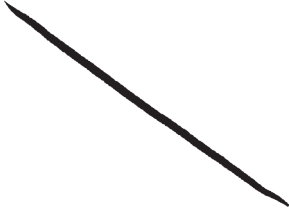


THE DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVE POTENTIAL IN CHILDREN AGED 9 TO 13 THROUGH ACTING CLASSES

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Abstract: The questions that lead to the following research are: Is every human being creative? Does everybody possess a creative potential? If anyone is born creative, does creativity remain a part of our whole lives, or does it fade away reaching adulthood? Can acting techniques develop or reawaken creativity? The research project we conducted focused on the ways creativity can be rediscovered in every field of activity, and the possibilities that acting teachers have on guiding their students aged 9 to 13 to regain and develop their creative potential via theater games and improvisation.

Keywords: creative potential, anthroposophy, preadolescence, child development, theater games, theater techniques.

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This research started from the similarity between the development of a seed planted in a favourable environment and the metamorphosis of the child when he benefited from the attention, care, and love of those around him, into an adult with roots deeply embedded in the ground and for whom the sky was the limit.

Some of the children who attend theater classes at the Children's Palace in Sibiu start from the prejudice that theater means getting on stage and pretending to be someone else, simulating an emotion that has nothing to do with personal experience, learning a text by heart, and deliver it with a certain *intonation*. How many children do not proudly state that they can cry on command? However, they gradually learn that the theater is about them, their authentic individuality, their ability to experience, play, open up and express themselves emotionally; all this occurs with the aim of discovering themselves and the world from which they belong and to which they are intrinsically linked.

Viola Spolin states that anyone can play, improvise, and the present research aimed to investigate to what extent creativity is manifested and can be developed through acting, theatrical games and improvisation techniques, especially within the group of pre-adolescents selected for the research.

Theoretical Background

Creativity

Creativity is that ability that resides in us, to create something new, original, according to the definition given by the Encyclopaedic Dictionary. In search of the answer to the question of whether creativity is only the prerogative of an elite of artists, writers, inventors, we learn, on the contrary, that it is inherent to everyone. We are born creative, and this is best seen in the play of small children, who are amazed by the novel solutions that spring out of the blue without any

effort. They make no effort, but things flow as naturally as possible, because, as the famous Julia Cameron, author of the international bestseller *The Artist's Way – A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*, says “Creativity is divine energy flowing through us, shaped by us, just as light flows through a crystal prism.” (Cameron, 2015, p. 176)

If we are born creative, the next question is: do we remain creative throughout life? Julia Cameron proposes in *The Artist's Way*, the environment and conditions conducive to the manifestation of creativity; she also presents, step by step, the impediments that lead to its stifling. Creativity is related to happiness and enthusiasm. Ideas flow in a continuous stream when we are in a state of bliss, solutions come naturally. A child or teenager enthusiastic about what they do, regardless of the field they are passionate about, will be creative, another, who lacks motivation, will not have any results. A passionate teacher will have passionate students. Furthermore, at this point, we remember those teachers who enter class burdened by the worries and shortcomings of the day. What can be more tiring than a grumpy teacher who cannot even offer a smile to his students? When the teacher enters the class smiling, that magical moment takes place, about which Daniel Goleman speaks “Invariably, the mood of the most expressive has been transferred to the passive [...] Through this imitation, people recreate in themselves the mood of the other.” (Goleman, 2001, p. 146).

Creative thinking corresponds to identifying solutions, not problems. When attention is focused on impediments, mistakes, on what *cannot* be done, nothing creative can arise. Instead, when the focus is on solving problems and finding optimal ways to do so, regardless of the field, the solution will always emerge.

Another factor that leads to the development and manifestation of creativity is related to the environment in which the activity is carried out. If it is an environment where the student can play, try, experiment with different ways of solving a problem, identifying solutions, if he can try and make mistakes and then try again without fear of being criticized or judged, he will gain confidence in his or her own abilities. Here we come to the next trigger of creativity, namely the self-confidence of the student. If he has confidence in himself, he will try, experiment, open up. The teacher, educator or parent, when giving him or her opportunities for experimentation, must encourage free expression, otherwise the child will end up with rigid, stereotyped, uncreative actions. He will not have access to moments of revelation, of lightening, of “Eureka! That’s it!” The child becomes strong when he manages to find the solution himself. “It is often daring, not talent, that makes one artist an artist, and another a shadow artist, afraid to come out and expose his dreams to the light, afraid that he would disintegrate at the first touch” (Cameron, 2015, p. 50). Self-confidence and courage create essential conditions for creative potential to burst forth.

Among the main inhibitors of creativity is fear. The fear of making mistakes, of being laughed at, of not living up to standards. Fear paralyzes and blocks any initiative. Fear keeps you anchored in the past or future, so you miss the present moment. Theatrical games bring the student back to the present, in that he needs to be here and now to solve the task. The framework, which the theatrical game provides, leads to an openness of the student, given the fact that he is doing what others are doing, he does not feel exposed, constrained, given the pre-established focus point.

