

AN INTROSPECTION OF AN AFRICAN EDUCATOR IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

Pedagogy in the 21st century continues to experience significant adaptations and revisions to suit the ever-changing needs of modern learners. Often achieved at the back of technological advancements of cultural pluralism, these pedagogical demands impact how education is tailored to meet the demands of the epoch. Image and representation, which is a key area of focus, is given prominence in this discussion so as to establish some of the lapses in the educational system. The contemporary focus on pedagogy is reflected in the 2017 policy advice paper by UNESCO, which examines the essence of pedagogy vis-à-vis the changing global technological landscape and projects into its impact on education by 2030. If pedagogy encompasses teaching, learning, and culture, then students, teachers, and the community become major stakeholders in the acquisition and impartation of quality knowledge and skill. With a personal career span of twelve years as a creative arts educator and visual storyteller, it became clear to me that governments, through the management of schools, need a system that is continuously used to assess the teachers' course manual, delivery of the course content, the classroom communications between the teacher and the learners, the teacher's assessment methods for both practice and theories, and the performance of the learners.

Keywords

Culture, experience, practice, politics, adapt pluralism.

INTRODUCTION

Images are complex and difficult text to easily assimilate. Images have become topics of concern in all human endeavor, including anthropology, political science, science, advertising, journalism, etcetera. In the 1920s, “manipulation of the image became extreme, removed from the status of art – became a tool for representing specific commercial and political point of view” (Kolker, 2002, p. 10) with the sole intention of commerce, embellishing, and agenda setting for the mass audience.

Creation and exhibition of images have become very popular, cheap, and readily accessible to everyone in the twenty-first century as a result of technological strides and the inception of internet. Images as mediated cultural heritage properties that are captured on light-sensitive materials for the consumption of this present and future generation’s needs to be authentic. The images must be created by very knowledgeable, creative, innovative, competent, honest, and passionate people so as to elicit the desired response.

The desired response may not necessarily be a positive one but any form of feeling that the creator of the image wants their consumers to feel. This calls to mind Mitchell’s (1994) compelling statement about the image:

As we move into an era in which ‘color’ and ‘line’ (and the identities they designate) have become potently manipulable elements in pervasive technologies of simulation and mass mediation, we may find that the problem of the twenty-first century is the problem of image. (p. 2)

Mitchell (1994) made this assertion based on a quote he made from W.E.B. Du Bois, “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of color and line”. This color and line invariably refers to the image and its desired effect on consumers. The sophisticated technologies have afforded the twenty-first-century image creator the opportunity to manipulate the visual elements of the image, including but not limited to line and color. Other visual elements can be used or manipulated to influence culture and identity.

Having stated that the problem of the twenty-first century is the *image*, it is only but incumbent for the teacher who is always at the center of the creation of this image to be equipped and well versed in the creation processes so as to effectively guide students. If the teacher is equipped, it then behooves them to perfect their art of image creation through continual personal practice, research, and documentation. Apart from scholarly publication, which is another instrumental way of preserving those findings and also sharing with learners and industry, the way the teacher impacts the acquired knowledge in the creation and composition of images is very vital.

To teach or write about an image devoid of misrepresentation and miscommunication, the teacher teaching the basics of image creation needs to inculcate the theories and philosophies of visual communication, some of which include: stereotype, aesthetics, framing, representation, reception. These are to be considered first before impacting the technical knowledge of the overall look of the picture, such as: headroom, looking-room, rule of the thirds, and three-point lighting, among others. The teacher may as well consider how these images would be received by the targeted audience. The twenty-first-century Ghanaian learner is a global learner who is informed by a lot of things around them.

These are based on the advancement in digital technology and faster and wider coverage of internet. Due to these multifaceted reasons, the learner comes to the class with a certain level of cultural baggage, beliefs, and existing knowledge of the art and craft of image creation. For this reason, the teacher at the center of these students of diverse background and different cultural knowledge should not regard their diversity as a negative but rather a positive resource to the class.

From the different rich cultural and technological experiences, the teacher could harness all their cultural differences and share for the benefit of the class. According to Powell (2011), “The media are a dominant element of popular culture and have the ability to set the agenda. When the agenda is consistent among media sources, the media has the power to create associations for people, race, culture, and religion” (p. 93). As it stands now, the media themselves have become problematic, looking at the various plat-

forms where an image could be shared. For this reason, professionals must lead the way.

