Pupils’ Creative Action at an Elementary School: Problems and Solutions
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Abstract: The choice of research theme and its topicality was defined by the existing conflict between theory and practice that nowadays still appears in the teaching of Home Economics and Technologies. On the one hand, the school is supposed to promote pupils’ creative potential, but in real life the training process is widely expanded by reproductive activity. The aim of the study was to explore problematic aspects of the elementary school pupils’ expressions of creative activity and to reveal their promotion opportunities in the training of Home Economics and Technologies, working with natural materials. The research used theoretical methods – literature, document analysis and empirical methods – interviews, observation and practical experience analysis as well as mathematical data processing. The study was carried out in Teacher Training and Educational Management Academy and in urban and rural elementary schools of Latvia.
Younger pupils’ creative activity is the creativity that is an original creation of the craft, which is a new approach in task solution in the process of knowledge and skills acquisition, in combining the methods of known activity. A problem situation and motivation is relevant for the development of creative activity as the expression of needs and interests which experiences the unity of emotional and intellectual awareness. In the training of Home Economics and Technologies, the precondition of pupils’ creative activity development is a variable choice of methodological techniques. Pupils’ creative expression activities in the training of Home Economics and Technologies are closely related to the teacher’s professionalism to choose methodological techniques promoting creative activity, and to feel that their acquisition is significant for oneself.

Keywords: pupils’ creativity, school education.

Introduction
We live in a very complicated period of time, characterized by the rapid rhythm of life, progressive development of science and technology, the change of the paradigm values. For twenty years the society emphasizes the importance of pupils’ creativity. Nowadays, there are many publications, descriptions of scientific studies. Since 1999, every year International Conferences of creativity are organized, the Creativity Centre has been founded, which became a RTTEM Creativity Scientific Institute in 2007, as a result of its activity, internationally reviewed proceedings of the conference “Creative Personality” are published every year (Bebre, 2009, 6-8). The year 2009, according to a decision of the European Parliament and the Council is declared to be the year of creativity and innovation.

It is indicated in the regulations of National Standard of Basic Education, syllabus standards of primary school subjects of basic education, and samples of basic education syllabus that one compulsory content component of the subject is the awareness of the one’s abilities for the improvement of habitats, i.e., in the aspects of self-expression and creativity (Noteikumi par va lsts..., 2014). The training content of Home Economics and Technologies at the elementary school is saturated with a wide theoretical material containing facts. Pupils have no time to feel and experience the joy of creativity.

Speaking of creative work, teachers clearly highlight the importance of creativity, but it is observed in practice that the chosen work organization and methodological techniques ensure reproductive activity. The conflict arises here - on the one hand, the school’s task is to promote pupils’ creative potential, but in real life the training process is widely expanded by reproductive activity. Content conflicts in Home Economics and Technologies exist in several aspects.

First, there is a conflict between creativity and teacher understanding of creative activity.

Secondly, the conflict between the methods used in the training process, uniformity of working forms and significance of diversity emphasized in theory.
Thirdly, there is the conflict between Home Economics and Technologies training content and its implementation into practice in the aspect of creativity.

**Aim of the Article**

To cognize problematic aspects of elementary school pupils’ creative activity and reveal their promotion opportunities in the training of Home Economics and Technologies, working with natural materials.

**Test Question**

Pupils' creative activities in the training of Home Economics and Technologies become more efficient, if the teacher chooses more variable methodological techniques in the teaching process, creates case studies, and gets pupils’ interested in creative activity.

**Methodology**

It is possible to find various explanations and definitions of creative activity in the pedagogical and psychological literature (creative activity, creativity, innovation, creative work). The article analyses the literature – open promotion opportunities of Home Economics and Technologies training and pupils’ creativity, working with natural materials. Creative activity will be used in the description of the research.

The research used: theoretical method - a literature and document analysis; empirical methods - observation, analysis of pupils’ work, analysis of practical experience; mathematical data processing. The study has been carried out in practice schools of Riga Teacher Training and Educational Management Academy – in urban and rural primary schools. 276 respondents took part in the research.

