

## Creativity in everyday life

*Creatividad en la vida cotidiana*

*Criatividade na vida cotidiana*

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**ABSTRACT:** The growing aging population addresses the need to question which aspects foster good aging. The development of creativity has been considered one of the aspects that can help the elderly adapt to the changes old age can bring. For this reason, strategies and techniques are necessary to develop creative ability in old age. It is essential to work with the socially negative stereotypes on aging and to implement positive practices that promote successful aging. Then, we present a theoretical journey on the concept of creativity and related research, plus specific tools to increase and improve the creative abilities, which were used in workshops for elderly people.

**Keywords:** Creativity; Positive Psychology; Aging; Intervention.

**RESUMEN:** *El creciente envejecimiento poblacional plantea la necesidad de interrogarse respecto a cuáles son los aspectos que favorecen un buen envejecer. El desarrollo de la creatividad ha sido considerado como uno de ellos, ya que puede facilitar la adaptación a los cambios que la vejez puede traer aparejados. Por tal motivo, son necesarias estrategias y técnicas que permitan el desarrollo de dicha habilidad creativa durante la vejez. Resulta indispensable trabajar con los estereotipos negativos que circulan socialmente referidos al envejecimiento e implementar prácticas positivas que propicien un envejecimiento exitoso. A continuación se presenta un recorrido teórico sobre el concepto de creatividad e investigaciones afines, sumado a herramientas específicas para incrementar y mejorar las capacidades creativas, que fueron utilizadas en talleres para adultos mayores.*

**Palabras Clave:** *Creatividad; Psicología positiva; Vejez; Intervención.*

**RESUMO:** *O crescente envelhecimento da população aumenta a necessidade de se indagar sobre que aspectos favorecem uma boa idade. O desenvolvimento da criatividade tem sido considerado como um deles, no sentido de facilitar a adaptação às alterações que a velhice pode trazer a uma pessoa. Portanto, são estratégias e técnicas necessárias que permitem o desenvolvimento de tal capacidade criativa na velhice. É essencial trabalhar com os estereótipos negativos que circulam socialmente relativos ao envelhecimento e se implementarem práticas positivas que promovam o envelhecimento bem-sucedido. Em seguida, é apresentado um curso teórico sobre o conceito de criatividade, e pesquisa relacionada mais especificamente no sentido de aumentar e melhorar as habilidades criativas, que são utilizadas em oficinas como ferramentas aos idosos.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Criatividade; Psicologia positiva; Idade avançada; Intervenção.*

## Introduction

This article gives a brief introduction to creativity and, above all, the possible ways of intervention to strengthen creativity with the elderly. To do so, we define the concept of creativity emphasizing its importance for old age.

Then we present a methodological proposal that provides techniques and strategies for conducting workshops to exercise creativity in seniors.

Finally, we comment on the impact the implementation and evaluation techniques had in concrete experiences where this methodology was used.

## Fundamentals and theoretical questions

Creativity is considered a fundamental aspect of human cognition, different from intelligence but closely related to it. Although it is often associated with art, it is also necessary to solve everyday tasks.

Psychologists, educators, neuroscientists, sociologists, economists and academics of all kinds (Artola, Barraca, Mosteiro, Ancillo, Poveda, & Sánchez, 2012) have studied this construct.

Nevertheless, after decades of analysis, there is still much debate about how to measure it, use it and develop it. From an operational point of view, creativity is defined as the ability to find a new and effective solution to a problem or situation (Runco, 2007).

Stenberg (2012) defines creativity as a habit that can be learned through exercise, whereas Csikszentmihalyi (1998) understands creativity as the result of the interaction of personality traits, cognitive resources, skills, motivation, past experience and the context or situation in which this process occurs.

In this sense, creativity is highlighted as one of the human potential that can still be developed in old age and bring benefits to the quality of life. This topic is always of great interest for psychology; its study can be widely applied in various fields and to society in general (Runco, 2007). However, although many aspects of creativity have been widely debated for over a century, much is still unknown about this complex construct.

An important line of research on creativity has been the study of the characteristics and properties of divergent thinking; the latter understood as the several response options that one may have considering that they may all be right depending on the perspective from which you see them (Hocevar, 1980). This kind of thinking meets the criteria of originality, inventiveness and flexibility (Lovecky, 1994).

People who stand out for this ability generally have high performance and are innovative in their work. Besides, they are deeply involved in the activities, showing they can be independent and able to self-regulate their own work.

