DEVELOPING CREATIVITY IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN WITH BEHAVIOURAL AND/OR EMOTIONAL DIFFICULTIES: EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS

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Abstract. One of the fundamental goals of education is to recognise a child's creative abilities and to create conditions for acquiring and expanding these competences. The success of education of children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties highly depends on the education system's ability to provide inclusive, high-quality education and services, as well as create an environment that meets the individual needs of each learner. It is relevant to find positive attitudes within the educational community, teachers' willingness to work, and the ways to develop creativity in children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties. This article explores teachers' experiences of creativity development for preschool children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties. The research method employed was semi-structured interviews with eight preschool teachers who have experience working with children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties. The findings of the study have revealed that important factors in the education of children include: a creative teacher, democratic relationships among the participants in the educational process, a safe environment, and motivating the child to be creative; barriers to creativity are related to the child's lack of self-confidence and negative reactions or criticism from adults; creativity of preschool children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties is most stimulated by providing support, respect, encouragement, and privacy; the most frequent ways of fostering creativity in preschool children are through the activities of art, music, dance, drawing, *etc*. The results of the study are important in the context of inclusive education and point to directions for further research on the possibilities of creativity development.

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1. Introduction

Early childhood education is one of the efforts of almost every country's government in promoting, educating, and guiding the early childhood, namely children from birth to the age of 6 years, which are given through educational stimuli that have been designed to help the child's physical and mental growth and development so that children are ready when they are born to enter further education (Suryana et al., 2022). Competence in creativity is now considered essential for individuals to succeed in modern societies and has been highlighted in educational policy agendas around the world. State progress strategy *Lithuania's Vision for the Future "Lithuania 2050"* (Viliūnas, 2024) emphasizes the importance of cultivating creative, open, and responsible personalities with universal abilities and a broad cultural outlook; it aims at promoting societal change by shaping the future generation as creative and open-minded personalities. In the preschool age, creativity is one of the key aspirations

on the path of social progress and development. The Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania (E-seimas.lrs.lt, 1991) (last amended in 2024 (E-seimasx.lrs.lt, 2024)) states that one of the fundamental goals of education is to identify a child's creative abilities and upon this basis to provide the conditions for the acquisition and/or extension of this competence conforming to contemporary culture and the level of technological development. This law further asserts that educating creativity in kindergartens and schools is crucial for ensuring success and establishment of the adult in the labour market and in the rapidly developing world (E-seimas.lrs.lt, 1991; E-seimasx.lrs.lt, 2024). The legal framework of education in Lithuania is oriented towards a democratic and modern perspective of education based on the strengths and abilities of the child, equal rights and opportunities, but in reality the educational system lacks appropriate educational conditions that meet the individual needs of each person. In practice, there is a lack of positive attitudes within the educational community, a lack of willingness on the part of teachers and other staff to work and find opportunities and ways to develop the creativity of children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties.

The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to analyse teachers' experiences on the possibilities for developing creativity in preschool children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties.

Methods: analysis of the scientific literature and documents, systematisation and interpretation, qualitative research (semi-structured interviews), qualitative research (content) analysis.

2. Theoretical background

Creative thinking skills in preschool children are a critical aspect of their development. The rapidly evolving and complex nature of the Industry 5.0 revolution emphasizes the importance of creative thinking as an essential skill that equips individuals for personal and professional success. There are many different definitions of childhood creativity. Humanistic psychologists Maslow (1962) and Rogers et al. (2014) conceptualized creativity as an aspect of self-actualization, viewing it as a higher-order personal need that becomes attainable only after more fundamental needs – physiological, safety, social belonging, and esteem – have been sufficiently met. Maslow (1962) defined self-actualization as the intrinsic drive toward self-fulfilment and the realization of one's full potential. Rogers et al. (2014) similarly argued that creativity arises from the pursuit of self-actualization, which depends on specific personal and environmental conditions. These include an internal locus of evaluation, a sense of personal worth, and freedom of expression, all of which enable the individual to engage authentically and creatively with the world. According to Saleem et al. (2024), one component of creativity is a child's originality, defined as the ability to produce original, unique ideas or solutions, or novel uses for objects. Curiosity and exploration is another component of creativity, defined as a child's ability to seek information by examining objects or situations, or a child's tendency to be curious or amazed and to seek out novel stimuli. Creative thinking affects a child's cognitive development and shapes their personality and independence. Therefore, educators, parents, and the environment must explore ways to stimulate and nurture creative thinking in preschool children. Creative thinking in preschool children is closely intertwined with their imaginative abilities, self-expression, and creativity. Its impact

