

CREATING CONDUCTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND MANAGEMENT: A PANACEA FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNING AND CREATIVITY IN SCHOOLS

DR. RUTH O. ANYAOGU

*Faculty of Education,
Imo State University, Owerri,
Imo State.*

Abstract

The paper dwelt on creating of conducive learning environment and its management for effective learning and creativity in schools. Discussed in the paper are learning environment, learning, learning as a process and as an end point, components of learning environments, creation of conducive learning environment, factors affecting creativity development etc. Conclusion was drawn and some suggestions made.

Keywords: Environment, Learning, Creativity, Teaching.

Environment: is the condition that sabbatical you live or work in and way that it influences how you feel or how effectively you can work. To Udokwu (2006), environment is the surroundings or conditions in which man, animal or plant lives or operates.

It is the world around us comprising the atmosphere, water, land and involves human beings and any other living thing or parts of nature. Environment is grouped into physical and social, which have symbiotic relationship. It has been generally acclaimed that environment shapes the character of the individuals belonging to it. This results from the dynamic forces that operate in the environment such as physical, economic, political, social, cultural etc. Man is equipped with a complex nature to respond and adapt to these environmental changes (Anukam & Anukam 2006.) However, the level of responses or the adaptation to these ever changing forces is a function of acquired knowledge, skills, values etc. of the individuals through learning. Environment is the supreme touch to development and learning.

Educational managers are expected to create a conducive learning environment and manage it effectively. It is a safe, airy conducive environment that will unlock students' power of imagination to transform their creative thoughts into creative actions. Hence creativity leads to discovery.

Learning Environment

Learning environment refers to the diverse physical locations, contexts and culture in which students learn; and learning is what a teacher is able to package for the child from the environment. Learning takes place in varied settings like outside-of-school, locations and outdoor environment. This explains why the term learning environment is often used and preferred to be an alternative to classroom, which has limited and traditional connotations.

Structural learning environment includes classroom, offices, hostel, libraries, toilets, business centres, laboratories, studios, workshops, cafes, sports and recreational outfits. Other physical learning environments are the school field, garden, layout, etc.

Learning environment also encompasses the organizational climate of a school or classroom which is otherwise called social environment. This consists of how individuals interact with, and treat one another, ways educational setting is organized by the teacher to facilitate learning, such as conducting classes in relevant natural ecosystem, grouping desks in specific ways, decorating the classroom with learning materials, audio, visual and digital technologies etc. It is the whole range of components and activities within which learning occurs.

Taking cognizance of the argument that learning environments have both direct and indirect influences on the students' learning including their active participation in the class activities, motivation, sense of well-being, belongingness, and safety, and that different types of instruction require different setting arrangement, learning environment needs to be carefully and purposefully created by the teacher to be conducive. This is because, how adults interact with students and how students interact with one another are considered as aspects of learning environment which could be positive or negative.

Learning

Learning is universal, it is a continuous process. Whoever is tired of learning is tired of life. It is a journey from birth to grave (Anyaogu, 2014). Learning entails change which can be desirable or undesirable, accepted or unaccepted by the society. According to Akunya (2006), "learning refers either to a process which produces progressive series of changes in behavior and experience, or a result – the sum total of all such changes". Referring to the result of the process, an educationist Onwuka (1985), takes learning to mean a more or less permanent change in behavior which results from activity, training or observation. However, all available definitions of learning emphasize one thing in common, that is, change in behavior. When learning is discussed as a concept, we usually consider it from two perspectives, namely:

- a. Learning as a process, or a means and
- b. Learning as an end-product, or an outcome.

Learning as a Process

Learning may be defined as a process by which behavior can be initiated for the first time, modified or completely changed. Lasbrey (2006), connected the following points with the definition of learning noted as:

- i. A change in behavior.
- ii. New learning requires practice, reinforcement or both, in order to stick and last. Practice makes learning become perfect while reinforcement is reassuring.
- iii. Some changes that occur in the individual are not learned. These include
 - Changes attributed to physiological reflexes such as sneezing, breathing, blinking of the eye etc.
 - Physical development or maturational increase in the body proportions such as in weight and height; and
 - Temporary states such as tiredness, drunkenness or drug state of addicts.

Learning as an end-product or an Outcome

Learning as an end-product is seen as a change in behavior of a more or less permanent nature, resulting from experience, training, practice, and reinforcement. In a nutshell, learning involves the acquiring of new knowledge, ideas, skills, values, and experiences which enable the individual to modify or alter his action or to realize his goals.

