Nurturing Creativity in Every Child: the Role of Art
This publication is to support Art education and encourage new talents and innovative aesthetics, sustain and nurture creativity for sustainable development and to advance art theory and practice in Nigeria and beyond.
Did you know that ARTS EDUCATION is so important in nurturing your child’s creative abilities?

In this age and time, many parents and teachers are yet to realize the significance of Arts education to a child’s educational development and personal growth. As a parent, how would you sincerely answer this question? That is what this article is set to address.

"Every child is an artist, the problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up", Pablo Picasso.

Creativity is an innate aspect of our humanity, possessed by everyone, including children. It is the responsibility of parents and teachers to help the children to nurture this latent skill through systematic artistic engagements.

Art plays an important role in our schools for balanced education and a child that does not receive art education is denied this opportunity. The arts are unique tools to stimulate and enrich learning. The arts are an integral part of a complete, successful and quality education. Arts education is the foundation of balanced creative, cognitive, emotional, aesthetic and social development of children, youth and life-long learners.

“Creativity is a characteristic given to all human beings at birth.” Abraham Maslow

All humans have creative potentials. The arts provide an environment and practice where the learner is actively engaged in creative experiences, processes, and developments. Arts Education contributes to an education which integrates physical, intellectual and creative faculties and makes possible more dynamic and fruitful relations between education, culture and the arts.

“The arts are an essential element of education, just like reading, writing, and arithmetic...music, dance, painting, and theatre are all keys that unlock profound human understanding and accomplishment.” –William Bennett,
Art is essential in your child’s education, because it instils in children the habits of mind that last a lifetime: critical analysis skills, the ability to deal with ambiguity and to solve problems, perseverance and a drive for excellence. Also, the creative skills children develop through the arts carry them towards new ideas, new experiences and new challenges, not to mention personal satisfaction. This is the intrinsic value of the arts and it cannot be overestimated.

Art is a unique way of knowing and understanding the world. Purposeful visual art activities expand children’s ways of exploring, expressing and coming to terms with the world they inhabit in a structured and enjoyable way. Children first learn to respond aesthetically to their environment through touch, taste, sound and smell and their natural curiosity suggests a need for sensory experience. Visual art education helps to develop sensory awareness, enhances sensibilities and emphasizes particular ways of exploring, experimenting and inventing. Arts-infused education builds 21st century skills—the 4 Cs of creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration—and improves learning.

Is Arts Education for the gifted few in selected disciplines or for all?

“An elementary school that treats the arts as the province of a few gifted children, or views them only as recreation and entertainment, is a school that needs an infusion of soul. That art is an essential element of education, just like reading, writing, and arithmetic.” – William Bennett

The Nigerian National Policy on Education recognizes the “cultural and creative Arts” as a core subject at both elementary and junior secondary school levels, but Creative Art practices in our secondary schools is presently relegated to the background. Parents encourage their children to pay more attention to science-based disciplines. Many are of the opinion that creative art is only for the gifted, which is absolutely wrong. The Cultural and Creative Arts curriculum, if well implemented, is expected to produce creative, patriotic and productive Nigerians who will contribute optimally to national development, irrespective of their chosen professions.

The Cultural and Creative Arts curriculum is an integration of Visual Arts, Drama and Music and is primarily concerned with the role arts and culture can play in the education of the present and future generations as they search for meanings with the following objectives:
1. To provide opportunity for students to develop a language for expressing ideas, feelings, emotions and moods through a variety of art experiences (creative growth);
2. To provide opportunity for students to learn the proper use of art tools, equipment and materials;
3. To provide opportunity for students to understand and appreciate works of art;
4. To provide opportunity for students to gain knowledge and develop intellectually, physically and culturally through art,
5. To provide opportunity for students to have adequate skill and competence for higher education in art;
6. To provide opportunity for students to develop interest in future vocation in art;
7. To provide opportunity for students to see the usefulness of art in other subject areas and the society.

With the above-stated objectives, I would like to stress that a child that does not offer Cultural and Creative Art in primary and junior secondary school is denied balanced education.

