
THE EFFECT OF EASTER CUSTOMS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVE ABILITIES TO CHILDREN

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Abstract

The aim of the present-day society is to have wise and creative individuals available. One only becomes creative when working with joy. Since immemorial times, people have always been producing customary objects for their religious feasts, whether Christmas decorations or Easter eggs, with pleasure. In order to be able to create valuable products for the society, one needs to be skilful in handicraft and to know how to approach various activities in a creative manner. One of the ways of how to achieve this is to start developing children in this direction through diverse work activities as soon as when they attend elementary schools. To develop creativity in children, work activities offer a very good opportunity as children gain, in a natural way, not only practical skills but also theoretical knowledge they will apply later in their lives and future occupations. The article is focused on the effect of Easter on the development of creative abilities in children.

Keywords: Easter, creativity, project

1. Introduction

In the introductory part of the study, we will make an attempt to look at traditional Easter from the religious point of view, history and folk customs. For all people, Easter is the holiday of the spring season, but for believers it has yet another, very important meaning – celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. And it is just from the two meanings of Easter holidays above that the customs and traditions come out.

1.1. Christian Catholic Easter

Easter is a movable feast. It falls on the Sunday after the first vernal full moon, and the tradition reaches far back to the pre-Christian period. In the pagan era, the vernal equinox, the passing away of winter, the awakening of nature and

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the regaining of strength by people and their animals, were celebrated. Later, the religion associated the feast with commemoration of the martyr's death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ (Figure 1 [1]).

