

**Community-Based can impact the status of art education
in Saudi Arabia**

“Community-Based Art Education”

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Abstract:

The purpose for this section was to investigate art education from the Ministry of education in boy's elementary and middle schools in Saudi Arabia. The discussion concentrated on the art curriculums and the important documents regarding for teaching art education in Saudi Arabia. The discussion also tried to pay close attention to the other Ministry of Education guidelines towards art education in elementary and middle schools, the manual for teaching art education, student evaluation and some of annual reports and other publication.

I have presented the community-based art education model. I have believed that the community-based model is the most suitable model to implement into the art program in Saudi Arabia by explaining why the community-based model is most suitable and the factors that can enhance the status of art education in Saudi Arabia.

Introduction:

This theory encourages teachers to take students outside of the classroom in order to enrich their learning experience. This is done so that the students may examine a variety of contexts of art (B

Olin, Blandy, & Congdon, 2001). This becomes the foundation for subject matter in the class. It allows the students to make a connection between art and society.

Community-based art education is different from a regular school field trip. The students must be engaged in research, interviews, documenting, measuring, drawing, and comparing to say the least (London, 1994). The teachers must ensure that when the students return to the classroom there are follow up activities that allow the students to digest and synthesize what they experienced. This firsthand experience allows the students to perceive, analyze, and organize the information into relevant information.

CBAE is inherently artistic by bringing children into direct contact with the world and allowing them to make their own connections. This is precisely the way of artists. They interact with the raw material and work with the parts that resonate with them.

This model uses the students' natural ability to be curious in the transfer of knowledge. The students interact with an environment they already know. Yet, they study aspects of the environment that they may not have thought of on their own. Thus, they learn more about their community and how it relates to their curriculum. This helps the students to understand the importance of art. Also, the personal connections they make with the environment nurtures their self-esteem and self-identity.

CBAE is also an interdisciplinary model. For example, the students may study a billboard that is in the community. They will study its construction (math and physics), its design and wording (psychology and linguistics), and even its physical positioning (social studies). By studying in detail this one object, the students not only studied five different subjects, they saw how these subjects interact with each other. This experience was inexpensive, easily accessible, dealt with contemporary issues, and showed the relevance of art education.

Education is at a high standard when connections are made between the environment and society. In contrast, education is at a low point when no connection is made between the environment and society. The students will be more interested in learning the material when there is a connection made with the students, parents, teachers, and society as a whole (London, 1994).

I believe that the community-based art education model is the best model for Saudi Arabia. As mentioned above, in order for the DBAE model to be successful the necessary supplies, books, and facilities must be available. In the majority of schools in Saudi these supplies and such are not available. In addition, many of the schools are rented houses with the art class being held in the kitchens. Thus, the community-based model should be utilized in order to take advantage of the benefits inherent in the society.

The community-based model would not be appropriate for classes such as dance, music, and theatre. However, these classes are not taught in Saudi Arabia. The focus of the curriculum is drawing and crafts. In the community-based model these categories retain their functionality.

Finally, the community-based model is inexpensive to implement. Its implementation would not require an increase in the budget. Neither would it require a change in the curriculum. However, it would require a change in the way the art classes are taught. In the next section, I will present factors that can change the status of art in Saudi Arabia and explain in detail why the community-based model is the ideal model to use.

In Saudi Arabia there is a lack of understanding concerning the importance of art education. This lack of understanding is a result of three factors. The message of art education is not clear, a connection has not been made between art and the other core subjects, and a strong connection has not been shown as to the impact of art in society. If society understands the importance of art education, then this will raise the position of art education to be on par with the other subjects.

As for the Ministry of Education, a curriculum must be presented to them that does not require a great deal of change from the old curriculum. Even more so, the curriculum or model to be implemented must be cost efficient. As mentioned before, the budget has been constantly shrinking and is not likely to rise anytime soon.

On paper, the art curriculum in Saudi Arabia follows the DBAE model. However, in truth, the majority of art classes consist of mere drawing and craft-making. Connections are not made between art courses and the other curriculum. The majority of schools in Saudi Arabia do not have the adequate facilities and supplies to do anything beyond drawing and simple crafts. Moreover, the general population considers art to be relatively unimportant. Thus, no one is concerned with the improvement of art curriculum in Saudi Arabia.

I have come to the conclusion that the community-based art education model is the idea model for art education in Saudi Arabia. This model does not require a change in the curriculum of Saudi Arabia, merely a change in the teaching methods. This model is also inexpensive to implement. These two factors should sit well with the Ministry of Education.

For the benefit of the Ministry of Education, the school administrators, and the students and parents, I will proceed to explain the benefit of art education. More specifically, I will explain how the community-based art education model can be used to show connections between the various subjects, expand the thinking capacity of the students, and show the relevance of the school curriculum in society and the world.

In Saudi Arabia 100% of the population is Muslim. A connection must be made not only between art and math, science, reading, and history, but also with religion. This must be done if we are to raise the status of art education in Saudi Arabia.

The most respected book in the world, the Book of Allah, the Qur'an, is an essential part in the curriculum of Saudi Arabia and in the society as a whole. Excerpts from the Qur'an must be used to help explain the functionality of art education. The following are some examples of translations of the Qur'an by Muhammad Khan (1999).

