The Role of the Newly Developed Art Education Curriculum in Achieving Excellence in Art Education in Saudi Arabia

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Introduction: A Brief History of Art education in Saudi Arabia

The history of art education, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is connected to the history of general education. The term “art education” came into being about sixty years ago, Felamban (2007), when art classes were formerly called drawing and crafts lessons before that time. Classroom teachers instructed their students to duplicate examples of pictures drawn on the blackboard using colored chalks. A diagram of a piece of craft was introduced as a model to be imitated. Thus, the children were deprived of opportunities to use or improve their creative abilities or acquire true knowledge about art.

Years later, a major shift took place when the “creative self expression” approach to teaching art education was becoming prominent practice. The influence of Victor Lowenfeld (1947) and his book, Creative and Mental Growth was clear from the outset. It was the therapeutic benefits and fostering of personal growth associated with this philosophy that made it a convincing for decision makers to include study about art in general curriculum. Art education was first assigned to classroom teachers, who were ill-trained to teach art. However, the situation began to change with the graduation of art education specialists from the Art Education Institute in Riyadh (established in 1964) and who joined the work force in the 1960s -1970s. Since that time, a greater emphasis has been placed on developing children’s creative capacity by giving them the opportunity to express themselves freely.

Although, the child-centered art movement was in full swing in 1930s and 40s, questions were raised about its validity in the literature (Efland, 1987). At the time, the creative self-expression approach was seen as having no solid foundation for the teaching of the structure of a discipline. Furthermore, evaluation the outcomes of the students were difficult to accomplish (Baraken, Wilson 1962, 1971). The assumptions behind the essential components were called into question, such as such as goals, content, curriculum, nature of the learner and teacher, creativity, implementation, works of art & evaluation (Day, Greer, & Clark 1987). It was obvious that this approach would not stand up against the wind of change looming in the horizon. In the 80s and as a result of numerous art curriculum-developing projects in U.S, the term Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) appeared in the literature (Greer, 1984). Since then, the discipline-based approach laid the foundation for developing a well-grounded art curriculum in any given situation. Since the discipline-based was the chosen approach to development of
the new art education curriculum in Saudi Arabia, the research find it helpful to shade some light on it basic assumptions

Major assumptions of DBAE were as follows:

1. Every student should gain a certain amount of knowledge, skill, and experience in art that could be measured as well as evaluated.
2. Art education is equal to other subjects in the school curriculum and should be treated as such.
3. The curriculum should draw its content from four distinct disciplines, namely: art history, art criticism, aesthetics and art production.
4. “Creativity as unconventional behavior that can occur as conventional art understandings is attained” (Clark, Day & Greer 1987, p134).
5. “Untutored childhood expression is not necessarily creative” (Clark, Day & Greer 1987, p134).
6. The “implementation of a curriculum is based on district-wide participation to ensure full effect of sequence and articulation” (Clark, Day & Greer 1987 p134).

By looking at these assumptions one can realize that traditional art education, which centers on art production, has faced great challenges, and any future curriculum project must take into consideration the issues mentioned above very seriously.

There is an opportunity to further develop the current art education curriculum in Saudi Arabia. First, a number of graduate students who earned MAs and PhDs from different universities in the U.S.A and Britain have returned to Saudi Arabia, thus forming a community of scholars in the field. Second, the ministry of education no longer assigns the development of curriculum materials to individual authors, a widespread practice in the past. On the contrary, the ex-minister of education, Dr. Mohammad Ahmed Alrasheed, believed that the nation’s development depended on the foundation of a good public educational system. Under his ambitious leadership, the General Curriculum Reform Project was announced in 2003 for all subjects in school, including art education. The curriculum is now completed and has been field tested and being distributed to schools to be used, thus providing opportunities to conduct research.
Research problem:

The purpose of this research paper is to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the new art education curriculum which developed between 2005-2008 in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia under the General Reform Movement.

Research Questions:

This study strives to address the following questions:

1- To what extent does the curriculum under investigation correspond to the discipline-based art education approach as the chosen philosophy, and its four components?
2- Is the curriculum in accordance with Road Map?
3- What assessment and evaluation methods are used in the curriculum, if any?
4- What are the curriculum’s expected outcomes?
5- To what extent is the curriculum helpful in achieving excellence in art education?

