

Developing Ideas From Nature For Ceramics

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Abstract: *Developing ideas particularly in art is by no means a new concept. Renowned career artists and art educators acknowledge that most art works do not just happen, seemingly coming out of nothing, but are products of conscious exploration of ideas and carefully searching for, hence, unrecognized relationships between them. These ideas are refined till the artist finally arrives at aesthetic order and then executes the form in a medium. This study explored the concept of idea development with reference to natural objects for the teaching and learning of ceramics in schools and to emphasize process over product as a means to guide the growth of the creative thinking abilities of students through the development of visual ideas. Data was collected by qualitative method which involved five stages namely; preparatory, finding a natural object, drawing, modelling and appreciation. Except for the preparatory stage, the visual students wrote a personal report on each stage soon after completion. The findings were that nature is a basic and a reliable source for visual ideas. When idea development (process) was combined with modelling (product), the finished artefact appeared to be original and emotionally more satisfying to the students. However, when theoretical foundations for idea development are not properly laid, the creativity of students suffers.*

Keywords: *Creativity, Idea, Idea Development, Nature, Natural Object.*

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper identified idea development as a basis for artistic creativity which can help reduce the incidence of stereotype forms in the making of art in schools. It also explored the concept of idea development with reference to natural objects for the teaching and learning of ceramics.

In art, ideas are hatched or identified and developed through various thinking processes and the final forms are realized in varying media: clay, wood and paint. An idea is an image of an external object formed by the mind. It is a notion, thought impression, any product of intellectual action of memory and imagination (Schwarz, 1988). Here, the mind or the mental faculty plays a major role in idea development and this idea is formed by the help of the eye (Mish, 1990). With the eye, one has the ability to see not merely to look at forms in nature or in the environment. Wildenhain (1986) holds the view that 'Eidos', meaning idea in Greek, was something that one reaches with the eyes, through one's sight, by the process of seeing and identified as that which was visual and seen. The form that is seen with the inner eye was "the idea".

The concept of idea development is intended to look at ways by which details of objects can be explored by the senses of perception thereby representing the character of objects in drawing. According to Amenuke *et al.*, (1991), the purpose of idea development is to help artist to create their own forms from known ones. Amenuke *et al.* emphasize that many ideas exist in the environment - shapes, structures, textures, colours and patterns of objects which can guide the artist to create new forms. Known objects in this context may refer to both natural and man-made objects found in the environment which the artist has lived with and for that matter is familiar.

Additionally, Amenuke *et al.* revealed that, to develop an idea from the shape or form of an object one first needs to explore details of the object. Critical observation which is vital in exploring the object results in grasping the outstanding features of the object to create a variety of ideas for development. This factor in idea development enlarges the form-knowledge; keep the artist fresh and from working only by formula and feed inspiration. Observation involves the eye to look at an object in order to identify its shape, colour, pattern, tone and size.

A child learns about roundness from handling a ball far more than from looking at it (Moore) Also the sense of touch helps to feel the texture that is, the smoothness or roughness of the object. All these interaction with the object helps the artist to acquire visual information which enables him to represent the object accurately on paper.

Drawing the object as accurately as possible is another important factor to consider in idea development. One of the simplest ways to draw an object is by using lines to get the outline. An outline drawing has no shading, no interior detail and no background. Apart from the outline of the object, texture also is very important in getting the accuracy of the object. Gilbert and MacCarter, (1988), identified texture as the surface quality, a perception of smooth or rough, flat or bumpy, fine or coarse. This factor expresses the character of the object. Another important point in idea development is the fact that several drawings of parts of the object should be done. Amenuke *et al.*, stated that, it is very necessary when the artist is drawing an object to focus on specific spots that create more interest. Read (1977) asserts that, Henry Moore's drawings sometimes began with no preconceived problem to solve, with only the desire to use pencil on paper and make lines, tones and shapes with no conscious aim. Sub-consciously, the mind takes in what is produced to a point where some ideas become conscious and crystallizes, consequently a control and ordering process begins to take place.

