



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF HUMAN-SOCIAL SCIENCE: A
ARTS & HUMANITIES - PSYCHOLOGY
Volume 15 Issue 5 Version 1.0 Year 2015
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Instructional Strategies for Effective Teaching and Learning of Creative Arts: The Dilemma of Generalist Teachers in Ghana

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GJHSS-A Classification : *FOR Code: 930299p*



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Instructional Strategies for Effective Teaching and Learning of Creative Arts: The Dilemma of Generalist Teachers in Ghana

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Abstract- Creative Art was introduced into Ghana's primary school curriculum in 2007. Comprising Performing, Literary and Visual Arts, Creative Art was intended to foster creativity development among primary pupils. However, Creative Art is taught by generalist classroom teachers who lack the specialized training, knowledge, skill and experience to identify efficient teaching-learning strategies that allow pupils to actively participate in art making experiences. This study adopted action research to guide 20 Lower Primary teachers in two schools to design and teach activity-based lessons in drawing, colourwork, weaving, printmaking, composition, and assemblage to 95 pupils using clay, crayons, drums, cardboard, glue, among other resources. The intervention workshops proved that in-service education and training could build the professional capacity of generalist teachers in Ghana to effectively implement the Creative Arts curriculum for primary schools. Ghana Education Service should train primary teachers if the objective of developing creative thinkers through Creative Arts could be achieved.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Creative Arts comprises art and craft, music and dance (Kindler, 2008). The Creative Arts syllabus for Primary Schools in Ghana (Curriculum Research and Development Division (CRDD) of Ghana Education Service, 2007) describes Creative Arts as an integrated subject that includes Performing Arts (Music, Dance and Drama), Literary Arts (Poetry, Recitals) and Visual Arts, which consists of such subjects as drawing, weaving, carving, modeling, casting and sewing. School teachers are expected to teach these subjects in an integrated manner. Though uniquely different in appearance and method from each other, the creative arts disciplines employ similar cognitive processes, ultimately allowing language and thought to be expressed through a variety of representations. The creative arts are represented not in the ordinary sense of language as writing on a page but in visual, kinesthetic, aural and tactile forms. Engaging children in the creative arts allows them to communicate in potentially profound ways (Eisner, 2002).

As Russell-Bowie (2009) posit, the arts can embody and communicate emotions, ideas, beliefs and values, and meanings through aesthetic forms and symbols that evoke emotive responses to life, with or without words. The key to effective education in Creative Arts is the expertise to guide children to communicate through abstract symbols and to decipher the communications of others (Alter et al., 2009). Creative Arts is a significant aspect of learning that is essential to the development of emotional, material, spiritual and intellectual lives of the child (Kindler, 2008). As Bogen and Bogen (2003) have explained, creativity can be encouraged through students doing various creative exercises that make them think and generate creative ideas in different ways. Although this may not turn pupils into artists, the strategy can help to shape their creative development as they learn the skills required for solving problems they may encounter in future endeavours.

Schirmmacher (1998) believes that children's artistic development can be facilitated through structured guided activities with much direction and inputs from the teacher. Ensuring this requires a supply of specialist teachers whose training makes it easy for them to provide the skills, knowledge and attitudes designed for the syllabus to achieve. Effective education in the Creative Arts therefore demands teachers who can formulate worthwhile objectives, select appropriate content, use relevant teaching and learning resources, design appropriate teaching and learning activities to address the identified problems, and make appropriate provisions for evaluating the teaching-learning process (Delacruz, 1997). Unfortunately, more generalist teachers teach Creative Arts than specialist teachers (Alter et al, 2009).

II. GENERALIST TEACHERS

Generalist teachers, according to Alter *et al* (2009), are teachers who lack the requisite training and experience to teach the Creative Arts effectively. Although generalist teachers in primary schools are hard working, they have limited comprehension of materials and tools, and lack knowledge about art (Holts, 1997 as cited in Ampeh, 2011). The curious nature of children gives them the opportunity to explore and experiment and to find new materials that add to their wealth of

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knowledge. Generalist teachers cannot support or foster pupils' ability to think in sound, to solve musical problems, and for that matter, teach Creative Arts effectively. With respect to music, Wiggins and Wiggins (2008) assert that generalist teachers lack both the requisite content knowledge of music and the pedagogical knowledge to teach music effectively to benefit their pupils.

