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THE CREATIVE ARTS PEDAGOGY AS A DEVELOPMENTAL TOOL FOR STUDENT-TEACHERS IN GHANA'S COLLEGES OF EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF GBEWAA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

Creative Arts education in Ghanaian Colleges of Education has not received the recognition it deserves due to societal perceptions that associate it solely with individuals deemed naturally talented. This misconception has contributed to a decline in student interest and institutional support, particularly following its merger with Physical Education in the curriculum. Additionally, inadequate structures and resources hinder the effective implementation of creative arts education, especially at Gbewaa College of Education. This study, therefore, examined the role of Creative Arts pedagogy in the professional development of student teachers, comparing those enrolled in Creative Arts courses with their counterparts from other disciplines during their teaching practice. Data were gathered through interviews and classroom teaching observations using a qualitative research approach. A sample of 20 respondents was drawn from both Creative Arts and Non-Creative Arts student teachers using a quota sampling technique; the results provided insights into the impact of Creative Arts courses on the teaching skills of the student teachers during their teaching practice. It was revealed that Creative Arts courses enhance student teachers' creative and problem-solving abilities, adaptability, and capacity for differentiated learning, which are key components of Ghana's inclusivity policy in education. The study recommended the need for curriculum planners to intensify the place of Creative Arts in the Curriculum by making it compulsory for all level 100s in the Colleges of Education in Ghana,

and also called for institutional support and resource allocation to strengthen Creative Arts pedagogy in Gbewaa College of Education.

Keywords: Creative Arts, pedagogy, inclusivity, Gbewaa, teacher development

1. INTRODUCTION

Looking around the world, the creative arts are a vital part of our culture and society, which exist in many formal and informal settings. In the ever-evolving field of education, teachers must continuously adapt to new pedagogical approaches, diverse student needs, and technological advancements. The creative arts, including music, drama, visual arts, and dance, play a crucial role in fostering dynamic educators who are innovative, empathetic, and effective in the classroom. Exposure to the arts enhances teaching skills by promoting creativity, emotional intelligence, and adaptability (Winner et al., 2013). The creative arts department in the Colleges of Education in Ghana has two units, which are the Performing Arts and the Visual Arts. The courses in the department and the interest of study in the college under these units have been through various challenges due to misconceptions and biases. In a nutshell, the creative arts develop the student-teacher creatively and holistically for the career ahead of them. Creative arts play a crucial role in the development of children and adolescents, fostering creativity and encouraging imagination, innovation, and self-expression (Craft, 2002). In the aspect of critical thinking, it develops problem-solving skills, analysis, and evaluation (Hetland & Winner, 2001).

The creative arts enhance verbal and non-verbal communication skills (DeNora, 2000). Emotional intelligence: Developing self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation (Goleman, 1995). Cultural awareness: Exploring diverse perspectives, traditions, and values (Banks, 2004). The study investigated the teaching and learning of the creative arts in Gbewaa College of Education and ascertained how it develops student teachers' creative abilities for the teaching profession during their teaching practice at level 400. The rationale behind the new curriculum for basic schools seeks to develop students in the 3Hs, that is, the Head (cognitive), the Heart (affective), and the Hand (psychomotor). This therefore supports Gardner's multiple intelligences theory that fosters holistic education. In light of this, the creative arts and non-creative arts students were studied to ascertain how the creative arts disciplines develop student teachers for the teaching profession.

The creative arts department at the college is currently confronted with numerous obstacles, including misconceptions and biases, which have a significant impact on the number of students who enrol in the department for the elective courses. Society's perceptions that Creative Arts education is exclusively for naturally talented individuals have prevented it from receiving the recognition it merits in Ghanaian colleges of education. This misconception has been a contributing factor to a decrease in student interest and institutional support, particularly in the aftermath of its integration into the curriculum with physical education called Physical Education, Music, and Dance (PEMD). Furthermore, the implementation of Creative Arts education is impeded by insufficient resources and structures, particularly at Gbewaa College of Education. Bamford (2006) discovered that the majority of educators believed that

Creative Arts education is exclusively for gifted students. Hetland and Winner (2001) conducted a study that demonstrated that students from low-income backgrounds were less likely to have access to arts education, thereby perpetuating the misconception that the arts are exclusively for exceptional people. For this and numerous other reasons, this appears to diminish the attention, intensity, relevance, and benefit that students receive during their first year of college education.

