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THE CREATIVE POTENTIAL OF STUDENTS IN EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS

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Creativity is seen as one of the prerequisites for success in various areas of life. Students often look for additional activities outside school or university to help validate the knowledge and skills they have acquired. Through participation in educational projects (local and international), students gain extra-curricular knowledge, experience, and competences, but are only sometimes able to put these into practice on their own to create new ideas, concepts, or solutions. The article presents the process of supporting and developing students' creative potential on the example of selected educational projects.

Key words: creativity, educational projects, elementary education, higher education, students

Introduction

Every child's educational pathway begins based on decisions made by adults - the child's parents or legal guardians. At the preschool and early childhood education level, the child, due to their innate curiosity to learn about the world, explores the world in a multisensory way, acquires knowledge, skills and develops attitudes within which they achieve a certain level of key competences. At the start of primary education, pupils' educational experiences increase due to, among other things, changes in the curriculum and teaching system (e.g. transition from integrated to subject teaching, change of teaching staff, change of school). At the beginning of each child's educational

journey, a variety of activities (including creative activities) are encouraged, above all, by teachers, as they are significant persons due to their frequency of contact, emotional bonds with pupils, and pattern of behavior in various situations (Domagała et al., 2020). However, during the classes (a.k.a. 45 min.), in addition to delivering curriculum content (discussed extensively), there is little time left to broaden and deepen selected issues related to developing the child's multi-faceted potential. Undoubtedly, teachers do this work during lessons. However, with the start of compulsory education, pupils have the opportunity to develop their interests during extra-curricular activities (free and paid forms), organised in different types, e.g. interest clubs (subject-based e.g. interest clubs (in subjects, e.g. mathematics, science, language), art clubs/schools (music, art, drama, etc.), sports clubs (football, volleyball, gymnastics, etc.), educational projects: short-term, long-term, cyclical or one-off, e.g. e.g. focused on a discipline, competition, etc., carried out in cooperation with other groups, schools, universities or institutions, or volunteering in a school/university, city, country or international area. Often, activities undertaken in childhood influence subsequent experiences in the learning process at later stages of education (in secondary school or higher education) and then their future life. Therefore, promoting additional activities and encouraging students to discover and explore the world at various levels is extremely important in the educational process. In addition, supporting children's development from an early age fosters their multifaceted formation of self-awareness, self-acceptance and self-discipline, ultimately allowing them to support and develop their creative potential.

Influences of family and social environment are also important in the learning process. Experiencing the dynamics of interaction and change in the student's immediate environment makes it possible to create specific effects of one's activity in the course of its varied course, as well as to work out the results of one's own choices and behavior among children and adolescents in the course of shaping and developing the further path of life (Rostańska, 2015). In children's and adolescents' education, there are several "highlights" in which the support and presence of professional educators and reasonable parents/legal guardians are essential. Most often, young people need support from adults when they cross one of the educational thresholds, i.e., the transition to subject education in primary school through the choice of secondary school or university. Students' needs (both conscious and unconscious), related to cognitive, social, and emotional functioning, are formed at the start of preschool education and deepen and change at higher stages of education. Although "the transition from one stage of educational development to the next is a natural phenomenon, inherent in the role of the learner, it nevertheless requires the expenditure of greater energy, hardship when taking on

new tasks, challenges, overt expectations and demands of the environment” (Michalak, 2016, p. 252). In a situation of necessity and compulsion to change (especially at the beginning of education), children generally have no choice or influence throughout events. However, over time, they develop an increasingly conscious role as learners, seeking and acquiring a sense of subjectivity, which simultaneously influences the perception of their activity with freedom of choice and efficiency. Therefore, involving children from an early age in extra-curricular activities, organising a space to search for their own self, realise their passions and expand their competences (Isabekov & Sadyrova, 2018).

