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Creative relaxation, motor creativity, self-concept in a sample of children from Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

Introduction. Although there have been many definitions and much research has been done in the field of creativity in the last few years, scarce attention has been devoted to studying and investigating the motor area of creativity. In this study we sought to verify the effect that a creative relaxation programme could have on the self-concept and motor creativity of a group of 5 year-old pupils.

Methodology. To analyse the effects of the creative relaxation programme (independent variable) on the levels of motor creativity and self concept (dependent variables), a longitudinal, quasi-experimental design was used to compare the groups using pre-test – post-test measurement with an experimental and a control group. The (TCAM) Thinking Creatively in Action and Movement test by Torrance (1980) was used to assess motor creativity. To assess the variable self concept, the PCSC test (Perception of child self concept) was utilised (Villa & Azumendi, 1992).

Results. Statistical analyses of the variables showed significant differences in favour of the experimental group with regard to the control group.

Discussion. The results obtained in this research work agree with those found by other studies, thus demonstrating the feasibility of stimulating self-concept and creativity in the Infant Education stage.

Key words: *creative relaxation, motor creativity, self-concept, early childhood education.*

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Resumen

Introducción. Aunque han sido muchas las definiciones e investigaciones realizadas en el campo de la creatividad en los últimos años, ha sido muy escasa la dedicación de dichos estudios e investigaciones respecto al área motriz de la misma. En este estudio se intentó comprobar el efecto que un programa de relajación creativa podía ejercer sobre los niveles de autoconcepto y de creatividad motriz en un grupo de alumnos de 5 años.

Método. Para analizar los efectos del programa de relajación creativa (variable independiente) sobre los niveles de creatividad motriz y autoconcepto (variables dependientes), se utilizó un diseño longitudinal de tipo cuasiexperimental de comparación de grupos con medición pretest-postest, con un grupo experimental y un grupo control. Para la evaluación de los niveles de creatividad motriz, se empleó el PCAM (Pensando Creativamente en Acción y Movimiento) (Torrance, 1980). Para la evaluación de la variable autoconcepto, se utilizó el PAI (Percepción del Autoconcepto Infantil) (Villa y Auzmendi, 1992).

Resultados. Los análisis estadísticos realizados sobre las variables estudiadas, arrojaron diferencias significativas a favor del grupo experimental respecto al grupo control en las variables analizadas.

Discusión. Los resultados hallados en la investigación concuerdan con los encontrados en otros estudios, demostrándose la factibilidad de estimular el autoconcepto y la creatividad en la etapa de Educación Infantil.

Palabras Clave: *relajación creativa, creatividad motriz, autoconcepto, educación infantil.*

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Introduction

The study of creative relaxation and its influence on the levels of child creativity and self-concept is a severely neglected, overlooked field in the research on human development. In fact, when searching for appropriate literature at the start of our research paper, no studies or investigations were found that alluded to the relationship of these three variables. We are therefore faced with an untouched field of study which is both stimulating and appealing. Only a few attempts to address this area have been found, such as those carried out by Perez and Garairdobil (2001), who implemented an intervention to improve motor creativity, perception and self-concept through applying an art programme.

Gadner (1993) states that a creative individual is someone who resolves problems regularly, manufactures products or defines new matters in a particular area in a way that is considered new, but that is finally accepted within a specific cultural context. Menchen (2001) on the other hand, considers that creativity is a natural and essential characteristic of the human mind which is potentially present in each and every individual.

Although there have been many definitions and much research has been done in the field of creativity in the last few years, scarce attention has been devoted to studying and investigating the motor area of creativity.

In fact, it was not until 1995 that one of the first definitions of, or approaches to, the concept of motor creativity appears. This definition is proposed by Maestu and Trigo, who describe it as *"the intrinsically human capacity of putting bodily life at the disposal of the individual's potential (whether cognitive, affective, social, motor), in the innovative search for a valuable idea"* (Maestu & Trigo, 1995, page 623).