**Results and Discussion**

In the research on the pupils’ creativity, their activation, it is first necessary to find out if there are differences between the adult and pupil’s creativity. There are various views on it in literature. M. Teplov considers the activity to be creative if it provides with new, original products of high public value (Теплов, 1961). R. Bebre defines creativity as the liberty to create something new, original (Bebre, 1985). In her turn, N. Picka defines creativity as the adaptation to new, unusual situations, spontaneous perceptual ability, as well as the ability by means of imagination (fantasy) to cover things in a new perspective, originality, ability to find something new, that is, “to invent” (Picka, 1990, 141). With regard to pupils’ creative work, N. Picka’s definition is the most appropriate, who has characterized creative activity as the ability of the imagination (fantasy) to help find something new, original. According to M. Teplov’ definition, pupils’ activity cannot be creative, if its products do not have the high public value.

Creativity for younger students is more like innovation, which is the original creation of the product, where as a result of acquired knowledge and skills in the process of work they find a new approach to problem solutions, combining the techniques of known activity. Pupils in the creative process find something new, improve themselves. The discovery is significant directly to them.

In practice it is observed that the pupils’ creative activity at school, compared with pre-school, is reduced. As the reason, they most commonly mentioned suppression of pupils’ creative activity with the prohibitions to act or a lack of support for creative activity (Hoff, 2003). The creative work is of great importance in a pupil’s growth because when creating something new, one discovers and gains new knowledge, skills by oneself. It is observed that pupils, who have a well developed imagination, usually make products creatively at handicrafts, without copying the models - it is their natural reaction to new information. Creative activity is an important place for creative imagination. In the human creative activity, also in handicrafts, it is necessary to have a conscious determination. We made certain that the determination of the younger school-age children is not yet particularly expressed: the pupils are bound by activity itself.

It is observed that when preparing planned patterns, mental activity of pupils is progressing in a particularly intense way. To achieve the consciousness image of sufficient clarity, a pupil strains one’s memory and thinking and also has a certain emotional attitude to the imaginary phenomenon. Thinking is of great importance for accomplishing work of this kind. Thinking and operation are closely related.
Practical action is used for solution of unusual tasks, but at the same time, more and more importance, according to V. Hibnere, comes from abstract thinking. She believes that artistic innovation requires both imaginative and abstract thinking (Hibnere, 1977). In practice, it was observed that there are pupils (mostly boys), who are particularly engaged in tasks that require imagination. They create new images, which are sometimes incomparable to reality.

Psychology distinguishes between a numbers of creative activity phases: 1) conception, 2) bearing the conception or maturity, 3) implementation. Among these phases there are different, individually expressed intermediate phases, which are closely related. According to V. Hibnere, these stages are not clear in the younger school-age children’s creative activities. They are often twisted; therefore it is even difficult to distinguish them from each other. Pupils are not even usually aware of them in their creative activity. Therefore, the result is the denoting factor when judging about their innovation features (Hibnere, 1977, 15). Motivation is important for promotion of creative activity. Ā. Karpova emphasizes that it is particularly important to understand the motive as the need, value orientation, and form of interest expressions (Karpova, 1994, 96). Motives arise and evolve, and are developed on the basis of requirements. In its turn, the requirements can be viewed as the source of the activity (Karpova, 1994, 25). True creative activities as motivation, admits T. M. Amabile, are characterized by a deep and sustained interest, pleasure, curiosity, satisfaction, positive challenge of a problem (Amabile, 1996). It is observed, if the pupil feels the need to convert various materials (clay, paper, textiles, etc.) into imaginary objects or characters they gain joy, satisfaction, acknowledge themselves at work.

