

THE RELEVANCE OF TEACHING CREATIVE THINKING AT PRIMARY SCHOOL LEVEL IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

In our fast changing world, where those skills that were adequate some decades ago are grossly inappropriate to prepare children for the general existence beyond school, and where technological transformation has created and annihilated jobs, the foundation of creative thinking skills needs to be laid very early in life. Learning as the acquisition of past inherited ideas gives rise to reproductive learning as the acquisition of established body of cultural knowledge, approved skills, set outlooks, methods and rules used for a fixed pattern of society. Such style of learning (reproductive learning) served people's needs in the past; but it is highly adequate for today's rapidly changing world. What is actually required in our contemporary society is innovative learning if we are to shape a certain future and ensure the overall healthy survival of the society. A philosophical analysis of this belief reveals that instituting a subject in primary school level that will cultivate creativity, which begins in formative years when the identity of a child as a thinking person is being established is urgently needed. Hermeneutical investigation of the ultimate goal of education, for instance, reveals that those who are creative, inventive and innovative are those who have sound imagination, critical and creative minds, and this makes the teaching of creative thinking at the primary school level crucial.

Keywords: Creative Thinking, Innovative, Learning, Primary Education In Nigeria.

Introduction

In our rapidly changing world, a world where every work is undergoing fast and long-term changes, the creative skills and potentials of children should be developed as early as possible. Again, to prepare adequately for the challenges of the 21st century, every nation needs to do more than improving their level of literacy. This implies that our education system should strive hard to enable all children develop the skills of thinking creatively, an education system which must have the capacity to unlock the creative potential of every child. In other words, the education of a whole child should not only embody a child's cultural, spiritual, scientific, technological and intellectual potentials, but also a child's creative ability.

According to Michael Barber, “creativity is not only an outcome of a good education, but a means of achieving a good education”, (86) hence, there is every need to introduce the teaching of creative thinking at primary schools in Nigeria. It is true that many people posit that creative thinking or creativity cannot be taught, for instance, Jen Kalz-Buonincontro noted that “teachers and professors still question whether artistic talent and creativity can be learned and how to foster students creativity in schools and universities “ (1). But today, many scholars are not only stating it categorically clear that creativity can be taught, but have also drawn curriculum for teaching creative thinking. Referring to the issue of whether creativity can be taught, Robert Dehaan reflects that:

.... there is evidence that the cognitive operations that are required for creativity can be taught and that the instrumental strategies that work best are relatively simple modifications of the active learning instructions that is most effective for teaching abstraction and problem solving (1499).

What this implies is that a child’s creative insight can be nurtured right from his or her early stage of education, effort should be made to encourage the development of a child’s faculty of creative thinking (creativity) at the elementary schools, using the right teaching pedagogy.

WHAT IS CREATIVITY?

Creativity is very difficult to describe. This stems from the fact that creativity, apart from having remarkable association with the arts, has also entertained divergent views, just in an attempt to define it. Another reason that accounts for the general lack of a generally accepted definition of creativity is that creative activity itself is complex in nature. The National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE, 1999) defined creativity as the jurisdiction of genius (28). This historical conception of creativity views creativity as the activities of men of great minds or ideas the domain of the gifted or charismatic class. It connotes the activities of such people like Francis Bacon, Albert Einstein, Bill Gate, Da-Vinci, etc. Creativity, in this sense, is also an attempt to explain and understand the manner of people that amply develop the capacity to utilize their creative ingenuity.

According to Rob Pope, creativity is “the capacity to make, do or become something fresh and valuable with respect to others as well as ourselves. (xvi). This definition conceives creativity as a potentiality that may or may not be achieved, and as something that is realized through an object made, or an action that is done or that is ongoing process. Eleni Sefertzi conceives creativity as “the generation of new ideas or the recombination of known elements into something new, providing valuable solutions to the problems” (2). Creativity in the light of this definition is not magic. A creative mind works with the known reality(ies). The work of a creative person is to view what is already in existence in a new and critical manner to know whether a novel reality can be fashioned out of it.

Again, Linda Naiman reflected that creativity is the process of bringing new and imaginative ideas into reality. He submitted that creativity is characterized by the ability to perceive the world in new ways, to find hidden patterns, to connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena, and to generate solutions. For him, creativity involves two processes; thinking, then producing. It involves the capacity to move beyond traditional concepts, methods, guidelines, rules, and patterns, relationships in order to produce or make novel ideas, forms and interpretations.

Meaning of creative thinking

In this essay, it is important that I define creative thinking. This is because although creativity and creative thinking are used interchangeably by various scholars, in this essay, creative thinking is going to be the operational concept. According to Panagiotis Kampylis, the term creative thinking rather than creativity should be used when one wants to “place emphasis on the initial thinking process that leads to any creative activity and outcome” (1). He remarks that creative thinking is among the key thinking skills that primary school students need to develop through formal education (1). Then, what is creative thinking?

