

### Abstract

When we take the limits of our minds and focus on situations and every minute detail as an entity of its own, it's amazing what is discovered. The word creativity on its own would automatically be locked in our mindset as things that only pertain to art and beauty, but creativity is the bedrock of art. We can also dare to say that it is the bedrock of all great innovations, and as such be given its right place in the development of the child. The need for art education is therefore critical in a child's life. A child can learn creative skills by helping in daily activities, by interacting with colors, shapes, materials and textures where he/she can discover new ideas. In all these activities, creativity is at play in the heart of a child which can either be enhanced or dampened. Perhaps if more people understand that creativity does not only mean drawing and painting, and could be experienced in our everyday experiences, art could be encouraged by the participation of child development. The article below, would give an in-depth understanding with evidences that exposing the child to a creative atmosphere and letting the 'child' out of the 'child' with controlled restrictions would enhance the child's all round development. Controlled in the sense that whatever wouldn't harm the child, be permitted. Let's dare to take the limits of our preconceived notions on what creativity is and what could result in creative activities and embrace the world of innovations, solutions and beauty that would exude from creative minds when given the chance to bloom from childhood.

**Keywords:** Creativity, Child Development, Expression

### Introduction

Making things involves the capacity to be opened to experiences, and it is a part of human nature. Making things welcomes novelty, it exercises new dimensions of imaginative thoughts; ideas, emotions, feelings, shapes and expressive forms. From such encounters, new knowledge is combined with energy and emotion to bring forth new forms of expression. Creativity is a part of every individual regardless of age. Creation begins at a very early age in children where they use both conscious and unconscious efforts in dealing with feelings and ideas, which come into realization in producing desired forms of expression. To a child, creation is personalized, it is personal in the sense that one's experience in a qualitative way means that a vital confrontation has occurred between the child and his perception and the understanding of what the child's senses are communicating to him. Studies by Lowenfeld and Brittain (1975) have shown that children like to do what adults do. There is always the urge for a child to try to create something by expressing himself through his drawings and in his playing activities. It is generally recognized that children progress through stages of creative development. These stages have been linked to chronological age, however, a number of factors like the environment, peer groups, societal norms, and attitude to children's drawings affect a child's development. Thus, to expect that a particular child at a certain age should still be at a certain stage of development is inappropriate.

Children pass through different evolutionary states, not only on the mental and physical development levels, but also on the level of development using the symbol as a sign of their various expressions and emotions. Lipoff (2012) observed that there are no defined ages when children will enter or leave a developmental stage; it is based on their individual development. Young children go through several stages of development where they learn and master skills. The need to create is always present in children and a child's world is often seen as a confusion of seemingly unrelated events that surrounds them. Naiman (2014) said that creativity in children is characterized by their ability to perceive the world in new ways, to find hidden patterns, make connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena, and to generate solutions. Wright (2014), on the other hand, observed that at the site where a young child is learning about art, there are points where ideas about the child, art, and teaching meet, sometimes connecting, colliding, or even competing. Tartakovsky (2016) said that everyone has creative ability, be it a child or adult, and our brains are literally built to generate creative ideas in different ways. So children's creativity should not be restricted, there should not be boundaries which will bring fear into children and thus make them less creative. Give enough space for a child to be creative. Children are creative when they have not been inhibited by adults, family members, institution or the society.

The objective of the paper is to highlight the need to nurture children's creativity and to be aware of the best ways to help the children learn and develop their creative abilities during their early years. It will also serve as a reference material to art educators in Nigeria particularly the teachers of the children during the crucial (formative) and developmental stages.

### **Creativity**

From the break of day to sunset, art is seen everywhere and in everything. Creative thoughts appear in almost all aspects of life. Creativity means having the power or ability to express yourself in your own way. The ability to express yourself freely and fully unleashes the capacity to view, analyze and present issues and ideas in diverse, powerful, novel and useful ways. Fowler in Azi and Sale (2011) refers to creativity generally as the ability to see problems that no one else may even realize exist and then come up with new, unique and effective solutions to these problems. Broadly speaking therefore, every idea, big or small, that has led to the advancement and sustenance of civilization, is a product of creative thinking (Azi and Sale, 2011). Creativity thus generates and nurtures innovation.

