

African Arts

— an adventure in education

In 1982 the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation published its report on *The Arts in Schools: Principles, Practice and Provision* in which it stated unequivocally that 'the arts have an essential place in the balanced education of our children and young people'.¹ It went on:

We live in an increasingly multiracial and multicultural society in which we must learn to understand and respond to other ways of seeing and doing . . . We are sure that, in the forms of education needed in this changing situation, the arts and principles and methods of teaching they represent, will prove to be more and not less significant than at present.²

Our own experience working in this field of African arts in schools over the last two years totally endorses this view.

Perhaps I should start with a quick look at how our project has developed. The African Arts in Education Project was started as an independent educational organisation in June 1981 when it formed its management committee but it had existed as a pilot project for some time before this (partly funded by a Gulbenkian grant) and had its roots in the visits to schools which its director, the Nigerian musician and actor Emmanuel Josiah, had been carrying out for a number of years.³ Over the first few months the AAIEP defined its aims as follows:

1. To promote the understanding and practice of African arts at all levels of education, particularly through the active participation of African artists.
2. To encourage teachers, lecturers, youth-leaders and community workers to recognise the importance of the arts in any study of Africa.
3. To use the arts of Africa to both initiate and enrich programmes of multicultural and development education in a pluralist society and to collaborate with other organisations and individuals working in the same field.
4. To prepare, test and disseminate teaching materials and resources and to identify and encourage good practice.

We hope that in our first full year of operation we have gone some way towards achieving these aims. During the school year 1981/1982 we worked on an extended basis (with between three and ten sessions of up to a full-day each) in twelve schools: one infants', six primary, three secondary and two elementary schools for American dependents' in Britain. These schools have been in ILEA and in the outer London boroughs of Croydon, Haringay, Brent, Havering and Waltham Forest and, in the case of the American schools, as far afield as Lakenheath in Cambridgeshire and Bicester near Oxford. In almost all cases we have done extensive preparatory work with teachers and worked as a team of three — with Emmanuel Josiah directing the music and dance activities, another artist (and artists who have worked with us have included the Ghanaian master drummer David Quarcoo, the Nigerian sculptor Taiwo Jegede and, more recently, the Nigerian artist Adesose Wallace and the Ghanaian artist Nana

Tsiboe) leading the various art workshops and helping with the music and myself, as education officer, working with teachers to try and ensure that all these activities are structured and integrated into the wider curriculum in both a multicultural and development education context. As well as these extended series of visits, members of the team have also made a number of 'one-off' visits to schools both in London and considerably further afield. In the case of the extended visits the number of classes involved has varied from a single class to, in the case of St James and St Peter's Primary School in Soho, the entire school including the nursery. But even when we have only been working on an extended basis with one or two classes, the rest of the school has almost always been involved, with parents and other visitors, in the final displays and 'sharing' performances. In one large school the teachers of the two classes we were working with prepared their own brief background sheets on Yoruba culture so that teachers of other classes could prepare their children for the final performance — and children who had worked with the artists subsequently taught the techniques they had learnt to these other classes. There have been other very satisfying examples of the 'snowball' effect our work can have, with displays in community bookshops, teachers' centres etc — the most important being the week-long display and workshops mounted on our behalf by the Centre for Learning Resources of ILEA from October 18-22nd 1981. In August 1982 we participated in a very successful summer holiday programme for young people, looking at both African and Asian culture, organised by the Camden Committee for Community Relations and the whole area of community and youth work is one into which we hope to expand.

Another important aspect of the project's work during this first year has been the Teaching Materials Development Group — an informal group made up of members of our committee, teachers from various schools we have worked in and other interested people. With the help of this group — and the extensive advice of the Schools Council — I was able to produce a detailed evaluation questionnaire which now goes to all participating schools and teachers and which is producing invaluable feedback on both the immediate and wider implications and effects of our work and which, along with the constant more immediate feedback from teachers and children in schools is, we hope, helping us to do our job better. Since then I have been building up — again with valuable help and advice from this group and many others — packs of teaching materials (which contain detailed information on all aspects of Yoruba culture — its mythology, religion, art, food, symbolism; its long history and its recent rapid development) which, together with detailed lists of back-up books and materials, are provided for all the schools we work in. We are now in consultation with the ILEA Learning Materials Service on the best way in which this kind of material — together with supporting audio-visual material — might be published. Although our work



Left: Work on Ghana at Norbury Manor Junior School, Croydon, inspired by a visit to the Asante exhibition at the Museum of Mankind and accompanied by the dramatisation of an Anansi story. Below: Boys from South-East London Boys' School dramatise the Asante Legend of the Golden Stool. They painted the wall-hangings with the artist Taiwo Jegede, inspired by the patterns of Ghanaian kente cloth.



so far has concentrated mainly on the Yoruba people of Western Nigeria (since we have felt it valuable to look at one rich culture in depth to counteract the prevalent tendency to trivialise and generalise the teaching of 'Africa') we are careful to stress that theirs is certainly not the only culture in Nigeria. We have looked at, for instance, Islamic patterns in Hausa art and architecture and used extracts from the novels of the renowned Ibo writer Chinua Achebe. We have also done considerable work on the Asante people of Ghana (linked with the current exhibition at the Museum of Mankind) and plan to extend into other cultures such as that of the Shona people of Zimbabwe whose early history of iron and gold workings has considerable similarities with both Yoruba and Asante culture.

