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Becoming Agents of Change:
Deconstructing Dis/ability in an Inclusive Art Classroom

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Abstract

This paper aims to inspire art educators to become advocates of change by dismantling oppressive structures and discriminatory practices that negatively impact the learning outcomes of students with dis/abilities in school. I reflect on my high school teaching experience in an inclusive art classroom in Ghana, where the curriculum, the human-built environment, and inadequacy in teaching and learning resources created structures of exclusion for students with dis/abilities in the mainstream classroom. Through differentiated instruction and adaptive art teaching strategies, I demonstrate how varied instructional approaches, classroom management, and routines are essential in creating a safe learning environment and equitable learning experiences for students with dis/abilities. I discuss further how art teachers can use assessment strategies to help make informed decisions regarding teaching students with dis/abilities. Art educators need to recognize that students with dis/abilities are entitled to equal opportunities for full participation, respect, value, and academic success in the classroom.

Introduction

From a critical dis/ability studies perspective, as a United States-based male art educator born and raised in Ghana, in this essay, I reflect on my two years (2016-2018) teaching high school art classes in Ghana contextualized within Ghana's history and challenges with inclusive education. From my experience, to be an art educator in an inclusive classroom transcends developing the skills of students with an artistic vocation in the fields of visual art but further acting as an agent of change committed to dismantling structures of exclusion that create a social stigma for people with dis/abilities. My narrative is of my struggle and success in implementing pedagogical and classroom strategies for a particular student, Samuel (a pseudonym), in an inclusive classroom where the curriculum, the human-built environment, and inadequacy in teaching and learning resources create structures of exclusion for students with dis/abilities in the mainstream classroom.

Samuel, a high school junior, had cerebral palsy, a disorder affecting muscle coordination and movement. He was one of the few students with dis/abilities placed in the school and the only student with dis/ability enrolled in my art class for the entire school year. He used a wheelchair due to stiff muscles and poor trunk stability, making walking difficult. Despite having speech impediments, Samuel's outstanding communication skills allowed him to effectively connect with his colleagues. His frequent laughter and rare display of anger or anxiety in class showcased his strong interpersonal abilities. He demonstrated intellectual and learning challenges, which I attributed to the absence of suitable resources to support his learning, yet he was incredibly imaginative and consistently made drawings from memory. Samuel consistently created art in his sketchbook, which he shared with me during the first week of classes. Most of his drawings were of buildings, cars, and human figures, all drawn from his memory. He mainly depicted his daily activities through drawing and painting, such as going to school, helping his mother at home, or what he observed at the market with his mother on weekends. While most of the objects in his drawings appeared distorted, he displayed great artistic ability and high skill in composing shapes and objects. He understood fundamental drawing techniques such as overlapping, baseline, and perspective, and he depicted objects in the surrounding environment. Despite his passion for art, drawing from observation, which was a primary focus of the class, was a restrictive activity for him as it took him longer than drawing from memory. As a result, he would get frustrated and discouraged from completing the task whenever he faced difficulties. Nonetheless, like every other student in my class, drawing activities were important for Samuel to hone his artistic ability and improve his hand-eye coordination.

In developing this essay, I pose the question: How may art educators deconstruct dis/ability in an inclusive art classroom? I write dis/ability with a slash to indicate my positionality against how dis/ability is constructed culturally in a society where people are identified and

represented by what they cannot do rather than what they can do, an ableist stance informed by socio-political constructions about who and what is normal (Davis, 2013). I draw from Critical Dis/ability Studies to problematize and deconstruct this traditional cultural perspective that proscribes dire implications for students within our classrooms. According to educators Scott Danforth and William Rhodes (1997), deconstructing dis/ability involves consciously and critically overturning assumed hierarchical relationships of power in everyday life, where social value is attributed to ability and devaluation is placed on dis/ability. By critically reflecting on my teaching and drawing from academic sources, I deconstruct dis/ability through differentiated and adapted instructional approaches and classroom management strategies to create a safe, inclusive classroom where students with dis/abilities are valued and have a sense of belongingness. I offer these equity-oriented strategies as resources that may help art educators create safe spaces for students with dis/abilities in an inclusive classroom. Flensner and Von der Lippe (2019) noted that the idea of creating a safe space has its roots in the 1970s women's and LGBT movement. This movement provided a platform for members to gather in physical spaces where they could openly share and act without fear of repression. Hence, creating a safe space in the inclusive art classroom is a proactive approach to fostering a diverse learning environment that upholds the rights of all students and protects them from emotional and psychological distress. This is particularly crucial for students with dis/abilities, as it ensures they feel valued and included.

