

Mask Prize (Kenya)/Alla Tkachuk

The MASK Prize: ensuring innovative young Africans creating Africa's future prosperity and well-being



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Abstract

In the 21st century, creativity and innovation is a major force that drives growth, prosperity and transformation. Creative human capital, therefore, is the critical determinant of a nation's success. Creativity is now a fundamental skill employers seek in employees. Education and training for creativity and innovation has become a major concern around the world. Yet, in many

regions, countries and cities, education for creativity and innovation remains elusive.

Creativity must be fostered from early years, or it deteriorates. Art practices are the most effective in fostering creativity. Despite this, schools offer art on a limited basis, often believing art education is about imparting the artistic skills only that can be seen as luxury when people face more pressing needs. Creativity and innovation - the ability to generate new 'outside box' solutions - the most important outcome of art education is often under-recognised. Not any art fosters creativity though: art that imitates can stifle creativity.

The MASK Prize, a renowned creativity competition for young people in Africa, is an exemplary programme that successfully demonstrates how creativity can be both fostered and promoted on a larger scale, <http://mobileartschoolkenya.org/MASK-Prize/index.html>. Inviting young people and schools to submit their works online in any art medium, the competition challenges them to reflect on creative ways of thinking and doing. The entries are judged not on the artistic skills, but how inventive they are. Winners receive prizes at an official ceremony in Nairobi. This is not-for-profit programme of a UK education charity MASK (Mobile Art School in Kenya).

In its 5th year, the MASK Prize has attracted more than 4,500 participants. Its exhibitions help young people to learn from each other and to celebrate creativity at key cultural centers around the world. The programme creates the important visibility and recognition of creativity through its awards and media partnership. Themed 'Young People - The Creative Nation', it hopes to unite young people in innovation, and to make them feel more powerful for being creative. It is vital to offer this programme to more young people in Africa. But for this, the MASK Prize seeks partners. Whether you are a government, company or individual, contact the MASK Prize organizers to support the vision of innovative young Africans ensuring Africa's future prosperity and well-being.

Ensuring innovative young Africans creating Africa's future prosperity and well-being. REVISAR

In the 21st century, creativity and innovation is a major force that drives growth, prosperity and transformation say many key business organisations such as the World Economic Forum. Creative human capital, therefore, is the critical determinant of a nation's success. Creativity is now a fundamental skill, the top skill employers seek in employees. Education and training for creativity and innovation has become a major concern around the world.



Yet, in many regions, countries and cities, education for creativity remains elusive due to lack of understanding of creativity and its values, the effective creativity-fostering programmes, collaboration across sectors, as well as inadequate public policies. Eighty-five percent of employers say they are having difficulty finding creative employees. Almost 80% of chief executives say that the lack of creative talent threatens their companies' growth and even survival.

What is the creativity skills set? When asked, business leaders describe 'creative employees' as those who are able to 'see the problems that no one else sees', and generate new, 'outside the box' solutions, opportunities and value. This ability is rooted in the capacity to 'at will' connect knowledge across various disciplines and form new combinations and patterns.

Innovation - is the process of bringing new ideas into the marketplace. Innovation is not only new technology, it also emerges from non-technological knowledge such as the know-how and operational practices. There is no innovation without creativity. Creativity can be learned and taught. It is neither a 'soft' skill - creativity is a high form of cognitive

process, nor its 'art' only - it occurs in all aspects of life, science and business.

Creative people are open, flexible and always constructive independent-thinkers. Dedicated to hard work, they enjoy putting themselves against problems. They are highly observant, imaginative, and confident. Curiosity, risk-taking, and the capacity to think divergently are also considered to be as part of the creativity skill set.

Creativity in schools. Creativity must be strengthened from early years. If neglected creativity can deteriorate from as high as 98% of 5 years-old children being creative to as low as 2% of adults aged 25 years old and over being capable of generating any new ideas. Strengthening creativity in adults is more difficult and more costly than in the young.

Art practices. Art practices are believed to be the most effective in fostering creativity. Despite this, schools offer the art practices (drama, music, painting, dance, singing) on an optional basis only. In Africa, art education in schools is limited. Teaching the artistic skills (the ability to paint, dance, play music instruments, etc) seems a luxury when people have more pressing needs. But another aspect of art education that is more critical than the artistic skills - creativity - is often under-recognised by teachers and policy-makers. Not any art practices are conducive to creativity though: art that only focuses on imitating the reality, for example, can seriously stifle creativity.

The MASK Prize. Ten years ago I established MASK that since implemented several successful training programmes in more than 20 Kenyan schools. Some of those focused on teaching students how to apply creativity in real-life situations strengthening their entrepreneurship and leadership skills. Some focused on peace-building and extremism-prevention. For its innovative approaches to creativity training, MASK is listed on the Harvard University's Global Innovation Education Initiative.

One particular programme, the **MASK Prize**, an annual creativity competition for schools and young people in Africa, aims to nurture and promote creativity on a larger scale, <http://mobileartschoolkenya.org/MASK-Prize/index.html>. The competition challenges young people to reflect on creative and innovative ways of thinking and doing. The entries are judged not on the artistic skills alone, but more importantly how inventive they are. The MASK Prize is not-for-profit programme of a UK education charity MASK (Mobile Art School in Kenya).

Participants enter their works online in any medium. Winners receive prizes and certificates at an official Award ceremony in Nairobi. To share and celebrate













creativity young Africans, the exhibitions of the works are exhibited at key cultural centres around the world.

Themed 'Young People - The Creative Nation', this unique platform hopes to unite young people in creativity and make them feel more powerful for being innovative. The MASK Prize also creates the important visibility and recognition of creativity and innovation through its awards and media partnership.



In its 5th year, the MASK Prize has attracted more than 4,500 participants in East and South Africa. The participants say "the MASK Prize is a wonderful event", "its lovely and amazing", "It is a great honour to receive the prize", "I was

in awe of creativity of other participants", "I gained a lot from the competition and I am a better person for it", "The initiative helps us a lot", "Today a dream comes true!", "Getting a certificate motivated me to be even more creative", and "I urge you to continue inspiring us as young artists".

It is vitally important to make this opportunity available to more young people in Africa. For this, the programme seeks partners among governments,



companies and individuals. Do contact the MASK Prize organizers if you wish to share the MASK Prize's vision of innovative young Africans ensuring Africa's future prosperity and well-being.

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