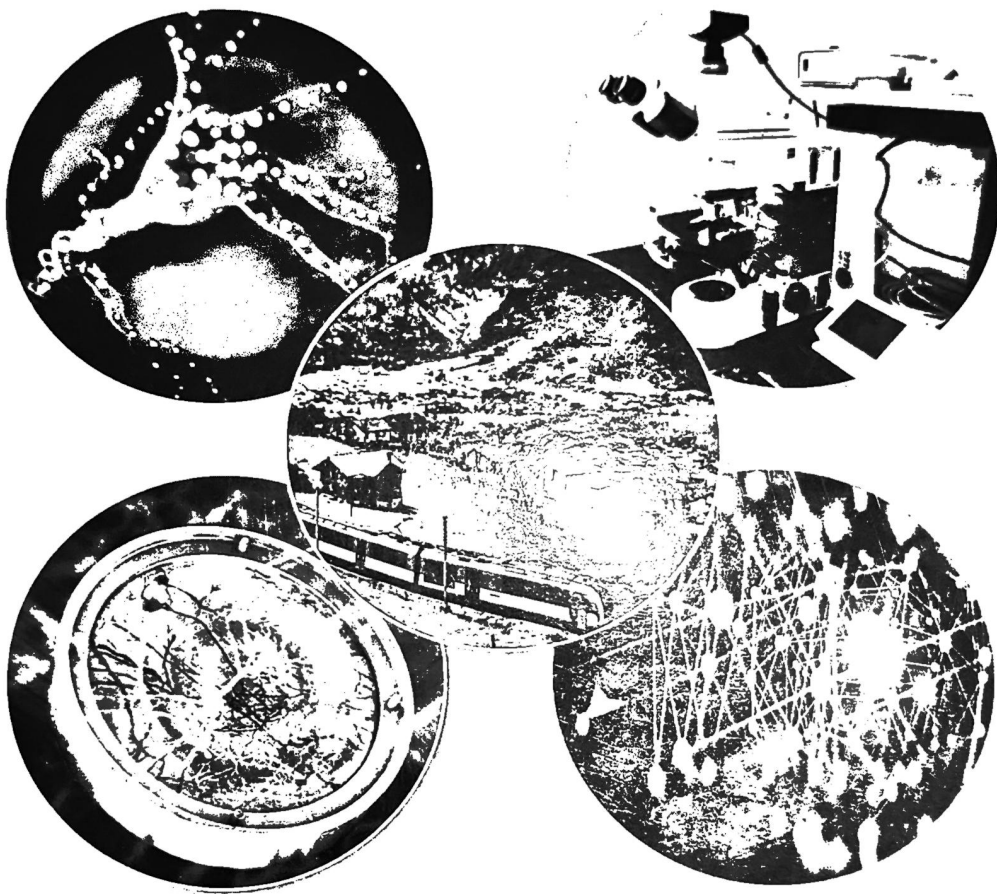


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APPRECIATING AND VALUING DIVERSITY IN TEACHING VISUAL ARTS: GOALS AND METHODS

Key words: Teaching visual Arts, valuing diversity and appreciation, goals and methods

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INTRODUCTION

The value of diversity and differences in the visual arts practice, research and education can best be experienced and appreciated by a clear understanding of what the visual art means. "Visual arts" is a broad category of art which includes a number of artistic disciplines from various sub-categories. The definition of visual art usually encompasses the following: all aspects of fine and applied arts, which include activities, such as drawing, painting, and sculpture. Others are graphics art, ceramics, fashion, textile, glass design, with associated activities like manuscript illustration, book illustration, calligraphy, printmaking and architecture. It also includes a number of modern art forms and expression: Assemblage, collage, mixed-media, conceptual art, installation, happenings, performances and film art including associated disciplines such as photography, video arts and animation or any combination thereof. These groups of activities also include high tech discipline, others like computer graphics and so on. Other modern visual arts, new environmental

or experimental graphics or land art which includes transitory forms like ice/snow sculpture and presumably graffiti art.

