

TEACHING AND TESTING CREATIVELY: A PANACEA TO EXAMINATION MALPRACTICES IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The current waves of examination malpractices in Nigerian schools have remained with us inspite of a number of measures which have been tried out in order to stop it. This paper makes a case that adoption of creativity teaching and testing will help reduce this evil to a minimum. This is because it will make teaching and learning more practical, meaningful and productive, Teaching and testing creatively implies that teachers who are proximally related to the academic lives of students or learners, should lead the learners in the learners various ways through the teachers creative activities, to become creative. To do so, the teacher must overcome the barriers to creative behaviours/ thinking and uphold the factors that enhance creativity. When students are led /made to be creative, the students then can adequately respond to creative testing. Creative tests do not have already made answers or sonorous and routine responses to be copied/ memorised. The paper has outlined some practical illustration of creativity teaching and some creativity test items. It recommended that workshops should be organized for teachers, more creative teaching and learning course be introduced as part of some courses in all teacher training education programmes in the country.

Examination is a concept in any educational systems which many students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders are familiar with. It is a popular and essential component of teaching and learning process. According to Onotume (1993:p3), examination is defined as “all forms of measurement and evaluation, tests taken as institutional arrangements to determine the quality and quantity of knowledge or ability possessed by candidates/ students as they attain or progress towards attainment of desired learning goal.” As a measure of knowledge and attainment, examination is useful for determination of learning, provision of feedback to both teachers and learners, promotion, placement, certification and diagnosis (Esomonu, 1993)

Examination bodies in order to achieve the goal of examination usually specify rules and regulations and advance measures to ensure that no candidate has some undue-advantage over others. A number of measures ranging from expulsion/suspension of such students from schools to outright cancellation of results / prosecution have been adopted. All these punitive measures notwithstanding, the wave of examination malpractice in Nigerian schools at all levels have remained unabated. Adeniyi (2001) noted that teachers through poor teaching and testing pattern, have contributed to this ugly situation. Education has been described as an agent of values clarification, orientation and transmission. These values the teacher no longer transmits to students in schools. This means that teachers are proximally related to the poor academic live of students. When teachers fail in their duties, students exploit their short-comings to satisfy their so called sharp practices for certification.

The implications of these large scales of cheating in examination are that it makes nonsense of the educational qualifications, discredits institutions of learning and the nation as a whole. In search for remedies of examination malpractice and alternative ways of assessing examining, there is need to seek alternative teaching and testing methods.

Why the Adoption of Creativity Teaching/Testing Method

Creativity teaching precedes creativity testing. If teachers teach creatively, it means that creativity testing should follow suite. Creativity teaching and testing is being suggested because every human being has the potential to be creative. Each person is a unique individual capable of creating, it comes within the human territory. Man is simply a creative species. The bible said that God made

man in his own image and likeness (Gen 1:26) therefore God being a creator with creative attributes implies that human beings got some share in varying degrees and indifferent spheres of life of Gods creative attributes (Ogomaka, 2004). Being creative therefore means that man is becoming like God his creator, pleasing him and actualizing one of the purposes of putting man on earth which is to subdue the earth and have dominion over it. Creativity teaching and testing, which makes or helps man to think and act creatively is therefore a step in the right direction towards making man become creative or more. The reason is because, creativity teaching and testing according to Ogomaka (2004) is one which encourages the use of non routine tests and real life problems in assessing learners which brings about a link between schools and world of work in the society.

In his own contribution, Alao (2005) justifying the need for a renewal of the assessment practices, identified the flaws in the current assessment practices in Nigeria and other developing countries. He stated that educational system in developing countries run close-ended educational programmes, which are good for advancement of behavioural objectives that promote lower-order thinking process rather than open-ended educational system that enhance divergent thinking, authentic reasoning and self direction inquiry. This is what creativity testing is all about.