extends beyond cognitive development, assisting children in overcoming challenges, enhancing self-confidence, and fostering social skills. Furthermore, creative thinking skills can also cultivate a child's critical thinking abilities, pursue personal interests, and establish healthy social relationships (Nurjanah et al., 2024). Creativity and judgment skills enable individuals to view problems from different perspectives, create new products, and make decisions by forming cause-effect relationships (Yildirim & Yilmaz, 2023). Description of Developmental Achievements of Preschool-Age Children (Nsa.smsm.lt, 2024) identifies creativity as one of children's educational competences which is developed by integrating it throughout the entire educational process with the aim of ensuring the child's successful versatile development.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol (United Nations, 2006) and the strategic objectives for implementing equity in education set by the Council of Europe encourage the implementation of inclusive education policies in all countries. The 2021–2030 Education Development Programme (Smsm.lrv.lt, 2020), the Action Plan for the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities for 2021–2023 (E-seimas.lrs.lt, 2020), and other legislation reflect the principles of equal educational opportunities and accessibility of education which promote the integration and inclusion of pupils with behavioural and/or emotional disorders, oblige to adapt the content, methods, and, if needed, the curriculum to each child, and to provide assistance to families. The law amending articles no. 5, 14, 21, 29, 30, 34, and 36 (E-seimasx.lrs.lt, 2024) of the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania no. I-1489 (E-seimas.lrs.lt, 1991) and supplementing it with article no. 45-1 (E-seimasx.lrs.lt, 2024) state that the education system must enable every person to develop their capacities and abilities, receive necessary support, and to succeed in learning, social, cultural and/or other activities.

Behavioural and/or emotional difficulties of a child interfere with their personal development and self-expression but can be successfully resolved by providing the required assistance on time. The Methodological Recommendations for Developing Preschool Education Curricula Lithuania (Monkevičienė et al., 2015) prepared in 2015 by Ministry of Education and Science (Lithuania), state that the creation of a positive school microclimate, teamwork, and cooperation among teachers and other school staff as well as the creation of positive relationships among pupils should be encouraged. The success of the education of children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties or disorders is determined by the readiness of the entire education system to provide inclusive and quality education and services, the creation of conditions in general education that meet the individual needs of each learner, the coordinated support of children and their families, the professionalism of teachers and support specialists, and the positive approach to children with these disorders (Bielskytė-Simanavičienė & Paurienė, 2017). Social and emotional competence at young ages is a factor that has been linked to a variety of positive outcomes including post-secondary achievement, employment attainment and workplace success. On the other hand, deficits in social and emotional development are associated with delinquency, aggression, and substance use. Creativity was associated with emotional awareness, emotional regulation, and emotional intelligence (Saleem et al., 2024). Developing emotional and social competences is like a key to unlocking opportunities for success in learning and participating in social life (Jones et al., 2015). The preschool age is one of the most important stages in developing emotional and

social competences. According to Ayers Denham and Basset (2019), knowledge of emotions is important for understanding ourselves, others, and the world around us. A child who is able to recognise their own and others' emotions will be able to build relationships with other people and adapt to new environments more easily. Emotional competence in social interactions is important for the child's behaviour and the arising feelings. Children who have appropriate conditions for actively using and practicing their creative thinking can strengthen their cognitive skills. These conditions also contribute to the development of children's social skills, such as discovering their emotions and values, thinking, and communicating with others. Thus, different teaching approaches that increase children's motivation and cultural understanding could support creativity (Yildirim & Yilmaz, 2023).

