
FOSTERING CREATIVE AND INNOVATIVE THINKING IN TEACHERS THROUGH EXPOSURE TO ART EXPERIENCES FOR QUALITY EDUCATION

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Abstract

It is often said that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers. It is imperative therefore, that the quality of the teachers should be appreciably above that of the learners, to facilitate quality education in the overall development of the nation. Art has robust experiences to equip its recipients with the technical-know-how of creative and innovative thinking to broaden their reasoning for quality service delivery. Most times, products of teacher training institutions are confined to the study of the particular course for which they are admitted and are not allowed to interact with other relevant disciplines such as Fine and Applied Arts, due to the structure of the curriculum for each course of study. This limits the scope of the would-be-teachers and deprives them of the possibilities of understanding creativity and innovation. The paper therefore focuses on understanding creative and innovative thinking and its implications to teaching and learning. It reveals the robust nature of art and its experiences which can be leveraged upon by teachers to enhance creative and innovative thinking for quality education. It identifies some of the challenges of the 21st century bedeviling today's teachers which can be tackled with insightful knowledge of art with its creative and innovative tendencies. The paper concludes that creative and innovative thinking will boost the imaginative thinking of the teachers and enrich their language from using one language of spoken word to using nonverbal or visual imagery in solving teaching learning problems. The paper recommends that an art section or a department of Fine and Applied Arts should be created in all educational institutions, be it primary, secondary and tertiary, to cater for the need of development of Nigeria citizens in creative and innovative thinking. It suggests ways teachers can be better equipped for efficiency and productivity and proffers recommendations on how to entrench creative and innovative thinking in every teacher for quality education in Nigeria for a better tomorrow.

Keywords: Creative and Innovative Thinking, Teachers Training, Art Experiences and Quality Education.

Introduction

The world we live in is changing rapidly. The experience of yesterday if not improved upon today, may not suffice tomorrow. There is need therefore, to constantly engage the mind towards solving the challenges that comes our way on a daily basis. To achieve this, the art of innovative thinking must be deliberately

cultivated by individuals. Socrates says all human were born a “tabula-rasa” (clean slate) which is devoid of built-in mental content. Bardzell (2014) emphasized that the mind starts blank, but acquires knowledge as the outside world is impressed upon it. This implies that conscious efforts must be made to acquire necessary knowledge which will help

to broaden our thinking to do things in an unconventional way for a better outcome.

Teachers are pivotal in making necessary changes in the learners and in the society. All over the world, teachers are seen as key actors of change within programmes and projects on global learning. Douglas (2016) identified three distinct locations of teachers as change agents. These are as change agents within the classroom, within the wider school, and within society as a whole. Teachers should be experienced innovators who are good at diversifying methods of impacting knowledge, to expedite the needed change in all ramifications.

Innovation is the introduction of a new idea, method or device. It simply means doing something new, or doing something old in a new way. On the other hand, thinking is the opinion or ideas of an individual about something. It means to ponder over something in one's head or to communicate with oneself in one's mind. It can be inferred therefore, that innovative thinking means to think of something new, or to think about something old in a new way.

Innovative thinking deals with ways to make some processes more efficient, more effective, more interesting or more affordable. This is inevitable in teaching learning process, to make the job of the facilitators of learning a worthwhile experience of inestimable value, which will be beneficial to the learners and the nation. It is important to note that innovation is different from invention. While invention deals with the creation of a new product, innovation deals with improving on already existing products to make it better. However, innovation and creativity are sometimes used interchangeably. Creativity is the bringing into existence of a novel idea,

while innovation is the practical application of creative ideas. Akinboye (2003) defined creativity as the ability to produce appropriate and valuable ideas and or solutions to problems. He added that creativity is a group of cognitive processes used to generate useful, original and novel ideas.

Various ideas which can foster learning are being generated from time to time by scholars, it requires innovations by the implementers (teachers) to put such ideas into use to enhance learning. Rachel Linden in OECD (2016) opined that innovation does not happen in a vacuum, but requires openness and interactions between systems and their environments. Conscious efforts must be made towards enriching the innovative thinking of teachers to place him/her on a comfortable pedestal for better implementation and efficiency.