It is to admit that sometimes the material itself arises suggestion. Skillfully organized handicrafts, containing the unity of emotional and intellectual sphere of consciousness, makes it necessary to speculate, search, try, it is a great pupils’ creativity facilitator. Interests significantly evolve in the first years of school training, especially the cognition interests. Development of the youngest school-age pupils’ learning interest is directly dependent on the teaching organization; therefore there is a considerable cognition that development progresses from the simplest to the most complex, from the known to the unknown. Teachers, realizing the handicraft training content, have to search for the tasks that generate pupils’ interest, necessity, the need to carry out the task. At the same time, K. Dēķens’s cognition is important that training made with the interest develops the human spirit, remains the mental property for life, urging it to continue the spiritual development. He admits that the only interesting work leads to a real education, raising human values (Dēķens, 1919, 116).

Acting with the interest is the foundation of learning, driving force, which promotes pupils’ creative work and encourages further development. The teacher needs to create the situation, to give impetus to the creative work. In one of the schools of practice, the teacher unconsciously created pupils’ creative activity – by bringing a stone to class, which encouraged pupils to post around the stone their spatial products (ladybugs). After the accomplished work pupils suggested the teacher to make more animals, insects, birds at the next class to complement to the layout. Pupils were looking for ideas at home that could be made in class. Some of them arrived with the finished product on the next day and with the initiative to prepare together. As a result, the efforts turned into a project that lasted for a month.

Such learning allows students to self-educate themselves, being aware of their values. Also E. Pētersons emphasizes that pupils’ direct interest can be used by the teacher most of all and it has to be saved from suppression and restriction by using inappropriate teaching and upbringing methods (Pētersons, 1931, 10). Unfortunately, today the school encounters the cases where the pupils’ natural tendency to cognize is being depressed by incompetent actions, as a result, their desire to learn gradually decreases.

A similar situation occurred in the integrated classes where the teacher at the open lesson in form 1 opted for all pupils the same way of working (to cut out two socks from cardboard, and draw their pattern). The task was so simple that one boy, who sat in the back of the classroom, could fulfill not only the current task. He designed the trimmings from the cardboard into the plane and airplane, whose construction was original and simple at the same time. Here was the boy’s natural propensity to act according to his interests. The teacher did not even notice the boy’s created models, his creative fantasy. It must be admitted that this situation, however, is better than if he was denied the opportunity to construct. It is to assume that regular work without interest causes indifference, and later even dislike.
E. Pētersons also noted that interest is the contrast of indifference. This means that as soon as the pupils lose interest, indifference is “creeping in” subtly but irresistibly. Conversely, if anything, as recognized by E. Pētersons, is not indifferent, if any object or object content has excited us, internally awakened, created feeling of pleasure and attracted attention to it, then we have a desire to act (Pētersons, 1931, 16). E. Pētersons assumes that interest in the didactic meaning can be talked about only if the condition is continuous (Pētersons, 1931, 17). Lasting joy can exist only if you add volition activity. Interest that breaks out at the beginning as the action of feelings, gains the action of volition and it is later considered as the action of volition. According to the practice, to perform creative tasks or to learn the more difficult work technique, one always needs an effort of volition. N. Picka acknowledges that the basis of volition is the spiritual force and it is based on the value consciousness (Picka, 1990, 83). A teacher’s activity is of great importance in the creation of value awareness that evaluates the pupils’ progress, gives positive feedback, thus making pupils proud of their ability. In my opinion, volition is built gradually in the long run. In the training of Home Economics and Technologies, it is necessary to take the youngest school-age pupils’ features into consideration – general shortage of volition associated with the pupils’ lack of skills to work in the long run in accordance with the designated purpose, to resolve difficulties and obstacles.