Teachers are confronted daily with many cases of emotional and behavioural difficulties/disorders during the educational process. These difficulties manifest themselves in different ways and make it difficult to adapt to the demands of school life (Gkora & Stathopoulou, 2022). Teachers should consider the strengths and needs of their students when designing lessons. Like their peers, students with emotional and behavioural problems learn best in classrooms characterized by effective instruction and behaviour management routines. As teachers know, students benefit most when academic tasks and instructional strategies are carefully designed to engage them and support their learning, and when expectations and rules are clearly communicated to them. When working with students with emotional disturbance or behavioural problems in the classroom, it is important to remember that when the curriculum and instructional strategies do not capitalize on the child's strengths and address learning needs, frustration may result in acting-out or withdrawn behaviours. Yildirim and Yilmaz's (2023) survey of teachers' and trainee teachers' opinions revealed the importance of a flexible and child-centered structure of the preschool curriculum that allows them to plan education according to children's individual characteristics and gives the child more freedom for creativity. The challenge is to minimize such counterproductive experiences, while simultaneously providing positive learning opportunities (Quinn et al., 2000).

The creative arts can offer children who are at high risk of becoming disaffected a powerful set of tools for creating imaginary contexts that can offer them the opportunity to renegotiate identities and thus re-engage in the educational process. By "becoming other" in their new role as creative artists, children can work with peers and adults to free themselves from the fear of failure and the constraints of their current interactions with the social world (Thompson & Tawell, 2017). According to Hagaman and Casey (2016), children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties are often inquisitive, curious, and creative. Certainly, the teachers are faced with the challenge to find ways to keep children interested or to find the most appropriate methods for absorbing educational materials and activities. It is important to involve educational support professionals, especially psychologists, and the student's parents in helping the teacher. When the educational environment is focused on the student and his or her potential, the achievements and learning outcomes of these children are virtually indistinguishable from those of their typically developing peers. It has been observed that these students can be quite resourceful and creative, and it is important to identify, support and nurture these qualities in a timely manner through the appropriate selection of educational tasks and the encouragement of the development of these skills in non-formal and extracurricular activities.

Most often, solving psychosocial problems in children and adolescents involves a combination of child- and family-centered psychological strategies, including cognitive-behavioural therapy and methods to improve social communication, as well as parenting skills training. These interventions are designed with the understanding that cognitions influence a person's well-being and behaviour. However, this approach is not considered appropriate for everyone, especially for children and adolescents who may have difficulty articulating or expressing their experiences and feelings. For such cases, clinical practice often offers an additional therapy, *i.e.*, art therapy. Therefore, art activities in educational institution can also be used to improve self-esteem and self-awareness, emotional resilience, social skills, and stress reduction in children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties (Bosgraaf et al., 2020). Children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties often express their emotions in socially unacceptable ways, *i.e.*, inappropriate shouting and aggression. These children have more difficulty in understanding, recognising, and managing their emotions. However, properly organized theatrical education creates favourable conditions for children to learn to recognize and understand emotions and to behave appropriately even during the strongest emotional reactions. Artistic activities help children to gain a deeper aesthetic experience and a better sense of the meaning of art for people. Active participation in artistic activities develops students' imagination, deepens their emotions, gives them an insight into the creative process, and allows them to have creative experiences (Brigham et al., 2019). During art classes, children learn to communicate, increase attentiveness, and reduce over-activity and mobility. The therapeutic nature of art encourages the expression of feelings and helps children to feel more confident. Children learn to control their instinctive desires, restrain excessive energy and become aware of themselves in an environment created by adults. The ability to control oneself shapes the child's character traits, which help to protect them from the consequences of inappropriate behaviour (Lubienė, 2014).

The role of the teacher is key to ensuring quality education for pupils. The teacher, in cooperation with parents/guardians, educational support specialists and taking into account the children's special educational needs and the suggestions and recommendations of the school's Child Welfare Committee, individualizes and differentiates education, selects the most appropriate educational methods, techniques and teaching aids and adapts the educational environment (Bielskytė-Simanavičienė & Paurienė, 2017). There are a number of points that preschool teachers should consider to support the creativity of children. Preschool teachers should provide rich materials that mobilize the imagination of children, offer opportunities for children to dream, provide opportunities to express their ideas, appreciate their individuality, and encourage different perspectives. They should encourage children to participate in creative games and care about and value their new products. Moreover, they should appreciate children's creativity and assure them (Dere, 2019). Cameron and Lively (2015) believe that children must not be controlled, punished or instructed because a child who is over-controlled and over-constrained tends to rebel, to lack self-confidence, and to stifle his or her own creativity by dwelling constantly on negative emotions.