To succeed today and in the future, children need to be inventive, resourceful and imaginative. The currency of the 21st century is creativity and the best way to foster that creativity is through arts education: Cultural and Creative Art (Nigerian Art Education Curriculum). So, when your child is denied the opportunity to take Cultural and Creative Arts, he/she loses the chance of learning and developing his/her creative side. Research shows that art activities develop brain capacity in early childhood.

Physiologically, the human brain consists of two parts: the left and the right hemispheres. The left part is used for logical thinking and analytical processes. This is typically what is required for school work that relates to Mathematics, reading and science. The right side is used for emotional perception, intuition and creativity. It is the right hemisphere that is mainly used when a person is involved in creative endeavours such as making art. It is this part of the brain that typical a school system neglects to develop.

For the brain to be efficient, the two hemispheres must work together. By stimulating and exercising the right hemisphere of the brain, the arts strengthen the connection between the hemispheres. Our children should be exposed to
the arts as their cognitive skills mature so that their right hemisphere will be as developed as the left and both hemispheres work in tandem, thus achieving the full potential of the mind.

Art engages children’s senses in open-ended play and develops cognitive, social, emotional and multi-sensory skills. Art is important for children, especially during their early development as they progress into elementary school and beyond; art continues to provide opportunities for brain development, mastery, self-esteem and creativity.

Each child possesses a range of intelligences and he/she needs a variety of learning experiences in order to develop them fully. Visual art activities enable children to make sense of and to express their world in visual, tangible forms. They can also be unifying forces in children’s learning and development: drawing, painting, inventing and constructing bring together different elements of children’s experience from which a whole new experience can develop.

Understanding visual imagery opens additional ways of learning for children and enables them to record real or imagined ideas and feelings. Opportunities to explore and investigate the visual elements in their environment help them to appreciate the nature of things and to channel their natural curiosity for educational ends.

The confidence and enjoyment that stem from purposeful visual art activities can have a positive effect on children’s learning in other areas of the curriculum. Children who have had experience in exploring and experimenting with a variety of art materials and media are likely, as they develop, to produce art that is personal. A quality visual art programme ensures that each child has a variety of enriching visual art experiences in both two and three-dimensional media.

No wonder, the Federal Republic of Nigeria on the National Policy on Education defines the Art as a core subject and art plays a significant role in a child’s development and learning process. Art can help students to become tenacious, team-oriented problem solvers who are confident and able to think creatively. However, most kids do not have access to quality art materials and qualitative art education, which is one of the core defining factors in child development.
Visual art is the very first form of empowerment a child engages in. To take a cue from Ghana, Visual Art is an integral part of the primary school curriculum and indeed, primary school children are required to acquire skills in basketry, leatherwear, sculpture, clothing and textiles. Thus, post-primary pupils may have been prepared for an apprenticeship in any of the aforementioned trades, should they decide to work and study. Vocational art education started in primary school is strengthened at the secondary school level. Secondary school leavers can thus use such skills in their jobs should they decide to seek employment.

UNESCO acknowledges that the learning of art and creativity is indispensable for the growth and sustainable development of societies and individuals. Arts education is instrumental to the development of creative industries. In the United States, 6 million people work in the arts industry, generating $160 billion every year, and in the UK, the creative industry is the second largest industry after the financial sector. In the developing world, the arts and creative industries are a resource waiting to be tapped, which can and, I believe, will have a strong economic impact.

The importance of art education can never be overemphasized. It is too enormous to be ignored. Art provides the platform for creativity. It fuels imagination and helps to produce dynamic and talented individuals our economy needs. Children’s early years are a time of learning. But they are also time of exploration, developing imagination and a sense of self. A wonderful way to explore, create and express oneself is through the Visual Arts. Art education is vital to child development. Creativity is emotional intelligence and the arts in education give the feelings and emotions form and meaning through self-expression. Creativity is a basic capacity of human intelligence. Art is at the heart of creativity. Art helps the kids to adopt the role of the innovator through fostering curiosity and developing the ability to create and solve a new problem.