Ruiz (1995), for his part, establishes that considerations of motor creativity have been directly linked to the way in which creativity is approached in the general area of psychology, and so one would have to consider a person as motor creative if he/she is capable of producing multiple, varied and unique responses when confronted with a stimulus or situation.

For Da Fonseca (1998), motoricity leads the child to produce outlines of sensorial action that will later be transformed into increasingly more versatile and varied behaviour pat-

ters. Thus, this author states that motoricity portrays in terms of action those products and functional processes that create new actions in lieu of previous ones, and he concludes that it is through exploratory, inventive and constructive motoricity that a child acquires knowledge.

Later on, authors like Murcia, Vargas and Puerta (1998) associate motor creativity not only with movement and its quality, but also with variability and originality, seeking space for imagination and new forms of creating, by developing these relationships between movement, thought and affectivity.

Trigo (2001) starts from a systematic, holistic and global conception of motor creativity, defining it later as "*the intrinsically human capacity of expressing corporality using one's whole potential"* (page 180). For this woman author *"educating to act and to transform is nothing but teaching people to think"* (2001, page 181). From this point of view, if we consider that knowledge, learning and thought do not refer solely and exclusively to cognitive development, but are also involved in creative and emotional aspects, then the interrelation between critical and creative thinking is the fundamental tool that is absolutely necessary to teach our pupils to think for themselves.

For this author motoricity is in itself creative, since the creative capacity of human beings is inseparable from their holistic nature. She likewise states that primary creativity, understood as the first phase of creative motoricity, is realised fundamentally through free play which develops without the imposition of external rules, and she differentiates between the creative product of motoricity (that coincides with the result of all creative processes) and the product created from motoricity (which refers to an act which has the possibility of remaining in social culture, because it given rise to a new pleasurable situation in motoricity).

With regard to the study and application of creative relaxation, this technique arises from the studies and investigation of De Prado (1991), who explains that the use and stimulation of children's imagination contribute to improve their learning and to stimulate their creative potential. Thus, for this author, what creative relaxation seeks is to induce a relaxed state, in order to evoke more mental images, to increase inventiveness and fantasy so as to create new realities and possibilities from a known reality.

It is evident that the vast majority of human creations have their basis in imagination and fantasy, which are at the service of creative capacity, for seeking, experimenting and trying out new solutions from elements and materials that exist in reality. Thus, thanks to the power of its imagination, the child becomes the master of a creative potential that will allow it to combine and transform authentic, original and new creations. Creative capacity is based on imagination, but if reality is not appropriately perceived by the child, the child will be unable to reach out of it in order to create, since, as García Núñez and Berruezo (1994) state, a child's adaptation to reality precedes his/her creation of new realities.

When mind and body relax, a child can detach itself from all the blockages and tensions that inhibit its creative capacity, thus releasing the capability of all internal processes involved in the creative process to concentrate, whilst at the same time liberating its imagination which is the basis of creative thought and expression.

For Charaf (1999), by practising relaxation one can achieve:

1. The integration of mind and body which will lead to a state of balance and harmony, resulting in concentration of physical and mental energy for the fluidity of ideas.

2. Mental flexibility, which through divergent thought will allow the combination, modification and construction of new realities.

3. Spontaneity and authenticity to generate new and original responses.

4. The capacity to confront new risks.

A child's affectivity grows in parallel to its cognitive development. One of the most important aspects to be considered is the development of the self concept, which starts developing when the child is very young through a variety of experiences with its environment (Arraez, 1998). Appropriate affective development requires acquiring a positive self concept, the the concept that a child has of itself will determine the way in which it will confront the world and relate to people, and will have a remarkable influence on the pupil's personal development (Peralta & Sanchez, 2003)

In recent times, several investigations such as the one carried out by Ferrando et al (2005) have found a low relationship between creativity and intelligence, thus eliminating the old stereotype that higher intelligence means greater creativity and vice versa, and allowing us to consider whether other affective or emotional type variables could indeed be related to expressing creative behaviour.

