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Multigenerational Family as a Creative Environment for the Child*

Rodzina wielopokoleniowa jako kreatywne środowisko dla dziecka

SUMMARY

Family, whether nuclear or multigenerational, constitutes the primary creative environment for the child. The conditions of creative environment are met by a functional family. Creative resources include interpersonal contact in general, communication, game, dramatization, etc. Creative environment in a family requires the willingness of creative adults, whether parents, grandparents, or the extended family. Kindergartens and, later on, primary schools pick up the threads of the creative background built in a functional family. Pedagogical education and the option of institutionalised continuous training in the area of creativity is perceived as an advantage teachers have over parents and grandparents who have only limited opportunities of such courses. The paper deals with the creative family environment and brings examples of the development opportunities in a nuclear and multi-generational family.

Keywords: multigenerational functional family; creative environment; child; older individual

INTRODUCTION

We have had several reasons to write the paper. The most important ones concerned the belief that children should live in a functional family and have the opportunity to develop their creativity and, at the same time, that grandparents the numbers of

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which keep growing should be engaged in such an environment. Creativity prevents the loss of their cognitive functions, develops emotionality and prevents, through the establishment of interpersonal contact, their social isolation. In grandchildren, it develops creativity and cognitive functions. This is an indisputable advantage for future school work, it evokes new approaches to the application of the knowledge gained at school. The development of empathy in relation to older people and the overall development of the creative and empathetic personality of the child are the added value to the efforts. Our assumption is that the personality of a child which is structured in a creative way would also be positively tuned to older people and would function as prevention against ageism. Ageism can be observed in many areas of social life. It is apparent at work, in the retirement area, but also in a family, or institutionalised facilities which take care of old people dependent on the help of others. We believe that the development of positive interpersonal contacts between grandparents and grandchildren also by way of a creative family environment may partially prevent such an undesirable phenomenon in the society as ageism. The paper treats a multigenerational functional family. Here, we cannot but have to mention dysfunctional family, whether nuclear or multigenerational, which creates a troublesome environment for the child. A child raised in such an environment focuses on the satisfaction of the basic needs, which leaves little room for the development of higher needs, including creativity. A child coming from such a family is therefore much more receptive of creative activities in a kindergarten and primary school.

MULTIGENERATIONAL FUNCTIONAL FAMILY

A multigenerational functional family is the optimum environment for the development of creativity of all family members. It establishes intergenerational ties with the past, the presence, and creates thus conditions for the future of the children. Creative environment in a family allows to develop child's personality in all directions. In connection with the creative environment in a family, it would be useful to take a family as a piece of art that needs to be painted for many years and is never finished. Individuals in a functional family have a sense of solidarity, are attentive to each other, protect each other, take care of each other, but also grow and develop as personalities. Edith Schaefferová (1995) asserts that imagination, creativity, originality, talent, interest, love, compassion, excitement belong to the very essence of family. We have been dealing with family from the perspective of a system approach which is typical for research, counselling and therapeutic work with family from the 1980s (Sobotková 2007). We agree with Charles H. Kramer (1980) who understands family as a group of individuals sharing one history, present reality and future expectations of mutually interconnected transactional relations. Important are emotional ties between the members of the family as a system, reasonable boundaries between individual

sub-systems (marital, partner, parental, sibling sub-systems) and the adaptability of family as a system. Family, whether complete or experiencing problems, incomplete or re-married, may range from functional to dysfunctional. Functional family is a family with clearly defined boundaries of individual members and sub-systems, and the boundaries between the family as a whole and the outer world. These boundaries are semi-permeable, they allow two-way communication and interaction. In the context of this paper, this means that the creative environment in a family overlaps with, or is mutually positively influenced by, the creative environment in the pre-school and school process. Functional family plays a protective role in relation to its members, provides them with safety and security and, at the same time, lets them grow and develop.