Another inhibitor of creativity is the desire to reach the result too quickly. In this sense we believe that the influence of applications and video games only increases this desire. Everything is happening extremely fast, the speed of contemporary life, as Salman Rushdie says in the novel *Fury*, exceeds the responsiveness of the soul. The student no longer has the patience to put brick over brick to build a whole, but wants to fast-forward the process, to reach the end; he no longer takes time to observe, to acquire *moments of accumulation of beauty*, to put it in Cameron's words. "Progress, not perfection, is what we must demand of ourselves. Too far, too fast, and just like that, we can destroy ourselves" (Cameron, 2015, p. 152).

In this rush, the student begins to compare himself with others, and the adults around him do the same, out of a desire to motivate him. By comparing himself or being compared to others, he will end up shifting the focus from within himself to outside. He will end up looking for his mobile actions outside, since the inside is not enough for the adults around. Thus, we contribute to diminishing the pupil's self-confidence. If what is inherent in him is not good, then he will end up copying. Imitation is formal and cannot bring joy, cannot create anything new, being a duplicate. The light of all that is new and authentic will be extinguished in the pupil. In the desire to be like others, we mutilate everything that is beautiful, original, and innovative. We level everything to meet the requirements. And then, if we see someone around who does not fit into the structure, envy appears, which is another obstacle to creativity. "Instead of enjoying what he has, he suffers for what others have" (Russell, 2011, p. 5).

Potential. Creative Potential

Potential slides into the realm of the possible or possibilities. It refers to those innate capacities and abilities, which may or may not be developed as they are discovered. So, potential refers to what can manifest, but does not necessarily have to materialize to justify its existence.

Regarding potential, Remo Largo, a Swiss doctor and expert in child development, claims that a child cannot develop more than his potential allows. Thus, if the student has completed a certain stage in the development of the brain, parents and teachers are pedalling empty if they want to overcome it. Largo reminds of an old African proverb “The grass doesn’t grow faster if you pull it”. (Largo, 2021, p. 84) The child can only learn to the extent that he is physically and mentally prepared for. Largo rightly argues that each child is unique and goes through the stages of development at his own pace, but that he can only develop his skills to the limit of his potential. “Das Kind kann sich aber selbst unter optimalen Lebensbedingungen nicht über sein Entwicklungspotenzial hinaus entwickeln” (The child cannot develop more than his developmental potential allows even in optimal living conditions) (Largo, 2021, p. 60). However, Jung is of the opinion that we cannot know the true potential of a human being, given that it belongs to the unconscious. “We call the unconscious ‘nothing’, and yet it is a *reality in potentia*; the thought we will think, the deed we will perform, even the fate we will mourn tomorrow already lie unconscious ‘today’. [...] That is why we must always count on the existence of things not yet discovered.” (Jung, 2014, p. 313).

As for creative potential, Julia Cameron believes that it is inherent in everyone. But its manifestation depends very much on overcoming personal blockages and creating optimal conditions in which the individual can express himself freely, without constraints.

Stimulating the ability to learn

Given the fact that every being is born with the desire to know, to discover the world of which he is part of, Largo states that educators do not need to stimulate anything, because the desire to learn already exists in everyone. Every child WANTS to learn, as they tend to update their self. The child is born with the need to discover, to learn, but only within the limits of what attracts him and when he reaches the respective stage of development. Every child is unique, possessing different capacities and abilities, different areas of competence. Largo introduces the term Fit-Prinzip (adaptation/matching principle). This principle presupposes the teacher’s adaptation to the child’s needs, and connecting them with the experimentation environment. He repeatedly emphasizes that the student does not and cannot be good at everything. Everyone has to find their place or role in the web of interpersonal relationships – family, group of friends, school, work, etc. Although the ability to learn should not be stimulated, instead, the conditions for experimentation should be created so that learning can take place.

As for the factors that contribute to the child's development, research claims that heredity is responsible of 50% of it, and the environment of the other 50%. Thus, we understand the importance of the opportunities for experimentation, which we offer to children. A child who benefits from the attention, care and love of his parents, even if his genetic inheritance does not mean that he excels in a certain area, will develop his potential much more than another child who did not benefit from these, and consequently lacks confidence himself, and his potential remains unstimulated.