Generally the authors who address this subject accept the existence of a certain relation between these two variables. In this respect, Guildford (1971) supports the existence of this relationship between self concept and creativity without defining which of these variables comes first. This means that the fact of having a positive self concept would favour the emergence of creative potential in human beings. As the individual experiments within his/her environment and acquires creative achievements, positive self concept will be gradually reinforced. The opinion of authors' on this subject is divided. Some of them point out that a positive self concept will allow creative potential to emerge while others state that it is creative capacity which aids the development of a positive self concept (Moore, Ugarte & Urrutia, 1987).

In this respect, Harter (1993) postulates the existence of a close relationship between the expression of this creative capacity and the secureness and confidence that the child has in its own abilities. This relation can be seen in two ways, according to this author:

1. Children who have greater self-confidence will be able to express their creative potential more readily than those whose self-confidence is lower.

2. Children who manage to express their creative capacity to a higher degree will tend to acquire greater self-confidence and feel more secure.

It is thus possible to appreciate the influence of affective factors on encouraging and expressing creativity.

Broc (1994), for his part, has studied the effect of a positive self concept on the life of a child in general. His studies highlight that such children tend to be more creative, their degree of anxiety is lower, they are more open, spontaneous, communicative and curious than others who have a negative self concept. By contrast, children with a negative self concept see

themselves as inferior and useless, they feel depressed and underestimate their potential. Such children usually lack self-confidence and are afraid to express their ideas.

Various authors and studies insist that the defining characteristics of creative children lie in their self confidence, imagination and perseverance in the face of obstacles. Amongst these authors, Maslow (1971) and Araya (2005) can be singled out. For the former, a creative attitude requires strength and self-confidence, whilst the latter considers that fear and weakness can drive creativity away or make it more difficult to find.

It is therefore fundamental that a child feel accepted and valued, since only a person who sees himself or herself positively will be able to fully develop its potential and creative capacity. Thus, we can consider that when the child feels accepted and respected it will tend to progressively develop the capability of expressing its sensations, emotions and thoughts, feeling at liberty and confident for creating and developing free, flexible open thinking, leading the child to knowledge, to experimentation and discovery.

Therefore, the main objective of this research paper is to prove that it is feasible to stimulate and improve self concept in a sample of individuals from Early Childhood Education, using a psycho-educational programme based on creative relaxation aimed at stimulating motor creativity.

Based on the above objective, we propose the following hypotheses to guide this study:

The first hypothesis is that children undergoing the creative relaxation programme (experimental group) show a significant increase in their motor creativity levels (fluidity, imagination and originality), in comparison with those children that do not undergo the above intervention programme (control group).

The second hypothesis is that children undergoing the creative relaxation programme (experimental group) manifest a significantly greater increase in their self concept than those that do not undergo the above intervention programme (control group).

Methodology

Participants

The study sample consists of 36 subjects, distributed in 2 natural classroom groups in the final year of Early Childhood Education at two public schools in Almería. One of these groups acted as control or reference group and the other one as experimental or intervention group. The latter was composed of 18 individuals (44% girls and 56% boys), and the former of 21 individuals (48% girls and 52% boys). The age range for the children was from 5 years, 3 months to 6 years, 3 months, without any significant differences in terms of age between the two groups ($F=1.414$; $p=0.189$).

Design

To analyse the effects of the creative relaxation programme (independent variable) on the levels of motor creativity and self concept (dependent variables), a longitudinal, quasi-experimental design was used to compare the groups using pre-test – post-test measurement with an experimental and a control group. The schools were included randomly in one group or the other.

At the same time a triple blind test technique was applied, as the children were not aware of the treatment and none of the teachers knew the aim of the study or the existence of another participant group. Moreover, the assessors did not know which individuals belonged to the experimental group or which to the control group.