Creative expression allows participation in a range of activities that allow creative imagination and expression like in music, art, drama. Creative arts engage children's mind, bodies and their senses, which is the practical application of artistic knowledge that enables students to express themselves in visually creative ways. Children are naturally creative; they see the world through their eyes and then use what they see in original ways. Exposing children to creative activities would encourage greater innovations, but restricting them would only numb their inborn abilities to express; thereby robbing them of broader opportunities to explore infinite ideas. Exposing children to creative activities should not be restricted to the school alone; parents have a great role to play in encouraging the development of creativity in children. Every child has the desire to represent something, be it an object he sees, or a feeling he experiences. The child then gives a meaning to the sign he makes. Dreams and creativity are a part of a child's everyday life. Children's creativity could, in turn, be either nurtured, ignored, commended, or even discouraged by parents or adults (Sousa, 2010)

### **Creative Development in Children**

#### **Chronological Development in Children**

According to Mbahi (2000), the selection of all learning activities should proceed from the study of the child's development. It is an obligation for all teachers to study the child rather than the subject if they want to teach children effectively. Shaffer (1985), defined development simply as the process by which organisms grow and change over the course of their lives. This is because the child's development focuses on a segment of a life span. Child development will specify how children change over time and why these developments take place. Shaffer recognized that no two children are ever exactly alike, even when they are raised together in the same home. He has given a chronological development table to indicate period of life and chronological time frame of individuals.

<b>Period of life</b>	<b>Chronological time frame</b>
Prenatal period	Conception to birth
Infancy	First two years of life
Toddler period	2 – 3 years of age
Pre-school period	3 – 6 years of age
Middle childhood	6 – 13 or 14 years
Adolescence	13 – 20 years

Piaget's (1930) work on the child's conception of physical casualty showed that children's explanation of physical development change with age. He isolated four major stages in development.

1. Sensory motor stage (0 – 2 years of age)
2. The pre-operational stage (3 – 7 years).
3. Concrete operational stage (7 – 13 years)
4. Formal operations (12 years and above).

Awoniyi (1985) also suggested chronological development in children as that of Piaget:

1. Early babyhood from the ages of 0 – 3 years,
2. Early childhood 4 – 7
3. Later childhood 7 – 11
4. Adolescent 11 and above.

Comparing the chronological development of each stage, there may be some similarities between that of Piaget (1930), Shaffer (1985) and Awoniyi (1985) with that of children's artistic developmental

stages stated by experts like Lowenfeld (1975), Gaitskell and Hurwitz (1975), Peter (1996) among others. Piaget, Shaffer and Awoniyi all agree that chronological development starts from conception and then develops from one stage to another.

Children's artistic development starts from scribbling (2 – 4 years), pre-schematic (4 – 7 years), schematic (7 – 9 years) and gang age (9 – 14 years). Though the specific age range differs slightly, there is an agreement on the particular distinction of the stages moving from one to another in a chronological pattern. These changes in age and development may also be influenced by physical changes seen in children. From conception to maturity children develop physically and the researchers have been able to give their own views on their ages.

When children's works are compared, the nursery or kindergarten with those of youngsters in the junior high school, it is seen that the drawings and paintings of the youngsters are much more subtly organized than those of the younger ones. This is caused by their physical growth or an increase in motor control. It seems that the symbols become more complex or more highly differentiated as the child grows older.

Physical development is at least partially responsible for the appearance and the development of child. Yusuf citing Lowenfeld and Brittain (1975) suggested that physical development is advancement, enfoldments, a progressive change and going forward to greater maturity. She stated that maturation sets the stage for behaviors in children to mature to a state of readiness before they can learn or perform certain behaviors. These views expressed about development of the child indicate that the child must be developed physically before performing skills, which occur in stages.