Analysis of the scientific literature (Šerkšnienė, 2021; Furnham & Swami, 2018; Bradbury-Jones, 2013; Fosco & Grych, 2012; Jonynienė, 2010; Nasvytienė, 2005; Compas et al., 2004) reveals that there are a number of factors stimulating creativity. For a child to feel good

and develop creativity, the group must have a teacher who has a wide range of knowledge and creative methods and who has most of the traits that lead to creativity. A study of teachers, children, and their parents found that children in classrooms where teachers received higher levels of professional development had higher levels of creativity (Saleem et al., 2024). Other important factors that can foster children's creativity are the democratic relationship between parents and the child, tolerant parenting, and non-exaggerated child care; a safe and appropriate educational environment, enriched with a variety of aids to encourage children to experiment, explore, create, and innovate; and the appropriate choice of educational methods. Concerning the development of intelligence and creativity, Garaigordobil et al. (2022) have underlined the relevant role of children's play in the evolution of thinking that leads to abstraction, as well as in the development of creativity. Developing children's creativity through artistic expression expands their knowledge of the world through the senses, their spoken language, their imagery of the world around them, *etc*. Art develops humanity, perception of beauty, physical and spiritual abilities, ethnic values, helps children to accumulate experience, allows them to experience the joys of creativity, and develops their personalities; artistic creation creates the natural conditions for the child's creativity to unfold. Through the ways and means of artistic expression – word, action, colour, voice intonation, line, shape – the child expresses oneself and represents his/her experience of impressions, experiences, understanding, emotions, and feelings (Monkevičienė et al., 2015, p. 96).

3. Research methodology

To find out the preschool teachers' attitudes about the key possibilities for developing creativity in children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties, a qualitative research methodology has been chosen (Žydžiūnaitė & Sabaliauskas, 2017). The research was based on Maslow's (1962) interpretive paradigm of a holistic approach to creativity, which links creativity to a healthy, self-expressive, whole person. Examples of this personality are secure and happy children who express creativity effortlessly, easily, and playfully. The study was also influenced by Rogers et al. (2014) constructivist approach to creativity, which argues that creativity lies within each of us (Grakauskaitė-Karkockienė, 2002). They are applied to provide an interpretative, holistic view of the analysed situation. The method of semi-structured interviews has been chosen. The research allows answering the question what are the possibilities for developing creativity in preschool children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties. In planning the research questions, three themes have been identified; they corresponded to: 1) factors influencing the development of creativity in children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties; 2) activities and methods that foster creativity in children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties; and 3) the possibilities that could improve the development of creativity in children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties. The research was carried out between February and May, 2024. A purposive criterion-based sampling of participants has been used. The main criterion was preschool teachers who have experience working with children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties.

3.1. Research participants

Eight preschool education teachers working in Klaipėda, Lithuania, agreed to participate in the research. Demographic characteristics of the participants: all were women, with an average age of 55 years and an average teaching experience of 29 years. Of these, six were teacher-methodologists and two were teacher-experts.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

Participants were sent a consent form containing all the information on the organisation of the research, including the purpose, the process, confidentiality, duration, *etc*. Once the signed consent forms were received, the timing of the research was agreed upon with each participant. The interviews took place in person, in direct contact between the participant and the researcher. Each interview lasted between 40 and 55 minutes. During the semi-structured interview, the questions were clearly formulated, the order of questions was followed, and respondents were informed that the data obtained would be confidential and that their personal data would not be disclosed, as all respondents would be assigned codes. The research data were analysed using qualitative content analysis. Each transcribed text was read by both researchers. The text was read to get the big picture, highlighting key sentences or parts of sentences that are relevant to the topic under analysis. The text was divided into units of meaning represented by phrases, sentences, and keywords directly related to the phenomenon under study. These units of meaning were grouped together to form a holistic structure, and a review of the structure was carried out to ensure that all transformed units of meaning had been covered, or that more general entities cover the composite units of meaning. If any questions arose, further revisions were made with the research participants. Once the research report was prepared, the respondents were offered access to it. No comments were made by the respondents. When presenting the findings of the research, the statements were coded (*e.g.*, M1, M2, *etc*.). The research was conducted according to ethical research principles: good will, respect for the dignity of the individual, the right to receive accurate information, and fairness, obtaining consent from the research participants (Gaižauskaitė & Valavičienė, 2016; Žydžiūnaitė & Sabaliauskas, 2017). As Hennink et al. (2011) state, ethical principles in qualitative research remain the same as in other types of research, but qualitative research can be more challenging. Qualitative research creates a relationship of trust between the interviewer and the informant. It is necessary to observe ethical principles not only during the interview, but also after the interview, because the identity of the informant cannot be disclosed even after the interview, and the results of the research must be presented correctly (Gaižauskaitė & Valavičienė, 2016).

