



## **School-Based Enterprise And School-To-Work Transitions In Art Vocations**

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***Abstract:***

*A survey of the Ghanaian industry landscape reveals that there are inadequate industries into which visual art graduates would fit. The inadequacy presents vast opportunities that could be explored if schools prepare graduates adequately to enter into art-based enterprises. A school environment promoting school-to-work experiences in creative arts has not been explored. Therefore a study was conducted on the concept of School-Based Enterprises and how effective they are in promoting work experiences in visual art vocations to equip graduates with skills for employment in future. An aspect of the creative arts that embrace art, media and technology are fashion, textiles and their associated businesses. Sixty entrepreneurs in fashion, textiles and related industries were interviewed to gather data on Practical Business Skills that compliment their technical skills to enable them run successful enterprises and how these competencies can be co-opted into formal school curricula. Based on the responses, case study projects were carried out with one hundred and sixty (160) HND Fashion and Textiles students in Kumasi Polytechnic. The findings were that knowledge and production skills alone do not create jobs (i.e. conjure materials, products and markets). Productive learning useful for employment comes by reinforcing students' learning (knowledge and technical skills) with work experiences and practical business competencies in school that conform to the tenets of their vocations. The research revealed that this is achievable through the concept of school-based enterprises. Therefore to create sustainable jobs in the creative arts industries it must be realized that technical skills in art and business training must co-exist to make it beneficial to creative art graduates.*

***Keywords:*** SchoolBasedEnterprise(SBE), ProductiveLearning, PersonalEntrepreneurial Competencies (PECs), Practical Business Competencies (PBCs).

**1.Introduction**

Since its inception, Polytechnic education in Ghana has undergone dramatic changes. Mainly such changes are all geared towards the realization of Ghana's goal of becoming self-reliant in terms of available man power to meet the demands of industry and other sectors of the national economy. Among these changes, one that gained momentum and wide acceptance on most Polytechnic campuses bringing together various stakeholders was The Npt/Nuffic Cbt approach. The crafting of a CBT curriculum in Fashion and Textiles dubbed 'Design and Production of Fashion and Textiles' unearthed countless number of competencies that need to be acquired by graduates to contribute meaningfully to national development agenda. (Draft Report on CBT Workshop – Fashion and Textiles, Accra Polytechnic October 2009).

In October 2009, during the evaluation of the final pilot curriculum (operated for about three years) in Accra Polytechnic – Ghana, stakeholders identified three cardinal areas that needed immediate addressing to make the curriculum holistic. These critical areas were: Entrepreneurial skills; ICT and design skills and CBT pedagogy and assessment. Of the three areas the writer focuses on the entrepreneurship development modules as part of the CBT concept. (Draft Report on CBT Workshop – Fashion and Textiles, Accra Polytechnic October 2009). Research has it that many countries have embarked on massive vocational education with the presumption that basic practical skills plus basic education will result in self-employment. However, Carnoy (1980) has observed that production skill alone does not conjure materials, the market or work. What really seem to work are the organisation of trainees into producer cooperatives and the provision of initial capital to stabilize the work. Productive learning in schools comes by reinforcing students' learning/knowledge with work experiences in school that conform to the tenets of the vocations. In line with this concept teaching hospitals are built to train doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other paramedical staff so as to work with minimal or no supervision after school. Demonstration schools are usually attached to colleges or institutions that train teachers. Popularly also, restaurants and lodging facilities run alongside catering and hospitality programmes to enable students have first hand experiences in their chosen disciplines. In the light of this, art programmes run by polytechnics would guarantee better Competency Based Learning/Training of students if production units or enterprise structures are co-opted into the main school curriculum. Central to this research, the curricular of most institutions running art programmes are deficient in trade and industry related skills and need immediate addressing. At present

training in tertiary art institutions revolve around practical skills acquisition and intellectual training rather than business oriented, work-based industrial practices. For years such a school environment promoting schools-work enterprises is perceived to bring industrial work practices to the doorstep of students for trainees to be abreast with practices of industry while in school, but this brilliant concept has not been explored. (Stern et al 1994) To contribute to addressing this challenge relevant data was gathered from entrepreneurs in fashion and textiles. This data became inputs for a case study project with HND fashion and textiles students where learning centered on productive activities. The central objective was to identify practical business competencies that must be acquired by trainees in art-based programmes in addition to technical skills and intellectual training (which schools dwell on ) to ensure holistic training for the world of work.