Instruments

To assess the variable self concept, the PCSC test (Perception of child self concept) was utilised (Villa & Azumendi, 1992). This is a test that evaluates self concept in 5 -6 year-old children. It consists of 34 items, each of which has a drawing showing a group of children in a particular situation (at school, at a birthday party, etc.). In the picture one of the characters is performing an activity that could be regarded as typical of someone with a positive self concept, while one or more characters are engaged in the same activity but portraying a nega-

tive self concept. The children respond to the question as presented by the assessor, then the latter must circle one of the following options:

1. Always.
2. Often.
3. Rarely.
4. Never.

1 means the lowest level of self concept and 4 the high level, except in item 13 where scoring is in the opposite direction. Thus, by adding the scores obtained for each of the items we obtain a total score for self concept.

The individual version of this test was used in this research paper: although it requires more time, it yields more reliable data about children's self concept, according to the authors.

The test presents a highly satisfactory internal consistency (α=.83).

The (TCAM) Thinking Creatively in Action and Movement test by Torrance (1980) was used to assess motor creativity. This test is designed to be applied individually to 3-8-year-old children, setting 4 different activities to evaluate the way in which young children use their aptitudes for creative thought in different activities that require essentially kinesthetic responses, thus avoiding possible difficulties in expressing their thought through language or drawing.

Through TCAM it is possible to assess fluidity (the number of different relevant, appropriate responses), imagination (how the individual is able to imagine and adopt the six roles proposed therein) and originality (evaluated according to the criterion of statistical infrequency).

Psychometric studies show satisfactory results with regard to the reliability of the test-retest trial, with a reliability coefficient of r=.84.

Procedure

Firstly, the pre-test assessment took place. This consisted of obtaining an initial measurement of the individuals' motor creativity and self concept from both participating groups at the start, administering TCAM and PCSC individually in the children's school during school hours.

To control the potential effect that the variable assessor might have on the results obtained, the assessors (who had previously received training to give these tests) joined the classes they were about to assess, two weeks before this first evaluation. They were introduced as practice teachers and made contact with the children during this period, since according to Marín (1980), it is necessary to have an atmosphere of trust and acceptance in order to assess creativity, since an atmosphere of being under evaluation would inhibit creative responses.

Once the pre-test phase was over, we proceeded to apply the intervention programme on creative relaxation to the children in the experimental group. The person in charge of this task was the children's teacher who had previously been informed of and briefed on the methodology to be followed. During the period when the programme was applied to the experimental group, the children from the control group did not have creative relaxation sessions as such, but their teacher simply asked them to lie down and rest with their eyes closed after doing any dynamic activity.

The creative relaxation programme went on for 10 weeks (third term), with daily sessions lasting 10 to 15 minutes each. This intervention phase lasted only 10 weeks in order to lessen the influence of the maturation factor on the results obtained. It was also borne in mind that the more time which elapses between pre-test and post-test, the greater the probability of extraneous variables interfering. Furthermore, as Anguera and others (1995) establish, the pre-test-post-test design does not allow for valid causality arguments unless the work is done within short or very short periods of time between pre-test and post-test, and therefore, it is not recommended in situations where a long-term psychological or educational intervention is being assessed.

Duration of the sessions was 15 minutes maximum, as it is very difficult to hold the attention and concentration of children in Early Childhood Education for long periods of time. For this reason, it was decided that relaxation sessions should be brief. Furthermore, to avoid

distractions and interferences amongst the children during the creative relaxation sessions, the class was divided in 4 groups, 2 groups of 4 children and the other 2 groups of 5. While the sessions were in process, the children who were not participating in them would stay with the practice teacher. Making the groups smaller minimised the possibility of disruptive behaviour on the part of children that could interfere with or alter the creative relaxation sessions.

