Virtual Learning Space and Its Impacts during the COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown: A Case Study of Art Educators’ Hangout

By:
Prince Olusegun Michael Adeniyi

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teachingvisualart@gmail.com
ABSTRACT:
There is a growing demand for global competence and cross-cultural skills, and that international experience is invaluable for teachers and their students; but the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic has put a halt to so many social and academic gatherings. For this reason, Teaching Visual Art has created a virtual meeting place for art educators tagged Art Educators’ Hangout. Reality of today’s world during the COVID-19 pandemic is that things are no longer the way they were. The world is observing social distancing and this has made it impossible for art educators to come together physically as the boarders are closed and countries are on lockdown. The Art Educators’ Hangout has offered the art educators the platform to discuss their works, interact and inspire one another towards advancing the learning field of Art and improving the quality of art education on the continent of Africa. The initiative is to foster dialogue and sharing stimulating art projects to improve creativity and art appreciation with the vision to build network of art educators across the continent of Africa that are locally relevant and influential with global perspective. This presentation provides the broad overview of the virtual learning space, Art Educators’ Hangout and its socio-economic impacts on Art educators during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns.

Figure 1: Some of the virtual meetings, Art Educators Hangout
INTRODUCTION

A Chinese proverb says, “If you are planning for a year, sow rice; if you are planning for a decade, plant trees; if you are planning for a lifetime, educate people.” In a knowledge-driven world, countries with low literacy rates have no future, as they will be left behind. There is a growing demand for global competence, IT literacy and cross-cultural skills, and that international experience is invaluable for educators but the COVID-19 pandemic has put a halt to so many social and academic gatherings.

Reality of today’s world during the COVID-19 pandemic is that things are no longer the way they were. As the world was observing social distancing, it became impossible for art educators to come together physically to share ideas and knowledge as the boarders were closed and countries were on lockdown. Hence the establishment of the virtual meeting place for art educators on the continent of Africa tagged the Art Educators Hangout. The Art Educators Hangout is a virtual platform where art educators from different part of Africa beyond the boarders meet while on quarantine from the comfort of their homes to contribute to the conversation about the future of art education in Africa.

The COVID-19 pandemic though has affected our world in no way words can express but it has not stop the Art educators from talking about how they can better their world through art, and how they can advance the learning field of Art on the continent of Africa through the platform Art Educators Hangout. The Art Teachers Hangout progressed to having presenters from diverse art related topics to sharing personal artistic experiences.

Creativity is contagious (Albert Einstein), when we share our creative works, we open others for more inspiring creative engagements. The Art Educators Hangout provided the art educators with the platform to foster dialogue and sharing stimulating art projects with the aims to improve creativity and art appreciation with the vision to build network of art educators across the continent of Africa that are locally relevant and influential with global perspective.

Art education takes many form and follows many paths. Some through recognized, established institutions, some through community and grassroots initiatives. Art education must find the artist in the environment where they live. Why? That environment provides the elements the artist accesses to develop their art. It is their palette, their paint box, their idea trove, and the place where their thoughts are formed. Meeting them in those spaces centres the budding artist and helps them speak their “local language.” —’Segun Olude.
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THE VIRTUAL LEARNING SPACES

The new technologies provide opportunities for creating learning environments that extend the possibilities of the four walls of classroom, as well as offering new possibilities. These technologies provide access to a vast array of information, including digital libraries, data for analysis, feedback and inspiration. They can enhance learning for teachers, as well as that of students, and increase connections between schools and the communities.

These days, students should not only share their research and ideas through technology within a classroom or school, but also share their learning worldwide through online publishing tools and websites that reach a global audience.

Digital media literacy in a global era offers more than using technology to do the things that were done by hand before, such as data or word processing, retrieving information, presenting knowledge, and one-to-one communication. It now allows easy participation in the sophisticated global experiences and networks that our wired world affords.

Technology can be a powerful tool for transforming learning. It can help affirm and advance relationships between educators and students, reinvent our approaches to learning and collaboration, shrink long-standing equity and accessibility gaps, and adapt learning experiences to meet the needs of all learners.

OBJECTIVES OF CREATING ART EDUCATORS HANGOUT

The Art Educators Hangout was created with the following objectives:

I. To provide a platform to art educators on the continent of Africa discuss their works, interact and inspire one another towards advancing the learning field of Art and improving the quality of art education on the continent of Africa.

II. To foster dialogue and sharing stimulating art projects to improve creativity and art appreciation with the vision to build network of art educators across the continent of Africa that are locally relevant and influential with global perspective.