Given the fact that the research intended to verify whether creative potential can be developed in any 9-13-year-old child, it seems that neuroplasticity is another pathway, which points to an affirmative answer in this regard. Neuroplasticity refers to the ability of the brain to change its structure at any age. Thus, if certain synapses are no longer used, they will fade, until they are completely lost. But if certain neurons are frequently activated simultaneously, neural networks are strengthened, and new synapses are formed. If the brain is able to change its structure at any age, the newer synapses can be created in children. Here we refer to the children, whose creativity was stifled by all kinds of blockages, related to the culture they come from, the family environment, the beliefs and the set of values imprinted on the child by the family. From the lack of faith in other ways of experimenting than the generally valid ones, and from other inner blockages, to the appearance of which all education contributed. In this sense, the teacher must know the role of the cerebral hemispheres – the left responsible for everything related to logic, calculations, time planning, linguistics, and the right for interpretation, recognition, understanding – and the importance of balancing them. Touching the total brain in Mihaela Roco's terms, or the integrated brain both vertically – neocortex, midbrain, reptilian brain – and horizontally – left hemisphere and right hemisphere – results in balance. Daniel Siegel, psychiatrist and university professor, claims that "The goal is to avoid living in an emotional flood *or* an emotional desert" (Siegel and Bryson, 2014, p. 29). In the workshop on the actor's art, a very important role is played by ways of developing intuition, that capacity, for which the right hemisphere is responsible, which relates to what is new and unknown. If the essential conditions for the smooth running of the workshop are met, the student has the opportunity to discover himself, through the choices he makes in games, exercises or improvisations. If we refer to the two cerebral hemispheres, the blockage that occurs is excessive thinking, over-analyzing. Reason blocks the creative process. Reason blocks the student when he has a task to complete. The solution is the compensation that comes from the intuition, the right hemisphere. If a student does not know, for example, what to do with his hands during improvisation, or how to stand on stage, his focus shifts

to the “how to”. His goal, however, is to solve the work task, not to think about how to solve it. When this happens, a very useful method of solving the problem is to introduce an unknown, unexpected element into the game that surprises and to which the student must react in the moment, not on autopilot.

Pedagogy of Encouragement

Moreover, it would be very helpful for each teacher to understand their own role when they are in front of students. Children learn by imitation, they reproduce what they see, not what they are told. Regarding the role of the teacher, Rudolf Steiner, the founder of anthroposophy and Waldorf pedagogy, a vast and multifaceted spirit, argued that programs should not be devised, but the child’s nature should be understood, as this will indicate to the teacher the path to follow. Steiner does not conceive of the child outside of this system, of the universe with its laws, the sky and the earth, the inherent rhythms, according to which everything that exists is guided. The developing being contains the potential of all that it can become. And it can become what resides in it, if it is supported in its own discovery and the world of which it is a part. Steiner is of the opinion that no one can teach anyone anything, if he does not understand the being in its totality, as body, soul and spirit. And in order to be able to educate the child, you must first understand that you, as a soul, are in front of another soul, which opens up to you, so that you can guide it. As a teacher you have to relate to the child in front of you, as a sensitive being in the process of discovering its relationship with the world to which it is intrinsically linked and interconnected.

A very important element in Waldorf education (or Steiner, as it is called in Switzerland) is the relationship between the educator and the child. The educator must be in a constant search and personal development, to be a living example for the fragile being in front of him. It matters what the educator is like as a being, as a temperament, character, soul. A moral being, representative of the good and the beautiful. Children like good things. When he listens to stories, he rejoices when good triumphs over evil. This perspective must be preserved, so that the model presented by the teacher, a being in search of truth, justice, meaning, is also perpetuated in the child. The educator himself must overflow with enthusiasm and retain the capacity to marvel at the whole of creation, so that the students, in turn, can do so. He must have the ability to talk about the world in symbols and by using analogies, because these touch not only the child’s intellect, but also his whole feeling. A warm way of telling stories and a genuine love for children are necessary and desirable. In this sense, the teacher must also have a very well-developed intuition, so that he can relate to any newly encountered situation

in ways that require his presence of mind and novel ways of solving, not the outdated ones employed in the past. In order to relate correctly to the developing being, he must know exactly the stages it goes through.

In the acting workshop, as it should be in any educational context, negative formulations, the fixing of evaluation templates and labels are avoided; in addition, the feedback that is constantly given to the students is centred on the positive aspects, the negative ones being rather considered objectives to solve in the next exercise. Not only that, but what is evaluated is the effort made, and in no case the student himself. The trap the adult can fall into at this point is to praise without reason any action taken by the child. That is why the individualization of the teaching-learning process is so important, given the different stages of development in which the child is. Thus, the starting points in their trajectory are different, considering the rates of development, but also the different skills, abilities and inclinations that each individual student possesses. Children are more willing to try again and again, the more they believe they can, no matter what stage they are at. They need to feel accepted and feel safe in order to experiment and develop. The education system focuses a lot on lacks, on deficiencies; instead of focusing on students' strengths, they focus on what needs to be corrected. Children have to achieve some goals, for which they are perhaps not ready. The educator should accept the child as he is, not as he would like him to be.

