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Challenges of Art Education and the Millenium Development Goals: The Cross River State Experience

By

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Abstract

This paper examines the context art education in Cross River State with reference to the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Creativity is a major attribute of art education and it is inherent in all children. Art education prepares the individual with the capacity to make meaning which involves ability to engage, analyze, entertain ideas and images in one's life experiences. The Millennium Development Goals emphasizes human development, human capital and human capabilities, using education as an instrument for increasing basic standards of living and advance the means to a productive life. The meaning of art and the correlation between art and other subjects is discussed within the context of general education the challenges of art education in Cross River State and how it impacts on the tertiary level of education with particular reference to the Visual Arts Department of Cross River University of Technology, Calabar. This writing concludes that what defines art and art education as a body of knowledge is necessary not only for producing artists but as a tool for enhancing career success in all professions and as a correlation with other subjects. Therefore it recommends that the discriminatory attitude of employment 01 teachers in certain subject areas at the secondary level at the expense of other subjects should be stopped. It is necessary to employ art teachers and make art compulsory in all secondary schools as a strategy for subject's integration which helps to build skills and teach classroom subjects across different disciplines.

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What is Art Education?

One of the obvious characteristics of present day art education is ^{1-u-t} creative ability is inherent in all children; few decades ago creativity thought to be an attribute of a few learners, primarily those having artistic talents. The interpretative aspect of the creative act suggests that all learners have the ability to produce something that is new, superior or unique when compared to the previous performances, and this has an impact on general education.

According to Gude (2007) the core objective of quality art education is that students increase their capacities to make meaning. The making of meaning refers to the ability to engage and entertain ideas and images in one's own life experiences. Contemporary art education employs visual and verbal manifestations to enhance student's abilities to engage, analyze and apprehend situations.

From the Department of Visual Arts students enrolment from 2002 - 2012 shows that over 90% of the students admitted in the Visual Arts Department had no previous background in fine arts as such did not attempt the subject in their O'level school certificate examinations. Most of them were seeking admissions in Mass Communication Department of the Cross River University of Technology, Calabar but were rather offered admissions owing to available chances into the Visual Arts Department. Most of the secondary schools in Cross River State never had art teachers and never offered art as a subject. The students admitted in the Visual Arts Department were therefore outright fresher who had to learn the basics of art expected to have been covered by the secondary school curriculum.

To the students art terms are strange, some of them for the first time were exposed to art by way of drawing, applying colours or manipulating clay. Some of them have coped very well in their various units of specializations and have produced excellent pieces of arts. Those in this group showed traits of being talented but were hidden away from opportunities of self discovery, and only appearing in an art department by chance. Owing to available scores as a lecturer in the Visual Arts Department some of the students have worked very hard knowing their limitations and as such have improved greatly, while some have remained tepid.

Dewey (1966) maintains that as skills are acquired they must be readily put to use in new situations that are under the personal control of the learner. Skills may be interpreted as ways of handling materials, carrying out various processes like printmaking, facility with tools or self direction in preparation for activity.

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In art education emphasis is placed on the development of the individual as a person, as a producer and a consumer of art forms. The individual's behaviour in relation to others is equally important. Art education is not considered adequate unless it brings about the growth of the students social skills and awareness, a way of life in which one works with others in a group, either in field trips and projects or directing the attention of art as it exists beyond a personal creative efforts.

Artists manipulate the elements of space and form right from creating an image to the development of the environment which shapes attitudes and patterns of living in the society. In this case, art becomes a social force rather than a vehicle for individual expression. Gaitskell and Hurwitz (1975) express the hope that the form and order found in art may help to bring about form and order in the lives of those who study it.

Basic design courses in most art schools and colleges use perception as the focus for teaching design. This prepares the pupils/students for perceptual maturity in dealing with problems relating to visual learning in picture making, drawing, painting, printing and sculpturing. The development of visual perception may go beyond these, to focusing on activities that deal with visual relationships.

Certain facts of nature are almost impossible to understand in terms of words. Certain things may not be easily understood without the help of art as a visual tool. This highlights the relevance of art education as visual aid and visualization as a process of learning. Art activities will require a child to coordinate his intellect, emotions, perceptual and motor skills and the major abilities are responding, expressing, designing and creating.