THE TEACHER AND HIGHER LEARNING

Teaching at the higher level requires a deeper understanding of teaching methods. For this reason, it is important to share in Ramsden's argument as a guiding principle when it comes to teaching about the image. Ramsden opines that education, be it formal or informal, should be transformative based on the teacher's course manual, assessment style, and pedagogical methods. Ramsden (1992) further elaborates that teaching in the twenty-first century is very complex and a difficult task that does not need a one-size-fits-all approach but demands that the teacher should always be reflecting in action and on action of the class and finding better methods of imparting knowledge to the 21st-century learners. In the view of the Higher Education Academy based in the United Kingdom, understanding how these individuals learn within the group is key to how a teacher's pedagogical methods impact the learning experience of these learners in the local classroom setting.

The Academy (2014) further states that constructivist and or behaviorist theories are outliving their usefulness because the assumption then was that learners are homogeneous, as that is not the case today even in Ghana, but rather learners are more diverse as alluded to earlier. The Academy has proposed a socio-cultural theory of learning which stems from cultural history activity theory: "teaching and learning are shaped by the social and cultural context of the learning environment and the complex and dynamic human activity systems within them at a point in time" (Higher Education Academy, 2014).

In my orientation sessions, I have always cautioned that the camera is more dangerous than the gun. The reason for this assertion are not far-fetched. If a gun is triggered, the casualty may be one. However, the same cannot be said of the camera. If you take a derogatory picture of a person in a way that impugns their character or is derogatory to their religion, culture, and personal ideals, the consequences can just be enormous. As Pow-

ell (2011) shares, “The reality created by media results in lasting images and stereotypes about groups, religions, and peoples” (p. 93). This reality of the media is not just text and graphics, but also images.

For instance, way back in 2005, Danish-Jyllands-Posten published an image of the Holy Prophet Mohamed. This led to global demonstrations in the Islamic world. The Islam does not only forbid any form of depiction of the prophet, but depicting him in ways that suggested he is a terrorist is enough to spark global rage. Looking at the inconvenience and the legal tussles that emerged after the depiction, the editorial would have avoided showing that if they had predicted the religious implications ahead of publication. One other danger about the image that is not known but should be known by teachers and students is that once the image is churned out in this technological era, the resultant effect is that the image will be shown in various mediums. For this reason, Greer & Jewkes (2005) are right when they note, “media representations reflect and reinforce a marked intolerance towards anyone or anything that transgresses an essentially conservative agenda” (p. 3). In Ghana, it has become the accepted norm that any form of imagery depicting violence, destitution, and anachronistic cultural practices is to be found in the northern part of the country. It is for this reason that film students, at least those I have encountered, play along these established conventional lines, even though what they say may not be entirely true. Due to these notions, they may over-look some regions or areas that have worse cases. Images like these are not only stereotypical, but also **continue to affect posterity**. If one were to go online, the Danish-Jyllands-Posten harm is still there for all to see. In highlighting the damaging effects of an ill-conceived message, it is only fair to draw a comparative study of the rigorous nature of military training as against the training of the camera person. If both are not well trained, they will shoot at innocent people.

From the pedagogical point of view, can it be said that image creators are given the necessary fundamentals so as not to needlessly harm their societies? The answer looking at the examples given, is an emphatic no! So, for an effective pedagogy in teaching and learning of cinematography, there is the need to blend the military regimental training style. This training would enlighten students, they would know that society is not homoge-

nous but consists of different people, cultures, and ideals. What this means is that in addition to the liberal and creative arts education, it is very important to train the body, mind, and heart (BMH) of image creators so they do not create images that would give society problems.

THE 21ST-CENTURY TEACHER WITH NAFTI IN FOCUS

Pedagogy in the 21st century continues to experience significant adaptations and revisions to suit the ever-changing needs of modern learners. Often achieved at the back of technological advancements, these pedagogical demands impact how education is tailored to meet the demands of the epoch. This contemporary focus on centrality of pedagogy as reflected in the 2017 policy advice paper by the UNESCO, which examines the essence of pedagogy vis-à-vis the changing global technological landscape and projects into its impact on education by 2030.

UNESCO (2017) captures and contextualizes pedagogy within a universality where pedagogy is “the dynamic relationship between learning, teaching and culture. It also includes teachers’ beliefs about these aspects and a consideration of the context in which learning, and teaching takes place”. Indeed, if pedagogy encompasses teaching, learning, and culture, then the teachers, learners, and the community become major stakeholders in the acquisition and impartation of quality knowledge and skill.

If the community is a major stakeholder in the delivery of quality education in the twenty-first century, then we have not lived up to expectation and that is the reason UNESCO have developed the 2030 policy advice paper for education to guide and monitor results of pedagogy.

