

Developing Children's Creative Thinking Potential Through Visual Activities in Preschool Educational Organizations

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Abstract: This article highlights the pedagogical foundations for developing children's creative thinking potential in preschool educational institutions. It analyzes the content of the concept of creative thinking, the characteristics of its formation in preschool age, and the possibilities of its development through visual-art activities. The study also substantiates the methodological potential of the open-ended tasks method aimed at developing key components of creative thinking in children, such as originality, flexibility, fluency of ideas, elaboration, and reflection. The article emphasizes the pedagogical importance of organizing visual-art activities based on a creative approach, the facilitator role of the educator, and the creation of an environment that supports free choice and creative expression. The research findings confirm that the use of open-ended creative tasks in preschool education serves as an effective methodological tool for developing independent thinking, creative initiative, and the ability to find unconventional solutions to problem situations among children.

Keywords: Creative thinking, preschool education, visual-art activities, open-ended tasks, originality, flexibility, reflection, creative cognition.

Introduction: The preschool period is considered one of the most important stages in which the fundamental cognitive processes, psychological qualities, and creative abilities of a child's personality are formed. During this stage, children actively explore the surrounding environment, their imagination (fantasy) and figurative thinking intensify, speech develops, and natural sources of creative thinking such as free expression and curiosity toward novelty become actively manifested. Therefore, the development of creative thinking potential in preschool educational institutions is regarded as one of the most relevant directions of the educational process.

Creative thinking potential represents a set of creative opportunities inherent in a child, which are manifested in the ability to generate new ideas, find unconventional solutions in problematic situations, express one's thoughts freely, produce multiple alternatives, and independently organize activities. The development of

this potential directly depends on the purposefulness of the pedagogical process, methodological consistency, and the creative approach of the educator. In particular, visual activities (drawing, appliqué, artistic construction, working with clay or plasticine) are considered an effective pedagogical tool for developing creative thinking in children, as they ensure the harmonious development of imagination and thinking, provide opportunities for free creative experimentation, and allow the results of activity to be expressed visually.

METHOD

The general objective of developing creative thinking potential in the process of teaching visual activities in preschool educational institutions is to consistently form elements of creative thinking in children, guiding them to generate ideas freely, interpret visual images in unconventional ways, make choices, and express their thoughts through artistic means.

This objective encompasses the following pedagogical directions:

- developing originality (the ability to generate new ideas and thoughts) in children;
- fostering flexibility (the ability to see different solutions within a single situation);
- activating the flow of ideas (producing multiple alternatives);
- strengthening elaboration (enriching and deepening visual representation);
- nurturing independence and initiative;
- developing reflection (the ability to explain and analyze one's own work).

Thus, the goal of developing creative thinking potential involves not only teaching children the techniques of visual activity, but also forming competencies related to creative approaches, free thinking, and the ability to find unconventional solutions in problematic situations.

To achieve the above-mentioned goal, it is necessary to methodically organize the process of visual activity in preschool educational institutions. Based on this, the following methodological tasks for developing creative thinking potential have been identified:

1. Ensuring methodological influence that activates imagination and figurative thinking in children. This involves creating opportunities for children to fantasize and implementing a system of activities that encourage the free creation and new interpretation of images. Through the activation of imagination, the initial source of creative thinking is formed.
2. Strengthening children's freedom of choice and creative independence through open-ended creative tasks. In the methodological process, tasks that do not have a single correct answer and can be completed in various ways are organized, which helps develop children's ability to make independent decisions.
3. Developing the ability to find unconventional solutions through problem situations and creative tasks. In the process of visual activity, problem-based situations are created, and questions such as "Can this be done in another way?" are used to activate mechanisms of flexible thinking in children.
4. Enriching creative experience through the use of non-traditional techniques and materials in visual activities.

Techniques such as finger painting, stamping, collage, natural materials, and monoprint are applied to expand children's opportunities for experimentation, innovation, and free organization of visual activities.

5. Achieving systematic development of the main components of creative thinking in children. Activities are methodologically planned based on components such as originality, fluency of ideas, flexibility, elaboration, independence, and reflection. As a result, creative thinking develops not episodically but as a consistently formed process.