Therefore, the research included such tasks for the accomplishment of which one needs problematic teaching, because it is based on creative thinking with partly intuitive nature. In the training of Home Economics and Technologies the pupils’ intuition becomes apparent, for example, in creative imagination, original conclusions, which are based on previous experience, accumulated knowledge, creating new images. The diversity of natural materials is appreciative material for the initiation of pupils’ creative activity. Therefore, in the practical part of the research we examined the pupils’ creative activity when working with natural materials, acquiring the handicrafts technology – appliqué work. Diverse teaching methods were chosen for the research (Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Methodological Techniques in Appliqué Works with Natural Materials for Encouraging the Pupils’ Creative Activity*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Methodological techniques for encouraging the pupils’ creative activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Theme formulation stimulating for imagination. The task is to appliqué from the tree leaves, using different shapes, different colors and different sizes of tree leaves. For example, “Human or Animal in Movement”, “My Carnival Costume”, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Free choice of material (tree leaves, flowers, branches etc.). The selected natural materials are glued on the base. The task - to complement the appliqué with natural materials, with a particular image or an animal.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Zig-zag base lines are drawn on the selected base with a brush dipped in the glue. Add tiny natural materials (sand, seeds, etc.). After drying and shaking off extra material the task is formulated – by stimulating imagination, to add to the results obtained with the appliqué or drawing, trying to see the image or reproduce an event.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>To appliqué (to model) a festive costume on the self-adhesive film.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>To appliqué with tree leaves, adding to a drawing or a picture of the calendar.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Pupils’ task is to appliqué according to their own intentions with seeds (free choice) or the free choice of natural materials.</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Integrated lesson, combining Visual Art with Home Economics and Technologies. The first task – to draw the landscape including water (choose from watercolors’, gouache or crayons). The second task is to appliqué a reflection in the water.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>The task - to appliqué the tree, using a variety of natural materials, including tree leaves.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Pair or group work - to appliqué on the large format paper some image from children’s literature or fairy tales.</td>
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The empirical part of the research was carried out in practice schools of Riga Teacher Training and Educational Management Academy. The research compiled full and part-time students’ experience
attending the practice in both urban and rural schools, in elementary school classes (276 pupils). The research summarizes the results of the last ten years.

It is to admit that students in the learning process find their ability to study and analyze the literature on creative activity successfully. Difficulties arise when pupils’ creativity has to be promoted. We noticed that 32% of students do not understand the nature of creativity and organize pupils’ activity at lessons according to the technical drawing or description, or work frontally where all pupils create the same products. In these cases, the pupils do not have case studies and there is no combination of well-known techniques, solutions for new challenges. Analyzing the lesson, students claim that their goal was reached, because each pupil was free to choose the colour of the material, but all the products were similar. It certifies that the students are not able to link theoretical knowledge to practice.

In the continuation of the research the pupils’ task was to appliqué a human or animal from tree leaves. Summarizing the results of the research, 56% of respondents had found interesting solutions for their works, while 44% of the respondents included stereotypical solutions in their works (a rabbit, a butterfly, a hedgehog) - images made in the pre-school educational institution. We can find the explanation in A. Vorobjovs’s cognition that imagination, like thinking, starts only if there is a case (Vorobjovs, 2000, 112). Therefore, the research was continued, creating case studies and changing the task. Pupils had to make applications from tree leaves “People or Animals in Movement” (Figure 1). Significant results were obtained in those classrooms where teachers before the work evoked a variety of sports, associated movements. However, in this situation there were pupils’ works, which rendered images, but there was no movement (23%). The situation improved when teachers included pupils’ self-evaluation in the learning process, which contained important criteria “a human or animal appliqué in motion”, and “my innovation in appliqué” Summarizing the results, only 9% of pupils’ works displayed no creativity.

The task can be varied similarly, allowing pupils to appliqué on their own with the seeds, as well as to appliqué a tree (free choice of material).

In the continuation of the research, we searched for new solutions, new teaching techniques. Pupils are given free choice of material (tree leaves, branches, flowers, etc.). The selected natural materials are glued on the base. The teacher encourages pupils to look into the glued natural material to try to see some image or figure and to appliqué it with other natural materials. It is to admit that by choosing such a teaching technique, no pupils’ works were the same (Figure 2).