Dysfunctional families may have unclear boundaries, be extremely closed, impenetrable, not allowing change. Family coalitions in dysfunctional families may be incomplete, including only some of the members; one or more members may be excluded from them. Interaction patterns and communication are impaired. For a dysfunctional family, whether complete, incomplete, or re-married, whether nuclear or multigenerational, sharing one household with grandparents at older age, it is rather difficult to build creative environment for the child. Some of the family members may strain to build protective rather than creative environment. From the system perspective, family is in a constant movement, undergoing circular chain of influence where personal growth or change, whether positive or negative, in one family member would evoke changes in all other members and, subsequently, also the entire family changes and evolves (Pavlučiková 2013). Family constitutes a source for the satisfaction of physical, mental and social needs of an individual from cradle to grave. It is influenced by the environment in which it exists and evolves. School is one of the main elements which co-shape the personality of a child and, in cooperation with the family, produces a unique, original and creative human being. For a child and his or her personal growth, which also includes the development of creativity, are important all members of the family. At school, important figures are the teachers, tutors, but also classmates who have an impact on the creation of his or her personality. If we want to speak of creative environment in a family, we will have to omit dysfunctional and non-functional families. Those families are treated by family and school psychologists when addressing mental disorders, learning disorders or behavioural disorders of their members. We will focus on a functional family. Multigenerationality does not necessarily have to mean living under one roof with grandparents. Important for this paper is regular contact between grandparents, parents and grandchildren. If a creative atmosphere is built in a family, it will most probably have an impact on all family members and, based on circular causality, the family members will positively influence each other in their interactions. An optimum situation is when parents are building creative atmosphere from early childhood. This way, they contribute to the development of child's psychomotor skills and cognitive functions. If a child lives in a multigenerational family in which grand-

parents are active individuals, the impacts on the child multiply. Family is one of the creative environments in which grandparents meet grandchildren. When talking about the grandparents, important is their physical and mental health and the willingness to continue to maintain and develop their personalities at older age, too (Pavlůvčíková 2015). Creative environment in family is developed by parents and grandparents in a long-term horizon, from early childhood until adulthood. Optimum age for direct creative activities in a family seems to be the pre-school and the younger school age. At puberty and adolescence, they focus on their peers or on a contact with peers through social media. The paper focuses on a reciprocal activity of grandparents and grandchildren in a family and should be taken as supplemental to the direct creative activities in pre-school and school environment. However, it is equally important for grandparents and for grandchildren. The foundations of mutual interactions between grandparents and grandchildren in all areas of creative activities should be laid in early childhood. At puberty and adolescence, the model of mutual creative activities should already be well established. The order of the transactional process when the grandchildren grow up and grandparents get older can, under optimum conditions, be reversed, this means that grandchildren become the creative element for the grandparents.

CREATIVE ENVIRONMENT IN A FAMILY

Creativity is a phenomenon discussed in one group with the personality of an individual and development of a creative human, and along with intelligence as the foundations for creativity and other psychological pedagogical attributes. We do not plan to analyse the definitions of creativity. We agree with the authors who define creativity as a certain inner force of a personality motivating the individual to do things anew and better, and not only to the individual's benefit but also for a better and more meaningful world. We take creativity as production of new and useful solutions, ideas, thoughts and actions (Zelina 1995; Valachová 2005).

Basic features of creativity include:

Fluency – quantity, fluency of thoughts. It can be observed as verbal, association-al, symbolic, expressive, auditory and behavioural fluency (Zelina, Zelinová 1990).

Flexibility – flexibility of thinking process, various thoughts, ideas, reactions. Flexibility means that we will not stick to one or a couple of solutions to a situation, problems, but we are able to vary approaches to the solution (Zelina, Zelinová 1990).

Originality – means the ability to produce new, unusual solutions, responses which are funny and ingenious. Originality stems from fantasy, imagination (Zelina, Zelinová 1990).

Other features of creativity include:

Redefinition – is an ability to produce transformations, change the function of certain thing or its part, and use it differently (Guilford, Strom 1978).

Elaboration – is an ability to elaborate the details of a solution, bring a thought to a successful end (Turek 1999).

Sensitivity – means the sensitivity to problems, the ability to spot defects, gaps in a solution (Turek 1999).

Serendipity – a rarely mentioned element of creativity, means the ability to find solutions right away, without lengthy examination, go right to the point of an issue (Turek 1999).

An important fact is that creativity can be practised, it can be learned, by way of a drill of mental functions and processes. As for the development of creativity, it is required to prepare appropriate atmosphere and optimum environment. We speak of the so-called creative environment. Miron Zelina, Milota Zelinová (1990) have aptly summed up the basic features of a creative environment in which creative skills of an individual and group can be demonstrated and developed. These are rather created for the school environment. However, we will derive those which can be used to develop creativity in a family and specifically in a multigenerational family where older individuals are present as well. In a creative environment skills that are appreciated include thinking, searching, experimenting, alternatives, freedom of thought, self-confidence and self-appraisal of the members of a group, whether school or family group, stimulations are targeted on originality, new ideas. Spontaneity, activity and initiative is welcome. Emphasis is laid on cordiality to other people, cooperation. All these attributes can be used both in the creative environment at school and in a family. Particularly important is the support of positive orientation to work, optimism, belief in one's own strengths.