“Art is man’s constant effort to create for himself a different order of reality from that which is given to him.” – Chinua Achebe
Today, more than ever, the arts are needed in our children’s education for safe expression, communication, exploration, imagination, cultural and historical understanding. The importance of Art to children’s educational development is briefly highlighted below:

- Brain research confirms that Arts education strengthens student problem-solving and critical thinking skills, adding to overall academic achievement, school success, and preparation for the work world.
- Art classes provide students a chance to develop cognitive and creative skills, and to develop their imaginations.
- The arts teach our students to be more tolerant and open through multicultural and historical perspectives and through their involvement in the creative process itself.
- Art is another way of thinking and using the brain. It contributes to developing creativity - not just the crayon and paper type of art - but it transfers to other subjects in solving problems and using higher critical thinking skills. It is also building motor skills and social skills.
- Stimulates and develops the imagination and critical thinking, and refines cognitive and creative skills.
- Has a tremendous impact on the developmental growth of every child and has proven to help level the "learning field" across socio-economic boundaries.
- Strengthens problem-solving and critical-thinking skills, adding to overall academic achievement and school success.
- Develops a sense of craftsmanship, quality task performance, and goal-setting—skills needed to succeed in the classroom and beyond.
- Teaches children life skills such as developing an informed perception; articulating a vision; learning to solve problems and make decisions; building self-confidence and self-discipline; developing the ability to imagine what might be; and accepting responsibility to complete tasks from start to finish.

- Nurtures important values, including team-building skills; respecting alternative viewpoints; and appreciating and being aware of different cultures and traditions.

- It’s been proven that early exposure to visual art, music, or drama promotes activity in the brain.

- Art helps children understand other subjects much more clearly—from math and science, to language arts and geography.

- Art nurtures inventiveness as it engages children in a process that aids in the development of self-esteem, self-discipline, cooperation, and self-motivation.

- Participating in art activities helps children to gain the tools necessary for understanding human experience, adapting to and respecting others’ ways of working and thinking, developing creative problem-solving skills, and communicating thoughts and ideas in a variety of ways.

The factors that will ensure proper implementation of the Cultural and Creative Arts curriculum in schools are as follows:

I. Qualified Teachers (Visual Art teacher and Music teacher)
II. Adequate and Comprehensive Textbooks
III. Instructional and Multimedia Aids
IV. Materials for Art practical
V. School Administrative Support
The following recommendations are from deliberations ensuing Working Session III: Implementing Arts Education in Africa, which took place at the World Conference on Arts Education: Building Creative Capacities for the 21st Century (6th - 9th March, 2006), Lisbon, Portugal.

**Recommendations for governments and political leaders**

1. Promote arts education as an integral part of national development policies and devote substantial financial resources thereto
2. Ensure the training of arts education trainers and teachers and promote active, participative teaching methods
3. Make arts education compulsory in all schools and introduce a secondary teaching diploma in arts education (e.g. bachelor’s degree)
4. Set up arts education departments in African universities
5. Create budget items to facilitate the professional integration of graduates from arts-education institutions
6. Make use of private institutions to train young people in arts education
7. Carry out a survey on the arts-education situation in the various countries in order to determine the objectives and priority actions for national policies

**Recommendations for Educators, Parents, Artists, and Directors of Schools and Educational Institutions**

I. Raise public awareness and promote the value and social impact of Arts Education, creating a demand for Arts Education and skilled arts educators;
II. Provide leadership, support and assistance for teaching and learning in and through the arts;
III. Promote active participation in, and accessibility to, the arts for all children, as a core component of education;
IV. Encourage the use of local, contextualized human and material resources as both the providers and the content of quality education;
V. Provide resources and learning materials to assist educators to develop, utilize, and share new arts-rich pedagogy;

VI. Provide assistance to enable Arts Education practitioners to harness technological developments which will enable Arts Education to reach marginalized groups, and facilitate the creation of innovative knowledge products and the sharing of knowledge;

VII. Support ongoing professional development of teachers, artists and community workers, in order to develop in professionals an appreciation of cultural diversity and enable them to develop their students’ potential to create, critique and innovate;