Theoretical Framework

I draw from Critical Dis/ability Studies, a framework that defines dis/ability as a social construct rather than a deficit within an individual. Based on this perspective, Cologon et al. (2019) noted that dis/ability is experienced by people when socially imposed barriers to being and bio-social impairment effects prevent full inclusion, participation, and equity. According to Reaume (2014), critical dis/ability studies challenge the systems that pathologize physical, mental, and sensory differences as needing correction and instead advocate for a change in conventional notions and accommodations for people with dis/abilities. Critical dis/ability studies can help examine and analyze power, privilege, and oppression of bodily and mental norms informed by social perspectives, practices, and concerns about dis/ability (Schalk, 2017).

A leading researcher in dis/ability studies, David Hosking (2008), identifies seven elements of critical dis/ability studies, which include (1) the social model of dis/ability, which recognizes dis/ability as a complex socially constructed ideology defined as an interrelationship between impairment, individual response to impairment, and the social environment; (2) multidimensionality based on the premise that people with dis/abilities are interconnected in multiple ways within every social structure; (3) valuing diversity as an inevitable component of society; (4) embracing legal rights of people with dis/ability as an indispensable tool in

promoting the integration and equality of people with dis/ability; (5) ensuring that the voices of people with dis/ability are not suppressed; (6) critiquing how language influences the concept of dis/ability and the people with dis/ability; and (7) implementing transformative policies that promote the full inclusion of people with dis/abilities.

Applying the critical dis/ability studies framework to this study, I seek to deconstruct macro structures and micro-processes in schooling systems that perpetuate society's negative perception of dis/ability as deficient and valueless (Naraian, 2021). This includes designing an inclusive art curriculum that values the voices of artists with dis/abilities, creating a classroom and school culture that helps students understand dis/ability, equipping them with a non-prejudicial vocabulary for discussing dis/ability, and helping them become agents and advocates of change who are sensitive to dehumanizing practices in school and society at large.

Methodology

I implement critical action research, a dynamic, subjective, and emancipatory process aimed at working with and through individuals and institutions to uncover and apply changes that improve the human condition (Jimenez-Castellanos, Alfaro, & Billings, 2010). According to Carpenter & Cooper (2009), critical action research draws from a critical theory stance as it challenges and examines power relationships, discusses issues about race, class, and gender, and commits to social transformation where the social and cultural contexts of students' lives are prioritized. Buffington and McKay (2013) noted that critical action research helps create and improve socially responsible and culturally responsive teaching and learning for equitable and inclusive art classrooms. Through critical action research, the researcher aims to promote change within the community by investigating and intervening in pertinent issues confronting society and developing support systems for participants (Jimenez-Castellanos et al., 2010). In using critical action research as a participant-observer in an inclusive high school art classroom, I assume the position of a social justice educator who interrogates longstanding societal norms in Ghanaian society that disenfranchise people with dis/abilities and disrupt hierarchical practices that perpetuate inequalities in the school system. As an art educator, critical action research positions me to reflect, examine, and identify issues in my pedagogy and to reconsider my curricular decisions to meet students' needs and mainly promote a conducive learning environment for students with dis/abilities where they thrive and become active members of the school community.

Including Dis/ability in the Art Classroom

In the spring of 2016, I graduated from the University of Education, Winneba, in Ghana, with a degree in Art Education. In the fall of that same year, I started my first teaching position as a visual art teacher in a Category C public high school in an urban district within the Western Region of Ghana. The Ghana Education Service (G.E.S.) uses Categories A, B, and C to group public high schools according to the schools' facilities, populations, and academic performance. Consequently, a Category C school within the G.E.S. framework typically exhibits deficiencies in infrastructure and academic performance compared to Categories A and B, which are comparatively well-resourced (Baidoo-Anu, 2022). The school had approximately 1900 students, and it was one of the high schools that received students with dis/abilities after the government made inclusive education a national policy in 2011. In my art class, I had 54 students, including Samuel. As appreciative inquiry practitioner Marjorie Schiller (1999) noted, the art classroom has often been used as a test case for inclusive planning where the child's readiness for other classes is determined. Indeed, the arts provide various learning opportunities, including supporting and promoting a child's social and emotional growth and development. My art class mainly focused on drawing and painting, emphasizing still-life and figure drawing. These creative activities are designed to support students with dis/abilities to develop their artistic abilities and improve their psychomotor skills (Loesl, 2012). However, despite art's critical role in helping develop and hone students' creative skills, instructional materials and resources are not always designed with students with dis/abilities' learning potentials and challenges in mind. These marginalizing and discriminatory school practices, including social and physical segregation of students with dis/abilities, have been central in the call for equitable educational practices in the school, hence inclusive education (Tan & Katsberg, 2017). With schools serving as an extension of society, inclusive education has become crucial in creating a secure school and classroom environment where students with dis/abilities feel acknowledged, valued, and respected.

