



Challenges Encountered Towards The Enhancement And Optimal Learning Of The Creative Arts Subject In South Africa

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, there have been debates regarding the scope of Creative Arts subject in the existing curriculum known as the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement offered in the South African public schools. Crucial points in question include the fact that the curriculum does not fully equip learners with the requisite skills for their respective areas of interest; and that these public schools are finding it difficult to get suitable and fully equipped educators for all the art forms (dance, music, drama, and visual arts) located within this Creative Arts subject. Presently there still need to be more skilled educators for this subject. This article sets out to interrogate these and many other challenges encountered in teaching and learning this subject. The study adopted a qualitative research method to collect data, using techniques such as semi-structured, structured, and sometimes convergent interviews with the principals, teachers, and selected learners from the selected public schools. A substantial review of previous and recent scholarly writings on the subject was done to substantiate the findings. A phenomenological data analysis was adopted whereby the primary findings were presented in themes and supported by the quotes from the participants. The over-arching finding, and conclusion is that this Creative Arts subject requires some intervention strategies and revision by government and all relevant stakeholders.

Keywords: Creative Arts subject, arts-integrated learning programmes, skills, social cohesion, culture, transformation

INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of democracy in South Africa, there has been a paradigm shift in the educational system Introduction (Msila, 2007). The South African curriculum has been revised three times in terms of its content. Firstly, it was known as the National Curriculum Statement in 1997. Thereafter, it was amended as a Revised National Curriculum Statement in 2002. Lastly, it was amended as the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement in 2011, which was formalised in 2012. Each iteration was an attempt to improve the educational system of South Africa (Du Plessis, 2015). With this came a new learning area, whereby four art disciplines, namely music, visual arts, dance and drama (theatre) were amalgamated into one subject called the Creative Arts subject (Burnaford et al., 2013). The grouping introduced what became known as arts-integrated learning. The integration of music, visual arts, theatre, and dance meant that all art forms were to be taught and learned as one subject.

Unsurprisingly, this amalgamation of four disciplines into one subject, the Creative Arts subject, has yielded several challenges. A preliminary study revealed that the current educators that have been appointed to teach the Creative Arts subject do not possess the skills required to teach all the four disciplines within this subject. Moreover, it is impossible for four disciplines to be taught by one educator, and this is presently the case in South African public schools. In addition, these educators' lack adequate training, and some of them cannot teach even one of four creative arts. Moreover, the teaching and learning process does not fully equip learners with relevant skills for their respective area of interest (Moodley, 2013). This was corroborated by Van der Berg et al. (2011) who contended that the revision of the South African Creative Arts curriculum is highly necessary in order to improve the quality of education in South Africa. The curriculum also requires extensive revision. Hence, the decision to explore and unpack the core challenges connected

to the Creative Arts subject in public schools in South Africa.

Our preliminary review of literary works assisted us to unearth a similar arts-integrated programme in the United States of America called the Chicago Arts Integrated Programme. Readings about this revealed that the programme has achieved relative success. So, this study also set out to interrogate the learning and teaching models of the two arts programmes; the South African Creative Arts subject and the American Chicago Arts Integrated Programme.

This study compared the Chicago Arts Integrated Learning Programme with the South African Creative Arts subject offered by the South African Department of Basic Education to obtain an in-depth understanding of the similarities and differences between the two models. So, the theoretical sub-aim was to obtain an in-depth understanding of the similarities and differences between the two. The article attempts to extrapolate the merits and demerits of the American model, this in order to determine a comprehensive and consolidated conclusion and the concomitant recommendations. The primary objective to investigate and determine whether factors that contribute to the relative success of the Chicago Arts Integrated Programme can be drawn and implemented into South African Creative Arts subject.

The focus area of study was the three public art schools that currently offer the Creative Arts subject in Gauteng, namely National School of the Arts (Johannesburg), East Rand School of the Arts (Boksburg), and Pro Arte Alphen Park (Pretoria). The rationale behind this sample was based on the realization that the Gauteng Province has only three public schools that continue to offer the arts after Grade 9, namely the National School of the Arts (Johannesburg), East Rand School of the Arts (Boksburg), and Pro Arte Alphen Park (Pretoria). The rest of the schools are private schools and are not accessible to everyone due to the exorbitant school fees. Moreover, this was a manageable sample, for they were within reach of the researchers who also reside around the province.

