AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CLIMATE FOR CREATIVITY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN AWKA SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA.

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An Assessment of the Climate for Creativity in Secondary Schools in Awka South Local Government Area.

Abstract

Creativity is the driver of innovations and advancement in any human society. Educational institutions have a major role to play in fostering creativity in their students by creating environment that is challenging and supportive for the teachers and the students. This work, using a survey design, identifies and assesses the level of climate for creativity in the secondary schools in Awka South Local Government of Anambra State. It used a sample of 329 secondary school teachers. A research question and a hypothesis guided the study. A 48-item questionnaire developed with insight from Ekvall’s (1996) dimensions of creativity climate measure was used to gather data for the study, while mean and standard deviation and t-test were used for data analysis. The Study revealed an overall moderately high climate for creativity, however dimensions of creativity such as challenge, risk-taking and idea time were absent in the secondary schools. Implications for school leadership and teacher continuous professional development were highlighted.

Keywords: school climate, creativity, teachers, leadership, environment.
Introduction

Background to the Study

Innovations and inventions are all extensions of creativity. It is has been widely acknowledged that innovations and inventions have led to the advancement and development witnessed today in the developed nations of the world. Creativity is therefore a necessary ingredient for innovation and invention in industries, organizations and the school system (Dalin, 2005; Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw, 2005; Coveney, 2008).

Creativity is one’s capacity to solve problems in new ways and to produce works that are novel, appropriate and socially valued (Kerr & Gagliardi, n.d). An analysis of various definitions of creativity show that creativity is about making connections and generating something new from these connections (Howell, 2008), generating variety of ideas for productivity and problem-solving (Sharp, 2001), and about novelty and originality (Borghini, 2005).

The position that creativity is inborn held in the past by some scholars have given way to current opposing evidences. The fact that creativity can be developed in a supportive school climate might be better understood through the lenses of two theories; generativity theory and systems theory of creativity. Generativity theory believes creative process in individuals is orderly and predictably continuous in time. It suggests that the generative processes that underlie creativity are universal and that with appropriate training, almost anyone will display a high degree of creativity (Epstein, 1999). The system approach to
creativity sees creativity as a systemic process where systemic properties such as availability and accessibility of information or the encouragement by institutions such as schools and corporations influence creativity (Centre for Research on Education and Lifelong Learning (CRELL) Conference Communiqué, 2009).

Research evidence has shown that creativity can be nurtured within the school (examples, Scofield, 1960; Seo, Park and Cho, 2006, Howell, 2008; Iheanacho, 2008). However, Iheanacho notes a number of human and organizational factors of the school that constrain the development of creativity in the students. Of particular interest is the conservative and rule-bound nature of the school. Others like Scofield believe that the classroom climate influences the development of creativity in students.

Climate is the observed and recurring patterns of behaviour, attitudes and feelings that characterize life in an organization (Ekvall cited in Isaken & Lauer, 1999). Within the school context, climate has to do with the quality and character of school life which is based on patterns of people’s experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, and Pickeral, 2009). Obviously, a climate is evident in the feelings and attitudes about a school expressed by teachers, staff, students and parents. These perceptions of the climate predict individual’s feeling of job satisfaction, pride, job performance, retention and learning (Gunter & Furnham cited in Isaken & Lauer, 1999; Best Practice Briefs 2004; Lindahl, 2006; Adeyemi, 2008).

A number of factors affect the climate. Prominent among them are; principals’ leadership styles, school physical environment and availability of materials. In a recent
study by Balway (2008), it was found that school principals perceived themselves as highly positioned to increase creativity within the school through the teachers and the school environment variables.

It is therefore essential that any programme for the development of creativity in students should first look at the extent the school climate is supportive of creativity. A climate that is supportive of creativity is one that is characterized with challenge, freedom, less conflict, idea support, debate, risk-taking, dynamism and liveliness, trust and openness, enough idea time and playfulness and humour (Ekvall cited in Richards, 2002). A study by Thomas and Berk (1981), found that school environment that is intermediate (neither formal nor informal) has been proven to increase students’ creativity than one that is formal or informal. Similarly, Flieth, Renzulli and Westberg (2002), found that students’ creativity was more stimulated in an environment where students were given opportunities for personal expressions.