Fiske (1999) maintains that in the global economy, creativity is a vital link in art education which aid achievements in other subjects. It documents the process of making art whether it is written, performed, sculpted, photographed, filmed, danced or painted, and prepare children for success in the workforce not simply as artists, but all professions.

Weening (2009) states in a world in which ideas and information are often delivered visually, children need to learn how to analyze and judge the meanings of images and how to use them to communicate their own ideas. In so doing, they may better serve their communities, become better citizens and in turn work to solve the greater world problems in the future. Also children participation in art activities help them to gain skills necessary for understanding human experience, and respect for others ways of working and thinking.

What is Art?

Although Weller (1965:5) observes that "we are no longer sure of what a work of art is in an objective was... as we become unsure of standards".

Kleiner (2009) supports Weller's view in observing that in the early 20th century came discoveries and new ways of thinking in different fields. The new ideas and values yielded innovative views which revised radically how people understood the world. Art was part of the reassessment of the new discoveries and shifting of theoretical bases on how people view the world. Also scientific discoveries constituted a changed view of physical nature and contributed to the growing interest in abstraction as opposed to the mimetic representation of the world.

Gilbert (1995:18) also remarks that "today more than ever before we are confronted with art from diverse cultures which has defied previously known classifications of what constitutes art. Weiner (1973) maintains that, in creating works of art a certain intellectual and cultural climate must occur because the Artist grasps reality in an immediate and intuitive manner, embodies it in a material form, and so make it available to direct apprehension, by this, provides a concrete view of what may otherwise remain an abstract concept.

The Correlation between Art and other Subjects

In a school environment pupils at the primary level or students at the secondary level get involved in daily activities which may involve drawing, writing, reading, singing, building or measuring. These activities serve as a means of learning in which facts are gained, skills developed, and working together in group activities help them to develop social skills necessary for a democratic living. The 6th Global Leadership Forum (2003-2004:1) states that "if we look at art from a pure arts perspective, that is art for art's sake, we may not see the relevance of art in fulfilling the MDG's goals. But, when we approach it from an interdisciplinary mind-set (e.g. incorporating economics, psychology among others) there is a chance for arts to be part of it all".

Art beyond its customary functions permeates into other subject areas which are considered educationally desirable. It involves the development of the perceptual facilities and the major skills in manipulation of forms, materials, images and ideas through the creative processes. In enhancing sensory awareness through art education children learn to communicate and to listen, to pay careful attention and to develop powers of concentration which may be relevant in other subject areas.

Art interrelates with other subjects in a broad context through creative skills derived from resourcefulness in which pupils or students find how best to utilize available local materials in a creative enterprise; in the process of improvisation they adopt alternative ends for imported materials not readily available, of course,

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improvisation often lead to inventiveness of which the pupils or students develop creative attributes such as flexibility, fluency and imagination which may be carried into other subject areas. As the pupils or students interact with these concepts they develop the capacity to create, fashion out, reproduce or represent familiar objects in an unfamiliar or different new ways.

The production of an art work as a correlation to other school subjects may take place when a pupil/student is emotionally and intellectually moved by an experience in another subject. For instance, experiences in subjects like language arts or literature such as stories or poems may arouse in the Child the desire to express such feelings in two or three-dimensional art forms. Also various art forms like light crafts, puppetry, collage, paper machie etc have strong relationships with other subject areas like theatre arts, spoken and written English or Social Studies.

The correlation between art and science, science states facts and art expresses meanings. Scientists deal with verification and reject emotional involvement, while the artists are inspired by science. Kaufman (1966:60) notes that art "offers an infinite but subjective number of truths, stress the individual character of the process, product and the imaginative nature of the motivating experience". Scientific enquiry through its empirical nature demands repetition for verification whereas the artist avoids repetition at all costs.

While the scientist places a premium on logical processes, the artist may consciously seek out the illogical in the search for a fresh statement. Artistic works are derived from unique experiences, and may be spontaneous, subjective and at times irrational. The speculative nature of the higher realms of physics and mathematics corresponds in many ways to the intuitive nature of art.

