

Opportunities for Incorporating Arts with Other Subjects and With Cross-Curricular Issues in the Lower Primary Phase Curriculum in Zambezi Region, Namibia

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Abstract

The purpose of this research article was to explore the opportunities for incorporating arts with other subjects and with cross-curricular issues in the lower primary phase curriculum in Zambezi region, Namibia. The research was located within the interpretive paradigm. The specific method of the research was a qualitative case study. In this study, the researcher worked with Lower Primary teachers from two different schools within the town of Katima Mulilo, in Zambezi region, Namibia. The researchers used multiple data collection strategies. In this study the researchers used the following data collection methods: Interviews, focus group interviews and class observations. The researchers transcribed and analysed the data using qualitative data analysis. The examples cited by the teachers showed that they incorporate Arts with other subjects. Four of the teachers interviewed indicated that they incorporated Arts when they teach Mathematics. Other examples revealed how they incorporated Arts with subjects such as English, Environmental Studies and Religious and Moral Education. From these findings the teachers realized that there are opportunities in the Lower Primary Phase curriculum to incorporate Arts with the other subjects. HIV and AIDS and Environmental Education were two cross-curricular issues that came out strongly when teachers were interviewed and during class observations. These two cross-curricular issues are mostly incorporated in the teaching of Arts at the Lower Primary Phase either using drama, but as indicated could also be included in lessons on drawing. The researchers recommends that a similar study be conducted at the Upper Primary Phase. It is here that one lays the foundation of the Arts. This in turn could lead to a fostering of a love for the Arts in learners in the secondary school which will be beneficial throughout their lives.

Keywords: lower primary phase; cross-curricular issues, opportunities

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research article was to explore the opportunities for incorporating arts with other subjects and with cross-curricular issues in the lower primary phase curriculum in Zambezi region, Namibia. As a subject, Arts is within the aesthetic area of learning in the curriculum but has thematic and methodological links to other subjects across the curriculum (Namibia. MOE, 2005, p. 119). It is crucial not to neglect the Arts and, if teachers incorporate with other subjects, the objectives and competencies should be clearly stated in the lesson plan (Namibia. MOE, 2004). If this foundation is not properly laid, learners could develop serious problems in other subjects (Namibia. MOE, 2004, p. 31).

A number of studies highlight diverse experiences where the arts intersect with various curricular areas and art typologies. For example, performing arts such as theatre have been incorporated with Language and Social Science courses, providing students opportunities to examine complex topics from new perspectives through embodied learning activities (Kisida et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020; Sanchez et al., 2022; Shaw & Valerie, 2018). Additionally, musical compositions and visual art exhibitions have been incorporated with Mathematics lessons, allowing learners to tackle abstract concepts through creative expression (Anderson et al., 2019; Lovemore et al., 2021). Elsewhere, contemporary dance routines have been designed to illuminate scientific principles in a kinesthetic fashion (Valls et al., 2019), while stop motion animation assignments have facilitated novel digital storytelling (Pavlou, 2020).

Research question

What are the opportunities for incorporating Arts with other subjects and with the cross-curricular issues?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Escala, Angel Herrera-Pavo, Guitert and Romeu, (2024) point out that educational initiatives that incorporate the arts across the curriculum span a multitude of subject areas and art forms. These experiences commonly target curriculum domains such as Social Sciences, Language, and Mathematics, while embracing diverse artistic expressions encompassing performing arts, visual arts, music, literary arts, and plastic arts. In Social Sciences, incorporating the arts allows for exploration of themes like gender and decoloniality. Issues such as "the colonial period and how the colony can be interpreted from the present" enrich the diversity of the curriculum. Literature is linked with the arts through poetry and music, fostering reading, creativity, and emotional connections with musical preferences.

According to Eck (2001) and Russell and Zembylas (2007) affirms that "Art plays a pivotal role in enhancing comprehension across a wide array of disciplines, including both the humanities and sciences. This implies that by engaging multiple sensory and cognitive pathways, art enables learners to conceptualize abstract ideas, visualize intricate data, and connect theoretical knowledge to real-world applications. Similarly, artistic incorporation helps learners understand complex topics such as historical narratives, literary themes, and scientific phenomena with greater depth and engagement". For example, while primary school arts incorporation processes often underutilize ICT due to teachers' limited awareness of its potential, literature showcases instances where digital tools like "Comic Life" have enriched narrative skills through comics and biographies. Additionally, ICT typology reveals a variety of digital tools available to support arts incorporation, such as interactive whiteboards, tablets, and specialized educational software, which enhance creative and collaborative learning environments. Furthermore, ICT supports professional development by incorporating digital resources and online collaborative spaces for mentoring sessions among teachers and arts specialists (Escala, Angel Herrera-Pavo, Guitert & Romeu, 2024).

