

Developing Creative Writing Skills in Children

Augusta C. Assimonye & Sylvia U. Ibe

Abstract

Writing creative content has still not lost its importance in the gathering of knowledge and exploring of new ideas and imagination. Though the modes of engaging in such activities are progressing rapidly with an adaptation of new technology, writing has never gone completely out of date due to the immense importance it subtly holds in economic and social life. Creative writing is more important for the young minds budding with a lot of energy and creative potential that awaits only a nudge towards the proper direction. While creativity helps to create, writing helps to record the creativity and blends it with the presentation. By nurturing the young for creative writing, one can envision a future of responsible and mature workers who can present ideas effectively. This article explored and explained the strategies teachers will apply in teaching writing creatively in order to develop creative writing skill in children.

Keywords: Writing Skills, Children, Development

Introduction

Creativity is the ability to develop new ideas and discover new ways of looking at problems and opportunities. Creativity is to put elements together to form a coherent or functional whole, reorganize elements into a new pattern or structure. Amabile (2016) saw it as involving coming up with alternative hypothesis based on criteria, devising a procedure for accomplishing some task and inventing a product. Nnabuike (2009) defined creativity as the ability to combine ideas in a unique way or to make unusual association between ideas. Creativity involves thinking or behaving imaginatively directed at achieving an objective that is original and valuable. This definition captures the four features of creativity according to the National Advisory Board on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCE, 1999), which are

- i. Imagination
- ii. Purpose
- iii. Originality and
- iv. Value

Crompton (2005) developed a continuum of creativity:

Stage 1: Noticing things: This is about being interested enough to find out more or observe more. It also involves questions expressing thoughts or feelings.

Stage 2: Making Connection: This involves taking the interest further by making connections between ideas, observations, developing individual style, solving problems, exercising judgement, possessing intrinsic motivation.

Stage 3: This involves using skills and knowledge and imagination to make something new and valuable to the local group or community.

Stage 4: This is concerned with making something new to the society as a whole, working at the pinnacle of the field in skills, knowledge, understanding and vision.

Creative writing is the use of imagination in producing written work. It is different from factual writing where someone has been provided the information to relate. In creative writing, the writer purely invents what to write and how to write it to make an effect. The activities in creativity continuum are all involved in creative writing.

According to Alohakids.com, there are ten benefits of creative writing to children as follows:

- Act as a mode of self-expression.
- Unleashes creative energy.
- Stimulates imagination.
- Enhances thought processing skills.
- Enables divergent thinking.
- Develops language skills.
- Aids emotional development.
- Boosts confidence.
- Gives a sense of pride.
- Serves as a fun leisure activity

The National Policy on Education (2013) on the goals of basic education states that it shall provide the child with diverse basic knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship, wealth creation and educational advancement. And that as from early childhood the spirit of enquiry and creativity is to be inculcated through exploration of nature, the environment, art, music and the use of toys.

Children have to be motivated for them to be creative. According to Johnston(2005 a), motivation is an important point in creativity. He

considers motivation in the classroom a major challenge because of the difficulties of competing with stimulation in the outside world- media, computer games, sophisticated toys, which involves a child being passively entertained rather than being actively engaged. To achieve creativity in children, teachers must be creative.

Features of creative teachers

Creative teachers are known for certain qualities which include the following:

1. Creative teachers are able to provide original and creative activities.
2. They make a real impact on the children they teach.
3. They have a good subject and pedagogical knowledge and skills.
4. They have an infectious enthusiasm that motivates children.
5. They provide learning which meets children's individual needs and
6. They involve children as active participants in their own learning (Johnston, 2005a).

Teaching for Creativity in Writing

Teaching creatively and teaching for creativity are different. The former refers to teacher's ability to teach in new and diverse ways while the latter refers to teaching so as to foster creative spirit in another, which is the focus of this paper. Teaching for creativity according to NACCE involves creative planning, relevant and interesting experiences, setting context for creative engagement, innovation and activities for creative thinking. These components must be incorporated by the teacher in teaching creative writing to children.

1. **Creative Planning:** A creative teacher plans creatively. A creative teacher does not implement the scheme of work as he/she received it. He/she must adapt it to the children's context. This starts during planning. In planning, the teacher plans creatively by
 - Preparing a relevant and engaging lesson.
 - Infusing an element of originality by presenting old ideas in a new way or new ideas in original context.
 - Infusing an element of problem solving, developing thinking skills and discussion and debate.