They are able to find original solutions to problems and to perceive different sides involved in a situation. Subjects with high capacity for divergent thinking can make great contributions to the social environment, as they have a high level of self-confidence, enjoy challenges and are able to involve and motivate others, while serving as an example to their peers in overcoming stereotypes and prejudices to find different solutions to problems (Artola, Barraca, Mosteiro, Ancillo, Poveda, & Sánchez, 2012).

### **The importance of working on creativity with elderly people**

Studies related to creativity have focused mainly on children and adolescents, while the evaluation of this cognitive ability in adults and, even more, in senior citizens is scarce in scientific literature.

In turn, the research related to the creative process in adults, focuses on the point of view of the inverted "U", which states that creativity tends to increase in people up to the age of 20 or 30 and then declines generating a decrease in creative skills.

Alpaugh, & Birren (1975) suggest that creativity goes down in individuals over age 50 and this may be due to a reduction in skills when developing divergent thought tasks as well as to a decrease in motivation to do more complex work.

However, other authors (Bronte, 1997; Ros, 2004) believe that creativity can be maintained, especially in older healthy adults, and can even increase over the years. Those who agree with this statement assume that the experience gathered is fundamental to be creative, and that there are qualitative properties in the creative process that differentiate young children from adults.

Also, Artola, Sanchez, Barraca, Ancillo, Mosteiro, and Poveda (2013) argue that creativity is a skill that all people possess, that persists and even increases during adulthood, being a skill increasingly in demand by society.

Moreover, advances in the field of neuroscience have shown brain plasticity during aging, which allows the elderly to develop new learning from certain neuronal changes, thus preventing deterioration (Rowe, & Kahn, 1997).

This new perspective has enabled the creation of spaces that allow cognitive stimulation not only to enhance a creative process but also to encourage greater adaptation to their environment (Carrascal, & Solera, 2014).

Iborra (2013) emphasizes the importance for seniors to get involved in creative activities as a way to promote their well-being and their ability to cope with various situations that may occur during old age.

Likewise, Fisher, & Spech (1999) claim that creative activity contributes to successful aging fostering a sense of competence, purpose and growth. To stimulate creativity through various techniques favors an increase in an active state of mind, the flow of ideas, feelings and emotions (Sbrocca, & Moore, 2007).

Based on research findings and according to the perspective of creativity as a cognitive ability of all human beings, which can be increased and which has a significant adaptive value, specific work proposals are tailored for older people, in order to promote cognitive functioning and largely prevent its damage (Carrascal, & Solera, 2014).

We will now examine the methodology of an intervention workshop that aims to provide tools for the developing of skills and creative abilities.

### **Way of implementation and proposed activities**

The implementation of the workshop *Daily Life Creativity* mainly aims to encourage the development of creative skills and their application in daily life activities. The specific objectives aim to promote socialization among peers and in an intergenerational way, to encourage and promote creativity using various tools, to create opportunities to rethink oneself from a fresh perspective, to increase flexibility in routines rejecting stereotyped behaviors, to promote creative leisure activities, and finally, to improve one's own capacity to adapt in everyday life situations.

Workshop experiences were carried out under the collaboration agreement between UPAMI (University for Integrated Senior Citizens) and the School of Psychology of the National University of Mar del Plata.

The proposal consists of a weekly meeting of two hours for 4 months and groups are formed with a minimum of 10 people and a maximum of 25. As regards the dynamics, the objective is to create a space of collaboration, dialog and reflection in which not only can the elderly enhance their own creative resources but also share experiences and emotions about this stage of life. The activities are aimed at developing creative skills, while promoting socialization.

The first meetings consist mainly of psychoeducational tasks and the development of theoretical concepts. Work objectives, formal guidelines and a proposed dynamics are presented. The task is to explain the meaning of creativity and show its importance, as well as to work with myths about who can be creative and present the possibilities for improvement through continuous exercise. The resources used for this purpose consist of newspaper articles, videos, cover notes and virtual conferences, among others.

Next, we will provide details on the topics addressed during the course and the description of the activities carried out.

### ***Divergent Thinking***

The aim of the activities that work the divergent thinking ability is for senior citizens to implement various cognitive strategies in order to produce multiple possible responses to different situations, with no single correct answer. The tasks proposed were:

#### *1. Working with hypothetical sentences*

Imaginary situations are presented to each participant individually. The task is to list all the consequences that might occur if that situation were real. For example, "Make a list of the possible consequences for what you consider would happen "if the wind stopped blowing". The proposal is for participants to generate ideas without questioning the situation, and to write down their associations freely. At the same time, the work aims to encourage and exercise areas of thought that are not usually active.

