
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Playing with Colour: A Case Study of Deduako Life Community Special Vocational School and the Garden City Special School

Dorothy Akpene Amenuke¹, Joshua Nyatefe², and Derrick Fiaku³

¹²³ *Department of Painting and Sculpture, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana*

Corresponding Author: Dorothy Amenuke, **E-mail:** daamenuke.art@knust.edu.gh

| ABSTRACT

Persons with intellectual disabilities (PWID) often experience limitations in cognitive functioning that distinguish them from the broader population. Although these differences may be real or perceived, they frequently result in significant social consequences, including stigma and exclusion. Deeply rooted cultural attitudes tend to reinforce negative perceptions of intellectual disability, often portraying affected individuals as less capable in various aspects of human endeavour. However, emerging perspectives suggest that PWID may demonstrate strengths in non-verbal and visual forms of communication, particularly through artistic expression. This study explored self-expression through art-making among persons with intellectual disabilities using structured creative art sessions. The research adopted a qualitative approach to examine how participants communicate ideas, emotions, and experiences through visual media. The focus was on understanding art as a medium of expression rather than as a measure of technical skill. The study was conducted with students from two special education institutions in Kumasi, Ghana: Deduako Life Community Special Vocational School and Garden City Special School. Participants were engaged in guided colour-based art activities designed to encourage free expression and creativity within a supportive environment. Findings revealed that persons with intellectual disabilities were able to effectively express themselves through visual art. Their works demonstrated originality, emotional engagement, and the ability to convey meaning through colour, form, and composition. The results challenge deficit-based assumptions about intellectual disability and highlight the communicative and expressive potential of PWID. The study concludes that art-making provides an important avenue for self-expression and communication among persons with intellectual disabilities and supports the need for inclusive creative spaces that foster their artistic development and social participation.

| KEYWORDS

Art, Art Therapy, Intellectual disability

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 01 January 2026

PUBLISHED: 28 January 2026

DOI: 10.32996/jmhs.2026.7.1.6

Introduction

Intellectual disability (ID), also referred to as a general learning disability, is characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour, affecting an individual's ability to learn, reason, solve problems, communicate, and perform everyday practical and social tasks. According to Inclusion Ghana (2011) and the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD, 2019), persons with intellectual disabilities (PWID) exhibit substantial limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive skills that originate during the developmental period. Intellectual functioning encompasses abilities such as reasoning, learning, decision-making, and problem-solving, while adaptive behaviour refers to conceptual, social, and practical skills necessary for everyday life. Naretey (2013) further notes that PWID often experience deficits in cognitive functioning and demonstrate significant challenges in areas such as communication, learning, self-care, and social interaction.

Historically, intellectual disability has been misunderstood and stigmatized across many societies. In Ghana, cultural and religious beliefs have often associated intellectual disability with curses, spiritual punishment, or supernatural causes (Inclusion Ghana, 2011). Such perceptions have contributed to discrimination, social exclusion, and the marginalization of PWID and their families. Consequently, many individuals with intellectual disabilities have been denied opportunities to participate fully in education, employment, and community life. The labels attached to disability as Shire (2009) would metaphorically put it, becomes “the barrel of the gun” that turns homes and communities into spaces of exclusion rather than support.

It is observed that, intellectual disability occurs across all social, economic, ethnic, and educational backgrounds. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (2014), approximately 0.5% of Ghana's school-age population lives with intellectual disability, with prevalence rates highest among individuals with little or no formal education. Contemporary approaches to disability, however, emphasize inclusion, self-determination, and the recognition of abilities rather than deficits. Best practices increasingly focus on empowering PWID through education, skills development, community participation, and self-advocacy (Fiaku, 2020).

Educational researchers have consistently argued that intellectual disability does not imply an inability to learn. Rather, PWID require differentiated instructional approaches tailored to their learning needs. Bawa and Osei (2018, 2020) contend that learners with intellectual disabilities can successfully engage with subjects such as Mathematics, English, and Science when appropriate teaching methods, sufficient time, patience, and supportive learning environments are provided. These perspectives align with the constitutional guarantee of equal rights and educational opportunities for all citizens of Ghana, including persons with disabilities (Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992).