First of all, thinking, in the views of Ngila Michael Muendane, “is the process of asking questions, such as : what is this? Do I know it? In other words, is there a file in my mind about it? If I do not know it what does it resemble? What is its purpose? How does it affect me? Will it give me pain or pleasure?” (16). We think to consider alternatives in order to make choices and to solve problems or riddles. To create, on the other hand, is to produce or make something new. It also means to generate new ideas, forms, interpretations, methods, patterns etc. creative thinking, therefore, implies asking pragmatic questions, which will enable one to generate ideas , methods , interpretations, etc, that are novel and valuable within a culture.

Robert Sternberg (Cf. sefertzi, n.d.) defined creative thinking as an activity that leads to new information, or previously undiscovered solution. Creative thinking, he maintains, is divergent thinking. In divergent thinking, one makes effort to generate a diverse assortment of possible alternative solutions to a problem. Divergent thinking is opposed to convergent thinking, in which one tries to narrow down multiple possibilities to find a single and best answer to a problem.

Furthermore, Panagiotis Kampylis described creative thinking as the kind of thinking that enables students to apply their imagination to generating ideas , questions, hypotheses, experimenting with alternatives and evaluating their own and their peer ideas, final products and processes” (6). Kampylis’ definition of creative thinking is adequate for young people within the post-primary school and tertiary education levels. This is because, in my own view, the ability to engage in critical evaluation of ideas is above children within primary school education level.

The Department for Education and Employment / Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (DFEE/QCA, 2004) defined creative thinking within the frame work of primary education as empowering students "... To generate and extend ideas, to suggest hypothesis, to apply imagination and to look for alternative innovation outcomes". (22). This definition is most appropriate for children in the primary education in that it takes into consideration the all-important role of teachers in the primary school in stimulating, guiding and fostering the improvement of creative thinking in children. Generating new and valuable ideas by children requires a guardian who will midwife the positive creative potentials deposited in children. In my own view, creative thinking is a critical rational activity targeted towards the generation of new ideas, forms, patterns and interpretations that are valuable within a particular culture.

What is critical thinking?

Juho Ritola defined critical thinking as the "method of analyzing and evaluating argumentations and forming opinion based on these processes" (659-660). Analyzing and evaluating argument is the task of a core branch of philosophy called logic. Thinking critically is a philosophical enterprise. Robert Epstein is right by maintaining that "critical thinking is part of the study of philosophy: the love of wisdom" (2). Epstein conceives critical thinking as a way of "evaluating whether we should be convinced that claim is true or some argument is good, as well as formulating good arguments" (5). Critical thinking in the light of the definitions above is disinterested pursuit of knowledge, truth and wisdom. A critical thinker seeks to know, or is searching for the truth about the universe. He wants to understand the world; to have a good knowledge of the world. He desires wisdom.

Now, what is the relationship between critical thinking and creative thinking? Can one think creatively without first of all, thinking critically? Put succinctly, can creative thinking be possible without critical thinking? Are they complementary? Is there sharp distinction between them? In his submission, Barry K. Beyer reflects that:

Whereas creative thinking is divergent, critical thinking is convergent; whereas creative thinking tries to create something new, critical thinking seeks to assess worth or validity in something that exist; whereas creative thinking is carried on by violating accepted principles, critical thinking is carried on by applying accepted principles. Although creative and critical thinking may very well be different sides of the same coin, they are not identical (35).

Beyer's reflection on the relationship between creative thinking and critical thinking requires critical reflection. In the first place, if creative thinking is divergent, while critical thinking is convergent, it implies that creative thinking is vehemently opposed to each other. One can think creatively without thinking critically. I don't think that it is possible to think creatively without thinking critically and vice versa. Secondly, if creative thinking is about trying to create something new while critical thinking is performing the function of

assessing worth or validity in what is created, it implies that both of them complement each other.

Furthermore, no sane researcher starts any research work with the sole intention of violating accepted principles. A researcher begins by applying accepted principles. A researcher begins by applying accepted principles. It is usually from the known to the unknown. Critical thinking leads to creative thinking. Creative thinking and critical thinking are not identical; they are different sides of the same coin, but none can be carried on without the other. They maintain a water-tight relationship.

Teaching Creative Thinking in Primary Schools: The Role of Teachers

Every human being is born with a creative instinct. Young children organize play – a condition when the imagination is employed to mirror situations and possibilities. A cardboard box with partitions inside it becomes a house; sand, water and grass that are mixed together becomes soup or stew. A doll becomes a living baby. Alice Sterling Honig remarks that we often get marveled at the marvelous creativity of young children's drawings, dramatic play and invented languages. Children also exhibit imaginative use of colour, themes and flight of fancy in their language. It is the role of teachers to encourage children's ability in art, dramatic expressions and creative responses to problems.