III. THE DILEMMA OF GENERALIST TEACHERS

By virtue of their training, Oreck (2004) asserts that generalist teachers who teach Creative Arts experience anxiety about the subject because they find Creative Arts lessons involving from the preparation stage through the presentation stage to closure of lessons. They consider the primary curriculum a far too demanding responsibility that is beyond the expectation of generalist teachers (Alexander et al., 1992 as cited in Ampeh, 2011) who lack the training, personal experience and artistic ability to teach the arts effectively (Alter *et al*, 2009). The dilemma of generalist teachers extends to lack of confidence for and competence in teaching the Creative Arts (Bartel *et al*, 2004). As Bofo-Agyemang (2010) also rightly points out, engaging pupils in the disciplines of the Creative Arts requires specialist teachers who can attend to different learning strands within the syllabus. This, according to Alter *et al*. (2009), is what generalist teachers cannot do.

Lack of the requisite preparation for implementing the Creative Arts syllabus has also plunged the teaching and learning of Creative Arts in Ghana into crisis (Bofo-Agyeman, 2010) mainly because the primary school teachers are generalists who have difficulty identifying the appropriate instructional materials and activities relevant to achievement of the objective of enhancing the creative development of Ghanaian children as specified in the Creative Arts syllabus (Zakaria, 2010; Ampeh, 2011; and Osei-Sarfo. 2012). Empirical studies conducted in Ashanti, Central and Northern Regions of Ghana have revealed that primary teachers hold the perception that Creative Arts is a specialized subject that must be taught by specialist teachers because it is too broad and demands knowledge and techniques that are beyond the capacity of generalist classroom teachers. Some teachers feel inadequate and intimidated by the complex nature of the practical activities required to attain the objectives specified for Creative Arts. Even those teachers who seemed to understand the importance of Creative Arts to their pupils' learning and creative development often ignore the teaching of Creative Arts for lack of artistic skills; they prefer using instructional periods allotted to Creative Arts on the school timetable to teach English, Mathematics and Integrated Science (Ampeh, 2012).

Similar to Alter et al's (2009) finding that generalist teachers feel overburdened and overwhelmed by the exigency placed upon them to teach an "overcrowded" curriculum of subjects, Bofo-Agyemang (2010) and Ampeh (2011) found that many primary teachers in Ghana are unwilling to teach Creative Arts which they perceive as 'an additional subject for which they lack the requisite skills and knowledge'. This emphasizes the professional gap in Ghana's system of education which placed the delivery of the new Creative Arts curriculum in the hands of generalist classroom teachers when the subject was introduced in 2007 and has since not trained specialist teachers to take over from the generalist teachers in primary schools (Bofo-Agyeman, 2010).

The goal of primary education is to lay a general foundation of knowledge and skills for use in secondary schools hence the curriculum emphasizes reading, writing, basic mathematics, integrated science, Creative Arts and civic education (Castle, 1993, as cited in Ampeh, 2011). Teaching in the primary schools demands that the teachers have a good mastery of the subject matter so that they can effectively deliver the content in a comprehensive manner to their pupils. Tamakloe et al (2005) maintain that a mastery of the subject matter and its methodology instill confidence in the teacher and reflects on the learner's ability to learn. As a key learning area of the primary school curriculum, the benefits of Creative Arts should therefore not be lost on young children in Ghanaian primary schools because their teachers are generalists who lack the skill, experience, training and confidence to effectively deliver the Creative Arts curriculum. Short experiential in-service training workshops could equip these generalist classroom teachers to acquire basic content and pedagogical skills to enable them to engage their pupils in creative self-expression activities during Creative Arts periods.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The action research method of qualitative research design was adopted for the study because it allows researchers to gather information about the ways that a school operates; how they teach, and how well their students learn, in situations in which they are personally involved (Mills, 2003, p.4). The method is participatory and enables particular change conditions in a situation in which the researchers are personally involved (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003, p. 572). In spite of the lack of time to wholly address the problems identified through observation of teaching and learning of Creative Arts in the two schools, action research enabled the teachers to learn from demonstration lessons and implement lessons that had been carefully designed around local materials and interesting activities in modelling, casting, print making, weaving

and sewing, among others artistic activities. Although Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) caution that the intervention process was frequently interrupted by school activities and these can affect the result of the study.

a) *Data collection*

Classroom activities in the selected primary schools provided the needed primary data. Primary data were gathered through interviews (informal conversations) to understand the challenges with the teaching of Creative Arts and questionnaire to identify their teaching experiences and knowledge of pedagogical strategies.