The creative arts course has played a significant role in the creative development of the student teacher in a variety of creative arts disciplines, including music, dance, drama, and visual arts, despite the numerous challenges it has faced over the years. These creative abilities assist student-teachers in varying their teaching methodologies and teaching approaches (differentiated learning). A significant number of student teachers demonstrate little interest in the subject matter due to the misconceptions and inadequate attention given to the course. This study, therefore, compared Creative Arts students to non-creative arts students of Gbewaa College of Education. During the macro teaching practice in the basic schools, the researcher examined the impact of creative arts pedagogy on the teaching skills of the Creative Arts students to ascertain how it helps improve their profession as teachers, as compared to the non-creative arts students. I explored how Creative Arts pedagogy in Gbewaa College of Education helps Student-Teachers to develop differentiated skills and competence for effective teaching and learning. The study revealed the various ways creative arts help develop students' creative abilities in differentiated learning and approaches to problem solving, and quashed the misconceptions and biases of the creative arts. It further informed curriculum planners on the relevance and the need to intensify its place in the curriculum.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Creative Arts and Student Development

According to the Ministry of Education, Ghana (2019), the Creative Arts inculcate in the learner the basic knowledge and understanding of diverse cultures, strong logical competencies, and a range of comprehensive communication and interpersonal skills. They further added that Learners are to become critical thinkers and problem solvers as a result of going through the creative arts courses. Their self-esteem and sense of emotional intelligence are also improved as they engage in tasks that require intuitive, emotional, holistic, nonverbal, and visual-spatial methods for processing ideas and issues. Therefore, the study of Creative Arts and Design will:

1. develop learners to have creative and innovative skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, collaborative and communicative skills, ideas for designing, making, and responding to artistic processes and products. This therefore ascertains the fact that to imbue problem-solving, critical thinking, and innovative skills in Student-Teachers, they must be taken through the Creative Arts courses thoroughly to build their competence in creative skills and problem-solving skills for teaching in our pre-tertiary Schools. Craft (2002) emphasises the importance of creativity in education, encouraging teachers to adopt innovative approaches. She promotes the integration of the arts and creative activities into various subjects, recognising the value of the arts in enhancing learning and engagement.

2.2 Active Learning Methods

Active learning is a student-centered approach in which the learning task is placed upon the student, often working in collaboration with classmates. In active learning, teachers are facilitators rather than one-way providers of information. Through class discussion, problem solving, cooperative learning, and writing exercises (graded and ungraded), facts are presented to students. It is a multi-directional learning experience in which learning occurs in a teacher-to-student, student-to-teacher, and student-to-student manner (Morale, 2000). Other examples of active learning techniques include role-playing, case studies, group projects, think-pair-share, peer teaching, debates, Just-in-Time Teaching, and short demonstrations followed by class discussion.

2.3 Differentiated Learning in the Classroom

Differentiation is a process by which differences (learning styles, interests, and readiness to learn) between learners are accommodated so that all learners in a group have the best chance of learning. Differentiation could be by content, tasks, questions, outcome, groupings, and support. Differentiation as a way of ensuring each learner benefits adequately from the delivery of the curriculum can be achieved in the classroom through (i) Task, (ii) Support from the Guidance and Counselling Unit, and (iii) Learning outcomes. Differentiation by task involves teachers setting different tasks for learners of different abilities. For example, in sketching the plan and shape of their classroom, some learners could be made to sketch with freehand, while others would be made to trace the outline of the plan. Differentiation by support involves the teacher giving needed support and referring weak learners to the Guidance and Counselling Unit for academic support. Differentiation by outcome involves the teacher allowing learners to respond at different levels. Weaker learners are allowed more time for complicated tasks (Ministry of Education, 2019). Dewey (1916) posited that learning should be experientially done with active engagement of students with real materials, not done through passive listening to lectures. He outlined six learning approaches, which are experiential learning, student-centered learning, problem-based learning, interdisciplinary Curriculum, Social interaction and Teacher as facilitator. Dewey's teaching methods prioritise active engagement, critical thinking, practical application, and preparing students for real-world challenges.