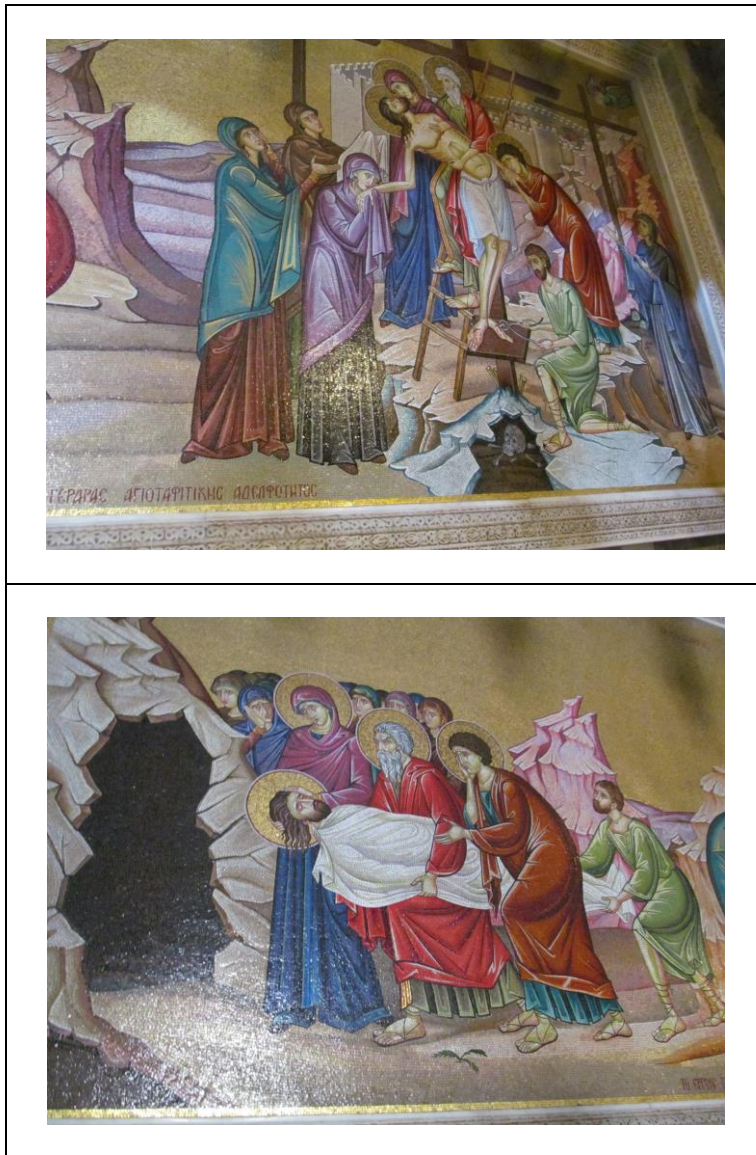


Figure 1. Wall painting in Bethlehem – the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The pre-Easter time starts with Ash Wednesday 40 days before Easter. It is the period of Lent, the time of moderate lifetime and of understanding that the value of the human life consists in the word ‘to be’ rather than in ‘to possess’. Each Sunday of this period has its own name according to the custom held that day. But the naming of the Sundays varies from region to region, so that

somewhere they call it 'Pučálka' (From roasted peas), elsewhere 'Pytlová' (Sack Sunday) or 'Liščí' (Fox Sunday). Black Sunday follows, on which people used to wear black clothes, then 'Kýchavá' (Sneezing Sunday) or 'Družebná' (Courting Sunday) when boys were courting girls. The fifth Sunday was called 'Passion Sunday', on which the rule of Morana, the goddess of winter, was ending and the reign of Vesna, the goddess of spring, came. On Passion Sunday, it was the custom in the country to carry a straw figure representing Morana out of the village. The last Lent Sunday - Palm Sunday - was under the sign of the blessing of catkins, willow sticks, and Lenten fares. Catkins then were hung in rooms or put behind paintings on walls to protect the home against lightning strokes and to bring luck during the whole year. Ritual pastries were being baked, large hanging straw decorations called 'muší ráje' were being produced, and diligent Easter egg painters started their work. Before Easter proper, after the last Lent Sunday, the Passion or Holy Week starts. Passion, being a Latin word originally, means suffering. The individual days in this week have their own names. Blue Monday and Grey Tuesday are the ordinary weekdays. Ugly Wednesday depicts the unpleasant activity associated with this day - homes being tidied diligently by housewives. It is the day when Jesus Christ was betrayed by Judas. You should not frown this day, or otherwise you would frown the whole year on. Maundy Thursday is the day of the Last Supper during which Jesus parted with the apostles. People should eat green meals (spinach, lettuce or cabbage) on Maundy Thursday to keep their vigour and health throughout the year. It is on this day that bells ring for the last time to stay silent until Sunday, 'flying off to Rome'. The ringing of the bells is replaced by the noise of clappers with which boys are 'chasing Judas'.

Good Friday, the day of Crucifixion of Jesus Christ, was, as the liturgies hold it, the day of deep sorrow. Good Friday is considered to be a magic day and, for believers, the most relevant Easter day. In the past, people even believed that the Earth opened this day to yield its treasures. In the regions of ponds, water sprites were said to go out and ride horses. Good Friday was the day of fasting; people did not eat meat, did not cook and even fire was put out in stoves. White Saturday brings the consecration of fire. Fires were lit and blessed before Masses in front of churches. From them, Easter candles were lit and their light was brought to the church. This night, those who decided to become Christians as late as in their adulthood were mostly baptized. Bread was baked and Easter stuffing with nettles and smoked meat was cooked. The fasting period ends this day and meat can be consumed.

Easter Sunday - the Easter dishes - lamb cake, Easter cake, eggs, bread, and wine - are blessed on this holiday. The whole Christian world rejoices in their redemption and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Ceremonial Masses are served in all churches.

Easter Monday - especially the youth look forward to Easter or Red Monday, for it belongs to 'pomlázka' - a bunch of freshly cut and braided willow twigs, decorated with ribbons, being the pride and joy of all boys and men. Our ancestors believed that a rejuvenation power was hidden in the twigs.

The girl who wanted to be 'rejuvenated' must have let herself whipped on Easter Monday by boys and paid for it with painted eggs. The eggs were also used to express mutual fondness. This custom has survived in the Czech countries [1]. Also, pastries became part of all festive occasions in human life, whether as decoration, meal, or hampered up for guests to take home. They were used as gifts and as a manifestation of appreciation and esteem. The Easter cake - the symbol of the sun - was and still is among the traditional Easter pastries. The real lamb roasted in the Middle Ages was replaced by a lamb baked of sponge mixture, batter, or dough. Easter carols were connected with gingerbreads of the typical shapes - little birds, lambs, eggs, or hearts. 'Judas' pastries from thin rolls had the forms of spirals, twists, or eights. They were baked on Green Thursday to symbolize the rope on which Judas hung himself.

