ENHANCING THE CREATIVE ORGANISATIONAL SKILLS OF LEARNERS THROUGH STILL LIFE DRAWING

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ABSTRACT

Drawing forms the basis for visual creativity in all the plastic arts. Freedom plays a key role in teaching and learning of visual creativity, but it has been observed that this freedom is not encouraged during still life drawing in most Ghanaian art institutions. The study aims to develop new knowledge that improves the organisational skills of learners and to further understand and use still life drawing as a means of creating new images from existing objects. The study employs grounded theory and content analysis by placing the conventional method of still life drawing against an unconventional approach to still life drawing. The study revealed that though the conventional method improves a learner's perceptual skills and eye to hand co-ordination, it does not significantly enhance his/her creative organisational skills. It was also realised that a variation in the pedagogical approach proves further enhancement of the learners' creative organisational skills. Purposive sampling was employed to select ten (10) students from the five departments of the Faculty of Applied Arts and Technology in the Takoradi Technical University. The study took the learners through a series of experiential still life drawing exercises. It revealed that the learners' approach and output in drawing from scattered objects that have to be composed through drawing show superior creative organisational skills as compared to already arranged objects.

Keywords: Still life; skills; drawing; freedom

INTRODUCTION

The study employed practical research that adopts 'unconventional' method of organising still life with a liberal approach. Ideally, still, life is supposed to give the artist more freedom in the arrangement of elements within a composition than do paintings of other types of subjects such as landscape or portraiture as expressed in the works of (Ebert-Schifferer, 1998; Langmuir, 2001). However, what pertains to most Ghanaian art institutions is that the items or objects are composed by the instructor for the learner to draw.

Universally, drawing depicts concepts in a very emotionally raw way and so when people engage in drawing, they access their thoughts and feelings via quite a different route than verbalising (Hartley et al., 2010). Drawing forms the basis for visual creativity in all the plastic arts. According to Hoddinott & Combs (2011), drawing helps an individual to think and process thoughts. Hoddinott & Combs explain that usually, imagination can be quite fluid and fragmentary, moving from one partially formed idea to another and back in rapid succession; however, drawing out one's ideas gives people tangible form and some level of permanence. They say again that even if the form is not exactly what one is thinking about, having a drawing to work with gives one something one can hold on to and work with. Sale and Betti (2011)

indicate that the process of drawing develops a heightened awareness of the visual world, an awareness that is both subjective (knowing how one feels about things) and objective (understanding of how things actually operate). Sale and Betti (2011) add that drawing affords an individual an alternative use of experience. It provides a new format for stating the world. Through drawing an individual is trained to make fresh responses and is furnished with a new way of making meaning. Drawing teaches an individual to observe, distinguish and relate.

The study, therefore, sought to find out whether or not still life could be used to improve the imaginative skills of learners. Practising visual organisation is a panacea for understanding the use of the language of art.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO STILL LIFE

According to Schneider (1990) the term still life was not used until the mid-17th century. However, the tradition of still life painting has been around since antiquity, an example of this form of art can be found in almost every culture. The popularity of still life is immense, making it very hard to understand why many throughout the history of art have excluded it from the category of high arts. During the Baroque period, masters of still life from Italy, France, Flanders, Holland and Spain painted still life scenes of fruit, flower pieces, musical instruments, fish and game, and vessels used in the household. These objects were painted "not only with the utmost realism but with all the dedication and seriousness that had once been reserved for the human form" (Utah Museum of Fine Arts, 1997).

Still Life painting is far more than a pretty arrangement of colours and shapes. The role of an artist is not to simply transcribe, but to interpret and imbue subject matter with a wider meaning. The objects depicted may act as a metaphor for a time or a state of being that has particular relevance to the artist. The subject matter could also be used to highlight social or political themes more obliquely, forcing the viewer to examine the theme more closely. According to Marcolli (2012), Still life is the most philosophical genre of traditional figurative painting. It saw some of its most famous manifestations in the Flemish tradition of the 17th century, but it evolved and survived as a meaningful presence through much of 20th-century art, adopted by avant-garde movements such as cubism and Dadaism. Still life, as well as other representational art, has continued to evolve and adjust over the years to the present day.