III. To safe the dwindling state of art education on the continent of Africa and bring about art advocacy to change the narrative.

IV. Strengthen collaboration among the art educators within Africa and beyond

V. To expose the art educators to new concept and ideas, and to inspire a cross fertilization of themes and working practices.

VI. To brainstorm on ideas and practice that is key to current development in the field of art practice and training.

VII. To challenge the status quo and set a new form of reasoning so as to meet up with the dynamic changes in the educational system this 21st century.
VIII. To develop cross-cultural understanding while addressing global issues

IX. To expose the art educators to a broad range of artistic expressions, cultural expressions and artistic opportunity for effectiveness and efficiency in post Covid-19 era.

MODUS OPERANDI OF THE ART EDUCATORS HANGOUT

Art Educators Hangout holds on Microsoft Teams every Sundays since April 2020 at 8:00 pm, West Africa Time (7:00 pm GMT). The participants join through same link since inception: https://bit.ly/ArtEducatorsHangout with updates accessible at: www.teachingvisualart.blogspot.com

It hosts at least one presenter at each meeting and some are problem led discussions. There are sections for questioning, comments and sharing future opportunities.

The sessions recorded videos are later uploaded at: http://bit.ly/Youtube_TeachingVisualArt

Figure 3: Connecting art educators, fostering dialogue and sharing stimulating art projects on Art Educators Hangout
IMPACTS OF THE ART EDUCATORS HANGOUT

Highlighted below are socio-economic impacts on Art educators during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns.

1. Rich Diverse Learning Experiences

The art educators were exposed to a broad range of artistic expressions and cultural expressions from different presenters from different social cultural backgrounds. Below is the list of presenters, Country, and topic with date of presentation

i. Mrs Olaniba Abosede, Nigeria; Promoting our Cultural Heritage through Textile Design; 4th October, 2020.

ii. Dr. Angela Saldanha, Portugal; 27th September, 2020

iii. Dr. Ademola Azeez, Nigeria; 20th September, 2020

iv. Hawley Hussey, USA; 13th September, 2020

v. Dr. Ademuleya Babasehinde, Nigeria; 13th September, 2020

vi. Dr. Merna Meyer, South Africa; 6th September, 2020

vii. Larry Jackson, USA; an Enriched Art Life; 23rd and 30th August, 2020.

viii. Hawley Hussey, USA; the Vital Role of the Arts in Healing Complex Trauma with Creativity, Play and Access to All Art Forms; 16th August, 2020.

Figure 4: Screen display during one of the Art Educators Hangout Meetings
The July edition of the Art Educators Hangout was centred on the concerns of art educators towards the dwindling state of art education on the continent of Africa which gave birth to the Art Advocacy for Africa booklet. The first action taken was a call for art enthusiasts and
art educators to lend their voice to the topic: The importance and value of Art education to the society. The responses were put together in the booklet to strengthened and advance art advocacy in Africa.

The Art Advocacy for Africa booklet could be requested by a mail to teachingvisualart@gmail.com or accessed at https://wakelet.com/@ART_EDUCATORS_HANGOUT1331

The list of the Contributors:

i. Fahuwa Felix  
Kingskozept  
Lagos, Nigeria

ii. Oladimeji Oluwagbemiga Isaac  
Tai Solarin College of education, omu Ijebu  
Ijebu ode, Nigeria

iii. Fashakin Michael  
Whitesands School, Lagos  
Lagos, Nigeria

iv. Aregbesola Akinola  
University of Ado-Ekiti
Ijebu Ode, Ogun State, Nigeria

v. Thomas Oladayo Artistokraft
   Funabab
   Abeokuta, Nigeria

vi. Mike Chilembe
   University of Malawi, Chancellor College
   Zomba, Malawi

vii. Princess Theresa Oghogho Iyase-Odozi
     University of Lagos
     Ogun State, Nigeria

viii. Gail Egbeson
      Performing Arts/ Theatre
      United Kingdom

ix. Ernest Asare
    Morgan International Community School
    Agona Swedru, Ghana.

tax. Kehinde Adediran Afinowi
     Kuje Senior Secondary School
     Lagos, Nigeria

xi. Rasaki Olanrewaju L. Oliyide
    Elim Educational Agency Limited
    Lagos, Nigeria

xii. Olanrewaju Temitope Julius
     Government Science and Technical College
     Abeokuta, Nigeria

xiii. Otunaiya Ayodele Oluseyi
      Federal College of Education, Abeokuta
      Abeokuta, Nigeria.

