

## FREE ACTIVITY METHOD OF TEACHING CULTURAL AND CREATIVE ARTS

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### Abstract

The free activity method of teaching is a method developed from the works of Rousseau, Froebel, Pestalozzi and Montessori. Their idea is that children should not only express themselves freely, but should also learn on their own without any interference by teachers or parents. The free activity method can help bring out the creative ability in children and help them discover their talents. The free activity method of teaching does not appear to be adequately explored, and does not seem to bring out the full potentials of children's artistic abilities. This may be due to how the method is being handled in schools. This paper is on the free activity method and how it can be used to help children express themselves freely.

**Key words: Free Activity Method, Culture and Creative Art, Teaching Methods**

### Introduction

Method of teaching has to do with principles and styles of instruction or teaching. It is also to do with the nature of education. The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC, 2007), Federal Ministry of Education, advocated for the introduction of child centered learning to be emphasized at the early level. It is expected that, teaching and learning should be within easy understanding of the child, and that children should be allowed to learn on their own and at their own pace. According to Westlake (2013) art by nature is a creative subject, and creative teaching methods are necessary parts of art course. He advised teachers to employ good teaching methods, to make a class memorable for children and to awaken their artistic abilities. Teaching strategy determines the approach a teacher may take to achieve learning objectives. It is used by teachers to create learning environments and the choice of activity which the teachers and the learners will be involved during the lesson.

Teaching strategies are used during the lesson presentation to ensure that the sequence or delivery of learning materials helps the learners. Mamza (2007) observed that art teaching is given little attention in schools. It is often seen as leisure time pursuit and this is one of the problems that exist in most primary schools in Nigeria. Mamza further said that art is sometimes used as a filler activity. It is therefore important for teachers to use various teaching methods in order to reach out to the children effectively. This however requires good knowledge of the best teaching strategies that could be most effective for the learning process. Suitable methods should be used to make learners learn on their own. This implies the provision of appropriate freedom of participation in classroom activities. Palkowski (2014) believed that pedagogy offers ways to assist learners in the development of their skills, and knowledge in visual arts.

Mbahi (1999) observes that the majority of teachers use one or combination of several methods of teaching like free activity, activity class, group method, art project, teaching aids, display and exhibition. Teachers

are encouraged to select the appropriate techniques for teaching. There are methods which recognize play as the major factor. Pestalozzi in Mbahi (1999) is of the view that children are born with potentials therefore education should only build on such. Mbahi (1999) points out that teachers must avoid giving the impression that only their views count. If they want to promote independence, critical and creative thinking, they have to avoid methods of teaching which stifle initiative and promote the acceptance of authoritarianism. A good teaching method therefore, will provide opportunities for children to use their inborn abilities, and how well the education system prepares the young ones.

There are some methods which, as Lowenfeld in Lopata, Wallace and Finn (2005) describe, are either ineffective or actively harmful to the artistic development of children, especially in the area of motivation. Olorukooba (2006) also supported Lowenfeld's view that the techniques of teaching and the way they are generally handled by art teachers may be inappropriate or ineffective and unrelated to the inspiration of the child. Therefore, it will be important to consider a suitable method, a capable teacher who has sufficient ability and liking for children to teach art.

A good teacher should have a variety of skills, good classroom management, organized; understand learning techniques and many other skills. With these skills, there will be a successful lesson delivery in the classroom with lots of fun. A teacher should gain a good relationship with the learners so as to be able to draw their attention. An effective teacher can help engage learners in learning creative skill. Effective teachers use different strategies in different combinations with different groups of learners to help improve learning outcomes. These different strategies also suit different types of skills and fields of knowledge, and because teaching strategies are used to deliver information in a classroom, as well as prepare creative condition that will encourage learner's success, teachers become personal models to the learners.