## 2. *Combination of names, letters and objects*

The objective of this activity is to ask participants to make a list of 5 names. Then, with the first letter of each name, they must write five objects, one for each name. Finally they must choose two objects and combine them into a new fictional situation based on their characteristics. A possible example would be to combine "pen and armchair", to generate a paper armchair where it is possible to write with a pen; or "dog and kettle "generating a "barking kettle".

## 3. *Search for alternative uses for objects*

Traditional everyday objects are presented to the participants for them to make a list of possible alternative uses for the objects, other than those for which they were originally created. It is also possible to complicate the task by letting them combine two or more objects to brainstorm an unusual use.

## 4. *Paper Towers*

Participants are guided to build a paper tower as high as possible using an A4 sheet of paper as homework; at the next meeting, productions are compared.

### ***Allowing flexibility in thinking patterns***

The tasks to work this topic consist in giving participants the opportunities to deconstruct routines as well as stereotyped and automatic behaviors that allow individuals to perceive and build an original way of thinking about objects or everyday situations.

### 1. *Describe and Discover*

The aim of this activity is to ask participants to retell or describe an ordinary day in their life. Once completed, the participants are asked to pay attention to daily routines and to make a list of possible variations; for example, taking an alternative means of transport, walking on different streets than the usual ones to get to the same place, among others. They must select an alternative and put it into practice during the "Describing" week, writing the way they have carried out this change in their routine and recording what they have "Discovered" about it.

### 2. *Role playing*

The role-playing technique consists of making the participants choose a celebrity as a reference, then pick a particular day and behave as if they were that character throughout the day. The intention is to break their own behavior patterns by taking others, answering questions such as:

What would that person do in this situation?

What would the character have for breakfast that is different from mine?

What activities does the character do?

The intention is to encourage the interruption of behavior patterns by exercising new areas and neuronal connection, changing the ways of thinking and acting. It is interesting to record the changes implemented and learn through them.

### ***Perception and Attention***

The purpose of these activities is to develop perception and attention in order to sharpen the mechanisms related to creativity by focusing, discriminating and actively searching for stimuli. Some of these activities are:



### 1. *Ink Blots*

Participants are shown inkblots and asked to state their first impression finding different shapes; they may be "Rorschach Test" symmetrical or asymmetrical.

The work can be done individually using crayons as an option. The same image can be shown to two different participants with the purpose of sharing the differences found, and to observe the peculiarities of the subjective perceptual process.

### 2. *Working with pictures*

This activity requires the teacher's prior work, who will take pictures of small parts of objects, signs, plants, or any other element found in the workshop area and nearby. The task is to give the photographs to the participants and ask them to find the elements that are part of the images, and once identified, to try to perceive the object in detail including all possible senses.

At the end of the activity, participants are asked to return to the group and describe what they have found, how the search was, and what happened to them during the activity.

This practice usually includes recording the environment in a new way with magnified attention, leading to discover elements or aspects not seen before.

### 3. *Gestalt*

The task is to introduce participants to images through a slide show or in print for discussion and debate. Following the laws of Gestalt, pictures with image/background contrast in different levels and with movement will be chosen.

## **Games**

Games are fundamental activities for the development of creativity. The games allow individuals to immerse their thought in different realities, following rules and logic different from those used in everyday life. The activities include:

### *1. "The games of my life"*

The aim is to ask participants to make a list and retell stories about the games that they played in their childhood.

This activity promotes recreational identification of possible alternatives to share among participants, and promotes the strengthening of personal identity.

### *2. Guessing characters (Who am I?)*

Each player is given a card with a name of a famous person. He/she should stick the card on his/her forehead without seeing it. The chosen player should ask questions to his/her peers, whose only answer may be "yes" or "no", in an attempt to guess the character he/she is. The same game has multiple variants, that can be adapted to the characteristics of each group.

## **Creative Imagination**

Working with creative imaginative processes involves generating activities in which participants must imagine various situations, create and develop their inventiveness through various stimuli given. The selected task to develop this ability has been:

### *1. Incomplete Tales*

Participants are provided with a sheet of paper with printed stories without an end. It is convenient to supply traditional and well-known stories. Then, everyone is asked to read the selected fragment and invent a different ending.

## *Emotions*

Emotions strongly influence the creative process, which can favor or inhibit it. It is important to achieve a non-critical relaxed environment to expand the creative possibilities. One possible activity to work with emotions and relaxation is:

### *1. Mandalas*

Participants are presented with a brief introduction to the origin of 'mandala' and the benefits of working with them.