Teachers Training and Development of Innovative thinking

One of the philosophies on which education in Nigeria is based is that education maximizes the creative potentials and skills of the individual for self-fulfillment and general development of the society. It is imperative therefore, that the teachers who will help in the dissemination of knowledge and uphold the country's philosophy be well grounded in the application of innovations in order to bring out the creative potentials and skills in their learners, for education to be qualitative, comprehensive, functional and relevant to the needs of the society.

Teaching as a noble profession deals with molding of lives of individuals to become useful to themselves and the society. For someone to be regarded as a professional teacher, such a person must have undergone

training in pedagogy and must have completed the curriculum in a given area of study. Curriculum refers to the comprehensive plan for an educational or training programme being offered by an individual to fulfill the rising needs of a dynamic society. Alebiosu (2005) viewed curriculum as an instrument that dictates the affairs of every educational system. It is the vehicle through which knowledge and other learning activities are disseminated.

In preparing teachers for the teaching profession, serious consideration ought to be given to the magnitude of the tasks ahead of the teachers, for the sake of efficiency and good service delivery, hence, the need for exposure to art programmes as a tool to improving creative and innovative thinking in the teachers for more productivity. The expectations of the society from the teachers are high. However, some teachers lack the adequate skills of creative and innovative thinking which are essential to assist them in the teaching learning process, because of non-exposure to relevant programmes such as Fine and Applied Arts which can develop their creative and innovative thinking. Douglas (2016) advised that teachers have to work towards their own professional development, such as increasing their knowledge base, developing strong ethical values, commitment to social justice, and encouraging and supporting participatory approaches towards learning.

The training of teachers should be all-encompassing and not limited in scope and contents in order to meet up with the high expectation of the society. There is need to expand the curriculum of the teachers' training institutions to accommodate programmes such as Fine and Applied Arts,

which have the capability of developing creative and innovative thinking in teachers and expound the horizon of their thinking beyond the knowledge of their various fields of studies. Tyokase and Olugbuyi (2012) sees creative thinking as a thought process that gives room for looking at ideas that can be used to solve problems (or develop new thinking).

The need to integrate courses in Fine and Applied Arts as part of the learning experiences for teachers-in-training cannot be over emphasized. This can either be offered as an elective or compulsory course, to prepare the would-be-teachers for effective teaching profession. The inclusion of such programme as Art is expected to develop creative and innovative thinking skills in the students. This will open the mind of the students; boost their analytical ability; improve the way they solve problems; make them more organized in their dealings and enhance their communication skill. Mallum and Haggai (2002) in Tyokase and Olugbuyi (2012) submitted that a creative teacher utilizes the findings of research in order to do far better jobs of teaching than one who is not conversant with the puzzling phenomena of creativity. Pink (2006) rightly noted that if students leave school without knowing how to continuously create and innovate, they will be underprepared for the challenges of society and the workforce.

The Significance of Art in Creative and Innovative Thinking

Art cannot be separated from man because it is a component part of man which grows from common as well as uncommon human insight, feelings and experience. Some people refers to art as music, dance, literature, drama as well as visual arts which comprises of

painting, drawing and sculpture. All the forms of art listed are various means through which experiences can be shared for others to experience what has been experienced. Art has no single definition. Onipede (2007) opined that the definition of art spanned from one person or culture to another based on the ideological, philosophical and technological leanings of the person defining or describing it. Art has been defined as the quality, production, or expression of what is beautiful, appealing, or of more than ordinary significance. Duane and Sarah (2004) sees art as the visual expression of an idea or experience formed with skill through the use of a medium. The medium being a particular material, along with its accompanying technique. Artists select the media which suit the feelings and ideas they wish to present from options which include but not limited to clay, fiber, stone, wood and paint. The medium is then used in such a way that the object appeals to the sensibility or enjoyment of the viewers to depict final product which is refer to as art.

The nature of art is such that encourage the use of creative and innovative thinking. Although, all the forms of art can be used for expression of ideas and feelings, certain ideas and feelings can only be communicated appropriately through visual forms which engage the use of lines, shapes and colours to communicate meanings which go far beyond ordinary verbal rhetoric. For live to remain meaningful, the need to give physical form to things we feel, think and imagine is crucial to human. In fact, the ability to create is one of the special characteristics of being human. Man risks going into extinction the moment he stops to create.

