



Cultural Influence And Creativity Of Ghanaian Children: Implications For The Socio-Economic Set-Up

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Abstract:

The study which is qualitative in nature employed the historical research method, document analysis and the observation tool to examine the effects of culture on creativity in the context of the development of the child's latent creative abilities. Its aim is to put across the complementary nature of culture and creativity. Practices within the setting of a culture greatly affect the caliber of person an individual will be, since those practices shape the experiences from which he/she can draw knowledge to feed his/her creative potential. The study also points out that Creativity, a feature of behaviour that reflects uniqueness, experimentation and a spirit of exploration, goes beyond the realms of the arts and literature into every field of endeavour. Modifying one's Culture (the human behaviour one acquires or learns in a specific setting) and avoiding conformity in the strictest sense can enhance creativity.

Keywords: Culture, creativity, behaviour, education, society, cultural modification

Introduction

Cultural practices have a profound effect on suitable outlets for creative expression. According to Ludwig (1992) these include the nature of the subject matter and form of expression, the functions that various forms of expression serve, as well as the caliber of people engaged in creative activity. There are different cultural practices. In Ghana, where chieftaincy is one such cultural practice, it is the stool that gives authority to the Southern Ghanaian chief. Mainly carved by men, the stool is a wooden seat that symbolizes an actual seat as well as a seat of chiefship. It mainly comprises three parts; the top or the seat, the middle portion which carries a unique design, and the base (Ross, 2002). Every part of the design of the stool is rendered with utmost care, each signifying one of the main ideas that make a perfect society. The functions of stools range from symbols of state, and ceremonial to utilitarian. For instance as a sign of welcome, husbands offer stools to their new wives; fathers also gave stools to their children when they began crawling; and during puberty rites, young girls are also placed on stools.

Culture, defies a clear-cut definition. However, O'Neil (2006) indicates that from the viewpoint of anthropologists and other behavioural scientists, culture is the full range of human behaviour patterns that are learned including belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. It can be inferred then that culture comprises the unique material remains of generations past, put to use by the present generation and modified through their activities and laid down as a measure of behaviour for themselves and successive ones.

O'Neil (2006) again identifies three "layers of culture". The first layer is the body of cultural traditions that distinguishes one specific society from the other. Collectively, the Ghanaian culture differentiates Ghanaians from the rest of the societies in the world. The second layer of culture that may be part of one's identity is a subculture. The shared cultural traits of subcultures mark them from the rest of their society. Different societies in Ghana have their own specific culture. Regarding marriage and family life, whereas the clan in societies like the Akan and Tallensi groups in Ghana forbid marriages among members, that of the Tongu Ewe, also in Ghana encourages it among very closely related members of the clan (Nukunya, 1992). The third layer of culture consists of cultural universals; learned behaviour patterns that are communally shared by all of humanity; such as marriage, child rearing and communication. In the context of this study, the term culture is referring to the way of life or the environment that influences children especially as regards their creative abilities or potentials

Creativity

Research into creativity in the 1980s and 1990s became rooted in a social psychological context which appreciates the important role of social structures in fostering individual creativity (Craft, 2001). Generally accepted definitions of creativity include: the ability to see things in new ways; breaking boundaries and going beyond the ordinary; and putting unrelated things together into something new. The concept of creativity embraces an aspect of behaviour, a unique attitude of delving into possibilities, searching for answers by questioning and manipulation within an environment (Charlesworth, 1983; Schirmacher, 1998)

According to Einstein (1879-1955), German born American Physicist and creator of the special and general theories of relativity noted that to fuel creativity, one must develop the childlike tendency for play and the childlike crave for recognition. Similarly, Piaget (1896-1980), Swiss psychologist, a pioneer in the work on the development of intelligence in children asserted that for one to be more creative, he must stay in part a child, with the creativity and invention that typifies children before adult society deforms them (CreatingMinds.org, 2007). Research has shown that creativity peaks just about the age of five, where about 80% of our creative potential is used. A rapid drop follows this as soon as one enters the formal school setting; by the age of twelve, our creative output has declined to about 2% of our potential, and it generally stays there for the rest of our lives (Schirmacher, 1998). The need for conformity and accountability which mostly leads to rote learning or “chew and pour” in the basic school could perhaps account for this situation. Even so, the same factors that account for the decline in creativity could be turned around to enhance it.

