Africa-Based Illustrations as Important Educational Tools for Nigerian Students

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Abstract: Most secondary schools in Calabar do not do fine arts as a subject and it was difficult to get pupils to feed the fine arts programme of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Faculty of Environmental Science, The Polytechnic Calabar (POLYCAL). Since, they did not study fine arts in their curriculum, secondary school pupils in Calabar were neither interested in fine arts as a subject nor were they able to get admission into POLYCAL. This study sort to use familiar African socio-cultural and environmental materials to generate illustrations for use in teaching secondary school students to appreciate fine arts as a subject. At the end of 1 year of the project, pupils became interested in fine arts, the secondary schools included fine arts in their curriculums and the following year's admission data for the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, POLYCAL, indicated a 166.7% rise in student intake.

Key words: African social culture, environment, visual educative illustrations, curriculum, appreciate, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

In all human societies, communication is most essential. It is essential not just because man needs to communicate with others in society but that through effective communication, individual positions are articulated as well as negotiating diverse social contexts. In African (and other) traditional societies for example, people communicate with one another using signs and symbols like the traditional gong, kola nut, horse whip, feathers, smoke and many other things. These cultural materials also served educational purposes as parents used them in illustrating the ideas that they are passing across to children, howbeit orally. Whether for intra or interpersonal communications, there are certain cultural archetypes, products and materials like works of art, stories, myths and other visual representations that can serve as communication and educational resources from which educational visuals can be generated. At the moment a great deal of stories and visual illustrations in educational books are either based upon western social and cultural materials or are sufficiently removed from African social reality that Nigerian students are used to. What this article does is to outline how educational visuals can be derived from familiar African social and cultural environment for educating African students.

Advocating for the use of African social and cultural environmental sources for indigenous education is not entirely new. Scholars have paid attention to oral literature associated with children (Awobuluyi, 1971; Oyesakin, 1983; Olatunji, 1984; Olunlade, 1987; Akinyemi, 2003). These scholarly works have bothered on the publication of children's literature drawn from performers, the analyses of Yoruba children's literature and the need to use oral literature as sources for educational materials. These researchers have dealt with textual materials and not the generation of familiar visual educational materials from African socio-cultural realities that African students are used to. Yet visual arts and instructional graphics are as critical for learning as textual educational materials (Ewy, 2003).

In very simple terms, art is the creation of beautiful or thought provoking products such as drawings, paintings, sculpture, music, writing, etc. What these products have in common is that they are all made through creative abilities. As such, in general terms, art is the product of creative activity in which materials are shaped or selected to convey an idea, emotion or visually interesting form. Agba stresses this further by saying that art is considered as the highest form of human expression. And it is the aim of this research to use artistic forms of expression to create visual illustrative ideas from African traditional culture for educational purposes. Art in all its forms can illustrate human emotions and in fact any type of educational idea that may be required in the teaching/communication process. Before modern forms of communication (print and electronic) came to Africa, oral tradition enabled people to draw from traditional culture in illustrating social interactions and facilitating

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the transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next. Such knowledge included those about arts and crafts like carving and smelting, farming, animal herding and many more which were critical for the people's survival. In addition, oral literature in the form of praise poetry, storytelling, proverbs and riddles served illustrative purposes too. Put together all these cultural materials served as a rich resource from which African traditional and informal education processes drew illustrations. If these cultural materials could serve Africa in times past, there is no overriding reason to believe that they cannot do so at this time when illustrations in Nigerian textbooks are mainly western cultural materials. This study reports an experiment carried out in the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, The Polytechnic Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria using familiar African socio-cultural and environmental materials for generating illustrations for use in teaching secondary school students to appreciate fine arts as a subject.