Our goal is to develop the creative environment at school and in a family. This also calls for creative adults – teachers and tutors at school, parents and grandparents in a family. Creative atmosphere can only occur where children feel relaxed and safe, and do not feel fear and anxiety. Individuals need to feel free to express their thoughts, ideas without being afraid of being howsoever disrespected or laughed at because of what they think. At school, this kind of atmosphere is established by a creative and appreciating teacher, in the school club it is the tutor, and in the family – parents and grandparents. Teachers and tutors are prepared for this activity during their studies, and later by way of all kinds of trainings. Parents and grandparents depend on self-study, unless they have pedagogical and psychological education. They could also be institutionally educated within personality and parental skills development programmes. However, for the time being such programmes for parents are quite scarce in Slovakia. In this case, it seems that grandparents who attend senior citizens club could be better off here. In such clubs, volunteers from among themselves or students of pedagogical and psychology schools are preparing creative programmes for senior citizens to train their memory and creative skills. They can then bring those activities home to build a creative environment in a family. Such atmosphere in a family also strengthens emotional ties between family members and responsibility to each other

(Pavlůvčíková 2012). We will try to illustrate, by way of example, not comprehensively, how such a programme can look like.

Various resources can be used to develop creativity in a family. Maybe one of the most important ones is game. Game definitely supports creativity. Brainstorming is another resource. This is a quite frequently used method when a problem is presented and individuals are asked to come up with as many probable solutions as possible. It is essential that they are not criticised, judged or laughed at because of the ideas they come up with. If the solution is not feasible, parent/grandparent gives hints to the child to find a more viable solution. A child usually very quickly understands why such a solution was not appropriate and starts pondering another one. The atmosphere of confidence is of great importance here. Dramatization employing movements, mimics, gestures, requisites (puppets, various toys), drawing, or even verbal resources employing verbal description helps to develop imagination, vocabulary, ability to express oneself employing sophisticated movements, leads to creativity and personal growth.

Three approaches to family creativity development:

- activities in connection with teaching subjects at school (creativity at school), children may take their own initiative and play creative games they learned at school also at home, and parents or grandparents willingly participate and cooperate,
- parenting style of parents and grandparents leading to creativity in a family by way of communication, dramatization, games,
- combined method linking both approaches.

SPECIFIC IDEAS TO DEVELOP CREATIVITY IN A FAMILY

Activity 1 – vocabulary development

All of us know the situation when we try to entertain children during a long trip by car by playing them fairy tales and songs, narrating stories, etc. An activity involving the entire family (except the driver) guarantees success and, if well chosen, develops creativity in a child.

Rules: The selected player says the alphabet silently and the other one stops him or her after some time. The first one says a letter he or she came at when stopped. All passengers in a car (or elsewhere) start making up words starting with that letter. When they cannot think of any other words, they repeat the step one in the first sentence. Words cannot be repeated and they must be meaningful. Based on our experience, the game is interesting with 5–6 letters. Then children get bored with it and need a change.

Focus: The method focuses on the development of verbal fluency, but it also develops attention and memory. It supports emotional atmosphere and puts the family together. This game is favoured by children over seven years of age, but also adults and grandparents.

Activity 2 – activity game

This activity is suitable for the whole family irrespective of the age. At least three piles of cards with words should be prepared first, one for children aged 7–9, the second one for children aged 10–12, and the third one for adults and grandparents.

- a) the first pile can consist of cards with such words as: *bunny, squirrel, barking dog, cat, cutlery, pot, tennis racket, pens and pencils*, etc. The more words we use, the more interesting the game becomes,
- b) the second pile may include more complex phrases or situations, e.g.: *volcano explosion, physical education lesson, Mount Everest tour*, etc.,
- c) the pile for the adults and older individuals may include such abstract words as: *lovingness, love at first sight, responsibility, punctuality*, etc.,

Rules: Player draws a card from the relevant pile and can express it by way of:

- a) drawing, and cannot speak or gesticulate,
- b) verbal description without using the root of the word or a translation into a foreign language and its subsequent identification,
- c) non-verbally by “playing” the word with one’s own body (pantomime).

When the card is drawn, the player chooses the method of expressing the word. All others can start guessing. If the word is guessed, both the presenter and the one who guessed the word get a point. The game manager keeps the scores. To make the game more exciting, a time limit may be set. More difficult words may allow a combination of drawing and pantomime.

