Renewed language of arts education: creativity, interaction between theory and practice

Visual Art Education in Egypt

Saria Sidky, Ph.D. Faculty of Art Education, Helwan University, Egypt
Moushira Moutawae, Ph.D. Faculty of Art Education, Helwan University, Egypt
Dina Adel, Ph.D., Faculty of Specific Education, Alexandria University, Egypt

Presenting author: Saria Sidky email: razzazz@hotmail.com

Workshop on Core competencies of arts education practitioners

The 21st century is characterized by an increasingly global perspective in which locally relevant skills are not sufficient keys to success. To meet the challenges presented by interactions between diverse values and cultures, the speed by which new information enters the public arena and the consequent changing needs and opportunities, requires adaptive shifts in educational philosophy and methodology.

Today’s educational system requires emphasis on teaching creativity, innovation and flexibility. Fortunately, art subsumes all three of these attributes and rises to the challenge of communicating between cultures, encouraging positive risk-taking and creative innovation. Good art education has become imperative. According to the National Council for Accreditation of Teachers (NCATE) and the National Art Education Association (NAEA) and others, art is now one of the most important academic subjects for the 21st Century student.

This paper describes two Egyptian Visual Art Education projects based on relevant theories and current national and international best practices out of which developed an Internal Accreditation Systems for Colleges of Specific Education and Content Criteria for Visual Art Education in General Education grades 1-12.

The first, and larger project included 45 art teacher participants, the second was a committee of professionals under the auspices of the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAA). Both projects were based on 21st century educational theory so the following was developed and distributed to all.
A. **Theoretical basis of Education in the 21st Century**

The most important 21st century generic educational theories include those that emphasize:

- Multiple intelligence
- Habits of the mind
- Right-side brain functions
- Visual thinking, language and literacy

The theories specific to art education curricula include:

- Brain research e.g. Mahta, G. of the Dana Foundation demonstrates that arts training can result in dramatic changes in the brain including possibly strengthening the "attention network" a series of regions linked to general intelligence.
- The six-fold Saskatchewan art education curricular model based on Creative/Productive, Cultural/Historical, Critical/ Responsive elements
- The Getty Center's Discipline Based Art Education (DEAB) model that divides art curricula into four interactive domains: Art production, Art Criticism, Art History and Aesthetics.
- The Diversity and Multicultural curriculum: emphasizing the understanding of social and cultural human communalities and differences.
- Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS): a research-based teaching method that improves critical thinking, language skills and visual communication through discussions of visual images.

B. **Current International Practices in Visual Art Education**

- Project Zero: an educational research group at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education to understand and enhance learning, thinking, and creativity using the arts.
- Artful Teaching: a collaborative program between Minneapolis Public School District and Minnesota’s Perpich Center for Arts Education
- Art and motivation for children at risk
- Art in magnet schools: Magnet Schools of America

C. **National Practice in Egyptian Visual Art Education**

- Museum education project through Fulbright Commission
- Power of art in thinking strategies: mind mapping project at College of Art Education
• Art activities for children at risk in Susan Mubarak 1000 School Project
• Art for the elderly: art activities in Senior Centers
• Art for child cancer patients: Children's Tumor Center
• Art and children with special needs: e.g. program for the visually impaired at the Alexandria Library (Biblioteca Alexandrina)
• Artful thinking and art production: Teacher training program, College of Art Education
• Art and multiculturalism College of Art Education in collaboration with Alexandria Library (Biblioteca Alexandrina)
• Crafts and human development in and out of school: College of Art Education, Society for Folk Art and UNESCO

D. International Accreditation Criteria for Art Teacher Preparation and Student Learning Outcome Programs

Until recently, the focus of most educational efforts has been on closing the achievement gaps between high and low achieving students. Today, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills which includes members of the business community, education leaders, and policymakers suggests that because the people and economies of the world are increasingly interdependent educational efforts should focus on closing global achievement gaps. With a growing demand for culturally sensitive, multilingual workers who are creative, inventive, flexible and open to new ideas from a variety of sources we need to be preparing our young people to learn information that is yet to be discovered and skills that are not yet practiced so that they can succeed in jobs that are yet to be defined.