In the folk interpretation, the egg had the ability to bring spring, harvest, and fertility. It always was the symbol of eternal life and re-birth. The spring ceremonies, therefore, never made and will never make do without eggs. Their miraculous power was multiplied by painting, especially with red colour.

The name 'kraslice' comes from the old-Slav word 'krasnyj' (red). The red colour was favoured most for being the colour of love and blood, joy and life, and for symbolizing safety and protection. Favoured also were the natural tones from yellow to brown - the symbol of the sun, and fine tones of green or even black. Blue colour was not used as it was the colour of grief, death, and illness. Eggs were painted both solid and blown out. Blown out eggs were called 'vejdomky' or 'pouky' in Bohemia and 'výfuky' in Moravia. Various techniques were used for decoration - wax batiking, etching, plastic - relief decoration, batiking with plants, decorating with glued-on straw, and many others [2].

Children liked painted eggs and also used them in various entertaining games. 'Egg cutting' was a popular game. One boy held an egg and the other tried to cut a hole in it with a coin thrown at it. If he succeeded, he won the egg. Similar was the 'tapping' game, in which the opponents tapped strongly against each other's eggs. Another game was 'rolling' played by younger boys. It had different rules, with the aim to roll one's egg as far as possible without cracking it and what can we know how many games boys did once invent [3].

There have been numerous manners and customs preserved. Often, we have no explanations for them anymore but still have been keeping them up to the present day.

1.2. Jewish Easter

At Easter time, Jews commemorate the liberation and exodus of Israelites from their enslavement in Egypt. The Lord God liberated the nation by making ten mighty plagues. On the last of them, all who were first-born died in Egypt, with only those who turned under the protection of God remaining alive. As a sign for this protection, all Jewish families had to slaughter lambs and smear the doorframes of their homes with their blood to be protected against and missed by destruction. This is where the Jewish name of Easter - Pesach (Passover) - has its origin as God, in His last plague, passed over the houses of Israelites. When

Israelites hurried from Egypt, they could not wait for bread dough to rise. So, they only baked unleavened flatbreads (matzah), which is why Easter is also called the Feast of Unleavened Bread [3, p. 134].

The holiday begins with a ceremonial feast called 'Seder', which means order. A rich table is set at home in the evening. There is a candle lit on the table together with a plate with three matzahs on it to commemorate the three forefathers of Israel: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. On the table cloth, there are five dishes commemorating events from the slavery - salted water, bitter herbs, roasted lamb, and four cups. Each of the cups has its own specific name. The first one: 'We were taken out'; the second one: 'We were saved'; the third one: 'We were redeemed'; and the fourth one: 'We were taken as a nation'. During the feast, the father reads narrations of the exodus from Egypt.

On this day, age-long customs are held, such as the searching for matzah. The father takes the middle one of the three matzahs, lifting it up and breaking it to get two halves. He takes one on the halves, wraps it in a white scarf, and hides it. Then he claps his hands three times and invites children to look for the hidden half of the matzah. The child who finds it will receive a gift [1, p. 95].

1.3. Christian Orthodox Easter

Orthodox Easter also is the feast of joy and happiness, being also associated with a number of different traditions, especially the colouring and decoration of eggs ('písanka'). Friends then give the eggs to each other in commemoration of resurrection, wishing well and kissing each other three times [1, p. 104].

