

Creativity, A Key to Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

Creativity is a critical concept for the successful implementation of educational programs. It fosters mental growth in children by providing opportunities for trying out new ideas, new ways of thinking and problem-solving. Creative activities help acknowledge and celebrate children's uniqueness and diversity as well as offer excellent opportunities to personalize and focus on each child. The notion that creative process is mysterious, inerrant and extremely rare has prevented creativity from being regarded as having educational aim and this brings about paucity in the creative instincts of early childhood. The purpose of this study is to explore how creativity is promoted in primary school classrooms for young children and also to explore how creativity acts as the center of curriculum during the early childhood period. From the findings, we see that the activities towards daily life skills are more effective in developing creativity and establishing curriculum that increases children's creativity in a positive way. The paper recommends that for creativity to flourish in an educational setting, it is necessary for learners to be actively involved in the process of their own learning. This suggests ways that future research can elaborate on the moment-to-moment interactions which form the basis of long-term creative development and it is expected that teachers put forth both children and their own creativity in all activities.

Keywords: Creativity, Creative Instinct, Early Childhood Education.

Introduction

How do children learn and express themselves? How do children think? What role does imagination, thinking, and cognitive development play in learning creative activities during early childhood? The experiences children have during their first years of life can significantly enhance the development of their creativity. Creativity is the critical point to developing innovative and effective learning in children. There is nothing more satisfying and fulfilling for children to be able to express themselves openly without judgment because creativity is the freest form of self-expression.

The ability to be creative and to create something from personal feelings and experiences can reflect and nurture children's emotional health. Children need freedom in order to be truly creative so as to commit themselves completely to the effort and also make whatever activity they

are doing their own. What's important in any creative act is the process of self-expression. Creative experiences can help children express and cope with their feelings and a child's creative activity can also help teachers learn more about what the child may be thinking or feeling.

Early childhood education encourages children to participate in creative activities by providing the children with materials which triggers their imagination, this helps in appreciating children's individuality as well as encouraging their different viewpoints. Early childhood is seen as a period in life when children particularly need high quality personal care and learning experiences. This informs the reason why Myhill & Wilson (2013) described early childhood period as a time frame covering the first five years of life prior to entering primary school. According to the researchers, enormous learning takes place within this period. To Zaslow & Martinez-Beck (2005), this period of development is characterized by rapid gross motor development. It is the time in the life of the children when pre-academic skills of coping with learning letters, shapes and forms, numbers are acquired and utilized.

The philosophy of early childhood in Wilson's (2015) opinion stresses on promotion of the physical, emotional, psychological development of all children and acquisition of competencies necessary for self-reliance. It aims at preparing the child for smooth transition from home to the school as a vital role of primary education. Hence, the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004), section 2 emphasize the need to inculcate in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the environment, music and playing with toys. The early childhood period is the basis for later success in life. It is the time according to Wilson (2015) when a child's brain develops at a rapid rate creating plenty of opportunities for children's learning and development.

A child can have a good start in life when he/she grows up in a nurturing and stimulating environment that meets his/her essential needs such as nutrition, health, and safety, as well as the psychological, social, spiritual, and intellectual needs. This also means that the child has a greater chance of reaching his/her full potential later in life. Early childhood is also defined by Wilson (2015) as a time that spans the prenatal period to eight years of age and it is the most intensive period of brain development throughout the lifespan. This period is the most critical time for the growth and development of the child and needs the utmost attention and appropriate care. The time period is widely considered the most vulnerable and crucial stage of a person's life.

This early childhood care and development is a comprehensive approach to policies and programs for children from conception to eight years and it encompasses early learning and stimulation, health, education, nutrition, hygiene, and sanitation. To Zaslow & Martinez-Beck (2005), it is a framework that targets all children including the vulnerable and marginalized and all these children have the same needs and this early childhood stage provides support for every young child to realize his/her right to survival, to protection, and to the care that will ensure optimal physical and psychosocial development including infant stimulation, health and nutrition, early childhood education, community development. Therefore, it is important to address children's needs holistically because the absence of one or more essential needs can lead to negative developmental outcomes for children.

Early childhood education prepares children not just to earn a living but to live a life which is a creative, humane, and sensitive. It paves the way for enhanced awareness, greater openness, and abilities. In other words, early education is to be a fundamental experience, a starter for enabling the individual to enter effectively and creatively into the many tasks and challenges of life. Early childhood education is therefore operationally referred to as the foundation for the growth and future development of all children which encompasses the provision of basic needs, such as nutrition, warmth, health, security, affection, interaction and stimulation for social, emotional, psychological, physical and cognitive development. This care is very essential for survival, development and later education. Take for instance in Nigeria, creative activities in childhood education starts as early as in the nursery classes where the pupils are taught how to creatively make art works like handfans, slippers, kites with papers which are beautifully cut, coloured and designed to suit their particular purpose.

