

PEACE EDUCATION AND ART: A STUDY OF THE EMERGING “PEACE THROUGH ART” MOVEMENT IN NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

There is general lack of participation of citizens in Nigeria with regards to peace promotion exercises and peace efforts often focus mostly on conflict resolution. This paper examines an emerging peace movement in Nasarawa state Peace through Art, to show the contributions of an art peace movement in promoting the culture of peace and peace education in Nigeria, the research also tries to show the impact art and artists can make in the area of peace education and how we can all benefit from the art industry in the area of peace promotion. This study adopts qualitative and quantitative analysis of data. It involves identifying and locating sources that provide information or personal/expert opinion on the research questions. The primary data used was mostly collected via oral interviews of members of the movement and beneficiaries of the movement. The research finds that creative work in groups connected individuals and created an awareness of their surrounding needs and helped overcome prejudices this agrees with Galtung’s notion of the uplifting effect of being part of something that is bigger than the sum of its parts. The research was concluded on the fact that art can intensify its mediating role in nurturing peace-oriented thoughts. The research also discovers how effective art is in peace education.

Keywords: Art, peace education, peace movement.

Introduction

A 2017 study published in *Frontiers of Human Neuroscience* reviewed numerous studies that point to the sociological value of art. Researchers noted that, in addition to affecting moods and attention, contemplating art also promoted better social knowledge and self-understanding. Art, they found, can help develop empathy, and allow viewers to take a new perspective and to understand others better. These qualities are crucial pillars of peace, which begins when we understand the effects that our own actions have on others. (Writes, 2019).

Many exhibitions throughout history have focused on the horror and destruction caused by war and violence. Many artists such as Picasso in *Guernica*, or Goya in his anti-war prints, both used powerful imagery to reveal the way war destroyed lives. This could arguably be one of the most powerful ways in which art could be used to promote peace, by warning society of what they can expect if they do not put a stop to those who make decisions on engaging in or desisting from war. (Writes, 2019).

In general, it is believed that peace could be cultivated through two forms of power, namely hard power and soft power. Hard power is legal steps taken by the government, authorities or customer stakeholders to seek peace through diplomacy. Those with hard power are community representatives who are mandated to resolve the conflict. However, hard power tends to be useful in times of conflict and post-conflict only. What was also needed is conflict prevention (Richards, 2018). Soft power, on the other hand, is peace effort done by affecting human consciousness. Soft power is in charge of moving, awakening, and touching everyone's heart on the importance of peace. The vitality of soft power lies in the message content. Peace messages actually live in the values of local wisdom rooted in every culture. The task and challenge is to manage the messages of peace in a creative way.

Until recently, only government was concerned with peace education in Nigeria. The general population participates only when there is a conflict such as war, riots, or acts of inter-party violence. Peace efforts often focused only on conflict resolution arranged by political groups resulting in very little transformation. It is believed that to make the peace education a

sustainable effort, it would require people from all levels of society to be actively committed to peace. There needs to be an attitudinal shift by the people who tended to be passive, getting all actively involved in the peace education. Due to constant conflict in Nigeria and lack of participation of citizens in Nigeria in peace promotion exercises, especially in peace movement which has proven to be very effective all over the world, this research will try to encourage involvement of everyone in promoting a culture of peace using an art peace movement. This is against the backdrop of the fact that art focuses more on creativity, education and entertainment. It usually has a gathering of relaxed individuals looking forward to be entertained and educated. This study therefore focuses on a movement in Nasarawa state called "Peace through Art" which is taking on the challenge of using art and culture toward building a culture of peace through education. In order to achieve this objective, the study therefore raises the following questions: i. What is the nature of peace education in Nigeria? And: ii. How can art be effectively used to contribute to peace education and ultimately national cohesion?

Conceptual Review

Peace education

Peace education is generally understood as encompassing two dimensions of practice, characterized by Reardon (2000) as "education about peace" and "education for peace." Education about peace refers to education primarily concerned with the acquiring of knowledge about violence and peace. This may include teaching about the negative effects of war and violence, or about the history and possibility of nonviolent alternatives, for example. Education for peace refers to education which focuses on learning the skills necessary for living peacefully and promoting action to create peaceful alternatives (Bermeo, 2022). So many different approaches and definitions of peace education exist today, this research will look at the approaches that best fit the field of art and peace.

Johan Galtung's, reflections on peace education mainly focus around teaching peace in schools. However, in *Encyclopedia of peace education* he acknowledges that most school

systems engage in some sort of structural violence such as “highly vertical division of labour manifesting itself in one-way communication; the fragmentation of those on the receiving end, preventing them from developing horizontal interaction that will allow them to organize and eventually turn the communication flow the other way; and the absence of true multilateralism in the education endeavour” (Galtung, 2008). His focus lies on structural components that promote or hinder the peace education process. He describes the content of peace education rather as a dialogue, leading to action. He agrees that one step should involve the display of knowledge about the facts of the world related to peace. Fountain (1999: 1) defines peace education as

the process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behavior changes that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural; to resolve conflict peacefully; and to create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at an intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, national or international level.