The creative relaxation programme applied to the experimental group was divided in three modules. During the first module that lasted three weeks, the children were asked to lie down on camp beds laid out in the school gymnasium. When they were lying down, they were asked to close their eyes while they listened to relaxation music. During this time the teacher would speak to them slowly in a soft voice with words that suggested to them a state of relaxation. These sessions had a maximum duration of 10 minutes, after which time there would be a brief discussion and verbalisation of the session.

The second module lasted 3 weeks and each session had a maximum duration of 15 minutes. These sessions started as the children were invited to lie down on the camp beds in the gym, and once they were lying down, they were asked to close their eyes while relaxation music was played. In the meantime, the teacher would speak to them in a calm and relaxed way, in order to help each of them reach a pleasant and satisfying state of relaxation. After approximately 5 minutes, the teacher would start to read them a story, encouraging the children to imagine its scenes and characters. For this purpose they chose stories that were; if they had worked with familiar stories, the children's imagination would have been conditioned by the images they had previously formed about them. Once the reading was over, the teacher would ask them to open their eyes slowly and to start getting up. Later the children would sit in a semicircle to discuss the aspects which were experienced or imagined during the session. We always endeavoured to have an atmosphere of trust, acceptance, freedom and humour for the verbalisation and sharing.

The third module covered 4 weeks and each session lasted 15 minutes maximum. The session started with the children lying down on camp beds. Next they were asked to close their eyes, while the teacher spoke to them slowly in a soft voice to put them in a state of relaxation. Relaxing music was played during the session. After approximately 10 minutes, the teacher would suggest that the children should imagine they found certain objects and should think of all the ways in which they could play with them and utilise them. For example: imag-

ine you are in the park and suddenly you find a ball, what can you do with it? Imagine all the things you can do with that ball. Other suggestions were: imagine what you could do with a hoop, with a handkerchief, with a stick, with a piece of wood, with a hat, with a newspaper, with a cooking pot, with a bucket, with a spoon with a piece of string, etc.

Once the creative relaxation session was over, the children would sit in a semi-circle to discuss the process they had experienced within an atmosphere in which spontaneity, acceptance, trust and humour dominated.

When the creative relaxation programme was finished, the post-test score was obtained in order to verify whether any changes had occurred in the motor creativity and self concept variables under study; thus the sample children were given the TCAM and PCSC tests again under the same conditions as in the pre-test.

Results

To analyse the effects that the creative relaxation intervention programme could have had on the variables studied, a comparison of averages was carried out using a Covariance Analysis.

The Covariance Analysis was used as a technique to analyse the data, because it is recommended for a small number of individuals or when small groups are studied (García Jiménez, 1992).

A Covariance Analysis was carried out for each variable in the post-test, taking as covariant its equivalent in the pre-test, as this would indicate the levels of each variable prior to the treatment. The aim was to eliminate any influence from the prior level on creativity in the post-test results.

A Variance Analysis was also carried out for each variable in the pre-test to rule out the presence of significant differences at the start between the control and the experimental group.

Table I. ***Average scores and standard deviations of the variable motor fluidity***

Group	Pre-test average	Pre-test standard deviation	Post-test average	Post-test standard deviation
Control group	22.45	8.32	26.32	11.47
Experimental group	23.78	9.76	35.89	12.45

The results of the Variance Analysis of the pre-test scores for variable motor fluidity do not show significant prior differences between the control and the experimental group ($F=4.26$; $p>0.05$).

However, the Covariance Analysis post-test and pre-test differences, using the pre-test scores as covariant, were indeed significant ($F=11.85$; $p>0.01$) in favour of the experimental group, for when analysing the data of this group at the two measuring times, significant differences were found between the pre-test and post-test scores for this variable. ($t=-11.56$; $p<0.001$), whilst in the control group, these differences do not appear between the pre test and post test measures ($t=-1.75$; $p=.148$).