A good number of studies have been carried out to determine the effect of school environment on creativity development, some others have assessed the level of creative climate in business organizations and public library sector (see Isaken & Lauer, 1999; Ismail, 2006; Coveney, 2008; ), while very few have assessed classroom creative climate (Richards, 2002; Divers, 2001). Richard’s use of Ekvall’s dimensions of creative climate to assess gifted children’s classroom creative climate, found most of these dimensions evident in the classroom. This validates their usage in assessing classroom as well as school climate for creativity.
Research seems to suggest that gender might be related to creativity and perceptions of creative climate. Balwany (2008) noted that male and female principals differed in their perceptions of their role in promoting creativity. Similarly, an earlier study by Thomas and Berk (1981) found that girls experienced creativity in intermediate and informal environment more than boys.

This work therefore assesses the creative climate of secondary schools and the possible influence of gender on the perception of school climate for creativity.

**Statement of the Problem**

The National policy on Education reveals the Federal Government’s interest in inculcating creativity and problem-solving through educational programmes in schools. Of particular interest is its recent inclusion of “creative arts” and entrepreneurship skill development in secondary schools curriculum (Osuji, 2004) and her target to produce “creative teachers” for the nation’s educational institutions (FRN, 2004).

Even so, Nigeria is continually rated more as consumers of other countries’ products of creativity than producers. The problem of unemployment and the tendency for proliferation of fake products are evidences of low creativity amongst her citizens. The type of education given in the schools contributed significantly to this lack of creativity and innovativeness, as most students at the secondary schools cannot create common handicrafts or produce any creative work. In view of these numerous problems facing the nation, some scholars call for pursuit of creativity by the schools if solutions to most of
the problems must be found (Onu, 2002; Onu, 2006; Olatoye & Oyundoyin, 2007; Iheanacho; 2008).

There are number of strategies and methods which have been developed to help in improving students’ creativity through developing their problem-solving skills. The constructive approach, problem-based method and divergent thinking techniques have been found effective in developing problem-solving and critical thinking skills in the students. It is perplexing though why most teachers continue to use lecture method as the dominant approach to teaching despite substantial evidences of better options. Is it that the teacher education programme has failed to produce “creative teachers” as stipulated in the National Policy? Or are there forces at work in the school climate such as relationship with principal and fellow teachers and students which influence the exercise of creativity by teachers in the schools?

This work is therefore positioned to assess the extent secondary school climate is favourable for stimulating creativity in both teachers and students. It therefore asks: What is the level of creative climate of secondary schools? Would male and female teachers differ significantly in their rating of the creative climate of their schools?

**Methods**

The study is a descriptive survey research aimed at assessing the secondary school climate for creativity. It made use of 329 teachers, which consisted of 70 male teacher and 259 female teachers sampled from 658 secondary school teachers in Awka South Local Government Area. This sample was drawn through simple random sampling.
However, 236 teachers (male = 56 and female = 180) completed and returned the questionnaire, which was an indication of their consent to participate in the study.

The instrument for data collection was a 48-item questionnaire titled “School Creativity Climate Questionnaire” (SCCQ) developed by the researchers. The questionnaire was to measure the extent of supportiveness of the school climate to creativity. It was a modification of Ekvall’s (1996) 9-dimension Creative Climate Questionnaire which had been used in Swedish organizations. The creative climate dimensions and their corresponding number of items include; challenge– 5 items, freedom - 5 items, idea support – 8 items, debate – 4 items, risk-taking – 4 items, trust and openness – 10 items, idea time – 7 items and playfulness and humour – 5 items. Negatively worded items were reverse coded. The questionnaire had response scale of; “Always or Almost Always” – 4, “Often” – 3, “Sometimes” – 2 and “Never or Almost Never” – 1. It was duly validated and its reliability established through ascertaining the internal consistency of items within each dimension using inter-item correlation coefficient. Correlation coefficients ranging from .711 to .823 were obtained for all the dimensions.

The methods of data analysis were mean, standard deviation and t-test. Analysis was based on mean of each of the dimensions of the questionnaire.