One very exciting aspect of the project has been the opportunity it has given us all to work with, and draw on the expertise of organisations, agencies and individuals working in a similar field. These include the Africa Centre, the Commonwealth Institute (with whom we collaborated on a New Yam Festival last Autumn and will do so again this year), the Continuing Education Open University/

BBC team (with whom we made a film as part of their Third World Studies course last year), the Centre for World Development Education (whose materials on *Nigeria in Change* we use extensively), the Ujamaa and Archway Development Education Centres, the Oxfordshire Development Education Unit, the education departments of both Oxfam and Christian Aid (the latter to whom we are grateful not only for advice but for extensive funding without which we would not have been able to keep afloat), the National Association of Development Education Centres, the ILEA Multi-Ethnic Inspectorate and advisers from a number of the outer London boroughs, the African Studies Centre at Michigan State University – and similar arts-based organisations like Ekome and Music, Arts and Dance in Bristol, Mexicolore in London and Aklowa in Essex. We have developed close links with the Museum of Mankind (who distribute an information sheet we wrote to all teachers attending the *Asante* exhibition) and try to integrate children's visits there (to the *African Textiles* exhibition, to see the video film on *The Making of a Drum*, to draw a special selection of Yoruba art objects which the education department have kindly assembled for us) very closely into our programmes. We have learnt an enormous amount from all these organisations and many other individuals, especially teachers, (perhaps more from them than they from us!) and one of the most fruitful aspects of the project has been the opportunity it has given for a constant cross-fertilisation of ideas, a continual process of learning from each other and from the teachers and children in the various schools in which we work, and an opportunity to share these new insights with other teachers and children and with the individuals and organisations who are increasingly consulting us.

The Gulbenkian report stresses the need for both 'participation and appreciation' in arts education: too often the second has taken precedence over the first. African arts, with their roots in a communal culture, are, however, essentially participatory and one of the most exciting aspects of our work has been the enthusiasm with which all children have participated – both in the drama/dance/music workshops and in the various associated arts and crafts activities (mask-making, clay-work, tie-dye, batik and fabric-printing, collage, painting etc.) This of course raises the question of the relationship between 'process' and 'product' and the value or otherwise of a performance as the culmination of our work. There is obviously a need to approach this with caution – preparations for such a display/performance will inevitably involve hard-pressed teachers in a great deal of extra work and workshop sessions can too often become mere 'rehearsals' and thereby lose a great deal of their creative potential. Nevertheless there is little doubt that, as long as there is not too much stress laid on a polished, meticulously rehearsed performance, some sort of culminating 'festival' and display, at which the children have a chance to share what they have been doing with other children in the school, with

parents and with friends, can and does prove a very satisfying and exciting climax to the project's work in schools. Such events, at which the children have variously presented, through music, drama and dance, the creation myth and other scenes from Yoruba mythology, have acted out the naming ceremony with which a Yoruba baby is welcomed into the community, danced the rituals of West African harvest festivals, dramatised African folk stories etc. — has also proved a very successful means of encouraging sometimes reluctant parents to come into schools and almost always end with total and enthusiastic audience participation!

In stressing the need for both 'participation' and 'appreciation' in arts education the Gulbenkian report argues that:

making music, composing and performing, dancing, dramatising, writing and making images is inseparably linked to, and enriched by, learning about music, dance, drama, literature and art: and vice versa,. To opt for one at the expense of the other will impoverish both.⁴

I would go further and stress that these activities — both making and learning about 'music, dancing, dramatising, writing and making images', and all the associated craft work, are also 'linked to, and enriched by' *each other*. The teaching of the arts in British schools has tended to be very fragmented with different activities taking place often in isolation from each other, at different times and often in different rooms. *The Arts in Schools* remarks on how often 'there is little contact between teachers working in different arts — even within the same schools'.⁵ In the case of African arts it is almost impossible to draw definite boundaries (in this respect they have a great deal to teach us). When, for instance, a specific drum 'language' and 'literature' is composed to be 'spoken' on the talking and other drums, where is the boundary between music and literature?;⁶ in a ritual festival that brings together dance, music, dramatisation, praise poetry, costume, masks, where does one draw the line between the different art forms? Certainly the way we have worked has



Below: Children from St. James' and St Peter's Primary School, Soho, draw Nigerian art objects at the Museum of Mankind.