Additional student activities in the school and university system

One way to help students discover and form themselves is to participate in extra-curricular activities such as volunteering, interest circles or other activity-specific student organisations with various projects. In schools and universities (of multiple types), student organisations offer membership (in the vast majority of organisations this is free of charge) in exchange for performing specific tasks. The activities undertaken by children and young people in this type of organisation can take on a reproductive or creative character (due to several dependencies, e.g. activity profile, internal regulations). Regardless of the nature and profile of an organization’s activities, members gain experience, specific competences and skills, and inspiring acquaintances. Teachers and others working with children should define creativity as thinking or problem-solving that involves constructing new meaning, because with the educational premise “to understand is to invent” creativity is something we can find in every child, not just the gifted or knowledgeable (Runco, 2003). Additional classes can be started already at the preschool and primary education levels. In kindergarten, they have a primarily didactic function (deepening and consolidating knowledge acquired in kindergarten) and upbringing (development of the child’s creative activity and independence) (Karbownik, Nowakiewicz, 2015). Among the activities offered in kindergartens for the youngest children are volunteering (or social, ecological activities, etc.), sports and recreational activities, art, rhythm and music, theatre workshops, or language classes (Ozdziński, 2001). They are organised directly in the institution (paid and free offers – depending on the type of activity and thematic scope) or outside the institution (based on the implementation of a project, e.g. from the municipality, European funds or a local sponsor) in children’s cultural centers, inter-school sports/art centers, municipal libraries, community centers. The situation is similar in primary schools.

Participants usually benefit from a specific programme to support and develop their abilities and skills, gather new experiences, enrich their interests and cultivate new friendships. Volunteering in a preschool or school can be seen as a place where children are sensitised to the problems and difficulties of others from an early age, where they are introduced to the process of helping and supporting those in need (in a broad sense), (Kowal, 2014). Through the inclusion of children in such extra-curricular activities, the perspective of seeing education as a multidimensional learning process is conveyed to them, both cognitively, emotionally, psychodynamically and socially (Bałachowicz et al., 2020; Kołodziejcki & Przybysz-Zaremba, 2017). Additional preschool and early childhood education activities are often inspired by those in the immediate environment (parents/guardians) and teachers.

At the next levels of education (secondary and higher), pupils/students, searching for a path to self-development, make decisions about additional activities (largely more independently and more consciously than at previous stages of education). In addition to extra-curricular activities to develop knowledge, talents and various competences, volunteering allows you to carry out pro-social activities in different spheres of social life, e.g. in culture, sport and education, democracy or ecology (Pieniążek, Zielińska, 2017), secondary and university students also have the opportunity to become involved in the activities of various non-governmental organisations, foundations or associations and the projects they run, whether local, national or international in scope. Young people who are active in or outside of school/university organisations do not receive financial gratification for their activities. However, thanks to a cooperation agreement (or a voluntary agreement) they have the opportunity to participate in workshops, training, and conferences to broaden their knowledge and competences, to support their personal and professional development. They are often given the space to try to create and implement their project (educational projects mainly serve this purpose). Thus, the additional activities of young people/students are not limited to the unilateral benefit of functioning in some organisation, but also allow and support creative development. In other words, “inspire to grow” in both self-development and the development of the immediate environment.

Selected educational projects supporting students’ creative development

This section of the article will present a selection of projects aimed at pupils and students that are local and international in focus. One of the projects that involves children, young people, students and adults (parents of stu-

dents, teachers, educators, partners) is the Odyssey of the Mind programme (<https://www.odysseyofthemind.com/>), run in Poland by the Odyssey of the Mind Foundation (is one branch of an international programme). In concept, Odyssey of the Mind is a team competition based on the creative problem-solving method, in which participants (teams of up to 7 people), in age categories (I - primary school students up to and including class V, II - primary school students from classes VI-VIII, III - secondary school students, IV - students/people up to 26 years of age) compete in three areas: "Long-term Problems", "Style in Long-term Problems: and in "Spontaneous Problems". Each team is supervised by a coach, who is the person who supports and integrates the group, as well as organises and monitors the group's creative work. The long-term problems are announced in the autumn of each year. Out of 5 problems with the following profiles: mechanical, technical, humanities, construction and artistic, each team selects and develops one, which they will finally present during the regional preliminaries in an allowed time of 8 minutes (regional preliminaries are organised in the early spring of the following calendar year). In preparation for the presentation, the team points to one of the problem-solving elements they have created, giving them their own "style" while allowing them to score extra points. During the competition, the team also received a "surprise" from a previously unknown task in the "Spontaneous Problems" section, divided into verbal, manual, and verbal-manual problems. The Spontaneous Problems prepare the contestants to think about the conference, as each team is randomly assigned a problem on the day of the competition (<https://www.odysseyofthemind.com/>). After the regional preliminaries, the teams with the best results are invited to the National Finals, after which the winners can represent Poland at the World Finals in the United States.