Consequently, apart from the role of the teacher, the perception he has of the student and the relationship he builds with him, it is important to develop the emotional intelligence of the students in order for them to be successful in their enterprises. When in a state of stress and fear, students are unable to focus on what they have to deal with. Their thinking is directed towards fatal finalities, such as, I will fail an exam, I will not pass, others are better than me, and I will never succeed. Daniel Goleman claims that IQ is only responsible for 20% of an individual's success in life. Hence, his research was directed towards identifying the other factors that determine success in life, which are in a proportion of 80%. Students who possess high intellectual potential but cannot manage their emotions will not be able to bring out this potential and most of the time will fail in their projects. This is why the teacher's task is to support them to get up after each fall, to help them find ways to calm down, to find tranquillity, to shift their attention elsewhere, to propose different actions, in which they can easily succeed and thus increase their self-confidence, to arouse their enthusiasm and the power to persevere. A depressed attitude does nothing but drag them down, thoughts being directed towards personal failure, lack of capabilities, even loss of meaning in life. Daniel Goleman argues that the optimistic attitude in the face of failure is what propels us forward, but the negative attitude only reinforces the conviction

of personal shortcomings and demoralizes even more. Also, the educator has the task of cultivating children's empathy, that ability to know and recognize their own feelings, as well as to recognize them in others. Empathy is responsible for a good relationship both with oneself and with others, good integration and collaboration in a group, understanding the motivations of others and one's own.

Physical, Cognitive and Emotional Development in Preadolescence

Although this age stage in the child's development has only been analysed very rarely, as a distinct stage, and has been considered more as a transition from the previous stage to puberty, preadolescence represents a true metamorphosis of the child. This begins with the crisis of 9 years, the rubikon, as called in anthroposophy, which refers to the fact that for the first time in his life, the child dissociates from the world of which he is a part, feeling that he has lost the paradise of childhood. Until around the age of 7, children learn by imitation, with Largo stating that at this stage they are learning geniuses. Any child anywhere in the world has the ability, at this age, to master any foreign language perfectly within a span of only six months, but only to the extent that someone in the child's environment uses this language permanently during learning. In the first 7 years of life, the child is a sense organ, in the expression of Rudolf Steiner, he perceives everything that surrounds him, and what he perceives crosses his entire body; the child overflows with fantasy and learns through play. With the loss of baby teeth, around the age of 7, he moves into another stage, where he learns through images. He is extremely receptive to the stories of adults, and the more the educator overflows with fantasy, the fuller of fantasy he will be.

Preadolescence or pre-puberty refers to the age category 9-12 (girls) or 10-13/14 (boys). Girls generally develop a year, a year and a half before boys. However, the demarcations are not categorical, given the different rhythms of development, and the differences within the same sex are greater than those between the sexes, according to Largo's research.

Bernard Lievegoed, a Dutch anthroposophist, physician and psychiatrist, analyses the stages of child development in the book *Entwicklungsphasen des Kindes – Stages of Child Development*, specifying that the stages of physical development are intrinsically linked to those of emotional, cognitive and volitional development. Everything is linked in the child's development, so that the end of one stage is easily recognized and understood as the transition to the next. Each stage of physical development corresponds to a stage of soul development, and soul development corresponds to the three forces: reason, feeling and will. Thus, states Lievegoed, any development in the length of the limbs or in height corresponds

to a stage of development of the will. Lievegoed places the will, as the engine of action, at the opposite pole of thought, which represses action and tends toward analysis. Therefore, to act, you need limbs, to be able to carry out the action itself, be it arms or hands, for actions that require dexterity, be it legs, to move as fast as possible. The development of feeling happens simultaneously with the growth of the trunk, growth in volume, in width. The development of thinking is observed in the modification of the child's physiognomy.

Thus, around the age of 9 we are dealing with a growth of the trunk, hence the development of the child's senses. Real self-awareness takes place. It is the moment when he feels that he has lost the paradise of his childhood, the world of stories. "Das Kind erlebt in diesen Jahren das Vorhandensein des eigenen Ich, abgetrennt von der ausseren Welt, als eine tiefe Tragik" (During these years, the child feels the presence of the self, dissociated from the outside world, as a great tragedy). (Lievegoed, 2020, p. 96) The world appears foreign to him and he sees himself alone in front of it. Many children become unhappy, come into conflict with others, because they begin to see everything with a critical eye. There is a shift from external authority to self. The teacher, idealized up to this stage, and parents, who represented the supreme authority, who could do and knew everything, lose their importance, fall from the pedestal on which the child had placed them. In addition to this, all kinds of physical and cognitive transformations take place, which he, again, has to deal with. Feeling alone, becoming aware of his own corporeality, he develops fears before the world that represents a potential danger. He is afraid of the dark, creates all kinds of scenarios based on sounds heard. It is the first time he has thought about death, and it has become a problem. For the young child, death is not a problem, he does not have to face it. He simply accepts it. For the pre-adolescent, death is a moment that concerns him a lot and arouses many thoughts. Feeling that life has lost its charm, he begins to see everything in black and white, and this polarity makes the child go through all kinds of contradictory states, to be either sad or depressed, sometimes cheerful and eager to know new things. Lievegoed states: "Die Lebenshaltung ist deutlich ambivalent geworden. Der Dualismus wird zum Leitmotiv" (The attitude towards life has become categorically ambivalent. Duality becomes the leitmotiv.) (Lievegoed, 2020, p. 64)

