

FOSTERING CREATIVITY IN CHILDREN LEARNING: TEACHERS AS CATALYSTS OF INNOVATION

Nkemdirim Olubunmi ADEDINA Ph.D

Department of Theatre Arts,
Lagos State University of Education, Oto/ Ijanikin
adedinano@lasued.edu.ng

Abstract

The global environment is dramatically changing especially with the increasing demands and torrents of changes in the 21st Century. There is a need to specifically nurture Children's creativity as a process to redirect and prepare them for the ever-evolving society. This paper will explore the role of creativity if adopted, to articulate ideas, discover techniques, and expound perspectives to reconstruct innovative and adaptive behaviours. Subsequently, this study sees the need to equip teachers with the necessary relevant skills with millennium learners. This is against the backdrop that teachers need to constantly train and retrain, and be open and receptive to new methods of teaching that will enhance their classroom enterprise. The study targets learners in Lagos State Public Primary Schools within the age range of 9-13, an age where educational institutions are expected to provide them with rich learning experiences. Teachers were exposed to training sessions where they were re-introduced to interventions and innovations to encourage creative teaching. Emphasis shifted from teacher to pupil-based learning while unfolding channels to encourage active participation and involvement of pupils in classroom sessions. The outcome of the study was measured by observation method to assess the level of improvement in creative learning after the research. The study established that creativity can be inspired in learners if teachers are exposed to the process of motivating and stimulating them. This is the skill required for critical thinking and problem-solving techniques which are major features of today's society.

Key Words: Creativity, Catalyst, Strategy, Teachers, Training,

Introduction

No matter how focused the learning objectives of any teaching are, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that it is, first of all, a human enterprise. Therefore, this demands a level of sensitivity to the way learners are responding and engaging within the context. Creativity in children is a fascinating realm where the blossoming of imagination and originality takes preeminence. When exploring creativity in the context of children's endeavours, a fundamental distinction often arises between the creative process and the product. This duality encapsulates the dynamic interplay between the journey of ideation, exploration, and expression on one hand, and the tangible outcome or creation on the other. Understanding this nuanced relationship explains how children perceive, engage with and manifest their imaginative capacities. In this exploration, the study will delve into the rich tapestry of creativity in children, examining the intricate balance between the unfolding process of creative thinking and the tangible output.

Emphasis has shifted from pure play to teacher intervention and taking over responsibility for creativity. It is now for the teacher to take charge and provide significant content and artistic form to teaching and learning. Runco (2004), is of the view that creativity is a characteristic of personality ability and traits. It is therefore essential for teachers to attend refreshers courses, seminars, trainings and workshops to constantly keep them at par with colleagues in other places. Lagos State Government has been actively involved in this practice of organizing such for teachers in the state periodically. Teachers are saddled with the huge task of affecting learner's behaviors and attitudes to achieve changes in academic achievement. To attain this height of responsibility, there is the need to equip teachers with the right machinery and methodologies.

Apart from the home, the school is another point where children's creative tendencies are learned properly. This is because education is a major channel to foster creativity in children. Teachers and caregivers need to provide optimal conditions for developing creativity in children. As a mainstream for creativity, education must integrate approaches that will define the concept of creativity and unravel its complexities and constraints. This will involve a process that will lead to enhanced productivity in classroom activities. Teachers are to aid children to engage in daily forms of creative output that will lead to innovative interactions during

learning and teaching.

Due to the ever changing society, curriculum planners have also been evolving new approaches to teaching and learning at various stages to meet with new demands and challenges of the profession. Teachers need to look back at the teaching and learning that has occurred, and reconstruct, re-enact, and/or recapture the events, the emotions, and the accomplishments. Creativity in education is therefore a major concern in children's education. Teachers and parents alike are involved in nurturing creativity in the lives of children both formal and informal.

