



## Creative Arts and the Development of Early Childhood Learners' Full Potential- A Review of Literature

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### Introduction

Teachers have known for many years that young children often understand more than they are able to verbalise and their understanding can be observed in behaviour other than verbal. The teaching and learning of creative arts therefore brings about a holistic development in the learners. Through creative arts, the learners are provided with valuable opportunities to experience and build knowledge skills in self-expression, imagination, creativity, communication and respect for others (Leer, 2006). Through these, the learners develop intellectually, emotionally, socially and physically. In general, the arts positively affect the overall academic achievement, engaging in learning and development of empathy in learners towards others. It is against this background that the importance of creative arts in the development of the learners' full potential is seen. This essay thus seeks to justify this claim, prior to which key terms, creative arts and early childhood education (ECE) shall be defined.

### Literature Review

Beach and Reignhart (2009) state that Early Childhood Education is the formal teaching of young children outside the family or in a setting outside the home. Morrison (2007) defines Early Childhood Education as imparting knowledge and skills to children who are from zero to eight years. Consequently, we can say Early Childhood Education (ECE) is the organized practice of educating children between the years zero and eight years.

According to Walcot (2004) creative arts reflect how children think and can also reflect their inner feelings outwardly through music, dance, art, drama and many other ways. Lear (2002) asserts that creative arts is the ability to think about something in a new and unusual way. From the foregoing definition, creative arts, at ECE level, is therefore the ability to produce new combinations through manipulation of objects, colours or stories.

Creative arts subjects through which creative learning can be promoted, assist the ECE learner to develop intellectually that is have the power or capacity to reason. It should also be noted that creative arts complement the sciences because they nurture different modes of reasoning. Read in Fowler (2004), asserts that while art is the representation, science is the explanation of the same reality. Furthermore, the arts are able to develop divergent rather than convergent thinking and encourage children to come up with different rather than similar solutions to problems. Many ECE learners can use their knowledge in rhymes, poems and games to solve addition and subtraction problems and also learn how to count. A good example is the "Tsoro" game where the child is able to dig and arrange the hole in an artistic way, arrange in set and count logically the number of stones in each hole. This encourages the learner to reason and be creative at the same time.

Secondly when young ECE learners are involved in creative problem solving, they are also regarded as partners in the learning process. Instead of the educator telling them what to think the arts engage the minds of the learners to sort out their own reaction and articulate them through the medium at hand. Dreyfuss (2006) sees the arts as a powerful path towards a well-rounded mind when he points out that the learners do not need to always look up to the educator for problem solving rather they work among themselves and use available material to solve problems. For example, the learner can use word games, songs, artistic pictures or puzzles to solve a number of problems.

Creative arts are important in the development of the learner's full potential in that they help the learner to think independently. Thus the learner is able to develop intellectually as he or she actively participates in the world rather than being a mere observer. All the learners are involved in various activities according to their interest such as singing, dancing, drawing, drama and poetry just to mention a few. If these are successfully developed and scaffolded as Vygotsky (1998) states and reinforced, the learners become useful and self-reliant future members of the society. Perrin (2004) asserts that the arts bring about long-term educational aims as workers at all levels need to be creative thinkers, problem solvers and should be able to push themselves towards high levels of achievement. The educator's role is to provide a conducive environment that allows for all learners to participate freely in activities of their choice. It is also pivotal to help and encourage all the learners in their endeavours.

Creative arts are a way of communicating. Through it the early learner is able to use both verbal and non-verbal forms. Such visual and aural systems of communication include using sound, movement, gestures, marks, image and form. Perrin (2004) asserts that the arts nurture musicians, dancers, visual artists, writers and actors. For example, in sound the learner talks his/her feelings by word of mouth, recites rhymes and say poems like, "if I were a flower under the soil, I would grow and grow". Eventually the child smiles, jumps and claps his/her hands over his head whilst jumping. This way the child is communicating and expressing a happy mood. Without even telling the audience that he/she is communicating happy feelings the audience can see and understand what is being communicated. Sad feelings are also communicated in various art forms. For example, by use of gestures like throwing hands, facial cues like frowning and crying the audience can see that the actor is communicating sad feelings. Polanyi (2007:48) propounds that there are other ways of "telling" besides verbal language.