Although considerable attention has been given to the educational needs of PWID, relatively little research in Ghana has examined the relationship between art, cognition, and learning among this population (Nyatefe, 2018; Bawa & Osei, 2020). Existing studies have primarily focused on learning difficulties (Narh, 2015) and intellectual development among individuals with developmental conditions such as autism (Saah, 2017). Consequently, there remains limited understanding of how artistic activities can facilitate communication, self-expression, and creative development among persons with intellectual disabilities.

In recent decades, art created by persons with intellectual disabilities has gained increasing recognition within contemporary art discourse. Across Europe, North America, Australia, and other regions, specialized art studios, galleries, and ateliers have been established to nurture the artistic talents of individuals with intellectual disabilities and to provide platforms for exhibiting their works (Lewis, 2014; Baaijens, 2011; Vick & Sexton-Radek, 2008). Rhodes (2008) argues that the emergence of specialist ateliers devoted to supporting artists with intellectual disabilities has been instrumental in creating a new and increasingly recognized artistic movement. These initiatives have challenged traditional assumptions regarding disability and creativity by demonstrating that PWID are capable of producing original, expressive, and aesthetically compelling artworks.

Despite this growing recognition, debates continue regarding the artistic status of works created by persons with intellectual disabilities. Such debates often underestimate the creative capacities of PWID and overlook the communicative power embedded within their artworks. Emerging scholarship increasingly suggests that many individuals with intellectual disabilities possess strong visual communication abilities and may express emotions, experiences, and ideas more effectively through visual rather than verbal means. Their artistic productions frequently exhibit originality, authenticity, and symbolic meaning, qualities that are highly valued within contemporary art practice. Consequently, art has become an important avenue through which PWID can communicate, construct identities, and participate in cultural life.

The present study was conducted within two special education institutions in Kumasi, Ghana: the Garden City Special School and the Deduako Life Community Special Vocational School, the only intellectual disability schools located in the Kumasi metropolis and the Ashanti region of Ghana. These institutions represent two of the thirteen special schools for persons with intellectual disabilities identified by Inclusion Ghana (2021). The Garden City Special School, established in 1977, was founded to provide educational opportunities and social support for children with intellectual disabilities, while the Deduako Life Community Special Vocational School, established in 2002, focuses on vocational training and community integration. Both institutions provide structured educational environments designed to enhance the development, independence, and social participation of their students. Previous research by Kassah, Kassah, and Phillips (2017) highlights the importance of such schools as centres of learning, socialization, and transition, where specialized instruction and supportive environments enable students with intellectual disabilities to develop skills necessary for greater community participation.

The significance of art within the lives of individuals extends beyond aesthetics and recreation. Artistic experiences have long been valued for their ability to facilitate emotional expression, communication, reflection, and personal growth. Art has also contributed significantly to changing societal perceptions of mental health and disability, encouraging more inclusive understandings of human diversity and creativity. Within disability studies, participation in artistic activities has increasingly been recognized as a means of promoting well-being, self-esteem, and social inclusion.

Closely related to this is the practice of art therapy, which has been widely used to support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including those with autism spectrum disorder and Down syndrome (Aguilar, 2019). Through artistic engagement, individuals are often able to communicate feelings and experiences that may be difficult to express verbally. Nyatefe (2018) notes that art serves as an important medium of engagement and communication for learners of varying ages and abilities. However, it is important to distinguish between art therapy and art education. While art therapy primarily focuses on improving psychological, emotional, and physical well-being, art education emphasizes artistic development and regards participants as artists rather than patients (Bragge & Fenner, 2009). The present study aligns more closely with the latter perspective by exploring artistic expression as a creative and communicative practice rather than as a therapeutic intervention.

Against this backdrop, this study investigates how persons with intellectual disabilities express themselves through colour-based art activities. By examining the artworks produced during creative sessions, the study seeks to contribute to the growing discourse on disability, creativity, and artistic expression. Specifically, it aims to demonstrate that persons with intellectual disabilities are capable of producing meaningful artworks that communicate experiences, emotions, and perspectives, while challenging stereotypes that continue to underestimate their creative potential.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative case study approach to investigate the self-expressive capabilities of persons with intellectual disabilities (PWID) through colour-based art activities. The case study design was considered appropriate because it enabled an in-depth exploration of artistic expression within the natural educational environments of the participants. The study focused on students from two special education institutions in Kumasi, Ghana: the Deduako Life Community Special Vocational School (DLCSVS) and the Garden City Special School (GCSS). Painting sessions were held with about

Prior to the commencement of the practical sessions, several visits were made to both institutions to establish rapport with participants, obtain the necessary permissions, and familiarize the researchers with the school environments. These preliminary interactions allowed the researchers to observe the diverse personalities, communication styles, and behavioural characteristics of the students. Some participants were non-verbal and relied primarily on gestures and facial expressions for communication, while others demonstrated varying degrees of verbal interaction, including humour, storytelling, and discussion of their creative activities.