It is with this backdrop that this paper seeks to find out how an individual’s way of life or culture affects his creativity since creativity peaks early in life. It also addresses the complementary nature of culture and creativity.

Methodology

The qualitative research approach was adopted for the study with special emphasis on historical research and document analysis. Two sources of data, primary and secondary were used. The primary sources of data were mainly obtained through observations and interviews made during visits to some selected basic schools in Kumasi and museums and art shops at Ntonso, Adanwomase, Bonwire and Ahwiaa all in the Ashanti Region. Three categories of schools were selected; an international school, made up of children

from different countries and cultures where 35 children were chosen; a Local Authority (LA) school (where 60 children were selected), consisting mainly of children within and around the community; and a metropolitan school (where 45 children were picked), consisting of some children from both different and similar backgrounds. The sampled children, both boys and girls were aged between 7 and 10 totalling 140.

Here, some teachers were interviewed concerning the background of sampled children and their general behaviour; the children were also observed and interviewed. They also made some drawings and talked intelligently about them. It was noted that the socio-economic status of the children might have influenced their choices of school; subsequently, their way of life and the opportunities they have for creating will differ. In other words, the culture the children found themselves in; both in school and at home; could act as a setting (physical, social, emotional or mental) that enhances creativity or vice versa.

At Ntonso, Adanwomase, Bonwire and Ahwiaa, the way of life of the people were observed especially their trade, weaving, dyeing, printing, and carving. Interviews conducted also revealed that the histories of the towns were tied with their way of life, notably their occupations. Adding to the primary source of data, textbooks, encyclopaedias, periodicals, abstracts and review of research and the internet were used to find information about what culture is, to find explanations for creativity, and also to learn how to observe children.

Results And Discussion

Culture And Creative Expressions Of Children

From observations of some of the children's drawings, it was realized that creative expression, which could be evident in child art, is dependent on several environmental conditions although the development of these creative concepts may be natural to the average child and cannot be taught. In other words, the child's potential creative concepts can be encouraged or nurtured in an atmosphere that is conducive or quashed in an unfavourable environment.

The mental, physical, and emotional environments within which creativity operates can be termed as a creative space. It is the sum total of what nurtures, supports, inspires and reinforces our creativity. We could think of people (ourselves, our families, our friends, or teachers), places (schools, offices, homes, studios, places of recreation), objects (palm

fronds, tins, rubber slippers) or experiences (our memories of an excursion, sunset); and all these are part of our way of life, our culture.

The children from the various schools obviously belonged to different socio-economic backgrounds; very high, high, average, below average and low; based on observation of the children and also from interviewing them. Subsequently their way of life or culture varied.

It was revealed that many Ghanaian children are very creative when it comes to the manipulation of things in the environment to suit their purposes. However, observations also showed that until recently, one could see Ghanaian children playing with kites that they had made with papers, playing flutes they had made from pawpaw stems, running around with make-believe parachutes which was a piece of cloth tied to their waists with the other half raised above their shoulders (afurukutu), various make of cars (articulators, armour cars, tankers, etc) they had fashioned with empty tins and cans of milo, sardine, mosquito repellents, rusty metals and old rubber slippers. This is not as common as it used to be in the cities. Still, about 59% of the children still had access to these kinds of free flowing creative encounters, the bulk of the children coming from the LA school with children from the International school making up only about 4% of that population. From their drawings, it was also deduced that it was possible the children from the international and some from the metropolitan schools may be more exposed to creative opportunities than their counterparts from the LA because of culture or their way of life especially since most of them usually travel abroad and gain new experiences, meet new people and go on site seeing. This may confirm Santrock's (2005) idea that stresses that like Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, the Russian psychologist also believed that children actively build their knowledge, thus the more exposure they have to creative opportunities, the more they build their knowledge. Figure 1 shows a drawing by an eight year old boy's experience when he visited a place of interest to him. His drawing shows his friends and him at "The Larabanga Mystery Rock" which is in the Northern Part of Ghana. This boy is a half Ghanaian, half Korean that may explain why the female figures in his work have 'long flowing hair' (Enti, 2008). Figure 2 is a beach scene made by an eight year old girl who enjoys going to the beach with her parents.