Objectives of the study:

This study will seek to:

1-Identify the strengths and weaknesses of the new curriculum developed in Saudi Arabia.
2-Investigate its adherence to the main approach used to construct its materials.
3-Identify its relation to recommendations of the Road Map.
4-Identify the expected outcome and its role in achieving excellence in art education.

Research methodology:

This study is descriptive and utilizes the observational method, specifically, the non-participant observational method with an emphasis on the content analysis approach to collect the data. Due to the nature of the study, which is an examination of an existing document, collecting data to answer the research question is more accessible using this methodology.
Definition of terms:

The following terms will frequently appear throughout this paper so it is useful to define them, as they are related to the issues discussed in the study.

Although the term curriculum has many legitimate divinations, including:

1- All the courses of the study offered by educational institutions.
2- A group of related courses, offered in a special field of study.
   Its use is limited in this study to the teacher’s book and the student activities book developed to improve the quality of art education provided in the Kingdom’s schools.

Discipline-based Art Education (DBAE):

DBAE refers to the approach to art education that focus on the structure of knowledge, attained through exposing the children to art production, art history, art criticism, and aesthetics.

Excellence in art education:

Excellence in art education is described in terms of worthwhile experience and quality art” (Smith). In the current study, excellence in art education is organized around concepts related to the student’s culture and heritage. It is valuable in producing visually literate citizens to foster the creative capacity within the students of art.

Literature Review:

There are art education curriculum development projects similar to the one under investigation. A good example that can serve as an antecedent is the curriculum reform movement of 1960 in the United States, which was instigated by the scientific advancement of the Soviet Union and their sputniks1 in 1957 Efland (1987) described the reform movement by examining the value and the place of art from the time of ancient Greece to the present time. In addition, he discussed how the Wood Hole conference, held in 1959, was a turning point for art education. He further discussed the influence of Jerome Bruner who had a strong impact on the curriculum’s problems. Although, Bruner was concerned about the problems of the curriculum as it applied to other subjects in the school system, art educators such as Barkan took Bruner’s argument and applied it to the problems in teaching the
visual arts. Efland claimed “Bruner’s ideas helped change the climate within art education, providing a new sense of direction” (p63). Efland then wrote decision makers’ concerns about the status of education as a means for the advance the nation. As a result, numerous high committees were formed to tackle the problem. The result of this attention was a number of curriculum projects. Efland described and analyzed the seven curriculum projects developed during the 1960-1970 as follows:

1- CEMREL Aesthetic Educational Program.
2- The Guidelines for Art Instruction Through Television for Elementary School.
3- Chapman’s Curriculum Planning Model.
4- Hubbard and Rouse’s “Art Meaning, Method and Media”.
5- The Kettering Project I Art Education
6- The SWRL Elementary Art Program.
6- The Aesthetic Eye Project.

Efland described how each project was developed, the developers, funding, goals and objectives, and how it was implemented. Efland identified three types of projects, in terms of their format, in which he stated that “in some cases these products were destined for use by planners of curricula; in others they were finished programs designed for use by classroom teachers; a third type involved teachers directly in curriculum constriction”(p86). Finally, Efland described the issues associated with the projects’ implementation in an actual school setting and the problems that may occur. He further compared and contrasted the seven-curriculum project in relation to design elements, themes from problem center inquiries, production skills dominants, balance among production, criticism and history, sequence and fixed variables, method of determination, field-testing, and the teacher’s and curriculum expert’s judgment.

In another case Ralph Smith (1987) wrote on the theoretical antecedent of discipline based art education. He dealt with issues like antecedents in aesthetics, in educational theory, and in theory of art education. He pointed out great scholars’ contributions in the fields of philosophy, psychology, anthropology, aesthetic education, and art education. Smith attributed the advancement of the field of art education to the scholarly writings of John Dewey (1934), Beardsley (1982),
Goodman (1976, 1984), Osborne (1985), Lanier (19881), Barkan (1962), Gardner, Arnheim (1969), and McFee (1977), as well as other scholars. Their collective effort’s helped to make possible the body of knowledge, community of scholars, and research methods pertinent to the field of art education.

Result of the study:

To address the research questions raised by this study, the researcher finds it necessary to 1) describe the process and progress of the reform movement; 2) describe the steps undertaken to build the art education curriculum as part of the whole reform movement; and 3) examine evidence supporting the inculcation of the DBAE philosophy.