In drawing, there could be additions of new ideas or deleting some ideas from the details of objects. Ghiselin, (1985) says Pablo Picasso orders things in accordance with his passions. Pictures moved toward their completion by progression. Each day brought something new. A picture was a sum of additions. In idea development, it is essential to maintain the basic idea, that is, in drawing the object, the initial vision remains almost intact in spite of additions and subtractions. Even if all appearances of reality are removed, the basic idea of the object remains.

a) *Nature serves as a very essential source for idea development. Ideas from nature are possible because there are a variety of shapes, textures, tones and patterns to exploit and incorporate them into works of art. Read (1977) states that, while some artist will look outside for their inspiration, others however, turn inwards to their own brains and psyches for their art, but the latter is still influenced by the experiences gained from interaction with the environment. Having taken his cue or theme or motif from nature, Henry Moore finds that he has in contemplation, not a dead and fixed idea, but one which is full of suggestions. To quote Read further, "the form lives' moves and has its being; like a cellular organism, it divides and subdivides, multiplies and recombines in an almost endless series of variations".*

b) *There is, explicitly, not only a form of life which is derived from nature but also a life of forms. The typical forms develop out of one another and even the most abstract are most vital. In idea development, nature inspires the artist to observe and not to look; to think about the most outstanding elements in an object and how they influence his reaction to question, explore and dream.*

Goetz (1994), maintains that creativity is the ability to make or otherwise bring into existence something new,

whether a new solution to a problem, a new method or device, or new artistic objects or form. Amenuke *et al.* apart from defining creativity as "making something new" they further postulated that creativity involves inventing new things or ideas, re-arranging old things or ideas in new forms. The ability to create new things or ideas is characterized by divergent thinking, richness in ideas, originality or uniqueness in thinking. The individual's freedom of expression in this vein is not limited.

Hindrances to creativity however, close up students creative abilities. One such hindrance is the use of bad and outmoded teaching methods. Using bad methods will tend to turn out conformists, stereotypes, individuals whose education is "completed" rather than freely creative and original. Lowenfeld and Brittain (1987) assert that art is not a subject where there are specific answers; in this regard the teacher should neither think he knows nor look for right answers pertaining to students' works. Lowenfeld further explains that it is rather important for the teacher to focus on encouraging each student in a very personal way to develop self-discovery and stimulating depth of expression.

Imposition of teacher's ideas on students may also lead to producing stereotyped and unimaginative works of art. There is little teaching in the modern method, because self-expression in art which is the basis of creativity cannot be taught, but it can be stimulated. Self-expression in art is a subject in which the student is an expert and gains healthy self-confidence. No one can tell the student how to be himself, but a wise teacher can provide students with materials, stimulus and above all, praise for the tentative efforts to reveal what goes on in the mind. "Don't do it my way, do it your way", should be the yardstick of the teacher of art (Lowenfeld and Brittain, 1987). These authors concept of teaching art is crucial to the principles of this research in view of the fact that it creates the environment for students to work on their own in order to bring out innate ideas.

It is vital to discuss the concept of form and to show how objects suggest shapes for idea development. Gilbert, (1992) explain form as, everything from the material the artist uses, shapes, lines and colours in a work of art. As regards idea development, it is the form that determines the kind of idea or shape which may be created. It is also from the experiences of the artist that the object suggests form. It is vital for a given form to be broken down and allowed to suggest associative forms and fantasies.

Read, (1977) noted that, the meaning and significance of form itself probably depends on the countless associations of man's history. The past and the present life styles of the individual affect his consciousness to form and impulse to create. For instance, rounded forms convey an idea of fruitfulness, maturity, probably because the earth, women's breasts and most fruits are rounded and these shapes are important because they have this background in our habits of perception.

The world is full of people who are carrying around in their heads great ideas for a work of art. What is lacking is form. Form is essential to any work of art (Gilbert, 1992). It can be deduced from the foregoing that form is a three-dimensional object which can be viewed from a number of

angles at three. It should be noted that in idea development the form must be visible thus the product resulting from the process.