Though artistic drawing comes in different forms such as figure drawing, imaginative drawing, landscape drawing and still life drawing, this study focuses on still life drawing. Hannavy (2013) reveals that historically, still life is an ancient genre, traditionally associated with the medium of oil painting. By definition, still lifes are inanimate artefacts or objects that are arranged and drawn; they are often food especially fruit and dead game) plants and textiles. The composition of still lifes can range from highly elaborate displays to simple arrangements, posed with a domestic setting. While still lifes are most often, the subject of painting, throughout history other media have been used, including mosaic, watercolour, collage and of course, photography. Barnet (2011) explains still life drawing as a depiction of inanimate objects in a restricted setting, such as table top. Hoddinot and Combs (2011) explaining how objects can be composed for drawing, state that though anything that sits can make a good still life, it is important to choose objects that are meaningful to an individual so that one does not lose interest before one brings the drawing into a close. They explain that the number of objects one chooses is entirely up to him/her. For example, one can make a beautiful still life drawing of a single stalk of

asparagus, or one can select a large number of items to draw like a table loaded with bags of groceries. Drawing objects and anything else, for that matter, is a very powerful way of getting to know them. When it comes to gathering objects for still life, one has basically two options. One can group objects based on their visual elements (formal similarity) or on their basic uses or meanings (functional relationship). Regardless of how one chooses his/her objects for a still life, one should keep in mind that one's objects must work well together to create a sense of unity (wholeness) in compositions.

If the artist chooses to group his/her still life objects together based on formal similarity, he/she is putting together objects that have two or more similar visual elements (the lines, shapes, values, patterns, textures etc. that make up a piece of art. In art, these visual elements combine to create the illusion of real things. An important subset of still life groupings based on formal similarity is the grouping based on the combination of formal similarity and difference. This means that in still life drawing, subjects are composed before they are drawn. In this regard, the objects to arrange always dictate how a learner should arrange the elements in the drawing. This encourages only the objectivity in drawing in both the representation and organisation of the subject. However, Sale and Betti (2011) reveal that perception, the faculty of gaining knowledge through insight or intuition using the senses, is moulded by subjectivity as well as by facts of the world. This also means that both subjective and objective thinking should be encouraged hand in hand in drawing to ensure that learners develop their faculties to the fullest. The restriction in already arranged subject encourages 'visual copying' without any flexibility and eventually can lead to stereotype way of organizing elements. Still life drawing improves perceptual skills and eye-hand co-ordination of learners. However, it does not give room for learners to express their imagination in the organisation of the elements the way each learner feels.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES OF THE STUDY

The target population consisted of one hundred of fifty (150) final year continuing students pursuing Visual Arts and drawing lecturers of the Takoradi Technical University. For the purpose of this study, which is applied or experimental research, the content analysis approach was employed. This was done because applied research is an investigation conducted to generate knowledge that directly influences or improves educational practices. Observation and questionnaires were also used to collect data. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) contend that a grounded theory study focuses on a process (including people's actions and interactions) related to a particular topic, with the ultimate goal of developing a theory about that process. They explain further that content analysis is a detailed systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of material to identify patterns, themes or biases. In this study, however, the grounded theory study was used to understand the topic "still life drawing" in its practice in order to develop new knowledge to improve learners' organisational skills. The content analysis in research was employed to examine still life drawings of students to develop patterns, themes and biases in the traditional process of still life drawing.

The data for the research were collected from different sources. Primary data were collected using random sampling where art students from departments of the Faculty of Applied Arts were selected randomly for the research. The secondary data were obtained from internet, books and journals. So that a student is not influenced by another, the first part of the research was carried out in a controlled environment. Objects to be drawn were positioned horizontally on a table and

photographed. They were rearranged into a composition and photographed again. It was done in order to use the photographs to correct the arrangements of the objects in the case any shift or change in the arrangement. After that, a table and a chair were set in a fixed place for a respondent to sit and draw the objects on the table. Each respondent went through two sections of still life drawing. With the first administered to each of the respondents immediately to elicit his/her experiences. Four students were engaged in this process. Each student worked within a day for the two sections.