xiv. Olanrewaju Shuaeeb Kusi
     Lakuzzy creations
     Abeokuta Nigerian

xv. Olufayo Ibrahim Olajide
    Tescom
    Ijebu-ode, Nigeria

xvi. Michelle Inixas
     COSDEF Arts & Crafts Centre
     Swakopmund, Namibia

xvii. Abiodun Abel Isaac
      University of Benin. Edo state!
      Benin city, Nigeria.

xviii. Dr Ademola Azeez
       Federal College of Education Technical Akoka, Lagos
       Lagos, Nigeria

xix. Onabolu Abiola
     Lagos Nigeria

xx. Olatunji Joseph Ogunlowo
    Wood carver
    Lagos, Nigeria
xxi. José Márcio Carmo Plácido Santos  
PASB  
Brazil

xxii. Adeyemi Adedola  
Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago - Iwoye.  
Ijebu-Itele, Nigeria

xxiii. Prof. Funke Ifeta  
Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun  
Ijebu- Ode Nigeria

xxiv. Bello Usman  
Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi Kano State  
Katsina, Nigeria

xxv. Funmilayo Awoyungbo  
Orede Art Academy  
Lagos Nigeria

xxvi. Ekpo Udo Udoma  
Davinci, Nok & Bezaleel  
Lagos, Nigeria

xxvii. Enekwachi Agwu  
University of Nigeria, Nsukka.  
Enugu Nigeria

xxviii. Adekoya Martins Omotunde Alaba  
Tai Solarin College of Education, Omu Ijebu  
Ijebu ode, Nigeria

xxix. Stanley Muoneto  
Kenyatta University  
Abuja, Nigeria

xxx. Oladunni Adesiji  
Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Abeokuta  
Abeokuta, Nigeria

xxx. Tsotorvor Rejoice Makafui  
Akatsi college of Education  
Akatsi Ghana

xxxii. Edem Kwami Buami  
Ho Technical University

xxxiii. Jonathan Agbanu  
Morgan International Community School  
Gomoa-Manso, Ghana

xxxiv. Olufowobi, Adetutu  
EDUCATION DISTRICT V  
Lagos, Nigeria

xxxv. Ojei uku-oritsemofe  
Alvina Schools  
Effurun, Delta State Nigeria

xxxvi. Prof. Adamu A. Mbahi  
University of Maiduguri  
Maiduguri, Nigeria
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OLUSEGUN MICHAEL ADENIYI

xxxvii. **Bello Oarhe Abdullahi**  
UNIBEN  
Lagos State, Nigeria

xxxviii. **Osho, Rasheedat Abiodun**  
Lagos state ministry of Education, Dist 3  
Nigeria, Lagos Ikoyi

xxxix. **Alabetutu Toyin Gloria**  
Ayinke Art African Aesthetics and Clothing Limited  
Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria

xl. **Ojo Olaniyi**  
AUD Junior Grammar schools Imota Lagos  
Lagos, Nigeria

xli. **Ike Tochukwu Aloysius**  
National Museum of Unity Enugu, Education Department  
Enugu, Enugu state, Nigeria

xlii. **Ebenezer Oluwafemi Awoderu**  
Vivian Fowler Memorial for Girls school  
Ikeja Lagos, Nigeria

xliii. **Olufemi Ogunseye**  
Day Waterman College Abeokuta  
Abeokuta, Nigeria

xliv. **Soremekun Emmanuel Olumide**  
Visual Art Teachers Association of Nigeria (VATAN)  
Nigeria

xlv. **Olatunji olawale**  
Diamonds International school  
Lagos, Nigeria

xlvi. **Al-marooof Olusegun Nuh**  
Oxbridge Tutorial College  
Lagos, Nigeria

xlvii. **Bello Usman Amsami**  
University of Maiduguri  
Maiduguri, Nigeria.

xlviii. **Bello Usman Amsami**  
University of Maiduguri  
Maiduguri, Nigeria.

xlix. **Abell Kennedy Modupe**  
Louisville Girls High School  
Ijebu Ode, Nigeria

l. **Agboola Musiliu Goriola Mr.**  
Lagos State Ministry of Education, District V Lagos.  
Lagos, Nigeria

li. **Oluwaseun Isaac Abati**  
Kenyatta University  
Kenya

lii. **Yusuf A. AbdulRasaq**  
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Zaria, Kaduna State, Nigeria.