In most cases, creativity is essentially an inherent ability to stir up latent talents and inspire actions. Creativity is more of a state of critical thinking to nurture children during learning process to give them abilities to address every situation that they may not have prepared for. Children's backgrounds play a major role in determining the extent to which they can creatively reason. In the 21st century, creativity is associated with the capacity to create new and dynamic solutions to complex situations. Therefore children need to develop problem-solving skills and creative solutions to face the increasing challenges in the world around them (Kupers, Lehmann - Wermser, Geert, 2018).

This study will address creativity as a viable tool for children's learning and the role of teachers in ensuring productive learning. The process of creativity is a chain of events that are interconnected and interrelated to the child within his environment. To properly situate the creative process in children's learning, the teacher is involved in the interplay and mechanisms to foster learning and make it less cumbersome. Scholars like, Oluchukwu, 2000, Ajao, 2001 and Ajayi, 2001, have identified variables that affect pupils' performance to include environment, teachers' competence, school management, infrastructure, learners' attitude, economic status and teaching methods. Obviously, teachers are yet to discover the link between creativity in education and classroom teaching. They are yet to come to terms with its implementation in the classroom for capacity development, exploration and expression of innate creative abilities.

Theoretical Framework

Componential Model Theory: Amabile (1983)

The Componential Model Theory was propounded by Teresa Amabile in the 80's. The Componential Model of Creativity seeks to explain how creativity functions by breaking it down into specific components which is vital to this study. The Theory emphasizes domain-relevant skills, tasks, motivation and creativity-relevant processes as crucial components in the creativity process... This theory dwells more on creativity as a characteristic of a product or response from creativity as a personal ability. This theory identifies three key components that contribute to the creative process as discussed below:

- i. **Domain-Relevant Skills:** This refers to knowledge and expertise in a specific field. Creative individuals typically possess a strong foundation in the areas they are working on.
- ii. **Task Motivation:** This involves intrinsic motivation and passion for the work itself. Emphasis is on the importance of personal interest and the enjoyment derived from the creative process.
- iii. **Creativity-Relevant Processes:** This encompasses cognitive processes like divergent thinking, analogical reasoning, and associative thinking. It explains how individuals approach problems, generate ideas, and make connections between seemingly unrelated concepts.

The componential Model emphasizes the dynamic interaction of these components in influencing creativity across various domains and contexts. It provides a framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of creativity and the factors that contribute to creative outcomes.

This study agrees with this theory, by acknowledging that it is the responsibility of teachers and parents alike to help children learn creative ways to solve problems. This could be achieved by introducing innovative strategies, allowing them the freedom to make mistakes and respecting their opinions. To solve a problem creatively, children need to be open to various perspectives and provide solutions. Children who choose from a variety of options to solve problems display abilities to be more creative than those who have all the decisions made for them. A product becomes creative when experts in the field affirm its creativity. Here, creativity is measured from the perspective of a finished product or creative response. This means that students should be active participants for the successful creative learning experiences. The onus rests not only on the teacher alone but also on the students being well incorporated and integrated into learning communities.

What is Creativity?

“Creativity is fundamental to human thought development and survival” (Kaplan, 2019, 145.) This has been a basis for constant debate among scholars. In the theory of multiple intelligence by Gardner (1995, 2011), 'creativity' is an important aspect of different kinds of intelligence, such as musical intelligence, (the capacity to produce and make meaning of sound patterns) bodily kinesthetic intelligence, (the ability to use one's own body to create products or solve problems). Sternberg (1985), identifies three components of intelligence to be, analytical, creative and practical. A further observation is made by Sternberg and Lubert, (1992), that what distinguishes creativity in individuals is that they are “a mixture of skills, personality traits and the willingness to take risks with an intuition for good ideas; the strategy of “buying low and selling high”. From both perspectives, creativity is seen as either stable or personal trait dependent on situations, are an offshoot of intelligence which is developed over a period.