In the second approach, six students were hand-picked and given A4 ex-shell papers and pencils. Four items were sparsely positioned on tables and students were asked to compose them by drawing. When they were done, the drawings were collected and labelled according to how the respondents were seated. The respondents were given new A4 sheets and the same four items were arranged on two joined tables. No time limit was given in both approaches. As and when a student got finished, the first drawing was given back to the student and the questionnaire also was given. Copies of questionnaire were used because the respondents were students and therefore were able to read and write. In all, twenty still life drawings were made and ten questionnaires were collected. Art works produced by the respondents were observed and the content analysed in relation to the responses given and pedagogical methods used. The sample population was taken from five departments in the Faculty of Applied Art, Takoradi Technical University. A sample of ten students was taken from all the departments: two students were selected from each department because of the practical nature of the investigation, big sample size could compromise the outcome of the research. In the Faculty of Applied Art of the Takoradi Technical University, still life drawing is part of the fundamentals of drawing; and composition drawing is studied as first and second semesters foundation courses in the first year of the three-year HND Commercial Art programme. However, in the Department of Painting and Graphic Design, still life drawing is part of the 2nd year programmes, respectively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussions of this study have been described using the drawings produced by students as well as the responses from the students which were collected using copies of questionnaire. The production processes were done in two sections.

Section one of the Still Life Drawing Processes

In the first section, the subjects comprise teacup with a saucer, Lipton tea beverage package, Saint. Louis sugar package and peak milk tin. The first approach used was an unconventional procedure in producing still life drawings where the items were not organized as desired.

The items were placed on a table as shown in arrangement A.

Arrangement A (indiscriminately arranged)   Arrangement B (organised arrangement)

For arrangement A, the instruction to students was: Re-arrange the objects in front of you and draw. Therefore they were to "reorganise the subjects through drawing." For the arrangement B, the instruction also was: Draw the objects arranged before you. Thus draw the already organised objects. The works and experiences of each student were then discussed. The discussions start with the first four respondents who worked individually, followed by the other six students who worked together.

Students Works and Responses in the First Section
The student who produced these still life drawings were labelled 'Student 1". The work produced from "arrangement A" was labelled 1a and the second 1b.

Results from arrangement A   Results from arrangement B
   (Composition 1a)

Student 1 who executed the works above worked alone and was of the view that the two procedures used are different in terms of experiences each provided during drawing. The drawing 1a from arrangement A was imaginative composition which makes an artist think deeply in composing correctly and to obtain beautiful organisation. He said the arrangement A had provided him with learning experiences which improve his visual organisational skills. This is because it made him sit for about 5 minutes composing in his mind how the work should be. It had also given him a great sense of imagination in drawing. During the still life drawing from

arrangement A, what was going through his mind was: where each object could be placed to make the work beautiful after the composition. The respondent also added 'I was also thinking in terms of perspective as well as make the work or the composition look natural. The researcher observed that the still life drawing 1a produced by the student 1 showed dynamism in the organisation because the composition was entirely different from that of the pre-arranged objects. This confirmed the student's assertion that the drawing from 1a from A arrangement was "imaginative composition" which makes an individual think deeply into composing rightly and obtain beautiful organisation. The drawing 1b from the traditional way of still life drawing represents the same B arrangement and therefore shows little or no differences in the organisation of the elements.

The second student who also did the same works was labelled 'Student 2". The work produced from the "arrangement A" was labelled 2a and the second 2b.

Results from arrangement A
(Composition 1a)

Results from arrangement B
(Composition 1b)

There are differences in the approaches of composing arrangement A and arrangement B. The arrangement A involves thinking when it comes to the composition of the items, but in B arrangement had already been done and the student did not need to think in terms of composition. The second composition, the artist is strict to go by the composition in front of him. Drawing from arrangement A has improved his organisational skills because arrangement A was done imaginatively: the objects and shadows were organised creatively by himself. When he was trying to put the objects together, he was thinking about how all the objects could be arranged in such a way that all the elements could be identified easily. Student 2 produced the 2a still life drawing by organising the elements entirely different from the arrangement A while the 2b drawing mirrored the arrangement B in composition. However, the student thought arrangement B was not easy to draw because it gave restrictions.