Inclusive Education in Ghana

Scholars Nancy Hutchinson and Andrea Martin (2012) noted that the campaign for inclusive education has become an international focus as it is perceived as the key to promoting the right to education for all. According to educators Susan Baglieri and Arthur Shapiro (2017), the central idea of inclusive education is to interrogate the problem of narrow conceptualizations of ability and broaden the range of experiences that can be valued and embraced in schools. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (2016) emphasizes that inclusive education requires a comprehensive overhaul encompassing changes in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures, and strategies. The aim is to eliminate barriers and provide all students with an equal and participatory learning experience in an environment that caters to their needs and preferences.

In 2011, the government of Ghana, through the Special Education Division of Ghana Education Service (G.E.S.), implemented Inclusive Education on a pilot basis in three regions, the Central, Greater Accra, and Eastern Regions in 529 schools and 34 districts (MoE, 2015). Prior to this policy's implementation, the G.E.S. encountered significant resistance from the broader Ghanaian society. Ghanaian scholar Mawutor Avoke (2001) noted that the resistance stems from the various traditional practices that demand people with dis/abilities be segregated to prevent them from polluting society. The impact of this predicament has been discussed by Yajim Amadu, a non-dis/abled Ghanaian artist whose sculptures highlight the tragic killings of children with dis/abilities, stemming from outdated cultural beliefs that consider such children as bearers of misfortunes to society. In light of these issues, inclusive education in Ghana has persistently sought to blend all children, able seamlessly and dis/abled alike, into one learning environment where students with dis/abilities will feel seen and valued. This mission was outlined in a statement released by the Ghana Ministry of Education in 2015, which states:

> The overarching goal of the Inclusive Education (I.E.) policy is to redefine and recast the delivery and management of educational services to respond to the diverse needs of all learners within the framework of the Universal Design for Learning and Child-Friendly School Concept. (p. 3)

In essence, this inclusion policy underscores the social and academic dimensions involving social exchanges (e.g., eating, playing, and engaging in out-of-classroom activities) between students with diverse characteristics and conditions and the ability to participate in ongoing learning activities (Hayford, 2013).

As a first-year teacher, teaching Samuel in an inclusive art classroom challenged me to rethink and adopt teaching and classroom management strategies that would make my class engaging for him. I had to employ teaching strategies to help me achieve the objectives of inclusive education in my classroom despite certain barriers within the school system. First, the human-built environment was a significant barrier to making the visions of inclusive education a reality, as the art classroom and furniture were designed without considering the student's diverse physical and cognitive needs. For example, the classroom was poorly set up and inaccessible for students with walking aids or wheelchairs to move freely. Second, there was a need for additional resources due to the significant disparity in funding and inadequate staffing for special education and paraprofessionals. Third, inadequate training on my part as the one-semester mandatory special education course I took during my teacher training was limited to teaching students with emotional, behavioral, and intellectual needs. Some teachers in the school expressed a similar sentiment and cited their inadequate experience addressing the academic, social, and emotional needs of students with dis/abilities. Previous studies

reveal that many teachers feel unprepared to teach diverse students and lack the skills for implementing inclusive strategies in mainstream classrooms (Agbenyega, 2007; Agbenyega & Deku, 2011; Ocloo & Subbey, 2008). This dilemma is created by the ableist system, which contradicts the attempts towards inclusive education and renders students with dis/ability as "abject, invisible, disposable, less than human, while able-bodiedness is represented as at once ideal, normal, and the mean or default (Dolmage, 2017, p. 7)."