liii. Alfonso Haodom
Kuisebmond Primary School
Walvis Bay, Namibia

liv. Suluka Abedeen Babatunde
Michael Otedola College of Primary Education. Noforija Epe. Lagos. Lagos, Nigeria

lv. Ayeni Pius Oluwagbogbemi
RACY & STURDY COMPREHENSIVE Schoooy
LAGOS, NIGERIA

lvi. Adewunmi A. Samuel
University of Ado-Ekiti
Lagos, Nigeria.

lvii. Oluseyi OYENUKAN
Auchi polytechnic and University of Lagos, Akoka.
Lagos, Nigeria.

lviii. Peter Ighodaro
Yaba college of Technology
Lagos Nigeria

lix. Babasehinde Ademuleya
Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife
Ile-Ife, Nigeria

lx. Onyekachi Anthony Nze
FUTO International School
Owerri, Nigeria

lx. Yaqub Kayode luqman
Ahmadu Bello University, zaria
Abuja, Nigeria

lxii. Dr. Idowu Olatunji
Tai Solarin University of Education,
Ijagun, Ijebu Ode, Nigeria

lxiii. Olutayo Aje
University of Lagos
Lagos, Nigeria

lxiv. Gbade Lawal
Lagos State ministry of education
Lagos, Nigeria

lxv. Mclaudy munanzwa
Mclaudy creations
Lusaka, Zambia

lxvi. Dr. Oluwasegun Quadri
University of Lagos Nigeria
Lagos Nigeria

lxvii. Emmanuel Kwame Aghadzi
Jasikan College of Education
Jasikan, Ghana.

lxviii. Dr. Enoch Mani
Tumu College of Education
Ghana
lxix. Ebenezer Hayford-Acquah
Ghana Education Service
Ghana
lxx. Akinyemi Ajibade
Nigeria
lxxi. Awosusi, Adeola Samuel
Federal College of Education
Abeokuta, Nigeria
lxxii. Osa Mbonu-Amadi
Vanguard Newspaper
Lagos, Nigeria
lxxiii. Tunde Ajayi
College of Education
Ikere-Ekiti, Nigeria
lxxiv. Fashakin Michael
Whitesands School
Lagos, Nigeria
lxxv. Esther Esosa Esizimetor
University of Benin
Benin City, Nigeria
lxxvi. Timothy Olusola Ogunfuwa
University of Lagos
Lagos, Nigeria
lxxvii. Hamza Alhassan
Tamale College of Education
Tamale, Ghana
lxxviii. Adeniran Makinde
NANTAP- national association of Nigerian theatre arts practitioners.
Lagos, Nigeria
lxxix. Merna Meyer
North West University
Potchefstroom South Africa
lxxx. Anifowose Lookman Oladayo
MOCPED
Lagos / Nigeria
lxxxi. Elizabeth Shinana
University of Namibia (Student)
Windhoek, Namibia
lxxxii. Eholor Oghomwen Priscillia
University of Benin
Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria
lxxiii. Aiya Vivian
Delta state university
Nigeria
lxxiv. Tabitha Odigili
Art tutor
Lagos Nigeria
3. The Values of Art education to the society

On 26th of July, 2020, Dr. Tijani Khadijah伊yabo was invited on Art Educators Hangout to speak on the topic: the value of Art Education. Dr Tijani is an Associate Professor of Art Education at the Department of Fine Art, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Nigeria. Excerpts from the presentation is shared below:

i. The first activity carried out by a child is art
ii. Art is a means of communication
iii. Art is used as a teaching aids to foster learning
iv. Art serves as a means for culture transmission from generation to generation.
v. Art instil aesthetic value
vi. Art formulates how we live in our communities
vii. Art is custodian of culture.
viii. Art is an integral of human life and core to human growth
ix. Art teaches empathy
x. Art encourages and foster collaboration, creativity and critical thinking (thinking out of box). All the 21st century skills.
 xi. Art is used for therapy
xii. Art is a means of expression
xiii. It is Science encapsulated in Art that becomes innovation, a novel and invention.
xiv. Art stimulates imagination
xv. Art foster observation skills
xvi. Art foster problem solving skills.
xvii. Art instill self-confidence and improve self esteem
xviii. Art is used to relieve stress and improve wellbeing.
4. Virtual Resources Space

To bring continued resources and support for art educators to advance art education on the continent of Africa during the Covid-19 pandemic period and beyond, a Wakelet Space was created. Here is the link to Art Educators Hangout Wakelet Space platform [https://wakelet.com/@ART_EDUCATORS_HANGOUT1331](https://wakelet.com/@ART_EDUCATORS_HANGOUT1331) and collaborators can join through this link [https://wakelet.com/i/invite?isSpace=true&code=F20fHF](https://wakelet.com/i/invite?isSpace=true&code=F20fHF) or use the join code: F20fHF
5. Collaborative Opportunities

The Art Educators Hangout provided platform to connect art educators and opened up collaborative opportunities for them. A very good example is the presentations with the students of Caleb British International School, Lagos Nigeria which has increased the students’ motivation, awareness and understanding of the arts.