The third student was labelled "student 3". The work produced from arrangement A was labelled 3a and the one from arrangement B 3b.
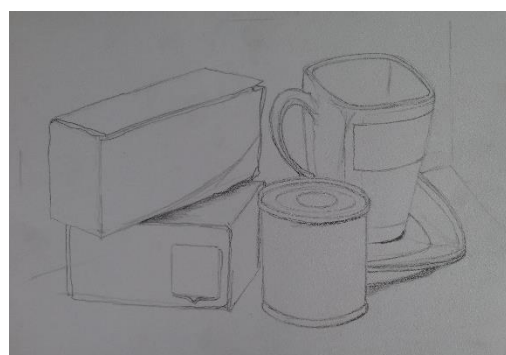
Results from arrangement A
(Composition 3a)

Results from arrangement B
(Composition 3b)

Student 3 was of the view that arrangement A and arrangement B were not the same. Arrangement A has to do with imagining how to compose, but the arrangement B looks at how to repeat arrangement with reference to the sizes or shapes. The arrangement A improved my organisational skills because one needed to think deeply to be able to make a nice piece of drawing. During the time of rearranging the objects, student 3 said he was thinking about how to get it right in the composition. It was observed that the result from the drawing 3b showed that the arrangement B revealed how the student organised the elements in the drawing whereas in drawing 3b, the student was able to change the arrangement A to create a new one.

The fourth student in the study was labelled "student 4". The work produced by arrangement A was labelled 4a and the one from arrangement B a 4b.

Results from A arrangement
(Composition 4a)

Results from B arrangement
(Composition 4b)

Student 4 also agreed that making a still life composition from arrangement A was different from arrangement B. The student explained that arrangement A was based on imaginative composition, unlike the arrangement B where items had been arranged before the student drew. Student 4 stated that drawing from arrangement A had improved his organisational skills. He explained that the arrangement B was already well; it has perspective, proportion and balance.

How to combine the items into a composition was what went through his mind when trying to put the items in arrangement A together.

Section Two

In the second section, the subjects comprised: *Voltic Water Bottle, Golden Tree Altime Beverage Container, Saint Louis Sugar Package* and *Ideal Milk Tin*. The first approach used was unconventional procedure in the creation of still life drawings where the items were not arranged as desired. The items were positioned on a table as shown in arrangement C.

Arrangement C

Arrangement D

For arrangement C, the instruction to students was: Re-arrange the objects in front of you and draw. Therefore they were to "reorganise the subjects through drawing." For the arrangement D, the instruction also was: Draw the objects arranged before you. Thus draw the already organised objects. The works and experiences of students were also discussed.

Students Works and Responses from the Second Section

The student who produced the works was labelled 'Student 5". The work produced from the "arrangement A" was labelled 5c and the second 5d. Student 5, stated that there was difference between the two approaches in the still life drawing. In the first approach (arrangement C) one needed to first plan on how to arrange the items but with the second approach (arrangement D) the objects had already been arranged and so the artist had to redraw it.

Results from C arrangement
(Composition 5c)

Results from D arrangement
(Composition 5d)

The student was of the view that the first approach (arrangement C) improves organisational skills because it makes the artist think about how to plan the items, its arrangement and the way one want it to be. Concerning the first arrangement, the student revealed that he was calculating on how his arrangement would support both the composition and shading.

Results from C arrangement
(Composition 6c)

Results from D arrangement
(Composition 6d)

The student who produced the 6c and 6d works was labelled Student 6. The student thought that there is a difference between the two approaches in still life drawing because the first method (arrangement C) lets the artist make mistakes but the second approach enables the artist to correct his mistakes. The student contended that the second approach improved his organisational skills because all the mistakes he did in the composition and light source in arrangement c: 6c drawing was corrected in 6d. The student added that in the course of rearranging the items in C still life drawing, he became confused with regard to how to organise and compose them. Though making mistakes is an important part of creativity and learning, this student sees very differently.

Results from C arrangement
(Composition 7c)

Results from D arrangement
(Composition 7d)

The student who produced the two above still life drawings were labelled student 7. According to him, there was a difference between approach C and D because, with the approach C, the

organisation was from within the artist, that is imaginative but the second was is not. The approach C had improved his organisational skills in that it had helped him to think and develop a means to compose objects/items without seeing it composed. The student revealed that he had to develop the spaces between the objects and its composition including perspective and other principles into the drawing.

| Results from C arrangement (Composition 8c) | Results from D arrangement (Composition 8d) |

The student who produced the 8c and 8d still life drawings respectively from the two approaches was labelled student 8. The student stated that there was a difference in the two approaches because arrangement C was the artist's self-made composition but the arrangement D was already composed by the teacher. Arrangement D improved his organisational skills the reason being that the objects were well arranged and organised. For student 8, his thinking was that the process of reorganising the unorganised items for drawing was a difficulty.

| Results from C arrangement (Composition 9c) | Results from D arrangement (Composition 9d) |