METHOD

A qualitative research design and approach was employed in this study to collect data from a population of principals, educators, and learners in the three selected public schools in Gauteng Province. The population was located in three areas in Gauteng Province, namely Pretoria, East Rand,

and Johannesburg. A non-probability, purposive sampling method was adopted to complete the whole picture of the study. Face-to-face interviews (semi-structured and convergent) were conducted with the principals, educators, and selected the learners from the three public schools. The individuals who have substantial and relevant evidence information regarding the Creative Arts subject were identified, ranging from the three principals, six Creative Arts teachers, fifteen grade 8 and fifteen grade 9 learners from the selected schools in Gauteng province. The data collected from these participants was analysed, interpreted, and are herein discussed later.

The study was conducted under the following assumptions: All the targeted participants will respond honestly and candidly to the interview questions, as the interviews are conducted in a way that participants remain anonymous; and that the Creative Arts subject educators have a sincere interest in participating in that research. The major limitation that occurred during the study was that some of the participants were not fully aware of the Chicago Arts Integrated Learning Programme, which hampered the attempt to comprehensively compare the Chicago Arts Integrated Learning Programme with the Creative Arts subject. Ethical clearance and letters of consent were obtained from relevant offices and participants in the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A brief historical background of arts education in South Africa

The Creative Arts subject in South African public schools was introduced by the Department of Basic Education as a compulsory subject from Grade 4 to 9. The primary objective was to unite diverse cultures, ethnic groups, and languages (Dolby, 2001; Marx & Delport, 2017). Arts-integrated programmes have a holistic ethic that encourages social interaction between learners from different cultures, as described in the South African educational system). The Creative Arts subject was implemented in the South African educational system to unite the various cultures in the country (Department of Basic Education, 2011). However, De Villiers and Sauls (2017) and Chirwa (2014) note that there is a visible lack of Arts-integrated programme educators who are effectively trained to teach creative arts, and this compromises the quality of the teaching and learning of the subject. There is also a limited number of public schools that offer the Creative

Arts subject as a voluntary subject (Westraadt, 2011; Malan, 2015; Nompula, 2012). Vargas & Fernandez (2012). Numerous scholarly writings and the views of the various participants in interviews and discussions form the basis of this study.

Findings from relevant literature on Arts-Integrated Learning Programmes

Lately, there has been an ongoing global discourse on arts education and its relevance and significance to the society. A study conducted by Malan (2015) discloses that education reflects the political and traditional preferences and values of a country, and that education exists within the context of social, economic, political, cultural, and constitutional imperatives. It was for this reason that scholars such as Pinnock (2011) and Malan (2015) propose the implementation of integrated arts education that has become widely adopted in various countries to promote developing cognition, creativity, social interactions, and motor control. Whereas Farbman et al. (2015) and Dunstan (2016) have acknowledged that the arts-integrated learning programmes benefit learners by enhancing academic achievement in schools and improving confidence and teamwork, there are challenges encountered in South African public schools. The South African Creative Arts subject has a plethora of challenges and limitations, such as; time allocation and inadequacy of skilled and properly qualified practitioners, among others. (Nompula, 2012) notes that the Creative Arts subject encapsulates all the art forms, and that it is impossible for one teacher to teach all these art forms alone. This suggests that each art form in the Creative Arts should be taught separately.

The time allocated for Creative Arts subject is an hour per week during school hours and one hour per week after school and this does not assist in solving the problem at hand (Nompula, 2012; Beukes, 2016; Kokela, 2017; Van Vuuren and Eurika, 2018). So, the Creative Arts subject does not offer learners sufficient time, primarily due to the inadequacy of hours given to the subject, hence the learners cannot be fully equipped with relevant skills of the respective areas of interest (De Moss and Morris (2002). This is further exacerbated by the inadequacy of the teaching personnel with basic or fundamental knowledge of the subject.

Meanwhile, according to Hursen and Islek (2017), arts-integrated learning programmes are successful in the United States and Australia, among others.

According to Scott, Harper and Boggan (2012), the arts-integrated learning programmes that were adopted and introduced by the Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education have enhanced the United States' arts-teaching programme in public schools. Catterall and Waldorf (1999) state that since 1992, arts-integrated learning programmes were adopted and introduced in Chicago by the Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education. Fiske (1999) posits the arts-integrated learning programmes are as a great success in Chicago after the Chicago Arts Integrated Learning Programme was implemented in public schools.

