

## **Family Well-Being and Emergence of Creative Thinking in Young Children**

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**Abstract:** Neuroscience research has clearly proved that the early years experience impact a child's learning, brain development and the innate potential to excel to a great extent. Also, it has a long term impact on the child's well-being (includes physical & mental health, learning and behaviour). The US National Institute of Child Health and Human Development has concluded that parenting is the primary influence on children's development. Positive relationships and nurturing environments both at home as well as at the child care center can enhance the learning potential of children. Children tend to become more creative when there is harmony, peace and understanding in the family and if the family collaborates with the child care center for the same. This paper is a depiction of the emergence of creativity in children with a harmonious family in collaboration with the child care center using thinking routines. The paper brings out the comparison of the creative thinking dispositions acquired by children with harmonious family background versus those from disharmonious families. Thinking routines were used with children and collaboration with the families resulted in the emergence of creativity in children when the families were in peace and harmony.

**Keywords:** Collaboration with parents, Creativity in young children, Family well-being, Thinking routines.

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### **I. Introduction**

Children in today's world have the challenge of facing the 21<sup>st</sup> century world with the outdated pedagogy of knowledge acquisition in the education system. The instability in the families and lack of understanding of children's needs by the parents leaves the child even more in a critical state to face the hardships of the present world. This calls for an immediate attention by parents and educationists to think of educational practices which will strengthen the children with skills to deal with 21<sup>st</sup> century. The 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, as given by the NEA

(National Education Association)<sup>1</sup>, USA are the skills which will make the children future ready. Howard Gardener's Project Zero has been one of the first to implement strategies to nurture 21<sup>st</sup> century skills right from early childhood education. The strategy of thinking routines is utilised in this case study of four children to nurture creative thinking dispositions in these young children. The strategy was implemented in collaboration with parents in order to reinforce the skills acquired by children and to internalise the same. This paper depicts the observations from this intervention and future research which can lead to a tested strategy for making young children future ready.

### **II. Related Research**

Research has shown that people who are happier tend to show higher levels of creativity i.e., the capacity to produce novel ideas, insights and solutions that have practical applications to problems and challenges.<sup>2</sup> In a family where there is peace and harmony, the child experiences happy feelings and positive emotions which lead to better creativity.

The nurturing of creative thinking also depends on the individual's positive emotions. The broaden and build theory of positive emotions<sup>3</sup> suggests that positive emotions are essential elements of optimal functioning. They broaden people's attention and thinking, fuel psychological resilience; build consequential personal resources among other positive consequences. Positive emotions develop people into more generative, creative and resilient individuals leading them to a high level of optimal well-being.

Well-being could be either subjective or objective wherein objective well-being is assessed in terms of economic indicators and subjective well-being refers to people's perceptions of their well-being both of which appear to be multi-faceted in nature. Most of the research in positive psychology has been with respect to subjective well-being. It is a broad category of phenomena that includes people's emotional responses, domain satisfactions and global judgements of life satisfaction.<sup>3</sup> Briefly, subjective well-being consists of two components viz., affect and life satisfaction.

According to Gardner, 1998,<sup>4</sup> creative people are likely to be those who differ from their peers in various personal qualities such as persistence, ambition, resilience and a desire to leave their mark on the world rather than being entirely dependent on intellectual capacity as in the case of intelligence. Empirical research suggests that Creative Partnership has great scope in transforming young people's lives in ways which can impact their sense of well-being. These partnerships improve intrinsic motivation and leads to increased feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem which in turn leads to a greater well-being.

Art therapy approach includes a number of creative disciplines like Music Therapy (Heal and Wigram, 1993), Drama Therapy (Crimmins, 2006; McFarlane, 2005), Art Therapy (Bush, 1997)(Moriya, 2000) and Dance Therapy (Chaiklin and Wengrower, 2009) which is generally used with small numbers of individuals who experience mental health or behaviour problems. However, there has been instances where there are whole school interventions designed to support pupils' emotional and social development (Karkou, 1998; Karkou and Sanderson, 2004).<sup>4</sup> The major contribution supporting the fact that arts based learning plays an unique role in the development of a pupil's creative thinking is found in the extensive work of Elliot Eisner<sup>4</sup>. In his best known book *The Arts and the Creation of the Mind*, he argues that aesthetic modes of knowing have the capacity to transform our consciousness and thus improves cognitive functioning and personal growth (Eisner, 2002).

