

# DRAWING AS AN INSTRUMENT OF PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE IN VISUAL ARTS: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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## ABSTRACT

The drawing aspect of art programmes in many institutions of higher learning nationwide remains an area of academic phobia for some students. It seems to threaten students confidence and wears off their Grade Point Average GPA build-up. Several rounds of conversational engagements with some students leave a palpable evidence of loathsomeness towards drawing classes. Many of these students, in their more sober moments, confide in their peers, or less often, in their 'senior friends' who are the lecturers. This paper looks into the above scenario and tries to locate the foundational reasons for this fear, and in that rubble, find the remote and immediate causes. It also tries to provide a string of formulae possibilities which, hopefully, will lead the affected students into freedom. It is hoped that this paper will provide a basis for an all-round solution to drawing problems, whether created by students, parents or the teachers themselves. A diligent consideration of the issues raised here is suggested for all drawing stakeholders.

**KEY WORDS: Drawing; Artistic Endowment; Pedagogic Leakage; Art Teachers.**

## INTRODUCTION

When actions are initiated, reactions tend to invariably follow. Thus, when reactions appear it becomes natural to research into the likely actions that precipitated these reactions.

Pictorial renditions, most of which are known as drawings have stood out as one of the most dreaded areas of the visual arts for some students. Lecturers in this area have also made their input as to how difficult it is for them to impart this skill into their students.

This paper has looked into the background of this problem and come up with some likely causes of this scenario. It has dared to locate some early actions whose ripples have followed students up to this point. Some causes have been traced to the parents' disregard for children's individual creative endowments. They seem to have always allowed their 'doctor' and 'lawyer' mentality to disfigure and stifle any flare for artistic culture blossoming inside their wards.

The paper also looked at the question of numerical insufficiency or total absence of art teachers in the secondary schools through which these students passed.

One of the unpopular but possible contributors to drawing difficulties also speculated in this paper is the question of the lecturers' depth of drawing expertise. The paper traces this to the complete erosion of demonstration sessions where students will watch their lecturers perform the drawing act. It was also argued that this lack of sure-footedness gives rise to lack of classroom control by the affected lecturers and breaches the ethics of objective assessment. These, and other lapses in artistic and pedagogic procedures in drawing were also considered.

The authors, however, put forward suggestions that would help, not just the suffering students and the parents, but also the lecturers.

## Beyond the Kindergatten

The overall parental attitude to art in Nigeria raises a barrier against the love and development of creative instincts in the young minds of children. As early as the post-kindergatten age of between three and four years, verbal redirection of their children' careers begin in earnest. These unconsciously persuade their listeners in particular directions. The 'doctor' and 'lawyer' mentality asserts itself and disfigure the linear clarity of creative and artistic endowments. Engineering and architecture, another duo of preferred disciplines, stand by to welcome those who, by one reason or the other, fail to be persuaded into medicine and law.

In such homes, all other materials and facilities are usually in place except drawing books, which are not on the book shelves, pencils and crayons which are not in the drawers. By this approach, art and its literacy are systematically starved of attention and ultimately are allowed to die. Children from such homes grow up loathing drawing and other artistic manifestations connected with it. They have been repeatedly and harshly reminded that they were sent to school to read and NOT to draw. Living in the shadow of this art/drawing 'hatred', their victims walk into their future ill-equipped and disadvantaged.

## Art Teachers and the Availability Question

Prior to the higher institution level, art teachers remain 'hot cakes' anywhere they are found. The proportion of available art teachers to the number of

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schools or students keeps widening. One does not look far before finding answers to the availability question. The childhood discouragement of the art career places that field of study at a disadvantage. At the secondary school stage, a negligible percentage of the school population offers art at the Junior Secondary School Level, worse still at the senior secondary school. This scenario encourages principals of schools to drop art at the examination levels. Many schools do not even see any art master to hire. This results in the fact that even those who have a flare for art, those who are naturally talented are also denied access to the course.

### **Choice of Career in the Field of Visual Arts**

The conditions for admission to pursue art career in most of the Nigerian Universities remain stringent. Basic qualifications include making a minimum of five 'credits' at the WAEC level. It is believed, however, that if art teachers are available at the Senior Secondary Schools, a lot more students will take the requisite examinations. This will increase the chances of many making the minimum of the required 'credit level'.

The Visual Arts discipline is made up of five areas: Sculpture, Painting, Ceramics, Graphics and Textiles. After a four-year training, graduates are expected to have majored in any of these five areas. "Unlike the street artists", who just start sculpting or painting or even engaging in textile design and activities, specializing students are usually subjected to mandatory general departmental courses. One of such general courses which run from the very first year though the fourth is drawing.