The main objective of the Odyssey of the Mind programme "is to inspire the development of creative and critical thinking through divergent problem solving by groups of participants" (Szmidt, 2013, p. 53). On the one hand, the competition creates a space that motivates young creators for long-term creative activity. Still, on the other hand, it raises some questions about the possibility of elements of harmful competition. In an educational context, it is a project that prepares students for creative activity. A team led and supported by a suitably qualified coach can achieve success on the international stage. In Poland, Odyssey of the Mind is one of the more widespread creativity competitions for children and young people - in the 2019-2020 school year, 3019 students from all over the country participated in the competition (<https://odyseja.org/>).

Odyssey of the Mind is also a project in which it is possible to participate outside the sphere of competition. Each year a call is made for volunteers

- the so-called Sheriffs and Judges, who support the programme on the organisational and promotional side during the days of the regional preliminaries and finals. Volunteers are invited to several days of training meetings to prepare them for their specific roles. The experience of Odyssey of the Mind volunteers often allows for further development of creative activity among adults.

Another example is the “Academy of the Future” project, operating at the Spring Association, which has been developing in Poland since 2003. It is an educational volunteer programme for school-age children with difficulties with self-esteem, learning or interpersonal relationships. Within the framework of the voluntary service, each child has an individual tutor for one school year, who cares about the relationship with the child, tries to get to the source of the student’s problems and difficulties, helps to solve or minimise them, and focuses their actions on the positive sides of the child, while supporting them in further development. Consequently, thanks to the tutor’s support, presence, trust, and positive motivation, the child gets to know themselves from a different perspective, begins to grow on different levels (personality and educationally) – and above all, allows themselves to feel pleasure in being themselves. Meetings with the child occur once a week on the school premises where the child is studying (<https://akademiaprzyszlosci.org.pl/en/>). In each school, volunteers (tutors) are supervised by a leader who cooperates with leaders from other schools in their city/region (e.g. Greater Poland) and representatives from other regions in Poland. They are responsible for assisting and supporting tutors from their school (the so-called college), manages a team of tutor-child tandems, and, in cooperation with volunteers, organises meetings and events for children from the college or region. It also liaises with other branches in Poland and summarises the annual work of the whole team. Thus, at each college (school), volunteers can create educational projects for smaller or larger groups, with complex themes and varying durations. During the school year, they also work with the school management and the school teachers, as well as with other institutions that support the multi-faceted development of children, which means that students also extend their pedagogical competences in working with children in numerous workshops and training sessions. The creative potential of students is revealed, among others, by creating activities and events for children, other students, and members of the association, and among school-age students, it reveals itself during individual and group activities in which they participate. They allow you to look at the educational process of children with any difficulties from a different perspective. It continues the educational premise in this article’s theoretical section on extra-curricular activities in school and university systems (e.g. Runco, 2003; Isabekov & Sadyrova, 2018).

Another example of voluntary activities with space to implement one's ideas and concepts is the nationwide educational project "PROJECTOR", student volunteering. It is a programme currently implemented and supervised by the Educational Enterprise Foundation. The program's main objective is to activate and counteract the exclusion of children and young people from small towns and villages all over Poland by developing their passions and interests and discovering talents and potential hidden in both students and project participants (<https://projektor.org.pl/>). Students' involvement covers all stages of the development of an educational project - from the beginning, they create their project with the opportunity to consult with more experienced volunteers, leaders, and specialists from the Projector Team, as well as in cooperation with Projector Ambassadors. Students, as part of the programme, also have the opportunity to benefit from several trainings, webinars and the "Projector Leaders" development programme. In this programme, projects are divided into: start-ups, specialised, systematic, summer holidays or particular actions, and the topics of the events are not limited, so a student on their own or in cooperation with a partner (another student) can fully realise their own concept (Trzmielewska, 2019). Educational projects created by volunteers in this programme are implemented in small towns (up to 20,000 inhabitants) in schools (primary and secondary), community centers, cultural centers, etc. On offer to partner institutions are 90-minute "Challenge Workshops" aimed at children in grades IV-VI or "Encounters with Passion" for grades IV-VIII. The programme is growing all the time. Since 2003, more than 35,000 original educational projects have been implemented, involving more than 10,000 student volunteers (Trzmielewska, 2019; <https://projektor.org.pl/>).