Students, one notices these days do not take their studies seriously. This is because they are not challenged enough since it is what they are taught in class that they will be required to reproduce during examination. They do not see the need to read until examination approaches. They can even perm or cram and pass. Those who do not know the subject matter can cheat and pass. This will not be the case if the tests which they are given require them to answer from their personal knowledge and experiences. Chauhan (1991: 283) contended that “Any evaluation of a child that depends solely on mental tests scores is bound to be misleading and incomplete”. This is the problem Nigerian educational system is facing. It does not assess the “Impacts” made on student by the contents. The impacts or effects translate as skills. When these impacts are emphasized, the reports of academic progress of students will say exactly what the students know and can do well. Right now there appears to be a shift in educational value from personal skill to certificate acquisition (Nduka 2004). The certificate which Hassan (2001) called fake have little or no value outside Nigeria. The reason being that our system lack quality assurances indices. Even within Nigeria, the labour employers view the certificates with a lot of suspicion and as such, pass individuals looking for jobs through series of selection tests. The only reason is because the certificates do not really depict the amount of knowledge and competence possessed by the individual carrying them about. Until the teachers begin to teach and evaluate learning outcomes creatively, students’ talents and ability will continue to be hidden. Examination malpractice will continue to be a problem in the Nigerian Educational System. The country Nigeria will continue to invite foreigners who have handled their own problems to help in the running of the nation’s projects. This will not foster the dream of becoming a self-reliant nation.

What is Creativity Teaching and Testing all About?

Before answering the above question? The first thing is to see what creativity means:- Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary describes creativity as involving the use of skill and imagination to produce something new or a work of art. Chauhan (1985) defined creativity as the ability to produce new forms in an unconventional / unique way. Here, the emphasis is on imagination and imaginative child is one who is good at thinking of new interesting ideas and forming pictures in his mind. Venom cited by Obani (1986:p6) defined creativity as man’s capacity to produce new ideas, insight, invention artistic objects which are accepted as having social, spiritual, aesthetic, scientific or technological value. Also. Jones cited by Harrison (1925:25) defined creativity as “a combination of flexibility, originality and sensitivity with ideas which enable the thinker to break away from usual sequences of thought with different and productive sequences, the result of which gives satisfaction to himself and possibly, others.” These views point to creativity as breaking away from the usual to produce new and meaningful ideas. This means that creativity does not encourage reproduction/replication of already existing ideas and this is the whole idea of subduing and having dominion over the earth and acquiring education that is functional and self reliant.

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Having explained the meaning of creativity, the next is to consider how to teach creatively. As one of the human attributes noted by Offor (2004), creativity can be enkindled and nurtured in schools. Continuing she stated, "Given that every one is naturally creative to some extent, the creative tendencies of the student are made more manifest through teachers' actions and dispositions". While good teaching encourages creativity, poor teaching stifles it.

One way to approach the issue of creativity teaching is to identify the factors in the systems that militate against teaching and learning creatively so as to avoid them/prevent them. The other way round also is to identify the factors that enhance/promote teaching and learning creatively and stress/emphasize them.

These militating factors have been identified and they include the following

- **Over Crowded Classrooms:** This does not encourage individualized attention which is necessary in creativity teaching.
- Mixed ability grouping of pupils for instruction.
- Teachers desiring that learners should conform in terms of behavior.
- Use of conventional techniques and strict adherence to methods and procedures known to the teachers or used in recommended texts.
- Adopting curricular demands that emphasize/stress uniformity in methods, contents and materials disregarding learners and individual differences.
- Lack of long term assignments (such as projects) and power test always or almost all the time.
- Tendency of teachers to assess students work based on authority views or established norms or teachers' own standards.

The Factors that Enhance/Encourage Creative Behaviours among Learners are as Follows:

(i) Making teaching meaningful

This is done when a teacher through his/her teaching methods is able to arouse/elicit creative behaviour/attributes from his/her students such as:-

- **Sensitivity:-** being curious to know about things around, critically analyzing until he/she understands fully a thing.
- **Elaboration:-** ability to explain difficult problems more clearly to the simplest form.
- **Divergent Thinking:-** observing relationship between two or more things for example asking a student to compare and contrast.
- **Fluency:-** entails ability to generate large number of ideas within a specified time and these ideas are such that can help solve problems..
- **Flexibility:-**willingness to accommodate new ideas not holding tenaciously to an idea when there are better ones.
- **Originality:-** meaning to produce something new demanding initiative and vision. Bringing about a new way of solving problems.
- **Redefinition:-** being able to change or reinterpret/redefine an existing object, idea, formula without alteration in meaning.

Others Include

- giving individualized attention to learners.
- Adequately and appropriately considering views of learners and reinforcing them during teaching.
- Making real life problem- solving activities part and parcel of teaching – learning experience.
- History of creative individuals forming part and parcel of the content of the curriculum.
- Encouraging students to ask questions and responding to every question asked by the students.
- Challenging learners to identify problems in their environments and giving them clues to proffer solutions to problems.
- Providing for learners proper linkage activities so as to experience problem solving techniques in the traditional society and in the industry.
- Not disregarding students' effort on account of poor quality.