3. Methodology

The research employed the qualitative method for this study, for the researcher to be able to have an in-depth understanding of the situation. A case study was designed to give full accounts and enhanced details of the impact of the creative arts courses on student-teachers in Gbewaa College of Education. Creswell (2013) stated that qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. He further opined that the process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, with data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. In this instance, and with conformity to Creswell's assertion, the qualitative approach was used for this study. The population for the study was the level 400 Creative Arts students and non-creative arts students of Gbewaa College of Education. The Quota Sampling technique was used for the level four hundred (400) Creative Arts students

and non-creative arts students. The total number of participants selected for the study was twenty (20). The sample procedure that was used for the study was to select ten (10) participants from each group of the students, which was ten (10) from Creative Arts students and ten (10) from non-creative Arts students, to give a fair representation of participants from each group. The Creative Arts students are made up of five (5) Primary Specialism Student-Teachers and five (5) Junior High Specialism Student-Teachers, which adds up to ten (10) participants. The Non-Creative Arts Students are all Junior High Specialism Student Teachers who don't offer any of the Creative Arts disciplines, and ten (10) of them were also selected. In total, the sample size of participants for the study was twenty (20). The data collection instruments that were used for the study were observations and unstructured interviews. Student-Teachers were observed while teaching during their teaching practice in the basic schools within the Pusiga area. Unstructured interviews were used after the teaching to inquire why certain decisions and approaches were employed during their teaching. The data gathered for the study were analysed thematically using the teaching practice assessment and evaluation form. All student-teachers were assessed based on these teaching standards, and to be able to assess and evaluate them equally without any biases, the assessment form was appropriate for that task. Thematic analysis was done using the five (5) sections of the evaluation form for the teaching practice. These are: 1, lesson planning, 2, introduction to a lesson, 3, lesson development, 4, lesson closure, and 5, mode of assessment.

4. Discussions of Findings

The findings for the study were categorised under the Creative Arts Students and Non-Creative Arts Students according to the standard of the evaluation form for the teaching practice.

Table I: Findings from participants

Creative Arts Students	Non-Creative Arts Students
Relevant TLMs were created by all participants who were Creative Arts students and used to aid their teaching	Only two out of the 10 participants created relevant TLMs and also used them appropriately
Captivating starter; songs, role-play, story-telling, musical games, videos, drama, riddles, and field trips that link to the lesson	Only reviewed relevant previous knowledge as the starter.
Activity-based teaching, with different learning approaches	Only two participants did activity-based teaching. They focus more on the explanation and definition of concepts
An effective summary and high contributions to the lesson	Ineffective Summary and contributions to the lesson were low
Used different assessment modes (Authentic assessment) with effective questioning (open-ended and closed-ended questions)	Used one assessment mode with weak questioning skills. used only closed-ended questions

All the creative Arts Student-Teachers used the learner-centered Method	Only two out of the 10 student-teachers use the Learner-centered Method
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The discussions of the study were done based on the five themes generated from the teaching practice evaluation form.

4.1 Lesson Planning

It was evident in the study that all the Participants prepared a lesson plan for their teaching practice. The study, however, revealed that all the lesson plans of the Creative Arts students had different forms of relevant TLMs prepared by themselves attached to the lesson plan, as compared to only two of the non-creative Arts students who had TLMs that were relevant to the topic they taught for the day. This underpins the assertion by Craft (2002) that the creative arts disciplines foster creativity, encouraging imagination, innovation, and self-expression in students. Some of the non-creative arts students during the interview section remarked that their topics didn't need TLMs, but upon deep engagement with them on what TLMs were, they realised they didn't factor in some of the resources that would enhance their teaching. The creative arts students, upon intense engagement with why certain TLMs were attached to the lesson plan, were able to give enough reasons and explain how they facilitate teaching.

4.2 Lesson Introduction

All the creative arts Student-Teachers had a very captivating starter they used to introduce the lessons, examples, songs, role-play, Ananse story, drawings, carved items, drama and so on, while the non-creative arts students didn't see the need for such starters and only reviewed the students' previous knowledge of the new lesson. The situation in the classroom of the creative arts students-teachers points out to the fact that they are familiar with the essence of these activities. The fact that they engaged in most of these activities during their school programme makes it very easy to keep the students active and attentive throughout their lessons. I asked most of the non-creative arts students why they only reviewed the previous knowledge rather than engaging the students in interesting starters that would attract their attention for the lesson. One non-creative Arts student said:

I don't know any song or game that I will use as a starter, because what I am about to teach is not about songs or games, so I only have to review their previous knowledge on what they previously learnt, so that I can continue from there to build up on my new topic.