Important contributions of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills include:

• defining a set of generic skills
• promoting art as a core subject and vehicle for acquiring these skills
• integrating visual art, music, theater, and dance into a coherent whole

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills inspired several organizations devoted to international educational accreditation including the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC), and the National Board for Professional Teacher Standards (NBPTS). Organizations focused primarily on Visual Art Education include the National Art Education Association (NAEA), and the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD).
The Projects

The movement to meet international accreditation standards in Egypt was spearheaded by the Higher Education Enhancement Project Fund (HEEPF) (2002) and the National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAA) (2007) charged with capacity building towards preparing schools and colleges for Quality Assurance and Accreditation and Standards-Based Student Evaluation.

Included in the capacity building efforts were the following two projects:
1. Establishing Internal Accreditation Systems for Colleges of Specific Education
2. Establishing Content Criteria for Visual Art Education in General Education grades 1-12.

1. Establishing Internal Accreditation Systems for Colleges of Specific Education.

   **Background:** Historically, education in the Visual Arts in Egypt was limited to the College of Art Education in Cairo founded in 1957. Its 500 a year undergraduate and 100 graduate students were barely sufficient to the need for teachers of the visual arts in high schools and resulted in relegating primary and elementary students to teachers in possession of only high school diplomas. To address the need for qualified teachers in underserved areas, Egypt opened 18 Colleges of Specific Education in 1988-2000, each with a department of Visual Arts Education.

   The graduates of these schools tend to remain in their local communities rather than migrate to the capital thus addressing the lack of the arts in their often closed and conservative communities, schools and colleges. They established art activities for children with special needs. Murals appeared on community buildings, local festivals included various forms of art and previously gender-segregated students worked and played together. The teachers exhibited their art and were soon assisting local crafts people to develop new techniques and diversify their handiwork.

   But these teachers faced three serious obstacles.

   - They were not sufficiently well-trained to meet all the demands on them and/or fully utilize the available opportunities.
   - Their colleges were isolated from each other and the larger art world
   - They lacked mentors who could help them establish high standards and quality programs.

   They were perfect candidates for internal accreditation capacity building skills.

In 2008 the Education Reform Project (ERP) in collaboration with the Supreme Council of Universities (SCU) and USAID set up 14 weeks of training for 45 teachers from all over the
country: Establishing the Internal Quality Assurance Programs for Colleges of Specific Education.

Local and international art education experts, representatives of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education met with the sponsoring organization to design a program of

- capacity building to improve art teaching skills (6 weeks)
- developing student performance standards/learning outcomes in the context of the national academic reference standards (8 weeks)

The 45 participants worked in groups which were supplied basic national and international reference materials. The groups developed two products:

1. National academic reference standards for Visual Art Education
   a. Basic knowledge and understanding of the field
   b. General intellectual and life skills
   c. Professional skills (Teaching and learning-knowledge of students as learners –professional , engagement and leadership)
   d. Transferrable skills

2. Specific programs to improve the academic quality of Visual Art Education in Colleges of Specific Education that
   a. Define the field of Visual Art Education
   b. Define the role of Visual Art teachers
   c. Define and weight the Visual Art Education content areas
   d. Classify performance indicators according to grade levels

The follow-up to this project included questionnaires sent to the Colleges of Specific Education and completed by their students, teachers and administrators. Others questionnaires were sent to 180 schools and completed by their art teachers. The results were positive and a report submitted to the Supreme Council of Universities.

Although no official follow-up studies have been performed to determine what effects the workshop had on moving the accreditation process forward, anecdotal data suggest that almost 90% of the Colleges of Specific Education are in the process of accreditation

2. Establishing Content Criteria for Visual Art Education in General Education grades 1-12.

Background: When Egypt first established national content standards for general education grades 1-12 in 2003 it failed to address any of the arts. Student and teacher art books were withdrawn from the schools and art was relegated to after school voluntary
activities. By 2007, with the founding of NAQAA, the arts were determined important vehicles of generic skill development for all children and defined as compulsory core subjects.

This project addressed the need for Visual Art Education content criteria in grades 1-12 that had not yet been fully articulated and was designed to reflect the accreditation criteria which everyone received.