4. Findings

Studies show that active participation in artistic activities develops pupils' imagination, deepens emotions, allows them to experience the creative process "from the inside", have creative experiences, perceive themselves in an environment created by adults, become more self-confident, *etc*. (Brigham et al., 2019; Šerkšnienė, 2021). The data obtained from the teachers' interviews, reflecting the factors that positively influence the development of creativity in preschool children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Factors positively influencing the development of creativity in preschool children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties (source: created by authors)

Category	Subcategory	Statements
Factors that have a positive influence	Support and respect for the child	"The main thing is to support and respect the child <...>" (M2); "<...> supporting the child <...>" (M3); "<...> it is support for the child that influences his/her creativity and, undoubtedly, respect for the child <...>" (M5); "It is strong support <...>" (M6); "Support from adults and respect for the child <...>" (M8).
	Encouraging the child	"<...> the main point is to encourage the child <...>" (M1); "<...> encouragement from teachers in real-life situations <...>" (M4); "<...> if encouraged by parents, teachers <...>" (M7).
	Providing privacy	"<...> when we give children the privacy to be creative <...>" (M1); "<...> this often happens when we give the child privacy <...>" (M4).
	A creative teacher	"<...> a creative teacher has a positive influence <...>" (M5).
	Rich, respectful, and safe environment	"<...> also, a rich, respectful, and safe environment has an impact <...>" (M8);
	Teacher-parent cooperation	"<...> the cooperation among the teacher and the parents has an impact <...>" (M7).
	Family	"Family has a huge influence <...>" (M6).

In the course of the analysis of the obtained data (Table 1), seven sub-categories were identified: M2, M3, M5, M6, and M8 consider that the factors that have a positive influence on the development of creativity in preschool children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties are support and respect for the child; M1, M4, and M7 consider it to be the encouragement of the child; M1 and M4 consider it to be the provision of privacy; M5 stated that a creative teacher is very important for the development of creativity; M6 considered that the family and its members are very influential; M7 identified the cooperation between the teacher and the parents; M8 stated that a rich, respectful, and safe environment is an important factor. According to Bielskytė-Simanavičienė and Paurienė (2017), the success of the education of children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties or disorders is not only determined by the teacher's readiness to provide quality education but also by the creation of the appropriate conditions for the needs of each individual learner and by a positive attitude towards children with these disorders.

The research also aimed to find out which factors are perceived by respondents as having negative influence on the development of creativity in preschool children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties. As is well known (Hagaman & Casey, 2016) that children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties are often inquisitive, curious, quite inventive, and creative, it is important for the teacher to notice, support, and nurture these qualities of children in a timely manner through appropriate selection of educational tasks, extra attention, encouragement of the development of these abilities, and avoiding criticism, tension, *etc*. The data from teacher interviews on the factors that have a negative impact are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Factors negatively influencing the development of creativity in preschool children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties (source: created by authors)

Category	Subcategory	Statements
Factors that have a negative influence	Teacher's reaction and criticism	"<...> the main one is the teacher's reaction and criticism to the child's performed activity <...>" (M1); "<...> teacher's criticism <...> reaction <...>" (M4); "<...> criticism <...>" (M5); "<...> criticising the child's works and negative reaction <...>" (M6); "<...> critical and negatively reacting <...>" (M7); "<...> criticism of the child, negative reactions towards the child <...>" (M8).
	Disrespectful behaviour of a teacher	"<...> disrespectful behaviour from the teacher <...>" (M2); "<...> the child is sad because the teacher is being disrespectful <...>" (M3).
	Psychological tension	"<...> creates psychological tension <...>" (M4); "<...> psychological tension <...>" (M5); "<...> the teacher creates psychological tension <...>" (M7); "<...> psychological tension <...>" (M8).
	Fear	"<...> I would distinguish fear <...>" (M1); "<...> it's a child's fear of the teacher <...>" (M2); "<...> fear caused by the teacher <...>" (M4).
	Anxiety	"<...> child's anxiety <...>" (M6); "<...> I would distinguish anxiety <...>" (M7); "<...> this may be triggered by anxiety <...>" (M8).
	Ignoring the child	"<...> when the teacher ignores the child <...>" (M3).
	Lack of appropriate environment	"<...> it's also the lack of appropriate environment <...>" (M5).
	Lack of attention	"<...> lack of attention <...>" (M4).