Though slow, the acknowledgment of arts in the school system is progressive and positively inclined especially when compared with other subject areas in the curriculum. This does not take away from the fact that education is still in dire need of creative development not only for the teaching of arts but also for creative learning. Kim (2011), raises concern for a decrease in creativity thinking and suggests a need for creativity in education. Some scholars consider creativity as intelligence. Sternberg and Grigorenko (2003), emphasize the nature of creativity and its importance in intelligence. Each person has slightly different optimum learning styles based on their intuitive connections to the nine Intelligences. Educators are now urged to touch on as many of the Intelligences as possible within lessons. It is considered an enabling factor for teachers to rate and diagnose of lack of readiness in learning, (Muhaad, 2019).

More creative theorists have constantly advocated for creative teaching, cutting across all levels of education. For instance, Griffiths (2014) calls for the inclusion and integration of creativity in teacher education as a measure to add value to the good life of learners. Even though creative teachers will not necessarily produce creative students pedagogically, creative teachers will make space for creative students. Despite these agitations, “almost no schools teach for creativity or train teachers to teach for creativity”. (Kaplan, 2019). Teachers must develop the necessary skills, needed to shape and inspire learners to advance creative activities and critical thinking. Training of teachers in creativity would influence constructive classroom learning.

The creative play is a one of the major channel for exploring creative process. Children have freedom to engage in role play and imaginative play. Creative play is a serious business for children and is often based on spontaneity and imagination. It creates avenue to nourish and develop their mental and physical health. Through play, children are able to cope with feelings and find room for self-expression while exercising their powers of choice and decision making to address situations. In the creative play process, teachers are expected to stimulate play and not to control it. Availability of needed materials serves as aids and makes the process exciting and vital for creative play. Learners can bring together their various personal experiences from activities they have engaged in, share and incorporate them during play with others outside this experience.

Creativity in children's learning involves fostering their ability to think imaginatively, explore ideas, and express themselves uniquely. It encourages problem-solving, critical thinking and innovation as essential skills for navigating the complexities of the world. In exploring creativity for children, there is a need to first make them identify creativity in almost all aspects of life. Children have the capacity to amaze their teachers through unusual responses and queries. This is a normal phenomenon because creativity breaks rules and norms of normal behaviours and set rules of classroom learning. Perfection is not the ultimate goal of creativity for children rather it is a channel rewarding outputs.

Methodology

This study explored available avenues for workshops and training sessions to adequately equip teachers on the field to inspire creativity as a process in teaching and learning. Two teachers in a select Public Primary school were randomly assigned classrooms based on their subject area, English Language. The teachers were engaged in two workshop sessions where they were exposed to different creative approaches to teaching. Sessions encompass the improvisation process, storytelling, and fictional narratives. The English teachers prepared lesson notes drawn from the scheme of work. Such as, phonics, vocabulary, poetry, tenses, and sentence construction, composition and comprehension passages. The four weeks experiment involved 127 learners, 56 males and 71 females drawn from two arms of Basic 5 (A&B) from ages 9-13.

The scheme of work was evenly distributed across the eight hours of weekly teaching. Each lesson starts with a warm-up action which is usually related to the day's topic. Warm-up activities could be a song, game, short story, or mental exercise like a quiz or game. This process of warming up prepares the learners physically and mentally for the lesson. The teacher uses action pictures and real objects to re-create situations surrounding the lessons. The pupils on the other hand acted out improvised stories and were engaged in healthy competition in the classroom. The teaching and learning sessions in the target group were lively, enthusiastic, fun, and entertaining.

Finding and Discussions

This section will analyze and discuss discoveries made during the study.

Exposition to Problem

This stage is the first stage where problems are introduced to children for the first time. In an English language class, where a comprehension passage was read, identification of new words was core, especially words they are not familiar with. This was done before reading the passage at all. At this initial stage, children's attention is at its peak because they need concentration to be able to pick out new words from the passage. It is only when this is achieved that the nucleus of lesson is identified and progress can be made to the next stage. After the reading of the passage, identified new words were written on card boards, turned upside down and children were asked to pick at random. The word on the card board of their choice becomes the creative idea to spur them to think critically by relating the word to the passage and interpreting it by giving it the contextual meaning. This vital step was employed to aid children to identify problems and seek solutions to them. They are open to choices made independently by them, for guides and leads that will propel them to identifying problems. In the same light, they must be free to make mistakes and learn from them.