6. Developing children's ability to express and analyze their thoughts through reflection and creative presentation. At the end of activities, children are encouraged to explain their work, justify their choices, and propose alternative solutions, thereby fostering reflective thinking processes.

7. Integrating diagnostic tools into the methodological process to assess and monitor creative thinking. An assessment system based on portfolios, observation sheets (diagnostic cards), creative rubrics, and criteria is introduced, allowing the identification of the dynamics of growth in children's creative thinking.

8. Strengthening the methodological competence of educators and improving their facilitative role. The educator is expected to master methodological approaches that support children's creative activity, guide and manage the process, and plan activities according to modern pedagogical requirements.

Thus, the purpose of developing children's creative thinking potential in preschool educational institutions is to form competencies that enable children, within the process of visual activities, to generate ideas freely, find unconventional solutions, make independent choices, and express their thoughts through artistic expression. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to consistently implement methodological tasks based on activating imagination and figurative thinking, organizing open-ended creative tasks, creating problem situations, using non-traditional techniques, and applying reflection and diagnostic assessment systems.

The preschool period is characterized by the rapid development of a child's personality formation, cognitive processes, and psychological functions, as well as the active functioning of imagination and figurative thinking. Therefore, the development of creative

thinking at this age should not be organized randomly or episodically but should be carried out based on clearly defined pedagogical requirements. The pedagogical requirements for developing creative thinking encompass children's age and individual characteristics, their level of development, the importance of play as the leading type of activity, as well as motivational, emotional, and methodological aspects of the educational process. In particular, the effectiveness of forming creative thinking during visual activities directly depends on how the methodological process is organized [6].

Below, the main pedagogical requirements for developing creative thinking in preschool children are systematized.

1) Requirement of considering age characteristics (differentiated approach). The development of preschool children is not uniform and differs across age stages. Therefore, the methodology for developing creative thinking must be adapted to the child's age. For example: Children aged 3–4 demonstrate creativity that is more spontaneous in nature; imagination is strong, but planning and reflection are still weak. At this stage, activities should mainly be organized based on free use of colors, sensory exploration, and experimentation; Children aged 5–6 show stronger compositional thinking, elaboration, understanding of results, and reflection abilities. Therefore, at this stage, it becomes possible to apply problem-based tasks, choice among alternatives, creative analysis, and presentation elements. Thus, organizing the methodological process according to a differentiated approach appropriate to the child's age is an important pedagogical requirement for developing creative thinking.

2) Requirement of a learner-centered approach (supporting individual capabilities). The development of creative thinking occurs differently in each child: some children generate ideas quickly, while others think more slowly; some work freely with colors, while others focus more on shapes. Therefore, in the pedagogical process it is essential to consider the child's: interests; temperament characteristics; psychological condition; creative experience; level of speech development; cognitive activity. In this context, the educator should support each child's personal development dynamics rather than comparing children with one another. A learner-centered approach contributes to the

formation of the quality of individual originality in creative thinking.

3) Requirement of psychological safety and a positive emotional environment. Creative thinking requires freedom. If a child does not feel comfortable, fears making mistakes, or constantly hears criticism, creative initiative decreases. Therefore, an important pedagogical requirement for developing creative thinking is to ensure the following psychological conditions during activities: avoiding criticism of the child; accepting mistakes as an opportunity for development; providing encouragement and support; valuing the child's ideas. This requirement is particularly important in visual activities, since giving a "wrong" evaluation to a child's drawing may limit their creative freedom.

4) Requirement of forming motivation and stimulating interest. Preschool children engage in creative activities not through compulsion but through interest. Therefore, the motivational stage of the activity is extremely important for developing creative thinking. At the beginning of a lesson, the educator should stimulate children's internal interest through methods such as: a narrative introduction; fairy-tale elements; game situations; problem-based questions; "imagination prompts". If motivation is insufficient, children approach the task merely with the attitude that it "must be done," which reduces the activity of generating ideas that is essential for creative thinking.

5) Requirement for open-ended creative tasks. One of the key pedagogical requirements for developing creative thinking is that learning tasks should be open-ended. Open-ended tasks are those that do not have a single correct answer and allow children to create multiple alternatives. For example: "Create different objects from one shape"; "Invent your own fairy-tale character"; "Draw the same theme in two different ways." Such tasks promote the development of originality, flexibility, and the fluency of ideas. If a task is organized only according to a template in the form of "draw exactly like this," it restricts the development of creative thinking.