There is a need for creation, to do something new, which will take him out of the states in which he is. He becomes independent, has the need to belong to a group, for self-determination. Who could tell him what to do, if those around him have lost their superhuman attributes of previous years? His capacity for observation increases. Thus, notice when family members argue, even if they maintain the appearance of a civilized discussion. He is much more open to

nature. Since the people around him have lost their superpowers, he looks for them in legends and mythology. His moral values are sedimented, the characters of legends and mythology imprint on him. If until this moment fairy tales and stories offered the child the opportunity to learn what is good and bad, now these two concepts become more complex, good being associated with the notion of wisdom, generosity, spirit of sacrifice, dedication, love, justice, and the evil of the notion of ugliness, unbelief, injustice, hatred, revenge, envy, jealousy. “Zu allen Zeiten waren junge Erwachsene für eine solche absolute Moral besonders empfänglich” (In all eras, young adults have been extremely receptive to an absolute morality.) (Largo, 2021, p. 236) Thus, the adolescent engages in the defence of the human rights, in support of the poor and in the fight against poverty, in the protection of animals or the environment. He becomes aware of the way he eats and what his diet consists of: animal, vegetable; he is extremely sensitive to injustices and wants to fight them at all costs.

To get through the crisis he is in more easily, the pre-adolescent listens to music or even produces music. Quite a few start the study of a musical instrument in this phase. Music has the ability to transpose you into another state, so they have a predilection for doing that. They become dreamers and create all kinds of scenarios.

After this phase of readjustment with the world, from which he dissociates, comes to an end, the preadolescent passes into a phase of conquering the world, passing through all kinds of experiences, which make it appear again loaded with meaning.

Also, during this period, there is a very subtle separation from the family, from those who were by his side in his development. Given that they have lost the status they held until then, the pre-adolescent will seek love, attachment, fulfilment of emotional needs from those of the same age. According to Largo, teenagers feel that they no longer love their parents as they did when they were small, they no longer feel the need to share everything with them, they perceive them differently, they can no longer idealize them, they need to talk to them, but they no longer feel they need their advice. (Largo and Czernin, 2011, p. 158) Thus, according to Largo, the adolescent becomes increasingly independent from an emotional point of view, which causes him to look at the people around him horizontally, not vertically. That is, he wants to be perceived as an adult, to be looked at on the same level, and not from top to bottom. Largo argues that the task of the teacher or parent is to respect this desire of the child, being aware that the child is still developing and needs his guidance. If the relationship between teacher and student is one of this kind, then the latter will feel that he can confess to the former, and most likely, their relationship will turn into a friendship in the future.

Around the age of 10, 11 years there is a sharp increase in length. At no stage in life, says Largo, will the legs be longer in relation to the torso than at this age. Hence the slightly unbalanced image of pre-adolescents. On the one hand, girls get tired very quickly at this stage, given the fact that the body consumes a lot of energy for growth, on the other hand, boys are an energy bomb. In preadolescence, gender boundaries appear for the first time. Physical changes occur, along with the development of sexual organs, sleep duration changes, visual acuity, taste and smell develop.

Communication and Creativity in Preadolescence

Depending on his inclinations and predispositions, the pre-adolescent can either become extremely sociable, the need for communication of his own feelings, opinions, ideas being very great, or extremely silent, retreating into his shell and crossing with even greater difficulty this stage of metamorphosis. It is perhaps the noisiest period in his entire development trajectory, because he wants to present his own opinions loudly, to be heard.

Self-perception, positive or negative, appears, the pre-adolescent becomes aware of his inclinations and capabilities, learns to communicate in a group, find and maintain his role in the group of friends; he enrolls in extracurricular activities, which can satisfy this need for the development of what is inherent in him. He is very receptive to non-verbal language. The degree to which he succeeds in discovering and developing his strengths and accepting his weaknesses determines the degree of self-confidence, acceptance, motivation and the way he assigns value to himself.

In this stage of metamorphosis on all levels, language becomes a tool for expressing emotions and thoughts. Preteen language is flexible, innovative, original, and booming. They use a different language to distinguish themselves from adults, so when an adult starts using their typical expressions, the child feels uncomfortable. Many times, the adult sees himself in front of them unable to understand the message sent by them. Communication takes place face to face, but even more so online. Thus, through text messages or the WhatsApp application, they can verbally communicate whatever is on their mind, without the risk of a reaction from the receiver, taking into account the fact that he is not in sight. The language becomes abbreviated, shortened, through expressions like “lol” or “I met my bff”. This burst of creativity in the formation of words and sentences, as Largo calls it, has often led to new art forms, for example rap or poetry slam – in which poets present their works using unconventional language, in front of an audience.

Research Methodology

The general hypothesis of the research was:

Any student aged 9-13 has the ability to develop their creative potential.

