

Painting: A Visual Symbol for Effective Teaching

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Abstract

The quest to bring about learning is an integral part of education of the child; a lot of avenues have been explored seeking for possible ways of sustaining retention of learnt materials. However, enough attention has not been given to painting as instructional material for child education. Essentially, this research work is geared towards revealing to the classroom teacher or any other educationist the place of painting as a visual symbol for effective teaching. The study determined and highlighted the contributions of art generally to child education and the influence of painting in particular to teaching and learning of the child. It also reviewed some literatures of authors who had worked in the related area previously. The study also discussed step by step methods applied in the execution of the practical projects and as well presented an in depth analysis of practical display of the easel painting as an example of instructional material. Practical display which revolves around stealing and its consequences was used in the study; it was used to condemn the act of stealing and instil in the young ones, the moral value from the tender age. Finally, the study recommended among others the use of quality instructional material capable of explaining difficult concepts in visual forms by the teacher, since it is believed to promote attention span and retention.

Keywords: Visual Arts, Effective Teaching, Visual Symbol, Painting

Introduction

A growing child engages in lots of activities, but gets attracted to that which arrests his attention. This, in other words, suggests that learning takes place if his attention is sustained. From the dawn of history, art has always been considered for both its instrumentalist and essentialist implications on every sphere of human endeavours. It has been instrumental to religion, politics, economy, education, technology and communication. Okeke (2007) defines art as one of the things like air, soil which are everywhere around us but which we rarely stop to consider.

The significant role art plays particularly in the education of the child is apparently multidimensional, its relevance as instructional material cannot be over emphasized. To this, Degaetano (1998) maintains that the arts are language that most people speak, cutting through individuals in culture, educational background and it has ability to bring every subject to life and turn abstractions into concrete reality. According to Degaetano, learning through the arts often results in greater academic achievement and higher test scores. The curricula activities outlined for all levels of education in the National Policy on Education (2004) makes it imperative that various ways should be employed in the implementation in order to achieve the desired goals.

Painting

Painting as one of the art disciplines serves this purpose, as it generally affects the educational upbringing of the child. It is therefore important to examine its role in a child's education. In painting, line, form and colour which are design elements are skilfully organized together as a visual statement geared towards communicating ideas, thoughts or feelings that may be beneficial to all. In this study, painting is meant to reveal its capability in interpreting an idea, concept, feeling or thought in a visual reality. It will equally unveil how its strength lies in its ability to simplify abstract ideas visually, neglecting the details which will tend to confuse children. Painting helps the classroom teacher to explain his/her concepts to the pupil more vividly, thus making comprehension possible. Painting is a two dimensional art. It is composed of various elements to present images for perception which are endowed with quality and meaning.

Painting serves two major roles as an aesthetic element which stands to appeal to man's sense of beauty and as a means of expressing higher emotions. Painting as a functional art serves to meet particular purpose or perform certain functions as educational, philosophical, political, therapeutic and commercial. Argon (1972) observes that the earliest records of painting that were made in pre-historic times have been located on the walls of sealed caves (showing hunting scenes) in caves and catacombs of Italy, France and Spain. He further explained that cave dwellers of that period (about 20,000 years ago) used three colours; yellow, red and black pigments extracted from vegetables and soil respectively. Painting is classified according to types of support, technique, function, schools and movements; subject matter (Argon, 1972).

In another dimension, painting according to Wangboje (1982) in Okeke (2007) is a picture making based on observation, memory and imagination. Candy (1980) in Okeke (2007) asserts that painting is an arrangement of shapes and colour, which Okeke (2007) rather gave a more comprehensive approach when noted that in painting, line, form and colour which are design elements are skilfully organized together as a visual statement geared towards communicating ideas, thoughts or feeling that may be beneficial to all. This goes to support the view that painting is a two dimensional medium of communication where shapes, colours and lines are aesthetically arranged on a flat pictorial format with a view to making a picture.

Using painting as a visual symbol for teaching is an ideal method which stands a good chance of bringing into reality instructional content in the classroom setting. This is because some concepts cannot be displayed in the classroom in form of concrete objects, so large pictorial images become a substitute. However, the reverse is the case in the present educational administration as some educationists like the classroom teachers have taken to teaching in abstraction which does not profit the child.

