

THE ROLE OF CREATIVITY IN VISUAL ARTS FOR DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

“Creativity is the ability to produce new and original ideas and things; inventiveness”, Uzoagba, 2000. Creativity is constructive, active and central to, but not limited to Visual Arts. It involves improvement through questioning, inquiring, searching, manipulating, and experimenting to find out the truth. Also, it is important to stress that creativity is productive, hence, this paper aims at revealing the active and productive role of creativity for development. It may be considered as a kind of fortress of potentialities applied for individual and societal development. In this paper, the nature of creativity, resources that aid creativity, and some developmental accomplishments that underpin the role of creativity are presented. It is concluded that creativity applied by individuals results in developmental triumphs/accomplishments. For this reason, it is recommended that Government and the individual should strive towards total development through creativity.

Introduction

This paper begins with a brief examination of key concepts in the topic. The concepts revolve around the expressions “creativity”, and “visual arts”.

What is creativity?

Creativity is a word that comes up often when talking about art, but what is creativity exactly? The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines the word “create”, as “to make something happen or exist ...” This definition simply means bringing into reality an event, product, or thing. The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines the word in another way. According to Uzoagba, (2000), the dictionary defines the word creativity as the ability to produce new and original ideas and things; inventiveness. This definition, no doubt, has the same implied meaning as the first. In his book, “Understanding Art in General Education, Uzoagba, (2000), presents some interesting comments on the term creativity which are presented and analyzed below.

1. “Creativity is ...constructive, productive behaviour that can be seen in action or accomplishment”- emphasis mine, (Lowenfeld and Britain, 1975). It is interesting to note that creativity is active, not passive, as it may be seen as a behaviour which is not only constructive, but productive. Worthy of note also is the fact that creativity results in accomplishment, or achievement. Furthermore, the definition does not restrict creativity to any field, hence, creativity may be applied in any career field for development.
2. “Creativity is the ability to invent new symbols and ideas, to improve on established symbols, to rearrange established organizations into new organizations and to integrate new or borrowed ideas into previously organized systems or situations, (June)”. A large part of this definition implies that inventiveness does not exist in isolation but draws from the individual’s knowledge of established symbols, organizations, ideas, systems or situations – it draws from resources. It is worthwhile to note that this is both a definition and an allusion to the nature of creativity.

The following comment further sheds some light on the nature of this word “creativity” by rather subtly addressing the issue of individual development of one’s creative ability through identified processes.

3. “Creative learners learn by questioning, inquiring, searching, manipulating, experimenting, even playing around, but always find out the truth”. Paul Torrance: (1962).

On the meaning of Art, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English has some definitions that include the following.

1. “The use of painting, drawing, sculpture etc to represent things or express ideas...”
2. “Objects that are produced by art, such as paintings, drawings etc...”
3. “The ability or skill involved in doing or making something ...”

The list of definitions above simply indicates the fact that the Visual Arts readily come to mind when the word “Art” is mentioned. However, for the purpose of this paper, preference is given to the last definition that emphasizes “skill” in “doing” something, regardless of whether what is done is drawing, painting, or anything else. That is, this preference has its basis on the scope of its application to Visual Arts, as well as any other discipline.

Ibrahim, (2000), traces the etymological beginning of the word Art to a Latin word “Arti,” which means “to do well”. According to him, Art is a name that is given to all skilful activities and is broadly divided into two, namely Visual and Non-visual Arts. He clearly distinguishes between these two forms of art by asserting that Visual Arts refer to those aspects of art with products which are visible, while Non-visual Art refers to those with products which cannot be seen with the naked eyes, divisions of Non-visual Art being Performing and Literary Arts. Divisions of Visual Arts are also given by him - Fine and Applied Arts.

It is a truism to say that creativity starts in the mind and involves ideas or imagination. And, imagination precedes actualization of ideas. Uzoagba, (2000), alluded to this position. According to him, works of art have to be conceived in the mind of a man, or group of men, and then made communicable to other men by the creative skill of the designer working in some medium that can be perceived by the senses through the eye, ear, and hand.