The correlation between art and science has been able to bring the two subjects into close proximity. Kleiner (2009) observes that Leonardo's drawing of the foetus and lining of the Uterus was an outstanding achievement which epitomized the scientific spirit of the Renaissance, originating a method of scientific illustration of the cut-away views. Although the drawing does not meet the 21st century standards for accuracy, scholars have recognized its importance for the development of anatomy as a science, especially in an age which pre-dates photographic methods of x-rays.

Gaitskell and Al Hurwitz (1975:80) state that "as soon as a child is capable of using a measured line, mathematics may begin to enter into some of the art work". These might include activities such as building model houses, making costumes for puppets, using geometric forms as a basis for collage and design. However, there are

several other correlations which may be either planned (formally arranged) or unplanned, all of which have parallel attainments in artistic participation.

Art Education and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

There are eight international development goals that all 192 United Nations member states and at least 23 international organizations have agreed to achieve by the year 2015. The MDG's focus on three major areas: Human Development (humanity), Human Capital and Human Capabilities. The (MDGs) have eight goals with 21 targets and a series of measurable indicators for each target. The Goal 2 Target 2A is to achieve universal primary education in which all children can complete a full course of primary education by 2015 (Wikipedia, 2012).

At this moment in our educational development in Cross River State, art as a subject is hardly taught in secondary schools, yet art is one of the core subjects for child development education in which drawing, colouring of objects and tracing of dotted lines are taught to pupils.

The latest teacher's audit assessment of April, 2011 from the Secondary Education Board, shows that only 20 fine arts teachers are in the employment of Cross River State Government out of the 230 public schools. This is grossly inadequate. Although the Secondary Education Board expects only 171 teachers to be employed as art teachers, whereas subjects like English language, mathematics, social studies, sciences the figures are much higher.

However, with 230 secondary schools and their population as an unknown variable, if a minimum of 2 teachers are employed to each school, one at the junior secondary level the other at the senior secondary level. It is clear that the 230 secondary schools will require at least 460 fine arts teachers in Cross Rivers State employment. This writer is reliably informed that the teacher/student ratio for employment is 1:45 for arts subjects and 1:33 for science subjects. The statistics from the Secondary Education Board is frightening and shows that the state is poles apart from the Millennium Development Goals in terms of human capital development.

The analyses of the 2009 Cross River State painting competition organized for all secondary schools in which I was a judge showed that over 95% of the secondary schools in the state do not offer fine arts as a subject and have no art teachers. About 90% of all the students who participated in the contest had no previous art instructions in schools. This is made worse by the discriminatory attitude of government employment where teachers in certain subject areas are preferred to others. This practice defeats the whole purpose of education which is to give the students a chance in developing whatever talents and interests they may have.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that there should be a renewed commitment to art education which engages and motivate students in general not necessarily with the aim of producing artists but individuals with creative and critical thinking skills which prepare them for success in all professions.

In the global economy, creativity is essential as it illustrates the link between art education and achievements in other subject areas as evident in the Cross River State tourism which highlight the contributions of the visual arts in tourism development.

Recommendations

1. This paper therefore recommends that the 'narrowed curricular mentality' by which government employ teachers with emphasis on certain subject areas while ignoring others is quite unhealthy and should be stopped.
2. It is necessary for Cross River State Government to employ art teachers in all schools and at all levels because art integration strategies help to build skills and teach classroom subjects across different disciplines.
3. Art is a vital part of the culture and life of this country therefore ail students deserve access to art in schools as part of a complete education, especially that Africa's major contributions to world civilization is her great artistic heritage within the sub-Saharan Africa, with all the treasures coming from Nigeria, examples are the Nok terracotta of 600 B. C. Bakor monoliths 200 A.D, Calabar terracotta, Igbo-Ukwu 9th century.
4. Consequently arts should be made compulsory in schools because through art pupils/students form new patterns of perception which enable them to see the world with fresh insights.
5. The children painting competition should be made a yearly event because if children have proper avenues to express themselves they are less likely to be violent, and able to deal with their emotions as seen in their paintings of "child abuse".

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