According to Clement 1986) different subject disciplines can be related either through their working methods and processes, through their common content, or because they share common purposes in the education of children. He argues that although the working methods used in the teaching of Arts and other subjects are very different to each other, there is significant overlap of content so that in all subjects there is a dependence upon the study of work made by artists, crafts workers and designers. He adds that there is ample opportunity for the use of interplay between Arts and Language in the teaching of Arts (Clement, 1986), for example in making images, children are communicating their observations, ideas and feelings in response to different kinds of experience. In writing a story or a poem, learners will use the language for similar purposes (Clement, 1986). These examples indicate that there are many opportunities for linking and complementing work between Arts and Language at the Lower Primary Phase (Clement, 1986).

Adding to the link of Arts and other subjects are cross-curricular issues such as environment education, human rights and democracy education, population education and HIV and AIDS education which are viewed as the main challenges faced by Namibian society and should be concerns that all learners should become acquainted with in all subject areas (Namibia. MOE, 2005, p. 119). The national policy guide for Lower Primary (Namibia. MOE, 2004) states that cross-curricular themes concern aspects of life which are important throughout life, and which should be considered at all stages of learning and beyond and that they contribute to the formation of attitudes and values, may inspire socialising and link school and society. It continues that the cross-curricular themes may be dealt with through topic work or as part of different subjects throughout the year or they may be dealt with as 'blocks' set aside for the purpose or link up with projects (Namibia. MOE, 2004). The policy document recommends that aspects of the cross-curricular issues be part of the work planning of different subjects so that the learners understand their interrelatedness (Namibia. MOE, 2004).

The HIV and AIDS pandemic with widespread illness and death is another cross-curricular issue where the Arts can help learners to deal with difficult reactions and feelings, and to gradually work through these to build empathy with the victims, self-confidence, assertiveness, and hope for themselves and support for others (Namibia. MOE, 2005, p. 119).

Cross-Curricular Issue	Environmental Studies	Language	Mathematics	Arts	Religious & Moral Education
Environmental Education	Natural Environment: Impact of human behaviour on water, plants, weather	Talking, listening to and reading stories, creative writing about the environment	Data handling: Picture graphs, consumption of water per week	Collage, using materials from the environment, visual art, songs and	Stories about the creation and environmental values education

				drama about the environment	
HIV and AIDS Education	Caring for our environment: Healthy eating, health services, behaviour towards and care for relatives / friends / neighbours	Talking, listening to and reading stories, creative writing about health, caring, illness, death	Data handling: Pictographs Time; Money	Drawing, painting, songs, drama about HIV and AIDS and about one's own feelings about it	Stories about care, comfort and health of sick people; the value of life and the individual
Population Education	Impact of settlements on the environment	Talking, listening to and reading stories, creative writing about families	Data handling: Picture graphs – boys and girls in the class/family	Population issues expressed through drawing, music drama	Customs, beliefs, and values
Human Rights and Democracy Education	Culture: Customs and religious ceremonies. Traditional stories, the right to shelter, clean water & environment, food and education	The right to one's own language; talking, listening to and reading stories, and writing in one's own language	Data handling: Picture graphs	Visual art, songs, music, drama about human rights, children's rights, rights of the girl child, expressing oneself freely	The right to freedom of religion

Table 1: The table shows how Arts and the cross-curricular issues can be linked: (Namibia. MOE, 2005, p. 120).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was located within the interpretive paradigm. This research paradigm seeks to understand the meaning which people give to their own social interactions (Southwood, Carstens & Brauteseth, 2004). The task of the researchers in using the interpretive paradigm was to explore the opportunities for incorporating arts with other subjects and with cross-curricular issues in the lower primary phase curriculum in Zambezi region, Namibia (Connole, 1998). The researchers decided to locate the study in this paradigm because “it assumes that all human action is meaningful and hence has to be interpreted and understood within the context of social practice” (Scott & Usher, 1996, p. 18). By interpretation, this means that the researcher was to search for perspectives on the situation being studied and also for theoretical understanding.