In essence, the teacher has to come up with a plan that tasks learners to take note of things, make connections between observations, solve problems, exercise judgements and come up with something new and

purposeful. A creative plan goes beyond the teachers' led instruction to the proposing of future construction of knowledge through challenge and discourse, experience and discovery.

For instance, the teacher can plan to encourage pupils to read every day. Reading involves both recommended and un-recommended books covering every genre such as novels, plays or poems, even factual books and dailies such as newspapers. Variety in reading will give children a holistic outlook to writing. Exploring new genres and types of books also helps them to explore and understand the various aspects of their natural interests.

Teachers can plan for age-appropriate television (TV) programmes and films learners can watch under their parents' guidance for encouragement of creative writing. Though on this, RK Mangalam World School (2018) says that whereas specific TV programs are also desirable and may be useful in educating the child, it is best teachers approach creativity in writing with the traditional hardcopy of a book as it has a much broader effect on the cognitive memory of a child. To enhance creativity, teachers must have plans for regular discussions about the books learners read or the programmes they watch. They can ask them to express what they find most exciting or appealing in the books/stories, for according to Johnston (2005) learning to appreciate others' creative output will open up the channels of a person's creativity.

Keith (2018) also advised teachers to encourage writing through the practice of oral composition. In it pupils talk about what to write which makes the actual writing easier and acceptable. All these are within the creative plans of the teacher.

2. Relevance and Interesting Learning Experiences

Children are known for play, curiosity and talk. They are energetic, moving across space. They delight in physical expression and in encountering novel experiences. Through this qualities, children can be made to actively experience the relevance of what they are learning. This is in line with the directions of NACCE (1999) that the arts should be taught as an opportunity for expression.

Participation in writing competitions and exercises harness children's playing and talking in developing creativity in writing. Teachers are to look out for writing competitions which children will participate in. They can also engage them in friendly competitions with pupils.

This not only create a strong bond among learners but also improves their skills.

Secondly, teachers are to connect learners' interests to writing. For instance, if they are to describe a person or object, the teacher can allow each to describe an object/person of his/her interest. This way they can enjoy the exercise since it bothers in what interests them. On narrative writing, they can be asked to narrative an event interesting experience.

Another fun way to improve kids' creative writing skills is to have them write short stories from provided cues. Pictures from a magazine, school parents' day, a class mate's birthday celebration are few of what can be utilized to induce writing.

3. Set the Context for Creative Engagement

Teaching ought not to be handing down facts to children. The classroom environment should be such that learners are busy and that will result to some creation of their own. The teacher can create activities for developing creativity such as the following:

Asking learners to

- write their feelings in relation to an experience;
- Write a composition on a witnessed incidence;
- Make up a reconciliation dialogue for estranged friends;
- Design an envelope for the letter to the head teacher
- Write a report of his/her birthday celebration
- Write personal feelings in relation to a story/incidence
- Construct sentences for making a welcome speech to a new class member.

To motivate children, teachers can look for opportunities to showcase their writings. For example, a play/speech written by a pupil can be staged at a class, school or community programme. Productions can be read in school assembly, displayed in the classroom or school hall, displayed to parents, visitors or even electronically. For instance, a teacher can send a pupil's writing to the school WhatsApp, Facebook or can also create and maintain a blog, inviting friends and family members to give feedback. This will give them the much-needed boost to improve on their writing.

For learners to take writing seriously, the teacher must also make out time for it. For instance, he/she must make it known that he is available for correction, proof reading or assistance. The assurance of teacher's availability motivates them to making of committed effort.

A writing teacher is a strong model to his/her class children (Kumar,2012). Seeing the teacher writing often communicates more than words. When writing is a part of teacher's class activities, it will come more naturally to the class. Teachers' writing involves both serious and unserious topics. He/she can communicate frequently in writing with the pupils either to give instructions, corrections, in listing what to do for the fun of writing and vice versa from pupils. This is fun as pupils compete to relate with the teacher in writing.

Another way for creating the context for creativity is by teachers' motivation. Recognising and commending pupils' writing effort is highly motivating. According to Naiman (2017) promoting intrinsic motivation and problem solving are two areas where educators can foster creativity in students. Students are more creative when they see a task as intrinsically motivating, valued for its own sake. To promote creative thinking, educators need to identify what motivates their students and structure teaching around it. Providing students with a choice of activities to complete allows them to become more intrinsically motivated and therefore creative in completing the tasks.