Some teaching methods like the demonstration method are based on the principle that one learns best by doing. It has been described as audio-visual explanation that emphasizes the important points of a process, product or an idea. It involves telling, showing and doing for the benefit of a group of persons. Demonstration method can be used to provide examples that enhance lectures and to offer effective hands-on inquiry based learning opportunities in classes. This method is also used when the teacher or an expert on a topic being taught performs the task in a step-by-step manner so that learners will eventually be able to complete the same task independently. The goal is for the learner to recognize how to solve problems when unexpected obstacles or problems arise. The discussion method is a method of teaching which covers classroom learning activities involving active and co-operative consideration of a problem or topic under study. It involves active participation of the members of the class. The teacher initiates interaction and allows the students to pursue the discussion. The students react, argue, suggest solutions, evaluate and draw conclusion. This discussion method has limitation at the low level because of the learner's mastery of language. Another teaching method is learning by doing where the learners practice how to manipulate

things. Children learn to do things without guidance. This method is also known as hands-on learning. It is an educational method that directly involves the learner, by actively encouraging them to do something in order to learn about it.

The discovery method is where students are compelled to search, discover, and find out for themselves, new things, rules, and principles about knowledge. The play method is a form of dramatization where the learners take part and their imagination leads them to act in the capacity of a known or imaginary individual. The cooperative method involves doing things together in a group setting where each member has a different task or role to play. The learners work together to come up with the answer or create the products or project that is required of them. The learners make unique contributions which bring about learning to the group or class. Each group is required to present its findings in front of the other groups and the teacher.

The free activity method is based on the idea that children should not only express themselves freely, but should also be able to learn on their own without any interference by teachers or parents Mbahi (2015) explained that teachers who use the method let children alone to do what they like without much interference. Teachers permit children to be free to do what they like. He concluded by saying that success or failure of this teaching method depends on how teachers interpret and understand its philosophy and the value of the method lies in the freedom it gives to the child to choose what he wants to express.

Mohammed (2013) agrees that free activity method encourages freedom of expression and creativity in learning. In this method teachers permit children to do what they like, when they wish and in any way they want. He further said that this freedom allows children to move about in the classroom to secure materials and tools. It is observed that teachers in primary schools who do not have any background in art seem not to understand what children need when art activities are carried out. They have little understanding of art as well as the teaching method that should be used. For the free activity method to be taught successfully, art should be presented in an atmosphere designed to encourage the freedom of creativity with less intervention. Kouvou in Mbahi (2013) stated that children express the internal self directly without intervention. The restrictive teaching method used by teachers in the primary schools does not help bring out the creative ability of the children. In restricted teaching the teachers tell the children what to draw, an instruction is given to the children and the children obey without questions. This approach does not allow the children to display the characteristics of their different developmental stages. It is expected that at each developmental stage, a child should be able to draw certain things, and as the child develops to the next stage, his drawing should get better and include more details, but if the child draws only what the teacher says, these details will not be manifest.

### **Cultural and Creative Arts**

Cultural and Creative Arts (CCA) is an integration of music, visual arts, drama, and dance in which a learner is expected to grow into the cultural heritage of his people. A learner is expected to perform naturally as a product of the culture, appreciate and acquire the element of his culture. Cultural and creative arts is designed and approved by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) with the idea of inculcating positive values and manipulates skills in young learners for the enrichment and development of the Nigerian society by teaching art and crafts, values, customs and traditions. This approach encourages the interpretative skills of learners through performance and demonstrative activities. Such activities should not only enable learners to benefit greatly from the subject matter but also to develop lifelong interest in the cultural arts, and also to fully equip themselves with the needed resources and good teaching methods like the free activity method which gives learners opportunity to express themselves freely.

Cultural and creative arts are activities designed to give control and meaning to learners because they foster their understanding of their own culture and that of others. So teachers of cultural and creative arts can create ideas which will help learners develop their own ideas as well to produce a meaningful art. Learners can even create imaginary communities and learn more about their culture

### **Classroom Environment for Free Activity Method**

Children are highly creative. They have a natural tendency to fantasize, experiment, and explore their physical and conceptual environment. Teachers are expected to develop and provide the child with a natural environment that will be good for creative work. Everything is a new experience for the child, and all they need is supplies of assorted tools for creative growth. It is important to continue to nurture creativity in children at the early stage, because as they start elementary school and begin spending more and more time with a wider circle of people. It is not uncommon for them to lose interest in certain activities. By recognizing creativity in children's play and the use of their imagination, a parent or a teacher can offer a significant resource for excellence in everything they pursue. Edging their way towards the teenage years, older school-age children have frequently developed strong interest and bond of friendships; their school and social activities for this age are the ones that will allow their minds to grow and their imagination to flourish.