Do they not look at the sky above them? How We have made it and adorned it, and there are no flaws in it? And the earth how We have spread it out, and set thereon mountains standing firm, and produced therein every kind of beautiful growth in pairs. (Qaf, 6-7) Do they not look at the Camels, how they are made? And at the Sky, how it is raised high? And at the Mountains, how they are fixed firm? And at the Earth, how it is spread out? (Al-ghashiyah, 17-20)

It is He Who created the seven heavens one above another: No want of proportion will you see in the Creation of the Most Gracious. So turn your vision again to the sky: do you see any flaw? Again, turn your vision to the sky a second time: your vision will come back to you dull and discomfited, in a worn-out state.

(Al-mulk, 3-4)

Do they not observe the birds above them, spreading their wings and folding them in? None can hold them up except (Allah) the Most Gracious: Truly (Allah) the Most Gracious: it is Her those watches over all things. (Al-mulk, 19)

Say: "It is He Who has created you and made you grow, and made for you the faculties of hearing, seeing, feeling and understanding: little thanks it is that you give. (Al-mulk, 23)

In the above verses, Allah has made mention of observing the environment and pondering over its aesthetics. These verses are only a sample from the Qur'an. Indeed, there are many more similar examples. Therefore, studying the aesthetics of the environment is a religious obligation for Muslims. This can be used to show that art and aesthetics is not only for the classroom, but should be incorporated into our daily lives as well.

Moreover, in the last selection of verses, Allah reminds people that it is He who has given the faculties of hearing, seeing, feeling, and understanding. Those who use them properly and to their highest potential are grateful and thankful to their Lord. Those who do otherwise are ungrateful. It is not the goal to merely excel at each sensual task individually. Rather, the populace must learn that art education can be used to enhance the use of all the senses simultaneously.

The introduction of Discipline-Based Art Education resulted in a revision of curriculum in many countries during the 1980s, but in its application, this often proved to be a dislocated approach in which the ‘disciplines’ of aesthetics, art history, and art criticism were segregated from the studio (Hickman, 2004). Presently in many countries, the art curriculum is broken up into seemingly unrelated elements. These elements seem unrelated to each other and unrelated to society by the way they are taught. On the other hand, the community-based model takes a more gestalt approach.

Gestalt, which is German for configuration or pattern, is the school of psychology that believes that the world is experienced in meaningful wholes instead of elements. People do not experience math, science, reading, art, and economics separately in life. These subjects that are taught separately in school are experienced as an interconnected whole in society. Moreover, the whole experience is different from the elemental experience. If students are expected to function in society, they should learn how society functions as a whole (Hergenhahn. & Olson, 2005).

Parents want their children to go to school to be properly educated in order that they are successful as adults. The administration wants the students to succeed in school so that they may be prosperous citizens. This success rests on making a bridge between academics and reality. The community-based model is that bridge.

Why are some colors considered cool colors and other colors are considered hot? How can it be that some images instill fear in some cultures and laughter in other cultures? In order to answer these questions, art education must go beyond the classroom. The community-based model examines the environment as it is. Then, the teacher may ask a question such as why some art forms are more prevalent in society and not others? The students become interactive with the environment.

Let us return to the example of the art class whose lesson is centered on the billboard, as mentioned above. This one object, the billboard, can be taken and expanded upon. The class can take on the guise of a marketing firm whose business is built on the success of its billboards. This way the students see the interconnections of accounting, economics, business, art, and advertising. In addition, they learn of a career utilizing art, advertising.

Max Wertheimer (1980), a gestalt psychologist, believed that merely memorizing facts and studying logic does not inspire productive thinking. Rather, students should be given a thorough understanding of the principals involved in a situation (Wertheimer, 1980). Presenting the students with a subject, such as the billboard, that is studied in depth with a focus on the value of art will allow the students to see the benefit of learning and applying art principles. Information gained from learning is only utilized when there is a reason to do so (Bandura, 1977).

The community-based model provides the student with an enriched, interactive environment. It has been shown that an enriched environment that has a variety of motor and sensory experiences enhances development (Hergenhahn & Olson, 2005). An enriched environment has also been shown to increase brain weight, and increase the levels of neurotransmitters produced in the body. The more the students are exposed to enriched environments the more their neurons are stimulated in new ways. This stimulation increases the length of dendrites on the neurons and increases the numbers of receptors. Thereby, the speed and efficiency of information being processed in the brain is increased (Hergenhahn & Olson, 2005).

Jean Piaget (1970) considered intelligence to be an act that creates optimal conditions for an organism to survive. The driving force behind intellectual growth is equilibration, which is to organize experiences to ensure adaptability to the environment. Since the environment is constantly changing, intelligence must constantly change to match it. Therefore, intelligence is a dynamic trait. The more the students learn of in-depth knowledge about the environment their potential to reach higher levels of intelligence increases. Intelligent students are more beneficial to the society and to their families. The goal of the families and administration of Saudi Arabia is to equip students with the ability to think intelligently. The community-based model facilitates this ability (Hergenhahn & Olson, 2005).

