

AN OVER VIEW OF VISUAL ART EDUCATION IN GHANAIAN SCHOOLS

K. Edusei

College of Art,

*Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology,
Kumasi, Ghana.*

ABSTRACT

The focus of this article is on the introduction and development of Visual Art Education in the School system in Ghana.

The discussion touches on the 1909 inclusion of the subject on the school time-table as "hand and eye" to change the mere bookishness of the school course.

The Christian Missionaries' exclusion of the subject from the school curriculum because its teaching will have an obvious reference to the indigenous culture to which they were antagonistic, is also discussed, together with its negative consequences.

Visual Art education's re-emergence into the schools, and its phenomenal growth especially at Achimota, where the pioneering efforts of expatriate Art masters such as A.G. Stevens, Maclaren, Pippet, Mr. and Mrs. Meyerowitz and Machendricks gave the subject the much needed Ghanaian cultural base is covered. The rationale, nature, scope and transfer of Visual Art Education from the Department of Art at Achimota to the newly established College of Technology in Kumasi in 1952 under Mr. Machendricks, and its later development in Ghana are also treated.

Keywords: Visual Art, Rationale, Nature, Scope, 'Hand and eye'.

against the indigenous apprenticeship system where the youth learn to produce artefacts.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper 'school' refers to the formal system of education introduced into this country by Europeans which consists of a specific meeting place for students and teachers who interact in the educational processes of teaching and learning. The educational process in such schools involving the acquisition of theoretical knowledge and practical skills about the creation of two and three dimensional artworks is what is termed as School Visual Art Education as

Visual Art was first introduced into the School curriculum in the then Gold Coast, now Ghana, in the year 1908, according to Foster (1967). It appeared as 'hand and eye' on the time-tables of schools and colleges as part of the attempt to infuse practical subjects into the school curriculum to change the mere bookishness of school instructions. 'Hand and eye' as a drawing exercise consisted of copying various shapes and lines by the student with the objective of helping to develop the co-ordination between the stu-

dent's hand and eye. The Education Committee appointed by Governor Rogers in 1908 to consider various matters in connection with education in the Gold Coast recommended in its resultant Education Rules of 1909, compulsory Industrial or Agricultural training. (MacWilliam and Kwamena-Poh 1975). The industrial training was to begin with simple crafts developing progressively into advanced instruction. The Education Committee of 1920 in a bid to solve the same problem also strongly advocated a plethora of manual activities among which was claywork.

The curriculum of the first school in this country began in the year 1529 at the Elmina Castle for Portuguese mulatto children and replicated by the other European merchants such as the Dutch, Danes and the British in their respective forts and castles dotted along the coast of Ghana involved mainly reading, writing and arithmetic. The Christian Missionaries – Basel, Bremen, and Wesleyan who took over the castle schools from the European merchants, failed to teach Art in their schools, even though they introduced new subjects such as carpentry, blacksmithing, shoe-making and book binding.

The Missionaries considered Art in Ghana as a subject that was interwoven inextricably with the indigenous culture, especially what they termed the 'primitive' and 'fetishistic' indigenous religion to which they were vehemently antagonistic. Therefore to them, Art could not be taught in the schools without making reference to the 'paganistic' culture they so much abhorred. The implication of this antagonistic stance against African Art and culture was that, education in the Mission schools had no relevance to the indigenous life or culture of Ghanaians (Edusei 1991). This unfortunate African Art-phobic concept of the Christian Missionaries persisted until the year 1919 which according to Antubam (1963), was the time Art was introduced into the schools.

From this period on, Art in the schools developed rapidly up to the establishment of an Art Department at Achimota in 1927.

The fact that the content of education should reflect the culture of the society implies that;

Whenever and wherever the content and organization of education are different from the cultural background of the society, that society falters in its progress, and there is bound to be social unrest and the learner can develop a schizophrenic personality (Agyeman, 1986).

In order to avoid this cultural gap in school Visual Art Education in Ghana, it is imperative to link its teaching with the indigenous Ghanaian Arts. This is because in the nature of the indigenous Ghanaian Arts is found the content for a culturally based curriculum which can make students culturally educated. In order to appreciate fully the presence of Visual Art education in Ghanaian schools and colleges the rationale, nature and scope of the subject need to be understood.

Rationale For School Visual Art Education

As already indicated, the school curriculum under the control of the missionaries was virtually bookish and devoid of any creative activities. The Basel Mission's attempt to introduce some practical subjects failed. The failure resulted in the inclusion of crafts and claywork as part of the attempt to practicalise the curriculum in the early 1900's.