Nelson Goodman in 1967 set up the Project Zero, now based in Harvard Graduate School of Education on the basis that "zero" was known about the field of arts education. One of the major contributions of this project is the *Studio Thinking Project* (Hetland, Winner, Veenema, and Sheridan, 2007) and the *Arts PROPEL project* (Gardner, 1989; Zessoules and Gardner, 1991). PROPEL adopts a portfolio form of assessment which assesses the progress of the students from learning basic skills of art production, then developing artistic perception by examining the kinds of choices artists need to take before going on to making connections with their own work and attempting to assess their own work according to personal goals and standards of excellence in the field.

Schools in UK make use of various strategies that directly or indirectly develop greater self-confidence and resilience among their students. Two approaches which are in line with the aims of Creative Partnerships are the *Mantle of the Expert* approach based on Dorothy Heathcote's work and *Philosophy for Children* by Matthew Lipman. The Mantle of the Expert approach involves a dramatic inquiry approach to teaching and learning and is based on the principle that young people learn best when their relationship to learning and teaching is more like that of experts than that of students.<sup>4</sup> Over time, this approach develops students' intrinsic motivation (Abbot, with Taylor, and Edmiston, 2006; Edmiston and Bigler-McCarthy, 2006).

Philosophy for Children (P4C) trains young people to think critically about issues and develops their reasoning and discussion skills. (Lipman, 2003; Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyan, 1980) It is characterized by a verbal cognitive focus and highly self-regulated peer interactivity developing from initial teacher scaffolding' (Topping and Trickey, 2007). P4C is now being practiced in over 30 countries worldwide, using a wide variety of materials (Jenkins and Lyle, 2010).

From the related research discussed above, one can see that all the initiatives foster pupil autonomy, self-regulation, 'possibility thinking' and the willingness to take risks in one's learning when the tasks undertaken retain a high degree of ambiguity. These traits and capabilities can be related to the various aspects of well-being. Though these initiatives are small scale in scope, there is a clear link between creative initiatives and well-being outcomes. However, further longitudinal research, both quantitative and qualitative, is required to substantiate this link.<sup>4</sup>

The current study is based on Project Zero, one of the initiatives mentioned above and uses thinking routines for young children to nurture well-being.

### **III. Objectives**

- To nurture creative thinking dispositions through thinking routines in young children
- To enable children to think of innovative solutions to problems through stories
- To enable children to analyse any situation critically and choose
- To collaborate with the parents in order to support the thinking dispositions in young children

### **IV. Methodology**

Young children construct concepts through concrete experiences using their sense organs. In this study, efforts were made to nurture thinking routines<sup>5</sup> which would trigger the dispositions for creative thinking in young children. Two thinking routines were used viz.,

- Routine 1 - See, Visualise, Draw
- Routine 2 - Listen, Visualise, Enact

These routines included seeing pictures of a story and drawing the same or creating the same in clay or sand and listening to story, visualise the same and enact. The drawings, clay models, sand art by children and children enacting were observed and recorded. The strategies which were used to incorporate creative thinking dispositions are as follows :

- Visualisation techniques incorporated in children through meditation
- Role play for various situations and concepts to teach understanding and expression of emotions
- Theatre activities to nurture enacting skills
- Clay modelling giving ample scope for creativity
- Sand play to nurture creative expressions
- Drawing skills through various art techniques
- Stage shows every week to nurture self-confidence in children
- Thinking routines using different stories

Strategies were also used to collaborate with the parents to nurture creative thinking dispositions at home and reinforce the children's behaviour at home :

- Individual parental meetings to give specific techniques to support the child's creative thinking disposition
- General parental sessions to provide methodologies of nurturing thinking dispositions in children in every situation
- Collaboration sheets providing dos' and don'ts with their child in different situations
- Newsletters with motivating and inspiring stories to the parents in being there for the children

## **V. Outcomes**

Children undergoing the thinking routines program showed changes in their behaviour after the program. Interestingly, children who were from good family well-being changed to a larger extent compared to those with disharmonious family backgrounds. However, not enough experimental research is available to prove the causal relationships between creativity and happiness in children.<sup>5</sup>The present study can be extended to a wider sample and longitudinal experimental research can be conducted to show the same.