The visual art also encompasses a number of decorative art discipline and crafts: ceramics and studies in pottery, mosaic art, mobiles, tapestry, and glass art (including stained glass. Wider definition of visual art sometime includes applied art area such as graphics design, textile, fashion design, glass design, industrial design and interior design new type of body art. These include tattoo art, face and body painting

It is necessary, pertinent to consider the value of diversity and differences in visual art practice and research because of its role in education in general. Many adults and others have not had the opportunity (or the desire) to explore the world of art in any systematic way. As a consequence, their reactions to visual art exist at a very basic level; "I like it or I don't like it" being the principle reaction to works of art, where ever encountered. One need only review the following questions to gain some insight into the complexity of the

world of art. Being able to provide reasonable answers to these questions would demonstrate one's ability to understand and appreciate art, at least at a very fundamental level. In order to understand art it is necessary to nurture an appreciation for the varied functions and values of art; to demonstrate that the visual arts are extraordinary phenomena, and that they are essential to our well being, individually religious and as a society.

What is visual art?

Visual art is about creating and making the general aesthetics of a work, and to create aesthetics style of any art or any related work of art. It is important to work with fundamental elements of art and design, arranging them according to the principles. These elements and principles together form the building blocks of art and design and a firm understanding of them is crucial in creating visual design/art of any product. These elements are the main media through which designer and artist translate images and ideas into concrete terms. In man's visual communication experiencing everything large and small, natural or man-made can be describe in terms of these elements.

Visual art are constructed from very basic elements or components that we experience through our sense of sight and/or touch; namely, lines, two and/or three dimensional shapes, textures,

colors, dark and light qualities, and actual or implied space. For any analysis and criticism of any work of art, the following should be considered or look into:

- Should natural objects be considered as works of art?
- Is art anything we want it to be, or does the term "art" refer to objects that have special characteristics?
- What conditions need to exist before we are willing to classify something as art? An understanding of the above questions will help towards understanding what art is all about.

Diversity in Art teaching

Fine and applied arts learning is an integral part of the society we live in. Art is part of the cultural heritage of every nation. It is what makes us most human, and complete as people. The arts cannot be learned through occasional or random exposure any more than math or science can. Education and engagement in fine arts are an essential part of the school curriculum and an important component of the educational program of every student. Education in the arts is an integral part of the development of each human being.

In any educational system it is very important that there is a wide array of diverse group of people in the classroom, this is so because it creates a realistic setting and also encourages students to grow outside their boundaries and learn something new about a culture, and any other subject they may not be familiar with. In any

fine arts class diverse group of students exists, it is important to recognize the fact that all students are unique in their own way in terms of creativity and innovation. Their differences could consist of their reading level, physical ability, cultural background, personality, religious beliefs, and others. There has always been diversity in any setting especially in art studio or classroom environment, it is important to embrace it and make positive use of it.

The authorities should value diversity and the need to model this attitude to their students need is important. The values of diversity in fine arts need to be recognize and people should respect the fact that students are different and that these differences is generally a good thing. For example, when attempting to solve a problem, it is better to bring together a diverse team with many skills and many different ways of approaching the problem than it is to bring together a team that has all their strength concentrated in one area. Sufficient data exists to overwhelming support the belief that study and participation in fine and applied arts is a key component in improving learning throughout all academic areas.

Evidence of its effectiveness is in reducing students dropout, raising students attendance, developing other team players, a love for learning, improving greater student dignity, enhancing students creativity, and

producing a more prepared individual for the workplace for tomorrow has been documented in studies. The fine arts also provide learners with non-academic benefits such as promoting self-esteem, motivation, aesthetics awareness, cultural exposure, creativity, improve emotional expression, as well as social harmony and appreciation of diversity.