Left: Luciano and Tes Loon were proud of the talking drum they made after seeing the film 'The Making of a Drum' and after practising on a genuine talking drum.

Bottom left: Children from Gillespie Primary School taking part in a final festival.





Left: Children from Dunningford Junior School, Havering, wearing the masks they had made. They also made their costumes.

Bottom left: 'Welcome to the new world Abosede': children from St. James' and St. Peter's school perform the Yoruba 'Ikomojade' or Naming Ceremony. (ILEA Contact Photo Serial No. 82/20/355-4)

tended to use different art forms to reinforce each other (and this has been greatly helped by the fact that all the artists who work with us have, like most African artists, been 'artists' in the widest sense of the word — with skills in instrumental music and dance usually balanced by those in a wide range of the visual and plastic arts.) Children will, for instance, look at examples of African masks (both the real thing and on slides), discuss their significance (and the link, for instance, they provide between the living and the dead ancestors), design and make their own masks from a variety of different media, write about them and then use the same masks in the dance drama (African masks being essentially functional rather than ornamental). Final performances will involve instrumental music, singing, drama and praise poems which the children will have composed themselves after discussion of the function of praise poetry and the importance of oral literature in African culture and a wide exposure to the wealth of African stories and poetry. Some of the most beautiful of these poems have been composed to welcome the new baby in the Yoruba naming ceremony.

Welcome to the new world Abosede^a
 Welcome new baby.
 We have come to congratulate you,
 You have lovely brown eyes
 And thick black hair.
 Your skin is soft and brown.
 Welcome to this world new baby,
 Welcome to this world nice baby.
 May God keep you from danger.

(Holly, aged 6)

Vaseem, also six:

Never tell lies, tell the truth Abosede
 I give you honey because nothing is sweeter than
 honey.
 I give you salt to keep you from danger^b

and Uzo, aged eight:

Welcome into the world Babatunde^c
 May all go well with you
 So long as you are content, we are happy
 Welcome into the world, Babatunde.

Many children will subsequently draw pictures of and write about such ceremonies. Bola, aged six, herself from a Yoruba-speaking family, is in every sense a proud participant in the following description:

One day there was a new baby born. We all got dressed.

'It's time for the ceremony', somebody said. 'Are



a Abosede is the Yoruba name given to a child born on a Sunday.

b The Yoruba naming ceremony includes the presentation of various symbolic foods to the new baby — water, honey, kolanut, salt, palm oil, alligator pepper etc.

c The name Babatunde ('Father comes a second time') is usually given to a boy born soon after the death of an important male member of the family and illustrates the Yoruba belief in incarnation.



Left: The final performance by second year pupils at Deptford Green School included a dramatisation of the coming of the missionaries to Nigeria. This was accompanied by work on Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* and formed part of an integrated studies 'African topic'.
Below: Making the batik.



you ready? Have you got the honey, salt and water?

'Yes', they said. 'Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes'.

Then we started to sing:

'Eku Ewuo

Iya Ala Bia mo'.

That's the song we sang.

The chief came in and the daddy took the fly whisks from the chief. Then the chief gave the baby a smile.

'What is the girl's name?' he said.

'Abosede', the daddy said.

Then the chief gave the baby honey.

'Abosede I give you honey so your life will be as sweet as honey'.

Then the chief gave the baby salt.

'Abosede I give you salt to help you fight all the evils in the world'.

Then the chief gave the baby water.

'Abosede I give you water because nobody can conquer water'.

The chief sang.

'Eku Ewuo.

Iya Ala bia mo'.

Now everybody sang and then it was time to go home and eat.

If an approach such as ours cuts across boundaries between different art forms it also cuts across boundaries between different subject areas. The Gulbenkian report refers to the 'unifying and integrating aspects of the arts'⁷ and 'the possibilities they present for enriching and enlivening the whole curriculum'.⁸ We have right from the start stressed the importance of a cross-cultural approach and are in fact rather reluctant to make 'one-off' visits to schools since such visits can too easily be seen as some sort of exotic entertainment with little or no spill-over into the wider curriculum. Instead we try

to ensure a minimum of at least five visits to any one school, provide advance advice on a wide-range of back-up materials and try to see that visits are sufficiently spread out (the optimum time between each seems to be between a week and a fortnight) to allow teachers to do the maximum amount of follow-up work in other classes. And in fact there is *no* area of the curriculum which cannot be involved and enriched. The relevance in history, geography, literature, religion etc is obvious (with children doing a detailed study of the geography and history of Yorubaland in particular and Nigeria in general — as well as a lot of work on Yoruba mythology and literature). But children have also learnt how to write formal invitations to their final performance and had valuable lessons in writing up what are really almost scientific experiments — as the following account by a fourth year primary child on *How we made our Batik* makes clear:

First we got a big sheet and we taped it in sections and then we used chalk to draw our designs on it. They had to be similar to African (adire) patterns. When the design had been finished we heated some wax in a foil bowl which rested over a clay burner. We made the burner by getting a lump of clay and then we rolled it out with a milk bottle. When it was flat we measured it to make sure it was square, then we cut holes so the candle could breathe and then we got a piece of scrap paper and wrapped it round the milk bottle and then we smoothed down both ends so they joined together. Then we took out the milk bottle slowly and carefully and flattened it out and then we measured the bottom of the milk bottle and we put the bottle inside and smoothed the clay over the burner bottom, took out the bottle and left the clay to dry. We put a candle in the centre of the burner



Left: Adesose Wallace accompanying children to the African Textiles Exhibition at the Museum of Mankind. This visit was followed by experiments with natural dyes and with Yoruba tie-dye patterns.

Bottom left: A Henry Maynard's Infants' School pupil experiments with different kinds of block-printing.



and lit it to melt the wax. Then we painted the wax over the chalk. Then we dipped it in dye (dylon). When it was dry we ironed off the wax (using absorbent paper).

Yoruba 'adire', Asante 'kente' and 'adinkira' and the patterns of other West African textiles have all proved a great inspiration for creativity and descriptive writing, with children experimenting with, and writing about, many different techniques: producing natural dyes; dip-, tie- and stencil-dyeing, lino, block and string printing as well as the more complex processes of batik. As an energetic group of three marvellous teachers declared last Christmas: 'The project has inspired our entire teaching for this half-term in every subject except mathematics'. At the time I was not able to offer much advice as to how to involve mathematics directly (although the experiment on batik above is obviously involving mathematical principles, as does the game 'ayo', which always proves immensely popular, with groups of children teaching and writing up the rules for others). Since then I have read Claudia Zaslavsky's exciting book *Africa Counts*,⁹ with an entire section on Yoruba number-systems, time-reckoning, currency as well as chapters on 'Geometric symmetries in African Art' etc. and am preparing, with the help of David Gilbert, a teacher from Sydenham School who has done work on African mathematics, sheets of information and advice on this to add to the information pack.

This sort of cross-curricular, integrated approach to the teaching of the arts is much easier to achieve at primary than secondary level. The Gulbenkian report speaks of the need for *flexible* provision for the arts, of how 'it is essential that the time allowed is adequate for the task in hand'¹⁰ and 'of the importance of the arts and of the possibilities they present for enriching and enlivening the whole curriculum',¹¹ so much easier to achieve in the primary school where most 'children work for most of the day with the same teacher' and there is seldom 'organisational need to establish fixed periods of time for the arts'.¹² Certainly we have found primary schools a joy to work in. Even when we have worked with a number of different classes or even with the whole school (as we did recently at St James' and St Peter's) the organisational problems have never proved insuperable; the only restraints usually are the bell for break or lunch. It is usually comparatively easy to bring all the groups together for introductory sessions or the showing of slides; one group may then remain in the hall for a dance drama workshop with Emmanuel, another work in their classroom making masks with Adesose Wallace while I might be discussing the early history of Ife, the holy city of the Yoruba, with a third group. Even within one class one small group might be working with Ade, or another artist, on, for instance, tie-dye techniques, another working on their collages started with him on a previous visit, while another small group might be working on the instruments with Emmanuel in the hall.

These may sound like very trivial points of organisation but, as any teacher will know, it is on



such points that the success or otherwise of an arts-based project such as ours can rest. And it is just this sort of flexibility which is so seldom present in secondary schools. The Gulbenkian report refers to the far more severe and difficult 'cycle of constraints' which affects the teaching of the arts in secondary school: 'A constant reason for this is that the secondary school curriculum is teacher-based and its organisation is considerably more complicated'.¹³ The report identifies the 'five common areas of constraint on the arts in secondary schools' as '(a) co-ordination (b) time (c) space and facilities (d) attitudes (e) examinations and assessment'.¹⁴ As it argues 'the real value of integration is not only between the different arts but also between the arts and the rest of the curriculum'.¹⁵ but secondary school organisation seems to prevent such an integration or make it incredibly difficult. We have certainly found our work in secondary schools fraught with organisational problems, such as trying to involve an art department housed four floors up in a separate building a mile down the road from the main school!^a But even in a school with a strong integrated studies programme and a commitment to multicultural education we have battled with problems of inflexible time-tabling, inappropriate room-allocation and the need to co-ordinate the work of so many. For the artists, who have found working in primary schools such an exciting and enriching experience, it can prove extremely discouraging. If you only have an hour a week with a large group, spent in a room which is not an art room (so that part of that precious hour has to be spent drearily 'clearing up' and moving everything out), with no time or space allocated for the group to continue during the week to work on what they have started, it hardly seems worth starting anything very exciting. I do not want to sound unduly pessimistic; we have learnt a lot through working in secondary schools and everything we have learnt has convinced us of the value of this sort of cross-curricular, integrated approach — but there is no doubt that fundamental *structural* changes in secondary school organisation are needed to allow such an approach to work in anything like the way it does in primary schools. As things stand it certainly needs extremely detailed forward planning.