The research participants pointed out that the factors that have a negative impact on the development of creativity in preschool children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties are the following: teacher's reaction and criticism, teacher's disrespectful behaviour, psychological tension, fear, anxiety, ignoring the child, lack of appropriate environment, lack of attention. M1, M4, M5, M6, M7, M8 considered that the reaction and criticism of the teacher have a negative influence; M2 and M3 stated that it is the teacher's disrespectful behaviour; M4, M5, M7, and M8 noted psychological tension; M1, M2, and M4 identified fear; M6, M7, and M8 noted anxiety; M3 stated that one of the factors is ignoring the child; M5 stated that the lack of an appropriate environment; and M4 noted lack of attention. According to some authors (Quinn et al., 2000), when working with students with emotional disturbance or behavioural problems in the classroom, it is a challenge for teacher to minimize counterproductive experiences, while simultaneously providing positive learning opportunities.

The analysis of the activities that develop creativity in preschool children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties and structuring of the data helped to identify the following activities (Table 3).

Table 3. Educational activities that are employed to develop creativity in preschool children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties (source: created by authors)

Category	Subcategory	Statements
Educational activities	Musical activities	"<…> when children play or make music <…>" (M1); "Individual music activities with the child <…>" (M4); "Musical activities are very important <…>" (M6); "Child's ability to participate in music classes. <…>" (M7); "<…> also, musical activities <…>" (M8).
	Moulding and applique	"<…> moulding and applique are important for creativity <…>" (M2); "<…> teachers involve children in moulding and applique activities <…>" (M5).
	Games	"<…> developed through games <…>" (M3); "<…> by using games and play situations <…>" (M8).
	Reading books	"Reading books with children <…>" (M1); "<…> reading books <…>" (M4); "Reading books in a quiet environment <…>" (M5); "<…> reading books is a wonderful activity <…>" (M7).
	Nature experiments	"<…> teachers organise different nature experiments, engage children, and develop their creativity <…>" (M6); "<…> nature experiments are important, as they greatly develop children's creativity <…>" (M2).

Insights from the theoretical scientific studies have shown that musical activities and reading books have a major impact on creativity development of these children (Quinn et al., 2000; Ayers Denham & Basset, 2019). Participants of this research also identified the following activities to foster creativity in preschool children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties: musical activities (M1, M4, M6, M7, M8), moulding and applique (M2, M5), games (M8), reading books (M1, M4, M5, M7), and nature experiments (M2, M6).

The methods that research participants found the most suitable for developing creativity in children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties were: drawing with traditional tools (M1, M4, M6, M7, M8), drawing with digital tools (M2, M5), role-playing games (M3, M8), art therapy (M1, M2, M5, M7), shadow theatre (M6), dance (M4) (see Table 4).

Table 4. Methods for developing creativity in preschool children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties (source: created by authors)

Category	Subcategory	Statements
Methods for developing creativity	Drawing by traditional means	"A very suitable method for these children is drawing with pencil, crayons, watercolour <…>" (M1); "Drawing with watercolour <…>" (M4); "Drawing with brush, charcoal <…>" (M6); "Child's drawing with pencil, we use ink <…>" (M7); "<…> drawing with various traditional means <…>" (M8).
	Drawing by digital means	"<…> when searching for effective and newer methods, we use *Adobe Captivate* application for oil painting <…>" (M2); "<…> we draw and paint using *Adobe Photoshop* application <…>" (M5).

End of Table 4

	Role-playing games	"<...> fairy tales are most suitable for these children, they like to act them out and recite poems <...> " (M3); "Children love to act, to identify with characters, so we use role-playing games <...>" (M8).
	Art therapy	"<...> we offer the children modelling figures and sponges, which we use in our art therapy method <...>" (M1); "During the activities, we apply art therapy, where various art materials are used: paints, finger paints, pencils, crayons, clay, paper of various sizes, *etc.*" (M2); "A very suitable method is art therapy (gouache, watercolour, pastels, pencils) <...>" (M5); "<...> art therapy <...>" (M7).
	Shadow theatre	"<...> we use shadow theatre <...>" (M6).
	Dance	"<...> like dancing, so we dance <...>" (M4).