The hypotheses arising from the general hypothesis, from which we started in this research, are:

- the friendlier the work environment is and the more it allows free expression, the more students aged 9-13 will be able to discover and manifest their creative potential;
- the more 9-13-year-old students overcome personal obstacles, or those determined by the home or educational environment, the more they will be able to express themselves freely and, thus, show their creative potential;
- the more students gain self-confidence, the more they will be able to express themselves freely and find original solutions;
- the better the students integrate into the group, the more they will manage to develop their creative potential;
- the more the teacher will support and encourage the students, creating a relationship based on trust and mutual respect, the more they will succeed in developing their creative potential;
- the more the students will be organically involved in the proposed theatrical games and improvisation exercises, the more they will succeed in developing their creative potential.

The assumptions from which we started take into account both the being of the student, with what he comes from home and the specific characteristics of the stage of development in which he is, but also the being of the teacher and the role he fulfils.

Theatrical games and improvisation exercises addressed in the acting workshop represent the ways in which the 9-13 year old student develops his creative potential.

The sample was made up of a group of 14 students in the 9-13 age category, who attended the theater course at the Sibiu Children's Palace in the 2021-2022 school year.

The *general aim* of the research is the development of the creative potential of these students.

The *specific aims* derive from the general aim, which coincide with the aims of the theatrical games and improvisation exercises within the acting workshop for children aged 9-13:

- *developing the capacity for self-perception*
- *sensory-motor development and sharpening of the senses*
- *developing attention, concentration, coordination and promptness*
- *developing imagination and memory*
- *development of communication skills and expression of emotions*
- *developing the ability to relate*
- *developing the capacity for self-evaluation*
- *development of creativity and originality*
- *developing self-confidence*
- *development of artistic taste and awareness of cultural-artistic values*
- *the development of adaptability*

Moreover, we consider that the age stage 9-13 years represents a moment of crossroads, in which the student either develops his creative potential, or it is almost completely suffocated, burying it in the dark; this it does not mean that he cannot re-emerge in adulthood in search of his lost self. Anything mechanically executed is lifeless, and the premise of creativity is life itself, all that is alive. Everything that is alive also constitutes the premise of the actor's art, and through this, the pre-adolescent can dig into his depths guided by the teacher, to bring out all his creative force.

In order for the creative potential to break out at some point, not only the students, but also the teacher, as we will see from the research results, must give themselves time and patience. Given the characteristics of the age stage and the metamorphosis of the perception of the 9-13-year-old student, the teacher must show both patience and great tact. The student looks at him with different eyes. The teacher is no longer the one who holds the secrets. From direct experience, I have noticed that students have a compelling need to communicate what they are feeling or thinking, so they no longer give the same time and attention to the teacher. They do not just talk a lot, they talk really loud to make themselves heard. Approaching any topic, each member of the group wants to express their opinion, but since everyone wants to express it now, they talk over each other. More than listening to each other, they want to share their own perspective on the subject. They want to be accepted in the group. The aim of the course participants is to be seen, to stand out, to impress.

Research Methods

Bearing in mind that creativity is not quantifiable, the research methods we used in monitoring student progress consisted of:

- Questionnaires applied at the first and last session, aimed at their motivation to participate in the theater course, as well as the awareness of the benefits that this course brings on a personal level. Awareness of acquisitions following the course.
- The case study, which consisted of two students completing the *Story on a Circle* exercise. Student L and Student B went through this exercise four times, the student in sessions 2, 4, 6, 8 and the student in sessions 3, 5, 7 and 9.
- The student's progress monitoring sheet, with the help of which the level of attention, cooperation, ability to concentrate, openness to new things, self-confidence, energy, spontaneity, expressed interest and involvement in exercises was tracked at each session; whether or not he distracts his colleagues with jokes, whether he gets into conflict easily, whether he easily learns and applies the rules of the game, whether he solves work tasks creatively, whether he speaks loudly, clearly, correctly and whether he has a correct posture.
- Photos. I took photos starting with the first and ending with the last session. The position of the students during the first session, their position during the last session – the position of the shoulders, the head, the way they sit on the chair, etc. The physical distances between the students from the first to the last working session, the interaction between the students were tracked.

Acting Workshop for Students Aged 9-13

The workshop was structured on 10 sessions, which *had the general aim of developing the students' creative potential*. Each session looked more closely at the development of all the other elements that the student needs in order for this potential to manifest itself. Thus, in each meeting, the aim was to preserve a warm, friendly atmosphere, in which each student would be given the opportunity to express himself freely. At the same time, the planting of self-confidence, the increase of each individual student's self-esteem, the development of the ability to collaborate and cooperate with play partners, the development of attention, the discovery of one's own phono-respiratory apparatus and senses, for a better development, were taken into account. This was also the case of perception, the development of imagination and spontaneity. Each of the ten meetings followed the following structure:

- Vocal training, through breathing and articulation exercises, diction;
- Physical training – Brownian motion, with different commands in each of the 10 sessions;

- Exercises for sharpening the senses/awareness and self-control exercises. A different goal was pursued in each of the 10 meetings.
- Energizing games, attention, coordination, promptness.
- Memory exercises, or:
- Confidence games, or:
- Imagination games.
- Developing creativity. Exercises in telling a story. Or:
- Improvisation

Each exercise was followed by assessment. Evaluation came from both peers and self-evaluation. During the exercise, the students were guided and coordinated to achieve the goal of the exercise. Free speech was encouraged. Any solution to the problem was accepted, as long as the students respected each other, listened to each other, worked as a team.