### **Drawing as a Subject**

The drawing practice in higher institutions of learning stretches from the rudimentary to the more sophisticated. It encapsulates the drawing of living and non-living things basically. The categorization for the drawing courses in some institutions of higher learning include:

- i. Basic Drawing I & II
- ii. Still Life
- iii. Draughtsmanship
- iv. Advanced Drawing I & II
- v. Figure Drawing

The drawing contact areas may even increase, depending on the nature of a given programme and under such situations one may be inclined to say that it is extravagant. This is not so because drawing is the basic take-off point for any of the five areas of Visual Arts. When one is aspiring to be a painter, ceramist, textile designer or a graphic artist, drawing remains the common denominator. It is almost an established fact, that once one can correctly render one's drawing, the rest becomes a walk-over or at least easier. It is noteworthy that even in the areas of sciences, Architecture, Engineering; all designs are drawing-based.

### **Recipe for Increased Enrolment: The Cross River University of Technology as a Case Study.**

The Cross River University of Technology has worked out various strategies to fight the art teacher shortage question. It has encouraged students who pass the JAMB requirements for University admission with a strong flare for art/drawing to apply to the Visual Arts

and Technology Department of its University. In addition to this category, those who are JAMB-qualified but are marginally unable to secure admissions in their first choice departments and with a natural inclination for art and drawing are also eligible for admission into the Department of Visual Arts. It is worthy of mention that this category of in-take makes up a smaller percentage of the student population.

This policy is as bold as it is strategic. The Visual Arts Department which used to record admissions of about fifteen to twenty students now record between sixty and upwards of one hundred. The idea is that in about five years, graduates of the institution should be able to feed the schools in Cross River State at the Junior and Senior Secondary School levels.

Drawing, as a subject, has consistently constituted a challenge to many students of the Visual Arts Department. Many of the students interviewed said they never drew nor took lessons in drawing in their secondary schools. Drawing days, according to them are usually bad days for some of them. Meanwhile Uzoagba (1982) describes drawing as a graphic language by which interpretations can be made. He goes ahead to say that without drawing, art has no expression. It is relevance of drawing in art professionalism that the Cross River University of Technology stresses in her programmes.

Some students confessed they never applied to study art in the university but found their names on the list for it. For such, that was a sound alibi for not doing well in the area. Nevertheless, such excuses have not solved the problem of drawing. Some said their parents, especially fathers, have stopped paying their school fees because they have enrolled to study Visual Arts. Doing badly in drawing, therefore, becomes a double burden and threat for such students.

Several classes of troubled students exist. Apart from the already mentioned classes, some do not have a generalized difficulty in the area of drawing, Complex drawing problems such as foreshortening and perspective rendition trouble them. Some others, shading and proportion constitute their troubled areas of drawing. Many excel in the pictorial rendition of found objects while others are more at home with life drawings. There are those who are not afraid of any drawing grade, as long as it is not an 'F'. These and more, make up a maze of trouble areas ravaging the young students, boys and girls.

### **Lifting the Drawing Burden**

Solving the admission and numerical problem does not take care of all the areas of need. This paper, however, has taken up the drawing issue to properly anchor the students. According to Mittler and Howze (1995): To draw, the artist moves a pointed instrument such as a pen, pencil, crayon, or brush over a smooth surface, leaving works. The generally accepted name for these marks is line. Line is probably the oldest, and certainly the most direct, means of visual communication. It is also the main element of drawing, although other elements such as value, shape and texture – are also important.

The drawing taught in the Department of Visual Arts and Technology is actually the amalgamation of the above-mentioned elements. To properly anchor the burden and to present it in its light and depth, it

becomes compulsive to look at some facts. Some drawing grades are hereby presented.

The choice of the sampling groups was made to include the first year students and those who have spent, at least, one full academic year in the University learning drawing along with other courses. These are the second years. Another group were the third years who have one more year to put in before graduation.

### Courses Investigated and Grades

1. Basic Drawing, (VAT 1201): Second Semester: 2008/009 Session (First year course).

| Class          | No in Class | Grades/No that scored them |    |    |    |    |   |
|----------------|-------------|----------------------------|----|----|----|----|---|
|                |             | A                          | B  | C  | D  | E  | F |
| a. First year  | 63          | 9                          | 12 | 26 | 9  | 4  | 3 |
| b. Second year | 42          | -                          | -  | 17 | 9  | 14 | 2 |
| c. Third year  | 63          | 1                          | 8  | 35 | 10 | 6  | 3 |

From the data above, the first year students who scored "Good" grades, (A+B) are 9+12 = 21 which constitute 33.3% of the class numerical strength while 66.6% made "Bad" grades. For the second year, there was no "Good" student as none made either A or B, in which case 100%, (all the 42 students), scored "Bad" grades. In the third year stream, 9 students qualified as the "Good" students in terms of marks as they made A and B's. Thirty-three, (33), in that class made other grades apart from "Good". Respectively, this represents 21.4% and 78.6%.

Having listed many of the drawing problems, the grades and some of their sources, it is only expedient to try to chart a pathway out of the 'woods'. Since the students must pass this subject as a condition to graduating, a way ought to be sought whereby the burden must be lifted. The above notwithstanding, Tababi (1979) says "drawing is the appreciation of the inner mind best appreciated through its graphic form".

Many questions may arise as to how to get round the problem. One of such possibilities may be students' inability to concentrate, not as a group, but as individuals. Another possibility is that of the dysfunctionality of drawing pedagogy. For drawing, both lecturers and students must go through the process of teaching and learning.