Participation in the study was voluntary, with an initial sample of nineteen participants. To maintain anonymity and safeguard the identities of the students, participants were assigned codes. Students in the DLCSVS group were referred to as Participant 1A, Participant 1B, etc., whereas students in the GCSS group were referred to as Participant 2A, Participant 2B, and so forth. Attendance varied throughout the project as students were free to join or withdraw from sessions according to their interest and comfort level. This approach was adopted to ensure that participation remained self-motivated and that artistic expression emerged naturally rather than through compulsion.

Materials and Art Resources

The primary materials used during the creative sessions included acrylic paints, paintbrushes, canvas boards, imperia sheets, water containers, sponges, threads, and other basic painting tools. The colour palette initially consisted of the primary colours red, blue, and yellow, which allowed participants to explore colour relationships and colour mixing throughout the study. Additional materials such as sisal fibre sponges and threads were introduced during later sessions to encourage experimentation with texture, pattern, and mark making techniques.

Colour Work Sessions at Deduako Life Community Special Vocational School

At Deduako Life Community Special Vocational School, participants engaged in four colour work sessions. Each participant was provided with a ten-inch square canvas, paintbrushes, and primary colours. The sessions were intentionally designed to promote freedom of expression, with no restrictions placed on subject matter, colour choice, or artistic style.

During the initial session, many participants appeared hesitant and repeatedly sought guidance regarding what they were expected to paint (Figure 1). This behavior reflected their educational experiences, where activities are often structured around teacher instruction. In addition, some caregivers expressed curiosity about the project and occasionally attempted to influence the participants toward representational forms of painting. Despite these external expectations, participants were encouraged to make independent artistic decisions.

A notable observation during the first session was the tendency of many participants to focus predominantly on a single colour. Rather than directing participants to use multiple colours, the researcher explored this phenomenon through observation and interaction. Participants were engaged through verbal communication, gestures, and demonstrations while additional colours were

gradually introduced onto their work surfaces. Their responses varied considerably, suggesting that colour choices may have been influenced by personal preference, familiarity, confidence levels, or social interactions with neighbouring participants.

Subsequent sessions focused on colour exploration and experimentation. Participants were introduced to opportunities for generating secondary and tertiary colours through direct and indirect mixing processes. Rather than providing premixed colours, the study encouraged discovery through practice. Experimental techniques included thread pull painting, in which paint coated threads were pressed between folded sheets and pulled to create marbled effects, and sponge painting, where sisal fibre sponges were used to apply and manipulate colour. These activities provided opportunities for participants to explore texture, movement, and colour relationships while maintaining creative autonomy.



Figure 1 (a) instructor giving guidance to students at (DLCSVS) (b) Participants working on their artwork .Photo credit: Joshua Edem K. Nyatefe

Colour Work Sessions at Garden City Special School

At Garden City Special School, practical sessions were facilitated by the research team. Eight students participated in the study, although attendance varied across sessions based on participant willingness and availability (Figure 2).

The first session focused on introducing participants to painting materials and basic painting procedures. Following preparation of the workspace, participants were provided with quarter-size imperia sheets of paper and acrylic paints in the three primary colours. Initially, students were encouraged to create images of their own choosing. However, many appeared uncertain about how to begin. To facilitate engagement, a simple visual prompt involving a tree and a house was introduced. Demonstrations were provided to illustrate different approaches to representing trees, after which participants were encouraged to develop their own interpretations.

Although participants initially relied on the provided examples, they gradually incorporated individual elements and modifications into their paintings. As the sessions progressed, each artwork became increasingly distinct, reflecting personal choices and creative interpretations. The participants demonstrated enthusiasm throughout the process and frequently extended beyond the original examples by introducing additional imagery and symbolic elements.