Duane and Sarah (2004) expatiated on the purposes and functions of art as being able to inspire, beautify, inform, persuade, entertain and transform. It can also arouse our emotion, spark our imaginations, delight our senses, lead us to think and see in new ways and help us to develop a personal sense of beauty and truth. Going by the aforementioned, it is evident that the functions of art can be leveraged upon in the teaching learning process to make the experience interesting and enjoyable for both the teachers and the learners. Thus, the general goals and objectives of education can be easily achievable.

An exposure to any of the forms of art, has the power to reform the thinking of an individual and change his orientation. Onipede (2007) opined that a good understanding of the principles and elements of art can go a long way to produce well-rounded citizens with urbane dispositions. He emphasized that training in art is essential to all individuals to inculcate orderliness, decorum and creativity which is synonymous with art, as a stepping stones towards greatness in all fields of human endeavor. It is crucial to note therefore, that the internalization of art, its principles as well as elements can propel creative and innovative thinking in its recipients. This will spur the needed changes aimed towards the ideal personality and environment which is not only essential for teaching and learning but also vital for national development.

Expanding the Frontier of Creativity and Innovation in Teachers

It is difficult for anyone to give what he or she does not have. It is just normal for one to operate within the confine of his or her ability

in whatever endeavor to be carried out. This assertion may not be ideal for teachers in Nigeria if the specific goals of education are to be achieved as enshrined in the National Policy on Education (2013). The implementers of the policy should be able to think out of the box to achieve the goals for the total development of individuals and the nation, hence the need for expanding creativity and innovation in teachers. Education is continuum. It takes place from birth to death; from cradle to the grave, throughout the lifetime of a man. Also, teaching is believed to be at its best, when it moves from known to unknown, simple to complex and concrete to abstract. It reveals therefore that both education and teaching are not expected to at any time to be static but dynamic. The dynamism of education and teaching calls for constant innovation and creativity to make them worthwhile to the society.

In today's world of global competition and task automation, innovative capacity and a creative spirit are fast becoming requirements for personal and professional success. An innovative teacher will take his teaching to the next level due to his/her ability to explore, research and use various tools at his/her disposal to uncover something novel. The innovativeness of the teacher will also spur him/her into finding different way of looking at problems and solving them. Subsequently, the thinking process that goes into the innovation will help students develop their creativity and their problem solving skills.

It is essential that teachers be dynamic in teaching methods and teaching strategies to bring about the expected results in the learners. This requires creativity and innovation. Tyokase and Olugbuyi (2012)

described teaching creatively as using imaginative approaches to make learning more interesting, engaging, exciting and effective. Deliberate efforts must be made therefore to expand the creativity and innovation of every teacher for effective service delivery in the interest of the learners and the nation building. Robinson (2011) said "Creativity is as important in education as literacy and we should treat it with the same status." The inclusion of some courses in Fine and Applied Arts to the curriculum and the courses to be offered by the teachers-in-training will open the creative and innovative skills in the teachers. A good understanding of courses such as imaginative composition, basic designs and art appreciation will go a long way in helping the teachers to:

- ◆ Appreciate the work of nature,
- ◆ Develop innovation and creativity,
- ◆ Master the use of imagination and intuition,
- ◆ Cultivate the culture of taking risk without fear,
- ◆ Solve problems in a creative and innovative ways,
- ◆ Master the ability of experimentation and improvisation,
- ◆ Understand the use of various tools, materials and equipment,
- ◆ Take mental detours and increase the thinking boundaries without limitation.

The Challenges of the 21st Century and the Required Skills for Teachers and Learners

The challenges confronting teachers and learners in Nigeria are numerous. Aside underfunding which constitute a major challenge to education around the world, gross neglect, insecurity and abandonment due to insensitivity of Nigerian government are other critical challenges which are ravaging the educational sector of the country.

These amongst others lead to most of the disappointing performances we observe in education today. Robinson (2011) noted that in today's world of global competition and task automation, innovative capacity and a creative spirit are fast becoming requirements for personal and professional success. In this computer age, the pace of technological change is very rapid. Computers are substituting for humans in performing "routine" work, tasks that require the rote following of rules or directions. At the same time, people are increasingly being called on to perform more complex thinking tasks that computers still cannot perform, such as those that involve complex interactions with other humans (whether collaborating, persuading, or selling) or that require solving unexpected problems using expert thinking. The impact of such changes is profound on education.