We in fact started in July one year to plan with Walsingham School how we would structure sessions to be held there in the following summer, in an attempt to try and overcome some of these problems (by, for instance, block-timetabling a whole afternoon per week or fortnight). They are a school who have already had experience of a similar approach with the Mexican arts group Mexicolore and it will be interesting to see if between us all we can come with useful prototype proposals to suggest to other secondary schools. In this regard we are extremely glad to have the opportunity to get involved at the level of teacher education at Avery Hill College since these are questions — such as whether the rigid timetabling so characteristic of secondary schools is being used as a form of social control and how far some degree of flexibility could be introduced^a — which really need to be challenged at that level. One area in which these sort of constraints are not in operation is in the sort of post-examination VI form enrichment source organised by ILEA in the summer term and this is an area in which we hope to get involved next year.

The Gulbenkian report refers to the two main emphases in the teaching of any art: to give children a broad introduction to the rich variety of media, techniques and forms of expressive and creative activity and to aim continually to raise their levels of competence and attainment in using and understanding them'.¹⁶ It is hoped that the African Arts in Education Project manages to achieve the second as well as the first of these objectives. African arts may be essentially communal and participatory and almost without exception we have 'managed to involve *all* children in one way or another at whatever level we have been working'.^b But they are certainly not a soft or easy option. Children rushing forward to 'beat the drums' have been surprised to find that this is not nearly as easy as they imagined — that to do it well requires every bit as much technique, skill and practice as playing any other instrument. Some children have been discovered to have a considerable talent. Stephen, a

a As the report argues on p.71: 'Buildings can easily dictate curriculum'.

a The 'tenth day' option as at Stantonbury Campus, Milton Keynes, might be one solution.

b As a teacher wrote recently on our evaluation form: 'All the students benefited in one way or other. Shy students had a chance to shine. Loud boisterous children had a music and dramatic outlet. Low achievers were able to express their talents in art. Wonderful for all!'



Far left: Emmanuel Josiah runs a small music workshop using African instruments. The cloth in the background includes genuine Yoruba 'adire' cloth and the children's own 'string' and 'stencil' printing patterns inspired by the patterns of this cloth.

Centre: 'It made everyone feel like dancing': Stephen on the drums.

Left: Thank you cards to Emmanuel and Ade.

very small boy at an infants' school in Waltham Forest, proved so skilled on the atumpan drums that he gave a drum solo to the entire school and parents at the final assembly. Afterwards he drew a picture and described the experience with delight:

I was sitting in the hall and Emmanuel picked me and Anthony to play the drums.

We went into the mobile and we started to drum. I was happy. When I was in there I learned how to play the drums. Me and Anthony played it for a very long time and we had turns. Emmanuel held my hands and showed me how to drum. I was doing it OK and I started to get excited. I started to drum fast and I got muddled up and Emmanuel helped me. After me Anthony started to drum and I helped him once.

We went into the hall and played for the whole school. It made everyone feel like dancing.

My teacher called Mrs. Devlin looked at me and smiled and winked.

I went back into my class and Mrs Devlin said, 'That was very good'.

Although the pride Stephen felt will obviously stay with him, there is a danger that his newly discovered skill will have nowhere to go once we depart with all our instruments. But in this case the school invested in a beautiful new drum of their own and went on to arrange for special classes for Stephen — and the multicultural adviser, after our work in a secondary school in the same borough, bought a complete set of African instruments to be made available to schools throughout the borough.

Stephen's account illustrates very clearly the close link that can develop between children and artists. The Gulbenkian report refers to how there has been 'too little contact between educationalists and professional artists'¹⁷ and devotes a whole chapter to the subject of 'Children, Teachers and Artists'. Undoubtedly it is in the forging of close links between these three groups, to the mutual benefit of all, that the chief value of our work lies.