There has not been too much research on the creativity developmental trends in the life of children. Furthermore, the emergence of creativity and creative instincts across the span of child development has, to some extent, been neglected. The researcher also notices that few researches has been carried out on the creative instincts in early childhood compared with other creative topics like reading acquisition or cognitive reasoning to mention but a few. This negligence is attributed by the researcher to the fact that people have identified creativity with insanity, genius or divinity and have thus built the notion that creative process is mysterious, inerrant and extremely rare and

these views have presented creativity as a natural talent which cannot be taught. Therefore, the essence of the research is to foster proper development of children, identify and address their problems, harnessing their potentials, mold their characters, enhance their learning and also equip them for life so that their actions are geared towards positive, personal, and global development.

The objective of the study is to determine the creative instincts in early childhood education of World Bank primary 1 and Urban primary school 11 pupils in Owerri Municipality. Specifically, the study:

1. Identifies the creativity instinct in early childhood education of the pupils in both primary schools.
2. Expands on how early childhood pupils develop their creative abilities.
3. Notes the effects that discouragement of creativity and independence have on the pupils
4. States the measures that can be adopted in order to enhance and improve on the creative abilities of primary school pupils.

The research therefore explores the idea of the creative child as constructed specifically through focus on the growth of the pupils in Worldbank primary 1 and Urban primary school 11 pupils in Owerri Municipality of Imo State. It also examines the ways in which the ideal of the creative child shaped the social and cultural perception of what creativity is in the aforementioned school and interrogates the ways in which the ideal of the creative child gave rise to the primary institution and inaugurated practices like games, toys and educational activities through which we have come to regard socially agreed notions of creativity.

Creative Instinct

Creative instinct serves a valuable two-part purpose which is to help one make meaning in and of life, and to give clarity that adds to ones mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing. The development and performance of instinctive behavior does not depend upon the specific details of an individual's learning experiences, instead, instinctive behavior develops in the same way for all individuals of the same species or of the same sex of a species.

The creative instinct helps one to create a life of meaning that reflects the personal values. It simply involves a surprising combination of previously unconnected ideas joining together in new and effective ways. Here Beaney (2005) states that using creative instinct to solve problems redefines concepts like failure, open-endedness, letting go, coming up with many ideas, and looking at something from a different point of view. This is because it tends not to come in pieces so much as it arrives as a complete idea or a new solution to an old problem. Hence as observed by Timms (2010) all children through creative instinct should engage themselves in construction of playful objects and through manipulation of objects they develop motor ability, curiosity and power of concentration which enables them fulfill their urge for creativity.

The teacher should help develop this instinct as it forms the base of architectural construction and creative work. A teacher according to Starko (2005) should present to the child all types of objects which the child manipulates like cube set, form board, plastic toys which can be disintegrated and resembled and such objects should be presented to the child for play. Even the craft activities can be utilized for the satisfaction of this instinct. Also it is the duty of the teacher to be very careful and tactful. He makes use of the creative instinct in organizing social service squads, thinking groups, projects, scouting and excursions and encourages the child to utilize this instinct in various hobbies where acquisition is involved such as stamp-collecting and album-making. In essence, the basic elements of the concept of creative instinct include intelligence, intensive interest, knowledge, originality (ideas), non-conformity, courage, and persistence.

Education and Creativity

Since we are faced with myriads of social economic and political challenges and the need for promoting creativity from the basic level of education cannot be underestimated, the principle goal of early childhood education according to Wright (2010) is to create pupils capable of doing new things and not simply those that repeat what other generations have done, but rather pupils who are creators, inventors and discoverers. To this Richards (2007) notes that while conventional education approaches generally try to develop convergent thinking, one of the basic purposes of contemporary education approaches is to raise creative individuals and so, in early year education,

the manifestation of creativity is at its highest because it is where it has the potential to be nurtured and developed the most.

Creativity is one of the issues discussed in all stages of education. Particular, in early childhood education, creativity is an essential part of the activities. Nurturing all of the developmental areas of children is the enduring goal of early childhood education. Therefore, promoting creativity as a developmental process according to Craft (2005) is also one of the important targets of early childhood education and so early childhood years can be regarded as the golden years of creativity since younger children are more creative. In order for children to express creativity, they need a combination of attributes. Here, authors like Craft (2010) note that children with access to creative learning in early years education are more likely to succeed in adult life by developing the skills they need to perform in the work place and wider society as entrepreneurs and citizens.