## **2.School-To-Work Transitions**

In recent times art educators would do well to think critically about the role of the arts in school –to-work transition. Stankiewicz (1996) acknowledges Parker’s (1994) motions that one reason for the value of visual arts education is in facilitating workplace readiness. The artistic process can be conceived as a system that transforms human talent and physical materials into a work of art. Stankiewicz (1996) holds the view that industrialization has resulted in deskilling workers (especially in the arts) making employment opportunities open to individuals who combine specialized skills with entrepreneurial talents. What this means is that we need an art education curricular with goals and learning activities that address both our society’s avowed educational purposes and changing realities. Based on the above the following important questions are asked: What kind of jobs are we preparing students for?

How do we know that the skills developed through arts programmes will indeed transfer to the workplace?

The issue of transfer of learning is at the crux of Stankiewicz’s concern in regard to school-to-work transition. If art teachers are unaware of the potential connections of their teaching with the work-place, or if they are unconcerned about this issue, it is unlikely that they will explicitly teach for transfer. The Japan Journal (November 2009, Vol. 6) recounts the Japanese government authorities’ striving over the last decade or so to better connect young people with the world of work. As part of entrepreneurship education older students work with organizations (school based set –ups) to come up with ideas for

products that harness local resources, establish hypothetical companies and produce plans covering everything from proto-type production through to sales. They then submit their plans and receive funding from the school, enabling them to actually go out into the community and sell their products.

### **3. Working In Visual Art Vocations**

To consider a career in the creative profession it must be noted that, for the most part, employments in these areas require abilities or capabilities that are not necessarily creative. One may be required to obtain technical or business skills. Careers in the art are highly competitive and what one needs to do is to become a qualified applicant (Shacklady 1997). To do this Shacklady says will require: having a clear idea of what you want to do; long term planning in terms of the route you will take, and willingness to make personal commitments to further your ambitions by picking up unpaid or voluntary work in your chosen field. Preparation for work therefore makes the concept of School-Based Enterprises timely as a module for educational programmes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. School-Based Enterprise is any activity through which students produce goods and services for sale to or used by people other than themselves (Stern et al; 1994). For example students build or rehabilitate houses, fix cars, run restaurants, raise crops and livestock, create clothing, run staff child-care centers etc. The aims of school-based enterprises according to (Stern et al; 1994) include; i. To provide work-preparation advantages as employer-based apprenticeship ii. To improve students career preparations by giving students years of structured, work-based learning linked to classroom instruction, leading to a recognized certificate that qualifies them for employment iii. It serves as a contrast to the passive learning typical of many college /tertiary classrooms as compared to the cognitive apprenticeship that engages students in active problem solving.

### **4. History Of School - Based Enterprise**

The idea of school- based enterprise is not new. The practical possibility of general revenues to offset the cost of schooling has appealed to many people over the years. In Von Borstel's 1982 historical review of the concept of productive education, one of the earliest proponents was the English political philosopher John Locke (cited in Stern et al 1994). Von Borstel's survey of twenty-seven productive education projects in developing countries found that nine of them generated enough revenue to pay all the cost of the

school, another five supported between 60 and 90 percent of school costs and six more recovered between 25 and 45 percent. This implies that the enterprise produced enough not only to cover the cost of production itself but also in many instances to cover the cost of education. According to Von Borstel, the 18<sup>th</sup> century French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau was the first to assert the pedagogical benefits of productive education. Rousseau's ideas were applied and refined by the Swiss-German educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, who opened a school in 1774 in which education was organized around productive labour. The American philosopher John Dewey brought this idea into the twentieth century, consistently arguing that students learn best when productive experience is an integral part of their education. (Stern et al; 1994)

### **5. Methodology**

The qualitative approach of research was adopted. Specific methods of research used were the descriptive and survey methods. A case study was also used in selected areas. Though four categories of respondents were used emphasis was placed on two (entrepreneurs in fashion and textiles; and hnd fashion and textiles students) while the other two (stakeholders in higher education in Ghana (Nabptex, Ncte, Nab etc) and heads of business organisations (agi, nbssi, moti etc); and art educators in fashion and textiles in Ghanaian polytechnics) were basically involved to confirm the data gathered. The entrepreneurs used for the study were managers of fashion and textiles business set-ups where students are attached for industrial practice. The purposive sampling technique was used to select sixty (60) entrepreneurs who were interviewed to provide experiential data for the study. The case study was done on three year groups of hnd students comprising hnd i, ii and iii of the fashion and textiles studies department of Kumasi Polytechnic. Different questionnaires were administered to these three year groups in a bid to diversify the techniques for gathering the same kind of data. In all, one hundred and sixty (160) students were randomly selected for the study representing 84% of the student population. Data was also obtained from thirty (30) students from the Institute of Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Development, Ieed – Kumasi Polytechnic who study Fashion and Textiles as elective courses.

Analysis of data was mainly descriptive. Based on the objectives of the study and research questions being investigated, the researchers derived associated themes under which responses gathered were assembled and discussed.