II. METHODS

With the adoption of the project method by Dewey (1939/1991), Winneba Secondary School, Ghana was employed as the population for the study. A sample of ten was drawn out of thirty-eight students (six girls and four boys) from the third year ceramic class. This was necessary so that the researcher will have adequate time (one-on-one) for each student during the project period. A general introduction of the project and brief interview was conducted to sample the views of students on the project. The criterion for selection was based on students who appeared to be reflective individuals, more independent and were willing and able to communicate their experiences and perceptions. Such subjects provided insights into the concept of idea development that no amount of observation would reveal. They helped the researcher see the implications of specific findings of the project. Also, the interest and enthusiasm demonstrated by the selected students was a factor. Initial observations revealed that the girls showed more commitment and exhibited interest in exploring new ways of generating ideas for art, hence the greater in number. For the sake of this paper only six students' works will be featured. A whole school term of three months was spent in undertaking the project. The preparatory stage took three weeks while the idea development process (drawing), and the practical execution stage (modeling), took about nine weeks. The project itself was carried out in five stages, the preparatory, finding a natural object, drawing, modeling and appreciation stages.

A. PREPARATORY STAGE

The initial meeting with the students included a lecture given by the researcher on the definition of art, design and composition of the elements of design, the importance of art making, idea development, the creative person and creativity in particular. The second meeting brought a painter/sculptor to discuss experiences related to the artistic process; purpose of art, natural objects as a source of ideas, elements and principles of design, idea development and what influences artists to make art. The third stage involved watching a video programme. Here, students got an insight into two topics: methods used by artists to generate ideas and how artists explore ideas for artistic execution. Questions were invited from the students during all of these activities.

B. FINDING A NATURAL OBJECT

Students had the freedom in finding interesting natural objects in the environment. Their interest depended on varied shape or form, texture and pattern found on the surface of objects, students used their senses for instance, the sense of touch to feel the nature of the surface of the objects. This is to enable students have personal contact with the found objects before drawing them (see Figure 1 for found objects).

C. DRAWING THE OBJECT

The drawing involved critical study of the shape, planes, textures, positive and negative spaces of the objects. The objects were drawn from different angles including details of texture, tones and planes. Several sketches were developed from the initial drawing (Figure 2-10). From these studies, the most interesting drawings from the point of view of the students were selected and played around with until students arrived at a form. Students were encouraged to allow the free flow of visual ideas and to hold back judgment especially at the initial stages of developing ideas. These forms were then drawn according to the way they would look like when executed three dimensionally. The selected drawings served as a guide while modelling in clay. The class was interrupted when requested by a student to allow the discussion of a work. Every student was encouraged to participate and contribute to these class discussions. While avoiding an authoritarian stance, the researcher took control and directed discussions into those channels that would help discover relevant knowledge.

D. MODELLING

Students were encouraged to come out with techniques which they considered would help them express their individual aesthetic. First the students visualized the third dimensional aspect of their works by trying to see in the mind what was happening at "the other side" of their designs. After that students were exposed to forming methods including coiling, pinching, slabbing, etc. They were also encouraged to think of and develop any other methods they considered capable of helping them to build their forms the way they saw them in their minds. The works were finally executed in clay and allowed to dry (see Figure 8).

E. APPRECIATION STAGE

An appreciation of works involving students and the researcher was done to allow the former to share their experiences during the project. This discussion also touched on how they, the students, arrived at the ideas expressed in the process of drawing and modelling. Appreciation of audio recording of students about their work permitted the researcher to do qualitative analysis of the views of the students.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The preparatory lectures and the audio visual tutorials which exposed students to where artist get their ideas from and how they translate them into visual form gave the students good theoretical background for the whole idea development project. Two students who missed the introductory part and could not watch the video programme were unable to have adequate background information within the limited time to sustain their interest, found it difficult to cope with the work later. In effect they dropped out. The idea development exercise gave the students a feeling of independence and the

confidence that they can work on their own. It has also taught them that the view of their colleagues is as important as those of the art teacher. Discussions that took place among the students about the project were enriching.

Students got their objects either nearby on campus, the bush or the seashore. Students affirmed that they were familiar with the found objects just as *Amenuke et al* established, but the introductory lessons gave them an insight as to what to look for in an object. They mostly dwelt on the textures, shapes, cracks, projections and depressions to choose their objects as shown in Figure 1. These they said sustained their interest to draw from several angles.

