

THE RELEVANCE OF THE VISUAL ARTS AND DESIGN CURRICULUM IN EDUCATION AND PRACTICE

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Osa-Francis Efe Obasuyi

University of Benin, Department of Fine/Applied Arts, Benin City, Nigeria

Abstract. *The paper deals with the issue of the role and relevance of visual arts and design as a subject, in the context of the planning and development of a viable and an articulate education course curriculum. It has been the focus of the attention and the discourse amongst professionals and educators alike, for these past few years. The above mentioned role, context and relevance are best exemplified by pointing out the context that is embedded in the methodological and technological content, and the implications for industry, a role which is predicated by the actions, the principles and the purpose of the circumstance under review. The paper states that this context refers to the debate which surrounds the use of a specific language format, one that will eventually determine the interpretation of such a language / subject matter that is under deliberation. Furthermore, we emphasize the issue of relevance or relevancy which implies or signifies the appropriateness of the need and urgency of an articulate course curriculum development for a discipline such as that of the visual arts and design. The paper points out to the need to harmonize 'teaching' with what is being taught (i.e content) and the 'preaching' or the 'theory'. Unfortunately, there is a serious gap between theory and the practice. The paper also stresses the need for a different attitude towards a unique conceptual framework that is driven by technology, commerce and industry.*

Key words: *relevancy, contextuality, task-based curriculum, competency – based curriculum, indirect/direct approaches*

INTRODUCTION

The issue of context, role and relevance of visual arts and design both as a profession, and discipline, in the context of the planning, and developing a viable and articulate education course curriculum needed for the successful sharing of its principles and

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Corresponding author: Osa-Francis Efe Obasuyi

University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria

E-mail: yandref201384@gmail.com

practice, has for a longtime been the focus of attention and discourse, amongst professionals, practitioners and educators.

This is a debate between the content of its technological prerequisites on the one hand, and the context of its role in industry and the requirements demanded by economic exigencies for the socio-economic development and development of the society on the other. This role and its relevance is best exemplified and well spelt out by the emphasis of such a context. They are embedded in the actions taken together with the principles employed and the purpose of the given design in question.

Steadman (1979) defines the word “context” as a discourse or deliberation which surrounds the use of a specific language form or format, as a unit which helps or enables the encoders to determine the interpretation (decoding) of such a language/subject matter under deliberation. Pautler (1976), describes the issue of relevance in the same vain as meaning or referring to “the relationship of a subject matter or something that relates to the matter under review or under discussion”. So the issue of relevancy of industrial design curriculum according to Halfin (1975) implies the appropriateness, or the need and urgency for a well articulated course curriculum development in arts and design for technological/educational needs of the society at large and the industry in particular. This refers to its social, economic, and cultural relevance to the new millenium way of life.

Hence, the contextual relevance of a visual arts and design course curriculum and its role in education, coupled with its practice as a profession and its place and value in industry, cannot be overstated. The onset of the new digital and technological age in a fast-paced world has had its implications not only on us in this part of the world, but on humanity all over the world. Consequently there is an immense pressure on governing bodies of schools/universities and educational policy formulators, to effect changes in relevant subjects matter and curriculum that is not only current and timely, but also seen to be very relevant to the future life’s roles of individuals in society (Keller 2012). As a consequence, there have been all kinds of debates among students, teachers and education practitioners on the one hand and parents/society on the other, for a change in the aspects of curriculum content and its development. This has been required by the urgency for rethinking the area of technology inclusion in the academic content of what is being taught in schools. This need is predicated upon the academic reality and relevance for children to be allowed to acquire competencies, skills and such worthwhile academic endeavors that will in the future make the children become self reliant and independent from society and government (Brown 2001).

Therefore there is serious consideration to be put forward for the complete restructuring of the curriculum and academic content of whatever is presently being taught today in our schools. According to Harahan (1978) this restructuring should be “consciously tailored towards a new technologically driven, commerce/industry and product-based, educational strategy or policy objective”, that will not only turn out graduates with that “spark” and energy for new innovativeness in the new millennium, i.e technology, commerce, and industry – based on economics, which will produce future individuals with a mind effectively adapted to the new ways of doing things (Norman 2009).