Table II. ***Average scores and standard variations of the variable motor originality***

Group	Pre-test average	Pre-test standard deviation	Post-test average	Post-test standard deviation
Control group	24,29	10.37	28.43	9.78
Experimental group	27.14	11.29	47.19	13.52

With regard to the variable motor originality, the Variance Analysis of the pre-test scores shows that there are no significant differences between the control group and the experimental group ($F=1.12$; $p>0.05$).

On the other hand, the Covariance Analysis shows significant differences for this variable in favour of the experimental group ($F=14.32$; $p<0.001$): when analysing the data from the experimental group at two measuring times, significant differences were found between the pre-test and the post-test scores for this variable ($t=-5.81$; $p<0.001$), whereas such differences are not present in the control group between the pre-test and post-test measures ($t=-1.52$; $p=.142$).

Table III. ***Average scores and standard deviations of the variable motor imagination***

Group	Pre-test average	Pre-test standard deviation	Post-test average	Post-test standard deviation
Control group	15.62	2.43	17.84	3.79
Experimental group	17.15	2.98	21.39	3.15

When the Variance Analysis of the pre-test scores was carried out for the variable motor imagination, no significant differences appeared between the control and the experimental group ($F=2.36$; $p>0.05$).

There were, however, significant differences when the Covariance Analysis was carried out for the same variable of the post-test and pre-test differences ($F=4.62$; $p>0.05$) in favour of the experimental group; when analysing the data of this group at two measuring times, significant differences were found between the pre-test and post-test scores for this variable ($t=-7.36$; $p<0.001$), whilst these differences do not appear in the control group between the pre-test and post-test measures ($t=-0.87$; $p>0.05$).

Table IV. ***Average scores and standard deviations of the variable self concept***

Group	Pre-test average	Pre-test standard deviation	Post-test average	Post-test standard deviation
Control group	64.32	6.43	65.86	5.59
Experimental group	62.15	4.67	83.27	7.34

Finally, the Variance Analysis of the pre-test score of the variable self concept did not show significant differences between the control and the experimental group ($F=1.27$; $p>0.05$).

However, significant differences did appear in this variable when the Covariance Analysis of the post-test and pre-test differences was carried out ($F=5.84$; $p<0.05$), in favour of the experimental group; when analysing the data of this group at two measuring times, significant differences were found between the pre-test and post-test scores for this variable. ($t=-14.75$; $p<0.001$), whilst these differences do not appear in the control group between the pre-test and post-test measures ($t=-1.03$; $p>0.01$).

Discussion

In the light of our research results, we can conclude that application of the creative relaxation programme produced a significant increase in the expression of motor creativity of the children, in fluidity, imagination and originality, thus confirming the first hypothesis of our research. It also brought about a significant improvement in the self concept of the children who underwent this intervention programme, so the second hypothesis of our study was confirmed as well.

The present data coincide with those obtained by other authors (Amabile, 1996; López 2001; Pérez, 2000 and Piqueras, 1996) who also demonstrated that application of several classroom programmes (based on play, art education, problem solving, etc.) can improve the creative production of pupils.

The data also agree with those found by Justo (1997) and Gallego (2003), who obtained a significant improvement in child self-concept using psychomotor intervention programmes.

However, data from the present study do not totally coincide with those found by Garairgodobil and Perez (2001), who using an art programme with 6-7 year-olds, obtained a significant improvement in motor creativity levels, but not in self-concept levels. This would suggest that self-concept stimulation should take place before the start of Primary Education, when teachers' feedback and school experiences could determine to a large extent the concept that children will form about themselves.

These results highlight the importance of developing and stimulating creative potential as early as possible in childhood, when children can still express themselves freely; since as we have verified in the present research paper, the creative achievements of an individual constitute the basis for a positive self concept.

On the other hand, Borrajo (1998) believes that the concept of education takes on a new meaning, where accumulating information becomes less important, and a new model appears which values the ability to decide what information we need at each moment, to know where to obtain it, how to deal with it, how to transform it, how to recreate it and how to create using it as a basis. Therefore, this author considers that adults should discard the role of information transmitters and take on the role of learning environment creators, where the child is accepted with its aptitudes and limitations and is provided a place for work and learning where it feels secure to learn and to develop its capacities without fear of being judged. In these environments personal initiative is valued as well as originality and the responsible freedom that each child employs in its own learning process.