6) Requirement to ensure freedom of choice and independence. One of the essential characteristics of creative thinking is the availability of choice. Therefore, in visual activities children should be given

opportunities to choose: colors; shapes; materials; techniques; themes (plots); compositions. Freedom of choice enables children to make independent decisions, demonstrate flexibility in thinking, and develop a sense of creative responsibility.

7) Requirement to organize activities based on play and integration. Since play is the leading activity in preschool childhood, the development of creative thinking should be organized in harmony with play. When visual activities are enriched with elements of play: children think more freely; imagination becomes stronger; creative initiative increases. In addition, to ensure a broader development of creative thinking, it is necessary to apply integration in activities by linking visual activities with speech development, nature studies, mathematical concepts, and music. Integration increases the sources of ideas and strengthens associative thinking in children.

8) Requirement for the educator's facilitative position. In modern preschool education, the educator should not act as a controller but as a facilitator who guides and supports the creative process. The educator should: not give ready-made ideas, but create opportunities for children to find their own ideas; not dictate the "correct" answer, but encourage the search for different alternatives; value the creative process rather than focusing only on the final result. The facilitative position strengthens children's initiative and independence.

9) Requirement to organize reflection and creative presentation. Reflection is an important component of creative thinking, as it reflects a child's ability to explain, evaluate, and analyze the results of their own activity. Therefore, at the end of activities it is necessary to organize processes such as: displaying children's works in an exhibition; allowing children to explain their own work; conducting analysis through question-and-answer discussions. Reflection helps develop children's speech, logical explanation, and the ability to justify creative ideas.

10) Requirement for criteria-based assessment of creative thinking. To determine the effectiveness of developing creative thinking, the assessment process should be based on clear criteria rather than subjective judgments. Creative thinking should be evaluated through indicators such as: originality; fluency of ideas;

flexibility; elaboration; independence; reflection.

Thus, the development of creative thinking in preschool children can be effectively implemented by taking into account age characteristics, applying a learner-centered approach, creating a psychologically safe environment, forming motivation, ensuring open-ended tasks and freedom of choice, applying play and integration, strengthening the facilitator role of the educator, organizing reflection, and introducing a criteria-based assessment system. The systematic and interconnected implementation of these pedagogical requirements makes it possible to effectively develop children's creative thinking potential through visual activities [7,8].

In preschool educational institutions, the method of open-ended creative tasks is considered one of the most effective methodological approaches for developing children's creative thinking potential. The essence of this method lies in the fact that the task given to the child is not limited to a single "correct" solution; instead, it can be completed in multiple ways and expressed through different visual images and ideas. Open-ended tasks guide children from reproductive activity (copying a model) toward creative activity, creating opportunities for them to think freely, make choices, justify their decisions, and generate new ideas during the process of visual activities.

The method of open-ended creative tasks is organized based on the principles of variability and freedom of choice, which are among the fundamental principles of developing creative thinking. In this approach, the educator does not present a ready-made result but allows the child to independently create a creative solution based on their own imagination, thinking, and experience. This process develops key components of creative thinking such as originality (novelty), flexibility (the ability to see multiple alternatives), fluency of ideas (generating many ideas), elaboration (enriching the image), and reflection (explaining one's work).

Through open-ended tasks, the following psychological and pedagogical processes are activated in children: imagination and fantasy are strengthened; associative thinking becomes more active; figurative thinking develops; independent decision-making skills are formed; creative initiative and intrinsic motivation increase.

Thus, the method of open-ended creative tasks makes it possible to organize visual activity lessons not on the basis of rigid templates, but as a creative process.

In preschool education practice, open-ended creative tasks can be classified into several types:

1. Variant tasks. In this type, the theme remains the same, but the method of implementation and the results may differ. For example, the theme “Spring Landscape” can be drawn by each child according to their own imagination.
2. Transformational tasks (creative transformation). In these tasks, a child transforms one object into another image and represents it in a new form. For example: “Turn a simple circle into different objects.”
3. Fantasy-based tasks. These tasks are based on fairy tales, imagination, or fantastic plots. For example: “Draw a city in the sky” or “A magical tree.”
4. Problem-based open tasks. In these tasks, children must find new solutions in a problem situation. For example: “If there are no paints, how can we create a picture?”
5. Integrated tasks. One theme is connected with several types of activity. For example, listening to a fairy tale and then drawing its main character (speech development + visual activity).