Considering the fact that the attention span of a child is short, such method as the use of painted pictures that can sustain their interest and encourage retention should be regarded as a welcome development. Equally, the processes that often cannot be studied first-hand or understood easily by reading and listening alone is to reduce the difficulty level of understanding such events, concepts or processes. It also encourages learners' participation and leaves imprinted picture in the mind of the learner. The use of painted pictures in representing ideas helps children in interpreting and relating the action to real life situation, thereby encouraging intellectual development.

Visual Symbol to Child's Education

A growing child is like yam tendrils that need to be guided for a better yields; he needs to be directed using diverse measure in his different aspects of life. For instance, in the moral aspect, how easily could a classroom teacher describe to a child, the consequences of an action without presenting a picture? So, visual symbol is inevitable. Still on the impact of visual symbol to child's education, Deceno (1964) maintains that visual feedback according to some authorities, is one of the most important ways human beings use to orientate themselves to the environment. Thus, one of the great benefits of painting is the visual reinforcement it gives. He stresses further that the classroom teacher checks the relevance of a picture to a lesson on ground; he equally makes sure it helps students in mastering some concepts to

strengthen the recall of the strategy for the illustrations. The pictorial images used previously can as well be put in order to use the images for set induction, thus strengthening the students' recall of previous lessons.

From the fore-going, when painting is regarded as a visual symbol for effective teaching, it therefore means that painting is being viewed as instructional material. Instructional materials as defined by Onyemaeze (1987), is all the available materials which appeal to all the sense and feeling that aid learning. Chukwumezie (2004) notes that, visual impression the child gets of the world around him/her goes a long way to influencing his overall development. In Nigeria for instance, there is urgent need to save the child of today from unplanned visual literacy programme of the past. The Nigerian children of today, who will come of age at the turn of the century will be confronted as adults with the complex techno-cultural civilization at the same time. So, it is important that, that which the child is exposed to visually on the course of learning should stimulate and instil in him creative and enquiring mind. Similarly, anaesthetically produced images for children have certain intellectual and practical requirement such as; the development of a keen sense of observation and the ability to visualize and interpret two dimensional art forms in relation to real life situation.

Statement of the Problem

One aspect of education that is of great concern to the classroom teacher is that which will sustain the interest of the child and aids retention. It therefore becomes necessary for him to seek various avenues through which he can ultimately sensitize learning and make retention possible. So, a pictorial representation like painting has been found to be a viable avenue for learning and retention of what is learnt. But unfortunately, some teachers teach without instructional aids while those who consider it necessary use teaching aids that are beyond the child's ability. This is often noticed when teachers use mere chalkboard illustration in teaching pre-primary, primary and junior secondary school children. Some even use oral story telling without the aid of pictures. This has adversely affected the education of the child. It is therefore, the lack of use of quality instructional materials that spurred the researcher to examine painting as a visual symbol for effective teaching of the child. It is also hoped that the researcher will reposition the choice of instructional aid in teaching and learning.

Purpose of the Study

The research is focused on the contribution of painting as a visual symbol towards enhancing teaching and learning. The researcher then worked to realize the following objectives:

- To reveal how the dual interpretation of a painted picture (the picture and what it represents) helps the child's cognitive development.
- To identify painting as a means of solving both the teacher and the students' physical difficulties, mental barriers and knowledge deficiencies in presenting and learning of a subject matter.

Significance of the Study

The researcher is significant in teaching the primary school level, grouped under concrete operational stage of intellectual development in Piaget's development, as well as the first half of the formal operational stage. This group finds it difficult to understand abstract concepts. If concrete objects are not used by the classroom teacher. It will help to re-position the quality of instructional material for the child education. The researcher will also serve as a footing for further academic research.

Methodology

The researcher, in order to effectively execute the practical display of the study, considered so many things which include support, dimension, preparation of the ground, medium, sketches, transferring of sketches and techniques of work.

Support: This is the platform or the ground on which the artist worked. It is the holder of the surface upon which the painting was made. It is equally the space where the artist expresses himself painterly. This may take the form of wall otherwise referred to as mural painting or on stretched canvas which is called Easel painting. For the purpose of this study, each of the four supports was canvas reinforced with wooden stretcher. This is made possible with the help of thumb tacks used in holding the four sides down. The force of the thumb tacked the surface (painting ground) to become very strong, plane, devoid of rumples and ready to be worked upon. The researcher preferred working with canvas as it gives better enabling environment to portray one's intentions painterly as a result of its smooth surface. The four sizable wooden stretchers were constructed to hold each canvas for reinforcement and to firmly hold it when working and more so, for easy carriage as well as hanging.