It is against this background that this study proposes to interrogate this teaching and learning model called the Chicago Arts Integrated Learning Programme to extrapolate the merits of such a model and compare and contrast the Chicago model with the South African arts-integrated learning programme known as the Creative Arts subject.

The study was also motivated by the appraisal made by Scott et al. (2012), who establishes that adopting arts-integrated learning programmes could improve the Creative Arts subject in South African public schools. Nompula contends that the appraisal of arts-integrated learning programmes has become a significant point of interest for researchers and scholars (Nompula, 2012). Perhaps this arts-integrated-learning model could be a remedy in enhancing the teaching and learning of Creative arts and could assist in eliminating the challenges encountered within arts teaching and learning in South African public schools, especially in this study's Gauteng focus area.

Findings from the Chicago Arts Integrated Learning Programme

In the early 1990s, there was an elevated level of interest in the Arts Integrated Learning Programme in American schools, particularly amongst Chicago schools. However, the system of creative arts delivery could only be described as patchwork at best. Some schools had no creative arts educators, and most schools had a music educator or a visual arts educator, but not both. Almost no schools had access to dance, drama, or media arts. Where creative arts specialists existed, they were often sorely overextended and served as many as 1,400 learners a week. The creative arts educators often had no regular workspaces, little equipment, few materials and little contact with management or government at large, and this resulted in little shared planning time. The Chicago Arts Integrated

Learning Programme was created in response to an identified need for a more coherent model of access to the creative arts in Chicago public schools (Burnaford, et al., 2001).

The Chicago Arts Integrated Learning Programme is a citywide school improvement initiative that forges partnerships, connecting educators and schools with artists and creative arts organisations to make quality creative arts education a central part of the daily learning experience for public school learners in high-poverty-area schools. Teachers and artists work collaboratively to integrate the curriculum with creative art disciplines (Burnaford et al., 2013). Elementary school learners who attended schools in which the creative arts were integrated with classroom curriculum outperformed their non-arts-educated peers in Maths. In 1998, more than 60% of the learners attending schools integrated with the Chicago Arts Integrated Learning Programme performed at or above grade level (Burnaford et al., 2013; Nompula, 2012 and Beukes, 2016).

Findings on the Creative Arts subject in South Africa

The Creative Arts subject was envisaged and conceptualised to be an efficient tool for social and cultural cohesion in the South African public schools (Nompula, 2011; Beukes, 2016). This subject could play a fundamental role in influencing the social and (Beukes, 2016; De Villiers and Sauls, 2017) cultural cohesion in the schools. The Creative Arts subject through various art forms ranging from visual art, music, drama, and dance has brought unity in the society and shaped the perception of learners towards other cultures (Kokela, 2017). (Mugovhani and Nawa, 2019) add that arts and culture are largely considered as a common societal activity in mainly rural and traditional societies wherein every member of the community is expected to partake in some cultural activity. In the context of South African schools, arts and culture, which is embedded in the Creative Arts subject, have a crucial role in cultural identity.

According to Burnaford et al. (2013), arts-integrated learning programmes contribute greatly in schools because the programmes nurture the talent of learners by creating learning programmes that incorporate co-planning, and a rigorous, more inventive and sustainable curriculum, by contrast to delivering pre-packaged and transient programmes. Scott et al. (2012) add that the arts-integrated learning programmes in the Creative Arts subject play an essential part in promoting

academic self-discipline, which forms a vital aspect of a performer.

Undoubtedly, arts-integrated learning programmes are an effective method of teaching in which learners discover and demonstrate learning through the diverse arts, such as drama, dance, visual art, music, and creative writing (Nompula, 2012). According to Ngema (2007), the Creative Arts subject in South African Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement has become a prime means of artistic expression that has drawn and united various cultures. Therefore, the creative arts are a universal language across many cultures in Africa (Mokotow 2007). Creative arts are used for unity and reconciliation in South African communities. Britz (2002) and Manenye (2014) posit that the Creative Arts subject has been adopted in South African schools to unite various cultures. The subject promotes social cohesion, especially in rural schools (Britz, 2002; Manenye, 2014). Farbman et al. (2015) and Dunstan (2016) have acknowledged that the arts-integrated learning programmes benefit learners by enhancing academic achievement in schools and improving confidence and teamwork, there are challenges encountered when teaching creative arts in public schools in South Africa. Undoubtedly, arts-integrated learning programmes are an effective method of teaching in which learners discover and demonstrate learning through the diverse arts, such as drama, dance, visual art, music, and creative writing (Nompula, 2012).

