

TOWARDS ADAPTING THE NIGERIAN VIDEO FILM INTO A TEACHING TOOL IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Introduction

Researchers widely acclaim that the film (video film) has very far reaching effects on young persons, as it amongst other factors, even promotes violence and dictates youth fashions and fads. The Nigerian Education Policy is yet to fully integrate the arts - media arts, dramatic arts, and music into the school curriculum; except at the university level where these are specific courses of study. This paper advocates that this being the case, the time is ripe to repackage the video film as suitable educational material, for integration into the school curriculum, as appropriate teaching aids that enhance understanding of subject matter. Sadly, for now, this inestimable resource is relegated to the hidden curriculum. There is no doubt that the teaching of English Language or French, Geography and the sciences, would be quite enhanced with electronic teaching aids, a formidable and potent medium that school children are already in tune with. This being the case, It is pertinent to start by taking a cursory look at education and the current methodology of formal knowledge acquisition in schools. This will help in the delineation of what modes and processes have been employed, and what is necessary to be adopted. Education is not merely acquired for the sake of it as Peters (42) observes, rather it is “the transmission of, or initiation into things which are intrinsically worthwhile and desirable”.

This notion, much like the proposition of ‘art merely for art’s sake’ has expectedly, met with fierce criticism for obvious reasons. Education should be able to cover the broad spectrum of moral and the overall psychological development of the person and not

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merely be an end to itself. Other benefits of education as O’ Hear (81) propounds, are that an educated person should be able to:

- Fend for himself/herself economically,
- Possess the capability to make informed choices,
- Be able to wisely make his/her own decisions about religious and moral issues, and above all,
- Have relevant knowledge and requisite skill in a given field of endeavour.

Though theoreticians differ in their views about the yardstick to be used to measure an educated person, from the above, one point is clear. Formal education could be imparted, not only through the medium of the classroom and teacher stereotypes. This issue is reinforced by the fact that education is much more than the acquisition of a skill. Since it embraces all the facets of life, to produce a holistic person, all necessary ramifications must be employed. Of this, researchers have proven the dramatic arts to be requisite (Lowenfield, 53, Heathcote, 159).

Curiously, educational policy developers and constructs in Nigeria seem to be so far blissfully unaware of this or perhaps have deliberately sidelined it. The Nigerian National Policy on Education outlines its aims and objectives amongst others as:

- The inculcation of national consciousness and national unity,
- The inculcation of the right type of value and attitudes,
- The training of the mind in the undertaking of the world around,
- The acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competence.

The obvious underlying fact here is that the child’s development is hinged on several factors - the self, the home, the larger society, organised institutions and the immediate community. The child as such, acquires knowledge capable of developing the body and mind towards the desired direction of being a knowledgeable and well-

informed adult. Such knowledge is acquired through training processes such as skill's acquisition. Also, formal learning exposes many strands of a given subject, encouraging the learner to ask questions and commit to whatever is perceived as fact. Drilling and learning by rote aim for the attainment of proficiency through the force of repetition and habit. This consists of the theoretical and practical aspects. Indoctrination involves the transmission of certain beliefs or dogma from teacher to child, or from other sources in society.

Because the process of development is hinged on the need to gain knowledge, Kholberg (69) fittingly refers to education as "the process where the child receives an all round development." However, the processes and media through which the child arrives at this 'holistic' all around development are crucial and must be thoroughly looked into as well as delineated. Extensive research such as conducted by Jean Piaget (28), and Skinner (78), indicates that childhood play is requisite for children's proper development. If it's missing, undoubtedly, such children will go on seeking it, even in adult life.

The dramatic arts is intrinsic to education especially in the light of its main content - drama, music, dance, creative arts, storytelling, improvisation and visual arts. The dramatic arts already exist as courses of study in universities, and in some form or the other in Nigerian formal institutions, especially secondary schools. Sadly though, most of the dramatic arts are relegated to optional extra - curricular activity, indulged in (if at all) after school has 'officially' closed.

It is needful to state that this resourceful compendium can easily be brought into the classroom as teaching aids in the form of video film. However, what obtains so far is that this inestimable resource is relegated to the hidden curriculum. As such, this paper takes a cursory look at the term 'hidden curriculum,' and attempts to locate how much of it, if any, is really instrumental to learning

processes.

The Hidden Curriculum and Curriculum Development

Hidden Curriculum in most general terms can be defined as some of the outcomes or by - products of schools or of non-school settings particularly those things which are learned, but not openly intended. However, a variety of definitions have been developed, based on the broad range of perspectives of those who study this phenomenon. Any setting including traditional recreational and social activities many teach unintended lessons since it is tied not necessarily to schools but rather, to learning experiences.

But most often, hidden curriculum refers to various types of knowledge gained in primary and secondary school settings, usually with a negative connotation referring to inequalities suffered as a result of its presence. In this context therefore, hidden curriculum is said to reinforce existing social inequalities by educating students in various matters and behaviours according to their class and social status.