Dimension: this refers to the length, width or height of the ground on which the painting is being executed. Here, the practical display was divided into four different phases which collectively made up the thematic storyline. Each phase had a dimension of 36x42 inches. The size was considered necessary so as to enable the artist express him/herself freely and to make the picture large enough to take care of a large class.

Preparation of Ground: after reinforcement, the next thing was to prime the canvas to close the pores and smoothen the surface. It is the first coating on which all subsequent paint layers are applied. For opaque painting like this, the sized canvas is primed with emulsion and glue. However, the quantity of emulsion and that of glue has to be considered to avoid excessive thickening of the surface. So, it is advisable that the quantity of glue outweighs the emulsion for a better result. It was then left to dry for 3 days before working on it.

Medium: this is the material used for making a work of art. The medium used in the study was Opaque colour. The researcher decided to explore and introduce this as another medium of expression. Opaque is an extension to Acrylic colour. It is the most transparent of all synthetic resins. Its transparency makes it useful for a lot of applications. The cyno-acrylate that it contained hardens by chemical action in a few seconds and gives excellent adhesive result. So because of its fast dryness, it enables the artist to train him/ herself to work faster thereby promoting a sense of professional approach to work.

Sketches: This was a quick drawing intended as an idea for a more sustained drawing according to Uzoagba (2002). In art generally, inspirations are first interpreted into pencil sketches to visualize the idea and compose the arrangement before they are finally portrayed in solid forms in chosen medium. A thumbnail sketch is a preparatory drawing for determining the shape, arrangement and organization of the comprehensive composition. One of the thumbnail sketches was selected because it had direct relationship which conveyed the message the researcher intended to depict.

The next stage was the transferring of the approved colour rough into the main painting ground chosen by the researcher. The artist first applied the middle colour choice, before the detailing of the forms. He was very cautious of the use of colour to avoid over colouring or the introduction of unclear symbols. He was equally aware that this is meant for children, so naturalistic rendering of forms was his target. All these were done by first of all cooking the colours on the researcher's palette, using palette knife and different types and sizes of brushes in the application of paints. The dominating colours were the blues and its contrasting oranges. Indirect approach to painting was used for a better result. This meant that the researcher painted on step by step basis. Sketching, laying the undercoat and allow to dry a bit before going on to lay another colour. So, it goes on segment or coatings.

Analysis

The painting ground is horizontal in format and thematic in nature, that is, it is a storytelling painting. In analyzing the practical aspect of this study, it will be important to bring to mind that it is meant for children, so forms, technique of painting and colour choice are to be considered for a better understanding on the part of the children. For instance, the composition is colourfully represented using bluish sky and its contrasting mixtures of orange and brown for the for-ground. Every other thing equally assumes its natural colour. The ideology behind this is that naturally, children always identify the sky with blue and the ground with brown, so anything outside of this will be confusing. In the same vein, bright coloured dresses are used on the figures for its emotional appeal, interest sustainability, retention and its attention-drawing ability.

Bearing in mind that for anything to be regarded as education, it is expected to be geared towards inculcating the right attitude in the recipient, the researcher deemed it mandatory as an educationist to contribute towards this end. This informs the choice of using painting to depict and condemn theft, one of the vices of the society. In this practical display, the painting is divided into four panels, which collectively make up the story. The first panel portrays a busy sunny market scene. Here, a child of about seven years of age left the school premises to the market to steal oranges into his school bag from a woman orange seller. This was happening as the woman was busy attending to customers. This is a typical day-to-day occurrence in our society where, as a result of neglect of duty from the parents or guardians, sometimes due to hunger, lack of family planning, illiteracy among others, children are exposed to harsh condition of living, leaving them with no option than stealing to make up for what is lacking.

In this first composition, the child can be seen tip-toeing to the basket that contains the oranges with his watchful eyes focused at the owner, who was clouded with the thought of making sales to a group of three women at the foreground. Believing and assuring himself that no watchful eyes were on him, he started collecting the oranges into his school bag. The neighbour who was also selling same orange at the right side of the picture plane was busy mending their wares to attract customers which diverted their attentions off the boy.