They will then be given mandala drawings in black and white and painting materials (color pencils, markers etc.). While participants are working with the mandala drawings, different kinds of music and aromas are provided.

Next, in the observation stage, participants check if there were changes in the production, which stimuli helped them concentrate or relax more and which ones generated or not pleasant emotions.

## *Creative Synthesis*

Creative synthesis activity is performed through the analysis of both television and print advertisements. The intention is to examine patterns of thought used by the ads creators, creative combinations that have been made and the advertiser's process in the creation of innovative products. To make the task more complex, groups of three or four may be asked to make up an advertisement taking into account the creative elements detected in the examples.

Finally, it is important to notice that while some activities are performed within the workshop, others can be done as homework, which helps the acquisition and transfer of skills exercised at the workshop to specific aspects of everyday life.

## Evaluation and benefits found

The evaluation of the intervention has been carried out by two methods; by the teachers during the process and by the students at the end of the workshop with a final evaluation of the workshop.

The material for each meeting was planned from the evaluation that took place during the process. As regards this, each activity was prepared to comply with the objectives of the workshop but mainly to evaluate the impact of each task in the group.

This impact was shown in the level of participation that generated in the elderly, the enthusiasm aroused, the possibility of articulating the exercise with practical aspects of everyday life, and also in using existing creative processes together with innovative ways in which they could develop creative skills on their own.

At times, taking into account some indicators, the subsequent meetings were planned following the same guideline or making modifications according to what was observed.

Consequently, the workshop did not start from a series of pre-planned activities but it emerged from the interplay between the workshop objectives and needs, motivations and characteristics of the group that took part in this experiment. This is relevant to the extent that the proposed workshop aims to highlight the uniqueness of each person and each group, strengthening the existing skills and capabilities in them.

With regard to the assessment by the elderly, it is usually done in the last meeting. Participants highlighted the fulfillment of the objectives of the workshop.

They mentioned being enthusiastic as regards the activities and being able to participate in groups. In addition, the elderly highlighted the development of creative ways they could apply in their daily lives.

They also appreciated the atmosphere of each meeting, the opportunity to express themselves and participate in a relaxed environment that helped them create bonds and exchange experiences. Finally, they emphasized the heterogeneity of the group participants as an element that contributed to the interest.

Furthermore, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire at the beginning and at the end of the workshop. This survey shows that the participants came to the first meeting with different expectations -such as developing and channeling their creativity, learning how to be creative, and even being part of an environment for a better understanding of oneself- which were fulfilled.

After the meetings were carried out, we implemented an informal survey in which we assessed if those expectations and objectives were achieved or not, and if the elderly had noticed any changes.

Among the most frequent answers, we found that positive changes had been made regarding the senior's own perception of creativity.

According to the participants, the workshop enabled them to acquire tools and skills to connect in a new and different way with several areas of their daily life.

Throughout the meetings seniors felt they were more alert, they could change the way they perceived their environment and develop skills for active observation. At the same time, they emphasized they have broadened their capability to make patterns and routines more flexible, and they have felt encouraged to make changes, enjoying the new experience.

At the end of the workshop, members participated in a meeting with seniors from other workshops which was held by the same collaborative agreement (UPAMI), which let them share their experience.

The preparation of this meeting and its development also worked as a forum for evaluating the experience. For this meeting, the members actively organized and compiled a PowerPoint presentation in which they shared their experience in the workshop. In the presentation, the seniors showed their experience in a "creative" way, using the various tools developed in the course.

## Conclusions

In this article, we have dealt with creativity and its importance in working with seniors. Topics and specific activities have been described to develop creative skills.

In the experiments carried out, the abilities that the elderly already had were highlighted and validated in order to encourage the creation of other creative strategies. Likewise, other aspects closely related to creativity were addressed, such as trust, flexibility, inventiveness, autonomy and self-efficacy; all aspects considered relevant in working with seniors. All participants evaluated the workshop experience positively.

We would like to emphasize the importance of having an environment in which seniors can actively participate to develop and increase their skills and resources.

Creativity emerges as one of the resources to be developed. It can be considered a fundamental aspect for solving everyday situations, facilitating the adaptation of the elderly to their own changes in this vital stage.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the possibility of systematizing this experience was sought as a communication practice needed by those who work in gerontology, in order to spread the enthusiasm for reflection on our work, communicate proposals and improve their professional work by the exchange of experiences.

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