Peace education to her is the general promotion of skills, attitudes and knowledge. She goes further to describe it as follows; It appears that developing awareness of critical situations and the will to take action to avoid or resolve them, the ability to reflect critically upon own actions, the provision of a peaceful and respectful environment, equality, tolerance, understanding of peace, human rights and social justice and possibly global political issues, knowing how to act in violent or conflict situations, respect of differences, promoting peace and social justice values enable reflection and the practice of the learned skills, values and attitudes (Fountain, 1999:). All those skills that peace education in her opinion should promote as its one goal, so both Galtung and fountain lean towards personal development rather than international politics issues.

Although they differ in their technicalities; most peace education definitions include the development of skills, attitudes and values in a safe, peaceful environment. Those values and attitudes mostly depend on existing peace definitions, theoretical knowledge and the skills needed for peacebuilding or peacekeeping. Peace education involves mutual learning processes that promote openness, tolerance, understanding and appreciation of diversity and

differences in culture or religion, intercultural friendship, personal development, respect, and the culture of peace. The approaches are different in their execution as well as in the further definition of the skills, values and attitudes mentioned. The intersections with art that this work looks at, suggest that the focus of this research should be within the aspects of personal development of skills and attitudes rather than the actual teaching of international politics and peace theory. As this work tries to identify mechanisms and their effects that promote peace education, the structural suggestions seem to be important. It still seems difficult to imagine, how such a mutual learning environment is created.

Art and peace

Arts and Peace involves carefully facilitated arts-based activities, such as theatre, dance, painting, yoga, and music to foster positive behavioural change. As with sport, art is used as an entry point for peace building. The purpose of Arts for Peace is not art itself, but rather the means through which to convey conflict transformation objectives (Hussein, 2016). Lederach (2005) argues for a more creative-process-like approach to reconciliation as well. He describes the term moral imagination to include three aspects: stretching the limits of one's personal perception of reality by practicing more awareness, including creative thinking in these perceptions and in our actions and finally enabling change.

He goes further to state;

...this is the capacity to imagine and generate constructive responses and initiatives that, while rooted in the day-to-day challenges of violence, transcend and ultimately break the grips of those destructive patterns and cycles (Lederach 2005).

He also advocates the power of music. According to him, "music, it seems, has the power to push things either in the direction of greater violence or towards reconciliation" (Lederach 2005). He also made a case for including more creativity in the reconciliation process in general and he explained some reasons for that. In this description, the creative process is not linear, it has its own speed and is sensitive to force or pressure, it is strongest

when it is simple and honest, it is not completely comprehensible by thought and reason only, it requires passion and fun rather than formal, serious work (Lederach, 2005).

Art Education and the Nurturing of Peace

The major learning methods in arts education are through observation, introduction of historical sites such as museums and galleries. One of the methods of teaching peace to children is also to introduce historical sites to them. Using this method, children can investigate historical and monumental buildings from distant past and discover their relationship with their environment. In this method, children learn how to protect historical sites and unique places. This method uses a background behavioral approach. For example, when a child is introduced to the great ancient Benin bronze art, he or she gets to know about royalty, slavery, and class system and can pursue the trend since those times into the present. In this method, the Benin art is investigated through peace seeking approaches. Students learn peace with their environment and historical objects and attain hope and cordiality from museums and lives of the departed. When a teacher takes his students to the cemetery of veteran martyrs, according to McCarty (1995), he does not praise war but commends those who sacrificed themselves to protect collective memories and lifestyles of the people in the territory. Moreover, these historical memorials do not induce regret but bring hope and reflect human challenges and tries for equality and liberty along with their sacrifice for their ideals. These memorials could teach

Galtung's focus on art was mostly music, in *Music and conflict transformation harmonies and dissonances in geopolitics*. Galtung talks about the group experience of an orchestra or a quartet as opposed to soloists. He describes how the individual, in putting itself aside by entering the group, can contribute to uprising the group performance to more than the sum of its parts. "This is beyond words alone. This is peace through art by way of isomorphism and structural identity. The art lies in being peace rather than just expressing and verbalizing peace. In the quartet or the symphony there is that jump into a new reality, which is more than the sum of parts. And the argument would be that the kind of conflict solution that is peace

building, as opposed to merely conflict settlement, has exactly that quality" (Galtung 2008). Here Galtung argues for the uplifting quality of music that we, as he suggests, feel when engaging in music with a group that helps us to feel like we are part of something greater than the sum of its parts. This experience he believes has the power of overcoming conflict.