The process of reforming the general curriculum started in 1999. There were six phases identified as the main plan, with each one dependent upon the accomplishment of preceding phases. The following table explains these phases.

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The first phase is studying the actual practice and planning from reform 1999-2002</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>The second phase is identifying learner’s proficiencies, preparing a study plan and preparing curriculum documents 2002-2005.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Third phase is training of curricula developers and the beginning of the actual developing of the materials and the accompanied aids 2005-2008.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>The fourth phase is field-testing the developed curriculum, reevaluating and preparing the arena 2008-2112.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>The fifth phase is dissemination and implementation of the curriculum 2008-2112.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>The six and final phase involves more implementation of the rest of curriculum 2010 onward.</td>
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Table of six phases for developing a general curriculum

Description of the process and progress of building the art education curriculum in Saudi Arabia:

The educational system in Saudi Arabia is centralized, a fact that curriculum developers must consider. The curriculum should therefore address issues related to different regions, customs and climates. The four teams were selected, namely the developing, scientific, revising, and layout teams, and attended a workshop devoted to curriculum designing and building. These teams included teachers, supervisors and
university professors specialized in art education, curriculum, cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, and evaluation. The first task was to prepare the curriculum document.

Preparing the Curriculum document:

The curriculum document served as a guideline or field manual for the developing team to use. It was used to help identify goals, objectives, content, as well as the chosen approaches, philosophies, and means for assessment and evaluation.

The curriculum document actually consisted of three parts. Part one was concerned with the theoretical framework that discussed issues and answers to questions such as: Why is the new curriculum for art education is needed?; What are the appropriate approaches and principles for building a curriculum?; What are the main objectives? What are the preferred teaching strategies?; and what are suitable methods to assess the student’s progress and the significance of extended activities?

The second part was concerned with the practical framework, which consisted of three components: 1) identifying goals and objectives; 2) identifying proficiency of the grade level; and 3) identifying the proficiency of a certain class level.

The fourth and final section of the curriculum documents consisted of seven appendixes having to do with the following concepts:

1- The scope and sequence for elementary level grade 1-3.
2- The scope and sequence for elementary level grade 4-6.
3- The scope and sequence for intermediate level grade 1-3.
4- The specification of a teacher’s book.
5- The specification of a student’s book.
6- An exemplar lesson plan.

Preparing the curriculum document was completed in approximately one year, after which the task of building the curriculum began. The developing team was divided into small groups of three to four people per group. Each group was directed to brainstorm a list of subject topics that would be suitable for the students’ stage of development, taking in consideration the scope and sequence. The outcome of this brainstorming exercise was discussed in weekly meetings and reported to the team’s chairman. It was agreed that the curriculum would consist of a teacher book manual containing ready-to-use instructional units that also included evaluation and assessment tools. There was a student book that
contained additional activities pertinent to the lesson that are already reviewed in class, so that the students can continue to work on art at home.

Content of the Teacher’s Book:

The teacher’s book contains ready-to-use instructional units comprising 80% of the required coursework for each semester. The remaining 20% is for the teacher to develop in the same format as the rest of the lesson plan. The required course information intended to acquaint the instructor with the content of the teachers’ book, are:

1. Introduction on how to use the book
2. Identification of subjects and subject matter
3. Recommended teaching strategies
4. List of art tools and media needed.
5. Instructions on how to use the assessment table
7. List of general and specific goals and objectives for each lesson.
8. Scope and sequence.
9. Suggested and recommended alternative solutions.
10. Detailed explanations of units and individual lesson plans.

Content of the Student’s book:

The student’s book, as mentioned earlier, consists of activities related to the subjects taught in the classroom. It is designed to encourage students to complete additional art activities at home. For example, if the students are given a lesson about Batik printing, the extracurricular activities may suggest more methods of utilizing this medium to produce artwork. By introducing extra activities throughout the student book, students who are interested in art will find and foster their passion.

Having described the curriculum’s format, content, scope, and the sequence, the remainder of the paper will focus on the research questions to be addressed in this study.

The first question addresses the extent that the curriculum under investigation corresponds with the discipline-based art education approach as the chosen philosophy, and its four components. By carefully examining the curriculum at hand, especially the scope and sequence section and the subject goals, it was clear that DBAE’s presence in the curriculum is evident. The recurring statements directing students to look, describe,
analyze, interpret, compare, refer to history or historical events, question of value, and use specific tools and materials provide clear indication of the alternative teaching methods from those of traditional art education curricula. For elementary grade levels 1-3 a greater emphasis on art appreciation and production was desirable because of the developmental stage associated with age. However, there was a shift in emphasis to art history and aesthetic concepts for the elementary grade levels 4-6. There was an equal emphasis of the four components of DBAE were noticed for intermediate levels 1-3.