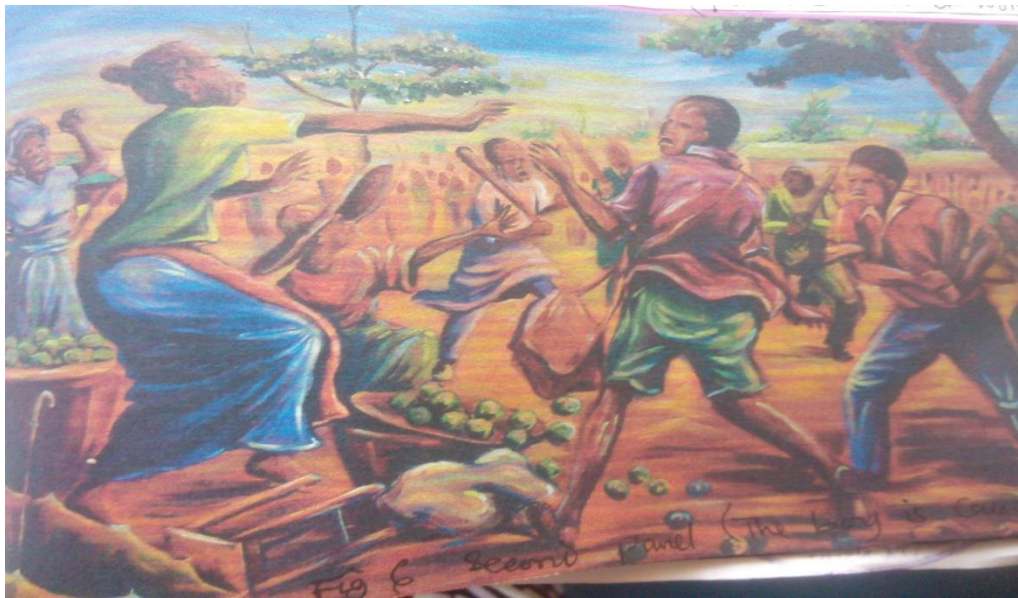
The second phase of the practical project revealed the capturing of the thief (the boy). This explains the facts that no matter the level of self assurance one has while committing an act in the market place, one is not completely convince that nobody is watching. This part was portrayed with heightened emotion. Thus, the artist used warm colour to achieve this, as well as his brush strokes to carry the viewers along. Here, the artist tries to depict where the watchful eyes of an orange seller, a female figure at the opposite direction noticing the movement and body language of the boy, immediately called the attention of the owner as the boy was about to sneak away. Noticing this, the woman screamed thief! Help! with a loud voice probably to attract the attention of nearby buyers and sellers on the foreground of the composition. At the mention of thief everybody became armed with objects that range from logs of wood to any object that could inflict injury. Their combined efforts as can be seen at the foreground and centre of the picture plane, lead to the chase and capturing of the boy accompanied by massive beating.

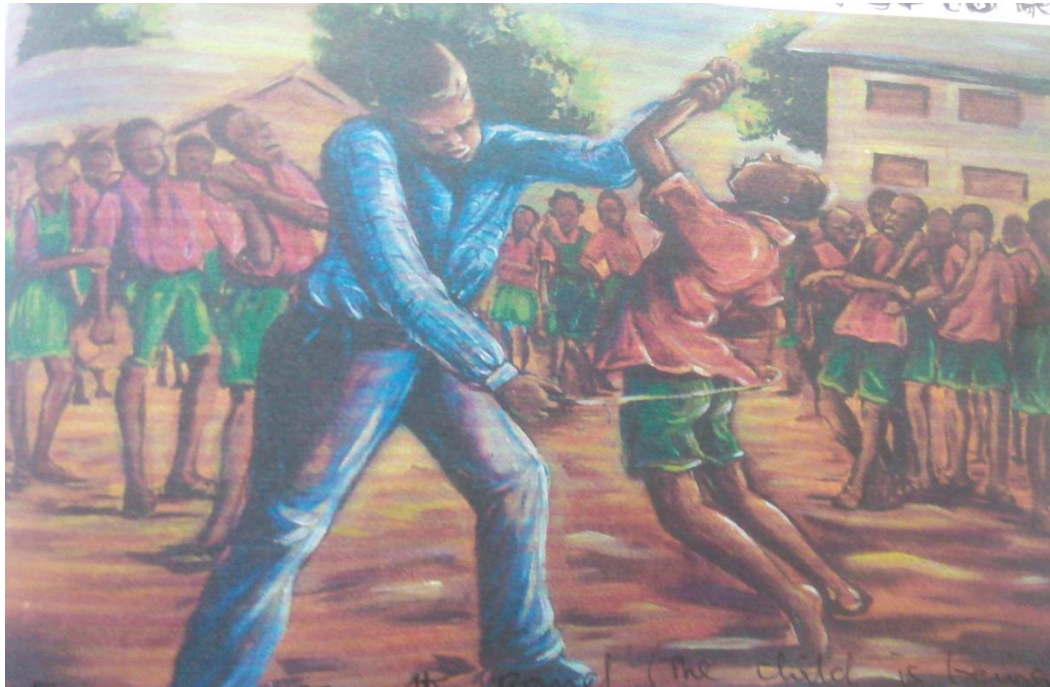
From the composition, one can notice an unsteady atmosphere characterized by movements of people running helter-skelter, carrying all sorts of weapons. The artist creatively spices up the theatrical scenery with scattered oranges all over the foreground, umbrella and seats turned upside down-evidence of the actions of desperate groups who were bent on fighting evil in the society. This situation can also be linked to fierce chase being given to thieves as often witnessed in Onitsha daily market and other big cities daily market with everybody voluntarily offering support. The market women were shouting on top of their voices, calling for more beating on the culprit, others were rather lenient, begging to have the boy handed over to the police. The artist in his composition tries to show people in different postures and directions from a distance, trying to have a glimpse of the action.