The introduction of Visual Art Education into the schools and colleges in Ghana was meant to foster creativity in students to enable them solve problems of national dimension with relative ease. This is possible because it is largely in the Art class that a person thinks, acts and feels creatively. Another reason is that 'Art has an integrating effect on the student's personality. It offers an avenue for the mental, spiritual and

physical development of the student. Art also develops intuitive and subjective thinking, which are very relevant and necessary in this age of automation and computerization' (Edusei Opcit. 1991).

Art helps as a therapy in the correction of psychological problems of mentally retarded children and it also assists in the occupational therapy of mental patients, among others. (Boateng, 1997; Peligah, 1999).

Since Art is a record of the past and the present, its study increases the student's knowledge and appreciation of the past so that he/she can understand the present and the future. Art objects are visual sources of knowledge and are essential in human development (Chapman, 1978). Art products represent the beliefs, values and attitudes, as well as the history of the people.

The study of aesthetics in Art develops appreciation of beauty in nature and thus increases pleasure and love for nature. At the Universities and other tertiary institutions of Art, the rationale for teaching Art goes further to include the production of high caliber professionals who contribute to the development of the country in a wide variety of fields. It is for these reasons that, it can be stated with conviction that the decision to incorporate Visual Art into the curriculum of Ghanaian schools is worthwhile. What then is the nature of School Visual Art Education?

Nature of School Visual Art Education

Visual Art Education at the basic school level is mainly practical in nature with no vocational objective. At the Senior Secondary School level however, Visual Art consists of optional elective subjects for the final school certificate examination. Three areas are offered. These are, General Knowledge in Art – a mainly theoretical paper which is compulsory and two practical electives from Picture Making, Ceramics, Sculpture, Jewellery, Textiles, Graphic Design, Basketry and Leatherwork. The standard at this level is such

that after graduating from school, an additional hands-on experience can make the learner practice his/her art as a vocation.

At the Teacher Training College level, the Art programme is called Pre-vocational skills. It comprises both theory and practicals. There is some theory aspect of the two areas of discipline chosen as well as some practical component of the selected fields. In addition to studying these, students also take some lessons on methodology of Art teaching.

At the University level, intensive theoretical studies in history of art, psychology of art, aesthetics, sociology and philosophy of Art are taken together with practical productions for the degrees of Bachelor of Art and Bachelor of Fine Art. Master's programmes in Art Education, African Art and Culture and Fine Art, and Doctorate programmes in Art Education and African Art and Culture are also available. All these programmes are run in the College of Art, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, Ghana.

The Department of Art Education at the University of Education of Winneba offers a Bachelor of Education in Art Education programme. A description of the Visual Art course automatically leads to a discussion on the scope of the School Visual Art curriculum.

Scope of School Visual Art Education

The scope of School Visual Art Education covers drawing and painting, sculpture, pottery and ceramics, textiles, graphic design and metal products design. Other areas are basketry, calabash designing, embroidery making, collage work and mosaic making.

At the Basic School (primary) level, some drawing and painting using coloured pencils, crayons and powder colours or some other water based colours are very popular. Some claywork involving modeling of animals, plants and domestic objects is also carried out.

The introduction of the Junior Secondary School (JSS) system in which Vocational Skills form an important element of the course has opened the way for a number of Art activities to be taught. These include basketry, claywork, leather work, graphic design, paper craft, picture making, sculpture, textiles and bead making. These areas of study are continued in the Senior Secondary School visual Art programme. However, they are not taken to a very high standard as is done at the tertiary level.

At the Teacher Training College, the University and Polytechnic levels, Visual Art subjects are studied to the specialist or professional level. At these levels, the theoretical aspects of the various branches of Visual Art is given serious attention. These include history, philosophy, psychology of Art etc. as already stated, together with the study of the methods and materials of production of the Visual Art objects. New Visual Art areas such as Fashion Designing, Interior Decorating and Digital Art are gradually finding their way into the Visual Art Curriculum at the tertiary level in Ghana.

Modern Development of School Visual Art Education in Ghana

The story of School Visual Art Education in Ghana is a chequered one. Starting from a period of disregard, and exclusion from the curriculum, through indirect introduction as 'hand and eye' to its acceptance as a possible subject capable of ameliorating the unhealthy condition of the bookishness of the school course, up to its current position as a subject of study in the University as already indicated, Visual Art education has had a turbulent history.