Howard Gardner's theories of multiple intelligences maintain the view that bodily kinesthetic intelligence is distinctively developed through craft.

The most frequently quoted extrinsic reasons given for the educational benefits of craft making were that it contributes to comprehension and skills that are practical both vocationally and in everyday life. Also, it enables knowledge and understanding of all kinds to be demonstrated in physical form (Department of Education and Science, 1971).

Presenting the child with opportunities to create constantly with the information he currently had is the best training for future creative action. One of the critical ingredients of an innovative art experience is the relationship between the artist and his environment. Observation, direct involvement, and informal coaching are critical for proper skill acquisition (Gardner, 1990).

The capacity to see, feel, hear, smell, and taste provides the means by which an interaction between man and his environment takes place. The improvement of perceptual sensitivity, then, should become the most important part of the education process. The more opportunities the students have to develop an increased sensitivity and a greater awareness of all the senses, the greater will be the opportunity for learning (Lowenfeld, 1970). "It is He Who has created you and made you grow, and made for you the faculties of hearing, seeing, feeling and understanding: little thanks it is that you give" (Khan, 1999).

There is general agreement that the main objectives of art education are the deepening of visual attentiveness and the growth of critical aptitude in perception (Department of Education and Science, 1971). These objectives are achieved by working in the fields of painting and drawing, three-dimensional work, ceramics, printmaking, textiles, art and drama, and photography.

Art is both a form of communication and a means of expression that should pervade the entire curriculum and the whole life of the school. It makes people perceptive and more discerning (Department of Education and Science, 1971). In this way it enriches the personal lives of people and contributes to the future of our society.

Art is the principal mode of communicating ideas and emotions from person to person, group to group, and from generation to generation. In order to develop criteria for judging the quality of art it must be first known what is the main function of the art work (Mcfee & Degge, 1977).

Art education should provide experiences that are intellectually sound, personally rewarding, and relevant to the lives of the children (Chapman, 1978). Many of the models and figures produced in the art class can be used for mathematical modeling. The young people in our schools face a future in which technology will generate an increasingly rapid flow of new materials and where an adult's craft skills will need to be flexible. Young people must develop an interest in materials, both natural and man-made, and an ability to understand the qualities of new ones and to make use of them.

Much of the practical work arising from collaborating with such subjects as mathematics, science, and geography will involve the use of a combination of materials (Department of Education and Science, 1971).

In regular core curriculum classes, the atmosphere is not suitable for interacting with the environment and allowing the students to expand their imaginative capacities. However, in an art class the students are given the freedom to use their imagination. More specifically, using the community-based art education model the students use their imagination and interact with the environment. This would be the only outlet where the students will be able to integrate the various subjects they have learned in school with their environment.

Another reason I chose the community-based model over other models to be used in the classroom is that it does not require a wide range of materials. The effectiveness of the DBAE model rests on the availability of the proper materials and supplies. The art classrooms in Saudi Arabia do not have the proper supplies or the proper facilities. It has been mentioned before that more than 60% of the schools are actually rented houses. The majority of time the art classes are located in the kitchen.

The successful implementation of the community-based model rests upon the teacher. The teacher has the essential role of encouraging resourcefulness in improvising and providing unusual or unexpected factors. The teacher should provide a good range of materials and tools that are easily seen and always available. However, in Saudi Arabia a broad range of materials and tools are not readily available.

Therefore, the teacher must be able to improvise from the environment more so than teachers from other countries.

The teacher needs to be talented and knowledgeable in his chosen field, such as that of painter, potter, sculptor or designer. In addition, he needs to be resourceful and willing to expand his skills in other crafts in order to cover the interests of his pupils. Finally, the art teacher must have some familiarity and appreciation of the whole field of design in everyday life (Department of Education and Science, 1971). For, the community-based art education model is built around the study of art in everyday life.

There should a guide book compiled for the art teachers to help them facilitate student learning. This guide book should contain different topics to study in the environment. For each topic the book should show the teacher how to make connections with the other subject areas. Also, the guide books should explain how to make appropriate arrangements for the different age categories.

This leads me to one of the other reasons art education is not taken serious in Saudi Arabia. Public school students take art every year up to eighth grade. The curriculum for art remains essentially the same from year to year. Therefore, parents do not consider art class as being important. I suggest that the guide books for the teachers present different curriculums to the students every year. This way teachers and parents see a progression in the curriculum and begin to see it as being important.

In addition to a progressive curriculum, the students should be assessed in all four aspects of art. In other words, the students should not just be assessed on art production. Art critique, art history, and aesthetics should be included in the curriculum and in the assessment. By doing this, the students and parents will begin to value art more.

Currently, art education has a low status in Saudi Arabia. The main reason for this is that society does not see the benefit in art education. By making a connection with religious principles, the core curriculum, the environment, and modern careers, we can expand the thinking of the people. This can be accomplished by using the community-based art education model. Also, since the community-based model does not require a lot of money to implement, the Ministry of Education should not be too averse to it. Thus, it is my view that the community-based art education model is the most suitable model that can help change the status of art in Saudi Arabia.

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