A child of 5 is at the representation stage, when the development of abstract and symbolic functions is paramount and when it is already capable of mentally manipulating those objects and actions it has already internalised. The child at this stage is capable of operating with mental images of objects without the need for these to be present. For this reason, once this possibility of mentally representing images of reality has been developed, the child has the capacity to create new mental images by combining, manipulating and transforming those images it has previously acquired.

Creativity is an intrinsic capacity that cannot be dissociated from childhood development. However, educational experiences can limit and inhibit the manifestation of this capacity. Thus, children with a positive self concept will be able to overcome contradictions and rise above them, they will have more confidence in their own capacities and will not repress their emotions and feelings. They will feel freer and more motivated to create, and will channel their creative impulse in a more constructive, enriching way, both for themselves and for the people around them.

Encouraging creativity and positive self concept in children will result in improving their quality of life as children, as they will play in a well adapted fashion, they will have good expectations about themselves and their future, they will maintain friendly contact with the people closest to them and they will be active, flexible and able to communicate their thoughts and concerns openly and without fear. Moreover, various longitudinal studies, like those of Nickerson (1999) and Plucker and Renzully (1999), highlight that establishing creativity in the Early Childhood Education period has a great influence on the creativity levels that will be shown at higher educational levels.

Likewise, they will be aware of their identity and personal usefulness, they will feel socially competent, they will be capable of making decisions and of establishing realistic goals, while at the same time they are also able to satisfy their basic needs of affection, due to the opportunities provided by the school environment for developing their personal skills. All of this thanks to the acknowledgement of and attention to their success and skills on the part of the educational system. Hence, the importance of not emphasising what the child is not capable of doing and fails in. It is therefore necessary to provide learning situations and opportunities where their capacities and skills can be tested.

This study has also verified that an optimal state of relaxation allows the child to be in touch with itself during the experience, whilst at the same time being at liberty to experiment and achieve creative results. For this reason, creative relaxation is a good starting point to develop the creative capacity of a child from its imagination.

The current educational system should bravely and successfully take up the challenge of framing learning within a set of significant contexts that permits pupils to use all their abili-

ties in a creative way and thus to make a creative impact on the environment in which they are immersed.

Nowadays it is vital for human beings to have a series of skills and resources at their disposal that will allow them to move forward in a changing, continuously demanding world which subjects them to a vast quantity of new situations that are different from each other. Therefore if the main aim of Early Childhood Education is to encourage and develop all the capacities of the individual, it makes no sense to leave out the stimulation and development of creative capacities in the child, for these capacities allow it to observe, manipulate, experiment and resolve questions it will encounter over the course of the teaching and learning process.

To attain this objective, the teacher should design activities that will allow the child to come up with new and original contributions that will stimulate its creative and divergent thought, for the essence of creative teaching lies in allowing each pupil to contribute something personal, valuable and innovative to the learning process.

As Navarro (2003) states, a teacher should value the free personal expression of each and every one of his/her pupils, thus providing them with unlimited opportunities to express themselves, helping them to become accustomed to facing future events and situations with a favourable disposition to innovation, while at the same time encouraging mental agility and flexibility so that they become used to problem situations which have many possible solutions.

It is therefore vital that the teacher be able to establish an appropriate atmosphere in the classroom that will give each pupil the opportunity to find and to manifest its own interests and needs, using these as the starting point for their creative potential, setting new objectives and goals to be achieved.

For these reasons, it is important to foster and develop creativity and self concept in children, to motivate them so that they can respond favourably when faced with new situations and innovative ideas, while at the same time encouraging them to behave in a spontaneous, imaginative and original way.

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