VISUAL ARTS AND DESIGN, A MUST FOR EDUCATION IN AN ARTICULATED CURRICULUM

Arguably true, according to Bordens (2003) who agrees to the fact that, there is a general understanding and recognition across the Industrial/Commercial World that innovative design education, when considered as a subject, profession, or a trade, can deliver many of the highly prized skills and qualities of the individual, skills such as flexibility and originality which are vital to human survival in the modern era. Indeed the very nature of the “high-tech” society we find ourselves in today, demands an internationally – oriented global approach in the attempt to develop a well articulated course curriculum that will ensure continuity of a design–led approach for industrial education. Such an approach will be vital to the future growth and improvement of quality and standards of manufactured goods/products for overall economic growth and success. Implementing a new and well articulated curriculum for Industrial Design may not be for technological institutions alone, we recommended that they be introduced into traditional universities curriculum and research organizations, too. This will play a major role in ensuring continuity and developmental standards of a design–led educational system aimed at solving technological, industrial and efficiency questions/problems (Crisp 2011). At this point it is important to attempt a picture of what the subject of industrial design is about. An attempt will be made to explain what the first steps that might be taken are, in order to ensure the development of an effective course curriculum development.

PHILOSOPHY AND CONTEXT OF VISUAL ARTS AND DESIGN PROGRAMME

According to Halfin (1976), exposure, scope, and general development of a curriculum for visual arts and design programmes in universities and technological institutions should be aimed at (or tailored towards) producing creative, innovative, and skilled manpower. They should be capable of upholding, sustaining and initiating skills acquired through the students’ theoretical exposure to the rudiments of the profession and thereafter be able to apply those skills to the practical development of society, thus enhancing the sense of values and needs of the community.

Thus, elaborating a unique philosophy and ideology for the development of a course curriculum for Visual arts and Design in tertiary institutions should be carefully aimed at fully exploiting the wealth of potential of the new technological era. It should ensure its translation into new products through the application of the latest in technology, innovations and new inventions in the field of a computer science and IT compliant technologically-driven world of manufacturing goods and products by using “high tech” i.e smart technology of engineering/manufacturing (Burkill 1994).

When putting into practice the above, one should be mindful of the fact that the involvement of different schools in the process of exploitation of visual arts, applied arts and design methods and making use of its technological potentials, in the resolution of design and aesthetic problems inherent to manufacturing should be total.

The general philosophy, purpose and inherent values in the proper planning and preparation of programmes for the development of curriculum for this course should first and foremost be geared towards promoting and developing general awareness of people involved. Secondly it should be aimed at inculcating a purposeful art and design-led, and design-approach consciousness thereby paving the way for an awareness campaign targeted

at both the manufacturers of products and the product consuming public, thus helping to promote the much desired technological reawakening of society at large.

Thirdly, applying and using whatever innovations of the new and more reliable methods of curriculum development to be employed, must be based upon tangible philosophy and objectives. The developer of such a program should be able to interpret national, state, individual student philosophies and other human engagement objectives. This kind of course/program philosophy and objectives must also be consistent with the school and departmental goals, targets and objectives. This philosophy and objectives must take into consideration the curriculum aspects that concern the students' background, the learning process, the facilities, materials, and techniques of instruction. It should also take into account the various curricula methods and approaches which reflect contemporary technological and scientific trends and developments in the industry.

Fourthly, the initiative for the development of a new course curriculum of visual arts and design must take on-board the current post-modern eclecticism in which quality is almost a by-product of stylistic erudition. Fine arts or art-based courses as they are taught in schools today and in the post-modern context, struggle with the loss of craft component disciplines, after going through many decades of modernist orthodoxy. So the time has come for a major paradigm shift of position both at the policy-making levels, and at the implementation levels (Maeda 2006).