Case study and motivation are important for the promotion of creative activity, as the expression of needs and interests. Interesting results were obtained in recent years, during the practice. Pupils in particular were bound with the task where the glued natural material could be supplemented by pupils’ drawing (Figure 3). M. Bīlmane’s statement regarding these works is significant that pupils’ creative activity contains no errors; they should not be even looked there for "(Bīlmane, 1924, 20).
After the accomplished work the teacher encouraged pupils to write their vision of the intention. One of the girls from form 2 writes “I picked the mayflower and saw heads with hair. There are many little men and long, long hair. I see that little men are sitting on the bus” (Figure 3, drawing 1). In practice, we observed that the pupils are attracted by the tasks corresponding to their interests. In form 2 the boy writes about his work “It is my jet. I called it “The Quick Swan”. I fly in space with it. The plane has two engines. The plane has two cockpits. There are edible things, too. Of course, the food is in tiny capsules. I am glad that I have “The Quick Swan” (Figure 3, drawing 2). We see that creative activity is closely connected with thinking, imagination and fantasy. At this age, according to M. A. Runco, it is topical to have the ability to generate ideas, regardless their realization into the real creative achievements (Runco, 2004). In the continuation of the research, it is possible to achieve creative activity for 100% of pupils if zig-zag base lines are drawn on the selected base with a brush dipped in the glue. Then they add tiny natural materials (sand, seeds, etc.). After drying, the extra natural material is shaken off. The teacher encourages pupils to see a particular image or figure and to complement the appliqué with natural materials or a drawing to obtain a definite image (Figure 4).

When leading the research, we ascertained that as a result of lasting joy and volition activities there are higher pupils’ creative activity indicators: the creative activity experience has become more variable, positive attitudes to independent creative activity have developed regardless of the environment, they depend on the teacher’s professionalism to choose teaching techniques for creativity promotion. The essential creativity contributing factor is the choice of tasks, which contain the unity of emotional and intellectual consciousness sphere. Girls were excited by a holiday dress modeling on self adhesive film. At this age the pupils’ imagination is vivid, it is confirmed by the fact that many pupils began playing with semi-finished outfits. By emotionally experiencing pupil’s activity achievements, observing them from a pupil’s point of view, the teacher creates a general sense of safety, encourages their further action. Thus, they create responsibility for commenced work promoting the pupils for further creative activity.

Pupils’ creative work is provided by a methodical technique, if they select the calendar or drawn, painted or prepared in advance texture at the lesson of Visual Art as the basis of the application. Each pupil’s selected base is different, which guarantees creative activity. A similar situation is also observed at the lesson where pupils on the previously drawn landscape with water (watercolors, crayons or gouache colors) appliqué the reflection in the water.

In practice, we noticed that pupils enjoyed the teamwork (in a group, no more than four pupils) where pupils on the large paper appliquéd an image from children’s literature or a fairytale. We noticed that working in a group and jointly searching for solution pupils enriched their experience of creative activity. After work the pupils discovered with joy that the works looked as in real life. The work carried out and the created painting was the delight not only for pupils, teachers but also for parents. Each pupil was proud both of one’s own, and the teamwork. It was proven by their great desire to show this painting to everyone that came into the classroom. We noticed that successful tasks that are relevant to pupils themselves captivate them, encourage their further creative activity.

When leading the research, we ascertained that it is necessary to choose more techniques, to create case studies, to make pupils work independently, creating an impetus for creative activities, reduce...
stereotypical images. A modern teacher is free in the choice of teaching methods, manufacturing a specific product. Implementing the content of Home Economics and Technologies, it is the most significant to respect the pupils’ interests, their needs and specific character of a class.

Summarizing the results of the research, we ascertained that the pupils’ creative activity in the training of Home Economics and Technologies becomes more efficient, if the teacher in the training process chooses more variable methodological techniques, creates case studies to get pupils interested in the activity with the unity of emotional and intellectual consciousness sphere.

Conclusions

- Creativity for younger students is more like innovation, which is the original creation of the product, where as a result of acquired knowledge and skills in the process of work they find a new approach to problem solutions, combining the techniques of a known activity.
- It is significant for promotion of creative activity to have a case study and motivation, as expression of needs and interests that experience the unity of emotional and intellectual sphere.
- The precondition of pupil’s creative activity development in the training of Home Economics and Technologies is a variation of methodological techniques.
- In the training of Home Economics and Technologies, pupils’ creative expression activities are closely related to the teacher’s professionalism to choose methodological techniques for creativity promotion, to feel their acquisition as significant for oneself.

Bibliography