During subsequent sessions, participants were encouraged to create artworks based on their own ideas and experiences. Activities involved painting, writing, and representing subjects of personal interest without predetermined themes. Familiarity with the art making process increased noticeably over time, and participants became more confident in their use of brushes, colours, and compositional arrangements.

The final session emphasized colour mixing and experimentation. Participants were introduced to the concept of generating different hues, values, and tones from primary colours. Unlike previous sessions, no visual examples were provided. This allowed participants to make independent creative decisions and provided an opportunity to assess their ability to work autonomously. While some participants initially appeared uncertain, most quickly became engaged in the exploration of colour relationships. They

demonstrated enjoyment throughout the activity, often observing and learning from one another while developing their own unique responses to the task.

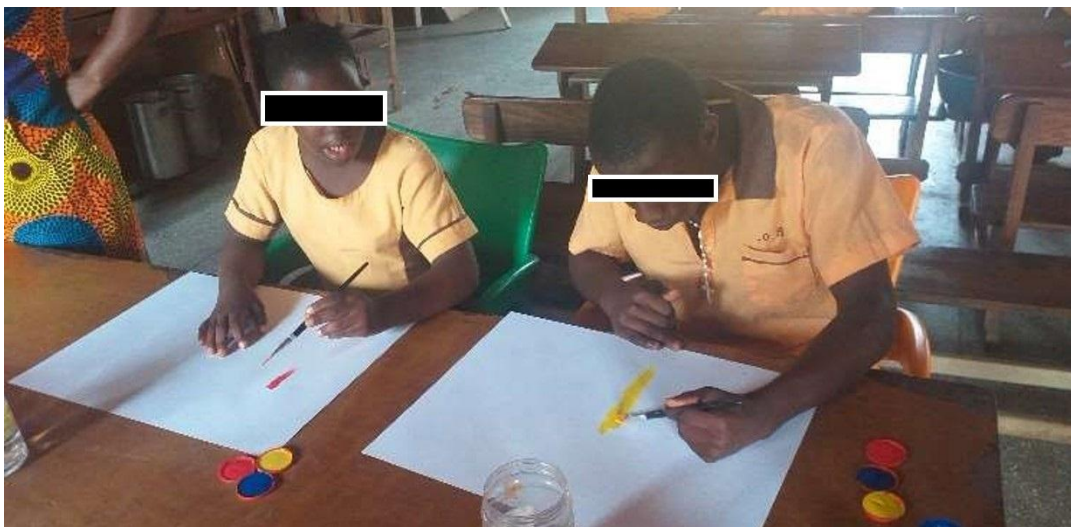


Figure 2. Some participants working on their artwork from GCSS. Photo credit: Ivan F. Ferguson-Fotwe

Data Collection and Observation

Data were collected primarily through participant observation, field notes, informal interactions, and visual analysis of the artworks produced during the sessions. Particular attention was given to participants' engagement with materials, colour choices, artistic processes, communication patterns, and responses to creative challenges. The completed artworks served as primary visual data, providing insight into how participants expressed ideas, emotions, and personal experiences through colour, form, and composition.

The study emphasized process as much as product, recognizing that artistic expression among persons with intellectual disabilities extends beyond the completed artwork to include the decisions, interactions, and creative explorations that occur during art making. Through this approach, the research sought to understand art not merely as an outcome but as a communicative and expressive practice through which PWID engage with themselves, others, and their environments.

Results and Discussion

The creative sessions conducted at Deduako Life Community Special Vocational School (DLCSVS) and Garden City Special School (GCSS) revealed important insights into the artistic capabilities and self expressive potential of persons with intellectual disabilities (PWID). Although the two schools employed different instructional approaches, both demonstrated that participants were capable of developing greater creative confidence and autonomy when provided with opportunities for sustained artistic engagement.

A notable finding was the influence of instructional structure on participants' initial responses to art making activities. Participants at DLCSVS, who were introduced to a largely open-ended creative environment, initially displayed uncertainty and frequently sought guidance regarding what to paint. Many also restricted themselves to limited colour choices, suggesting a preference for familiar or perceived safe options. However, continued exposure to experimental techniques and opportunities for independent exploration resulted in increasingly confident use of colour, materials, and compositional decisions.