According to Kriukelienė (2009), artistic activities in educational activities are distinguished by the fact that they help to solve many problems that are particularly difficult to talk about, without compulsion: artistic creativity helps to disclose emotional problems that have been hidden for many years, often unconsciously and unnamed by the child, with ease and without fear. Drawing reveals inner conflicts, feelings and memories that have been buried in the sub-consciousness. Creating in a group develops the ability of communication and cooperation and encourages the development of imagination.

The teachers who took part in the research offered suggestions for improving creativity development in preschool children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties:

- To cooperate with the child's family ("<...> actively cooperate with the family, its members, and people that are important to the child <...>" (M1); "<...> constantly cooperate with the child's parents <...>" (M3); "<...> actively involve parents <...>" (M5));
- To build a positive relationship with the child ("<...> to build a strong relationship with the child in which friendship and trust are the most important <...>" (M2); "<...> to create safe and trusting relationship with the child <...>" (M4); "<...> to talk to a child <...>" (M6));
- To observe the child and his/her condition ("<...> respond immediately when noticing changes in the child's behaviour <...>" (M7));
- To educate teachers, parents ("<...> first of all, we should start with the education of teachers and parents <...>" (M5));
- To create a safe environment ("First, it is necessary to ensure a safe environment <...>" (M3)).

5. Discussion and conclusions

The study conducted by some authors (Buzaitytė-Kašalynienė et al., 2018), investigating the causes of behavioural and/or emotional disorders, found that a child is exposed to other micro-social environments while growing up, for example, when a child starts attending an educational institution, he/she is exposed to the rules, requirements, and opinions of others and learns to cope with a new environment that influences the child's behaviour and emotions. Research by Thompson and Tawell (2017) shows that in the creative process, children

can collaborate with peers and adults, freeing themselves from the constraints of the social world. According to Hagaman and Casey (2016), children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties are inquisitive, curious, and creative, while teachers are challenged to find ways to engage children or find the most appropriate ways to absorb the educational material. The authors' research revealed a similar opinion among teachers as the results of the study by Ališauskas and Šimkienė (2013), which showed that very important factors in the education of children with behavioural and/or emotional problems are the following: a rich, respectful and safe environment and cooperation between teachers and parents, a creative teacher, *etc*.

The study shows that the teachers' experience of using the methods to develop creativity in preschool children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties has a positive impact not only on the children's personality traits (courage, open-mindedness, *etc*.) but also on their ability to discover new and original things. The analysis of the data from the qualitative research highlighted key findings:

- Factors that encourage children to develop creativity include a creative teacher, democratic relations among participants in the educational process, a safe environment, and the child's motivation for creative activities;
- Obstacles to children's creativity are related to the child's lack of self-confidence and negative reactions and criticism from adults. The development of creativity in preschool children is necessary because of their special developmental period, their curiosity and inquisitiveness; it can be developed through role-playing games, artistic activities such as drawing, music, dance, *etc*. Artistic activities promote preschoolers' joy of discovery, build self-esteem, and develop social and emotional intelligence;
- Teachers find that the creativity of preschool children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties is most stimulated by support and respect, encouragement and privacy, and is not stimulated by teacher criticism, disrespectful behaviour, and psychological tension. Teachers recognize the benefits of educational activities for these children and most often develop children's creativity through art, music, dance, drawing, *etc*.

5.1. Research limitations and possibilities for continuation

The limitations of qualitative research are due to the inherent subjectivity of qualitative research. Although the design and conduct of this research followed the requirements of this type of research, the generalizability and applicability of the research findings are limited in part by the small number of participants. Qualitative research findings are unique and specific to the individuals involved. However, the views expressed by the research participants suggest that such research is relevant and needs to be continued, including surveys of the views of educational support professionals and parents, and a greater focus on creativity in inclusive education for preschool children with behavioural and/or emotional difficulties. More extensive and comprehensive research could be used to formulate and propose recommendations for educators.

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