It also requires providing a suitable place for the child where they can freely move around and work with teaching/learning materials provided by the teachers. The provision of a good environment for effective learning is very useful for the promotion of play activities. There are also many classroom activities both inside and outdoors that the teachers can use for learners. The learners can learn from nature as they play and create.

### **The Free Activity Teacher**

The selection of learning activities should proceed from the study of the child development, and the teachers' primary obligation is to study the child rather than the subject (Mbahi, 2000). Every effective art teacher must know his subject and also the nature of the child, the child's development, interest, needs, desires and mental capabilities at all levels. This helps the teacher understand the child and finds ways of motivating the child to achieve his goals.

Martin (2001) emphasized that children should be encouraged to be perceptive, imaginative, and creative when they are guided by knowledgeable and sympathetic persons who allow freedom to express ideas and feelings in a mode appropriate to their developmental level and ability. She stresses that this sort of freedom is nurtured in an atmosphere where children are provided with time, place, suitable materials, and ideal motivation from the child's own world or experience and feelings. The use of visual materials like photographs, books illustrations, comic's televisions, which include culturally derived imagery in their drawings should be provided by the teachers. Teachers should take full advantage of their fascination with culture and use it to develop their drawing abilities beyond the most basic level.

### **Classroom Teaching Procedure**

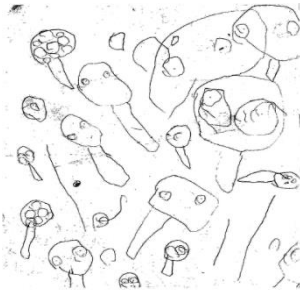
It is very important to make a classroom suitable, very comfortable, and well organized for learners. In every classroom situation, the learner needs to know what is expected of him to ensure he has a smooth free activity day. It is also necessary to have a discussion with the teachers about the activities and how to go about them. The learners can be involved in the activities of organizing the classroom procedures for the day. This process can nurture a sense of freedom and ownership in a classroom. According to Alst (2014) a successful instruction is highly dependent upon having all the learners highly engaged and independent in their activities. She further recommended that for learners to learn and grow the classroom environment needs to be structured and orderly. This means that classroom procedure needs to be in place and implemented consistently so that learners understand what is expected of them. One of the classroom teaching procedures a teacher should always have in place is to gain the attention of the learners; this is because learners should always be active.

### **Materials and Facilities required for Free Activity Teaching**

Every classroom situation should have an art station as one of the learning activities or a child care facility because art helps children learn through self-expression and creativity. Art also helps learners to develop fine motor skills required and improve their hand-eye-coordination. It makes them become aware of colours, texture, line and form. It also gives them opportunity to express their feelings in a positive way. If we appreciate the importance of arts, we are more likely to encourage children to do art. Vercillo (2013) thinks that one of the worst things that a teacher can do is to squelch a child's creativity. Creativity is how children approach the world in order to learn about it and to learn about themselves and it is how they

express the way they feel and how they share themselves with the world around them. Teachers squelch creativity without realizing that they are doing it. At other times, teachers just simply fail to nurture the buds of artistic expression that learners start blooming. As teachers, it is crucial to work on doing things that encourage children to express themselves, through creativity and this is done by providing enough materials and facilities suitable for their ages. If the learners are provided with optimum learning facilities, their learning will become joyful and long-lasting. The free activity method helps develop the learners skills and allow the learner study according to his/her own pace.

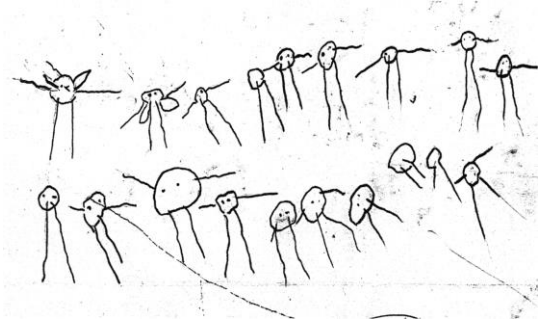
These are important skills that learners can use in daily life and continue to use as they grow into adults. All learners are creative. All the elements used in the creative process are natural and inborn. They all need self-expression, they are curious, they like to explore, they are imaginative and do not know what the expected outcome or answers are unless they are told. The outcome of most creative efforts is usually something you can touch, see, hear and taste. When a child uses crayons, a finished drawing may be the result of a creative work. It is not the drawing that you want to encourage, but the process of creating it. Encouraging creativity builds learners thinking skill. Learners learn to solve problems and come up with their own ways to do just about anything. It is important to allow children express and try their own way. Self-expression and being involved in creative activities not only help them learn, it is a lot of fun for them. Let learners learn by playing, exploring, imagining, creating, and ultimately discover new ways of seeing the world.