One unanimous sentiment iterated by the principals of the three selected schools was that The Creative Arts subject is not treated as a critical subject in the majority of schools around Gauteng. This emerged after the participants stated that most schools do not have qualified educators. This has become a significant obstacle for learners to exhibit their talents and develop their skills. One principal added thus;

The Creative Arts subject in South African public school should have enough time allocated for learners and have strong teachers who will know exactly how to nurture the talent of the learners rather than tarnishing it (Anonymous).

These participating principals conveyed the importance of employing educators who are well equipped and are specialists in the subject in South African public schools. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement also requires extensive revision, particularly within the Creative Arts subject.

According to the educators, lack of adequate infrastructure does not allow for successful teaching. One of the educators stated:

It is challenging us to do practical work. We have to take learners outside because it is impossible to do practical work (drama or plays) in our classroom. We do not have a sports field on our premises, and that makes it challenging (anonymous).

The other added

Another issue is that time allocation, which does not allow all the syllabi these art forms (dance, drama, and music) to be fully covered. Another challenge is that quite often 'unqualified' teachers are required to teach the Creative Arts subject. This becomes difficult for learners to be productive in the classroom. Undoubtedly, the learners are not easily motivated because the intended goals or learning outcomes are not fully achieved.

The learners corroborated both the principals and their educators that time allocation is not sufficient for them to learn all the art forms. A strong statement of concern from one of the learners came thus:

The time that is allocated to us is not enough for us to learn as much as we are supposed to learn in the creative arts. You cannot expect me to have good dancing skills and talent in 1 hour 30 minutes. That is not enough at all for us to develop our skills. They do not have enough time to understand both theory and practical side.

One of the major concluding observation from these learners is that Creative arts assists them to develop their various talents and helps me to improve their understanding of other subjects, such as Maths and English, and to gain more confidence as learners all round. Creative arts education is linked to enhanced academic achievement in areas, such as mathematics, reading, creative problem solving, critical thinking, and verbal skills, and can improve motivation, concentration, confidence, and teamwork. Research acknowledges the value of creativity, curiosity, and imaginative play, particularly for young children, and the need for innovative, creative, and critical thinking in successful societies of the future (Barnejee, 2010). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation states that arts education keeps learners in school (UNESCO, 2015).

Wolf (1999) posits that the arts-integrated learning at the primary level of education improves the learners' level of understanding and opens up

waves of creativity in their thinking and understanding of their academic subjects and their life skills. Arts-integrated learning exposes the learners at foundation level to various career paths other than the typical academic careers. Through arts-integrated learning, learners discover talents they were not aware they possess and confidence about their school capabilities within the broader world. Arts-integrated learning instils discipline and gives the learners a fighting chance of deciding if the creative arts have a career path that they would like to pursue. Arts-integrated learning also creates a learning environment that is not stressful, and is fun and motivational, allowing every learner in the class a chance to express themselves and find their niche. When learners are engaged in creative learning, they are prone to learn faster and apply the learning skills in their everyday lives outside the classroom (Herbst, 2005).

The significance of arts-integrated learning programmes in the education system: with particular reference to the South African Creative Arts curriculum

There is no doubt that creative arts in South African public schools could play an integral role in transforming education and reconciling various cultures. It is not possible to ignore the creative potential that resides in South Africa. Almost everyone, anywhere, has some form of creative talent. South Africans can sing, dance, and entertain whilst they are working. There are storytellers, artists, designers, chefs, sculptors, and painters. These are people with a wealth of creativity that could make a telling contribution to building South Africa's economy (Joseph & Hartwig, 2015).

Down the years, creative arts have played a crucial role in shaping the cultures of various tribes and in religious ritual practices in Africa and across the globe (Turner, et al., 2017). A number of scholars have postulated that, if well supported, the Creative Arts subject could yield multiple benefits, such as maintaining identity, understanding and appreciation of other culture; and so on (Appadurai, 1990, Mokotow, 2007, Dolby, 2001, Britz, 2002 and van Vuuren and Eurika, 2018). This subject could be very useful if it could be subjected to some thorough revision. This would definitely contribute and assist towards the sustenance of the many different cultural practices in South Africa.