However, the hidden curriculum (and this definition is the relevant one to this study); can also refer to the transmission of norms, values and beliefs conveyed, in both the formal educational content and the social interactions within these schools. Hidden curriculum is constantly changing the knowledge and beliefs of a society, as society evolves.

Several educational theories; The Structural, Functional View, The Phenomenological View and The Radical, Critical View, as cited by Henry Giroux and Anthony Penna (26), have been developed, to help give meaning and structure to the hidden curriculum. The most favoured by this paper is the Structural, Functional View, which focuses on how norms and values are conveyed within schools and how their necessities for the functioning of society become indisputably accepted.

Since the hidden curriculum consists of those things pupils

learn through the experience of attending school rather than the stated educational, objectives of such institutions; the question that readily comes to mind is - what about things learned outside of school, especially through the media (television and films) in Nigeria? To effectively tackle this enigma, the school curriculum will be briefly considered.

The Curriculum

The school curriculum is a requisite adjunct to formal education acquisition. Curriculum building involves the mapping out and designation of courses of study in such a way to lead learners to achieve targeted goals. In formal education or school therefore, curriculum is the set of course work and content offered at a school or university.

Bobbit, in *The Curriculum*, postulates that “curriculum encompasses the entire scope of formative deed and experience occurring in and out of school- experiences that are unplanned and undirected, and experiences intentionally directed for the purposeful formation of adult members of society.” The curriculum has therefore been explained as the course of deeds and experiences through which children become the adults they should be, for success in adult society, both in and outside the formal school setting. To Bobbit, the curriculum is therefore a social engineering arena.

Though contemporary views of curriculum reject some features of Bobbit’s postulates, they retain the bases of curriculum as “the course of experiences that form people into who and what they are,” or in my definition, attempt to shape children into the adults they should be, tomorrow.

Curriculum therefore, necessarily means two things: - the range of courses from which students choose what subject matters to study, and a specific learning programme. But if we adopt Bobbit’s postulate, inevitably, hidden curriculum becomes an intrinsic part of curriculum.

Other Curricular

Currently, Spiral Curriculum is promoted, as allowing students to visit a subject matter’s content, at the different levels of development of the subject matter being studied. Another approach, the Constructivist Approach, proposes that children learn best through active engagement within the educational environment.

However, it is important to note that a crucial aspect of learning – understanding by stimulating the imagination, is absent in the “neo-conservative curriculum,” which stresses the ineffective aspects of knowledge amounts and of logical- mathematical thinking; that is, rote learning. The yawning gap in this crucial aspect of learning – that is, understanding by stimulating the imagination, is what video films specially commissioned by the government and education policy makers would fill.

Considering the above factors, it is shocking to note that in spite of the overwhelming influence of the media (especially television and video film) on school age children and adolescents, media studies are prevalently absent in the Nigerian school curriculum. It is pertinent to state, that the Nigerian National Policy on Education has no provision for the teaching of dramatic arts both in primary and secondary schools. It does recognise Music, Art and Creative Arts though, and these are enshrined in the curriculum.

However, a re-visit of the curriculum is necessary. Issues such as exactly what is meant by ‘arts’ and ‘creative arts’ need to be clearly spelt out as generally, a cursory look at the current practice in schools immediately reveals that Art/Creative Arts usually tilt into Fine and Applied Arts, and stops there. As for Music, the Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004) acknowledges that music can actually be taught in schools but with a proviso, predicated on the availability of a music teacher. The question that comes to mind is “how many music teachers are being trained in our teacher training institutions, waiting to pass out into Nigerian

schools?"

Dramatic arts fares even worse as it is completely excluded from the curriculum and relegated to "extra-curricular" activity. Frequently, it serves as a forgotten tool that only comes in handy for end of year/parent day activities.

The Way Forward

One can safely surmise from the above stated facts, that the compendium of factors that affect child psychology and learning processes far exceed what is learned in the classroom and within the school environment. It therefore becomes pertinent that educationists and especially curriculum developers should attempt to determine and locate factors and media, that children and young persons [of school age] are responsive to; with a view to tapping such potential and possibly inculcating- preferably modified forms of it, into the school curriculum. The ultimate aim here; will be to ferret out what constitutes learning aids to today's child, for enhanced understanding. This is necessary, for effective administration and overall teaching.

Researchers, (Bompadre and Pabio 302) have determined the overwhelmingly powerful influence of the media - especially of dramatic arts as represented through the video film or television medium, on today's school age children.

It is true perhaps to state that the reality of the electronic media - especially television and video films is very much ingrained in the psychological make-up of school age children in today's Nigeria. It goes without saying that the children's heroes and heroines are music and film stars - whose walk, talk, dress, mannerisms, fashion and fads they slavishly copy! Since this medium possesses such immense appeal and glamour to school age children, then, it is the right time to introduce it into classroom lessons as teaching aids.