The study area: The Polytechnic Calabar (POLYCAL) was established in 1973 in Calabar, the capital city of Cross River State, Southeast of Nigeria which has a land mass of 23, 074 km^2 and an estimated population of about 2.89 million (2006). The institution's Fine and Applied Arts Department was established in 1998 to award a 2 year National Diploma. In 2002 The Polytechnic Calabar transformed into Cross River University of Technology (CRUTECH), Calabar as a degree awarding institution. When POLYCAL transformed into CRUTECH, the Fine Arts Department also transformed into the Department of Visual Arts and Technology, CRUTECH, in 2002 to run a 4 years Bachelors in Visual Arts programme. The secondary schools used in this research are Army Day Secondary School, Government Secondary School, Hope Waddel Training Institution, Saint Patrick's College and Federal Government Girls College in Calabar.

Statement of the problem: Right from the beginning of the Fine and Applied Arts Department, POLYCAL in 1998, it was impossible to find students for the programme. In 1998 and 1999 we had 12 and 10 students admitted, respectively into the programme. However, by the end of each of the academic sessions, most of the admitted students left the programme to study other subjects. The reason why it was difficult to get and retain students in the Department, according to Ajibade and Lawson (2003) is that most secondary schools in Calabar do not offer fine arts as a subject. Yet, fine arts was requisite for secondary school pupils to gain admission into the

Department. A major constraint in the secondary schools themselves was that fine arts teachers are very scarce which makes it impossible for proprietors to mount fine arts subjects for pupils to study. And because secondary schools in the city were not offering fines arts in their curriculum, pupils could not develop interest in fine arts and apply to POLYCAL to do the Diploma Programme. In 2000, it became necessary for the Department of Fine and Applied Arts to intervene and device an empirical means of getting secondary school pupils in Calabar to develop interest in fine arts as a subject.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The materials used were pencils, crayon, water colour, pens, felt pens, pastels, charcoal, poster colours, ink, white bond paper, white cardboard papers, masking tape, drawing pins, drawing boards and artists fixatives. Letters were written to the Principals of the secondary schools, telling them of the project to work with their pupils to introduce and make them develop interest in fine arts by teaching and engaging them in artistic exercises. The principals responded positively and gave us the permission to do the project with their pupils. For a period of 1 year of three terms in 2000, classes were scheduled for drawing and painting exercises for which art materials were supplied to the pupils. The bond paper and cardboard paper was cut to A4 and A3 sizes and then placed on the drawing board for pupils to use. Pupils were asked to think about their society, their culture and environment to draw and paint subjects that came to their minds. The methodology for drawing was to employ familiar African socio-cultural environment as sources for generating group illustrations. The drawings and paintings made by the pupils were fixed with artists fixatives, to make them permanent on the paper. After each exercise, discussions took place in which the whole class looks and discusses the works. Pupils from various ethnic backgrounds were able to discuss and identify the social and cultural subjects of in the drawings and painting that they themselves have contributed to.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As the project's sessions progressed in 2000, it was generally discovered that the secondary school pupils' enthusiasm grew towards fine arts and activities built around drawing and painting. They were very excited to show their parents the group illustrations in which they participated which included Illustrations make things easy