GENERAL AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF A VISUAL ARTS AND DESIGN CURRICULUM

General objectives

The issue of restructuring a course programme for any field of study, according to Biggs, "must first and foremost clearly spell out the objectives of what the programme intends to achieve; in terms of end-results or expected societal roles to be performed by these graduates/graduands" (2007). To this end the issue of developing a curriculum for an industrial design course programme might be seen to be a rigorous one and therefore requires competencies that, one thinks, do not abound readily. This is because most of what the present educators implement are some programmes of teacher-learner education that provide instructions in units or course development systems only (in most cases) and not on core curriculum development proper. So the serious issues of an efficient and articulate curriculum are seldom raised. The understanding of the objectives of curriculum development is not just about doing things differently, it is about doing something based on an agreed social objective, purpose and need. Therefore serious attempts should be made to be able to keep up with changing times and events with the rest of the world technologically (Bruner 2007).

The issue of developing an arts and design curriculum requires a well grounded knowledge in the discipline as well. The developer must be abreast with the knowledge and understanding of the student/learner capabilities and how the learning and learner environment works. The curriculum developer needs to know more about change or changes, about the processes and the various factors that influences such changes. Therefore the main focus and objective of a well articulated course curriculum development must attempt at invoking the three principal elements of curriculum development. The need for a more balanced effort to handle and deal with the following three principal elements of a curriculum development follows as such:

- (i) the CONTENT of the area of specialization
- (ii) the SOCIETAL FRAMEWORK in which the program intends to function
- (iii) the HUMAN or PERSONAL needs assessment /component

The above three elements of the principles and practice of curriculum development weave delicately into the opinions of Devore who stated that “there exist serious gaps between theory and practice in the delivery of Training programmes” (1980). For example in the area of content of specialization, one would have expected to see into the curriculum content subjects such as Computer Technology, CAD/CAM, CAD/CAF, CGI or other computer-centred disciplines, such as Automobile/Transportation design, Machine/Tools design, Fabrics manufacture, Product Design, Graphic design, Textile Design, Ceramics Tech, Ergonomics, Styling, Design / Material science and Technology, Structural technology, Merchandising, Commerce / Business management, Law and marketing, and a whole range of other fine arts and science related courses. The inclusion of the content of the above subject areas would ensure a broad based platform that will engender the goal of the focus for an economy based upon technology, commerce and industry. This will bring about the achievement of the unifying themes of the “science of efficient human action and behavior” in industrial/economic self-reliance.

Specific objectives of a visual arts and design curriculum

A Curriculum for Visual Arts and Design, according to Devore (1980), should be structured to reflect the following specific objectives:

- Provide specialized, technology-based professional education aimed at producing highly skilled professionals in arts, applied arts and design, capable of understanding, interpreting and synthesizing problem situations, providing solutions and answer to complex technical/technological problems in the field of Technical Aesthetics, Product Design, Prototype and Industrial Goods Design.
- Develop the students ability in special skills acquisition in Art and Design, coupled with other design related fields as well as acquaint them with the appropriate technological “know-how”, and skills that they can apply effectively when there comes the need for the application of these skills which should be tested on their encounter with problem-solving exercises in industrial design and other related problems, usually associated with defective designs.
- Develop students` understanding and highlight awareness of the place of social-cultural norms and values of their immediate environment. Design in technology and aesthetically related economic problems. The way it affects the manufacturing and industrial sectors versus the general market economy of our society, relating this to the contemporary classroom skills for broader understanding and effective use of their theoretical educational experiences.
- Develop students` ability to understand the elements and principles of visual arts and design as well as design methods and methodology, and be able to synthesize appropriate information, to produce effective designs and prototypes as end results.
- Develop students` ability to provide, on graduating, appropriate solutions to the technological, economic and aesthetic problems of society.
- Develop students` ability to relate to their clients and their community. This will enable them to communicate better their intended creations innovations or inventions with the

sole aim of positively influencing attitudinal/behavioural change and taste in product consumership (sales and purchase). This is an appropriate medium and tool for effectively influencing change in societal norms and values.

VISUAL ARTS AND DESIGN CURRICULUM: DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACHES

According to Halfin, in order to develop curriculum “one must be able to determine what skills the students who complete such a course should be able to perform and under what condition they should be able to perform such skills and how well they should be able to do this” (1976). Most curriculum developers have adopted the “INDIRECT” or “DISCIPLINE” approach.