Also the researchers organized three visits to each class per week to observe teaching and learning activities first in the observer role to ascertain the activities the teachers engaged their pupils in during Creative Art lessons, and later in the participant observer role to collect detailed data on the teacher and pupils interactions to inform the design of intervention lessons. Anecdotal records taken during the intervention lessons highlighted the teaching strategies, activities, skills, attitudes and values that were imparted to the pupils by the class teachers.

b) *Population and sampling*

The accessible population comprised 20 primary school teachers (12 males and eight females) and 315 pupils (165 boys and 150 girls) of the Agona District Administration “B” and “D” Primary Schools at Swedru in the Central Region. The purposive sampling technique was used to select 95 pupils representing the three class levels: Classes One, Two, and Three in both

schools for in-depth study. The class distribution of the pupils who participated in the study was 30 in Class One, 35 in Class Two, and 30 in Class Three respectively.

V. THE INTERVENTION PROJECT

The observation revealed that the sampled generalist teachers use the lecture method to teach Creative Arts devoid of practical activities. To demystify the teaching of Creative Arts, the sampled teachers were engaged to discuss the syllabus requirements and to design activity-based lessons that would create interest and foster creativity among the young pupils. They were also guided to appreciate the identified instructional strategies as viable means to achieve the teaching and learning objectives specified in the syllabus. They were then supervised to teach structured lessons based on Units 1 – 6 of the Creative Arts syllabus for Ghanaian primary schools as follows:

1. Making Pictures, Drawing / Colour Work
2. Pattern Making, Print Making and Lettering
3. Composition, Performance and Listening and Observing
4. Weaving and Stitching
5. Modelling, Casting and Carving
6. Construction, Assemblage and Paper Work

Table 1 illustrates the activities that were designed for the intervention lessons for the respective topics identified in the Creative Arts syllabus for each class level of Lower Primary Schools.

Making Pictures, Drawing/Colour Work				
ACTIVITIES	CLASS	UNIT	SECTION	TERM
Doodling and Colouring	One	One	One	1
Basic Shapes	Two	One	One	1
Crayon Resist Butterfly	Two	One	Two	2
Memory Drawing	Two	One	Two	2
Colour Identification	Three	One	One	3

Pattern Making, Print Making and Lettering				
ACTIVITIES	CLASS	UNIT	SECTION	TERM
Pattern Making	Two	One	Two	2
Pulled String Pattern	Two	Two	Two	1
Sponge Printing	Two	Two	Two	1
Stencil Printing	Three	Two	One	2
Frottage	One	Two	Two	2
Direct Printing	Two	Two	Two	2

Composition, Performance and Listening and Observing				
ACTIVITIES	CLASS	UNIT	SECTION	TERM
Creating Dance Movements	One	Three	Two	3
Creating Rhythmic Patterns	Two	Three	Two	1
Acquiring Instrumental Skills	Three	Three	Two	2

Weaving and Stitching				
ACTIVITIES	CLASS	UNIT	SECTION	TERM
Threading a needle	Two	Four	Two	1
Simple Stitches	Two	Two	Two	3
Appliqué	Three	Four	Two	2
Weaving	Two	Four	Two	2
Card loom Weaving	One	Four	Two	3

Modelling, Casting and Carving				
ACTIVITIES	CLASS	UNIT	SECTION	TERM
Modelling	One	Five	Two	3
Casting	Two	Five	Two	3

Construction, Assemblage and Paper Work				
ACTIVITIES	CLASS	UNIT	SECTION	TERM
Making a bag	Two	Four	Two	2
Construction of Toy Vehicle	Three	Six	Two	2
Construction of Pallet	Three	Six	Two	2
Making of Sandals	Three	Six	Two	2
Decorated Wall Clock	Two	Six	Two	2

Plates 1 - 6 are examples of the pupils' artworks in the two schools.