Within education, creativity in Runco's (2006) opinion is recognized as an essential 21st century skill where children exposed to creative learning in early year education are the key to a prosperous modern economy. Here, creativity to Craft (2010) is not just book smartness, but also a relation of ideas, fluency, skills and flexibility display if it is well inculcated in the young learners. Therefore; the importance of creativity in education processes has recently been considered. The most contemporary approach that we can use for creativity is highlighted by Sarsani (2005) who sees it as "the ability to form associations among relations that weren't formed before and hence putting forth new experiences, opinions and products within a new thinking scheme". Since a creative individual could more easily adapt to new situations easier and possesses flexible thinking, it is very important that young children, who are future scientists, musicians, artists, and problem solvers, prepare themselves for life in a sophisticated manner.

Once creativity is initialized in a specific field in young children, Kemple & Nissenberg (2010) believe that it would be easier to transfer and implement this creativity into many other areas of life. In fact, supporting creativity in young ages according to Craft, Jeffrey & Leibling (2011) generates helpful consequences in the future. For instance, adults whose creativity was supported in the young age become aware of their creative abilities, strengths and weaknesses earlier than those whose creativity did not flourish. Besides, these individuals could gain abilities

to make reasonable connections between their present and future lives, so they know who they are now and who they would be later in life.

It is worthy to note that we are all born with a creative instinct and all people have creative potential. The creative potential of children according to Craft (2010) originates in a bundle of instinctual force which is manifested by the need to create and by a natural impulse to produce. This innate trait itself contains also a "growth potential". Not in the sense that it would develop by itself since it requires favorable environment to transform it into action, but in the sense that it has plasticity and it depend on its development on the social interactions of the individual.

From these ideas, which orient the child toward creative activities, Duffy (2006) states that an education which aims to cultivate the creative activity of the child corresponds with its natural tendencies and as such, it aligns with the principle that education needs to be in conformity with the nature of the child as well as cannot neglect the natural endowment of the child which needs to be its starting point. Creativity in essence, is a comprehensive concept including cognitive processes such as perception, sensitivity, flexibility, rationalism, intuition and discovery, which are commonly used in our daily lives. Supporting creativity in education process has a great significance in each of the steps of formal education. Raising creative individuals according to Runco (2006) is only possible by supporting children's creativity from the early ages. In this respect, supporting creativity in early childhood period gains a great importance.

As creativity is not a learnt behavior, it is easy to observe it in children. Supporting individuals to be creative starting from the young ages Duffy (2006) believes that it will contribute in forming societies that are creative and think freely in the future. This makes the role of early years practice not just about imparting knowledge and facts, but there is a need for creative people who could deal with difficult problems, comprehend the connections between past and present knowledge and understand the values of their own culture and those of other cultures. Therefore, it is vital to discover and foster creativity from the beginning of early childhood.

Creativity has become a much-debated subject in the academic research field over the years. In present times, the rise of modern technology and changes in the economy towards global innovation, according to Craft & Hall (2015) has seen creativity as critical to survival through generative problem-identification and problem-solving across life. Since the capacity to imagine

and create new, unique solutions to complex problems is a distinctive human trait that is integral to our human design, and we live in an increasingly complex world that demands individuals who can develop sophisticated creative solutions to the increasingly complex problems facing communities and schools. Sawyer (2012) believes that the idea that through systematic education we can make quantitative and qualitative changes to the human creative potential revealed a great dependence of the creative potential on the learning activity for man's creative power which is interpreted as his ability to produce "the new". Hence creativity to Torrance (2007) is one of the assets for developing countries to move towards industrialized nations.

In this sense, creativity according to Ejike (2008) can be fostered by encouraging children to explore their surroundings, allowing them to seek their own questions about their surroundings and helping them to arrive at interesting answers for their questions, where 'interesting' answers can be understood as answers that will satisfy them and lead them to further questions. Guiding children's learning in this manner to Craft (2010) can encourage creative thinking, giving power to children's ideas and thoughts, allowing them to creatively solve problems and be able to understand better the world around them. The ability and inclination to be creative is essential to living a fulfilled and successful life. In other words, it is vital that learners have sufficient understanding of the material with which they are being asked to be creative. When we support children's freedom to work with a variety of mediums and other natural resources in Munro's (2006) opinion, we allow them to express themselves by using their imagination, which transforms into the Art they make.

The findings therefore suggest that most importantly practical activities like carton decorations, building blocks, beads, fan or hat makings, craft designs to mention but a few should have direct impact on student's confidence to attempt new ideas and activities with other pupils as they develop new skills and techniques, and also how they learn to use a range of familiar and unfamiliar tools and resources as well as how they learn to work collaboratively. Hence the pupils also developed a deeper understanding of the nature of creativity and for some this was an empowering experience and demystified the complex concept making creative activity more approachable. Ultimately, this research in line with Cropley's (2011) opinion suggests that the play and creativity module provides early childhood students with opportunities to learn through experience and to begin to find the 'artist within'.