The specific method of the research was a qualitative case study. Hammersley as cited in Hitchcock and Hughes (1995, p. 317) defined a case study as a collection of detailed, relatively unstructured information from a range of sources about a particular individual, group, or institution, usually including the accounts of the subjects themselves. Bell (1987, p. 6) argued that a case study approach is particularly appropriate for individual researchers because it gives an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth within a limited time scale. The advantage of using a case study approach in the context of a qualitative research focus was that it linked closely with the interpretative orientation.

A case study tells a story of the situation being studied in a language that both a layman and practitioner could understand (McKernan, 1996). A case study approach is also rich in description, interpretation, explanation and narrative of the situation being studied and it works more for understanding than for rigorous scientific measurement, prediction and control of settings, respondents and actions (McKernan, 1996).

In this study, the researchers worked with Lower Primary teachers from two different schools within the town of Katima Mulilo, in Zambezi region, Namibia. The first sample group consisted of four teachers who currently teach the Lower Primary Phase at Wooden Combined School and these four teachers formed a focus group in which the researcher explored their views on the teaching of Arts and the possibilities offered for the development of the Arts across the curriculum. The second group consisted of two teachers; one of them (Ellis) was also part of the focus group discussion as she teaches at Wooden Combined School. Rachel was from NHE Primary School and did not form part of the focus group discussion. The two schools were chosen for convenience in terms of distance and because they are University of Namibia (UNAM) support schools during teaching practice (TP) and school based studies (SBS) for our student teachers.

Data collection instruments

Small scale research projects such as this, which are located in a qualitative case study, are seen as being inherently subjective and because of the nature of the research the results are not generalisable. To increase validity, the

researchers used multiple data collection methods. In this study the researcher used the following data collection methods: Interviews, class observations and focus group discussions.

Interviews

One of the most effective modes of gathering data in an inquiry is through the interview method. Allison, O'Sullivan, Owen, Rice, Rothwell, and Saunders (1996), defined interviews as face-to-face situations in which the researcher sets out to elicit information or opinions from a subject. The researchers chose to use this method because it has the advantage of "allowing the interviewer to probe areas of interest as they arise during the interview" (McKernan, 1996, p. 128). The researchers specifically used semi-structured interviews because in this type of interview "the interviewer has certain questions he or she asks of all interviewees, but also allows the respondent to raise issues and questions as the interview progresses" (McKernan, 1996, p. 129). The researchers conducted these semi structured interviews with the two selected Lower Primary school teachers who worked closely with the researchers before class observations. The researcher also had a focus group discussion with five Lower Primary school teachers from Wooden Combined School, in order to explore their views about possible ways to integrate Arts in other subjects and in the cross-curricula issues/themes. The four Lower Primary school teachers who were part of the focus group discussion teach from Grades 1 to 4. This group was comprised of one grade 1 teacher, one grade 2 teacher, one grade 3 teacher and one grade 4 teacher. According to McKernan (1996, p. 166), "studies have shown that in adult life a person is at least three times more likely to exchange meaningful information with others by speaking than by writing". All the interviews and the focus group discussion were conducted in English. The researchers tape recorded the interviews with the two teachers whom they observed in their classes and video recorded the focus group discussion.

Class observations

Observation "is the observation and recording of events or circumstances in which the researcher is present" (Allison et al. 1996, p. 26). The researchers observed three lessons of each of the two selected teachers from the two different schools. The researchers used an observation method because "it is a technique that can often reveal characteristics of groups or individuals which would have been impossible to discover by other means" (Bell, 1987, p. 88). The researchers' video recorded all six classroom observations in order to cover everything that was happening in class and for easier transcription purposes.

The aim of classroom observations was for the researchers to confirm that what the two teachers were saying in the interviews compared to what they did in the classroom situation. There were no field notes taken since the researcher was doing the video coverage and therefore captured everything that happened in the classroom.

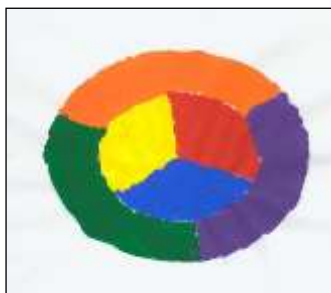
Findings

The incorporation of arts with other subjects

In this section the researchers reports on the findings of how these teachers incorporate Arts with other subjects at the lower primary phase in Zambezi region, Namibia. The data from this section was primarily from the initial semi-structured interviews, class observations and focus group discussion.