There is a whole lot of difference in the teaching learning of the 21st century and that of the past ages. Gardner (2007) cites "the creating mind" as one of the five minds we'll need in the future. He opined that to cultivate such a mind, we need an education that features "exploration, challenging problems, and the tolerance, if not active encouragement, of productive mistakes." In the same vein, Florida (2005) called the age we are the creative age because the key factor propelling us forward is the rise of creativity as it is the primary mover of the economy. Multiple skills are needed to succeed by teachers and learners in the 21st century where new technologies have changed the social lives of people. Craig (2009) identified some aspects of technology that constitutes threats to man in the 21st century as automation, globalization, workplace change, demographic change, personal risk and

responsibility. He opined that the areas identified have prompted some education reformers to argue that the traditional curriculum is not enough: schools must provide students with a broader set of "21st century skills" to thrive in a rapidly evolving, technology-saturated world. If this is to be achieved, the creative and innovative thinking will play a major role.

Levy and Murnane (2004) pointed out two kinds of skills that are important in the face of the challenges of the 21st century. The first is "expert thinking," the ability to solve unexpected problems for which there are no predictable and programmable rule-based solutions and the second is "complex communication," which involves interacting with other people to acquire information, to explain it, or to persuade others of its importance. It was agreed that the skills are not superseding traditional skills in reading, writing and arithmetic but rather increase demand for "the three Rs". This re-emphasis the relevance of the development of creative and innovative thinking in teachers who will facilitate "the three Rs" in the learners. The development of creative and innovative thinking skills will determine to a very large extent how problems can be approached in a more flexible and imaginative ways. This will also assist in re-designing learning experiences to be more relevant to student interests and career paths, as well as personalize learning to the aptitudes and abilities of the learners and make it responsive to their culture and identities.

Conclusion

The importance of developing creative and innovative thinking in teachers through exposure to art experiences, especially visual art, cannot be over emphasized. It is essential

that everyone cultivates an artistic sensibility to reduce the search for white-collar job. With the advancement in technology and innovation, the future belongs to the thinkers who are creative. This is the more reason the inclusion of a course such as Fine and Applied Arts is necessary for all to broaden our sense of thinking and imagination.

Aside boosting the imaginative thinking of the teachers, an exposure to creative and innovative thinking through art will elevate both the teachers and the learners from the level of vertical thinkers which limits ones definition of problem in only one way, without considering alternative views and make them a vertical thinkers. This will help them to generate alternative ways of viewing a problem and produce multiple definitions.

Innovative thinking will also enrich the language of the teachers from using only one language of spoken words in addressing problems to one who can use other languages such as nonverbal or symbolic language, sensory imagery, feelings and emotions as well as visual imagery in solving teaching learning problems. When creative and innovative thinking skills are integrated into classroom teaching and learning, it will lead to higher quality education for the development of the nation.

Recommendations

In the light of the above going discussions, the following recommendations are hereby proffered.

- ◆ The policy makers of Education in Nigeria should review the existing policies to accommodate training in art at all levels of Nigeria Education.
- ◆ An art section or a department of Fine and Applied Arts should be created in all

educational institutions, be it primary, secondary and tertiary, to cater for the need of development of Nigeria citizens in creative and innovative thinking.

- ◆ The teaching of creative arts should be made compulsory at the basic education level to inculcate the culture of creativity and innovation in the learners from their early stage.
- ◆ Offering of Visual Arts as a subject should be mandatory to all students in the secondary school irrespective of their subject combination to foster creativity and innovation in their future vocation or career.
- ◆ All students in the tertiary institution should be made to have an interface with Fine and Applied Arts Courses as this will boost their creative and innovative thinking and assist them in their various areas of specialization.
- ◆ All would-be-teachers undergoing training in all faculties of Education, Colleges of Education and its allied institutions must take a course in Fine and Applied Arts to improve their creative and innovative thinking for a better service delivery in teaching and learning processes for the overall benefits of the nation.
- ◆ In-service training should be organized for teachers on the field who have prior orientation in Fine and Applied Arts in order to bridge the gap between them and creativity for a better service delivery.

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