Here are Children's early works produced using free activity methods

**Drawing by Amina Aminu Ibrahim (3 years)**

Children make random scribbles and explore materials in a playful way. At first, the scribbles are uncontrolled and then progressively become controlled.



**Drawing by Anaticha Baba (4 years)**

Also noticeable in this child's drawing is the fact that he enjoys whatever image they produce and their creative instinct need to be encouraged rather than denying them the opportunity to do art in school.



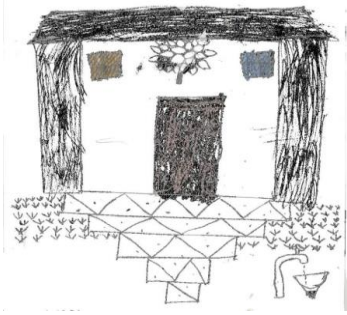
**Drawing by Zainab Muktari (7 years)**

Visual combinations of these forms result in the child's discovering universal design, which have been used in every primitive culture. That is, the child uses whatever he likes best or what is in closest proximity to him. At this stage children are still egocentric in thought and therefore draw what they wish. This period is also characterized by increased awareness of environment and flexibility seen in their drawings and art activities. As they become increasingly aware of the world around them, many objects that make up their environment will begin to appear in their drawings



**Drawing by Asmau Uwais (8 years)**

Basic objects found in the environment are seen in their drawings. X-Ray drawings show interiors and exteriors at the same time.



**Drawing by Tade Awogbade (8 years)**

**Source:** Mshelbila. H (2006). A study of the relationship between visual art expression and chronological age of nursery and primary school children in Yola north. Adamawa State

Favourite subjects are houses and plants; animals, cars, airplanes and amusements. Early schemata are drawn as if floating all over the page. Later schemata are related to a baseline at the bottom of the picture or multiple baselines covering the page from top to bottom. The baseline is highly significant in indicating readiness for co-operative play and thinking.

To be able to develop creative thinking in children, it is necessary to use the free activity method. In this method learners are left alone to do their work without interference. They have choice of subject matter according to their background, interest, needs, experiences and capabilities. They are free to do what they like. This approach will also help the teachers to evaluate the children's drawings with more precise records of their specific progress at each artistic developmental stage. They will either have enough skill and encouragement to continue or desire to create art on new things. If a learner has been discouraged by criticism or lack of enough art experience or exposure, the learner may not continue to draw or participate in visual art activities. When freedom is given to the children, they will be able to display these stages, especially when the free activity method is emphasised in schools.

**Conclusion**

The free activity method is a method that allows perfect freedom for the child and this freedom helps learners develop their own abilities. The free activity method requires a good environment for effective learning and promotion of play activities. When learners are given the opportunity and enough art materials to express themselves, they will be able to display their various characteristics. Teaching methodology is essentially the way a teacher explains or teaches students so they can learn. The philosophy a teacher chooses usually indicates how the teacher believes students can best learn new materials and the ways in which students and teachers should relate and interact in the classroom. There is not just one method of teaching art, every art lesson, class or learning environment requires different teaching methods, strategies and tactics. It is therefore, very important for teachers to know various teaching methods and instruction suitable for children. Art teaching should provide what is referred to as self-expression.



When the environment is not very conducive enough for the children to learn and art materials are not very adequate, coupled with lack of qualified art teachers who could use appropriate teaching styles and the pupils proper attention, could adversely affect the performance of the learners. The success of this method depends on the teacher's understanding and interpretation of its philosophy. The value lies in the freedom it gives the learners to choose what they want to express and the scope it gives them to experiment with knowledge and skills they are acquiring (Mbahi, 2015). This gives a learner a sense of initiative and independence.

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