The Arts in Schools refers to how 'working with professional artists can benefit pupils in three ways: in improving skills, attitudes and understanding'.¹⁸ Much of the success of our work lies in the fact that Emmanuel Josiah, and several of the other artists, have great charisma and a remarkable rapport with children. Teachers write in the evaluation forms of the 'delight' the children experience in knowing the artists, of the 'marvellous bonus' their presence had

provided. Our final departure from schools is almost invariably greeted with enthusiastic thank-you letters and cards. One teacher wrote recently:

Here are the cards the children wanted to send you. They were feeling rather lost on Tuesday with the school so suddenly empty of the beautiful things and the people who had been filling it full of life and learning and enjoyment.

I have not had any knowledge of African culture before and it has been a great revelation to be introduced to an ancient and rich civilisation. I feel I've only begun to learn, but already I appreciate the warmth and the social responsibility, a rich and sophisticated literature and the most wonderful drumming and arts. You really let us into it by sharing your arts with us.

The children and I wanted to thank you for a very profound experience. I am sure it will endure in our lives and memories and go on working at different levels.

We all hope to see you again.

As the above letter shows, the major resource we have to offer schools is undoubtedly the personal contribution of artists themselves — but the *things* we can provide (the actual instruments, costumes, examples of cloth, masks, replica Ife heads, ayo games, carved calabashes etc) are also important. Obviously examples of art and craft objects are particularly important to our work, as a source of inspiration to children's creativity, but both Mexicolore and the India Alive Project¹⁹ have also illustrated very clearly the value of introducing everyday artefacts — cooking utensils, tools, foods, toys, newspapers etc — and we are hoping for funding to allow us to build up sets of these as well as duplicate sets of instruments, art objects, cloth, costumes etc (as our resources in this, as in most other directions, are totally overstretched at present) which can be loaned to schools for the full period of our visits.

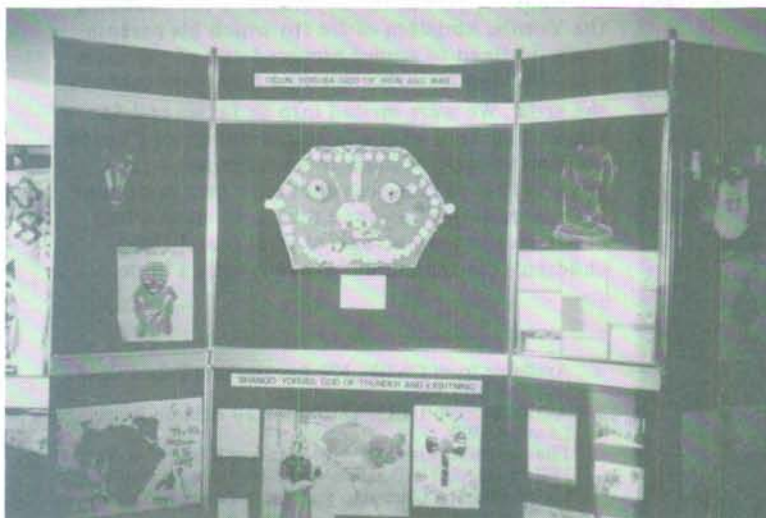
If the African Arts in Education Project has a contribution to make to the field of arts education, then we hope its claim to make a contribution to the field of multicultural education is also valid. We fully recognise the absurdity of attempting to 'do' African culture in five weeks or so²⁰ and in no way see our input as an end in itself — merely one of many different ways of enriching the curriculum, of getting different ideas and materials into the schools and encouraging teachers to incorporate them into their own long-term teaching — a process which, as the teacher in the letter above points out, will hopefully 'endure . . . and go on working at different levels'. Certainly our experience in schools has been a very *multicultural* one. We may start from a specific West African culture but we are constantly led out by the teachers and children from this into other cultures. The examples of this process are numerous. When Emmanuel talks about his own childhood in Nigeria, children are eager to share their own experiences of families and growing up. Our work in an infants' school centred around the Yoruba naming ceremony (part of a Health Education project on 'Growing' designed to show

the school's appreciation of the fact that the same human needs are met differently by various cultural groups, and that different does not mean less valuable') was balanced by a talk from the local vicar on Christian baptism and a chat from a Sikh mother on comparable Sikh customs. Introduction of the Nigerian game 'ayo' in St James and St Peter's in Soho revealed that forms of the game are not only played throughout Africa (under a variety of names from 'oware' to 'warri' to 'bao') but are also popular in Bangladesh and other parts of Asia. Work on Shango, the Yoruba God of Thunder and Lightning, in a secondary school led to comparisons not only with Thor, the Norse God, but with the Indian God Indra whose 'vagra' (weapon symbolising a thunderbolt) is very similar to the 'ose Shango' or Shango axes (themselves based on the shape of Stone Age axehead believed to be the missiles which Shango rained down on those who caused him displeasure). In another secondary school we were fitted into a first year general studies course which

included a look at creation myths from a wide range of different cultures as well as the Yoruba.