Orthodox Easter is a holiday celebrated only by few believers in the Czech Republic, predominantly by the members of foreign nationalities, such as Greeks, Russians, Ukrainians, and Romanians. The date of Greek Orthodox Easter is based on the Julian calendar, which means that it need not fall into the same period as Catholic Easter where the date is governed by the Gregorian calendar. In Greece, Easter is celebrated as a traditional family feast spent together by the relatives. During the week before Easter, the Christ's Sepulchre is decorated. On Good Friday, Christ's body covered with flowers is carried out of churches symbolically and the mourning procession goes through the whole town or village. Orthodox Easter culminates by a night service on Holy Saturday. Exactly at Saturday midnight, Eastern Orthodox priests, dressed in festive Easter vestments, announce 'Christós Anésti' (Christ is Risen) to the believers. At the end of the divine service, believers light up candles among each other to take the light home from the church. After that, the celebration of Christ's resurrection starts immediately, with a festive atmosphere everywhere, with bells ringing and even fireworks being blasted in some towns. The dish taken that night is magiritsa soup made from lamb offal, tsourekia – sweet bread with red-dyed eggs baked in, and other culinary specialities. Red eggs are handed round as gifts to celebrate the message that Christ has risen. Relatives rap against each other's egg tops. Those whose eggs remain uncracked can make

a wish and will be in luck all year long. Then, on Sunday, the wide families meet in the country on every garden or yard to take part in the traditional roasting of lambs and kids. All people are merry, drinking tsipouro, ouzo and retsina, music plays, roasted meat smells lovely, and a rich table is prepared with tasty meals and drinks to relish the moments of peace within the family. They are just these moments that create and strengthen the traditional Greek family togetherness, so needed at present in particular.

A little different is the celebration of Orthodox Easter in Ukraine and Russia. Festive dish called paska is baked on Holy Saturday. Sweetish dough similar to that used at Christmas is baked in a special baking tin. People cook on Sunday morning and then go to the church, taking a special basket containing paska, a candle, a drop of wine, eggs, some butter and curd cheese with them. In the church, they have the basket with the dishes blessed. After that, people return home and families meet at a festive dinner. They continue celebrating until Tuesday, cooking rolls ('holubce') and making potato salad. Godfathers go round their godchildren, presenting them with eggs and small gifts.

Romanians celebrate the 'Paste'. As in Greece, the Orthodox people in Romania observe a long period of fasting and, similarly as in Ukraine, they keep the habit of baking Paska. On Good Friday, they start preparing painted eggs, and some households also fumigate their houses to keep various insects away. At the evening service, the believers worship the cross with a figure of Christ crucified. The Easter services are held until next Tuesday. In Romania, there is the tradition of rapping eggs, and it is said that those who do not meet on Easter to rap their eggs will not reunite after death.

2. Religions in the Czech Republic

Czech Republic has one of the least religious populations in the world, with almost 35% of all people being of no denomination and only 13% avowing various churches and religious societies (Table 1). As follows from Table 1 Christianity is the most widespread religion in the Czech Republic, with the largest group being the Roman-Catholic Church. The Protestant Churches, such as the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren and the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, are represented to a lesser extent.

Table 1. Religions in the Czech Republic (2011) (source: Wikipedia).

Religion	(%)
Not declared	44.7
Atheists	34.5
Roman-Catholic	10.4
Other religion	9.1
Evangelic (Protestant)	0.5
Hussite	0.4
Orthodox	0.2
Jehovah's Witnesses	0.1
Silesian Evangelic Church	0.1

When looking into a more distant past, i.e. to the period before the communist era, the Catholic and Evangelic churches were supported by a greater group of believers. Contrary to the other European countries, no other religion is represented in the Czech Republic, manifested in the religious cultural monuments – Christian churches. Neither Islamic nor Buddhist architecture is represented in our country, unlike Romania, for instance [4]. A little ethnic group of Jews amounting to about 3 thousand members can also be found in the territory of the Czech Republic. There are a couple of synagogues here, of which, that of Pilsen is the greatest one (Figure 2).



Figure 2. The Great Synagogue in Pilsen – the second biggest in Europe and the third biggest worldwide.

3. Easter religious traditions

The Czech religious traditions include, in addition to services, also feasts, ‘pomlázka’, and egg painting. Children learn the Easter folk customs, traditions and associated trades through live exhibitions, videos and films, and visits to regional museums and different workshops. Many children learn the folk customs right in their families, which fact makes it possible for them to try many practical activities, such as creation of decorations, weaving, baking, straw works, etc. [5]. The Easter folk traditions preserved numerous manners and customs associated with the celebrations of the awakening of nature in spring – rejuvenation through willow twigs (‘pomlázka’), dousing with water, egg painting, grain sowing, baking of sweet lamb cake, and many other.