For learning to take place, after monitoring and evaluation of the teaching, means that education is hinged on what I call the *tripod of education* – the teacher, learner, and environment. In between them are the learning models as espoused and sanctioned by the educational sectors. The community through Government – Management of the school have to make sure the school engages qualified teachers that are passionate, understand

today's learner, and know the philosophies of image creation in addition to the practice of art and craft of image creation. Qualification is not necessarily somebody with PhD. In the creative sector, it encompasses how a teacher updates themselves with modern trends in pedagogy and technology and how to adapt them to meet the learner's needs.

As the number of learners increases, the number of lecturers are reduced as a result of retirement and others finding greener pastures elsewhere. The classrooms, studios, and campus sizes remain the same. As a result, there is pressure on the teacher and the facilities, and the learners would not gain the maximum yield from the education. But for the tripod to stand and support the pedagogy of the teacher, there is the need for a fine balance and synergy between the learner, teacher, and environment.

In the year 1999, I entered the National Film and Television Institute in Accra, Ghana, as a Motion Picture Photography learner with the sole intention of becoming a good practicing cinematographer. In 2004, I graduated and was judged the best cinematography learner based on my graduating motion picture project, *Justice*. As a result, I was given the opportunity to serve the Institute during the National Service window and later offered an employment contract in 2005. This offer came without any further training or orientation on how to execute my duties.

In the course of my practice as a creative arts educator in image creation at the Institute, it became clear that until this recent past (2012), attention was not put on progressive scholarship and professional development of the teacher in ways that could enable them to handle their areas judiciously.

From 1978 to 2016, NAFTI was run as a department under the Ministries of Information and Communication with the Civil Service structure, not a university structure where academic qualification, performance, and progression of teachers are keenly monitored for promotion. By the way, I am Assistant Lecturer, a position I have held since 2005. As a result of the above, governments through the management of the schools need a system that is continuously used to assess the teacher's course manual, delivery of the course content, the classroom communications between the teacher and the learners, the teacher's assessment methods for both

practice, theories, performance, and scholarship development of the twenty-first century educator and learner. And this calls for strong pedagogical instructions and supervision at the country or institutional level that is modelled on best practices, while keeping in mind the need to suit the local context.

Interestingly, a lot of people still harbor the notion that the creative field is one where you learn on the job. Those who share this notion conclude that Ghana, like many other countries, is a pioneer of the art learnt on the job (Meyer, 1999; Garritano, 2015). This was through the understanding of the art and craft of cinematography through apprenticeship. This way practitioners of the art went through the mill and really understood the rudiments of the art and craft of image creation, and in the same light, these were the people that started teaching at NAFTI. They brought onboard a lot of practical reservoirs of knowledge that hinged on theories (military regimental). This is confirmed by Marquez (1997) in his contribution to index on censorship titled *The best job in the world*,

Some 50 years ago, there were no schools of journalism. One learned the trade in the newsroom, in the print shops, in the local cafe and in Friday-night hangouts. The entire newspaper was a factory where journalists were made and the news printed without quibbles. (p. 77)

However, 72 years ago, if Marquez and his cohorts, as media practitioners, learnt on the job as a result of non-availability of schools but were able to deliver without any objection, then they had a very effective pedagogy. Now that there are a lot of media schools, the question then is, what is the present generation – educators, governments, and learners learning from that culture of education? Aside of this, society itself has not only transformed; it has become multi-plural. This calls for new dynamics, approaches most of which cannot simply be attained by merely learning on the job.

Again, Marquez has questioned the existence of media schools, even though he has accepted that they teach some useful tricks and blame technology for the kind of ‘professionals’ the schools are churning out. The solution lays in a Ghanaian-Akan wise saying – *Sankofa* – which denotes

a return to our roots, substantially to appropriate that which is positive from the past. Hence, the twenty-first-century pedagogy in the formal educational setting should combine apprenticeship, internship, collaborations, informal, technology, lecture, presentations, etc. with a learner-centered approach for an effective pedagogy. In most of the schools and even in the universities, learning is still by rote methods, where emphasis is placed on memorization rather than understanding key concepts.

This mode of teaching poses a lot of challenges not only to teachers, but learners as well. For this reason, most scholars and researchers on education, including Scott (2015), have proposed that formal education like culture needs to do away with archaic traditions and embark on the journey of transforming pedagogy to empower the learners to be critical, analytical, innovative, and creative so as to provide solutions to address the complex challenges of the twenty-first century and beyond.