Creativity blocks appeared especially at the beginning of the activity. These, but also the ways to overcome them, are analysed in the broad research of the activity. For the detailed description of each individual session, we refer to the full methodical-scientific work of the first degree, entitled *Development of creative potential in the actor's art workshop, for students aged 9-13*, pages 68-87.

During the ten weeks of conducting the research, I had the opportunity to observe how this group strengthened, how the students were able to focus their attention on the objectives of the games or exercises, how they improved their pronunciation and emission, how they became more prompt and more spontaneous, more imaginative and more creative. The work in the group did not always go smoothly or harmoniously from the beginning to the end of the meeting. We had conflicts, moments of blockage, difficult situations, which we managed to overcome together. What we failed to do was excite or build a student's confidence so that she would continue the activity. Given the fact that she was either present or absent at the course, the element of continuity was missing. What we managed to plant in one week was lost in the other two or three weeks of absence. *As a general conclusion, when the student does not devote the necessary time to the development of his creative potential, and the parent does not support him in this regard, he will not have the opportunity to develop.*

Among the obstacles, we mention those related to communication between students, from the arrogance of some and the reaction of others to this type of attitude. Other blockages due to poor communication refer to those related to one's own need to share, which often led to the neglect of others, to the lack of listening to others' opinions. Another situation was when a student was offended by a female student, who did so as a joke. A bad joke that left deep wounds in this

developing soul. Through open communication we were able to understand each other's perspectives.

Another obstacle was the fear of criticism, more precisely the fear of being laughed at in front of colleagues. The form of the games, the relaxed working atmosphere, which did not encourage criticism, but mutual support, led to the elimination of this blockage. Another obstacle was the self-perception of the students, who said that they do not have a very rich imagination. This blockage was overcome with the help of sensory sharpening exercises, which opened their senses to as many inputs as possible from the outside world, but also through visualization exercises with varying degrees of difficulty, and imagination.

The group of children I worked with represented a very good starting point for the present research. There are children who are concerned with the cultural-artistic field from the first grades. Participating students include two who write stories from the junior grades. Most of them read literature with pleasure, they talk about the books read in class. They do not include children from disadvantaged backgrounds, who would have represented a challenge in terms of overcoming educational obstacles and those related to the environment of origin, the time dedicated to their own interests, the time dedicated by parents to the development of children, of the attention paid by parents to children. Participating students are among those lucky ones who enjoyed great attention from their parents or those who took care of their education, students who have varied interests and who share a common passion: theater, in general and acting, in particular.

Research Results

Results of the case study

The Story in a Circle exercise aimed at developing the storyteller's imagination, memory and spontaneity, verbal agility and creativity. This was audio recorded at each session. Analysing the stories created by student L, the recurrence of the proposed words, the originality of the proposed movements, I noticed that the frequency with which the words are repeated in the story increases considerably, from a repetition of 4, 5, 6 times in the first story, to a repetition of 18 times in the last story. Word frequency is higher in the last story: 59 words per minute in the first story versus 80 words per minute in the last story. This suggests *an improvement in the student's freedom of expression*. Being a very cerebral student, the fact that she emits so many words per minute means *a development of her spontaneity and promptness*. Also, the student begins to play with words, so that in the third story she repeats the word candle 12 times, just for the pleasure of seeing her classmates kneel. So,

she allowed herself to focus her attention on more parts than the second story, where she was only thinking about the 4 words she had to repeat. The stories are not very creative with unexpected twists and turns as the student focused on repeating those 4 words. Also, the proposed movements were repeated, for example the kneeling accompanied each story. So, she did not show creativity in proposing moves.

As in the case of student L, an increase in the frequency of words per minute is also observed in student B: from 73.09 words per minute to 81.84 words per minute. However, the student showed creativity and freedom of expression already from the first story, instead in the following sessions he applied an algorithm, which guaranteed his success. However, this robbed him of the charm of the story, which thus became predictable, monotonous and automatic.

For both students, the actions followed each other logically, in the fourth story there were no more pauses or stuttering, the speech was cursive, following the logical order of events, the use of words was not forced, but they were introduced at the right time.

The overall result of the research

Through theatrical games and improvisational exercises, students develop their creative potential. The specific hypotheses were confirmed, so that the friendly work environment that encouraged free expression led the participating students to discover and manifest their creative potential. Also, overcoming personal obstacles and those related to the environment of origin, led to the possibility of developing and manifesting creative potential. The encouragement from the teacher and the involvement of the students in the proposed games and exercises led to the achievement of the objective. The development of self-confidence, attentiveness, the ability to collaborate and cooperate, self-perception, concentration and attention, spontaneity and promptness give creative potential the opportunity to manifest itself.

At the same time, the lack of involvement of the students cannot lead to the achievement of the aims. An unmotivated student will fail to develop his creative potential.