The following are findings reported on art related research: The Impact of the Arts on Learning (Fiske, 1999) that should be noted by every parent, teacher, and administrator. The arts reach students not normally reached, in ways and methods not normally used. This leads to better student attendance and lower dropout rates.) It changes the learning environment to one of discovery. This often re-ignites the love of learning in students tired of just being fed facts.

Students connect with each other better. When this is done well, it often results in fewer fights, greater understanding of diversity and greater peer support in any leaning setting. The arts provide challenges to students of all levels. Each student can find his/her own level from basic to gift. Students learn to become sustained, self-directed learners.

Is the study of Fine Arts important?

The study of f and applied arts is so important because of the benefits associated with it. They engage many areas of the brain and also have far-

reaching effects on the learner's mind (Jensen, 2001). The arts promote the understanding and sharing of culture. They promote social skills that enhance the awareness and respect of others. The fine arts enhance perceptual and cognitive skills. The Burton study of more than 2000 children found that those in the arts curriculum were far superior in creative thinking, self-concept, problem-solving, self-expression, risk-taking, and cooperation than those who were not (Burton et al., 1999). The arts have the capacity to engage everyone. Today's world is witness to the Information Age. The primary sources of content information are no longer teacher lectures or textbooks canted. Learning is not limited to what you know, but is dependent upon how to find information and how to use that information quickly, creatively, and cooperatively. "We are in the twilight of a society based on data. As information and intelligence becomes the domain of computers, society will place a new value on the one human ability that can't be automated: emotion (Jensen, 1999, p. 84)."

An effective education in the fine arts helps students to see what they look at, hear what they listen to, and feel what they touch. Engagement in the fine arts helps students to stretch their minds beyond the boundaries of the printed text or the rules of what is provable. The arts free the mind from rigid certainty. Imagine the benefits of seeking,

finding, and developing multiple solutions to the myriad of problems facing our society today! These processes, taught through the study of the arts, help to develop the tolerance for coping with the ambiguities and uncertainties present in the everyday affairs of human existence. There is a universal need for words, music, dance, and visual art to give expression to the innate urgings of the human spirit. (Eisner, 1987) The premier organizations in the corporate world today recognize that the human intellect "draws from many walls." Arts education gives access to the deepest of those walls.

Creativity and innovation

The act of creativity can be seen as that which provides the urge for continuing exploration and discovery. Creativity is being more closely related to the thinking abilities and to the attitudinal development. It is a continual process for which the best preparation involves creativity itself.

Every child is born creative. The urge to explore, investigate, discover, what is on the other side of the screen is not limited to human behavior, but is experienced by the whole animal kingdom, (Lower field and Brittan 1975). One of the most commonly agreed upon components of creative thinking is the ability to produce a large number of ideas. In general sense the idea of creativity means different things to different people of the world.

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Visual Arts: Goals And Methods

Creativity exists everywhere in people's life. It can be found in designing and packaging, processing and production, fabric and fashion, sign and architectural design, applied science and technology, visual arts, theatre, music, film (video production) and a host of other activities. Creativity in the modern dispensation is used as a powerful tool to attract attention to a nation or country powerful endowment. Creativity can be meaningful to individual, if it is ideologically and culturally inclined. Runco (1994) opines that creativity is in terms of cognitive processes that lead to an original and adaptive insight, idea or solution. Thus, creativity is the most essential of all human resources and skills (Bolaji 2007). Akinboye (2004) sees creativity as a tool that propels organizations, catapults careers, and generate potent growth and viable outcomes.

Creativity is at the heart of art and design, at all stages throughout the design process. The most exciting and challenging design is that which is truly innovative; the creation of a radical departure from anything currently on the market (Baxter, 1995). The more people try to define creativity by identifying with specific sets of values, meanings, beliefs, and symbols, the more our creativity will be focusing on how values, meanings, beliefs and symbols are formed, the greater the chance that our creativity will become

less restricted (Bolaji 2007).