Figure 1: Boy, 8 shows his visit to



Figure 2: Beach scene by an 8year old girl

“The Larabanga Mystery Rock”

(Source: Authors’ field survey, September 2007-January 2008)

That notwithstanding, it was also noted that what pertained to the immediate environment of the children from the average and low socio-economic backgrounds mostly found in the “less endowed” schools also showed in their drawings. For instance when asked to draw their future occupations, a seven year old girl drew a figure in green dress and what she described as a cap on her head with an inscription as shown in Figure 3. A post-drawing inquiry with her showed that she admired nurses a lot especially when they wear their green dresses and that may have accounted for her drawing of the nurse. Similarly, a boy aged eight made a drawing of his trip to Cape Coast with his family while lying (the figure coloured yellow) on his grandmother at the backseat. This is shown in Figure 4.



Figure 3: *“What I will be in future”*
by girl aged 7

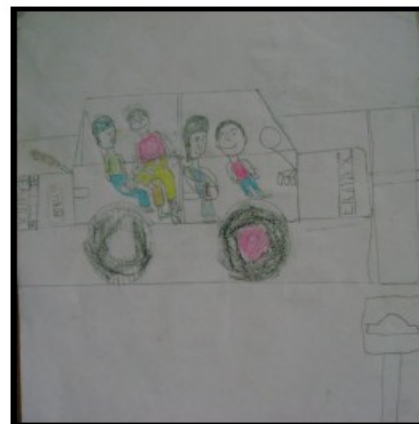


Figure 4: *“On my way to Cape Coast”*
by boy aged 8

(Source: Authors’ field survey, October 2006)

From the interviews with the children, it became evident that while about 39% of these children both from the international and metropolitan schools assumed to be socio-economically average and high respectively, had access to art materials and opportunities to create, about 25% of them made art to conform to rules of precision and accuracy such as painting in colouring books, or arranging picture puzzles or tracing from story books. These were also the children who were used to playing computer games, watching television most of the time, or playing with assorted toys. Example of tracing from a story book is shown in Figure 5. The reason given for most of the tracing that was done by the children was that they cannot draw. Table 2 shows the number of children in certain situations in each school.



*Figure 5: A picture traced from a story book
(Source: Authors' field survey, October 2006)*

What could be inferred from this is that typical Ghanaian cultural environment where children creatively used things found in their immediate environment is fast eroding with the almost total adaptation of foreign cultures in the form of already made toys; legos, cars, guns, motors; computer games; the story books that are read; and a host of others.

Category of Children	Number of Children			Percentage
	Metropolitan n= 45	International n= 35	Local Auth n= 60	100%
Children whose parents provide art materials and encourage them to make art	19	35	0	39%
Children who would want to indulge in art activities	31	32	55	84%
Children who find opportunities in the environment (e.g. milk tins, boxes, torn bathroom slippers, sand, old newspapers, magazines) to create things	25	5	52	59%

Table : Results of interviews regarding children and their various creative activities

(Source: Authors' field survey, September 2007)

Culture And Creativity In The Child's Social Setting

The main functions of the family include procreation, socialisation and economic co-operation. When children are brought forth they need to be trained in the accepted modes of behaviour in the society they find themselves. At the core of what American anthropologist, Margaret Mead, (1907-1978) noted in the years spent in studying how culture influences individual personality, is that the attitudes, beliefs, values and perceptions a child gathers on his/her way to maturity, control the extent to which temperament characteristics are formed in him/her. This in turn determines the creative ability of the individual. Craft (2001) buttresses Maslow's point about creativity as a trait given to all human beings at birth, this when he notes creativity as a state of being that is challenged by the ways culture socialises the young; the way children are brought up; stifling creativity right from early childhood. An instance is in sex roles conferred on children as they grow – boys must be active and independent, while girls are required to be gentle and passive – which limits them to certain kinds of behaviour on the basis of gender.