Fig. 1: Illustrations make things easy

Fig. 4: Melody makers

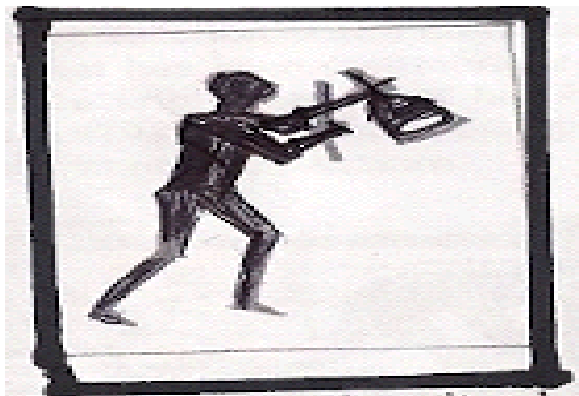Fig. 2: Say it in drawing

Fig. 5: Tales by moonlight

Fig. 3: Town crier

(Fig. 1), Say it in drawing (Fig. 2), Town crier (Fig. 3), melody makers (Fig. 4) and Tales by moonlight (Fig. 5). Many of them brought drawings and paintings that they had on their own, made at home. And some of the parents who initially frowned at their wards doing fine arts activities became very interested in the project. They offered to supply some of the materials and were glad to drop-off their children on weekends for more activities. On the part of the school principals, they were most excited about the artistic activities and the interest that grew in the pupils. They promptly accepted to include fine arts in their school curriculums. In the 2001 academic year, the excitement and interest that the project generated in the pupils was also visible in the student population pattern of the Fine and Applied Arts programme of POLYCAL (Table 1). From Table 1, one finds that while 12 and 10 students were admitted in 1998 and 1999, respectively by 2000 only 6 students applied to the programme. And after the project was instituted in the secondary schools in Calabar, the number of students that applied and were admitted into the programme increased by 166.7-16%.

As elsewhere in the world, among African youths generally there is considerable awareness about communication technologies like digital cameras and camera phones with which they can make images for illustrative purposes. However, rather than get secondary school pupils to use technologies of visual

Table 1: Students admitted to study fine and applied arts in POLYCAL, 1998-2001

Years	1998			1999			2000			2001			Total	
Sex	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F
Numbers	8.0	4.0	12	5	5	10	4.0	2.0	6	11.0	5.0	16	28.0	16.0
Percentage (%)	66.7	33.3	100	50	50	100	66.7	33.3	100	68.8	31.3	100	63.6	36.4

Total number of students in the years under review 44 (Ajibade and Lawson, 2003)

communication, the project employed art, made by the pupils themselves which made the exercise enduring and educative. For, according to Pearce (1992) technological innovations can alter the capacity for society to inform, amuse and persuade itself. Using illustrative images to get pupils interested in fine arts gave them capacities to persuade themselves to appreciate fine arts. As tools of communication, the drawings and paintings made by the pupils themselves, penetrated deep into their passive consciousness making them take appropriate action. Thus, just as traditional African societies got their myths and folklore from their own socio-cultural environment, it is possible for contemporary Africans to derive educational visual illustrations from the society.

From the data analysed and the observations in the secondary schools during the project, it is inferable that using familiar social, cultural and environmental materials as sources for illustrations in the participatory art creation process has had the effect of getting secondary school pupils interested in fine arts as a subject. Whereas the exercise itself was successful in generating interest in fine arts among secondary school pupils in Calabar, an unforeseen limitation emerged. While secondary school principals were happy about the project's success and expressed their willingness to mount the fine arts subject at the project's end they drew attention to the lack of teachers who can teach fine arts. In other words, the project created a need for fine arts by generating awareness and interest in the subject among secondary school pupils and principals but had not considered the manpower (fine arts teachers) that will continue the teaching of fine arts in the secondary schools to make the gains sustainable. As an interim measure, lecturers in the Department of Fine Arts, POLYCAL, took it upon themselves to visit interested secondary schools and offer free services and teach fine arts to the pupils. Unfortunately, this strategy, good as it was not sustainable because at one point, the cost of moving in between secondary schools to teach them became unbearable for the lecturers.

CONCLUSION

By 2002 when the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, POLYCAL, transformed into the Department of Visual Arts and Technology, CRUTECH, it became clear that lecturers can no longer go to the secondary schools in view of their work schedules in their primary places of assignment. And because lecturers could no longer provide the free fine arts classes to the secondary schools, the subject was again delisted in most of the secondary schools because Government did not employ fine arts teachers.

That government did not employ fine arts teachers for secondary schools meant that there was no longer going to be secondary school pupils to feed the arts programme in the new Department of Visual Arts and Technology, CRUTECH. As a way out, the new Department in CRUTECH delisted fines arts as a requisite for admissions to endure a steady rise in student intake (Ajibade *et al.*, 2011). To have directed the gains of the project at serving the overall interest of society, government ought to have employed and posted fine arts teachers to the secondary schools to take over from the lecturers who where providing free classes.

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