One major way to spark creativity is through exploration, exploring exposes one to new things. New things are inspiring, while exploring one might stumble across a new way of doing something, a new thing to do, or something more subtle. Sometimes one uncover a bit of information that clicks with things he has been thinking about and completes (or helps to complete) the picture he has been developing in his mind. Other times one may discover a tool, a process or an approach that others are using which is unrelated but still inspiring in its ingenuity. In general, exploration can fuel ones creativity.

Creativity is a term that is often used indiscriminately. Distinctions are not made between "making," "producing" or "creating" works of art. Students are expected to create such works whenever they are engaged in art activities. "Creative self-expression" is a very common phrase in art education discourse. It implies that when students are expressing reactions to their own experiences they are being creative ... even though what they produce may be very similar to what they have produced before or to what their peers "create".

In addition, it is often believed that students' abilities to create art are dependent on inherited traits, which are not easily altered by classroom experiences. Because of these assumptions, the nature of creative

behavior is not sufficiently differentiated, and there are seldom any specific efforts made to develop particular creative skills. Articulating the skills associated with the production of art includes clarifying the aspects of creative behavior that are agreeable to change in the art class. For example, "fluency" and "flexibility" are traits that are associated with creative behavior. In order to insure that these traits are nurtured, art activities must require students to generate a variety of responses (fluency) and/or easily alter their works (flexibility) to increase their expressive impact.

It must be remembered, however, that the extent to which students will be successful and creative (producing art that is both worthy as art and innovative) will depend on the student having acquired an adequate range of the technical, observational, representational and interpretative skills that are essential to the production of art.

What can teachers do to encourage, value, and promote diversity?

Fine arts practice requires students be provided with an environment that is conducive to learning both theoretical and practical skills. The society people find themselves is more diverse, it is important that students learn to value and use diversity to the greater good. In any setting valuing diversity should be a thing of concern to all in order to create an environment where each

student feels valued and respected. In order to value diversity, it is necessary:

- Take time to learn about students' background, interests, and learning style.

- ◆ This will allow create an environment that is conducive to each individual student.

- Allow time for the students to learn about each other and gain an appreciation for the diversity they bring to the classroom.

- ◆ Students should be reminded how boring it would be if all alike and there were no difference

- ◆ Students should be aware that everyone has strengths and weaknesses. When working as a team students should be encouraged to take advantage of the strength of the team members in order to produce the best possible results.

- Bring in different people to the class as resources that students might be able to connect with.

- ◆ Search out people that are different from each other and that might share certain qualities with other students.

- ◆ Students need role models. Many times when they see they are connected in some way to a person they will be more apt to listen and learn from them.

- Never tolerate bullying, teasing, and other put-down behavior at any time in the classroom/studio.

- ◆ Implement a "zero tolerance" for anything that is disrespectful, hurtful, or intolerant of diversity.

The idea of diversity encompasses recognition and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing their individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. It is the discovery of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment that matters in any art studio and classroom environment. This is all about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich scope of diversity contained within each individual.

Research is a highly valued activity in that being engaged in legitimate fine art making task implies that one is also engaged in a worthwhile research activities. The value of diversity therefore is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment.

Enhancing our capacity to deal creatively with diversity Enhancing our capacity to deal creatively with diversity and helping ourselves collectively tap into the incredible richness that awaits us there. A tremendous amount of wisdom, know how and methodology exists on this subject already, albeit not as well integrated as we might like. So we all have adventures to undertake to help develop it and weave it together.

Students do have differences which can be categorized into primary and secondary types of diversity. The first is visible differences such as gender, ethnic origin, and age fall into the primary category; whereas obvious differences such as class, sexuality, and disability and work style come under the secondary category. Research work on the issue of diversity should be focused on the positives and strengths of difference as well as the problems. It engages with and understands the totality of people's identity and experience, and in addition recognizes and confronts experiences of oppression and discrimination and their impact on the individual. Many differences occurring

within behavior, lifestyles, customs and habits embrace tradition going back generations and these are often encapsulated in what we know as culture. Lemos and Crane (DoH, 2001) highlighted a lack of cultural awareness and unequal treatment in service delivery.