The Need of Art Education in Promoting Peace in Nigeria

Teaching peace is of such a vast range that can cover a child's aggression in school level, tribal segregation in the national or international level and even global commitment to saving the planet. However, its basics vary from one community to another. Nevertheless, forms and contents of teaching peace coincide with the implicit and explicit understanding from background condition and the related affairs (Haulsrod and Sternberg, 2012). Every community or society has its own special technique of peace education, which is usually based on their culture, type and effect of conflict on the community. Due to variety of challenges facing humans, several ways have been proposed for teaching peace. Thus, teaching peace includes different forms and issues. Different forms of violence need different techniques of teaching peace. One of the ways through which peace could be taught effectively in Nigeria is using art. Psychologists and art critics believe that having an artistic life guarantees salvation in social and individual life of people. Therefore, art helps solve mental disorders and increases internal coordination. This will be facilitated if we understand ourselves.

This promotes mutual compassion and understanding and removes humans' introversion toward their fellow counterparts. On the other hand, this cements the accepted social values and promotes ethics. According to several scholars, peace plays the reliving role historically played by religion. Teaching peace and arts have several common purposes. They aim to relieve stress, improve concentration, expand imagination and augment sympathy. Whenever words cease to work music begins. Whenever a fact, an incident or a human experience could not be expressed through verbal signs and philosophical, logical and scientific concepts, art begins. Art can do things that could not possibly be done with things that use verbal potentials of the language. (Nasrabadi, Heidari and Neyestan, 2016).

It refers to human senses and when added to revelations, art demonstrates a high level of potential for transmitting inherent experiences of humans and reveals mysteries that could not ever be opened with any other keys. Art opens up routes for humans that could not be traversed with unstable feet of wisdom and logic. Artistic creation is of an elevated position in the spiritual life of humans and this gives it a higher position compared to science, logic and even philosophy (Ahmadi, 2013). The power of an image of a war-stricken kid is incomparable to hundreds of books and articles published to censure violence and praise peace. Maxine Greene, in his book titled “Releasing Imagination: papers on education, art and social change” (1995) believes that imagination is the basis for educational and social reforms. For him, arts education is a tool for stimulating learners’ imagination, thinking in different ways. Art can therefore help us better understand others, that we learn through art to see through each other’s eyes and hear through their ears and these are the outcomes of the real learning for they turn into parts of one’s body (Dewey, 2012: 394). This is one of the biggest challenges we have in Nigeria today, a lack of understanding of each other and art can help us end the lack of understanding among us.

Peace Movement and Art

Art has considerable potential in peace building, not only in the conflict resolution field but also in post-conflict reconciliation. Defying all linguistic boundaries, it is considered a universal language and therefore an ideal resource to understand the perspectives of others, particularly their perspective on a given conflict (Chambelland, 2018). The use of art in conflict situations can be strategic, especially during negotiations and mediation processes when verbal communications reach its limits. Art is a powerful instrument for collective reconciliation between communities, and it can equally be useful for individuals to overcome any trauma linked to conflict.

The Dada movement, founded in Switzerland in the early 20th century by artists from a plethora of countries, including war-torn countries, shows the extent to which creativity can be used to both advocate for peace and overcome the devastating effects of war. Dada artists

often relied on photography collages to express their dissatisfaction with government regimes that pushed unwilling victims into war. Without a doubt, their art helped them deal with their inner turmoil. There is a reason why, today, art creation is used as therapy with many groups – including refugees, war victims, veterans, and war survivors with PTSD. The value of art therapy goes way beyond the perceived aesthetics of the works themselves (Writes 2019)

Through the use of art and cultural traditions, both sacred and modern-contemporary, the opportunity of involving and mobilizing people in the peace movement becomes greater. (Richards 2018). This could be seen in the United States in the era of the 1960s, when the young generation rejected the Vietnam war, they blended with the hippie's musical movement with the slogan "Make Love Not War", To stand against the war. In music, over the years there are a number of music festivals created by world musicians with the theme of peace. (Richards 2018)

Peace through Art Movement in Nasarawa State

Creating art is a way to reimagine the future, to build bridges and foster understanding, to develop empathy, to make friends, to express feelings, to build self-confidence, to learn how to be flexible and open-minded, to be exposed to different ideas and learn to listen to the views of others, to work collaboratively. These are all attributes that can help to promote peace (Marder, 2019).

In a world today in which people live amidst violence, this groups and others like them are creating opportunities for children, teens and adults to engage in the arts to help them discover things about themselves and an understanding about others that will help them better deal with differences and handle conflicts better and more peacefully. Some of these groups are international, some are more local, but all are necessary, and doing very important work.