Moreover, by examining the curriculum’s goal and objective statements, the researcher noticed that the developers of the new curriculum strived to expose students to knowledge in and about the arts. This type of practice is not included in traditional art education offerings. Its inclusion may improve students’ visually literacy. This outcome would be a great achievement to the core goals of the curriculum.

The second question concerns the extent to which the new curriculum corresponds with spirit of the Road Map. Although the curriculum under investigation touches on many issues raised by the Road Map, it is most evident in section (II), “Concepts Related to Arts Education”. Under this rubric two approaches to art education are suggested. “Arts can be (1) taught as individual subjects, through the teaching of the various arts disciplines, thereby developing a student’s artistic skills, sensitivity, and appreciation of the arts, (2) seen as a method of teaching and learning in which artistic and cultural dimensions are included in all curriculum subjects” (p8). By examining the Saudi art education curriculum it is congruent with its first approach, where art is introduced to students through the following pedagogical streams:
1. Study of artworks from different cultures
2. Exposure to artistic activities such as exhibitions, museums, and films
3. Participating in artistic activities, which helps students produce their own art

The third research question was: What are the assessment and evaluation methods used in the curriculum, if any? A curriculum’s strength lies in the means it provides a clear idea about student’s progress to the teacher. What they have learned?; how they can make the most of the information and skills that they acquired?; and above all, how has their behavior changed about the misconception and false believes about the arts? The new curriculum provides the teacher with an innovative method to assess the student’s performance and evaluate the instruction provided and the means to avoid whatever’s
affecting the wanted results. In addition, the teachers are provided with an “achievement table” to aid in assessing students’ progress.

The achievement table is a device that can be used to grade students based on their competency level. The teacher is asked to use strategies, such as questioning, observing, and reviewing the student’s portfolio, to assess their competency and aptitude.

The fourth question dealt with the expected outcome of the curriculum. Some of the desired outcomes of the curriculum are stated in the curriculum document itself and include:

1- Help transmitting cultural heritage.
2- Foster creative ability.
3- Help understanding of the role of art in social life.

The final question of this study related to the main subject, which is the extent the curriculum helps to achieve excellence in art education. Since Smith described excellence in art education as “the worthwhile of the experience and quality of art” and that “excellence in art education is synonymous with excellence in art curriculum” (Smith, R. 1987), it is building a well-grounded curriculum with clear content and objectives. It is indeed, the first step to achieve the desired outcome. However, the developers continue to evaluate achievement of excellence based on the level of attainment of objectives set forward by the curriculum.

Conclusion:

This study investigated the quality and merits of the new art education curriculum developed in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia within the general curriculum reform movement. It sheds light on the status of art education past and present, and discusses the changing climate provided by three conditions that the field of art education acquired:

A- A community of scholars provided by new graduates from famous universities.
B- Body of knowledge provided by the amount of research paper published in the field.
C- Clear method of research in the field of art education.
The researcher then reviewed related literature to compare and contrast similar curriculum developing projects. He described briefly the curriculum reform movement of 1960 in the U.S. and its strong effect on many curricula developed since that time. The process and progress of building the art education curriculum in Saudi Arabia was then explored. A content analysis of the main approach that was adapted by the team of developers, namely DBAE, has been undertaken. It was apparent that the four domains of this approach (art history, art criticism, aesthetics and art production) are evident throughout curriculum.

The researcher then examined the research questions raised by the study. He determined that the new art curriculum is a major advancement of the field of art education in Saudi Arabia because:

1- It is built on the solid foundation with clear objectives and articulated content.
2- It addresses the issues of excellence and creativity.
3- It is not only limit learning in a school environment, but also, extend artistic activities and learning outside schools, through the extended activities provided.
4- It is congruent with the spirit and initiatives of The Road Map, especially in its efforts for “building the creative capacity and cultural awareness for the 21st century” (p14).
5- Its outcomes could be easily measured because of its implementation on the national level and the self-evaluation means built into it.
6- The new curriculum is subject to revision as art educators obtain feedback from the field.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