### **Factors which Influence the Development of Creativity in Children**

Oguz (2010) stated that there are two factors that influence children's development: the factors which are specific to the child (readiness, maturation, age, intelligence, motivation, general state of arousal and anxiety, physiological state, individual difference, and child psychology), and environmental factors (family, school, teacher, peer group, socioeconomic and cultural status). As adults, we sometimes overlook the importance of creative time to young children. We just see a child randomly throwing paint on a piece of paper, and tend to focus more on the mess the child is making instead of how he/she benefits from it. Children should be appreciated, because art not only allows children to just be kids and have fun, it also helps their development.

According to Nowicki (2016) children have an endless wealth of creative energy. It shows in their whimsical lyrics they sing, their imaginative play, and their innate ability to make something out of anything. Naturally children don't fret over what anyone thinks, they are just free to live an authentic life that reflects their unique style.

Encouraging creativity builds children's thinking skill. Children learn to solve problems and come up with their own ways to do anything. It is important to allow children to express and try their own way because self-expression and being involved in creative activities not only help them learn, it is a lot of fun for them. Let children learn by playing, exploring, imagining, creating, and ultimately discovering new ways of seeing the world. Factors which influence creativity can be categorized as follows:

Socio-cultural factors.

There are some socio-cultural factors in children's creative abilities, which are found in different children. Children are a product of the environment and the environment determines their learning abilities. Children contribute to their own development and learning as they strive to make meaning out of their experiences in their environment through social interaction, physical manipulation, observing what happens, asking questions. Yusuf (1992) agreed that environment is an immediate factor influencing children's expression. The child explores his environment and subsequently expresses his experiences in artistic manner to communicate his intention.

Early childhood teachers need to understand the influence of social – cultural context on learning, recognize children's developing competence and accept a variety of ways for children to express their developmental achievement. Social interaction is based on the use of culturally derived symbol system, the ability to acquire fluency in the symbols of their culture, determine their success in becoming a fully contributing member of that culture. Social interaction helps children work together, learn, share and interact with their peers.

The Peer Group.

Children generally play and work together. They help each other, share things between themselves. Most children play with their age groups and in the process try to do better than each other. According

to Mbahi (2015) peer groups set goals and in order to achieve those goals, they work together and contribute to the group's cohesiveness and development.

#### Emotional factors

Through creativity, children are able to represent experiences that they cannot verbalize. Their pictures may be out of proportion or exaggerated. When we value children's creativity, we help them feel valued as people. (Mbahi, 2015).

#### Physical

A skill is the learned capacity to carry out predetermined results often with the minimum outlay of time, energy or both. Skills usually require certain environmental stimuli and situations to assess the level of skill being shown and used (Mshelbila, 2015). Logsdon (2010) believed that there is a fine motor skill which involve the small muscles of the body that enable such functions as writing, grasping small objects, small motor skills which also involve fine motor control and dexterity.

### **Ways to Promote/Improve Creativity**

#### Conducive Environment for Creativity

Montessori in Rusk (1979) emphasized a child-centered education where children are free to exercise their freedom with little interference by the teacher. She believes that freedom to play implies making use of their environment freely. It also requires providing a suitable place for the children where they can freely move around and work with teaching/learning materials provided by the teacher. Total freedom should be given to the children and they should be allowed to choose which activity they want to explore and be left to discover their own mistakes. The Montessori Method again emphasized materials, environment, structures, play, exercise, concept and practicality as basic for the development of creativity. An important guiding principle of the Montessori philosophy is that the teacher or parent is to respect the unique individuality of the child, as well as impact upon the development of the child's personality. There should also be much physical and intellectual freedom for the child.