Some Practical Illustrations of Creativity Teaching Leading to Asking of Creativity Test Items

1. Ask open-ended question during your teaching, for example, “what would happen if there were no rivers?” such questions will stimulate free thinking and provide scope for many possible answers, with none of them wrong.
2. Involve pupils/students in your class in the activities which stimulate creativity and fantasy. For example; present some meaningless similarities “I am a horse” and let the child find out the possibilities.
3. Involve the child in exploring activities like, “make a list of as many problems as possible related to the environment, or list of things around you.”
4. Present some statements of observation to explore the possibility of its reversal, for example; “the rose is red, ‘Red is the rose”
5. Appreciate openly whenever a child expresses creative behavior like asking unusual questions, giving unusual ideas and taking self initiated actions. Appreciate the child when he/she makes ambiguous statements. Encourage the child to make as many arguments as possible about the solution while solving the problems.
6. Do not always insist on correct answers. Allow the child to think and re-think about the correctness of the answer. Do not evaluate the goodness of the answer but insist on the number of ideas. Quality of the answers is taken care of when the child examines all the possible answers to each question.
7. Do not encourage rote learning or memorizing of the facts. Allow them to pursue as much as they want without bothering themselves about giving the expected solution or answer.

Below are some examples of creativity test items borne out of creativity teaching as stated by Offor (2008) and Ukah (2008).

1. Suppose you meet a body of water on your way, what things will you do to determine its depth?
2. What does ironing do to clothes?
3. What do you think will happen if the earth were to be flat and not spherical?
4. Should you discover a new bleaching solution, what will you call it?
5. Think about the sun and write as many ideas about it as possible
6. Explain further in your own words, the statement that living things die.
7. Looking at what they do have or have in common, group or classify these living things in any three different ways, grasshopper, soldier ant, goat, weaverbird, tailor ant, deer, cat, sheep, lion frog and alligator.
8. In terms of your mother how would you explain your father?
9. Why do people wash their white clothes with blue solution?
10. Kerosene is more useful in the house than diesel Comment.

The examples of the creativity test items shown above are not mere achievement tests showing only what the students have learnt but more importantly, they assess the extent to which they can use their knowledge to tackle problems in real life. The items of the tests are not routine, so the students are not limited to providing the answers as they are taught but are very free and in fact, are required to give other possible answers they may think of. One would therefore agree that if teachers begin to teach creatively and ask creativity test questions, examination malpractice which is fueled by undue emphasis on paper qualification, supported by Nwagwu (2002) and Olushola (2007), will be minimized or even stooled. The reason is because there are no ready-made answers to creativity test items as could be seen from questions (1 -10) above. The idea of copying likely answers and smuggling into examination hall is ruled out. Receiving help or coping from another person in the examination (which will mean writing the same thing as the other person) will be very implicating and a futile effort as answers are not supposed to be the same since they have not already been determined.

Conclusion

This paper is of the opinion that if teachers teach and assess creatively, examination malpractice and parading of paper qualification without enough evidence of competence will be

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minimized if not stamped out. Emphasis will now be on acquisition of relevant skills which is what is mostly needed to make education functional. A functional education is one that the recipient will be able to relate what they have learnt in the school to life experiences and be able to solve personal and societal problems (Opara, 2004). In his own view, Awotuwa (2003:3), supporting the above idea stated that “the aim of teaching is to help our students develop their potentials in their journey to adulthood so that they can become good and productive and useful citizen of their country.” A trial the writers strongly feel will be convincing.

Recommendations

The teacher stands as the first and principal human resource in resources development exercise. In the light of this, the following recommendations on how to start and sustain creativity teaching and testing especially in our secondary schools are being suggested:

1. Workshops should be organized regularly for serving teachers in order to make them know what creativity is all about, be more creative and more capable of teaching and testing creatively. This is because no teacher can lead a learner to be creative if the teacher does not know what creativity is all about and is not himself/herself creative. No one gives what he does not have.
2. Teacher education institutions in this country should introduce or mount a course in creativity and creative teaching or integrate creativity and creative teaching into an already existing relevant/related courses. By so doing the schools will begin to have teachers turned out from such institutions to teach and test creatively.
3. Resource persons should be invited to write text books on how to teach creatively and how to generate question which are creative. This will expose the pupils and sensitize them on how to be creative and even more.

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