This perspective resonates with Mitchell's claim that the problem of the twenty-first century is image and image creation, which can be addressed by encouraging, supporting, and transforming pedagogy to embrace the culture of analytical and critical thinking, among other skills. And shifting away from the traditional methodologies of lecture to customize and participatory learner-based approach of investigating, exploring, and acquiring knowledge without any inhibition from educators and the environment (Scott, 2015).

If 'developing' countries like Ghana and, to a large extent, the National Film and Television Institute, whose mandate is to give a holistic creative arts education, so as to address the fears of Mitchell with regards to image being a problem in the twenty-first century. Then there is the need for all major stakeholders involved in the media space, like the Cinematographers Guilds and Associations, including the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in close collaboration with governments and other stakeholders to relook at the culture of the film schools for transformative pedagogical activities that would positively impact image creation and its consumption.



THE TRANSFORMATIVE AGENDA IN NAFTI

It is in line with this transformative pedagogy that the National Film and Television Institute adopted the Value-Added Learning Audit (VALA) after a couple of successful exchange programs between selected learners and faculty members from NAFTI (Ghana), the University of Witwatersrand, AFDA and University of Johannesburg (South Africa), Helsinki University and Arcada Polytechnic (Finland). The main objective of VALA is to improve the research, presentation, and production competencies of learners.

Unfortunately, this VALA method of pre- and post-assessment of learners' production was not adapted but adopted. The reason that VALA did not work even though it is a useful pedagogical activity that worked very well in other countries in the exchange program is that NAFTI did not localize the VALA activities in the context of adaption. The end result, as it would seem, is like prescribing a malaria antidote for typhoid fever. It was important to modify VALA to suit NAFTI, taking into consideration the number of learners, time, and equipment available to the learners to produce their projects within a semester. All lecturers and stakeholders came to the realization that it is important to domesticate the VALA pedagogy to suit the learning demands of our learners and the available resources – time, space, equipment, knowledge, and exposure. The VALA pedagogy is participatory and collaborative. It allows learners to build their confidence and at the same time bring their creative voice to bear on their productions, as they take ownership of the learning process with little guidance from faculty members.

For a holistic creative arts education in the twenty-first century that is participatory and collaborative – teaching and learning needs to be structured on the principle of freedom of expression and what to learn, but at the same time have parameters within which teaching and learning should happen (Mercogolino, 2012). In the spirit of holistic pedagogy, as claimed by Mercogolino, the school's authorities and the teachers need to have a good structure for the learning environment, curriculum, teaching, and assessment modules and at the same time have control over the attributes mentioned. And also allow the learners freedom in the mist of structure

and control to choose what, when, and how to learn, devoid of fixed but evolving pedagogical approaches.

In the epoch of digitalized environment, where learners are familiar with e-books, e-libraries, and fast internet access, most educators in this part of the world continue to heavily depend on traditional text books and technologies to teach. Today's twenty-first-century Ghanaian cinematography learners are interested in the latest camera, accessories, and lighting technologies – high-end video cameras, Digital Single Lens Reflex (DSLR), and mirrorless cameras – as against the generations before, who were obsessed with the art and craft of cinematography.

In the face of ever-changing trends in technology, pedagogy should be seen as a culture – a dynamic, self-reflective, ongoing practice – of learning and impartation processes that reflects the changing dynamics and diversity of contemporary learners and learning situations. Today's learners have become far more sophisticated because of the World Wide Web. They have 4G networks on their phones and tablets, and within seconds they are able to go on YouTube and other sites to access current and trending information, while we are still depending on Joseph V. Mascelli's 1965 book *The Five Cs of Cinematography* for teaching camera angles and height.

Also, in my early years as an educator, teaching cinematography I adopted teaching methods from books that are considered to be of world-class standard. Now with the hindsight of experience, I should not have done that. Rather, I should have adapted those world-class teaching methods to suit our peculiar cultural context. Pedagogy is not one-size-fits-all affair, and this is one of the reasons course manuals and outlines are changed from time to time to respond to the ever-changing learners and industry needs. As much as education is expected to be a world-class standard, it needs to be contextualized and culturally sensitive to a country.

In conclusion, aside from the teacher's formal and professional education on pedagogy, practice, and experience, a teacher must have certain attributes that position them in ways that will allow them to teach effectively. Theory is as important as practice. Teachers who practice bring a lot of real-life situations in a form of experience to the learning environment

and use that to structure and guide effective teaching and learning. I share in the view of Marquez when he surmises that teachers bring a lot more to the classroom than learners would get from text books, YouTube, the web, and other related mediums.

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CV

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