The third panel shows a scene where in order not to take laws into their hands, by beating the boy to death, he was handed over to the police. The pictorial composition presents a mean-looking policeman forcefully grabbing the battered boy on his school knickers as he drags him to the school, while passers-by watch as the action unfolds. The final panel presents a picture of where the boy has been handed over to the school authority. It shows where the school head master was flogging the child in front of other students as a corrective measure, as well as a deterrent to whoever might be tempted to engage in such mischievous act.

With these pictorial representations in the four panels above, the researcher has created an effective means of teaching abstract concepts to the classroom teacher without difficulties. This has equally helped in detail explanation of the different angles of the subject matter. Since the classroom teacher is shouldered with the responsibility of influencing the behaviour of his student or pupil positively, a step-by-step analysis as the one above offers a perfect avenue for achieving this fit. This now widens the horizon of options to classroom teachers like consulting the artist who will creatively render a visual interpretation of whatever information he/she wants to pass to the audience.







The Sketch, Source; the Author

Conclusion

An individual at birth is equipped with certain biological make-up which is not enough for harmonious life in the society. By implication, he is a product of both nature and environment. Education therefore is an effort to provide one with the necessary skills, habits, attitudes and information required for full preparation, integration and successful adult life in the society through learning. The classroom teacher is shouldered with the responsibility of achieving this fit. This has led the researcher to explore and come up with a solution to address this issue. Pictorial image (painting) as instructional material has been discovered as the best option for effective child education in the absence of concrete objects. This is evidenced from the discussions and explanations so far in this study. The impact of painting as a visual symbol for effective teaching can be summarized thus: it makes learning to be available and affordable to a great number of audiences at the same time; it promotes attention and retention; it provides visual presentation of ideas, concepts and information that are seemingly abstract in nature; It caters for individual differences; it entertains to discourage boredom through the use of exciting colours.

Going through painterly illustrations and analyzing them will develop in the children analytic abilities. It will also develop critical skills and the understanding of visual metaphor. All these are important elements for achieving creative thinking and broader mental and aesthetic sensitivity. The procedures employed so far both in the explanations and practical material is capable of interpreting ideas in a visual reality. More so, it can help the teacher to explain vividly concepts that cannot be displayed in the classroom in form of concrete instructional material. The researcher has been able to prove that the use of pictorial images can promote effective conveyance of information by visual means. He has also made available information that can explain ideas in simple language for the benefit of all. With all these discussions it is clear that any system of education which does not include sophisticated or qualitative visual material to aid learning is bound to have serious problem.

It is recommended that teachers should make effort to teach with quality instructional materials capable of explaining difficult concepts in a visual form. This can be made possible if the government should make effort to include art courses in the general courses offered in the higher institutions. This will offer the opportunity to the would-be teachers to learn the basic things in quality instructional material production. It is also important that lecturers or workshops should be organized for teachers to update their knowledge on the use of instructional materials.

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