

ADOLESCENT STUDENTS PERCEPTION OF SUPPORTIVE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT FOR CREATIVITY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF EBONYI STATE

C. U. MGBORO, Ph.D

*Department of Educational Foundations,
Ebonyi State University,
Abakaliki.*

And

N. A. EKE

*Department of Educational Foundations,
Ebonyi State University,
Abakaliki.*

Abstract

The study focused on Adolescent students perception of supportive classroom environment for creativity. Supportive classroom environment was identified to provide consideration, cohesiveness, commitment, concern, care, and co-operation; independence, risk taking, freedom to explore and question issues, tolerance for ambiguity and critical thinking. Creativity has no single definition. However it is regarded as a process of producing novel ideas, and solutions to problems. The study was conducted in Ebonyi North Education zone. The design was descriptive survey. The population was all senior secondary school students in the zone. The sample was 1000 students drawn from 25 secondary schools. The instrument for data collection was the Supportive Classroom Environment for Creativity Questionnaire (SCECQ) which has 15 items. The result revealed that students generally do not perceive the classroom environment as supportive of creativity. Recommendations were made based on the findings of the study.

Creativity is the driving force in education and societal growth. The complexity of the society and ever increasing information demand creative solutions to tackle the continuous changes. The society therefore wants the school to turn out leaders who are creative and can think out of the box (Isaksen & Murdock, 1993). Creativity has no single universally accepted definition (Mgboro, 2003), however the idea that it is the production of novel ideas, solution to problems or novel products as a result of prior experience, knowledge and insight appears to explain the essence of creativity.

Learning is a creative process (Starko, 1995). Through the process of learning students acquire information by linking their previous experience with new knowledge in a creative format peculiar to the learner. Surprisingly some classroom environments do not support but rather suppress the students' creative expression. The reason, according to Torrance and Safter (1986) stem from teachers' lack of skills to develop support for and/or evaluate students' creativity. It is not surprising therefore to observe that some students are more creative outside the classroom situation - Albert Einstein (Mgboro, 2003). Since education is focused on training people who are productive in the society, moreover life in the society does not follow a pre-planned predictable pattern, the classroom environment should provide the supportive environment for creativity.

The classroom environment comprises activities and behaviours that influence positively or negatively students learning. These activities and behaviours include communication, clarity, coherence, consideration, cohesiveness, commitment, concern, care and co-operation. Research findings reveal that some environment discourage or encourage independence, risk-taking, freedom to explore and question issues, tolerance for ambiguity and critical thinking which are ingredients of creativity (Sternberg & Lubart, 1993).

Environments shape behaviours, therefore a psychologically safe environment is necessary to foster creativity. In the classroom teachers are central in establishing environments that support student creativity. Teachers who acknowledge, respect and encourage creative pursuits in students model risk taking; teach with a sense of humour, approach curriculum content and instruction with open mindedness and build creative learning environment (Carter 1992). Torrance and Myers (1970) had earlier found that a responsive classroom environment is revealed by teachers' respect of unusual questions, imaginative and unusual ideas; showing that students' ideas have value and sometimes allowing students to do something for practice without the threat of evaluation and the usual consequences. In contrast, classroom environment with control, rigidity, and inflexible structures inhibit creative expression and growth (Mgboro, 2002). The assumptions, expectations and perception teachers hold of the student which might be transmitted unintentionally through nonverbal cues and the way the students perceive these expectations can inhibit or encourage creativity (Delucia, 1994). Furthermore when teachers recognize students efforts, encourage students' trust of their own judgment, and show interest in students activities such pattern of communication can turn on the students for creative performance (Hutchinson & Beadle, 1992). Moreover, when teachers share their personal experience with students the latter tend to be more active in the learning process (Carter, 1992). It follows that proper selection of classroom activities can create a positive climate wherein values can be shared and students are given the opportunity to take leadership roles and develop creativity.

Adolescent Students Perception Of Supportive Classroom Environment For Creativity In Secondary Schools Of Ebonyi State- C. U. Mgboro, Ph.D and N. A. Eke

Most studies carried out on supportive classroom environment are foreign based. This calls for the need to explore the characteristics of creative supportive classroom environment as perceived by students in the local Nigerian environment, specifically in Ebonyi state. What then are the students' perception of the supportive classroom environment for creativity?

Method

The study was conducted in Ebonyi North education zone which has four local Government Areas with 78 secondary schools. The design was a descriptive survey aimed at finding and describing supportive classroom environment for creativity as perceived by students. The study involved all senior secondary school students in public secondary schools in Ebonyi North education zone. Twenty five schools were sampled for the study using simple random sampling technique. Forty (40) SSS I students were sampled from each of the 25 schools chosen through balloting. The total number sampled was 1000. The instrument for data collection was a researcher developed questionnaire titled Supportive Classroom Environment for Creativity Questionnaire (SCESQ) derived from literature. The fifteen item questionnaire was structured after four point scale of strongly agree (SA), Agree (A) Disagree (DA) and strongly disagree (SDA). A mean score of 2.5 was taken to mean that the students perceive the item as supportive of creativity.

The instrument was validated by three experts, two of them were in educational psychology and the other from measurement and evaluation from Faculty of Education, Ebonyi State University. To ensure its reliability, a test re-test was carried out using 50 students drawn from one of the schools outside the sample. The result was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and the reliability coefficient of 0.86 was established. The research question was answered using mean scores. The result of the study is presented in the table below.