Plate 1: Coloured shapes in doodles



Plate 2 : Patternmaking



Plate 3 : Clapping to create rhythm for dance



Plate 4 : Creating rhythm on drums



Plate 5 : Making simple stitches



Plate 6 : Card loom weaving



Plate 7 : Modelled clay ware



Plate 8 : Mould and cast sand



Plate 9 : Cardboard vehicles



Plate 10 : Cardboard sandals

VI. TEACHER PREPARATION FOR CREATIVE ARTS LESSON

Since the study aimed at helping teachers to design better ways of teaching Creative Arts in the lower primary schools, the researcher took the sampled teachers through the writing of the expanded scheme of work and guided them in the formulation of specific objectives. They were again helped in the development of lesson plans which are concise, working documents which outline the teaching and learning that will be conducted within a single lesson and demonstrated the processes, procedures and techniques involved in executing each activity. It included question and answer sessions that enabled the teachers to understand the concepts and principles involved in the various

processes as well as the tools, materials and procedures they adopted to practice the activities.

The teachers embraced the approach and effectively used it to design all the lessons they taught after the researchers' introduction of the interventionist creative activities.

a) *Impact of Creative Activities on Lesson Delivery*

It was observed that advance preparation by teachers before the lessons were taught enabled them to outline definite goals which are purposeful for the success of a particular lesson. This is based on the general assumption that efficient teachers consistently plan and carefully prepare good lesson notes to guide instruction in the classroom (Agyeman-Boafo, 2010). As this study has revealed, the lesson plans designed by the teachers contributed immensely towards the effective teaching and learning of the Creative Arts in the

two schools. The advance preparation enabled them to procure before hand; all the relevant tools and materials needed for each lesson and also practise their use in the designed creative activities. This made them to understand the principles and processes involved in the creative activities that they took their pupils through in each classroom.

There was enough evidence to prove that where the pupils were made to interact with materials and tools provided either by the teacher or the pupils, they were enabled to discover concepts and facts unaided or with minimum interference which made the learning of the topics more pleasurable and not boring, thus fostering retention and cooperation among learners (Asafo-Adjei, 2001). It was also evident during lesson delivery that the teachers asked good open questions to stimulate the imagination of the pupils and thereby encouraged them to become more thoughtful about their works.

b) *Impact of Creative Activities on Pupils*

The Creative activities developed by the researcher and teachers and taught to the pupils enabled the pupils to see major concepts, big ideas and general principles as reality. There was more interaction with the materials, tools and the various processes and the teachers did not merely engage the pupils in accumulating isolated facts. This led to skillful and efficient handling of tools and materials. The pupils also found the creative activities stimulating and this motivated them to develop positive attitudes towards learning. It also enabled the pupils to develop skills such as observing, cutting, modelling, stitching designing and construction. This was obvious from the way the pupils were seen working on projects they learnt outside the class. The activities whipped up the interest of the pupils which enabled them to think, feel, act creatively and develop the passion and flair for Creative Arts. This means that the pupils actively participated in class and were able to practise the skills and values they acquired in solving problems in the future.

VII. SUMMARY

It is essential to underscore the fact that the interventionist activities and the participatory method adopted by the teachers and the effort they put into using practical approaches to demonstrating the various processes before engaging the pupils to practise under their supervision brought a great innovation into the teaching and learning of Creative Arts in the sampled schools as the strategy heightened teacher and learner creativity. The intervention enabled the teachers to demonstrate alternative ways of doing things before asking the pupils to work on their own.

The activities the teachers engaged the pupils in exposed the pupils to experimentation with tools and materials such as pencils, crayon, drawing papers, scissors, glue and colour, among others. The teachers

also taught their pupils how to drag, pull, twist, fold, knot, weave and cut materials while the pupils also made marks and rub with crayons and chalks on different surfaces to create patterns. This implies that learning by doing is one of the best methods of teaching a practical subject like Creative Arts.

VIII. INSTRUCTIONAL MEDIA

The chalkboard, textbooks and different colours of chalk, pens, felt pens, crayons and pencils that were used in the lessons constitute the visual media available for teaching Creative Arts lessons.

Before each lesson, the teachers were engaged in designing and executing structured creative activities for each class to ensure their appropriateness and practicability. Materials supplied included paper, clay, glue, poster colours, pencils, crayons and scissors. These were distributed through group leaders in each classroom to avoid commotion. The teachers then engaged the pupils in the intervention activities that allowed step-by-step description of the activities and their outcomes.