The advantages of the open-ended task method in preschool education include the following:

1. It creates an environment of free thinking – the child is not afraid of making mistakes and can express ideas freely.
2. It supports individuality – even with the same task, the results differ from child to child.
3. It increases creative motivation – the child works with an inner desire of “I can create too.”

4. It develops components of creative thinking in an integrated way – originality, flexibility, and reflection develop simultaneously.

5. It aligns the educational process with the competency-based approach – the child learns to manage the process rather than only focusing on the final result.

To effectively implement the open-ended task method in visual activity lessons, the following methodological algorithm is recommended:

Stage 1: Motivational introduction. The educator creates a situational narrative, asks an engaging question, or uses visual materials to inspire children. For example: “Imagine that we have gone to a magical forest...”

Stage 2: Formulating the open task. The task should be clear but flexible. For example: “Draw the most interesting place in the magical forest.”

Stage 3: Choice and planning. Children are given the opportunity to choose colors, materials, and techniques. The educator may ask guiding questions such as: “Which colors would suit it best?” or “Which method do you like?”

Stage 4: Creative execution. Children work independently. The educator does not interfere but guides the process with supportive prompts such as: “What other detail could be added?” or “Could it be done in another way?”

Stage 5: Reflection and presentation. Each child presents their work and briefly explains it: “What did I draw?”, “Why did I choose this idea?”, “What other possibilities could there be?”

Below, Table 1 presents examples of open-ended tasks suitable for visual activity lessons.

Table 1

Examples of Open-Ended Tasks Suitable for Visual Activity Lessons

No.	Task Title	Task Description	Expected Outcome (Developed Skill)
1	“Multiple Images from One Shape”	“Draw five different pictures from a circle.”	Development of originality and associative thinking
2	“An Unusual House”	“Draw any house you like, but make it unusual and interesting.”	Development of flexibility and idea generation

3	“Magic Tree”	“Draw not an ordinary tree, but a magical one.”	Development of imagination and elaboration
4	“Two Seasons in One Picture”	“Show two different seasons in a single picture.”	Development of compositional thinking and creative solutions
5	“Drawing through Music”	“Listen to music and draw whatever colors and shapes come to your mind.”	Development of emotional perception and figurative thinking

When evaluating the results of open-ended creative tasks, it is recommended not to limit the assessment to traditional criteria such as “beautiful–not beautiful.” Instead, the evaluation should rely on indicators of creative thinking, including: originality (Is there a new or unique idea?); flexibility (Are there different variants or approaches?); elaboration (Is the image enriched with details?); independence (Was the task completed independently?); reflection (Can the child explain their work?).

The method of open-ended creative tasks is an effective pedagogical approach that enhances creativity in the process of teaching visual activities in preschool educational institutions. Through this method, children not only acquire visual skills but also consistently develop key components of creative thinking such as generating new ideas, making choices, solving problem situations, and explaining their own work.

CONCLUSION

The preschool period is an important stage in which children’s imagination, figurative thinking, and creative abilities develop intensively. Therefore, the development of creative thinking in preschool educational institutions is considered one of the key directions of the pedagogical process. The results of the study indicate that organizing visual activity lessons based on a creative approach, applying open-ended creative tasks, and creating a supportive environment that allows children freedom of choice and opportunities for creative activity effectively contribute to the development of their creative thinking potential. Furthermore, when the components of creative thinking—such as originality, flexibility, fluency of ideas, elaboration, and reflection—are systematically developed within the process of visual activities, children’s independent thinking, creative initiative, and

ability to find unconventional solutions in problem situations are formed. The educator’s role as a facilitator, consideration of children’s individual characteristics, and the organization of activities based on open-ended creative tasks further enhance the effectiveness of creative development.

Thus, the use of the open-ended creative task method in visual activity processes within preschool educational institutions serves as an effective pedagogical tool for developing children’s creative thinking. This approach plays a significant role in shaping their creative thinking, independent decision-making abilities, and personal initiative.

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