In other words the structure and content of acknowledged disciplines that has been found to work even under the most severe of conditions, is recommended to be used in the design of such curricula. Further still the other commonly used method is the indirect or the so called “cut-and-paste” approach. The advantage of this approach is that one takes the best elements of a variety of similar curricula and puts them together to form another one or to form a new one.

A third approach, which is also the indirect approach, employs the design of a program based on a combination of past educational and life experiences. As it can be seen above, all of the indirect approaches provide useful information, yet they are not finely tuned to deal with the students’ present and future roles/needs. So, what is needed or required is the “DIRECT” approach. This is an approach that ensures that relevant content that is in tune with the industrial/technological reality of the time is included. Suggestively supporting this view O’Brien (2008) said that the immediate and future needs of the students must be analyzed to determine the areas of competences they need in order to acquire such skills. As both students and societal needs must be analyzed to determine the skills and capabilities needed by students, that is relevant to such societal needs and problem resolution. Frynier (1973) in his work suggested that a curriculum developer should also analyze what knowledge, skills and attitudes, as well as individual needs are required in order to maintain the standards, and by so doing, optimize themselves and society at large.

To support the above, it should be noted straightway that the trend of adopting either or both the “REAL TASK” or “COMPETENCY” based types of curriculum development, does not have a “hard and fast rule”. In order to provide information the “TASK-BASED” curriculum development requires the synthesis of the task, analysis and research by psychologists, educators. A holistic approach to the curriculum designed is used on a large scale.

Halfin (1975) further attests to the fact that the “TASK-BASED” curriculum development as its first step “is aimed at identifying the life roles to which the curriculum will be directed i.e. the present and future roles of students are considered. The specific roles and competencies within these roles that are relevant to the curriculum are clearly highlighted”. In the process of developing the curriculum the developer must identify specific roles, and these roles are broken down to more specific elements called TASKS. A task therefore could be said to be the smallest unit of activity within a role. This task should involve activity, time, and purpose in relation to the role and should culminate with a logical ending point. Sources of information for identifying tasks may include, the developer’s own personal experiences, or that of persons who

are knowledgeable or competent in each of the life roles that are selected. Literature on the various roles could be used. If the life roles are emerging ones, stimulating the roles may be of help. Tasks so identified should be stated in action form.

It is also vital to consider the next step, that is to “VALIDATE TASKS”. This means to check the analysis process carried out in the previous stages of development. It involves several techniques, for example, the survey of the actual person’s real life role, or observation of the person carrying out such roles. This is to determine if the tasks identified are appropriate. Simulation could also be of use. Others stages still worth mentioning include determining such tasks and their viability, as well as the need to be included in the curriculum. There is also the detailing of tasks. It implies, identifying the steps required for performing each task, the sequences for achieving the tasks, the critical points to be encountered in completing such tasks, and the attitudes needed for successful completion. The cognitive processes, such as problem-solving, analysis and evaluation should be identified and linked with the appropriate steps. Manipulative skills and knowledge also need to be identified. It is also very necessary to design the behavioural objectives such as what the person should be able to do, and under what conditions they should be carried out, what quality of the performance is expected and so on and so forth (Halpin 1976). Finally the course program should be designed. First and foremost its design should be based on turning to account all the tasks, data and behavioural objectives. In the long run it is important to properly evaluate the resultant curriculum. This relates to the prior steps taken in the developmental process. The evaluation information should be collected as one progresses through the developmental processes. Consequently a follow-up of the impact of the course which was developed is easy to determine. The strengths and weaknesses of such an endeavour and the ensuing curriculum can be evinced.

Therefore, the ‘secret’ in the problem of teaching courses for industry and technology is closely related to “what to teach”. This is relevant and uniquely necessary if the needs and wants of the society are to be met. As for what is taught as subject content, this must be related to the functional requirements of modern day living which are needed for establishing the parameters that will ensure meaningful economic development brought about by constantly changing priorities, planning and the decision-making process.

In the same context “how to teach” what is to be taught must also be viewed as a prime professional responsibility that searches for maximum involvement of the individual learners and their responses to the relevant content of the curriculum. Professional expertise and experience on the part of the educator are required. They should be able to integrate the sociological, political, technological, economic and psychological factors which affect and motivate society to develop instructional materials and teaching models that would suit any given ideal society or situation.