Onwuka (1985), stated that learning can be broken into three types:

1. Cognitive learning which refers to learning of facts, knowledge, and ideas;
2. Affective learning which refers to feeling, attitude, values and appreciation; and
3. Psycho-motor learning which has to do with manipulation. This is manifested in physical dexterity skill in the use of fingers as in writing, drawing, typing, planning musical instruments, wrestling, etc; in the use of the legs and the body as in dancing, running etc. The child's (student) ideas, thinking, and skills under the application of the three types of (domains) of learning in a conducive learning environment becomes creative and his/her creativity may metamorphosed to creative learning leading to new discovery and growth.

Components of Learning Environments

Learning environment reflects both school and classroom environments and children feel frustrated when their learning environment does not match their learning styles. If this happens, the learner tends to become disruptive and inattentive because they are confused about what they ought to be doing.

In the light of this, learning environment has to be such that will focus and address;

1. Provision of students with varied learning activities, well arranged, managed and supervised.

2. The emotional tone and quality of human relationship in class.
3. Fostering of creativity, originality of students.
4. The issues of hostility, bitterness and destructive criticism of others.
5. Organization of learning activities which can be achieved through large groups, small groups and individually.
6. Guiding the students in class activities to accomplish learning activities (Nosiri, 2009).

Creation of Conducive Learning Environment

Conducive learning environment

- a. Implies enhanced learning environment that makes learning easy, possible, and effective.
- b. It entails creating an environment that nurture students desire to learn and accept the challenges of thinking and inquiring. The first step in creating of conducive learning environment is

1. Setting/arrangement of the classroom

A major factor in determining the nature or the setting of the physical classroom environment is the type of learning that a teacher wants to encourage which also relates to the teaching styles. The different learning approaches are individualistic, cooperative, collaborative and competitive learning which also demand different setting arrangements.

(a) Individualistic Learning:

This is the type of learning where the learning or achievement of one student is independent and separate from the achievement of the other students in the class. It is teacher-centered in that the knowledge and cognitive skill are assets that a teacher can transfer to the learners. The teacher provides the major sources of information, assistance, criticism and feedback while the students work alone without being interrupted by other students. In this type of learning, students are seated as far from each other as space permits. Learning resources or materials are organized in a way that each student will have immediate access to the appropriate materials. It aims at individual benefits and assessment and is commonly adjudged against a set criteria.

(b) Co-operative Learning:

This occurs when students work collaboratively towards a common goal and achievements are positively co-related with the other cooperating students. Students work together in small clusters or groups. Effective cooperative learning promotes positive interdependence. In this case, learners have the feeling of connection with other members of the group as they accomplish a common goal, individual accountability, where every member of the group is held accountable for the groups achievements or failures. There is face-to-face interaction, group members engage at close range and are influenced by each others verbal communication, social skills – students become aware of the human interaction skills involved in effective group

cooperation, group processing-the group members reflect and discuss, how well they are functioning as a unit and how effective their working relationships are for effective cooperative learning, there is the need for group management techniques, social skills training and students-centered teaching methods.

2. Apart from the seating arrangement in class which reflects the type of learning style, a conducive learning environment is created when the needed learning materials are available, functional and attractive for the learner to access. An Information Communication Technology (ICT) driven environment with highly digitalized and automated activities comes to mind when learning resources are talked about. Information and communication technology has shrunk the world into a global village and this has repositioned the social, economic, political and academic outlook of man. It therefore becomes instructive that a created learning environment has to display technologies, computers and accessories, mobile phones, internet and internet resources, emails, videos, tapes, language laboratory, projectors, TV, close circuit TV, radio, visual classroom etc. (Idongesit and Ekpo, 2009). This does not preclude the utilization of local teaching resources and improvisation.

3. For conducive learning environment, the hitherto status symbol enjoyed by the teachers as the wisest person in the society, main source of knowledge, a mobile encyclopedia, information gate-keeper, a library, a repository of knowledge and an intellectual dictator has to be played down. There has to be a shift in the learning process and contents which will no longer be at the complete control of the teacher but has to give way for intervention or facilitation where learning is democratic and participatory with the learner being meaningfully and gainfully engaged. This is necessitated by the more challenges than ever, facing the teaching learning process in the complexity of the dynamic society and the computer age children in schools.

4. Again, the social and emotional aspect of learning environment make for conducive learning. This has to do with the culture of the school or the class which include how individuals interact and treat one another, that is, how adults or teachers relate with students and how students interact with one another. Is it a hostile, friendly, non-cooperative, selfish etc. environment? Are there more or few incidences of misbehavior, disorder, bullying and other illegal activities in class?

5. Furthermore, Nwagwu, Emenalo & Anyaogu (2015) emphasizing the importance of classroom environment, posit that the only way adults consciously control the kind of education the child/learner gets, is by controlling the environment in which they act, think and feel, so whether the environment where the child learns is a chance environment or a designed environment for a purpose, makes a great deal of difference. We never educate directly but indirectly by means of the environment”.