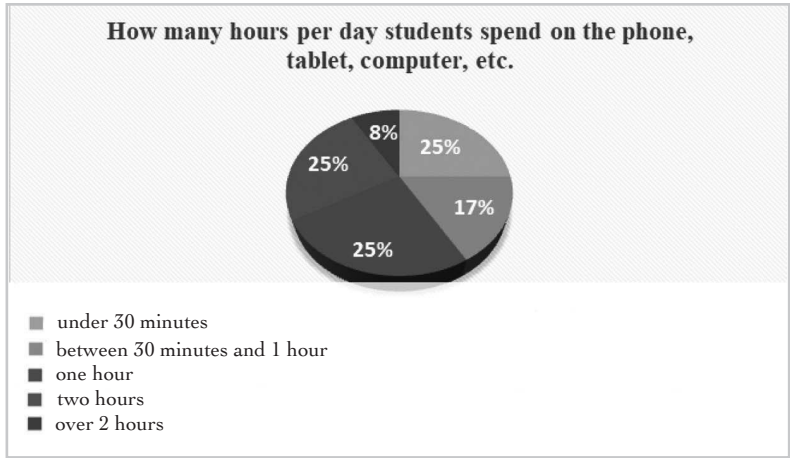
Through the questionnaire, we found out the extent to which the students were supported by their parents from childhood to the present in terms of their own inclinations and abilities. It was observed how the parents contributed to the development of the child's creative potential, by supporting him in doing what he likes, by enrolling him in activities that developed his creativity, by the frequency with which the parents read him stories or poems in his early childhood, by the

frequency with which the parents played with him, or made and built all kinds of ingenious objects together with the children. A clear and eloquent result of the research is: the lack of support from the parent in terms of their own inclinations and skills, together with the lack of time spent by the parent with the child, can lead to the child's lack of self-confidence, to a lack of energy, a devitalization, lack of enthusiasm in what he does.

Regarding the level of self-confidence, the second conclusive result of the research is: a student with high or very high self-confidence who was always supported by parents in childhood, is spontaneous and creative. Therefore, the development of creative potential depends to a great extent on the environment of origin and on the confidence that the student has in his own abilities.

At the end of the research, 100% of the participants claim that they consider themselves creative, and 83.33% believe that they have a rich imagination.

Among the last elements observed, we will add the influence of gadgets in developing or diminishing students' creativity. Misused technology diminishes one's ability to maintain and focus attention. Daily time spent on the phone – whatsapp, instagram, tik-tok etc. or computer – video games – by project participants varies from under 30 minutes to over two hours. Correlating the questionnaire data with these time intervals, we conclude that students who spend two or more hours a day on the phone are those students who claim that their imagination is so-and-so. Analyzing the questionnaire of the only student, who spends more than two hours a day on the phone, we learn that it is a student, who claims that her parents did not spend much time with her when she was little, and when something does not succeed, she gives up and loses her confidence in her, the grade she gives to self-confidence being 2 (on a scale from 1 to 5, 1 meaning not at all, and 5 very high); in relation to others, she believes that her colleagues are always better than her, but when faced with a challenge, she always quickly finds a solution, which she implements. If the fact that her parents did not give her the necessary attention in her early childhood led to a lack of self-confidence, perhaps the same thing led to the situation in which she finds herself, i.e., she devotes more than two hours a day to technology, social media; this also contributes to diminishing self-confidence, given the examples of perfection she follows there. At the same time, from the analysis of her questionnaire, among the last questions is one that refers to the motivation to do homework for school. This student chooses the answers: I study and do my homework out of fear of my parents (word circled by her) or teachers, but also: I study and do my homework to please my parents and teachers. However, no direct correlation could be made between the time spent on the phone and the development or decrease of creativity.



Conclusion

Therefore creativity resides in each of us. The structure of the brain can change at any age, so learning can take place permanently. The age stage between 9 and 13 years implies a strong metamorphosis of the child, who begins to lose the paradise of childhood and does not yet know how to relate to the world seen now through different eyes. This causes him to look with a critical eye at those around him, to lower them from the pedestal he had placed them on until then. The 9-13-year-old student is either extremely noisy or closes in his shell and struggles to understand the world he is a part of. He wants to have adults around him to guide him, but at the same time, his attention turns to peers and friends of the same age who are going through the same changes and with whom he can grow.

The teacher must understand and support this transition. Every student has a creative potential, regardless of the field of competence to which it refers. The teacher's duty is to approach the student as he is, to discover him and to accompany him in the discovery of his own person. For this he must not, as Jerzy Grotowski says, accumulate, but get rid of everything that prevents him from being himself.

The acting workshop contributes to the development of the student's creative potential. Overcoming the obstacles determined by the education that the student had, creating an environment as pleasant and emotionally comfortable as possible, which offers the opportunity for each student to discover himself and others, supporting and encouraging each individual, lead to the possibility of the butterfly breaking through the chrysalis and bursting into the light.

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