Focus: The method focuses on the development of verbal and motional fluency, development of imagination, sensory perception. It develops elaboration by making the player to try expressing the word until successful end. It participates in the serendipity skill, because it teaches players how to go to the essence when expressing a word in order to express it in the time limit set. Last but not least, it develops expressive formulation of one’s own feelings, puts the family together.

Activity 3 – new, unusual use of ordinary articles

The method to develop creativity can be well used in a family. Here, things of everyday use in a household are given other uses.

We will use ordinary household articles, such as: *bucket, bottle, pot, fork, spoon, pencil*, etc. Again, the more articles on cards, the more interesting the game.

Rules: One player chooses one of the articles and tries to come up with other possible uses in addition to the intended one. The other player puts his or her ideas down. Assessment can relate to fluency, but also flexibility of thought, originality and re-definition.

Focus: In addition to verbal fluency, flexibility, originality of the use of articles, the activity also supports imagination and independent thinking. It develops family

atmosphere, as the parent or grandparent praises each new solution and appreciates the player. It develops self-confidence in a child and trust in the child's own strengths.

Activity 4 – creative baking

Most children like helping their parents and grandparents with cooking and baking. Similarly, majority of younger children like playing with modelling clay. Children are very inventive in making up new shapes, articles and new combinations of colours. We believe that they also feel good about a specific practical activity, that they alone managed to create something new, even if only with modelling clay. The game can change to actual baking cakes bringing benefit and joy to the entire family.

Rules: This activity requires to take care of the safety of children and other family members. We have, as an illustration, chosen a simple and well-tried coconut ball recipe. With the help of an adult, the child combines softened butter, oat flakes, ground coconut, powdered sugar, vanilla, cocoa in bowl adding cold water if necessary. The child works with the dough as with modelling clay, and makes small balls that he or she rolls in the coconut. A snack for the whole family is ready. Recipes can become more difficult as the child grows. Cook books for children are a good source.

Focus: The activity develops fantasy, imagination that is a part of original ideas. It develops family interaction, empathy, solidarity, care for family members, responsibility, it supports positive orientation to work and trust in one's own strengths.

CONCLUSIONS

Each activity focusing on the development of creativity and carried out in a family is beneficial for all family members. Besides the indisputable cognitive benefit for children, adults and grandparents, it also builds positive atmosphere in a family. Positive atmosphere in the family has a preventive effect and protects the family from conflicts and subsequent disintegration. Creative atmosphere helps develop empathy in all participating individuals. It makes family members more sensitive to their own flaws and imperfections, as well as to the flaws of siblings, parents and grandparents sharing one multigenerational household or meeting only occasionally. It teaches them to be tolerant of those flaws or to find direction. It supports family identity, and creates the “we” of the family. The sense of solidarity and help is the value added by the activities and development of creativity in a family. Creative family environment strengthens social and emotional atmosphere. Creative development of a child requires safe environment in which the child feels free to behave naturally without fear of being laughed at. A functional family represents such a safe environment. What is important and helpful to the development of creativity in a family is the implementation of creativity development programmes at schools and school clubs,

programmes for parents and grandparents are rather scarce and it would be beneficial if their numbers grew bigger. Creative environment in a family can only be built on the willingness of creative adults, whether parents, grandparents, or extended family. Our aim was to develop creativity also in support of a positive interaction process in a multigenerational family, to develop empathy and mutual emotional connection of all participating family members. We may assume that in such a positive family atmosphere children would, over some time, be supportive of their elders, whether parents or grandparents, when they become dependent on the help of someone else.

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STRESZCZENIE

Rodzina – czy to nuklearna, czy wielopokoleniowa – stanowi podstawowe środowisko twórcze dla dziecka. Warunki środowiska twórczego spełnia funkcjonalna rodzina. Zasoby kreatywne obejmują ogólnie kontakt interpersonalny, komunikację, grę, dramatyzację itp. Środowisko twórcze w rodzinie można zbudować wyłącznie na woli kreatywnych dorosłych, zarówno rodziców, dziadków, jak i dalszej rodziny. Przedszkole, a później szkoła podstawowa, wychwytuje wątki kreatywnego środowiska w funkcjonalnej rodzinie. Zaletą nauczycieli jest edukacja pedagogiczna i możliwość zinstytucjonalizowanego ustawicznego szkolenia w zakresie kreatywności. Takie kursy są rzadko prowadzone dla rodziców czy dziadków. Artykuł dotyczy twórczego środowiska rodzinnego. Podano tu przykłady możliwości rozwoju w rodzinie nuklearnej i wielopokoleniowej.

Słowa kluczowe: wielopokoleniowa rodzina funkcjonalna; środowisko twórcze; dziecko; starszy osobnik