If our most obvious contributions are in the field of arts and multicultural education, we hope we also have a contribution to make in the vital field of development education. Yoruba culture is very much a living, dynamic, constantly changing culture. Traditional drum music has subtly adapted itself to the 'ju-ju' and 'high-life' rhythms of the cities (not to mention crossing the Atlantic to feed into the roots of reggae — just as the Yoruba Gods were transplanted to the New World and live on in rituals still carried out in Jamaica, Cuba, Haiti and Harlem^a and have become syncretised into the rituals of Catholic worship in Brazil^b and elsewhere.) Ogun, the traditional God of iron and war, has become the god of mechanics and drivers of motor vehicles^c and is claimed by one modern researcher to be *more* responsive to change than the global religions.^d We have found that both he and Shango (who had adapted himself to the discovery of electricity and whose statue by a modern artist, Ben Enwonu, stands, 'oshe shango' aloft, outside the electricity building in Lagos) are an extremely potent source of creativity in children. Children at Gillespie Primary

Left: Ayo: a game of great skill and always very popular in schools. Below: Work inspired by the Yoruba deities, Ogun and Shango, on display at the ILEA Centre for Learning Resources. Right: Work on Mothers and Children by the children of Stamford Hill Primary School.



- a A notice in the 'Man in Africa' display at the Museum of Natural History in New York goes so far as to claim: 'There is possibly a greater knowledge of the Yoruba religions, for instance, in Harlem than in Nigeria'.
- b Where Shango, for instance, has become syncretised with the Catholic Saint Jerome because this saint is represented by a ram, Shango's animal.
- c See the play *The Road* by Wole Soyinka, himself Yoruba speaking.
- d The cult of Ogun indeed represents an ideological domain that the global religions long ago abandoned. No other belief system is as prepared to respond to the sweeping changes brought about by the twentieth century technological revolution. No other supernatural figure lends itself as appropriately as a symbol of civil unrest and revolt as Ogun. Today, as in the past, Ogun offers a psychic refuge from the dangerous forces that are unleashed through mankind's own initiatives'. (Sandra T. Barnes, *Ogun: An Old God for a New Age*, Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Philadelphia, 1980).

School in Islington designed a beautiful Ogun mask using the very contemporary metallic materials of paper clips, drawing pins, staples, bottle tops etc. Children from other schools incorporated tin foil, used flash cubes and flashing bulbs into the Shango collages – to great effect. These, and other Yoruba deities, have also inspired a lot of writing:

Shango is the God of the Sky,
Shango the one that flashes by.
Shango is the God of thunder,
Shango the one who we live under.
Dagger of lightning that looks like gold.
Shango is the one who is so bold.
Trees come crashing to the ground.
White the lightning, all around.
When the storm has died away,
Shango will be back another day
(Juliette, second year secondary)

There is the danger in using mainly traditional arts as our major stimulus, of reinforcing rather than

dispelling stereotypes – leaving the children with the impression that Nigeria is nothing but masked dancers, drum music and exotic costumes. While the presence of the artists themselves goes a long way towards demystification, we have also found it essential to use backup materials such as the Centre for World Development Education's excellent slide and poster sets on *Nigeria in Change*^a (their sets in particular on Women and Children tie in beautifully with and extend our work on naming ceremonies, families etc) and we are constantly aware of the need to give our work this development education dimension. Oxfam's new booklets on *Ghana: Using Third World Art Forms for Creative Activities* (on 'The Art of the Potter' and 'Adinka Block Printing')^b contain excellent guidance. We have found that, for instance, practical work on the Yoruba 'rail-track' tie-dye patterns specific to market women (who often brought their produce down to market in Lagos by train) can be the starting point for work on the position of women traders in the economy.^c

The headmaster of St James and St Peter's Primary School wrote on the evaluation form: 'This came up to and beyond expectation. I think you should see the importance of the project in relation to antiracist policies in the ILEA' and it is finally in the field of antiracist teaching that I hope we also have a contribution to make. The whole field of attitude change is obviously the most difficult of all to assess and evaluate and I do not want to make exaggerated claims for the effect of our work. But we hope that, for instance, all our work on names and naming ceremonies may provide some small antidote to the negative phenomena of 'name calling' which was a major topic for discussion at the 1982 NAME Conference. The use of 'brainstorming' to provide lists of words evoked by the word 'Africa' or 'Nigeria' with children *before* we start work in a school (perhaps summed up most effectively in the three words 'poor', 'hot' and 'funny') and their own and teachers' evaluations at the end seem to indicate that their attitudes have shifted as their knowledge has increased. It was the son of deeply prejudiced parents who, after playing a prominent part in the depiction of the founding of the Yoruba kingdom of Ife (to which his parents sadly declined to come) prepared one of the most beautiful and lovingly-executed thankyou cards to the artist. We were invited into St James and St Peter's (a school with a large percentage of Chinese children) largely because the headmaster was anxious that the Chinese children's near contempt for any culture other than their own should be challenged at a sophisticated level – and these children's enjoyment and participation I hope

a Available from CWDE, 128 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1 9SH.

b Available from UJAMAA Centre, 14 Brixton Road, London SW9.

c The Granada film on 'Asante Market Women' shown on ITV in March 1982 gave a very interesting picture on the position of Ghanaian women at home and within the economy.