### **The Role of Teachers and Parents in Children's Creative Development**

Teachers are expected to develop and provide the child with a natural environment that will be good for creative work. Mbahi (2000) was of the view that the basic function of a teacher at this stage is to understand their characteristics and to be mindful of the way he relates to the children. He added that the responsibility of the teacher is to enable pupils to express and interpret their reaction, thoughts and feelings of experience and to be aware of the kinds of developmental changes they may expect from their pupils as they impinge on their art making.

Teachers need to recognize the differences in children's physical development, social adjustment, emotional stability and mental abilities all of which constitute learning process (Oladapo, 2000). Olorukooba in Mshelbila (2006) emphasized that the role of teachers should be that of influencing the lives of learners. He also said that educators often emphasize the child as the central role of their responsibility because the child is the most important subject of a teacher. It is part of the teacher's duty to understand the needs of the child by studying pupils and relating subject area to his growth patterns. Today's art teacher is interested in the total educational, emotional, mental, physical and aesthetic growth of his pupils, not in the development of their art expressive ability alone. The teacher should be concerned with pupils understanding and behavior as well as in developing their concepts and skills.

Martin (2001) added that children should be encouraged to be perceptive, imaginative, and creative when they are guided by knowledgeable, sympathetic persons who allow freedom to express ideas and feelings in a mode appropriate to their developmental level and ability. She stresses that this sort of freedom is nurtured in an atmosphere where children are provided with time, place, suitable materials, and an ideal motivation from the child's own world or experience and feelings.

According to Deasy and Stevenson (2002), studies have shown that teaching and learning can increase students' cognitive and social development. They further stated that art provides opportunity for students to develop crucial thinking skills and acquire motivation which they need for achievement at higher levels or in future.

Child development is in a sequential process (Reyner, 2010). Children progress in mental reasoning from simple to complex abilities, and creative activities provide them with sensory learning experiences they can master at their own rate. Bullard (2010) agrees that children increase their knowledge, skills and creativity while enhancing emotional, social, cognitive and physical

development. They are also more likely to develop a “love of the arts” when they are exposed to art at a young age.

Lian (2010) believes that children need significant free time to explore possibilities and follow the call of their inner desire and natural process. Lian stated that children should be given the freedom to choose what they want because children who are given that freedom show higher creativity than those who have their choices made for them. Most theories of child development view young children as highly creative with a natural tendency to fantasize, experiment, and explore their physical and conceptual environment. Teachers are expected to develop and provide the child with a natural environment that will be good for creative work. Every child has creative ability just waiting to be tapped. Infants, toddlers, pre-schoolers, early school age and older children all delight in opportunities for expression through colors, shapes, and sounds. From a very early age, children respond to color, sound and movements. Everything is a new experience for the child, and all they need is supplies of assorted tools for creative growth. It is vitally important to continue to nurture creativity in children at the early stage, because as they start elementary school and begin spending more and more time with a wider circle of people, it is not uncommon for them to lose interest in certain activities. By recognizing creativity in children’s play and the use of their imagination, a parent or a teacher can offer a significant resource for excellence in everything they pursue. Edging their way towards the teenage years, older school-age children have frequently developed strong interest and bonding friendships so their school and social activities for this age are the ones that will allow their minds to grow and their imagination to flourish.

The role of parents and teachers in the life of a child is an important factor. The parents and teachers should be able to arouse and sustain the interest of the child in any activity. Awoniyi (2007) stated that as long as a child finds something satisfying, he or she continues to be interested in that particular thing. He also stated that the interest of a child depends on his physical and mental development, and when a child is physically and mentally fit, the child will show interest and will always be ready to work.

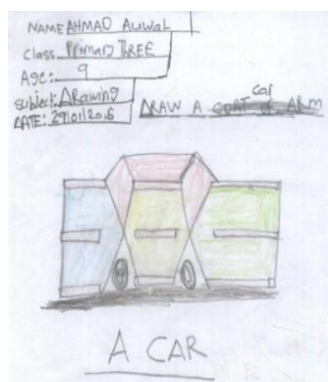
It can be drawn from the foregoing that freedom should be nurtured in an atmosphere where children are provided with time, place and suitable art materials. Understanding of children’s development should be the basis or guiding rule in teaching in the elementary school. The end result will reveal a positive effect on children’s performance. The greatest contribution teachers can offer to children is to provide proper materials and encouragement. Below are drawings of creative children.