Upon some discussion with the participants, I realised that most of the Non-Creative Arts Students don't really understand the purpose of the starter and also have difficulties in being creative to assimilate their lessons into interesting and attractive activities. Richard-Amato (2003) defines the affective state as a learner's attitudes, motivation, anxiety levels, acculturation, personality, and feelings of community. Music seems to be very beneficial in this area, as it can increase joy and confidence while lowering anxiety. Research into the affective impacts of music examines how different types of music can affect listeners' emotional states.

Pupils in the lessons of the Creative Arts Student-Teachers classroom were very active and attentive due to the engagement of the Pupils in some of these activities.

4.3 Lesson Development

The lesson development by the creative arts students revealed a systematic approach to teaching with different activities that reinforce differentiated learning. Their lessons were broken into activities 1,2, and 3 with different learning approaches, while the non-creative arts students just focused on explanations and definitions of concepts to their students. Ministry of Education (2019) defines differentiated learning as content, tasks, questions, outcomes, groupings, and support. Differentiation as a way of ensuring each learner benefits adequately from the delivery of the curriculum in the classroom through (i) Task, (ii) Support from the Guidance, Counselling Unit, and (iii) Learning outcomes. Per the definition of differentiated learning, the study was able to establish the fact that the Creative Arts Student-Teachers were doing something right, and this is because various activities and approaches to learning were embedded in their lessons during their teaching. One Creative Arts student-teacher said this:

I am very aware that to make your lesson attractive and interesting for learners, you must go beyond the normal way of teaching by trying to engage your learners in various activities with learning aids that will attract their attention throughout the lesson. Because some of these activities were studied during our Creative Arts lessons in the College, it becomes easy for us to incorporate them into our lessons.

4.4 Lesson Closure

The study revealed that the lesson closure for the Creative Arts students saw a summary and major contribution to the lesson by the learners themselves, while the Non-Creative Arts Student-Teachers found it difficult to get a full contribution from learners in their classroom.

4.5 Assessment

The Creative Arts Student-Teachers used different assessment modes due to the variation in teaching approaches, while the majority of the Non-Creative Arts Student-Teachers used one mode of assessment, which was closed-ended questions. Constructivist assessments, such as portfolios, peer reviews, and performance reflections, provide a more holistic view of student progress (Hickey, 2009). Authentic assessments provide a more accurate picture of student learning. Authentic assessments can motivate students to engage more deeply with learning and also prepare students for real-world challenges and applications (Wiggins, 1998). The study revealed that all the Creative Arts Student-Teachers employed the Authentic assessment method for their lesson, while only a few of the non-creative arts student-teachers did that. The Creative Arts Student-Teachers engaged the students with open-ended questions that reinforce critical thinking and collaborative learning, which also keeps every student active and part of the learning in the classroom

5. Conclusion

This study examined the impact of Creative Arts courses on Student-Teachers at Gbewaa College of Education, focusing on their creative development and professional preparedness. The findings demonstrate that Creative Arts courses significantly enhance student-teachers' instructional competence by promoting learner-centred pedagogies and the use of differentiated teaching strategies to address diverse classroom needs. Through the analysis of teaching practice assessment records, the study compared the teaching skills of Creative Arts and Non-Creative Arts student-teachers, revealing that those exposed to Creative Arts training consistently demonstrated stronger teaching methodologies, regardless of their subject specialisation. The results indicate that Creative Arts disciplines play a crucial role in developing essential professional teaching skills, including creativity, adaptability, effective classroom engagement, and methodological flexibility. These competencies are vital for effective teaching and align with contemporary educational demands that emphasise inclusive and learner-responsive instruction. Based on the findings, the study recommends that curriculum planners strengthen the position of Creative Arts within Colleges of Education by making such courses compulsory, particularly for first-year students, to enhance creative and pedagogical skills early in teacher training. It further recommends that the management of Gbewaa College of Education increase institutional support for Creative Arts by providing adequate resources and instructional materials. Finally, the study calls for further research across other teacher education institutions to determine the generalisability of the findings beyond the Gbewaa College of Education.

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