IX. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The intervention lessons showed that most of the tools and materials needed for teaching Creative Arts can be obtained very easily from the local environment. The Creative Arts syllabus can be implemented with materials such as clay, empty containers, bottle tops, paper cartons, cardboards and pieces of fabrics. Poster colours, oil paint, dyes and other relevant materials that are appropriate to work with are expensive and not very easy to find in rural communities in particular. If such materials can be procured for demonstration lessons and are managed properly by the teachers, the material will last many lessons. To obtain the necessary tools and materials required for each lesson, the teachers can ask and encourage their pupils to search for or buy them for the practical activities, if these cannot be supplied by the schools.

The participatory method adopted by the teachers and their effort in using a practical approach to demonstrating the various processes before allowing pupils to practise under their supervision animated the learning environment and the instructional process. It was exciting to find the same generalist teachers doing things differently and interacting with their pupils as if that was the usual classroom atmosphere. The change in the teachers' capacity to do things differently with extra support demonstrates the possibility of changing the attitude of more generalist teachers towards the Creative Arts and getting them to deliver the syllabus with confidence. Duplicating this short course in other schools is likely to infuse creativity into more generalist

teachers and ensure effective teaching and learning of the subject on a large scale.

It was also observed that the activities the teachers engaged the pupils in exposed the pupils to experimentation with tools and materials such as pencils, crayon, drawing papers, scissors, glue and colour, among others. The teachers also taught their pupils how to drag, pull, twist, fold, knot, weave and cut materials safely while the pupils also made marks and rubbed with crayons and chalks on surfaces to create patterns, and thereby infusing additional skills in them. This implies that learning by doing is an effective method of teaching a practical subject like Creative Arts.

X. CONCLUSION

The study shows the possibility of helping teachers to design better ways of teaching Creative Arts in lower primary classes, the sampled teachers were taken through the development of lesson plans that provide a practical and usable guide to the teaching and learning activities that are designed for particular lessons (Butt, 2008). Although, a good lesson plan does not ensure students will learn what is intended (Kizlik, 2009), the enhanced lessons plans certainly contributed to effective teaching and learning of the intervention lessons.

The teachers were also taken through the writing of the Expanded Scheme of Work and guided to formulate specific objectives, select appropriate teaching methods and strategies, and to develop activities for the various topics specified for the different grade levels. These are the aspects of the Creative Arts syllabus that the classroom teachers had identified earlier as bothersome as far as lesson planning, preparation and teaching of those lessons were concerned. Designing better ways of teaching Creative Arts with the sampled teachers demystified the subject and what its teaching demands. The teachers expressed relief during the evaluation stages because those who had made some efforts to teach the subject prior to this stage had experienced some stress over what they thought was the right thing to do.

It was interesting watching the teachers heartily embrace the approach and effectively using it to design all the lessons they taught after the initial tutorials they received on being introduced to the intervention activities. Their active involvement in the design and development of the intervention activities attracted much commendation. The demonstration of the various processes, procedures and techniques involved in executing each activity, which were accompanied by question and answer sessions obviously enabled them to understand the concepts and principles involved, as well as the functions and relevance of the tools, materials and procedures they adopted to practice the activities.

The advance preparation by the teachers before the lessons were taught enabled them to outline definite goals which are purposeful for the success of a particular lesson, thus agreeing with the idea that efficient teachers consistently plan and carefully prepare good lesson notes to guide instruction in the classroom (Farrant, 1996). Advance preparation created opportunity for the teachers to procure the relevant tools and materials required for each lesson as well as practise their use, which enabled them to confidently guide the pupils through the respective activities. The strategy helped them to assimilate the principles that underlined the activities and processes they and their pupils engaged in during Creative Arts lessons.

XI. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Student teachers in all of Ghana's Colleges of Education should be given sufficiently detailed tutorials about the Creative Arts to enable them understand and appreciate its benefits so they can teach the subject well in the schools they would be posted to after graduation.
2. Regular and well organised in-service education and training programmes should be designed and actively supervised by the Ghana Education Service in collaboration with Art Education specialists to update the knowledge of generalist classroom teachers on the principles and methods of teaching Creative Arts to equip them to engage their pupils meaningfully during Creative Arts lessons. Knowing how to plan activity-based lessons would contribute immensely towards effective teaching and learning of the Creative Arts to foster creativity in the pupils they teach.

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