The Nature of Creativity

This paper shall examine the nature of creativity by studying varied characteristics exhibited by creative people. Getlein, (2002), observes that the exact nature of creativity remains elusive but that, there is general agreement creative people tend to possess certain traits. Such traits as presented by the author are as follows.

Sensitivity	Flexibility
Fluency	Originality
Analytical skill	Playfulness
Organizational skill	Productivity

Getlein, in the book “Living with Art”, writes short notes on each item in the list above – the author refers to “sensitivity” as heightened awareness of what one sees, hears, and touches, as well as responsiveness to other people and their feelings. By, “flexibility” is meant an ability to adapt to new situations and to see their possibilities; willingness to find innovative relationships. “Originality” refers to uncommon responses to situations and to solving problems. By the word “Playfulness”, the author refers to a sense of humour and ability to experiment freely. The next word, “Productivity” refers to the ability to generate ideas easily and frequently, and to follow through on those ideas. “Fluency” is examined in the text to mean a readiness to allow the free flow of ideas, “analytical skill” to mean “a talent for exploring problems, taking them apart, and finding out how things work. Finally, the ability to put things back together in a coherent order has been seen as “organizational skill”.

Another, but similar list of characteristics that are exhibited by creative people, is presented by a different author, Uzoagba, (2000), in his “Understanding Art in General Education”. He posited that the creative person has specific attributes, abilities or skills that he uses during creative process. He listed the attributes as

- a. Sensitivity to problems (awareness).
- b. Ideational and associational fluency (many ideas).
- c. Flexibility (ability to change).
- d. Originality and redefinition (ability to improve and adapt).

A comparison between the sets of characteristics possessed by creative people as presented by the two authors reveals a glaring agreement, which can even be seen in the common choice of the words “sensitivity”, “flexibility”, and “originality”. The fourth in the list given by Uzoagba – “ideational and associational fluency (many ideas)”, means productivity of ideas in the context of the work of Getlein M.

Having seen from the above the active, not passive, productive nature of creativity, and behavioural (overt) manifestations of creativity by people who are creative, it is quite imperative that the covert or intrinsic operations which give birth to the observable manifestations, attitudes, or traits with respect to creative people be studied at this juncture in this discourse.

Emotions provide drive for human beings to carry out actions. In the book, *The Science of Mind and Behaviour*, the duo Michael and Ronald, (2004), observe, “Emotions have important... functions”. According to the authors, positive emotions such as interest, joy, excitement, contentment, and love have important adaptive functions, that, they help us broaden our thinking and behaviour so that we explore, consider new ideas, try out new ways to achieve goals, play and savour what we have, (emphasis mine). One does not need a stretch of imagination to see that the underlined, in fact, portrays the creative way of doing things. This author, therefore, infers that emotions give rise to creativity.

In respect of the obvious place of emotions in creative development and creative prowess of an individual and by extension, a society, this paper proceeds to examine the meaning and place of “motivation” in the nature of creativity. Encyclopaedia Britannica (Ultimate Reference Suite) considers motivation as forces acting either on or within a person to initiate behaviour. According to this source, the word is derived from the Latin term *motivus* (a moving cause), which suggests the acting properties of the processes involved in psychological motivation. The forces acting on an individual are external stimuli while those acting within the individual are internal. The words “pushes” and “pulls” are used to classify motives. Hence, Encyclopaedia Britannica (Ultimate Reference Suite) regards push motives as those that concern internal changes that have the effect of triggering specific motive state, while pull motives represent external goals that influence one’s behaviour towards them. However, it was admitted that most motivational situations are in reality a combination of push and pull conditions. Giving the example of hunger, it was observed that in part, it may be signaled by internal changes in blood glucose or fat stores, but that motivation to eat is also heavily influenced by what foods are available.