A child’s drawing at the scribble stage



A child’s drawing at the pre-schematic stage



A child’s drawing at the schematic stage



A child’s drawing at the gang stage



Drawings of children at the schematic stage



Drawings by a child at the gang stage

Source: Mshelbila. H (2015). Comparative Study of the Effect of Montessori and Free Activity Methods of Teaching Creative Art to Primary School Children in Zaria. PhD Thesis Department of Fine Art Ahmadu Bello University Zaria.

### Encouraging/Nurturing Creativity in Children

Children should be provided with an environment that allows them to explore and play without undue restrictions, and also the choice of art materials will help them become very productive and imaginative especially if they have help in selecting, organizing, and arranging them. Time, space, materials, climate and occasions are very important in encouraging creativity in children. Children should not be hurried when they are engaged in creative activities because the best and most exiting work involves an intense or arousing encounter between themselves and their inner and outer world. Teachers can provide adventure, and encourage them to present their knowledge and ideas before and after they have watched an absorbing show, taken a field trip, or observed and discussed an interesting plant or animal brought into the classroom.

Montessori approach is very vital because it encourages creativity, and it is also a means of self-expression. As a child grows up in this world, self-exploration/discovery is important in forming their being. The objective of the Montessori teacher is to motivate children by allowing them to develop confidence and inner discipline so that there is less of a need to intervene as the child develops (Edward, 2002).

It is clear even from the foregoing that children should be free to follow their own interest within their environment, rather than be forced to learn something that is inappropriate to the developmental stages. Children develop in a natural way and are highly motivated, and the result is that they develop good discipline and master basic skills and in many cases much early in life.

The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC, 2007) advocated for the introduction of child centered education to be emphasized at the early level. It is expected that, teaching and learning should be within easy understanding of the child, and that children should be allowed to learn on their own and at their own pace.

Wright (2014) views the child as natural, as inherently innocent and uncorrupted by the world which shapes the notion of precious childhood and the idea that this should be preserved at all cost.

### The Role of the Art Curriculum.

The art curriculum itself can encourage or discourage creativity. The curriculum should equip learners with basic knowledge, skills to deal effectively with the challenges of life (Mbahi, 2015). Mbahi further said that curriculum is the first part of preparing to teach, it tells us the best ways to organize learning materials and appropriate time to use different media. The curriculum also enables children to explore and express their ideas and feelings and also their experiences through art. This is because art expresses creative skills and imagination; it also expresses culture, social, economic and many aspects of the society. Then art education itself is a tool that helps explore different talents, abilities that are hidden in individuals, especially children. The balance between the child's natural development, needs and education, specific developmental needs are balanced within educational settings.

The properly planned art curriculum should be carefully implemented otherwise it will make children lose interest and their creative ability. This could affect their development because children get captivated in doing art and are always willing to do more and bring out good results. Art and creativity should be compulsory in all schools. The government and school authorities can help by

enabling these rules, providing amenities and employing more art teachers who have knowledge of art.

### Conclusion

Children's creative ability should be respected in the same way as that of adults. This is because their ability can be easily misunderstood based on content and judged using the same criteria that may be applied to that of adults. This is so because children respond to their own creative abilities, and their perception of the level of their competence is often affected by the attitude of their peers and adults who react to their art work negatively. Such reactions can affect a child's choice to pick up art materials or even turn away from appreciating art in general.

Therefore, exposure to a variety of materials at an early age can encourage a child's life long appreciation of art. Some encouragements can be in the form of providing quality children's picture books that have illustrations and field trips to art galleries and museums. These experiences can broaden a child's exposure to a variety of artistic style and content.

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