Response Generation

Children in this instance make attempts to recognize new words, their antonyms, and synonyms if possible. Here, they give their interpretation to new words at first contact and think of the meaning, literally before reading the passage. This serves as the backdrop for them to pick or choose likely ideas from later on. The sensory organs of children must necessarily be stimulated to enhance creativity. Their sensory organs must be put to work while they are guided by the teacher to develop ideas from their environment in a variety of ways

Learning Environment

Every individual is a product of his environment. So also the child cannot live in isolation of his immediate environment. This is where he is fed with ideas through exposure to people, events and places. The first unit of contact for a child is the family. From this micro unit, the child steps to other communities like church, mosque, market, playing ground, other personality traits and characters. Children have opportunity to borrow from other cultures and respect choices other people make. In effect, a child learns from the environment and borrows from his or her experience when there is need for it to recreate from already incubated ideas. This is an essential strategy that makes for diversity and variation of creativity on same identified problem. They are also taught to respect each other's opinions bearing in mind that they hail from different environments. Without this, they would be without clues and direction and this would lead to poor productivity. Children need freedom to help them identify, think and solve problems by observing their environment.

New Discoveries

This is the point at which children have an insight that leads to making discovery and making meaning out of the problem. At this stage, children were allowed to make suggestions as to likely answers to the identified problem. At this brain storming stage, in most cases, learners were encouraged to give answers by expressing their ideas without fear, intimidation or negative response from peers. Teachers have a lot of role to play here to ensure a stable environment by setting agenda, rules and regulation. Teachers also employed the use of visual items like paintings and objects. This is to further prod and push children and serve as guides. At the same time, learners were able to identify objects as suggestive instruments to provide fantastic solutions in time and space. This was done through storytelling, songs, games, poetry, paintings etc.

Facing reality

Here, dramatic play was employed to activate creative abilities. Children were engaged in drama and dramatic activities, like mime, storytelling, imitation and role play to enact the identified problem (s). This approach was particularly effective during the reading of comprehension passages. They had opportunities to think, re-think, try out and act freely without teacher intervention but within the limits of set rules to prevent distraction. By so doing, they led as active participants while teachers became observers. This exchange of roles allowed teachers to critic their works constructively and come up with ways to improve their works or maintain it from the point of creativity of the children.

Motivation

Psychologists encourage motivation as an effective way to encourage learning especially as levels of motivation defers from one learner to another. This involved giving special privileges, such as opportunity to read the passage, singing a song in recognition of input, clapping of hand or sticking a star in front of pupils name on the class indicator for a week. Other modes of reward are use of endearing words such as, you're doing well, I'm so proud of you, that's a brilliant response, good of you and that's quite impressive. This was done to re-enforce their abilities to generate ideas, show special artistic skills (like, mimicry, impersonation), keen memory, special aptitudes or exceptional reading skills. The ultimate goal of this strategy was to encourage them to expand their knowledge base, build on and expand their creativity.

Output

The final output of this creative process is the end result. The level of creativity attained by children during this exercise may not be said to be the best yet, it induced new approachesto teaching and learning. Teachers made efforts to take bold steps by un-learning and re-learning. Teachers were once more reconnected to factors that affect children's learning and were able to consider this and seek ways to ameliorate. More so, the moment to moment transition during teaching infused new life and spiced up the sessions. At the end of the study, teachers and students benefited from this study as there was a larger picture created of classroom machinery.

Observations

Learning Environment

Physical environments are designed to stimulate the senses to enhance creative problem solving approaches. This is why most classrooms now display pictures and designs of items and objects to learners. Automatically, children will derive their first mental images and begin developing ideas from what they see in their surroundings. Unfortunately, classroom activities aiding creativity encountered stoppers at this point. This is because the learning environment was sparsely decorated due to poor funds, inability to think outside the box on the part of teachers, inexperience of teachers in applying artistic skills, generate humour, increase attention span or setting unrealistic goals. When addressing a problem, children should be able to examine their surroundings and get clues that will help them generate a pool of possible solutions. An environment that provides both novelty and variety will greatly aid creativity.