Though inclusive education has become part of Ghana's education system, special educators Lawrence Ametepee and Dimitris Anastasiou (2015) noted that only 3% of the children with dis/abilities in Ghana receive formal education, as many children with dis/abilities either drop out of school or never get the opportunity to go to school. Recent studies have indicated comparable negative trends in the enrollment of students with dis/abilities in mainstream classrooms (Mensah et al., 2022; Naami & Mort, 2023). Factors contributing to this underwhelming enrolment have been explored in various studies. According to a 2020 report by Arkorful and Obeng (2020), there is limited access to educational resources for all children with dis/abilities as resources only cater to students with deafness, blindness, and intellectual dis/abilities, excluding most children with profound forms of dis/ability. Special educator Grace Gadagbui (2010) noted that the most troublesome issues keeping children with dis/abilities from school include (a) parents of children without dis/abilities threatening to withdraw their children from inclusive classrooms and (b) perpetuation of traditional practices, including physical segregation, bullying and avoidance by some students who believe spirits cause dis/abilities. Opoku-Nkoom and Ackah Jnr (2023) attribute the low enrolment of students with dis/abilities to teachers resisting inclusion practice, which stems from their unpreparedness to teach in an inclusive classroom and headteachers (principals) denying admission to students with dis/abilities. Despite Ghana's 2006 Dis/ability Law (Act 715), which prohibits stigmatization, discrimination, and exclusion of persons with dis/abilities, most Ghanaians are yet to come to terms with the policies seeking to create an inclusive society while authorities have failed to ensure these laws are fully implemented. Therefore, these traditional beliefs affect not only students with dis/abilities' access to education but also create identity tensions for them as they grapple with their self-esteem for a place in society. These issues raise concerns about whether Ghana's inclusive policy is genuinely inclusive and has been implemented to effectively serve the interests of all students with dis/abilities. I argue that excluding other profound forms of dis/ability narrowly defines inclusive education in Ghana and discriminates regarding who gets included in the mainstream classroom. I point to the shortage of trained teachers and special education paraprofessionals who understand how to teach and support students with profound forms of dis/abilities. Furthermore, if headteachers are denying admission to students with disabilities, it is reasonable to argue that the guardians of the inclusive policy have failed to uphold the

right to education for individuals with disabilities under Dis/ability Law, contributing to the low enrollment.

In fulfilling the right to inclusive education, the UNCRPD recommends that the education system must (a) be available to all individuals with dis/abilities at all levels, (b) ensure accessibility for everyone without discrimination, (c) be acceptable to all, respecting the needs, language, and perspectives of individuals with dis/abilities, and (d) guarantee adaptability by providing students with dis/abilities reasonable accommodations that promote equitable learning experiences. Based on these recommendations, it is evident that inclusive education in Ghana, though introduced barely over a decade ago, is not truly inclusive, as seen in the admission denial of students with dis/abilities into mainstream schools, the exclusion in accommodation for profound forms of dis/abilities such as cerebral palsy, and the inaccessible environment, all contributing to the low enrolment rate of students with dis/abilities in the mainstream classroom. It is important to note that these challenges to inclusive education are not exclusive to Ghana, as several studies reveal that cultural beliefs and stereotypes, as well as the lack of teacher training and resources, are contributing factors to the slow progress of inclusive education in various parts of the world (Arrah & Swain, 2014; Loesl, 1999; Mónico, Mensah, Grünke, Garcia, Fernández & Rodríguez, 2018; UNCRPD, 2016).
In what follows, I discuss instructional methods I used that art educators can employ to deconstruct dis/ability in their classrooms.

Including Difference—Meeting Samuel's Learning Needs

The multidimensionality and value for diversity feature of critical dis/ability studies interrogate the public policies that perpetuate exclusion and conformism. This is based on the premise that people with dis/abilities are part of a diverse and variable population within society's structure (Hosking, 2008). According to Hosking (2008), critical dis/ability theory recognizes difference as an inevitable aspect of society. As such, issues about dis/ability must be addressed by creating an equitable society that values diversity.

Throughout my student-teaching, and until my encounter with Samuel, I rarely employed differentiated teaching strategies, and for a big art class, I barely paid attention to students' learning styles. My teaching approaches relied heavily on good craftmanship, and my priorities were set on students who fit within my definition of creativity, i.e., artists who make beautiful art that fits society's standards. I followed a "one size fits all" approach that subjected the students to the same teaching and evaluation methods irrespective of their ability or interest. I set the same learning goals for all the students regardless of their learning needs. Indeed, my teaching approach was not inclusive, as the students who did not fit my expectations were unconsciously excluded. In the case of students with dis/abilities, my approach to teaching adds another layer of neglect and worsens their experience in school as

they are already marginalized in society. Reflecting on my daily teaching, I began to question and rethink my strategies. I knew I needed to change something in my approach to benefit all students, particularly Samuel. I wanted to create a classroom environment that rejected society's discriminatory practices and made him feel cared for, valued, and a sense of belonging.