Culture being dynamic, is in a constant state of flux. The cultural reality of a child growing up in a Nigerian city today is far

removed from that of a thirty five years old who grew up in the same city, those many years ago. Most observers however, agree that communication media and technologies have contributed immensely, to shaping society that is changing very rapidly.

McLuhan, a foremost communications theorist declares; "The medium is the message". He argues that "in each cultural era, the medium in which information is recorded and transmitted is decisive in determining the character of that culture." He further postulates that; "electronic media creates (in the viewer), the sense of experiencing everything at once quite unlike books that encourage logical linear thinking." While we are not advocating that books be done away with completely, the advocacy of this paper is chief amongst others, that learning with dramatic arts through the electronic medium, be incorporated into the school curriculum.

This paper suggests that efforts should not be spared to inveigle facets of learning that can enhance assimilation, into the formal school curriculum. Besides, there may not be any logical argument to sustain the fact that, in today's Information Communication Technology (ICT) driven world, electronic methods and aids and processes of teaching are completely absent in the formal school curriculum. It is simply untenable that the teaching procedures of the 1930's and 1940s when electronic gadgets were a novelty, possessed by a minority elite, and where children had to learn strictly by rote, is still in place today.

A strong suggestion is being made to curriculum developers to incorporate the dramatic arts shaped into appropriate teaching aids into the school curriculum, as necessary tools of learning, for holistic development. Also, it is pertinent here, to establish that the advocacy of this paper has been practiced partially in other parts of the world, with immense success.

Successful Antecedents

The television programme 'Sesame Street' created by Joan Gang Cooney, has had roaring success as an invaluable teaching aid specially designed for ages 0-10. Currently, 'Sesame Street' is aired in one hundred and fifty countries of the world. Though not enshrined in the school curriculum, (and this is why this researcher has defined it as partial), even at that, the impact is so immense. 'Sesame Street' runs workshops and designed initiatives that package programmes with specific objectives. Among the general objectives are:

- Literacy and Numeracy: Bringing education's building blocks to children everywhere. Other programmes are designed and targeted at:
- Providing exciting tools along with important skills to help children take first steps into literacy and mathematics proficiency,
- Rural Literacy: Providing resources to build children's early literacy skills;
- Talking Cents: Introducing children to financial basics. The immense power of teaching through drama structured electronic teaching aids, is fairly demonstrated in this case. All of the above on television, not yet in the school curriculum, and yet, is being utilised in 150 countries worldwide.

Another immensely successful, though partly related, but not electronic teaching aid methodology (spanning over fifty years), is Maria Montessori's incorporation of visual aids into the school curriculum, frequently referred to as the 'Montessori Educational Method.' Applied primarily to pre-school and elementary school setting, the Montessori educational method, stresses the importance of adapting the child's learning environment to his/her developmental level, and of the role of physical activity in absorbing academic concepts and practical skills. It is also a method, which uses didactic (self correcting) equipment to introduce common concepts

Recommendations

The video film can be effectively put to multiple uses. This untapped resource must be broadened and expanded from the singular use of entertainment to which it is currently relegated, for resourceful use in the school curriculum. The learning of English Language, which youths find cumbersome and frequently grapple with, (given the high rates of poor performance in school certificate results), could be effectively taught with lessons couched in a simple dramatic plot.

For instance, the plot could consist of a family situation, where the children's bad English, gets constantly corrected by parents and older ones. In an episode (episodes structured into lessons), a semi-illiterate uncle would visit and thoroughly 'bombard' the environment with terrible English. Of course the children snigger secretly, but their mother/father makes good use of the opportunity after Uncle's departure, to straighten out Uncle's errors. This could be episodic, where each episode (just like lessons arranged in coursework textbooks), target specific aspects to be taught. The family could go shopping; visit the park, in subsequent episodes, or even travel. The possibilities are multiple. It is important to state here that the above stated format is also quite invaluable for teaching foreign languages – such as French, German or Spanish, to mention but a few.

Documentary formats or preferably, docu/ drama formats are also ideal teaching aids for social science subjects. Teaching aids patterned after notable documentaries such as is transmitted on cable network 'Discovery' and 'National Geographic' channels, would simply be immense for aiding understanding of subjects such as geography. Science subjects such as chemistry, physics and biology, are not left out. Computer imaging and animation devices would be used to carefully structure lessons to bring clearly to mind, what for so long had been left strictly to the imagination, in the old methods of rote learning. The details, of biology, and processes of

chemical reactions in chemistry can easily be documented and be seen by students who possibly don't even have an equipped laboratory in their schools. The students will be entertained and refreshed while learning, opening them to hitherto uncharted vistas in their young lives.

Conclusion

In this computer driven age, where the world has 'shrunk' to a global village, change in the right direction is quite overdue. And just for some, if any, who may tote the argument of the possibility of rural areas that lag behind in terms of infra-structural development, being left behind; development should be forward looking, while efforts should be intensified to improve such sectors of society.

Further delay could jeopardise and further water down the educational quality of Nigerian schools.

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