The kind of thinking that is prevalent among children within primary school age, as remarked earlier, is divergent thinking - which implies disintegrating past concepts; creating novel connections; widening the boundaries of knowledge and the beginning of extraordinary ideas. Teachers foster creative thinking in children by encouraging them to keep on generating positive and new ideas. This helps to maintain a child's interest and desire for deep learning.

The teacher in the primary school education should always be conscious of the fact that one major way through which children can learn of their self esteems is through their interactions with him/her. He should also be magnanimous in the actual descriptions of children's efforts and thoughts. Also, he should not lose sight of the fact that every child is unique, and as such, his or her trust and creativity must be nurtured and nourished. In addition, group meetings where children can freely air views on how to solve problems should be organized by the teacher on regular basis.

Brenda Fyfe, reflecting on the concept of creative thinking in children submits that: "Research shows that almost all children have the potential to think creatively to varying degrees.... Unfortunately, our creative behavior often goes unrewarded or is met with comments such as "do it right" don't be silly" you should know better," or How is it supposed to be done" ? (30) The implication of Fyfe's submission is that, most of the time, the creative potentials in children are stifled by teachers who are not trained properly on how to develop creative thinking in children. In other words, creative abilities in children should be handled with utmost proficiency by teachers. Any creative skill exhibited by a child in the classrooms should be rewarded with

such remarks like “this is a wonderful idea”, “I love your question, keep it up”, “what a wonderful child?”, “That is great, how did you conceive such idea?” etc. Upon noticing any good creative efforts made by a child, the teacher must strive and second it with encouraging and positive rewards.

Furthermore, when a child is able to generate a concrete creative work, the reward can also come in the form of tangible gift. All these are meant to encourage creative thinking in young children. Positive remarks by teachers to children’s creative potentials are the foundation of large creative works in adults. As such, the creative thinking teacher is one who is always concerned with the encouragement and reward of creative potentials in his pupils or students. He is that teacher whose joy is in the capacity of his pupils /students to be independent and productive thinkers in the future.

The Need For Teaching Creative Thinking At Primary School Level In Nigeria

The epoch we live in is undergoing momentous, speedy and enduring changes at the socio-cultural, technological and economic levels. Panagiotis Kampylis remarks that “education seems to be in a constant flux, striving to keep pace with the new conditions” (72). Nigerian educational systems must be able to bridge the gap between researches, theories and practice. Presently, our primary schools are simply consolidated organizations which have conformity, tradition, social and cultural integration as their cardinal objective. This piece of work is advocating for a primary school system that should have as its target the fostering of creative thinking, non-conformity and diversity. By implication, the role of primary school teacher in Nigeria should change from experts relaying information and knowledge to facilitators encouraging pupils to inventing and organizing knowledge. Pupils in the primary schools should be introduced to what I may call “constructive reasoning”, which is a kind of reasoning or thinking aimed at generating new and valuable ideas. They should be exposed to “mathematical reasoning” – a kind of rigorous abstractions. This “mathematical reasoning” must be within their cognitive capacity. Reading and solving abstract questions will help to sharpen their intellect, which will also lead to the unlocking of their creative potentials at an early stage of their existence. This is not going to be easy in that it calls for educational reforms and paradigm shift in the role of primary school teachers. Still, the era we find ourselves in this country (Nigeria) urgently and seriously stands in need of it. The views of National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education report 1999 (NACCCE,1999) sums up my idea:

Countries throughout the world are re-organizing their education systems. Like us, they are engulfed in rapid economic and social change. Everywhere, education is seen as the main way of enabling individuals and nations alike to meet these changes. Schools have a complex task. We expect education to prepare young people for the world of work and economic independence; to enable them live constructively in responsible communities; and to enable them to live in a tolerant, culturally diverse and rapidly changing society. Perhaps above all, we expect education to help young people to

build lives that have meaning and purpose in a future we can scarcely predict... We need new approaches, because the challenges we all face are unprecedented (18). The above long quotation is a clarion call to develop in young people the skills and knowledge of creativity. If this is true, then the development of creative potential of young people must start from the primary school level of education. By this I mean that the introduction of the teaching of creative thinking at the primary school levels in Nigeria should be the paramount priority of our educational authorities. It is high time a curriculum was developed for the teaching of creative thinking in the primary schools and introduced it.

Conclusion

Nigerian educational system remains highly inadequate if the skill of thinking creatively is not properly developed in young children. The world we live in today is undergoing rapid changes. There is general unemployment in Nigeria and the economy is bad. Employers are looking out for people with sound imagination who will be highly creative and generate new ideas that would develop their companies and institutions. There is, therefore, the urgent need to introduce the teaching of creative thinking at the primary school level in Nigeria. This will help to train citizens who would be creative, economically independent and self reliant.

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