Below: Yoruba tie-dye "rail-track" patterns produced during Exhibition workshops at ILEA's Centre for Learning Resources. Bottom: Beautifully illustrated names inspired by the Yoruba Naming Ceremony.



indicates that they will no longer dismiss all things African as primitive and not worthy of regard.^a

We have always claimed – and continue to claim – that we see our work as important for, to borrow Gillian Klein's words, 'not just children from ethnic minorities, but ALL children in all places'.²¹ Nevertheless there do seem to be some indication that working with African artists can give a particular sense of pride to black children. The staff at a school for American dependents' in Britain wrote:

For many years we have been devoting time to the history and culture of minority groups and especially with the blacks the emphasis has been on the more negative aspects of history – i.e. slavery, the American Civil War and Civil Rights. The approach used in our project was very different, emphasising the more positive aspects of the arts of Nigeria . . . For our school this project had great merit. It was especially beneficial as we have a large concentration of black students who have never before looked into their own fascinating African background. The black students were in the limelight for a change!

Perhaps the most encouraging remarks I have ever heard was from a second year black pupil at a large comprehensive school in South London where we had worked for half a term as part of an African topic, culminating in a performance that looked at the foundation of Ife and other scenes from Yoruba mythology and life, including the coming of the missionaries. In the event the performance threatened to be a disaster. There had been all the organisational problems common to secondary schools; on the day itself the main teacher concerned was ill, it was snowing heavily, the dress rehearsal was chaotic. But at the last minute everything came together and they gave an inspired performance to the whole of the junior part of the school. Afterwards Bentley came up to us, eyes shining: 'We *must* do it again, show our parents. All they ever show on telly is the bad side of Africa – we're giving the other side!' It is this sort of reaction which, in spite of all the problems we've had of inadequate funding, no premises of our own, totally overstretched resources etc makes the job worthwhile. We do however hope that some of these problems will soon be resolved with the granting of Urban Aid funding and our own premises under ILEA's auspices which, together, would allow us to drastically reduce our charges to schools, considerably expand our activities and plan ahead with confidence. We would therefore be very pleased to hear from anyone – teachers, teacher-educators, researchers, artists, other interested

individuals etc – who would like to participate in any aspect of our work. For the moment please contact either Emmanuel Josiah, Director, African Arts in Education Project, c/o L101 Odhams Walk, Long Acre, London WC2 (Tel: 01-836 2103) or the author at 13 Glenluce Road, Blackheath, London SE3 7SD' (Tel: 01-858 8489).

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1. *The Arts in Schools: Principles, Practice and Provision*, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1982, p.3.
2. *Ibid.*, pp.5-6.
3. *Multiethnic Education Review*, ILEA, Vol. 1, No. 2, Summer 1982, pp.28-30 (for detailed account of this pilot stage of the project).
4. *The Arts in Schools: Principles, Practice and Provision*, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1982, p.43.
5. *Ibid.*, p.9.
6. Finnegan, R., *Oral Literature in Africa*, Oxford University Press, Nairobi, 1976 (see chapter on 'Drum Language and literature').
7. *The Arts in Schools: Principles, Practice and Provision*, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1982, p.53.
8. *Ibid.*, p.58.
9. Zaslavsky, Claudia, *Africa Counts: Number and Pattern in African Culture*, Lawrence Hill & Co., Westport, Connecticut, 1979.
See also her book for juniors: *Count on your fingers African style*, obtained in UK from Harper & Row.
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19. *India Alive Project Report*, 1981, Sheffield World Poverty Action Group, 14 Penistone Road, Sheffield S30 3QC.
20. Davis, Gerry, 'Multicultural Education: Some assumptions underlying current practices', *Multiethnic Education Review*, ILEA, Vol. 1, No. 2, Summer 1982.
21. Klein, Gillian, 'Editorial', *Multicultural Teaching*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Autumn 1982, p.3.

a Although there were certain unforeseen cross-cultural problems – such as a marked reluctance on the part of the little Chinese girls to take part in messy activities like mask-making or tie-dye. Amidst the general enthusiasm Que Anh wrote cautiously: 'I don't like to wash the cotton because it will make my dress dirty and my hands dirty'!