In Poland, an additional place for pupils and students to realise their passions, ideas and concepts in educational projects is their school or university. They can pursue a more practical part of their studies through activities in school or study clubs and voluntary activities. The range of opportunities depends on the school or university, faculty, field of study and/or specialisation studied. For example, students - future teachers - can pursue a more practical part of their studies through activities in study clubs or voluntary work. Examples of spaces for the creation of innovative educational projects by and with students (under the supervision and support of academic staff) are science clubs. For example, at one of the best pedagogical faculties in Poland - the Faculty of Educational Studies at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland - there are more than 20 student organisations that actively participate in local, European and extra-European academic life through educational projects, including funding from the European Union (Erasmus+, <https://erasmusplus.org.pl/>) and national and international partners and sponsors. Students and faculty members create their projects and participate as partners in many educational projects

aimed mainly at schoolchildren, pre-service students or adults (e.g. teachers). For example, the AGO student scientific club of pedagogues-therapists has implemented original educational projects for preschool and school children, students and teachers "Hidden Treasures Hunters" (Skolożyńska, Wojczyńska, 2020), or "StressOUT! Face up to stress!" aimed at students before and during examinations (<https://wse.amu.edu.pl/dla-studenta/dzialalnosc-studencka/kola-naukowe/kolo-naukowe-pedagogow-terapeutow-ago>). In turn, the educational and research project "AMU Students without Borders", carried out by the student scientific club of intercultural education, includes educational activities of the University's students on other continents. So far, students have carried out several editions of the project in Africa (Tanzania), South America (Paraguay), Indonesia (Ubud, Bali), Nepal (Thansing) and Madagascar (<https://amu.edu.pl/en/news-and-events/news/8th-edition-of-the-amu-students-without-borders-project>).

At the Faculty of Educational Studies at the Adam Mickiewicz University of Poznan, Poland (<https://wse.amu.edu.pl/>), students and academic staff also carry out a variety of educational projects of the Erasmus+ programme (university cooperation, co-operation with schools, with business). Current projects: Pedagogical Innovations in Polish diaspora education. Supporting teachers' competences in a bilingual and multilingual environment (Polish PIE: Polish PIE: Pedagogical Innovation in Education), where innovation and creative potential are noticeable in the project's main objective: to support teachers and managers of Polish schools by expanding and strengthening their socio-natural competences (especially regarding local fauna and flora) with the use of digital technologies (ICT tools). Researchers are preparing scientific research about the creative potential of education in bilingual and multilingual environments, and teachers from Poland, Iceland, Italy, Spain, and Turkey will present in a book and website original teaching materials and nature routes for children (<https://polishpie.amu.edu.pl/>). The creative potential of students and pupils is expressed in the activities undertaken in each project country during ongoing classes, meetings, and events. In another project called Critical ARTs Education for Sustainable Societies (CARE/ss), teachers from universities in Cyprus, Greece, Malta, Spain and Poland are developing a pedagogical framework for online and blended learning for engaged arts education, which is diverse of possibilities and needs in a different group e.g. active citizenship, multiculturalism, respect of diversity, digital learning and sustainable development (<https://care-ss.frederick.ac.cy/>). The creative potential of academics in this project is illustrated in the research and courses created for students in each project country. The students' creative potential is shown during the course, when they make, for example, course projects on socially engaged art.

Summary

The encouragement of pupils/students to initiate and carry out their educational projects is mainly based on their previous experiences (starting from the first educational stage): volunteering, participation in science clubs, additional activities to develop abilities and talents, etc. Supporting pupils and students at the initial stage of creation, creating and strengthening their competences through training, workshops, conferences, meetings, etc. led by professionals (scientists and teachers) is only possible if they reveal their creative potential. The provision of feedback, the indication of constructive comments by teachers, tutors and supervisors during education, but also, the motivation of students to undertake further activities (e.g. despite temporary setbacks/mistakes), also by those close to them (especially parents and legal guardians of the students), as well as the invitation and encouragement to undertake new activities (local and international), but in line with their interests, build and foster a sense of empowerment and a feeling of satisfaction, which at the same time influences the desire for further development and increases the potential to undertake creative activities. Educational projects must also respond to contemporary difficulties and challenges. All competences and experiences of pupils and students gained through additional activities not only expand their possibilities in building a professional career, but also increase the chance of feeling self-fulfillment in the context of everyday life, which also allows them to create the world according to their ideas, ideas and beliefs in the future.

Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work.

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Online resources

- <https://akademiaprzyszlosci.org.pl/en/>
<https://odyseja.org/>
<https://www.odysseyofthemind.com/>,
<https://projektor.org.pl/>
<https://erasmusplus.org.pl/>
<https://amu.edu.pl/en>

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