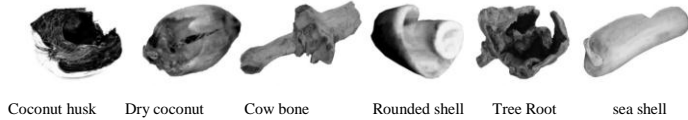


Figure 1: Selected objects for the project

The project has confirmed that, the shape, form, texture of natural objects chosen and used by the students to some degree influenced the final form. Students who started with complicated natural objects but with poor drawing skills encountered some initial difficulties (Fig. 1, Plate 5), while students who had rather very simple natural objects (Fig. 1, Plate 6) had problem abstracting as can be seen in Figure 7. Figures 2 to 7 are drawings based on the 6 objects in Figure 1.



Figure 2: Drawings of coconut husk



Figure 3: Drawings of dry coconut



Figure 4: Drawings of cow bone



Figure 5: Drawings of sea shell

The process of putting order into the drawn objects involves imaginative thinking. The more imaginative a student was, the more creative the finished work. The final objects which emerged from the students drawing were new and original which is the basis for creativity as affirmed by Goetz as well as *Amenuke et al*. The final products were not a duplicate copy of peoples' works. They can be viewed from three angles; front, side and back.

The object in Figure 6 is so complicated that the student was unable to finish the drawings for modelling in clay.

Unfortunately, this particular student missed the introductory classes making it extremely difficult to understand the concept of choosing the right object.



Figure 6: Drawings of tree root

In Figure 7, the object chosen by the student is too simple, as such, abstracting became an impediment in arriving at the final sketch for modelling. As such the student's interest was not sustained because of the limited sketches obtained from the object.



Figure 7: Drawings of flat shell

Most students initially had difficulty transferring drawings into three-dimensional form because they lacked the skill of visualizing two-dimensional drawings in three-dimensional form. They also lacked basic hand building ceramic skills. Therefore longer periods were used to introduce these skills to them. The basic forming methods used include coiling, pinching and slabbing. While some used a single method others combined two. In decorating the works, it was realised that most students adopted the incising technique. It was confirmed that this technique is simple since it can be used at any stage of drying, from soft to bone dry and is useful for making textures. Also simple pointed tools of different sizes can be freely handled to indent a design into the clay. Most students did not completely depart from the textures found on the objects.



Figure 8: Final fired works

The process of idea development is a process of abstraction and it brought to students the awareness that, there is no guarantee of success in ones project all the time. Idea development is a process of problem solving through art and so like problem solving in any other discipline the fact that things would not always work out right should be anticipated. Sometimes one may succeed, another time one may fail. It is therefore not strange to notice two students unsuccessful in carrying out the project.

IV. CONCLUSION

In spite of the numerous art activities these visual arts students might have undertaken over the years, this project in

idea development according to the students themselves is unquestionably the most challenging, yet the most rewarding artistic venture ever undertaken by them. It is a fact that the students find the process new. Like a traveller venturing into uncharted waters, they were at first resistant and sceptical, but their determination yielded dividends.

The project enabled the students to apply, independently and creatively, the knowledge of composition and modelling that had been acquired in lectures. This fact confirms the views of Knoll (1997) that theory and practice belonged together, and Woodward (1887) that students first learn, in a course of instruction, the skills and knowledge that they then apply independently and creatively in the practical project.

Again, students had freedom to execute the project in accordance with their interest and abilities. They were permitted to choose objects on their own, as a result of which they made use of their abilities significantly.

The habit of critical thinking was developed among the students during the project period. Decisively, they were able to appreciate and criticise the work of their colleagues employing the art language. In effect, it promoted social interaction and co-operation among the students, as they have to work as team.

Students gain knowledge directly through their own efforts, thus, they acquire permanent kind of information, which will remain with them for a long time (Himanshu, 2012).

Idea development should be the basis for ceramic art activities in institutions of learning. This will enable students to become more fulfilled artists. When ceramics teachers combine idea development with modelling, students are able to actualize themselves in new and spontaneous ways. Thus, they develop the ability to work with elements and concepts to translate from one form to another. This experience is indispensable both in school and in the real world.

Finally, in planning the art lesson, the exchange of ideas among students should be encouraged such that students will have broad concepts of the subject of idea development before embarking on projects.

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