Consequently what is taught or shared and learnt in the process would become concrete through the practical demonstration of the effectiveness of such an integrated process in the teacher-learner situation. This could be interpreted in the form of functional, potentially viable working models or prototypes both for further training and for the manufacturing industry as a whole.

CONCLUSION

The issue of the approaches for the development of a curriculum for general education in conjunction with its use, adaptation and applications in various fields in general, and in visual arts and design in particular, has always been thorny since the beginning of education and our relationship with the environment (Obasuyi 2004).

More issues that readily come to mind are those of the need, relevance and role of the subject matter, of timing and of how stringent and suitable these needs are for society. Others problems are generated by issues such as skills acquisition, academic knowledge and the power to function effectively in various fields of specialization and in all other areas of professional endeavour. All these and more have always kept busy the minds of educators and curriculum developers over time.

With this scenario and the urgent need for economic self-reliance in mind, we should bring forth the need for general reappraisal of the educational curriculum objectives as far as the Visual Arts and Design programmes in tertiary institutions, are concerned. All this considered, we find it appropriate to point out to the following issues:

- curriculum development is not just about doing something differently, but about doing something based on an agreed set of social needs, on their function and relevance which are based on a specific purpose and objective.
- this need calls for, and requires experts who are highly specialised in this field and have a vast knowledge of the need to know more about change and the change process.
- Three vital elements of any curriculum development program must be highlighted:
 - the content of the discipline
 - the societal framework which the program would function
 - the personal needs component of the given discipline

Be that as it may various studies have revealed that there is a need to harmonise the “teaching” with the “preaching” and that there exists a serious gap between theory and practice on the one hand, and the need and resolution to solve existing problems on the other.

To make a long story short, and given all of the aforestated reasons, the time has come to focus on the unique basis of the conceptual framework and core of the visual arts and design disciplines. They are about skills acquisition, education, technology and industry. This is contextualized by a broad based reservoir of concepts, principles and the unifying themes of the “science of efficient human action or behaviour” by which technology drives industry, which in its turn has industrialised and revolutionized the way we think and do things. The world has never been the same again ever since the invention and design of the “WHEEL”.

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RELEVANTNOST KURIKULUMA VIZUELNIH UMETNOSTI I DIZAJNA U OBRAZOVANJU I PRAKSI

Rad ispituje problem konteksta, uloge i relevantnosti vizuelnih umetnosti i dizajna kao discipline naspram konteksta planiranja i razvoja održivog i jasnog nastavnog plana i programa koji je u središtu pažnje i razmatranja među profesionalcima i pedagozima tokom poslednjih nekoliko godina. Uloga, kontekst i relevantnost najbolje se mogu ilustrovati njihovom istaknutošću u okvirima metodološko-tehnoloških sadržaja i njihovim implikacijama na industrijskom polju. Ovo se zasniva na preduzetim radnjama, primenjenim principima i svrsi s obzirom na razmatrane okolnosti. U radu je utvrđeno da se kontekst odnosi na razmatranje koje obuhvata upotrebu određenog formata jezika koji će na kraju odrediti tumačenje takvog jezika / predmeta koji se razmatra. Osim toga, u pogledu pitanja relevantnosti misli se na relevantnost koja podrazumeva ili označava odgovarajuću potrebu i hitnost razvijanja jednog artikulisanog nastavnog plana i programa za disciplinu kao što su vizuelne umetnosti i dizajn. Rad preporučuje potrebu za usklađivanjem „nastave” sa „onim što se predaje” (tj. sadržaja) i „predavanjima” ili „teorijom”, jer postoji ozbiljan raskorak između teorije i prakse. U radu je naglašena potreba za pristrasnošću prema jedinstvenom konceptualnom okviru koji se odnosi na tehnologiju, trgovinu i pogonsku industriju.

Ključne reči: *relevantnost, kontekstualnost, nastavni plan i program zasnovan na zadacima, nastavni plan i program zasnovan na kompetencijama, indirektni/direktni pristupi*