In June, 2008, NAQAA A charged a committee of educators representing the College of Education, the College of Art Education, the Ministry of Education, and the National Council for Educational Research, Curriculum and Assessment to develop criteria for Visual Art Education in grades 1-12. It reviewed national and international Visual Art curricula and performed a needs assessment of Visual Art Education in Egyptian schools.

The committee met 20 times and produced a document that defined, Visual Art Education, Content Criteria for Visual Art Education, and Visual Art Student Skill Acquisition. The document was reviewed by a committee representing other academic disciplines to integrate Visual Arts with other arts and other fields. Five deans of Egyptian Departments of Art Education reviewed these reports and produced a comprehensive document that established content criteria for Visual Art Education on General Education grades 1-12. A content analysis was performed to insure that these criteria were consistent with international standards of education in the 21st century.

By combining the work of the two projects we produced the following: (1) general skill criteria for Visual Art Education in Egypt and (2) a Curriculum for Visual Art Education as a Core Subject in grades 1-12 in Egypt

1. **General Skill Criteria for Visual Art Education in Egypt**
   - **Creativity and innovation**
     Creativity, innovation and imagination in art production and personal insight. Using the arts to express ideas, emotions and beliefs.
   - **Critical thinking and problem solving**
     Critical thinking, reflection, evaluation, art criticism, art appreciation and aesthetic response to art and nature, building criteria for evaluating art work
   - **Communication**
     Visual and verbal communication, cultural diversity
   - **Collaboration**
     Group activities in art craft and design and community service
- **Information literacy**: Visual and verbal knowledge and understanding of national and world art history. Using technology to create, perform and conduct research in the arts and advocate for art education. Use technology as a tool to access visual and digital media and verbal information. Encourage and promote the development of art practices through digital media.

- **Media and technology**: Create multiple divergent thinking, sketches, ideas and integrating the arts and making connections among the arts and other disciplines. Relating art activities to community needs, engaging in art activities. Participating in the community's cultural and artistic life. Relates art activities to community needs, knowing various careers for art in the community and understanding the productive role of hand crafts, art workshops and exhibitions in society.

- **Flexibility and adaptability**: Understanding the relation between national and international history of art and popular art.

- **Initiative and self direction**: Recognize the role of Arts Education in preparing audiences and different sectors of the public to appreciate artistic manifestations.

- **Global awareness**: Choose art work to produce portfolios of original art work; participate in solo or group exhibitions. Using personal commitment and vision when reflecting upon and evaluating art. Demonstrate mastery of complex art techniques and skills. Pays great attention to details.

- **Civic Art Education**: Using personal commitment and vision when reflecting upon and evaluating art. Demonstrate mastery of complex art techniques and skills. Pays great attention to details.
2. Curriculum for Visual Art Education as a Core Subject in grades 1-12 in Egypt

- History and Culture
  - International art heritage and tradition
  - Contemporary art styles and time periods
  - Egyptian art heritage and traditions
  - Crafts and folk traditions
  - Art museums and galleries
  - Cultural, personal and practical functions of art

- Aesthetics and Art Valuing
  - Principles and Elements of art
  - Expressive Techniques
  - Visual and aesthetic forms in nature and art

- Creative Expression and Art Production
  - Creating and developing ideas
  - Reflecting and revising ideas in subjects
  - Applying design concepts in art work
  - Expressive use of media tools and technology

- Art Criticism and Communicating Meaning or Purpose
  - Basics of art criticism
  - Criteria of informed judgment in art
  - Basic tools for discussing art
  - Summative evaluation and meta-analysis
  - Communicating social and personal values
• Connecting Art with other Knowledge Fields
  o Integrating visual art with other art forms
  o Integrating visual art with other disciplines

• Art Activities and Community Needs
  o Role of art in society
  o Small partnership projects and craft development
  o Directing artistic workshops and museum education projects
  o Careers in art and design
  o Art in other jobs and careers

The most important outcome of these efforts has been the dramatic change in the Ministry of Education's position *vis a vis* Visual Art Education in grades 1-12. Not only has it reintegrated Art as a core subject in the curriculum but has, for the first time, entered a formal partnership with the Ministry of Culture that will continue to improve and enhance art education by providing schools with art work, establishing artist in residence programs and supply other support.

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