Rachel's responses on the incorporation of Arts with other subjects

When responding to the question of how she normally incorporates Arts when teaching other subjects, Rachel responded by giving an example that in Mathematics when she was dealing with traffic lights she focused on the shapes of the traffic lights. She said that she incorporated the topic on traffic lights by focusing on their different colours when she was dealing with the topic on the colour wheel. In English she said that she incorporated Arts through role play, singing songs and drama.



Colour Wheel painted by a group of six grade 3 learners

Ellis responses on the incorporation of Arts with other subjects

When responding to the question of how she normally incorporates Arts when teaching other subjects, Ellis gave an example of when she was teaching the theme of “My Family”. She said that she incorporated Arts where she instructed her learners to draw family members in their Mathematics lessons and after drawing family members in their Mathematics lesson, she asked them if they could count how many people in each family so that they can draw up a bar graph for the family. She said that through drawing they were emphasizing the skills of Arts. She also described how she was teaching about colour, when learners were making pie charts of the types of food they like. When doing this she saw that her learners were able to identify colours of bananas, apples and other types of food. She said that her learners were enhancing the skills of recognizing and identifying colours which they learnt and painted in Arts.

Ellis, Molly, Karen and Aline responses on the incorporation of Arts with other subjects

Ellis in the focus group discussion responded by giving an example in English where she tells learners stories, after telling the story, other learners can retell that story and later dramatise it. When responding to this question Molly said that in Mathematics learners draw shapes and in that way she is incorporating Arts in Mathematics.

Karen gave an example in Environmental Studies where she said, “I can incorporate Arts in the theme of culture whereby I divide learners in groups to perform different songs according to their tribal groups where they belong, in that way when learners are busy dancing and singing songs I am incorporating Arts with Environmental Studies on the theme of culture”.

Aline supported Karen by saying that she normally incorporates Arts in English where she encourages her learners to tell stories about their families while others are listening to what those learner do with their families. She gave another example of Mathematics where they draw bar graphs, or picture graphs of their families and they can also count members of their families. Karen concluded by giving an example in Religious and Moral Education where learners have to tell religious stories to their friends.

The examples cited by the teachers showed that they do incorporate Arts with other subjects. Four of the teachers interviewed indicated that they incorporated Arts when they teach Mathematics. Other examples revealed how they incorporated Arts with subjects such as English, Environmental Studies and Religious and Moral Education. From these findings the teachers realized that there are opportunities in the Lower Primary school Phase curriculum to incorporate Arts with the other subjects.

The incorporation of cross-curricular issues in arts

In this section the researchers’ reports on the findings of how these teachers incorporate cross-curricular issues in the teaching of Arts at the Lower Primary Phase. The data from this section was generated by the initial semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion and class observations.

Rachel’s responses on the incorporation of cross-curricular issues in Arts

When responding to the question of how she normally incorporates the cross-curricular issues in Arts, Rachel answered this question by saying that it is possible to dramatise issues in cross-curricular themes citing the following example “for HIV and AIDS education, let me say you teach them about the health providers, you can let learners act out a drama: one learner can take the role of a patient who is suffering from HIV and AIDS, another learner can be a mother, the other one a father and a health provider”.

Ellis’s responses on the incorporation of cross-curricular issues in Arts

When responding to the question of how she normally incorporates the cross curricular issues in Arts, Ellis answered this question by giving an example of how she uses stories to teach about HIV and AIDS saying that; “when I am teaching about health of the people, I teach learners about disease which make people sick. So when I am busy teaching this topic to learners I tell them a short story in Arts about a certain person who died from the HIV and AIDS virus and I teach them precautions of what they should do regarding this virus. For example I teach them that they should not touch the blood of someone who is injured with their own hands”. She added that people die in our country because of not taking these precautions. She said that she informed her learners during the story that even when someone was injured in the playground at school they should not touch their friend’s blood but they should report to the teacher. On the issue of environmental education, she said that “we can plan a programme whereby we teach learners that in the Arts period we need to have a clean environment. So they can draw up a programme whereby they try to clean their class and the school surrounding so that they understand that a clean environment is a safe environment”.