Undoubtedly, Creative Arts subject plays a vital role in schools, but some issues have contributed to the ineffectiveness of the subject.

There is a clear indication that one of the main contributions to the ineffectiveness of the Creative Arts subject in schools is to find specialist educators in each art form.

It is envisaged that this proposed study will provide some positive solutions for arts and culture curricula in public schools in South Africa and that the solutions will infuse a viable and positive approach that will ease the difficulties connected to the current arts and culture curriculum in South African schools. Therefore, adopting arts-integrated learning programmes could be a solution to South African creative arts practice and creative arts practice in other developing countries.

According to Fackler (2016), Shank (2013), Hodson (2015) and Melabiotis (2018), unsuccessful creative arts in public schools is intertwined with the failure to adopt the arts-integrated learning programmes. Mestry (2017) reports that there is an ongoing plea to revise the creative arts curriculum in public schools in South Africa. An improved creative arts curriculum could afford learners' desired talents and skills.

CONCLUSION

Creative Arts was conceptualised as a pedagogical strategy to encourage learner-centred and multicultural education. However, the transformation that has occurred in the realm of education in South Africa demonstrates that this Creative Arts subject requires intervention from government in terms of manpower, infrastructure, and adequate equipment with specialist educators for each art form within the broader spectrum.

As a number of scholars have postulated, the South African Department of Basic Education's initial conceptualisation of this arts-integrated leaning programme called the Creative Arts subject was a noble idea. Undoubtedly, arts-integrated learning programme comes with new knowledge and vital skills that could respond to the transformation that is taking place within realm of the education. Arts integrated learning has been deemed as a tool that creates an effective atmosphere for creative and enjoyable education in public schools worldwide. South Africans should not be naïve to the changes that are taking place in the field of art education. Teachers need to be equipped with the relevant knowledge and desired skills to improve the subject in South African public schools. Certainly there are things that have changed in education, especially in the field of arts, as it demands new teachers who are competent and skilled in teaching various art forms.

Another factor is that there should be collaboration between general art practitioners and arts educators. Arts education is constantly changing, and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement should change and improve with the context. Transformation in the South African educational system has been identified as an essential tool in the promotion of quality education, and conscientious scholars must always look at new ways of transforming the Creative Arts subject in public schools, and the curriculum must be relevant to the African context.

Learners require relevant, up-to-date creative arts skills to compete in the industry. Learners must have cutting-edge information about career opportunities. When the content of the creative arts education is improved, the South African creative arts industry will be sustained. Through creative arts, learners thus are emboldened to discover hidden talents and career opportunities and choices they would otherwise not have known.

The provision of the requisite tools and facilities for an enhanced creative arts education is a factor that would improve the Creative Arts subject in South Africa. Skilled educators would be attracted to teach this subject if they were supported academically be allowed them to facilitate learner exposure to the overall arts industry context. It is therefore a national imperative for the South African education system should focus on the revision of the curriculum so that the curriculum is fully equipped and beneficial for both the educators and learners in South African public schools. The revised Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement about the Creative Arts subject should aim to improve the quality of teaching and learning of Creative Arts in South African public schools.

It is also significant for the general creative arts practitioners to be incorporated into the discussion-making processes about the teaching and learning strategies (perhaps as Advisory board members) and involved in the revision of the curriculum to improve the quality of teaching and learning of the Creative Arts subject. Together with the members of the school teaching personnel, they could assist in identifying best possible examples of successful arts-integrated learning programmes around the globe and adopt the merits thereof. One such example would be the Chicago Arts Integrated Programme.

It is evident from the participants of this study that educators are feeling under pressure and are not enjoying teaching a subject that they have

little to no knowledge about. The educators are concerned about the quality of teaching they deliver to learners. Perhaps it could be recommended that the education sector could cater for in-service training for these educators. The education sector should encourage and facilitate excursions that will expose educators and learners to the creative arts industry outside of school, so that both may be well-versed with the requisite expectations.

It is imperative that the Creative Arts subject should be taught at the same quality level as the other academic subjects, so that learners are given a well-rounded quality education that would improve their future career choices.

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