VIII. Encourage and promote the development of art practices through digital media;

IX. Set up, if they do not exist, cultural centres and other Arts Education spaces and facilities for youths;

"It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge." Albert Einstein

In conclusion, parents should be aware of the fact that quality arts education, which promotes emotional development, as well as cognitive achievement, is a key factor to achieve quality education. Parents are encouraged to make Art a part of their children’s development by making art and craft supplies available and accessible to them, celebrate their art works and enjoy the arts at home by sharing their artistic skills and interests with their children. If your child show(s) great interest, enroll him/her in an art class (like the CHILDREN ART CLUB). If possible, remind or inform your child’s School Management about the importance of art in his/her education and you may also share this publication with them.

I recommend that Art Education should be taken seriously and well funded in schools and professional Art teachers should be employed to teach the subject. Moreover, adequate time should be allocated to Art, because it requires enough time.

Art provides our children with balanced education. We all have roles to play here. We must mobilize, inform and educate school administrators that are neglecting art education (Cultural and Creative Arts) in their schools to begin to recognize the vast potential returns that can be realized by implementing and investing in arts education.
Please join us in this mission to take arts education to every child in Nigeria. Not only will we change attitudes towards it, but we also will change the future of our country and of the continent – Africa.

Let me take a line from the Nigerian National Anthem, “… The labour of our heroes past shall never be in vain.” Art teachers are to help to sustain the effort of Late Aina Onabolu (the first Nigerian Art teacher) for the introduction of arts education in Nigerian secondary schools. He will forever be remembered for his pioneering efforts in bringing and contributing immensely to make arts education in Nigeria a reality. As Art teachers, we all have a collective role to educate, sensitize, and orientate the public on the significance of Art to the society. Our efforts may have been frustrated many times, but we cannot stop until we see the needed change. We can make it happen. Power to you all!

“My horizon on humanity is enlarged by reading the writers of poems, seeing a painting, listening to some music, some opera, which has nothing at all to do with a volatile human condition or struggle or whatever. It enriches me as a human being.” – Wole Soyinka

Written by:

Prince Olusegun Michael, Adeniyi
(Award-winning Artist-cum-Art Educator, Blogger and Visual Art Consultant)

My virtual extensions
Email: oluwasegunadeniyi@gmail.com
Blog: www.olusegunadeniyi.blogspot.com
Facebook: www.facebook.com/olucolourful
Youtube: http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCxIQCedv4axDzfq5FhACjZg
WhatsApp: +2348030874474
Brief Biography

Prince Olusegun Michael Adeniyi is carving a golden image of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as an outstanding Art educator, raising the standard of Art education in Nigeria and beyond. Olusegun Michael Adeniyi is an award-winning artist-cum-art educator. A graduate of University of Benin, Nigeria where he obtained a degree in painting (Fine Art). He also bagged the best graduating student award in NCE Fine and Applied Arts from Federal College of Education, Abeokuta in 2000.

He was nominated for Maltina Teacher Award in 2015 and for the Global Teachers Prize in 2014; same year, he was awarded the Eminent Award for Innovative Teaching by the BBHS Old Boys Association (the Eminent, 1979-84 set), awarded Distinguished Merit Award by Nigerian Conservation Foundation where he was member of jury for its 2014 Art contest for Lagos state secondary schools; he got the Most Outstanding Teacher award of the 2012/2013 Academic Session at the Baptist Boys High School Mission; in 2013, he was TNJ Africa 40 Under Forty Achievement Awards honouree; and in 2010, he was awarded the Most Innovative and Dedicated Staff award of 2009/2010 Session at Anu Olu Int’l College, Abeokuta. He has won several art awards with his students which includes: 2016 British Council Your World Contest (winner, country stage: Nigeria), NNPC/Chevron Art Contest (2010, 2014, 2015), Make Art Not War (2014, 2015), 2016 International Children’s Art Calendar, National Gallery of Art Children Art Contest (2010, 2013, 2014). He is currently an Art and Design instructor with Caleb British Academy.