Diversity is a concept that embraces a wide range of characteristics including:

- language
- Race
- ethnic background
- Dress
- Values
- Age
- Gender
- educational background
- religious observances
- political interests

- notions about social and community responsibilities
- economic status
- mental, physical disabilities

Diversity, or difference, is a central feature of modern existence, partly because of interaction between cultures; may be for historical reasons; and can be through the growth of international communications technology. As a result, we have to be aware and accepting of differences if we want to reap the benefits that naturally flow from diversity.

We are living in a society that is ethnically and culturally diverse and it is important that services reflect this. This is important in an art environment that better reflect the lives of different people and section of the society. In the same way that cultures interact with each other, diversity brings new skills and fresh ideas. We are all different one from each other and it is these differences that have a penetrating value and direct pertinence to the workplace.

The key elements of working with diversity and discrimination are:

- That discrimination is often, subtle, unintentional and cumulative.
- That people often respond to being told they are discriminatory by being defensive, dismissive, denying, disregarding or down grading.
- That discrimination can be active or passive. Doing nothing in some situations can be as damaging as actively discriminating.
- That people are multi-dimensional.

They are not just a race or gender, but have an age, a class, sexuality, an educational experience. All these things will affect who they are.

- There are often hidden elements to our own and others diversity; a sexuality, dyslexia, a particular faith
- The impact of people difference on others, remembering that we are as different from others as they are of us, and power relationships arising
- Recognize and celebrate the strengths and positives of diversity is so important in our society.

Educational values art

In general education, art contributes to the development of a very important area of literacy by cultivating abilities to utilize a non-verbal language of expression and communication. Art plays an essential role in supporting and changing culture. It enhances almost everything that humans manufacture. Art is so important in our personal lives and as fundamental as a vehicle of expression and communication that individuals and societies could hardly exist without. So student should take due advantage of this involvement in art in order to contribute to cognitive development and to their growth and well-being.

CONCLUSION

Appreciating and valuing diversity in teaching visual arts normal starts with a clear understanding of its fundamentals, it is necessary to nurture an appreciation and value of art, and to demonstrate that the visual art are an extraordinary

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phenomenon, that are essential to the wellbeing for the individual and the society. The value of diversity and the differences can then be appreciated by a clear understanding of what the visual art means. The visual art is an integral part of the society, education engagement in art activities is an essential part of the school curriculum which when acquired helps in human development. The value and diversity in teaching the visual arts need to be recognized and respected. Art provides learner with academic benefit such as promoting self esteem, motivation, aesthetics, awareness, creativity, innovation and emotional expression as well as social harmony and appreciation of diversity. Fine art practiced by nature requires that students be provided with an environment that is conducive to learning both theoretical and practical skills. Education in every society is very important factor to the cultural and artistic development of the society.

Art contributes to the development of a very important area of literacy by cultivating abilities to utilize a non verbal language of expression and communication. Art plays an essential role in supporting and changing culture. There are benefits associated with this dispensation that are rooted in exploration and innovation. Thus, there are far reaching benefits for any developing nation that makes creativity the center of its philosophical ideology. Methodologies that aid exploration and

discovery of potentials, a problem-solving ability which allows the learner the opportunity for creativity should be focus of any educational endeavor or curriculum transformation. The need for a paradigm shift from theoretical and paper certification to a practical application of knowledge necessary for future employment and skill development in the art and design for self-employment is very necessary for Africans development.

There are benefits associated with this dispensation that are rooted in visual art teaching in Nigeria higher institution which is through exploration and innovation. Thus, there are far-reaching benefits for any developing nation that makes creativity the centre of its philosophical ideology.

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