The school is also part of the child's upbringing. The school system operates within a cultural milieu that places much emphasis on reading and writing. It was observed that

the cultural environment in the sampled schools may encourage conformity on the part of children since they do much rote learning without questioning what has been given them. Even within the realm of art where children should be allowed some form of freedom when creating, some teachers mostly want these learners to abide by laid down rules for example, colouring workbooks or copying what the teacher has drawn on the chalkboard. This culture stifles creativity since children do not take initiatives; a trait that is central in developing the creative potential. For instance even though all children have creative abilities (Enti, 2008) some of the children mainly in the LA school drew objects that are usually found in textbooks (because they may be used to them) even though they did not copy from the textbooks as shown in Figure 6.



Figure 6: A ten year old boy draws from memory objects found in textbooks

(Source: Authors' field survey, September 2007 – January 2008)

A school where there is no creative space can also be a way of inhibiting the construction of a creative environment. A rigid art curriculum or learning environment (for instance, no visit to galleries or museums, no observation of nature, no use of common things in the environment, no means of expression) can very well hinder the formation of a creative environment and thus affecting the creativity of an individual. This was what was observed to pertain in notably the LA school; it was confirmed by interviews with the headmistress and the class teacher whose class was used for the study.

The Interaction Of Culture And Creativity In The Economic Setup - The Growing Child

Economics involves many activities centred on the management of resources for the satisfaction of human needs; thus a people's economic life depends largely on the environment; and primary occupations relate mainly to resources present in the environment. Thus, people along the coast of Ghana engage in fishing while those in the forest zone engage in farming (Nukunya, 1992). Similarly, almost every child at Bonwire in the Ashanti Region can weave at least a piece of cloth because that is what is common in that environment. In most cultures there is an established division of labour by gender, thus specialised occupations like blacksmithing and other types of metalwork, woodcarving, and weaving on certain types of loom which take several years of apprenticeship to train are nearly always male occupations (Rattary, 1927). Pottery, wall paintings (murals) like the Sirigu wall paintings and weaving on other loom types usually are or were women's work. So one's creative potentials are made to conform to these norms. This was the case at Adanwomase, Ntonso, Bonwire and Ahwiaa. Most of the artists and craftsmen that were observed in these towns were males. Gradually though, things are changing. An instance is the skilled 27 year old Gifty Oforiwaa, who defied the norms and is a practicing female kente weaver at Bonwire competing favourably with her male colleagues (Ross & Adu-Agyem, 2008). She is shown in Figure 7. Besides, encouraging the expression of their creative selves, most of the youth are self employed because of their way of life. This is the way of life of the people and that has really affected their creative input. This is helping to boost the economy because their products attract tourists' attention. Figure 8 depicts a young man at Ahwiaa working on his carved piece called "Unity". Figure 9 on the other hand shows some finished art pieces fashioned by some of these youth at a shop in Ahwiaa.



*Figure 7: Oforiwaa at her loom at Bonwire
(Source: Photo by Authors, March 2009)*



Figure 8. A young man working on a carved object 'Unity' at Ahwiaa
(Source: Photo by Authors, March 2009)



Figure 9. Some art pieces fashioned by some youth at a shop in Ahwiaa
(Source: Photo by Authors, March 2009)

Implications For Socio-Economic Success

Necessity, they say, is the mother of invention. From observations, not too long ago, water which had a sweet distinct taste was sold in very huge clay pots with cups placed on them for consumers' use at the Kejetia Market in Kumasi. Just about the same time, water from these earthen wares as well as aluminium containers with corresponding aluminium cups was hawked around especially in the market places in exchange for food items. To maintain hygiene in view of the countless consumers who drank from the same cups, water was packaged in a white plastic bag so that it could be carried away. This is what became known as 'Panyin de Panyin'. This was modified into sachet water. Water is now bottled for hygienic purposes and also for convenience. Thus, culture gives birth to creativity (provides the setting so that needs in the society could be met) and also shapes the ideas through evolution.