Play and Imagination

Sometimes it was difficult for the children to fit into the mood for creative learning irrespective of the teacher's efforts. It appeared as if their depth of creativity was laid to rest and had dried up making them bereft of ideas. This happened more often when classes come up late in the afternoon, especially after break time when children appear to be tired. On these occasions, totally different approaches were applied like taking them outside the classroom to the open field, tuck shop, playground or any other location in the school. Most times this works like magic as children regain their energy and their interest is geared up once more. Fragments of lesson will then be introduced by the teacher and children respond adequately. This is a further indicator that the environment is actually a strong determinant for creativity.

Teacher's Inhibitions

Teachers sometimes face brick walls in encouraging creative learning despite sessions of training before the commencement of the experiment. This happens more when children respond based on impulse without giving thorough thoughts to activities expected of them. Teachers are sometimes thrown off balance and at a loss for next step of action. Their unpreparedness for unforeseen situations should have been engaged as opportunities for greater creativity through improvisation but this was not so. Thus, teaching and learning sessions at these instances became laborious, tasking and demanding so much that pupils and teacher struggle through the process.

Interference

It was also observed that the awareness of being under observation or surveillance especially for grading, puts children under undue pressure. It seemed too demanding and made them perform below expectation thereby undermining their creativity. Also they became distracted with, peer pressure and side comments from peers especially when it appears that they were struggling to be productive. It becomes demoralizing for them, they lose focus and achieving the objectives of the lesson becomes almost impossible.

Fear of Failure

At times students that are involved in creating are distracted. This is a psychological situation that requires the teacher's encouragement and patience in case the pupil does not recover. In most instances when this occurs, it leads to lack of concentration as the ability for imaginative creativity is stalled for some moment or totally.

Conclusion

This study has brought to fore that the process of creativity in children's learning is often intentional than unintentional. All that is needed for children to be creative is proper guidance, freedom and a conducive environment. Creativity enables mental growth through the varieties of options available to them during creative process. The uniqueness and diversity of each child is brought to play through opportunities given to explore new ideas, critical thinking abilities, problem solving skills and active participation. Teachers play an important role in cultivating a mindset that values creativity, ultimately preparing children to face the challenges of an ever evolving world.

The Componential model theory has remained a reference point in studies related to the field of creativity in its quest to seek the link between domain-relevant skills, creativity-relevant processes, and task motivation as key components of the creative outcome. The theory, alongside the study, emphasized teachers' ability to incorporate brainstorming sessions, experimentation, problem-solving skills, and exploration of ideas, motivation, and constructive feedback sessions. Although there are some extant factors that may pose as threat to the creative learning process, such as, physical environment, peer influence, and lack of confidence; teachers must ensure that children remain focused and are not distracted. Adopting this theory has aided the study in the search for expertise for creative teaching through knowledge based, problem-solving skills, meta-cognitive skills, and innovative learning strategies during training sessions. Teachers are motivated to seek expertise in their professions by coming to terms with creativity as a process, not the product, and as a means, not an end in itself. Without doubt, creativity maintains the ability to deliver desired output if properly managed and infused into children learning.

The creative process offers teachers excellent opportunities to personalize teaching and focus on inspiring children creative abilities by encouraging and supporting their efforts. They can acquire skills to refine their teaching and improve expertise to positively impact children's learning. Creativity helps children relieve stress and pressure from learning and creates a balance as they achieve mastery of their personalities. Teachers must be careful not to dominate or restrict this process rather they must seek the satisfaction of children where they can be themselves and draw from the power of their imagination. Teachers in Nigerian schools, especially public schools, need training and re-training to keep abreast and up to date with new strategies of teaching and learning that is now fully learner interactive than teacher centered. Teachers can empower children to develop critical skills like problem solving and innovation. Embracing and promoting creativity in the learning process is paramount for teachers. They must also create conducive learning environment for psychological balance, to encourage exploration, expression, inquiry that will proddiverse thinking skills to the fore.