- 4. Innovation:** The introduction of something new involves creativity. It is true that the classroom is the same and the scheme of work is what is given to the teacher but he/she can inject enthusiasm by doing things differently, introducing new things and encouraging learners in the learning process such as incorporating their effort in deciding the subject for investigation, how to investigate and how to evaluate. Learners involved in identifying and exploration of information will also result to innovation.

For instance, the teacher can ask learners to keep a record of events. This is an activity that requires the child to properly express the emotions of his/her daily life and nurture the ability to transcribe it in a way that represents the true feelings of the event. Children can be asked to keep a journal of family activities such as travels, visits, birthdays, or reunions. Such an exercise is a great way for regular practice and also helps the pupils to develop their unique style and

flair of writing. Taking the boring events of a tedious day and jotting it down in an exciting way is an asset that any child can possess towards the goal of being a creative writer (Kumar,2012).

5. Improve children's creative thinking: Inquiry and observant minds culminate in creativity. Children should be encouraged to ask questions always and never to accept an answer as final. It is always good to go beyond one answer option. If questions encourage thinking, then questions can challenge pupils to come up with several options. Failures are not to be penalized for itself but children should be encouraged to always seek reasons for their failure and work hard to overcome them. Children should be made to criticize or evaluate their work. For instance, after a writing exercise, questions such as these can be used to make children evaluate their works.

- What did you like about your writing?
- What are the things you don't like about it?
- How would you like your writing to be?
- What do you think are needed to improve it?
- Do you have what is needed to improve it?
- How can you do that effectively?

Children can be guided to reflect on what they do. This can result to discovery of a broader view and rising above the routine. This guided evaluation helps them to finetune or sharpen their creative ability. The teacher cannot be the only person passing judgement over learners' activities. Teachers can ask also creativity questions such as the following:

- Design a letter with which to ask your parents for permission for class excursion.
- What can be the contents of a dialogue between you and a new pupil in school?
- What solution do you devise to reduce non-writing of home work by class mates?
- What ways can you take in order to finish reading an assigned text fast?
- If you were the teacher, write how would you deal with late coming to school.
- Can you create new uses for your break time?
- Can you write a proposal for the class end of year party?

The above strategies are in line with the assertion of Naiman (2017). Teaching students to solve problems that do not have well defined answers is another way to foster their creativity. This is accomplished by allowing students to explore problems and redefine them, possibly drawing on knowledge that at first may seem unrelated to the problem in order to solve it.

Conclusion

The need to develop creative writing skill in young pupils cannot be over stressed judging from the adverse effect of information and communication technology on writing. Any discipline that calls for reading and writing is usually shunned by students, who prefer chatting and video games. But if they develop the creative writing skills in basic levels, the menace will be curbed. But according to NACCE(1999), young people's creative abilities are most likely to be developed in an atmosphere in which the teacher's creative abilities are properly engaged. In essence, a creative teacher produces a creative learner. Without the teacher being creative in the lesson preparation and teaching of writing, it will be difficult to nurture creative writing skills in learners. There is a maxim which says 'capture them young'. Creative minds are not born as many believe but are made. The way children get handled in schools either prepares or blocks their potential for creativity in writing.

References

- Amabile, Teresa M.; Pratt, Michael G. (2016). "The dynamic componential model of creativity and innovation in organizations: Making progress, making meaning". *Research in Organizational Behavior*. **36**: 157-183. [doi:10.1016/j.riob.2016.10.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2016.10.001)
- AlohaKids : <https://www.facebook.com/aloha.usa>
- Crompton, A. (2005). *Creative music in teaching the primary curriculum*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Federal Republic on Nigeria (2013). *National policy on education*, 6th ed. Lagos: NERDC Press.
- Johnston, J. (2005). *Early explorations in science* (2nd ed) Buckingham: Open University Press.

Keith, K.L. (2019). How to Help your Child Learn Writing Skills? Retrieved from <https://www.verywellfamily.com/help-your-child-learn-writing-skills-620623>.

Kumar, K. (2012) How to improve your child's creative writing skills. Retrieved from <https://www.stratfordschools.com/blog/how-improve-your-child's-creative-writing-skills>.

Mangalam, K. R. (2018). How to develop creative writing skills in children? Retrieved from <https://krmangalam.com/blogs/how-to-develop-creative-writing-skills-in-children/>

Naiman, L (2017) Creativity at Work. Retrieved from <https://www.creativityatwor.com>.

National Advisory Board on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCE) 1999.

Nnabuiife, E. (2009). Entrepreneurship in Nigeria: issues and strategies A conference paper presented at POFSA at Federal Polytechnic, Oko.