Socio cognitive approaches to creativity in learners

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UNDERSTANDING CREATIVITY AMONG LEARNERS: A SOCIO-COGNITIVIST APPROACH

INTRODUCTION

The idea of creativity has been fundamental to the cultural and technological innovation and advancement. Creativity is inseparable from the context of its production and reception. Though it is often believed that creative people work in isolation; creativity and intelligence are manifested better by social interactions and collaborations with other individuals. Most of the human creativity is contextualized in the socio cultural ethos where the interactions with people and artefacts are the essential contributors that embody collective knowledge. Our education system is moving away from the traditional behaviorist approach to a constructivist paradigm. However, the current trend of education focuses on emphasizing the development of formal thinking, thus, ignoring the alternate style of thinking i. e. creative thinking. Indian education system arguably remains largely unsuccessful at nurturing creativity in the learners.

There have been studies which measure creativity in terms of individual cognitive ability and conceptualize it using descriptive theories. Creative cognition, however, moves away from the traditional psychometric approaches which rely on tasks that result in flexibility and fluency scores which are just the end product and therefore, fail to precisely characterize the processes which underlie creative thinking. Finke et al. (1992) suggested a ‘ geneplore’ model where learners construct mental representations in ‘

generative’ phase and come up with ideas in ‘ exploratory’ phase. The focus is largely on considering the creative cognitive processes and structures in detail as they are the ones that are used to generate the items that actually led to the scores on the divergent thinking tasks. Even though creativity is taking place within an individual’s mind, it is preceded by the interactions with the the socio-cultural ethos in which the individual is situated. The conceptual spaces for exploration, tools and goals involved in creative activity come from culture rather than human mind. Creativity is not an abstract and separate entity emerging within an individual, but it is both situated and progressively evolving that take place between people. Barron (1999) remarked that all creativity is collaboration. Social creativity can be integrated with individual creativity by distributed cognition (Hutchins) and appropriate collaboration. It preserves the integrity of the individual creator and simultaneously manages a group creative process in order to achieve common ends.

Rationale: Although, there have been researches which try to explore the cognitive mechanisms and role of affect, they do not provide a holistic understanding about the interaction of the individual and social creativity. Moreover, one can sense a major gap between the research on creativity and its indexical educational implications. Amalgamation of the situated cognition, creative and distributed cognition, and social creativity paradigm would empower the educators to develop strategies and plan their lessons and curriculum that best approximates real contexts which are necessary to foster individual and social creative thinking. Thus, a need was felt to study the interaction and impact of creative cognition and socio cultural ethos in

an educational context to develop a holistic understanding about creativity and contribute towards enhancing creativity among children by suitable intervention.

OBJECTIVES

Among this literature available, most of the studies view creativity from a narrow perspective overlooking the aspect of social creativity. Very few studies seem to be available to establish a relationship between multiple intelligences and creative processes. Further, neither there is an adequate amount of experimental research work nor the results of those experiments are substantiated by field studies or personal accounts. Also, there is a dearth of research pertaining to creativity among the learners in India especially adolescents. Keeping this in mind, following objectives for the study has been formulated.

- This study would operationally define and conceptualize creativity by conducting lab studies to understand the effect of nature of tasks, affective states, socio-personal factors, gender, age etc. on creativity as manifested in underlying cognitive processes during various experimental tasks.
- Secondly, the study would examine the nature of relationship between creativity and multiple intelligences.
- It will examine research questions like whether there are any differences in the cognitive processes of learners who are more creative than others; whether awareness about creative cognition increases creative thinking in the learners etc.

- The study will also examine the societal discourses about creativity which legitimize the person and products which can be called creative.

METHOD

We intend to conduct an exhaustive study which will examine the expression of creativity in three stages described below:

Anecdotal records and Lab Studies: The experiments would be based on the anecdotes or historical accounts of creative successes or failures that provide appropriate hints about potential processes and conceptual structures. They would be then operationally defined in terms of experimental procedures and outcomes. Anecdotes are essential as they highlight the importance of ecological validity whereas lab studies are effective in establishing causality between the processes and products. The independent variables would be the nature of the task, affective states, socio-personal factors, gender, age etc. whereas the dependent variables would be the cognitive processes underlying creativity and multiple intelligences. The experiments will be carefully designed to effectively cater to the nature of our research questions. Suitable statistical procedures will be applied to measure the creative abilities and its manifestation during the tasks. Lab experiments will give an inkling about the way creativity is manifested under the controlled conditions.

Field Study: A limitation of lab studies is that it creates artificial settings which may not be relevant to real world creative accomplishments. To balance that, field studies would be conducted to contextualize and validate the findings obtained from the lab studies. Since we aim at suggesting an

intervention, the same research questions which were tested in the laboratory setting would be examined in the field.

Interviews: To further enrich our understanding about creativity, learners would be interviewed regarding their awareness of their cognitive processes, their experiences during creativity tasks, societal discourses about creativity etc. Detailed narrative accounts from teachers and parents of the learners would also be gathered with the help of semi structured questionnaires and self-designed interview modules. The data will be subjected to qualitative methods in order to generate meaningful understanding which will be further used to design creativity modules for enhancing teaching-learning process.

IMPLICATIONS

- This study will provide an understanding about the cognitive, personal and socio-cultural factors that are likely to effect the creative thinking and its manifestation.
- We intend to suggest interventions in schools to enhance the creative capacities of the learners of various grade levels i. e. pre-primary, primary, upper primary, secondary, senior secondary etc. through effective teaching-learning process.
- A holistic understanding about the processes underlying creativity will enable the educators to enhance creativity among their learners. It will also assist the educators in taking decisions regarding their pedagogy, curriculum designing, and classroom environment in order to nurture creativity.

- Further, the study will provide new ways to draw significant understanding about the cognitive processes and experiences underlying creativity.