Table1: Mean Responses of Students' Perception of Supportive Classroom Environment for Creativity

S/N	Item	Mean
1	Allowing unconventional behaviour	2.3
2	Encouraging questioning authority/domination	2.00
3	Encouraging risk taking	2.00
4	Encouraging choice and flexibility within some limits	2.61
5	Allowing movement and reasonable noise in classroom	2.00
6	Providing time and outlet for humour	2.70
7	Including humour in teaching	2.80
8	Always asking 'why' you did or said something.	2.5
9	Incorporating metaphor and analogies in instructions.	2.6
10	Providing situations/activities that are open-ended.	2.00
11	Providing materials for artistic expressions in all content area	1.00
12	Providing space and time for quiet thinking and reflection	1.00
13	Discussing multiple perspectives	2.30
14	Encouraging sensorial exploration of materials	2.5
15	Allowing multimedia approaches to assignments.	2.00

The table above shows that generally students do not perceive the classroom environment as supporting creativity. This is because most of the responses (9 out of 15), have mean scores less than 2.5.

Discussion of Findings

The result presented in the above table indicate that generally students do not perceive the classroom environment as supporting creativity. The result is in line with Simonton (2000) who observed that through the process of teaching teachers stifle creativity in students. Furthermore, teachers were discovered to cherish creativity in only few people (Sihank & Cleary, 1995) especially outside the classroom (Mgboro, 2002). Notwithstanding the philosophy that the school is a place for preparing students to handle the challenges facing humanity, the teachers' professional training and the external influences on teachers (parents, supervisors, government policies and examination bodies) appear not to challenge them to adopt the skills nor allow them to teach for creative development. Teachers therefore were found, from the study, not to encourage questioning authority, not to encourage risk taking; they do not provide situations/activities that are open ended, materials for artistic expression are not provided in all content areas. Space and time for quiet thinking and reflection are not provided for students. The slavish following of the scheme of work as an organized body of knowledge that should be completed within a specified time frame appear to force teachers not to allow unconventional behaviours, situation/activities that are open ended, and quiet time for thinking and reflections. Consequent upon the above situations teachers do not encourage questioning authority; do not discuss multiple perspective to issues learnt or the use of multimedia approaches to assignments Freeman (1992) had earlier discovered that it is through what the teachers and students do together instead of giving orders that creativity is fostered. When teachers try to live out their own aspirations for achievements through their students the teachers become unduly involved in the students life (Miller 1981). The result is that the students accede to their teachers' over involvement (Mgboro, 2002). It should however be observed that different kinds of classroom environment are perceived by students resulting in different frames of behaviour (Mgboro, 2002). This is because the interaction existing between teachers and students is a diffuse type in which all aspects of the students' life are relevant. The implication of the above statement is that when students perceive themselves as highly efficacious they can persist and tackle threatening environmental conditions.

Conclusion

The study aimed at investigating adolescent students' perception of supportive classroom environment for creativity. Using the survey design the study sample was 1000 adolescent students from public secondary schools in Ebonyi North education zone. It was discovered that generally adolescent students in Ebonyi state do not

Adolescent Students Perception Of Supportive Classroom Environment For Creativity In Secondary Schools Of Ebonyi State- C. U. Mgboro, Ph.D and N. A. Eke
perceive their classroom environment as supportive of creativity. Recommendations were made based on the findings.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study it is recommended that existing classroom activities/teacher behaviours need to be restructured as a way of enhancing creativity. Re-training of teachers to equip them with the skills that would challenge the moribund minds of the students is necessary. The school programme/time table should have enough free periods during which time students would be encouraged to reflect on what they learnt.

References

- Carter, M. (1992). Training teachers for creative learning experiences. *Exchange* (5), 38-40
- Delucia, R. C. (1994). Perceptions of faculty-student relationship: A survey. *NASPA* 31 (Summer) 271-279
- Freeman J. (1992). *Quality education. The development of competence*. Geneva: UNESCO
- Hutchinson, L. M. & Beadle, M. E. (1992). Professors' communication styles: how they influence male and female seminar participants. *Teaching and teacher education* 8 (4) 405-418.
- Isaksen, S. G. & Murdock, M. C. (1993). The emergence of a discipline: Issues and approaches to the study of creativity. In S. G. Saksen, M.C, Murdock, R. L. Firestein, & D. J. Treffinger (Eds) *Understanding and recognizing creativity: The emergence of a discipline* (pp. 13-47) Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Mgboro C. U. (2002). Nurturing the social-emotional development of the creative child. *The Nigerian educational psychologist*. Nigerian society for educational psychologists (NISEP) 1(1), 101-108.
- Mgboro, C. U. (2003). Identification of the underachieving creative child: implications for the teacher. *The Nigerian educational psychologist*. NISEP 2(2) 140-148.
- Miller, A. (1981). *Prisoners of childhood*. New York: Basic books
- Starko. A. J. (1995). *Creativity in the classroom: schools of curious delight*. New York; Longman.

- Torrance, E. P. & Safter, H. T (1986). Are children becoming more creative: *The journal of creative behaviour* 20, 1-13.
- Steinberg R. J. & Lubart, T. I. (1993). Creative giftedness: a multivariate investment approach. *Gifted child quarterly* 37, 7-15.
- Simonton, D. K. (2000). Creativity: cognitive, personal development and social aspect. *American psychologists* 53(1) 151-158.
- Schank, R. C. & Cleary, C. (1995). Making machines creative. In S. Smith, T.B. Ward, & R. A. Finke (eds). *The creative cognition approach*. MIT press 229-247.
- Torrance, E. P. & Myers, R.E. (1970). *Creative learning and teaching*. New York. Dodd, Mead, & company.