3.1. Easter in awareness of Czech children

At present, all children know Easter feasts, having associated them with egg painting, dousing with water, and with whipping a bunch of twigs. But do children know the history of Easter and its original meaning? No research has been made in the Czech Republic yet. The authors dealing with the effect of traditions on creativity have always concentrated on Christmas [6]. There are not many researchers examining the effect of Easter on creative abilities, one of them being Vlad Petre Glăveanu, who describes the connections of folk creativity and Easter in his doctoral thesis [7].

The aim of our research was to find out whether children are aware of the meaning of Christian Easter, which Easter customs are held, whether they decorate their homes with their parents on Easter and whether they keep the Easter folk customs and traditions.

The research sample comprised 100 children aged 13 and 14. Within the research, the respondents were asked six questions concerning Easter and Easter customs. The questions are listed below:

1. Why is Easter celebrated?
2. Can you name the Passion Week days?
3. Do you know the traditions for the individual Passion Week days?
4. Can you name at least five Easter folk customs?
5. Do you paint eggs at home?
6. Do you also produce Easter decorations at your school?

3.2. Research results

87 respondents were knowledgeable about the origin of the Christian Easter holidays - Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. 6 respondents only knew about the original pagan custom of spring celebration. 5 children mentioned the celebration of Easter by different religions.

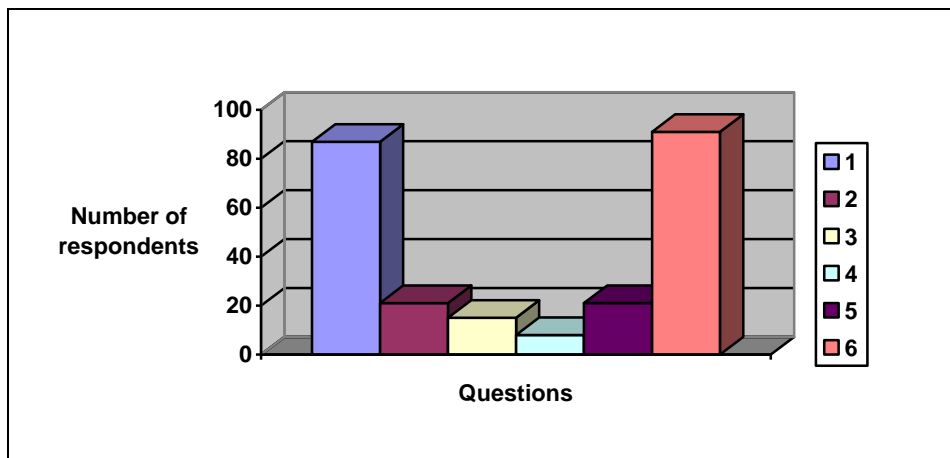


Figure 3. Research results.

Only 21 children from believing families were able to name the Passion Week days. Most children could not name the days, some of them recalled them after being remembered, but they did never meet or could not remember the names of Blue Monday, Grey Tuesday, and Ugly Wednesday.

Very few respondents only knew the folk customs of the individual days of the Passion Week; they mostly knew the traditional egg painting, 'pomlázka', sponge dough lamb baking, i.e. the Easter traditions. Children from Christian families were able to explain the customs associated with Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, White Saturday, Easter Sunday, and Easter Monday.

The pleasant fact was that all children knew the Easter traditions and that they devoted their school time on Easter to produce various Easter decorations. The results are presented in Figure 3.

4. The effect of Easter on the development of creative abilities in children

To be effective, every concept of creative teaching should follow from the knowledge of Psychology and Pedagogy as the issue of creative teaching is associated with personality development during ontogenesis and with teaching methods. It represents a set of theoretical and empirical knowledge in the fields of goals, methods and tools that aim at pupils' creativity development [8].