As art classrooms have become more diverse, art educators Michelle Kraft and Karen Keifer-Boyd (2013) call for art educators to recognize the differences in physical, psychological, and living conditions of students in the classroom. Embracing the multidimensionality and diversity of students will position art educators to acknowledge the uniqueness of each student, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and develop teaching strategies that will enrich their learning experiences. According to art educator Donna Beattie (1997), an inclusive art program should have a component that allows art educators to gather information about student support strategies. A key trait I developed over my career was building a positive rapport with each student to help me know them better personally and academically. I typically engage students in conversations, asking them what they enjoy doing for fun, the types of art they love to create or admire, the activities they like to participate in, and the places they love to visit. Given the diverse group of learners I was teaching, building rapport with each student on both a personal and academic level was helpful in breaking down barriers that caused isolation for Samuel and allowed him to feel comfortable in my classroom. With each conversation we had, I learned more about him and gained valuable insights into the best support systems I could implement to enhance his learning, despite the limited resources.

Differentiated Instruction

Since a goal of inclusive education is to ensure changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, and approaches to attend to the needs of students with dis/abilities, art educators need to rethink their curriculum planning approaches to help build a classroom environment that is exposed to diverse forms of knowledge and respects the perspectives of all people. As art educators, recognizing the diversity in students' learning styles is the first step toward creating an inclusive curriculum. Various scholars have emphasized differentiated instruction as a viable way to achieve equitable educational outcomes for diverse learners. According to Educator Carol Ann Tomlinson (1999), differentiated instruction is "a teacher's proactive response to a learner's needs" through planning for student differences in readiness, motivation, and learning profiles, with ongoing adjustments based on the results of a variety of assessment for learning practices throughout the teaching and learning cycle" (p. 287). Art educator Heather Fountain (2014) added that differentiated instruction entails a variety of practices and strategies that help teachers meet the diverse needs of students within their classrooms. Differentiated instruction is implemented to provide various learning

opportunities for students with different readiness levels to match learning targets, activities, resources, and learning support to individual learners' needs (Stradling & Saunders, 1993; Landrum & McDuffie, 2010).

Fountain (2014) noted that differentiated instruction has three components: content, process, and product, which art educators can reference in lesson planning. In the lessons, I implemented differentiated instructional approaches through content and process to accommodate all students in the classroom. More specifically, I emphasize process to understand students' attitudes, creative practices and progress as they work. I used visual materials such as finished drawings that I prepared for each class and varied demonstrations of how to draw shapes, shade, mix colors, etc. I worked with each student one-on-one, frequently reiterating key concepts from the lesson, as I believe that repetition enhances understanding. This approach was fundamental for Samuel in making him feel included and helping him identify the best ways to process information. He loved seeing exemplars of the lessons and responded positively to every demonstration I made on the board. I made it a point to always walk to him and do the demonstration one-on-one to ensure he understood everything I was teaching. These regular check-ins allowed me to connect with him more deeply and foster a positive relationship.

Generally, artists with dis/abilities are marginalized in Ghana's art curriculum, and their experiences are mostly silenced despite being actively involved in artistic production in Ghanaian society. The ableist art curriculum does not introduce students to the artistic practices of artists with dis/abilities, which deprives students of the opportunity to understand issues of dis/ability and the non-normative ways of artmaking. To deconstruct society's concept of normalcy, differentiated instruction must be inclusive and engage students in a learning experience where the voices of people with dis/abilities are emphasized in the content being taught. According to Keifer-Boyd, Bastos, Richardson, & Wexler (2018), a more democratic and productive inclusive curriculum must include the perspectives of people with dis/abilities through art, narratives, and terminologies to embody the true notion of inclusion as equitable. In doing this, art educators must purposefully include voices of artists with dis/abilities in the curriculum and engage students in inquiry-based learning to help them understand the social and cultural realities that shape the experiences of people with dis/ability (Keifer-Boyd et al., 2018). For example, artists with cerebral palsy, such as Felicia Bowers, who draws with her eyes using assistive technology; Lin Tzung-yi, who paints with his feet; Dan Keplinger, who paints with a head stick, are among many other artists with dis/abilities who have defied society's limitations to engage in creative activities to share their experiences through their artworks. Including these artists in the curriculum will expand students' worldviews, help change their perceptions of dis/ability, and expose them to non-normative art-making.

