

IO3

PARENTS AND CARERS FOCUS GROUPS' SYNTHESIS REPORT



Introduction

The role of parents and carers in the life of their children is of great importance, and especially with families having been through the covid-19 confinement and homeschooling period, the challenge of their well-being¹ but also their children's, is deemed to be an issue to be explored. Creativity in this respect has been proven to be a tool for preventing mental health issues² by having this healing effect.

In the framework of the third Intellectual output of the arted project **“Audiovisual Guide for Parents and Carers”**, national focus groups of art educators, trainers, parents and carers took place with the aim to identify perceptions of families around creativity and how they embed creativity in their lives with their children. These focus groups took place in the UK, Greece, Germany, Austria, Iceland and Italy.

Within this workshop, parents experienced a creative intervention exercise from the facilitators of the focus group to have an embodied creativity perception and they then reflected on how that felt and whether it would be something to do with their children at home or outdoors. Videos of the activities that took place in respective countries, can be found on our website at <https://www.arted-eu.org/> under resources for parents and carers.

¹ Armstrong V.G. Ross, J., Art boxes supporting parents and infants to share creative interactions at home: an art-based response to improve well-being during COVID-19 restrictions. Public Health, Volume 193, April 2021, Pages 109-112

² Crawford, P. and Crawford, J.O., 2021. Cabin fever: Surviving lockdown in the coronavirus pandemic. Emerald Group Publishing.

Discussion on Creativity and its everyday life applications

These focus groups had structured questions co-decided by all partners, to extract concrete comparative conclusions from all countries. These questions were developed as follows:

What is creativity for you?

Parents and carers' views on creativity varied from country to country, however there were many common aspects:

Parents and carers link creativity with basic **human nature and positive mental health**. According to parents and carers in the UK, creativity gives “*time and space to breathe*”, time for “*self-expression and offers holistic development and mindfulness*” and broadens oneself.

It is also implied that **cognitive competencies are linked to creativity**, including “*solving problems*” to help others and “*creating meaningful new ideas*”. “*I feel creative when a new idea comes in my head, and takes me away*”, says Irene from Greece; ‘*it's everybody jumping into their ability*’ mentions Cait from the UK.

Parents agreed that creativity also means **innovation**, that it entails a **novelty** element. This of course implies imagination and fantasy and thinking out of the box. Creativity is free expression (of emotions), finding your “own” personal language. Maybe just a stimulus could trigger creativity, because maybe you ‘cannot create from a void’ (IS).

Are you engaging with your children in creative activities?

Parents/carers like engaging with their children in creative activities when their children are younger, something that decreases as the children get older. There are various activities they undertook with their children, mostly painting or doing crafts together; also playing outside unleashes imagination and creativity. A main comment from parents and carers from almost all countries is that engaging children creatively in everyday housework, which the parents/carers would do anyway, is easy and can trigger creativity especially during cooking! Also a good practice that was mentioned is the orientation of an area in the house where children are allowed to make a mess as long as they tidy up after- messy can be creative.

Barriers for creative engagement:

1. The **limited time of parents**; the **limited time of children** due to homework overload;
2. The **overuse or wrong use of digital media** and tools. TV was interestingly debated since it was seen to act both as a barrier *and* a stimulus for further imagination and creativity;
3. Another note was that **parents sometimes feel un-creative** in comparison to the over-creativity of their children; they **need empowerment**. Maybe also sometimes the school is not creative enough to absorb or cultivate all of the child's creativity.

Are your children engaging creatively in school?

Regarding children engaging in school, we are noticing different levels of creative education practices, varying from primary to secondary schools.

In **primary schools**, teachers have more time and space for creativity, with national curricula allocating and establishing special time for arts and creativity classes (all countries). Teachers make efforts to develop children's cognitive competences through creative applications. For example, they 'use *different apps that can help learning without children realizing that they're learning*' (Germany). However, even creativity is sometimes planned ahead with programming and planning without leaving space for imagination from the children (IS).

In **secondary schools**, parents argue creativity as such is not well embedded in school curricula and that "still the artist is treated as a bit of a specialism" (UK). The school does not value creativity, in fact it limits it very much. Subjects like music or art are left out (IT).

There is, however, consensus among parents on how effective and important creativity is. They mention that more creativity in schools would **prevent school drop-outs** as there are students who haven't "done anything creative in school" and there is no time to "express yourself more". **Creative and artistic time and space even in all-day schools is limited and timed**; this means that there is *not so much time allocated for free expression*. This raises an important **mental health** issue for students who are in a non-creative school environment. Even **bad infrastructure** prevents creativity because the school environment might not be inspiring (IT) (no green spaces, small rooms etc).

They all also underlined that it **depends a lot on the individual teacher's will** to be engaged in creative activities. The teachers *do not value or gratify creativity*, on the contrary they sometimes limit it and reproach children. Parents and carers argue that **teachers should be involved in more creative processes and workshops**, to become more creative thinkers-doers. Actions are individual and not holistic, collective action is required.

Creativity Intervention

At this point facilitators introduced a 15-minute activity, applying creativity/arts education tools from **arted activities** designed by partners designed for children of either primary or secondary education. The methodologies varied from storytelling, creative writing, role playing, jeux dramatiques, creative mapping, EduLARP, body percussion etc. You can find the respective interventions described from the facilitators in their national language on our website <https://www.arted-eu.org/> under resources for parents and carers.

Reflecting on the activity

'What was your impression of this activity? How do you feel now?' were the questions to initiate the parents' reflection on a 15-minute simple creative activity; and here are some striking replies:

"I lost myself in the activity"

"I was just flowing"

"I was surprised in what I was able to produce during that such a short amount of time"

"Creative work helps me to ground and find myself"

"It almost feels like therapy or something"

"I love to draw because I don't have any expectation for my drawings, and I like that"

"When you're supposed to or express these thoughts in pictures or in drawings, I think that's a nice way to take breaks"

"I gave vent to my creativity and had fun"

"This activity greatly helps the development of active listening, beyond creativity and imagination"

"There's a little explorer in each of us"

"I had fun and I laughed a lot. It was very easy and pleasant and I also learned something"

"Creativity is much more than just painting but it has to do also with how people interact"

"I enjoyed it, left me feeling quite intrigued as to what would happen"

Using the activities as a home activity

Parents/carers from all countries were motivated after the exercise to use this at home with their children. There was excitement due to the fact also that these exercises required minimum material, costs and resources. They were happy to comment on variations they could make of the exercise, looking for ways to make this creative routine a ritual!

"It was very easy and 'was flowing'- there is no right or wrong in these exercises"

"I believe that this is quite an exciting thing for children, especially in primary school, because they also get tools and can go on a journey of discovery with the tools."

"It was nice because it's the sort of activity you could do in the car or like that could go on and on. So like when you're on holidays..."

"I just like the complete freedom. It's exactly the same. (...) there's no right and there's no wrong. We're not guiding them down a path. It can be as free as we want it to be. Because it's still got some sort of outcome as it has been a fun activity to do together. And I just like the freedom of it."

Conclusions

Parents and carers in all the workshops of partner countries (UK, Greece, Germany, Austria, Italy, Iceland) were eager to participate and share views on creativity not only for their children but also about themselves.

They have a good perception about creativity classes in their children's schools and how things are working (or not). They're doing their best to be in touch creatively with their children, but their time is limited, or they feel like they are losing their bond with their children as the latter grow older.

Very interesting was the post-activity reflection of parents from all partner-countries, as they realized how easy it was for them to implement such an activity at home with their children with no special resources, how fun and uncomplicated it was, shifting their opinion completely on what creative activities may be and how they felt after having experienced them.