

Creating solutions – Why is it worth discussing this topic?

One day, as a child, Thomas Edison came home from school and handed his mother an envelope. He told her: "My teacher gave it to me and told me to give it to you and you alone." The mother opened the envelope, took out the letter and read it out loud in a broken voice: "Our school is too small for your son and there are no teachers who are good enough to teach him. Please teach him yourself." Edison stayed home and studied under his mother's instructions. Many years later, already as a world-famous inventor, he came to his family home after her death. While putting things in order, he came across this very piece of paper hidden deep in a drawer. To his great surprise, the letter said: "Your son is retarded [mentally ill]. We won't let him in our school again because he's not fit for it." That day, he wrote in his diary: "Thomas Alva Edison was a retarded child who, thanks to his heroic mother, turned out to be the genius of the century."

What should we do so as not to suppress a child's creativity and innovation through judgement and rigid expectations? The psychologist Carol Dweck distinguished two types of people in her research. The first one is people who think that their talents can be developed with the right amount of effort. This is a pro-development approach that gives perspective and self-confidence. It triggers a desire to act, experiment, make mistakes and create something together with others. The second group consists of people who believe that their skills are constant and unchanging. This attitude is called a closed attitude. Such people withdraw into themselves, get easily discouraged, do not want to cooperate in a group, are afraid of comparisons, do not engage in activities for the benefit of others. Research shows that people with a pro-development approach achieve more than those with a closed attitude.

Who are the lucky ones who are not discouraged by failure, who are open to ideas, action and are goal-orientated? The answer is simple. These are people to whom effort is more important than the result and the judgement. To act, to do and to try. Failures do not discourage them but motivate them to continue working. Better students are not a threat but an inspiration. Perseverance in the pursuit of long-term goals contributes to the ultimate success much more than intelligence alone. Dr Dweck cites the example of a school in Chicago where students have to pass a number of courses in order to complete a year, and if they do not complete a course, they receive a "not yet" grade. A failing grade can trigger negative thoughts about oneself: "I'm nothing, I've achieved nothing, I give up, I'm useless, I can't do anything." The "not yet" grade gives positive information, full of hope that the student is on his way to completing the subject in the future – "I already know something, but I still have to work on it". This stimulates creativity and curiosity. It stirs courage, a willingness to come up with one's own ideas, to express one's own independent opinion.

Creative children have a tendency to initiate unusual activities, innovative solutions, they are able to think independently and flexibly. However, they can be hyperactive, sensitive, respond emotionally, and often fail to follow the rules. On the other hand, children, who have no problem passing exams "now", are capable, calm, hardworking and conscientious, able to control their impulses. In order not to clip the wings of the creative children, it is worth helping them by strengthening what they manage to achieve now. Use the green pencil method – underline in green what was good instead of marking the errors in red. If we point our attention to what has not been done correctly, we focus on the failure. The red colour evokes many unpleasant emotions: the sense of shame, of inability, of being imperfect, of fear and of discouragement. The green colour is a symbol of hope that we can do something right, it is an appreciation of success. The children will want to repeat this pleasant experience of success and being noticed, they will be motivated internally. The child will not focus on avoiding mistakes, but on putting the effort into repeating success. It's a dramatic difference in the way of thinking. Such support gives creative children a chance to work on the pro-development approach that Dr. Dweck wrote about. Not yet, but soon. There is always an opportunity to achieve a goal.



| DEAR PARENTS AND GUARDIANS!

The topic of today's class was:

Looking for one's own solutions as an expression of freedom

Suggestions for activity:

- For a week, try to focus on what your child is doing right and emphasise it. Show the child that you can see their successes. Don't stop at things they can improve. After that week, think about whether and how this approach has affected your relationship. We encourage you to maintain this approach and build a better relationship with your child.
- Listen to your child carefully when they want to share an idea with you. Devote time to them, listen and don't clip their wings with negative comments and remarks. Your approach to their ideas today will influence how willing they will be to look for solutions later, even in adult life.
- Allow creativity, "stupid games"; they allow for maintaining flexible thinking and originality. Try, for example, to find as many uses for everyday objects as possible or to create a story out of pictures and words cut out of newspapers.
- Together with your child, point out a problem concerning your everyday life that you can solve together. Let it be something connected with e.g. arranging the space in the house, organising meals. Use creative thinking techniques. Pay attention to the differences in your perception of a problem and emphasise that it can have a positive impact on finding solutions in your conversation with your child. Appreciate the child's suggestions, ask them how they came up with them. Devote time to your child and listen carefully, ask questions. Try to talk about your ideas without imposing them on your child as the right solution. Make sure your child understands and encourage them to ask questions. Decide what you choose together. If you do not agree, you can try two selected solutions (yours and your child's).
- You can try the "Lotus flower" technique, which is a variant of the mind map, allowing you to create multiple solutions to one problem. This method was developed by Yasuno Matsumura. It consists in writing a problem down in a circle in the middle of a sheet of paper and adding possible solutions in circles adjacent to the central one. More circles should be attached to the new ones, containing solutions and ideas similar to the previous ones, which are their result. You will end up with a network containing different solutions and views of the problem. This technique allows new ideas to be generated, especially if you are stuck.