Peace through Art is a movement that started in Nasarawa state around August of 2021, by a few visual artists coming together to find ways to contribute to peace promotion and education in Nigeria, this group is trying to tap into children's and teen's innate creative resource and imagination, where they can imagine and visualize their enemies as human

beings like themselves with no much difference, thereby visualizing a more peaceful coexistence. The main aim is to reduce the transmission of hatred and violent thoughts which has existed in the minds of many Nigerians of the present generation and should not be allowed to continue in the next generation. The idea is to develop empathy through art and imparts leadership skills so children and teens can help to create a peaceful future for their communities.

The Peace through Art group is involved in creating of art works by the children which will involve different mediums including mural art in the street carried out through teamwork and will turns into a positive work ethic, which, in turn, results in a genuine feeling of self-worth by all participants. Exhibitions featuring the art works by practicing artists and works created by the children and teens promoting peace will also be among activities of the group. Regular visits to historical sites, in and outside the states to create a better understanding in the minds of the children about their history and the beauty of Nigerian diverse cultures. Some of these activities have already been started and an analysis of the activities was carried out using interviews of some of the participants and beneficiaries.

From interviews with members of the peace movement, it was found that the idea behind the movement was to teach the kids using fun ways to create understanding of each other's differences and diversities, for children to engage in the arts and to discover things about themselves and others that will help them better deal with differences and handle conflicts peacefully. They were all also positive and believed there was some improvement in the children and believed the future was promising. Teenage participants also affirmed that they had and were all very excited to be involved in the process. They believed more in their capabilities, seeing more possibilities in their future, learning more ways to communicate with each other, gaining more friend and learned to co-exist peacefully

Galtung's notion of the uplifting effect of being part of something that is bigger than the sum of its parts did come up during the interviews (Galtung 2008). Some people touched upon the issue when talking about harmony and coordination in group works, according to

them art connected them and created an awareness of their surrounding needs and the overcoming of prejudices among other things. Almost all of them also agreed that they gained openness and became less judgmental through the creative work in the groups. The open-mindedness is considered a good basis for peace work and education. All this happens through the simple teaching of listening and the need to feel the group's dynamic when working in an art group.

Some findings agreed with Galtung's structural considerations (Galtung, 2008). Galtung's mutual learning process made a lot of sense during the interviews. So, within their reflections, art bares a basis for peace education to that effect. It needs more encouragement of thinking, display of knowledge and imagining the future to address global political issues within the setting. Looking at Fountain's UNICEF approach it is also possible to trace resemblances between the general goals of peace education and interviews with participants' (Fountain, 1999). Their notions touch upon many of the values she mentioned. The learning process of arts groups for the participants was, mostly administrated by people in charge or generally described as mutual. Everybody was able to contribute knowledge, and people learned from each other and through working together, which naturally requires mutual respect as well. The appreciation of diversity seemed to be dependent on setting and success of the art projects.

The peace values of equality and harmony were touched upon by the coordinators and the kids during the interviews to some extent. Some people mentioned, that harmony was both required and promoted during the group production of arts where they all had to work together as one unit. This was not necessarily limited to group art production but also mentioned in connection to individual art production. This as well as the mutual learning supports Galtung's ideas on positive peace, He states that the definition of peace can involve different concepts from security through military forces over "justice and prosperity, harmony in society, between human beings, and in the mind, inside human beings" (Galtung 1981). Many people mentioned refraining from judgment, the overcoming of differences and the group growing

together and developing a community to some extent, many people loved their community however and developed strong feelings of belonging and affections towards their group. With this it is possible to say that visual art might be a reasonable basis for peace education in Nigeria

Conclusion

Arts education gives the opportunity to the society and the cultural environment to create novel meanings in the minds of learners. Visual art has always been relevant in all aspects of education and learning, learning usually works well with visual illustrations, photographs etc. all produced by artists. Society as a whole creates art and in a social process, art can intensify its mediating role in nurturing peace-oriented thoughts in children, firstly as children and secondly as the future generation of the society. Art education gives numerous opportunities to students to go beyond limitations of the classroom to communicate with the real world. Like language, art is of a multifaceted power in education which could function as a connecting device to enrich and link various aspects of human life. The belief that Art is used to pass time is a proof of lack of awareness about the potential power of art. Issue-based arts education in a framework centered on social, political and cultural context could be guided in different ways, mixed with other subjects, taught combined with them and nurture peace. Since arts education focuses on issues related to life and concerns of children, students are motivated to have a deeper look at themselves, other people and the surrounding environment.

Like Cohen and White suggested, that there is much more room for improvement through more research and the documentation of work on art and peace (Cohen and White, 2012). Only through this can one project learn from the experience of another and for such an area to grow and develop. If we learn more about the success of the art and the peace process, we can also come to a conclusion about the peace development process. Further discoveries in this way could improve the work not only of peace educators but also of peace keepers and peace builders. This study shows that the link between art and the peace process is not yet fully understood, as everyone has different experiences. The study also suggests that there are

many sources of knowledge in the area of peace and conflict resolution that needs to be researched more on.

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