CHAPTER

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APPRECIATING AND VALUING DIVERSITY IN TEACHING VISUAL ARTS: 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 visual art means. "Visual arts" is a broad category of art which includes several artistic disciplines from various sub-categories. Visual art encompasses all aspects of fine and applied, which include activities, such as drawing, painting, and sculpture, graphics art, ceramics, fashion, and textile, glass design, with associated activities like manuscript illustration, book illustration, calligraphy, printmaking and architecture. Visual art also encompasses some decorative art disciplines and crafts: ceramics and studies in pottery, mosaic art, mobiles, tapestry, and glass art (including stained glass. The wider definition of visual art sometimes includes applied art areas such as graphics design, textile, fashion design, glass design, industrial design and interior design new types of body art. These include tattoo art, face and body painting

What is visual art?

Visual art is about creating and making the general aesthetics of a work, to create the aesthetic style of any art. The 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 are the main media through which designers and artists translate images and ideas into concrete terms. In man's visual communication experience everything large and small, natural or man-made can be described in terms of these elements.

Visual art is 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, colours, dark and light qualities, and actual or implied space. For any analysis and criticism of any work of art, the following should be critically considered or looked 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

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 Nigerian. 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 there must be a wide array of diverse groups 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 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 an art studio or classroom environment, it is important to embrace it and make positive use of it.

The authorities and teachers should value diversity, and the need to model the attitude of their students need is important. The values of diversity in fine arts need to be recognised and people should respect the fact that students are different and that these differences are 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 its strength concentrated in one area. Sufficient data exists to overwhelmingly support the belief that study and participation in fine and applied arts is a key component in improving learning throughout all academic areas.

Is the study of Fine Arts important?

The study of fine 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).

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 more closely related to thinking abilities and to 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, and discover, what is on the other side of the screen is not limited to human behaviour, but is experienced by the whole animal kingdom, (Low 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 a general sense, the idea of creativity means different things to different people in the world.

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's powerful endowment. Creativity can be meaningful to an 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, and 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 uncovers 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 one's 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".

What can teachers do to encourage, value, and promote diversity?
Fine arts practice requires that design students be provided with an environment that is conducive to learning both theoretical and practical skills. The society people find themselves in is more diverse, students must learn to value and use diversity for the greater good. In any setting valuing diversity should be a thing of concern to all to create an environment where each student feels valued and respected. To value diversity, it is necessary:

- Take time to learn about students' backgrounds, interests, and learning styles.
  - This will allow the creation of an environment that is conducive to each 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 were alike and there was 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 strengths of the team members to produce the best possible results in any they do.
  - 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 behaviour at any time in the classroom/studio.
  - Implement a "zero tolerance" for anything disrespectful, hurtful, or intolerant of diversity.

Research is a highly valued activity in that being engaged in legitimate fine art and design-making task implies that one is also engaged in worthwhile research activities. The value of diversity, therefore, is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.

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 categorised into primary and secondary

types of diversity. The first is visible differences such as gender, ethnic origin, and age fall into the primary category; whilst less obvious differences such as class, sexuality, 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 behaviour, lifestyles, customs and habits embrace traditions 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; maybe 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 services must reflect this. This is important in an art environment that better reflects the lives of different people and sections of the society. In the same way that cultures interact with each other, diversity brings new skills and fresh ideas. We are all different 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 downgrading
- 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, class, sexuality, and educational experience. All these things will affect who they are.

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

Educational values of 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 it. So students should take due advantage of this involvement in the art to contribute to cognitive development and their growth and well-being.

Conclusion

Appreciating and valuing diversity in teaching visual arts starts with a clear understanding of its fundamentals, it is necessary to nurture an appreciation and value of art, and to demonstrate that visual art is an extraordinary phenomenon, that is essential to the well-being of the individual and society. The value of diversity and differences can then be appreciated by a clear understanding of what visual art means. Visual art is an integral part of society, and 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 the learner with non-academic benefits such as promoting self-esteem, motivation, aesthetics, awareness, creativity, innovation and emotional expression as well as social harmony and appreciation of diversity. Fine art and design practice 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 a very important factor to the cultural and artistic development of the society.

Art, therefore, contributes to the development of a very important area of literacy by cultivating abilities to utilize a nonverbal 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 centre of its philosophical ideology. Methodologies that aid the exploration and discovery of potentials, and problem-solving ability which allows the learner the opportunity for creativity should be the focus of any educational endeavour 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 African development.

There are benefits associated with this dispensation that is rooted in visual art and design teaching in Nigeria's higher institutions which is through exploration and innovation. Thus, there

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are far-reaching benefits for any developing nation that makes creativity the centre of its philosophical ideology.

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