cooperation collapse because of several common misunderstandings:
  - lack of confidence,
  - different understandings and expectations,
  - different views,
  - teachers’ preparation suffers the lack of attention to some specific subjects to be taught at colleges and universities.

## Closing Thoughts

The Reggio Emilia educational philosophy is an innovative and inspiring approach to early childhood education, which values the child as strong, capable and resilient; rich with wonder and knowledge. This philosophy emphasizes the innate curiosity of children and aims to assist them with understanding their world and who they are in it. The Reggio Emilia approach starts from the premise that children use many different ways to express their creativity, understanding and thoughts (i.e., the 100 languages). This perspective has been endorsed by many artists, who state that these different ways of thinking, exploring and learning are expressed through drawing, sculpting, music, dance and movement, painting and drama (*The Scots Journey* 2017<sup>3</sup>). Thus, creativity remains one of the main features within Reggio Emilia philosophical approach and practical actions.

In children, creativity develops from their experiences with the process, rather than concern for the finished product. Thus, creativity should stand on the one line with literacy. Children get to know the world and close surroundings through their senses: touching, seeing, smelling, hearing, tasting, and acting as an independent explorer.

Creativity is identified through the following elements: creative person, creative result, and creative process. Based on Reggio Emilia philosophy, every child is perceived as: having unlimited potential, eager to interact with and contribute to the world, driven by curiosity and imagination, delighted in taking responsibility for his or her own learning, able to listen and listened to, having an enormous need to love and to be loved, and valued. A rather important variable for creativity education is environment, which has a significant place in Reggio Emilia ideology and educational practice, as the environment is seen as the third most important teacher. Instruments and tools (light tables, projectors, mirrors, soft boxes/puzzles), used in educational activities, allow children to free their imagination and creativity, and thus play quite an important role in developing the creative personality.

Working not only with children in kindergartens but also supporting parents and cooperating with them matters most. Children's education is understood as a supportive measure for the positive parenting and thus even must be taken into legislation practice locally, regionally, and nationally. Cooperation with parents strengthens the development of main competence of children and prevents them from developing anti-social and violent behavior.

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<sup>3</sup> The brochure *The Scots Journey* can be downloaded from: <https://www.tsc.nsw.edu.au/what-is-the-reggio-emilia-philosophy/>.



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