The Role of Primary Caregivers in Shaping Early Childhood Creative Instincts

In conjunction with the efforts of teachers towards developing the creative instincts of their pupils, the role of primary caregivers in shaping early cognitive development in children cannot be understated. A child's primary caregiver refers to the person, usually one or both parents or a legal guardian, who caters the most for the child's physical needs. Primary caregivers assume the main responsibility in childcare {Cai, Jiaoli et al (2021)}. This implies that it is the duty of a primary caregiver to ensure that a child has all that he/she needs to thrive physically, emotionally and mentally. Hence, beyond ensuring that the child receives an early childhood education of the best quality, the primary caregiver must also make efforts to engage the child in conversation and activities that build his/her creative instincts at home.

In some cases, some children even spend the better part of their early childhood being homeschooled. In that period, all facets of the child's mental growth happens under the care of his/her primary caregiver, and the family by extension. In concurrence, Emerllahu & Dali (2016) posit that parents and family are one of the direct holders of educational work (147). This statement refers to the fact that early childhood education is not limited to the school environment, but also continues at home, with parents and guardians as tutors. Furthermore, if stimulation and development of creativity is a crucial part of early childhood education, then the creative process of the child must continue and flourish at home as well. Additionally, Ceka & Murati (2016) state that "parents take a crucial stand, when it comes to their children's development and education as whole, as the parents themselves are the ones to take care on the overall children physical and intellectual development, till the point they get independent and ready to face the challenges of the society they live in" (61). From this, we can deduce that parents must make intentional contributions towards helping their children hone their creative instincts. Such contributions include, but are not limited to providing the essentials needed by children, to aid their all round growth (safe and clean housing, nutritious meals, adequate clothing e.t.c).

Also, children should be encouraged to ask questions about everything, and to explore different perspectives and solutions to solve problems. This teaches them that it is alright to look at things from diverse viewpoints, and no idea is entirely bad or entirely good. Engaging kids in activities that stimulate their creative instincts at home is also highly encouraged. Activities like

puzzles, crafts, board games, painting e.t.c will give them free range over their thoughts, and help them to sharpen their basic organizational skills. Story-time should also be made an interactive session with children, to enable them form opinions and ask questions about the happenings in the story, and relate it to the happenings around them.

Children should also be encouraged to interact, and practice teamwork, with age mates to develop their psychosocial skills. Most importantly, time for rest should be judiciously utilized to enable them wind down and refresh themselves. All of these, combined with the efforts of teachers during school hours, will result in children who are confident in their creative prowess and abilities. Consequently, they will mature into innovative-thinking adults who contribute meaningfully in their societies.

Conclusion

Creativity in early childhood education is adopted as the most fundamental aspect of this research work. It was therefore evident very early on within the research that the pupils had an understanding of the term ‘creativity’. This highlighted a change in students thinking in relation to the diversity of creativity and was also helpful to the pupils for it provided them with a deeper understanding of creative practice which fosters creativity’ as identified by Craft & Jeffrey (2008).

Even though education throughout the globe are faced with different challenges, which may be economic, social or personal, yet new avenues are needed to improve and stimulate pupils interest, self-esteem and skill acquisition, a number of prominent educators and policymakers have argued that the increasing standardization of education with an emphasis on basic skills and testing has led to children’s creativity diminishing as they move through the educational system and as such are unable to accommodate the concept of creativity. This brings to point, the need for a more culturally and historically sensitive model of creativity that acknowledges the ways in which creativity has become a focus for the cultural education of the child. Therefore, understanding creativity is very important for primary school education and the study suggests better ways of enhancing the creative instincts in the early childhood education of primary school pupils.

Thus a good educational system should recognize the pupils’ innate capabilities and inborn potentials and should therefore help to motivate creativity in children which is required for solid functional development needed for liberating human ideas, intelligence and individual original

value. Early childhood teachers therefore can help their pupils to develop their creativity by providing a creative environment, helping them to build up their skills through play, as well as being creative themselves and encouraging the children's creative efforts.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made following the findings of the research on the creative instincts in early childhood education of pupils in primary school in Owerri Municipality:

1. Creativity can be emphasized more at schools where early childhood teachers are educated and practices for developing creativity of teacher candidates are made.
2. In service trainings that can be helpful in associating creativity with all developmental areas and types of activities can be designed.
3. Government should ensure that there is constant training and retraining of early childhood teachers through conferences, seminars and workshops to keep abreast with the methods of teaching and interacting with young learners.
4. Early childhood education curriculum should be modified or reviewed to meet the need and interest of young learners/pupils that will enhance practical participation/involvement of pupils to stimulate creative activity.

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