In modern societies, a culture shift in small companies is a significant challenge in fostering innovation and creativity in the economy. It is a point in the right direction that organizations, regardless of their respective organizational cultures – a subordinate has no business bringing up his idea during a meeting; subordinate is down the organizational hierarchy and the superordinate is at the top so there is not discussion of ideas, e.t.c. – develop democratic cultures that encourage creativity.

Creative thought lies increasingly at the centre of successful economic life in an advanced knowledge-based economy. It will be not be surprising then, that some time to come people's creativity will increasingly be the key to a country's cultural identity, to its economic success, as well as to individuals' well-being and sense of fulfilment. Successful societies in the 21st century will be those that nurture a spirit of creativity and foster the cultural activity which goes hand in hand with it ("Culture and Creativity", 2001).

To have the best of one's culture, (whether in a school setup, an organization, a home or a society) conformity in the strictest sense must be avoided. Sure, a child must be made to abide by rules and regulations or a yardstick of behaviour, but that must be done in the context of offering encouragement, understanding, and providing room for the child to make mistakes, explore and find out things for himself. All these help shape the experiences of the child from which he can draw knowledge to feed his creative potential; for "... as a man thinketh so is he" (Prov. 23:7) Besides, creativity is increasingly gaining recognition as a human trait that can be (and should be) developed through education. The school culture thus must make conscious efforts to develop the creativity of children through art education at all levels of the school system despite one's field of study. This is because Art, a subject that singularly develops all six kinds of knowledge including creative knowledge, improves academic achievements – enhancing test scores, attitudes, social skills and creative thinking (Amenuke, Dogbe, Asare, Ayiku & Baffoe, 1999; Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1970).

Conclusion

Behaviour is the common element in both concepts of culture and creativity; culture (which is the learned behaviour) being the whole set, creativity (which is an aspect of the learned behaviour) its subset. When there is a problem to solve because of one's learned behaviour, it is the creative aspect of learned behaviour that would be used. After learning how to wear clothes, humans or designers have not stopped experimenting with

different fibres, yarns and fabrics to come out with unique design of clothes that are more comfortable, affordable, attractive and durable. Thus, culture could provide the setting or environment be it physical (availability of resources), social, economic, mental or emotional that can enhance creativity.

Culture can also retard creativity through the sets of behaviours, values and attitudes it dictates. It is vital to value, strengthen, and uphold the expectations of the culture one finds himself in (whether in a shared cultural tradition that set one society apart from the other or the cultural traits in a subculture) without sacrificing uniqueness in the process. Even as culture has a powerful impact on the creative expression of individuals, this relationship is often reciprocal.

Culture can undoubtedly influence the creativity of individuals who stick to it, but then creative individuals can also assert themselves and also shape culture itself. Even so the following should be noted:

1. Child art is a creative activity that every child should be given the opportunity to indulge in.
2. Anyone working with children should watch out for what children portray in their drawings and paintings and what they say about them over a period of time. Since major learning problems might have their solutions embedded in the child's artwork.
3. Creativity is important and its development should be encouraged in schools. Thus, Art educators must capitalize on the fact that children have creative potentials and create an atmosphere that encourages creativity in the classroom.
4. Parents must also value their children's creative expressions and encourage them to develop to their full potentials.
5. Child art is a set of learning activities that expand the imaginative capabilities of children it does not mean when one encourages his ward to indulge in this creative activity then he is definitely going to be an artist. We should not be myopic and realise that once a person is creative, it permeates his entire life, whether he is an artist or not.

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