The history of modern School Visual Art Education in Ghana however began at Achimota in 1927 when the Principal Rev. A.G. Fraser appointed G.A. Stevens as Art Master. Stevens and Maclaren were European Art Masters who did not influence the art of their African students with their own ideas of life. They therefore introduced the teaching of history of West African

Art as part of the Art course at Achimota. Another European art Master, Gabriel Pippet, introduced woodcarving and basketry and craft hobbies as an extra curricula activity into the life of Achimota. This was a great step forward for the development of Visual Art Education, because prior to this innovation 'Art teaching in Achimota was strictly academic and almost divorced from the crafts and also bore no relation to the life of the student's cultural environment and previous knowledge' (Antubam, 1963).

The year 1936 opened a new phase in the development of Ghana's indigenous Art and Crafts at Achimota, with the appointment of a white South African, Mr. Meyerowitz as Art and Craft supervisor. As a talented sculptor-designer and ethnographical field research enthusiast, Mr. Meyerowitz revolutionized the approach to Art and Craft teaching in the country. He developed the Art Department of Achimota to a point where a three-year course in specialist Art and Craft teaching with emphasis on Ghanaian and African traditions was offered. Under Meyerowitz the scope of Art and Crafts was widened to cover basketry, pottery, weaving, traditional wood-carving, terracotta, modeling, brick and tile making and mural painting. Through the suggestion of Mr. Meyerowitz the Education Department instituted a scholarship scheme to train Ghanaian Art and Crafts specialist teachers aboard. These were Achimota trained specialists with three years post specialist teaching experience.

After the death of Mr. Meyerowitz, Mrs. Eva Meyerowitz took charge of the Art and Crafts Department at Achimota for a short period. Mr. Machendricks who succeeded her continued the work until the establishment of the College of Technology in Kumasi in 1952 where the Art Department at Achimota was transferred to.

At the Kumasi College of Technology, Mr. Machendricks worked hard to turn the Department into the first real Art and Crafts School in

Ghana. This Art and Crafts School has become the present College of Art in the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi. Later the Teacher Training section of the School of Art and Craft in the College of Technology was transferred to Winneba as the present Art Education Department of the University of Education of Winneba. As a part of the then specialist Teacher Training college, the Department continued as the only Institution training specialist Art Teachers until the 1973-74 academic year. In that year, a three-year specialists course in Art was established in a number of existing basic Teacher Training Colleges such as the Komenda, St. John Bosco at Navorongo, Asokore and Peki for two-year post secondary and four-year trained teachers. These teachers were to organize the Art programmes in the new Junior Secondary Schools to be opened all over the country. But the establishment of the Junior Secondary Schools remained only at the experimental stages until 1987. As a result, the Art courses in the Teacher Training Colleges were unfortunately terminated in the 1975-76 academic year.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps Visual Art in the school curriculum in Ghana has come to stay. What needs to be done now is to infuse aspects of the indigenous Visual Art Education system into the school curriculum for it to assume a unique Ghanaian cultural and artistic identity.

This can be done by inviting indigenous master craftsmen into the schools and colleges to teach students about the indigenous tools, materials and methods of production. The philosophy behind their works of Art can also be explained during such visits. The schools and colleges can also take field trips to the workshops of the master craftsmen to enable students observe and understudy the craftsmen at work and interact with them.

The teachers in the schools and colleges should ensure that the works of their students amply reflect the cultural values of the communities in which the students live. This approach will help promote Afro-Centricism in School Visual Art to further enhance students' appreciation of the cherished values of Ghana in particular and Africa as a whole as viable authentic sources of artistic inspiration.

REFERENCES

- Agyeman, D.K. (1986). *Sociology of Education for African Students* BlackMask Ltd. Accra.
- Antubam, K. (1963). *Ghana's Heritage of Culture* Kochlear and Amelang.
- Boateng, C. (1997). *Drawing and painting as a mediator of the inner and outer worlds of mentally-retarded children. A case study: Garden City Special School, Kumasi M.A. Thesis.* Art Education, unpublished.
- Chapman, L. H. (1978). *Approaches to Art in Education* Harcourt Brace Horanovich, Publishers New York.
- Edusei, K. (1991). *Significant Ghanaian Educational Innovations and Landmarks and their Socio-Cultural Impact* – unpublished.
- Foster, P. (1967) *Education and Social Change in Ghana.* Routledge and Kegan Paul London.
- MacWilliam, H.O.A. and Kwamena-Poh, M.A. (1975). *The Development of Education in Ghana* Longman Group Ltd. London.
- Peligah, Y.S. (1999). *What is Art Therapy?* *Journal of Science and Technology*, Vol. 19, No. 1,2 and 3. KNUST, Kumasi.