## **6. Discussion of findings**

### *6.1. Assessing Trainees' Practical Business Competence Levels*

The entrepreneurs contacted confirmed the importance of many Practical Business Competencies (PBCs) useful to graduates. However respondents had varied opinions with respect to the ones that are very important to supersede the other. Generally, the study revealed that these broad areas of competencies namely; production skills, marketing skills, business organisation skills and financial management skills are useful competencies that graduates must acquire. Further to that, close to 95% of the practitioners acknowledge that out of the four broad competency areas, production skill is the first most important. The study also confirmed that though these PBCs are very important, however, students do not have or exhibit these competencies. At best students have some production skills (which schools focus on) but not the marketing, business organisation and financial management skills. In addition, it was pointed out that most lecturers are not business inclined and do not exhibit these skills themselves, making it difficult for them to impart these PBCs to trainees. Discussing the production skills further, all the entrepreneurs (100%) unanimously opined that competence in production or practical skills alone is not enough to enter and manage a business in the art-based professions (fashion and textiles) successfully. They pointed out that production which is the technical know-how/skill is a foundational skill in business. It is okay to start in business with production skills but not enough to sustain the business. Moreover production skills was described as the skills needed to get the job done, but then it does not end there since there is a lot more to business or enterprise practice than production alone. Principally, they mentioned the need for one to exhibit some Personal Entrepreneurial Competencies (PECs) to be successful in any business venture. Aside the PECs, some competencies needful for trainees to acquire to be successful in business include; customer care, human relations skills, communication skills, time management skills; advertising, marketing and selling skills; costing, book keeping, financial management skills are all needed for the survival of businesses. It was noted that financial management or money handling skills is of prime importance in every business enterprise.

### *6.2.Acquiring Practical Business Competencies*

The research revealed that there is not one single approach to develop PBCs among trainee artists in fashion and textiles. What exists is a multi-system approach where all sorts of conventional and unconventional methods are employed to impart the desired skills and competencies. To guarantee the acquisition of these skills respondents proposed three cardinal conditions must be fulfilled namely: conducive place for training; experiences of the trainer and lastly interest, willingness and desire of the trainee to learn and acquire such skills. To provide effective training the approaches proposed by respondents included: exposure to business environments, gaining experience (learning by doing), and participatory observation as well as through workshops and seminars. The sixty (60) entrepreneurs making (100%) confirmed that formal school trainees need to spend adequate time with industry in the form of attachments to acquire some of the nitty-gritty skills and competencies in business since they do not exhibit them. This confirms (Shacklady: 1997) assertion that one must be willing to pick unpaid or voluntary work in his/her chosen field as work preparation activity.

### *6.3.Need For The Establishment Of Business Training Laboratories*

Industrialists' desire for the establishment of Business Training Laboratories (Production Units) in schools to train art-based-graduates to develop adequate PBCs cannot be over emphasized. Out of the sixty respondents only one respondent declined to the idea of schools getting involved in establishing production units, however, the remaining fifty-nine respondents (98%) responded YES to the idea. Their endorsement of the production unit system in training institutions were based on the following reasons, namely: for skill training, for business training and lastly for business gains (income generation). This implies that if schools organise effective productive activities as part of students learning enough income could be generated to offset some of the cost of education as proposed by Von Borstel (1982) as cited in Stern et al 1994.

## **7.Case Study With Students**

### *7.1.Identification Of Market Demand For Fashion And Textiles*

The case study project (*mini enterprises – production, marketing and sales*) conducted with HND fashion and textiles students produced a number of outcomes that confirmed

the importance of SBEs as a platform for the acquisition of PBCs for the world of work. Through the projects, students were able to develop means of identifying market demand for goods and services within their catchment area. The outcome revealed five key concepts that can be used to determine what consumers want especially in the area of fashion and textiles. These were made-to-order goods/services; products in vogue; goods and services used during rites of passage (birth, adolescence, marriage and death/funerals); goods required in daily use and ritzy goods – expensive and fashionable products for celebrities, wealthy and influential persons in society.

### *7.2.Sources Of Raw Materials For Fashion And Textiles Production*

The study group also learnt to identify the sources of raw materials for production. To be competitive as done in any business venture respondents considered a number of factors before the procurement of raw materials for production purposes. The following factors considered before procurement of raw materials with their accompanying percentages were realized: quality of raw materials (100%); suitability of raw materials for intended product (100%); durability of raw materials (88%); ease of end use (78%); availability of raw materials for subsequent production (22%); meeting product specifications (55%) and pricing. In considering price of raw materials 78% of the study group opted for average prices, 22% high prices whilst none purchased any raw material because the price was low. From the above discussions it could be deduced that given the right coaching trainees could be trained to procure suitable raw materials at reasonably low prices for production purposes.