Suggestions

Professional Development Workshops

Teachers should embark on regular periodic professional training or workshop that focus on enhancing creativity in incorporating art, music, technology, designs and other creative elements in the classroom.

Brainstorming Sessions for Teachers

Teachers should engage in regular brainstorming sessions to foster creative environment to share and develop innovative ideas for lesson plans, classroom activities and methodologies.

Problem Based Learning

Lessons should be designed to suit realistic situations and problems. This approach will stimulate creative thinking for teachers and children in their joint work.

Cross-disciplinary Collaboration

There is need to facilitate collaboration among subject teachers. This would promote exchange of creative teaching strategies and approaches that may not be immediately apparent within individual's subject area.

Reflection and Feedback

To continuously promote improved mindset. Teachers should establish a culture of reflection and feedback from other teachers and children too. It is a way of encouraging them to assess their teaching methods with colleagues.

Incorporate Technology

This is crucial given children's exposure to technology and devices available and accessible to children in this age. Teachers must be ICT compliant and be ready to explore ways of infusing and integrating technology creatively into teaching. Use of interactive apps, online platforms and visual reality are unique and innovative ways to engage children.

Flexible Classroom Design

Teachers should create flexible and adaptable classroom spaces that will allow for rearrangement to suit different creative activities. A dynamic environment can foster creativity. An overcrowded classroom is an inhibition to movement and expression during creative enterprise.

References

- Ajao, W. (2001). Cadbury is determined to move Education Forward. Vanguard, December 27 2001:16.
- Ajayi, I. A. 2001. Issues in School Management. Lagos: Bola bay Publications.
- Amabile, T.M. (1983). "The Social Psychology of Creativity: A Componential Conceptualisation, Personality Process and Individual Differences. Vol. 45. Pp 357-376

- Dothage, K. & Gable, S. (2022). "Creativity in Young Children". Gh6041.pdf
- Gardner, H. (2011). "Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences. New York: Basic Books
- Griffiths, M. (2014). "Encouraging Imagination and Creativity in the Teaching Profession". European Educational Research Journal 13 (1). Pp.129
- Kaplan, D.E. (2019). "Creativity in Education: Teaching for Creativity Development". Psychology, 10. Pp. 140-147.
- Kim, K.H. (2011). "The Creativity Crisis: The Decrease in Creative Thinking Scores on the Torrance Tests on Creative Thinking". Creativity Research Journal, 23, Pp. 285-295
- Kupers, E., Lehmann-Wermser, Geert P. (2018). "Children's Creativity: A Theoretical Framework and Systematic Review". Sage Journals. Vol. 89. Issue 1.
- Muhammad, D. (2019). Education through Theatre: How the children deserve. CenRaPs Journal of Social Science. (1) 1, Pp.1-13
- Oluchukwu, R.B. 2000. Challenges of educational planning in the 21st century. Olagboye, A. Fadipe, J. (Eds.). Management of Nigerian Education: project monitoring and school plant maintenance, NIEPA, Ondo, International Review of Education. Vol. 53. Pp. 593- 612.
- Prendergast M. (2004). The Ideal Spectator: Dramatic Chorus Collective Creation and Curriculum. Alberta Journal of Educational Research. Vol. 50, 1ss. 2: 141-149.
- Runco, M.A. (2004). "Creativity: Annual Review of Psychology, Vol. 55, Pp 657-687
- Sternberg, R.J. (1985). "Beyond IQ: A Triarchic Theory of Intelligence. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press
- Sternberg, R.J. Lubert, T.I. (1992). "Buy Low and Sell High: An Investment Approach to Creativity". Current Directions in Psychology Science. Vol. 1. (1). Pp. 1-5.
- Sternberg, R.J. & Grigorenko, E.I. (2003). "Teaching for Successful Intelligence: Principles, Procedures and Practices". Journal for the Education of the Gifted 27. Pp. 207-228.