Adaptive Art Instruction

There may need to be more than just differentiated instruction to achieve equitable learning outcomes for students with dis/abilities in an inclusive classroom. I draw this conclusion with the knowledge that differentiated instruction is one step towards ensuring equitable learning opportunities for all students, including students with dis/abilities. For example, through differentiated instruction, Samuel showed his ability to draw best from memory, allowing him to exercise his autonomy to create. However, his drawings still needed to improve, so I turned to adaptive instruction, a dynamically altered instruction designed purposefully for students with diverse learning styles and abilities (Naughton, 2020). This instructional approach helps meet the specific learning needs of students with dis/abilities. It comes with adaptive art materials and tools, such as easy-grip drawing and painting tools, adapted scissors, modified easels, wheelchair-accessible potter's wheels, etc., which help improve accessibility. Recent adaptive technologies such as Tobii Dynavox and Eyewriter have also paved the way for people with dis/abilities to create art with their eyes using the in-built eye-tracking system. These interventions not only disrupt society's expectations of what a conventional painting brush or a pencil should look like; they prove further that people with dis/abilities can equally function without any limitations with suitable accommodations and support. By introducing adaptive art instruction and tools in the inclusive classroom, art educators can help bridge the achievement gap for students with dis/abilities and help them work to their full potential without enduring society's demands to adapt to "normal tools."

Through adaptive instruction, I restructured the curriculum and set three specific objectives for Samuel to achieve by the end of the school year. The first objective was for him to improve the precision of his line drawings, the second was to improve his hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills, and the third was to improve his control of drawing tools. I requested for Samuel adaptive drawing tools, including pencils, brushes, and crayons with grips to support his hand movement during drawing and painting. I dedicated 30-minute meetings with him twice a week during my planning period to engage him in various drawing activities and to keep track of his progress. I created a structure of drawing activities, such as drawing basic shapes and rendering shapes into form using shading techniques, such as hatching and cross-hatching, to help improve his line drawings. The school also provided an inclined desk for Samuel to help his posture while he engaged in drawing activities.

I applied scaffolding strategies by asking him to draw every object by breaking each part into simple shapes. For example, when creating still-life composition drawings, I asked him, "What is the first object you see?" Then I asked further, "What is the shape of the object?" I asked him to draw these shapes without details. I repeated these questions and directions until all the shapes in the composition were drawn. In the next step, I asked Samuel to add details to each shape from memory without paying too much attention to the composition. With this

approach, I employed Samuel's ability to draw from his memory to ensure his active participation. To improve his handling and control of drawing tools, I drew squares and circles of varied sizes and asked him to shade and paint within the spaces. These were activities he did every day, and anytime he had the chance to work on his own. I provided room for errors as I understood it takes time to see results. As society constantly discriminates against people with dis/abilities, I purposefully made Samuel a priority in my class. I dedicated more time with him, yet I did not deprive the other students of their deserved attention. I ensured that the objectives I set benefitted everyone. In a society where people with dis/ability are easy targets for mockery and stigmatization, I took a strong stance against name-calling or negative comments from other students about his personality or the works he produced. I ensured the classroom was a safe space for Samuel by helping him find his voice and encouraging him to speak up whenever he felt bullied by anyone. I encouraged the students sitting next to him to intentionally engage him in meaningful, random conversations that would make him feel at home. There were occasions when I would ask Samuel to lead group activities that involved discussions or present on behalf of his group to boost his self-confidence and fully engage in class activities. Although some of these activities were challenging for Samuel, the students learned to accept him for who he was and to refrain from inappropriate language as I helped them understand the importance of respecting dis/ability as an integral part of human variation.