It then follows that teachers as well as the management have to make the classroom friendly, enriching and attractive to their students by decorating and adorning the environment with real objects, maps, pictures, charts, wall clock, fixed objects and even toys with multiple colours.

6. In the same vein, conducive learning environment engenders and causes learning to occur and true education is based not on memorization but on inspiration and motivation.

Providing the students with the opportunity of using “out of school” learning environment where students actively participate in and serve the needs of the community whilst learning and developing lifelong values and skills, (otherwise called service learning), and of field trip (excursion) where the students venture outside school grounds, create conducive learning environment. Students take advantage of the unique learning environment not normally encountered within the school classroom to cater for their varied learning needs since not everyone learns in the same way, has the same leaning ability, nor thrive in school environments.

7. Again, Agulanna and Nwachukwu (2014), stressed that effective teaching requires a conducive environment that can facilitate high quality interaction between the teacher and the students to bring about meaningful learning. And to achieve this requires certain ingredients such as Time usage, Teachers essential teaching skills and the professional and managerial skills.

A. Time usage: Time is of essence and limited, so a teacher has to ensure that the classroom is organized and controlled to utilize enough time on actual instructions and not on unimportant activities. School time is of three types, namely;

- **Allocated time – i.e. time set aside for learning.** Teaching has to ensure that he makes judicious use of the time to cover the scheme for the students to do well in examinations.

- **Engaged time (time on tasks):** Actual time students spend on specific activity; and this depends on students’ willingness to learn which is a function of motivation and interest. Also, teachers; engaged time is increased by avoidance of interruptions and distractions in the course of instruction (maintenance of momentum), focused and meaningful sequence of instruction to prevent students getting confused due to a mix up. (smoothness, management of transitions, which is moving from one activity to another. Students have to be informed about the next activity to embark on. And maintaining group focus during learning has to do with the use of good classroom organization strategies and questioning to ensure that every student is actively involved in the teaching learning process.

- **Academic learning time: The time when students are at their best.**

This is the time when students work with a high rate of success, hence students need to be engaged in worthwhile and appropriate learning activities to increase academic learning time. Orderliness in the classroom enables the students learn with reasonable success. They have to be presented and exposed to not too hard and not too easy materials for better understanding, because if a task is too hard the students become despondent and disruptive and if too simple they will not be challenged and may spend time on inappropriate activities.

B. Teacher essential teaching skills.

Essential skills like positive attitudes, rehearsal or review of information presented in instruction, closure and questioning make for proper classroom time management which gets students engaged in learning thereby improving their academic achievement and reducing undesirable activities in the classroom.

C. Personal and managerial skills

This is another ingredient for high quality classroom interaction needed for conducive learning environment. There include good knowledge and grasp of the subject matter and updated from time to time through, workshops, conferences, avid reading, and clarity and effective communication. Others are teacher's personality, independent practice by the students, reinforcement for students good responses, witness which Koulin (1970) in Agulanna and Nwachukwu (2014) explains as the teachers ability to be aware of the happenings in the class; and overlappines where a teacher is able to handle two issues simultaneously without getting immersed in one to the exclusion of another.

Factors Affecting Creativity Development

Creativity is seen as a process which transforms the novel ideas into useful products, where there is an interplay between the learning environment, the individual, and the context. To Hunter, Bedell, and Mumtord (2007), creativity is a complex process where the interactive relationship is located within four dimensions.

- i. Creative persons;
- ii. The cognitive process of creativity;
- iii. Products of creative performance; and
- iv. The social and cultural context

At first level, individual creative output is determined by the following:

- Antecedent conditions like biographical factors;
- Cognitive ability like divergent thinking;
- Disposition like self esteem;
- Knowledge, motivation, social influences like rewards; and
- Contextual influences like physical environment.

Within education, the most salient considerations for promoting creativity are personality, knowledge, motivation, thinking and learning styles, teaching styles, assessments, rewards and environment (Ukozor, Oguguo, & Okorie, 2016).

Conclusion

In conclusion, conducive learning environment is one that is enhanced to make learning easy, possible and effective. It is a pre-condition for effective teaching and learning, hence a teacher, administrator, school management and government have to ensure that the needed instructional materials and facilities are put in place. Also positive physical aspect of the environment has to be created by teachers and the school

management. Conducive learning environment as evidenced from the paper can be said to be sine quo non to effective teaching, learning and creativity.

Recommendations

Based on the paper, the following recommendations were made:

1. School management/teacher should intensify efforts to make teaching and learning environment conducive for effective learning and creativity.
2. Administrators /managers and teacher should endeavour to maintain the learning facilities, equipment etc.
3. Reward, praise and positive reinforcement should be applied to encourage learners and students in creative activities and learning.

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