On the incorporation of cross-curricular issues in Arts, when Ellis was dealing with stories as part of the themes and topics of Arts about the story of Nekoto she concluded the lesson by emphasizing the importance of water and she said “Now today, we talked about Nekoto. You know that water is life, we cannot stay without water. Without water, everyone who is on earth could die, whether plants, animals, birds and human being. So we must make sure that if we are having water we must keep it clean. We shouldn’t play in the rivers to pollute our water”.

She also incorporated Environmental Education when she taught the topic on weaving by saying that long ago our grandmothers and our grandfathers used to weave objects in their daily lives. She said “In order to survive and to get money to help their families, they took time, the whole day collecting some objects or natural resources in the forest which they used when weaving”

Molly and Karen’s responses on the incorporation of cross-curricular issues in Arts

When Molly in the focus group discussion was asked about how she normally incorporates cross-curricular issues when she is teaching Arts at the Lower Primary school, she responded by giving this example, “I can incorporate HIV and AIDS when I am teaching my learners to dramatise, as Arts is having four skills. So after dramatizing, I can assign my learners to come up with drawings of people suffering from HIV and AIDS and how these people can be helped”. She said that in drawing, creative learners can end up drawing a patient and someone who is helping that patient.

Karen supported Molly by giving the following example that “I can incorporate HIV and AIDS education in Arts whereby I ask learners to say their feelings about this disease and then I can tell learners to draw the types of food which they think is healthy and should be given to people who are suffering from this dreadful disease”. On the incorporation of environmental education in Arts Karen said that she sometimes tells her learners to draw the things which were made by God and those that are made by people.

HIV and AIDS and Environmental Education were two cross-curricular issues that came out strongly when teachers were interviewed and during class observations. These two cross-curricular issues are mostly incorporated in the teaching of Arts at the Lower Primary school Phase either using drama, but as indicated could also be included in lessons on drawing.

DISCUSSION

The incorporation of arts with other subjects

“Arts is within the aesthetic area of learning in the curriculum but has thematic and methodological links to other subjects across the curriculum” (Namibia. MOE, 2005, p. 119). The examples cited by the teachers showed that they did incorporate Arts with other subjects. Teachers interviewed cited that they incorporated Arts when they taught Mathematics, others cited examples of how they incorporated Arts with subjects such as English, Environmental Studies and Religious and Moral education. This was supported by Clement (1986) who argued that different subject disciplines can be related either through their working methods and processes, through their common content, or because they share common purposes in the education of children. He argues that although the working methods used in the teaching of Arts and other subjects are very different to each other, there is significant overlap of content so that in all subjects there is a dependence upon the study of work made by artists, crafters and designers (Clement, 1986). He further argues that there are many opportunities for the use of interplay between Arts and language in the teaching of Arts (Clement, 1986).

From the findings, it was evident that these teachers are aware of opportunities in the Lower Primary school Phase curriculum to incorporate Arts with other subjects and are willing to try to implement this approach.

The incorporation of cross-curricular issues in arts

Cross-curricular themes concern aspects of life, which are important throughout life, and which should be implemented throughout the learning process and beyond and that they contribute to the formation of attitudes and values, may inspire socialising and link school and society. During the interviews conducted with the teachers, they revealed that they were aware of these cross-curricular themes and their importance. For example, HIV and AIDS and environmental education were two cross-curricular issues that came out strongly. Ellis, when teaching about the story of Nekoto concluded the lesson by emphasizing the importance of water, that water is life. These cross-curricular issues are referred to while other issues such as human rights and democracy and population education were neither fore-grounded in the interviews nor incorporated during the actual teaching of these two teachers. The focus on HIV and AIDS and environmental education themes is understood and implemented by both teachers. Given the particular phase being taught by the teachers in this case study topics

related to human rights and democracy education, and population education are perhaps beyond the current scope of these teachers.

Recommendation for further study

The researchers recommends that a similar study be conducted at the Upper Primary Phase. It is here that one lays the foundation of the Arts. This in turn could lead to fostering of a love for the Arts in learners in the secondary school which will be beneficial throughout their lives.

CONCLUSION

The degree of willingness revealed to incorporate Arts in a meaningful way. The study showed that there were opportunities for these teachers to incorporate Arts with other subjects because it has thematic and methodological links to other subjects across the curriculum. The results from the study also showed that these teachers incorporated Arts with cross-curricular issues.

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