The outcomes of the thinking routines program can be discussed under the following heads :

- Enhanced drawing and enacting skills leading to self-regulation- The case of Kaushal – The child came into the school one and half years earlier to thinking routines program began for him. The center had constant collaboration with the parents right from the beginning as the family was a joint one and was harmoniously living accepting all the suggestions and incorporating the same in day-to-day living. The thinking routines induced the child to –
  - Learn the drawing skills and express ideas through pictures
  - Learn the enacting skills and think of innovative problem solving
  - Apply the creative thinking skills in real life situations
  - Make connections between simulated and real situations

### **The educator collaborated with the parents for the following :**

- Answering all the curious questions of the child practically and with simple real answers.
- Encouraging the child to ask questions
- Encouraging the child to imagine solutions for various situations
- Exposing the child to a wide variety of concepts through hands-on experience
- Involving the child in making connections
- Supporting the child to achieve self-regulation

### **At the end of the program, the child was able to –**

- Make connections between simulated and real situations
  - Apply creative thinking skills in real life situations
  - Achieve self-regulation
  - Achieve socio-emotional well-being
- Enhanced capabilities of innovative ideas leading to empowering the child with capacities in making connections – The case of Kishan – The child joined the school one year before the thinking routines program and belonged to a unit family which was leading a harmonious life. The parents were well educated and coordinating with each other as well as with the educator to support positive child development. The program induced the child to –
    - Learn the drawing skills and express ideas through pictures

- Learn the enacting skills and think of innovative problem solving
- Apply the creative thinking skills in real life situations
- Make connections between simulated and real situations

**The center collaborated with the parents for the following :**

- Activities for self-regulation
- Creating opportunities for making connections
- Connecting the child's fantasy play with real life situations
- Encouraging the child's creative ideas and skills in drawing and enacting
- Encouraging the child to use innovative problem solving skills

At the end of the program, the child was able to –

- Achieve self-regulation
- Depict his imaginative ideas and concepts on paper, clay and sand
- Use theatre skills for understanding and expressing emotions
- Apply creative thinking skills for problem solving

➤ Enhanced creative thinking skills but conflict in achieving emotional stability- Case of Pradeep – Pradeep joined the school two years before the thinking routines program was implemented. He came from a joint family where the husband and wife were not in harmony and the other members in the family were treating the child in a negative manner. The culture of the family was such that all the members used abusive language with the child except the mother. The program worked with the child to

- Acquire self-regulation
- Learn the drawing skills and express ideas through pictures
- Learn the enacting skills and think of innovative problem solving
- Apply the creative thinking skills in real life situations
- Make connections between simulated and real situations
- Help the child utilise his creative thinking in everyday situations

**The center sought collaboration from the parents to achieve the following :**

- Support the child in achieving self-regulation
- Encourage the child's innate creative thinking skills with additional training
- Use positive language and stop ill-treating the child at home
- Enable the child to utilise his creative thinking skills in real life situations.

However, both the parents were not able to support the center as the father never visited the center for collaboration and the mother was busy with her career. The others in the family were least concerned about the child's positive development. At the end of the program, the child was able to –

- Make connections between simulated and real situations
- Competent in the drawing and enacting skills
- Get stopped for using his creative thinking skills in everyday situations
- Have a conflict in achieving self-regulation because of lack of support.

➤ Enhanced enacting skills but conflict in achieving self-regulation- The case of Rahul –Rahul came from a unit family where the mother was illiterate and the father was literate. The father was a dominant person and was not in harmony with the mother. The father did not trust the mother as a capable person to take care and guide the children. Only the father visited the school and was unable to collaborate with the center as he had to attend to his job at different times of the day in a week. Also, he did not entrust the mother to collaborate. The program induced the child to -

- Acquire self-regulation
- Learn the drawing skills and express ideas through pictures
- Learn the enacting skills and think of innovative problem solving
- Apply the creative thinking skills in real life situations
- Make connections between simulated and real situations
- Help the child utilise his creative thinking in everyday situations

**The center tried collaborating with the parents for :**

- Constant support for the child to acquire self-regulation
- Additional training to nurture his innate capacity to enact/dance
- Creating opportunities to exhibit his talent

- Appreciate him for every small little act showing creative thinking.

**At the end of the program, the child was not able to –**

- Achieve self-regulation
- Understand and appreciate different feelings and emotions
- Apply creative thinking skills in real life situations.
- Utilise his creative thinking skills in innovative problem solving

## **VI. Conclusion**

From the outcomes of the program, it is evident that the family harmony played a major role in the collaboration with the center for positive development in children. Also, the thinking routines on their own will enhance the well-being in young children leading to self-regulation. However, when the family collaboration does not exist, the child is found to have a conflict in achieving self-regulation and is unable to enhance his creative thinking skills. Though this study was for only few children, it is an indicator to pursue deeper research in order to arrive at conclusive evidence for the positive link between creative thinking skills and well-being.

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