Results

The results of the study are presented as follows:

Research Question: What is the level of creative climate of secondary schools?
Table 1:
Level of Creative Climate of Secondary Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of Creativity Climate</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>2.429</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3.953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>2.929</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>4.422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea Support</td>
<td>2.535</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>2.497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debates</td>
<td>3.107</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>5.855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Taking</td>
<td>2.411</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>5.768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust &amp; Openness</td>
<td>2.743</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3.846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idea Time</td>
<td>2.214</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3.881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playfulness &amp; Humour</td>
<td>2.627</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>4.755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Creative Climate</td>
<td>3.033</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>.2250</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that taken together, the schools’ creative climate is moderately high. However, dimensional analysis of the data shows that “idea time”, “risk-taking” and “challenge” are below the scale mean of 2.5, indicating that these are not present in the school climate. While “debate” has the highest mean score among all the eight dimensions, followed by “freedom”, while “idea support” and “playfulness and openness” are slightly above the scale average.

**Hypothesis:** Male and female teachers will not differ significantly in their overall mean rating of school creative climate.
### Table 2:
**Test of Mean Difference between Male and Female Teachers on Creativity Climate**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males (Mean)</th>
<th>Females (Mean)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall Creativity climate</td>
<td>3.033</td>
<td>3.024</td>
<td>.00911</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>.305</td>
<td>.761</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that at 0.05 significance level, df = 234, t (.305) and P >0.05, the null hypothesis of no significant difference was supported. Therefore, the overall mean rating of male teachers (M=3.033, SD=.2250) does not differ significantly from overall mean rating of creativity climate of female teachers (M=3.024, SD=.1850).

**Discussion of Findings**

School Creativity climate influences not only schools’ ability to innovate, but also each member’s ability to generate creative ideas for their individual and group development. This work which assessed the level of creative climate of secondary schools, found that the schools’ creative climate was moderately high. However, these schools’ major deficiency was the absence of climate for challenge, risk-taking and idea time. This was found to be at variance with the work of Ismail (2006) who found from the assessment of creative climate in business organization that a climate of “challenge” was the highest dimension of creativity evident in the organization. The difference in result may be as a result of variation in orientation between business and service organizations. The result of this study showed that most members of the school community prefer to undertake tasks that are easy to accomplish, tasks that are devoid of any challenge. Again, the absence of risk-taking is an indication that people generally want to stay in
their “comfort zones” and would not want to take up new ideas and innovations unless they are quite sure of the outcome.

The absence of idea time is an indication that most of the teachers work under tight schedule and that sufficient time is not given for the completion of assignments. Findings of the Education Sector Diagnosis of 2005 showed that teachers perceived high workload as one of the sources of demotivation (FME, 2005). It is therefore difficult for one to be creative in a work environment that is consistently tied to the meeting of deadlines and tight work schedules.

Gender difference in perception of creative climate was found to be statistically non significant. Teachers were therefore unanimous in their perception of secondary school climate. This does not conform to the findings of Balwany (2008) which found that male and female principals differed in their perception of their role in fostering creativity in schools.

However, a more elaborate study on school climate for creativity that will take into consideration such variables as leadership style and leadership experience, level of school resources and school size will give more enlightenment. A comparative study of Students’ and teachers’ perception of the school and classroom creative climate will also give new and wider insight into the level of creative readiness and disposition of schools and teachers.

**Implications**

Findings of this study underscore the need for good leadership practices that encourage the development of school environment germane for creativity for the teachers and
students. A leadership style that too frequently punishes failures or is less supportive of new ideas, will most likely lead to fear of failure and little room for trial or risk-taking. The use of distribution leadership that seeks to get all involved in leadership roles may help in creating a climate of challenge and idea support among the teachers.

The time and self-management competencies of the teachers are implicated in this study as idea time is the greatest source of deficiency to creative climate of schools. Pre-service and in-service professional development may help in preparing teachers to manage their time efficiently in order to maximize the opportunities for new idea generation after routine work.

**Conclusion**

School’s creative climate is a measure of its level of disposition to and readiness for creativity in its teachers and students. The secondary schools under study have moderately high creative climate as shown by their overall creativity score but are deficient in relevant dimensions of creativity climate such as challenge, risk-taking and idea time. Schools’ idea support was barely on the average. Leadership style constitutes a major determinant of school climate. Therefore, school principals set the stage and pace in the school by their administrative practices. If teachers perceived the school principal as deficient in approaching challenging situations arising from the day to day management of the school, then teachers themselves will not develop the ability to face challenging tasks. It is therefore necessary that they are fully grounded in the theory and practice of school change and reform in order to appreciate the need for creativity in the
school system. School principals are called to be creative themselves so as to lead the way for supportive climate for their teachers and students’ creativity.

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