Having seen what motivation is about, it is important to relate the term to creativity – “intrinsic task-focused motivation is... essential to creativity...people rarely do truly creative work in an area unless they really love what they are doing and focus on the work rather than the potential rewards”, Sternberg, 2006. This conclusion that people rarely do truly creative work in an area unless they really love what they are doing, was, according to the author, based on research of Amabile (1983) and others. It is hereby observed that love for what people do amounts to intrinsic (internal) motivation, which in the context of Sternberg’s statement is important to creativity.

In addition to motivation, other agents/conditions and resources necessary for creativity to thrive are:

Intellectual Skills	Environment
Knowledge	Confluence
Personality	

Three intellectual skills, which are particularly important for creativity, are identified by Sternberg, 2006. They are

- a. the synthetic skill,
- b. the analytic skill, and
- c. the practical – contextual skill.

By the word “synthesize” (from which “synthetic” is derived) is meant “harmonize, arrange, blend, integrate... unify...to combine or to produce by synthesis”, Merriam Websters’ Dictionary and Thesaurus (Ultimate Reference Suite, 2008). Armed with this meaning, it is easy to see with Sternberg, (2006), that the synthetic skill enables one to see problems in new ways and to escape the bounds of conventional thinking- it is the position of this paper that relating different ideas which pertain to a problem can result in production of hybrid, creative, or new ideas or ways of seeing things.

The word analyze suggests separating or distinguishing the component parts of something (as a substance, a process, a situation) so as to discover its true nature or inner relationships, it involves “laying bare parts or pieces for individual scrutiny”, (Merriam Webster’s Dictionary and Thesaurus, Ultimate Reference Suite, 2008). The analytic skill, according to Sternberg, (2006), helps to recognize which of one’s ideas are worth pursuing and which are not. Congruence can be observed between the dictionary definition of the word analyze and the statement by Sternberg, and this can be seen in the word “scrutiny” as a “process” so as to “discover” which of one’s ideas are worth pursuing. The third of the three intellectual skills, that is, the practical - contextual skill is “to know how to persuade others of – to sell other people on – the value of one’s ideas”, Sternberg, 2006.

As an internal resource for creativity to thrive in an individual, and consequently, in a group, adequate KNOWLEDGE about a field is essential to move it (the field) forward through creative work. In the words of Sternberg, (2006), “one cannot move beyond where a field is if one does not know where it is”.

With respect to PERSONALITY, it has been observed, with reference to research investigations summarized in Lubart, 1994, and Sternberg & Lubart, 1991, 1995, that personality attributes such as willingness to overcome obstacles, willingness to take sensible risks, willingness to tolerate ambiguity among others, are important for creative functioning. It is widely acknowledged that necessity is the mother of invention. If this statement is correct, it may as well follow that willingness to overcome obstacles is sine qua non to creative functioning, supposing that an obstacle creates necessity to the creative mind.

An ENVIRONMENT, which is supportive of positive creative ideas, is important. Although environment is external to the creative individual, it can affect his/her creative output by hindering it or otherwise. Hence Sternberg, (2006), observes, “one could have all of the internal resources needed to think creatively, but without some environmental support (such as forum for proposing those ideas), the creativity that a person has within him or her might never be displayed”.

Developmental Accomplishment Profile in Visual Arts That Underpin the Role of Creativity

To accomplish, according to Merriam Webster’s Dictionary & Thesaurus (Ultimate Reference Suite, 2008), is to “succeed in reaching ...a stage in a progression”. This implies development. At this juncture, this paper should present some accomplishments by person(s) who have made mark in history, through creativity, beginning with some accomplishments by a career visual artist.

In Visual Arts, individuals have made marks in Ceramics, Textiles, Painting, Sculpture, and Graphic Design – aspects of Visual Arts. Such individuals have thus achieved national and international renown. By so doing, they spurred development in their areas, for instance, by boosting tourism and educational/research activities. In contemporary times, one of such Nigerian artists is Bruce Onobrakpeya.