Student 9 produced composition 9c, from arrangement C and 9d from arrangement D. There was a difference between the two procedures because the arrangement C involves imaginative composition. The student was of the view that arrangement D improved his organisational skills. This is because the arrangement C was a difficult one and for that matter, arrangement D which one does not need to imagine was easier and had improved his organisational skills. The student

stated that when he was organising the objects in the arrangement C as seen in 9c, what he was thinking about was how the proportion, balance in the composition could be achieved.

| Results from C arrangement (Composition 10c) | Results from D arrangement (Composition 10d) |

Student10 drew 10c and 10d still life drawings. The student explained that there is a difference between the two approaches, because, for an artist to create still life from arrangement C, the artist requires to think and arrange the objects to suit his competence. It, therefore, increases creativity since the artist has to arrange the objects his own way. In this vain, the student thinks that arrangement C has improved his organisational skills since arrangement C enabled him to think and organised the work creatively. The student explained that in the course of producing the still life from arrangement C, his mind was on how to relate the objects to get each of them proportionally right, and the distance that should come between the object. Though one student held a contrary view that the conventional approach to still life drawing rather enhances organisation of elements, this does not affect the position held by the majority of the respondents.

Main findings from the Study
The research found out that:
- Respondents did not have enough knowledge in drawing from unarranged objects in still life drawing.
- Respondents have had competences in producing still life drawings from already arranged objects but not much from unarranged objects.
- Still life drawings produced through observation of already organised objects bore resemblance of the original arrangement and the objects under study.
- Still, life drawings produced by unarranged objects showed the objects understudy and dynamism in each student's organisational competence.
- When respondents work together during unconventional method of drawing in still life, they may influence one another in the arrangement objects in the drawing.

Freedom in Arranging Objects in Still Life and Its Implications for Fostering Creativity in Art

The findings which emanated from this study have implications for teaching and learning of still life drawing and basic design. One major implication is that art teachers have to adapt this unconventional method of arranging subjects for drawing during still life drawing in addition to the conventional method of letting students draw from already organised objects in a desired manner before drawing. Undoubtedly, still life drawing would continue to play a significant role in improving student's observational and organisational skills which are needed in every facet of art especially in creating new visual ideas. Key to the success and effectiveness of this approach in still life is the frequent practice of making compositions from unorganised subjects or items which learners of art will be taken through. The study also challenges the traditional status quo that still life is created from the way the items have been arranged.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has offered some solutions to the more philosophical questions surrounding still life, principally the examination of the boundaries between composing and allowing the learners to compose, but also the central question of what we are actually viewing. The deductions from the study are as follow: the two approaches should be emphasised in the teaching and learning of still life drawing. However, in the case of practising still life, the conventional approach could be more suitable than the unconventional one. In case of teaching and learning of basic design, the unconventional method could be used to enhance learners' organisational skills through the uses of tangible objects to serve as elements and employ principles of art which are usually imagined. When two or more learners/students draw from organised objects at the same spot, they shall produce still life drawings which show the same arrangement of objects as arranged before drawing. This was evident in all the ten still life drawings made by students from already composed subjects. The study also concludes that when two or more artists draw from the same spot from objects which are not composed already but are "composed through drawing" they shall produce still life drawings which show divergent and dynamism in subject organisation unless in a group where one may influence the other. This was also evident in all the still life drawings which were created by students. Except for two students who sat close to each other and therefore were influenced by each other, the rest show different organisation in arrangement of the items (objects) as against the real objects which were observed and drawn. The method of doing still life from unarranged objects showed varied organisation in students' drawings. Students' drawings produced from already arranged objects showed the same organisation. Students' drawings produced from arranged objects showed much objective awareness. Students' drawings produced from unarranged objects showed much subjective awareness. When students do independent studies in still life drawing especially using "unarranged objects method, "creative visual organisation skills are enhanced.

The study recommends that visual art tutors and educators should use "unarranged objects method" in teaching and learning of still life for the varied organisation of elements from students. Drawing of arranged objects should be employed by art teachers for teaching and learning when students are to produce drawings that mimic the real arrangement. Art educators should use still life involving already arranged objects to emphasise objective awareness skills

acquisition and unarranged objects approach to emphasise subjective awareness skills. Art teachers should encourage learners to do independent work in skill life drawing to enhance their organisational skills.

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