Assessment Strategies

According to art educator Bette Naughton (2020), assessment is essential in identifying students learning needs and choosing suitable adaptations to effectively remove barriers to learning and their ability to express themselves fully. Beattie (1997) defines assessment as "a method or process used for gathering information about people, programs, or objects to make an evaluation" (p. 2). Assessment is integral to my practice as it informs me about students' learning styles, artistic abilities, mastery of tools, and their progress. For example, during the first week of the school year, I evaluate students' artwork to give me an idea of their learning needs and skill set. As expected, each student is unique as they portray varying skill sets and abilities. Some students stick with a particular media and need help exploring other mediums; others draw and paint best from observation but cannot create from memory. Some students have basic artistic abilities and need help advancing their artistic potential. Gathering this information at the beginning of the school year is vital in deciding what support students need. Assessment in an inclusive art classroom helps identify the learning needs of students with dis/abilities and sets achievable goals that help improve their learning. Through formative assessment strategies, I dedicated time to observe Samuel's creative process, paying close attention to how he utilized the adaptive pencils and paintbrushes, his overall attitude toward completing tasks, and tracking his progress each week through his finished artworks to enhance my teaching approaches to effectively address his needs.

Instead of searching only for problems in his work, I focused on his strengths and potential. I did not look for good craftsmanship in Samuel's artworks. However, his progress was minimal yet noticeable. He drew better than before, as his pencil strokes were finer and sharper. His drawings started to look much like what he had imagined and referenced, and he spent less time creating them. These essential learning outcomes became building blocks for deciding on new accommodations. I found his engagement and determination to work as a strength, and I built on that by giving him additional tasks to challenge him and testing new drawing approaches. I introduced the grid technique, which is a way to help students draw better from observation and improve their accuracy. This way, I took photographs of each composition from different angles, and I allowed Samuel to choose the best angle and printed them for reference. I created the grid on the reference photo and in Samuel's drawing book and guided him to draw the objects. He started drawing better with the help of the grid, as each box in the grid helped break the object into smaller pieces. We used the grid technique for each drawing, making drawing much easier for Samuel. This significantly boosted the drawing activities as he became even more independent with time.

Assessing Samuel's artistic development after a year of consistently teaching and experimenting with different instructional approaches, it was evident that he made significant progress in his artistic development. Each lesson allowed students to grow artistically by emphasizing process rather than product. For Samuel, the differentiated and adaptive instructions helped create an equitable learning experience that helped improve his artistic skills. He gained a deeper understanding of himself and improved his confidence in drawing, though there was still more room for improvement. The adaptive drawing tools enhanced his pencil and brush control, while his hand-eye coordination improved significantly with time.

Implications and Conclusion

In this paper, I have shared my experience teaching a student with cerebral palsy in an inclusive art classroom. I have discussed inclusive education in Ghana, highlighting some challenges that impede the effectiveness of the policy. Further, I have discussed some instructional approaches and classroom strategies to help art educators effectively teach students with dis/abilites in an inclusive art classroom. This paper makes a valuable contribution to the existing body of literature on inclusive education, particularly from a Ghanaian context. It offers insight into the challenges, successes, and opportunities related to inclusive education in the country.

This paper provides practical implications for educators, research, and policy to improve the implementation of inclusive education practices. An important implication is that art educator preparation programs must be structured to allow pre-service art educators to gain more experience working with students with dis/abilities through intensive teaching practicum. This should involve increasing the time that preservice art educators spend working with students

with dis/abilities to give them a greater experience in working with students with dis/abilities to help them challenge and change their beliefs and assumptions about dis/abilities. Ultimately, this will enable preservice art educators to become upstanders who work to create a more inclusive learning environment for all students through instructional approaches and classroom management that challenge stereotypes and misconceptions. As the inclusive policy in Ghana falls short of including students with profound dis/abilities, I advocate for an enhanced inclusive policy that is specifically designed to include students with all forms of dis/abilities. This includes ensuring adequate funding and resource allocation to support the educational needs of students with dis/abilities, such as equipping schools with specialized teaching materials, assistive technologies, and professional development opportunities for art educators.

While this paper primarily focused on a singular student with cerebral palsy, it highlights the need for broader research that includes students with other profound dis/abilities. This will shed light on the challenges confronting inclusive education in the art classroom and present opportunities for policymakers to revise inclusive policies to implement inclusive education effectively.

My encounter with Samuel was a valuable experience that greatly shaped my understanding of teaching. I understood my role as an art educator better, not only to impart knowledge but also to lead, innovate, and help build a better society. Every decision I made regarding instructional approaches and classroom management was intentional and a conscious effort to dismantle educational and cultural barriers imposed on students with dis/abilities. My choices were driven by my desire to promote inclusive education and to inspire students as a catalyst for change. As I intentionally exhibited acts of care towards Samuel, I created a classroom culture that embraced equality and equity, built on love and respect for one another regardless of who they were.

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