Bruce Onobrakpeya

Some of his accomplishments:

1. He developed a bronze lino technique in 1968 in which low relief linoleum is invested with a bronze coating resulting in a visual delight. In 1972, he evolved yet another technique, which he called “Plastocast” by casting plates for deep etching in plaster. He has been described by many international Art journals as the creative genius of Africa in the field of printmaking, *Emu*, 1992.
2. Bruce Onobrakpeya has exhibited his art works in Nigeria and abroad. According to Benson, 2007 (*Guardian*, September 28, 2007), Onobrakpeya had his first one-man exhibition in 1949 in Ughelli, Delta State of Nigeria. And that, he has since participated in several exhibitions around the world including the International Book Fair in Bologna in 1969; Howard University in Washington DC (1970); the Commonwealth Art Gallery in London (1971); Gallery Watata in Nairobi; FESTAC’ 77, Lagos (1977); tenth one-man show at the Goethe Institute in Lagos (1978); SEVEN STORIES ABOUT Modern Art in Africa at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London (1995-1996) to mention just a few. Some of his awards/accomplishments which are presented by Benson, 2007 include Pope John Paul II award for painting the life of Saint Paul, the Sadam Hussein award, the Solidra Circle award and Fulbright Exchange Scholar award. Furthermore, that he has been listed in International WHO IS WHO in Art and Antique.

Accomplished persons whose names are notable in contemporary Nigerian Visual Art scene are numerous and include Benjamin Enweonwu. On the foreign scene, one of the striking names is Pablo Picasso.

Prior to summing up of this discourse, this paper should reflect at least one perceived instance of creativity applied in science and technology. In a book titled, “You Can Be A World Changer – 101 Stories of People Who Made a Difference”, some corporate authors (Cook Communications Ministries), observe, “in 1969, Armstrong was aboard Apollo 11 with astronauts Edwin ‘Buzz’ Aldrin Jr. and Michael Collins as it was launched at Canaveral, Florida. Three days later, the men found themselves in an orbit around the moon, 240,000 miles from the earth”. Perhaps, it would not

have been possible for Apollo 11 to have taken a direct flight to the Earth's moon surface, from the Earth. This supposition is based on the fact that more fuel that would have been required by the rocket might have made flight more difficult due to weight. This kind of divergent thinking is reflective of creativity. The afore mentioned corporate authors continue, "on July 20, 1969, Armstrong and Aldrin flew the landing craft *Eagle* away from Apollo 11 command module... Armstrong found a safe place for the lunar module to land...he brought the craft to land on rest on the moon's surface". This suggests that not every part of the rocket that left Earth eventually landed on the moon. "After several hours of preparation, Armstrong opened the *Eagle* door, climbed slowly down a ladder, and set foot on the moon. Millions around the world applauded". This great feat and evidence of development by mankind did not come on a platter of gold, but, through creativity observed in critical, divergent, and analytical thinking, and made manifest in inventions and accomplishments.

Conclusion

Creativity is central, but not limited to Visual Arts. This is an allusion to the role of creativity in Visual Arts. This role of creativity in Visual Arts is clearly expressed by an author who was earlier referred to in this discourse.

According to him, (Uzoagba, 2000), works of art have to be conceived in the mind of a man, or group of men, and then made communicable to other men by the creative skill of the designer working in some medium that can be perceived by the senses through the eye, ear and hand. The nature of creativity has also been examined, highlighting some characteristics of creative people. Not left out are vital resources necessary for creativity to thrive. Finally, a few cases of the triumph of creativity for developmental accomplishments by individuals are presented in this paper.

Recommendations

It is recommended that more research work be conducted on creativity, as, it can be viewed in diverse ways.

Government should assist in the promotion of creativity-friendly environment.

Finally, it should be mentioned, that, knowledge gained on this subject of creativity be applied in every discipline to facilitate remarkable career and disciplinary progress and pep up personal and group/societal development.

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