### *7.3.Means Of Ensuring Effective And Efficient Production Processes*

The study group admitted adopting various strategies to ensure effective and efficient production processes. On effectiveness some of the strategies employed included:

Seeking assistance from experts to complete tasks (eg. sub-letting)

Producing goods or rendering services to exact specifications to meet clients' request

Utilizing learned skills and competencies to execute jobs professionally

By these strategies the study group confirmed achieving their intended targets.

Efficiency has to do with achieving one's intended results with minimal use of resources – time, money, energy etc (Sme Toolbox, Jica 2008). To ensure efficiency in the production processes members of the study group testified to employing strategies including;



Managing time judiciously so that much work is accomplished within a short space of time.

Being economical with the use of resources to avoid wastage

Adopting a quick approach to work to achieve set targets in no time.

Observing break sessions to recoup strength to be efficient on the job.

Bargaining for discounts to cut cost of raw materials and services.

#### *7.4. Impact Of Good Finishing And Packaging Of Fashion And Textiles On Sales And Marketing*

The study also revealed that the final finishing and packaging of products impart directly on pricing. This became evident when well finished goods were priced higher yet gained much patronage. Members of the study group also learnt a simple method of pricing their goods. The basic pricing formula used was cost of raw material(s) + cost of production + profit margin. When in doubt pricing was done on the high side as it is always easier to discount prices than to raise them. Respondents confirmed making different degrees of profit. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of the study group described their profits as average, 30% described their profits as minimal whilst 12% thought that they made significant profits. This demonstrates the potential benefits of school-based enterprises as viable means of generating enough revenue to offset the cost of education whilst offering opportunity for technical and business skills development for trainees as alluded to by Von Borstel (cited in Stern et al 1994). Available statistics indicate that the bits of profits together with some other activities at the business training laboratory generates approximately a third of the quantum of funds needed to run the department within a year. Through the activities of the unit and students projects a number of training facilities are procured to supplement what the institution provides; some of which include industrial sewing machinery and accessories, printing and waxing tables for textiles production. The study group mainly promoted and advertised their goods through word-of-mouth advertising. The resultant effect of this direct approach coupled with a concept of marketing adopted (knowing and understanding the customer so well that the product or service fits him and sells itself) greatly assisted the study group to sell their goods and render various services for profits.

### *7.5. Handling Business Finances*

Handling business finances featured prominently in the study. Some basics that respondents testified gaining experiences in were opening and operating different bank accounts, the importance of issuing invoices, receipts, preparation of simple accounts, as well as cash handling. At the end of the exercises respondents testified to have learnt some important lessons. Among the key lessons imbibed included:

The importance of economizing resources for the purpose of optimizing outputs

The essence of time management especially in business

The essence of good funds management and cash handling

The benefits of quality production, finishing and packaging as well as rendering quality services to clients

Ability to negotiate

If these lessons can be learnt then it means that a lot of competency areas are left uncovered by the school system that planners and trainers must revisit. The school therefore does not exhaust the training of graduates if training is limited to intellectual training and technical skills acquisition while remaining silent on business related skills.

### **8. Conclusions And Recommendations**

A school environment which advocates education to be organized around productive labour holds a lot of promise for these times. The outcomes justify the 18<sup>th</sup> Century French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau's assertion that there are pedagogical benefits of productive education. The research revealed that the current school system does not provide trainees in art-based programmes with Practical Business Competencies (PBCs). These PBCs it was noted are acquired on the job and therefore it becomes imperative for schools to establish business training laboratories (production units) for training purposes. The study revealed based on the case study that students are able to identify market demands, identify sources of raw materials and carry out effective and efficient production processes. In addition the training laboratory and project allowed for good finishing and packaging of goods, advertising, marketing and selling skills that guarantees profits. The profits made are significant enough to supplement the cost of students training. Moreover such initiatives allow for trainees to learn business money handling and financial management skills. The study is thus a brave attempt to investigate the observation by Carnoy (1980) that production skill alone does not conjure

materials, the market or work. This assertion the research proved to be true and therefore needed the intervention proposed.

It must be noted however that despite the numerous benefits of School-Based Enterprises it is confronted with a number of issues and may include: hiring qualified staff, recruiting students, excessive administrative interferences and bureaucratic bottlenecks especially in state owned educational institutions. Since SBEs is proven to provide sound justification for work oriented training the following recommendations are made to strengthen its operation.

School activities must relate to work so that the school is not perceived as a separate entity from the world of work.

The acquisition of Practical Business Skills must be part of the school curriculum and taught in schools and/or acquired during attachments.

Training in art (which is vocational and technical in nature) must be made business focused since artworks ends up in the production of goods and services for public consumption.

Art and business must co-exist to make it beneficial to trainees, training institutions and the nation as a whole.

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