Every concept of creative teaching follows from the results of research works focused on the level of creative abilities. There were many research works carried out to establish the level of creative abilities in elementary school children, whether using Urban's figural test of creative thinking or Torrance's figural test of creative thinking [9; 10; A. Kárpáti and V. Gyebnár, *A TCT/DP Rajzos kreatív gondolkodás teszt*, Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, Pedagógia-pszichológia tanszék, 1994, http://edutech.elte.hu/karpati/downloads/rajziteszt/TCT/Cikk_TCT-rol.pdf]. The research works focused on the connection of creativity and psychomotor skills are associated mostly with a certain trade. In the Czech Republic, the connection of creativity and skills in the school environment is the subject being focused on by the Faculty of Education of the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen under the management of J. Honzíková [9].

Easter holidays, the feast of spring, are a great opportunity for developing creative abilities in pupils by means of folk customs - the egg painting tradition. If a teacher wants to develop creative abilities by means of Easter customs, he/she choose the teaching project on the subject of Easter. Pupils will not only develop their creative abilities and skills but will also learn Easter in the religious point of view. When planning the project, the teacher follows from the educational objectives set by Kratwohl [9, p. 76]: objective adoption and perception – the pupil perceives the importance of the Easter customs; response – the pupil responds willingly and looks forward to performing the Easter creative activities; value appreciation – the pupil recognizes the importance of the Easter feasts; value integration – for the pupil, Easter becomes a meaningful

event; value implementation into the character structure of a personality – the pupil is convinced of the religious meaning of Easter.

When implementing the project, teachers proceed in several steps, namely planning, implementation, and evaluation [11]. At first, they plan specific objectives:

- learn to know periods in terms of folk traditions and customs;
- learn Easter in terms of religion;
- learn the custom objects of the Easter period;
- produce objects typical for this period, using different techniques, traditional and non-traditional materials;
- understand the activity as an opportunity for self-fulfilment, self-improvement, and to develop creative thinking;
- lead to positive relation to work and to responsibility for the quality of mutual work results;
- lead pupils to acquisition of working skills and habits, to work organization and planning, to the application of suitable tools and aids, and to observe the safe work rules.

They determine the teaching aims:

- develop the key competences – work in groups, motivate to learning, develop cooperation, teach pupils to perceive and think independently;
- induce interest in folk customs and traditions;
- realize the development and importance of religions;
- motivate pupils to work;
- know how to work with literature and magazines (publications chosen by the teacher).

They determine the expected outputs:

- use simple procedures to produce Easter eggs,
- use the elements of folk traditions in creative activities with different materials,
- select suitable working aids corresponding to the applied technique,
- keep the workplace tidy and observe the rules of work hygiene and safety.

4.1. Painted eggs – the symbols of spring

The teacher demonstrates the technique for the pupils but leaves its application to them. The result then can be for instance eggs dyed in onion, eggs decorated with rubber bands, with the marbling technique, with sugar icing.

The positive aspects of project teaching can be summarized in the following points:

- It brings teachers and pupils close together when solving common tasks.
- Pupils learn to take responsibility for planning classes and results, developing thus assessment thinking.
- It teaches creation and encourages intuition and imagination.
- It develops communication skills.

- It reduces fears of failure.
- It increases pupils' self-confidence.

5. Conclusions

In classes, we understand the development of creative abilities predominantly as a formative effect on pupils. Pupils' creative abilities are influenced by the purposeful action of the teacher, who himself/herself should be creative [12]. At the same time, a creative teacher is assumed not to work with the traditional authoritative methods but to search for and discover creative procedures and techniques. Such a teacher encourages learning initiatives in pupils, provides pupils with opportunities of creative work, and does not demand any clearly correct solution of problems; on the contrary, he/she encourages pupils to develop alternative solutions, supports them in getting over frustration and failure, does not suppress independence and humour in pupils, respects their questions, frees them of the threat of examination and marking, and demonstrates his/her confidence in pupils. A significant role in creative teaching is played by motivation, which acts as an activating factor that supports pupils' endeavour and willingness to develop their creative abilities. Easter and Christmas are highly motivating for joyful and creative work.

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