This factor of pedagogic leakage has to do with the lecturers' attitude and the methodology of teaching. The lecturers in the Visual Arts and Technology have maintained a high level of uprightness with their students, committing their energy to doing their best. Since the under listed vices and wrong-doing continue to infect the institutions of higher learning, it becomes expedient to alert every stakeholder to the potential danger inherent in them. Most implicated are:

- Teaching by 'remote control'
- Lack of the necessary level of expertise
- Absence of demonstration sessions
- Evasive and abusive teaching
- Victimization and subjective assessment
- Bribery and gratification (sorting)
- Students/facility ratio

#### a. Teaching by 'remote control'

This is a situation where lecturers stay away from their lectures and use phones to tell the students

- Figure Drawing, (VAT 2201): Second Semester: 2008/2009 Session (Second year course).
- Draughtsmanship, (VAT 3161): First Semester : 2008/2009 Session, (Third year course).

Before giving the figures, the authors wish to state that in many Institutions of higher learning, including the Cross River University of Technology, grades A-F are usually classified under too broad areas; A - B as "Good" while C - F are graded as "Bad".

what assignment to do. This method of teaching does not provide any platform for student/lecturer interaction, neither will it inform on the level of comprehension.

#### b. Lack of the necessary level of expertise

Sometimes some teachers (lecturers), due to one reason or the other fail to measure up to the expected expertise threshold. Either they were brought up under substandard academic environment, or they have failed to keep step with developments in their areas.

#### c. Absence of demonstration sessions

When teachers are not equipped with the mastery of their area, demonstration sessions are weeded out their teaching programmes. Semester after semester, students are robbed of the great benefit of watching their 'master' lead by example.

In subjects like drawing, and in fact, in all the five areas of Visual Arts, demonstration while the students watch remains the only undercurrent of proper and expedited learning. The demonstration factor instills fear in the heart of such lecturers, making them all the more less willing to draw in the open, not to talk of doing that in front of their students.

The above picture is a major fracture in the structure of learning. Students' drawing sheets, at least some of them, should bear enough lecturers' corrective drawing from where the learners source inspirations.

#### d. Evasive and abusive teaching

The absence of personal professional confidences in area of teaching generates evasiveness. Whatever seems to expose that lack of confidence is likely earn abusive responses. Such situations compel students to keep their sincere questions to themselves or at best seek peer solutions, whether right or wrong.

#### e. Victimization and Subjective assessment

When lecturers lack expertise in some areas of the profession, they are usually quite impatient and irritable. They tend to openly or covertly resist exposure. Bright students who 'innocently' tread that path directly

or indirectly are subjectively assessed to pay them 'in their own coins'.

f. **Bribery and Gratification (Sorting)**

For good class or classroom management, personal discipline on the part of the lecturers play a central role where this is lacking, teaching suffers. Bribery and gratification, popularly known as "sorting" seems to be the accepted method to excellence, but no. The intentional exploration of students' drawing – based weaknesses, either on cash or kind or by unethical relationship encourages the erosion of proper assessment standard and classroom control. Engaging in this practice is to put at advantage those who have loose conscience who see no wrong in it so long as they make their marks. On the contrary, those who resist it on the grounds of academic and ethical impropriety keep being victimized. The Cross River University of Technology, however, has set up a far-reaching structure against such victimization practices against students. Every organ or level of administration is compelled to always remind its membership of the University's anti-victimization posture. This has helped, in no small way, to keep all parties on their toes.

g. For students/facility ratio, not much ought to be expected by the present students population and the number of lecturers teaching drawing. In other words, space constraint and staff/students ratio contribute to drawing leakages.

**CONCLUSION**

The drawing difficulties whose seeds were planted long ago keep manifesting on current academic platforms. The sufferers of such situations, as presented by this paper, may not have been the sole planters of these worry seeds, but hey suffer it anyhow.

The paper is instructive on giving children or wards an impersonal exposure to areas of possible career choices to nip compulsive directions from the bud. Not all who are exposed to early drawing and creative exercises end up being artists. This is all the more necessary as even sciences and other professional areas are fraught with free-hand, technical and design drawings. After all, no discipline has any advantage over the other as all are inter-dependent

servicing the social area under its jurisdiction. In this inter-dependency, art perhaps ranks first due to its inter-disciplinary mobility even into the sciences.

Personal discipline and upgrading of professional practice ought to be the aspiration of every lecturer, not just in the drawing and drawing-based sectors of the visual arts. The sub-heads treated along the dysfunctionality of pedagogy should be addressed seriously to enhance proper teaching and create the appropriate psychological and physical environment for students' learning. By this, confidence will be built in the students as they watch their lecturers make drawing demonstrations for the benefit of all. It is only then that they will be moved to aspire to draw like their lecturers. Students must be encouraged to work harder in these drawing classes in order to improve their lot and score higher marks which will amend the current performance profile. In this way, the fear and the recurrent threat embedded in those hearts will be vitiated, after all drawing is recording what the eyes see. This is what is being taught in our drawing programmes in this University.

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