I. Dr. Angela Saldanha, from Portugal shared her works in a virtual class with the Year 10 Art students of Caleb British International School, Lagos Nigeria.

![Figure 8: Dr. Angela Saldanha in a virtual class with the Year 10 Art students of CBIS, Lagos Nigeria.](https://youtu.be/Cnyth5S6SB0)

II. Dr. Samia Ahmed Mostafa El Sheikh from Egypt shared her artworks from her recent Art Exhibition titled “SHE, from their EYES” (mixed media with hand weaving re-contextualizing famous portrait through history) in a virtual class with the Year 10 Art students of Caleb British International School, Lagos Nigeria.

![Figure 9: Dr. Samia Ahmed Mostafa El Sheikh in a virtual class with the Year 10 Art students of CBIS, Lagos Nigeria.](https://youtu.be/6l9Zkv2zAyQ)
III. Larry Jackson from USA shared her works in a virtual class with the Year 7 students of Caleb British International School, Lagos Nigeria.

Figure 10: Larry Jackson in a virtual class with the Year 10 Art students of CBIS, Lagos Nigeria.

Watch the video and many more on the art teacher’s YouTube Channel: https://bit.ly/OlusegunAdeniyiYoutubeChannel

6. Created Opportunities for bigger Stage

The platform has opened up opportunities for the presenters to present at other conferences. The likes of Professor Segun Olude and Mrs Abosede Olaniba received special invitation after their superlative presentation at the Art Educators Hangout to present at the SSASEA UNESCO Arts Education Conference organized by Sub-Sahara Africa Society for Education through the Arts (SSASEA) which will be held at the North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa between 1st and 4th December, 2020. The Conference Theme is: Embracing indigenous knowledge through the Arts for sustainable development goals (SDG’s*) in general and in times of (pandemic) disruption and uncertainty.

Figure 11: Presentations on Art Educators Hangout by Professor Segun Olude and Mrs Abosede Olaniba
7. Contents for Learning and Professional Development

The meetings will continue to be a reference point in advancing the knowledge of art and further discussion to expose the art educators to new concept and ideas, and to inspire a cross fertilization of themes and working practices. Hence the meetings have been documented online.


Updates are available at: www.teachingvisualart.blogspot.com

8. Exhibition of Students’ Artworks with invitation of Parents

One of the lessons from Larry Jackson presentation “an Enriched Art Life” on 23rd of August, 2020 was the need for art educators to frequently exhibit their students’ artworks. This statement inspired the virtual collection of artworks created during the Covid-19 lockdown by the students of Caleb British International School, Lagos Nigeria at: https://wakelet.com/@CBIS_YEAR_7_GOING_87253
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Figure 13: Virtual Exhibition on Wakelet by the students of CBIS, Lagos Nigeria
RECOMMENDATIONS

Artistic exchange and collaboration virtually between art educators across the continents will be essential in our new world, post Covid-19 era.

Training of art educators in the new technology tools to be able to meet up with the challenges of our ever changing world.

Community art should be encouraged in many of the African countries to increase art appreciation.

More platforms should be created to encourage shared knowledge and ideas to foster creativity.

To realize fully the benefits of technology in our education system and provide authentic learning experiences, it is recommended that educators should use technology effectively in their practice. Hence, Digital media literacy trainings and presentations should be part of future conferences schedules.

To remain globally competitive and develop engaged citizens, our schools should weave 21st century competencies and expertise throughout the learning experience. These include the development of critical thinking, complex problem solving, collaboration, and adding multimedia communication into the teaching of traditional academic subjects.

Learning experiences enabled by technology should be accessible for all learners, including those with special needs. Thus, switching to virtual learning due to occurrence any future global crisis will be smooth for both teachers and students.

Blended learning, Hybrid learning and other models of learning enabled by technology should be encouraged in schools. Educators should organize physical spaces to facilitate best collaborative learning using digital tools.

Recommended Reading for Art Educators

https://wakelet.com/wake/a630302f-7802-47f6-a3bd-96c3aa3740f1
https://wakelet.com/wake/2da47fde-8a0c-47bb-9efd-5c6747865ed1
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By Laura Bradley
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