In contrast, participants at GCSS appeared to benefit from a more structured introduction to the creative process. Visual prompts and demonstrations provided an accessible entry point into artistic activity and reduced initial hesitation. As participants became more familiar with the materials and processes, they gradually moved beyond the examples provided and incorporated their own ideas, experiences, and visual elements into their work. By the final session, many were able to engage independently in colour exploration without direct instructional support.

Despite the differences in instructional approach, a common developmental pattern emerged across both schools. Participants progressed from reliance on external guidance toward greater independence in artistic decision making. This progression was reflected not only in the increasing originality of the artworks produced but also in participants' willingness to experiment, take creative risks, and communicate personal ideas through visual expression. These findings suggest that persons with intellectual

disabilities possess significant creative potential that can be fostered through both structured and open ended artistic experiences, provided that opportunities for exploration and self-directed decision making are maintained.

Artistic Expression and Creative Competence of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities

One of the most significant findings of the study is that persons with intellectual disabilities demonstrated substantial creative competence and the ability to communicate through visual art. The artworks produced across both schools reveal originality, individuality, and expressive intent. Rather than functioning merely as recreational activities, the painting sessions became platforms through which participants communicated personal experiences, emotions, observations, and aspects of identity.

These findings challenge persistent stereotypes that associate intellectual disability with limited creativity or artistic understanding. The participants consistently made decisions regarding colour, composition, symbolism, and subject matter. Their artistic choices reflected personal preferences and interpretations rather than simple responses to external instruction.

The communicative power of art produced by PWID has been noted by other researchers. Baaijens (2011) reported that audiences attending exhibitions of artworks created by persons with intellectual disabilities experienced emotional reactions ranging from laughter to tears and left with a deeper understanding of the artists' perspectives. Similarly, Timmermans (1994, cited in Baaijens, 2011) argued that contemporary art should be evaluated not solely on technical proficiency but also on originality, authenticity, symbolic value, and communicative ability. The artworks examined in the present study embody many of these qualities and demonstrate that PWID are capable of producing works that communicate effectively with viewers.

Relationship to Established Artistic Traditions

A notable outcome of the study was the resemblance between participants' artworks and established artistic movements, particularly Abstract Expressionism and Art Brut (Naïve Art). Across both schools, participants frequently employed spontaneous brushwork, gestural marks, unconventional colour relationships, and abstract interpretations of familiar subjects.

It was observed that the collective body of work produced at DLCSVS shared many characteristics such as emotional immediacy, freedom of expression and intuitive mark-making associated with Abstract Expressionism. Similarly, It was also noted that many of the works created at GCSS (Figure 3) exhibited visual qualities resembling those found within the Abstract Expressionist tradition with artists such as Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Robert Motherwell, and Hans Hofmann being proponents. Works by these artists displayed spontaneity, physical engagement with materials, and emotional expression through gestures. Several artworks produced by participants, including those by Participant 1A, Participant 1 B, and Participant 1 C demonstrated sweeping brushstrokes and dynamic compositional arrangements reminiscent of Hans Hofmann's gestural painting style, particularly his work *Nulli Secundus* (figure 3a).



Figure 3 (a) Hans Hofmann, 'Nulli Secundus' 1964

(b) artwork by Participant 1A

(c) art work by Participant 1B

(d) art work by Participant 1C

Importantly, these similarities should not be interpreted as imitation. Rather, they demonstrate that authentic artistic expression by persons with intellectual disabilities can naturally generate visual languages comparable to those celebrated within mainstream art history. Such findings challenge assumptions that artistic sophistication is dependent upon formal academic training or conventional cognitive abilities.

Attitudes Towards Artmaking

Participants in both schools displayed enthusiasm and curiosity throughout the creative sessions. Upon the arrival of the researchers, many students eagerly anticipated participation and expressed excitement about the activities. Their engagement supports Nyatefe's (2018) assertion that children are naturally drawn to art because it provides opportunities to communicate experiences and understanding of their world.

Initially, many participants waited for instructions before beginning their work (Figure 4). This tendency likely reflects the structured educational environments within which they have been learning. This is what Kassah and Phillips (2017) would draw attention to,

about, special schools frequently combining theory and practical instruction, encouraging students to rely on teacher guidance before undertaking activities independently.

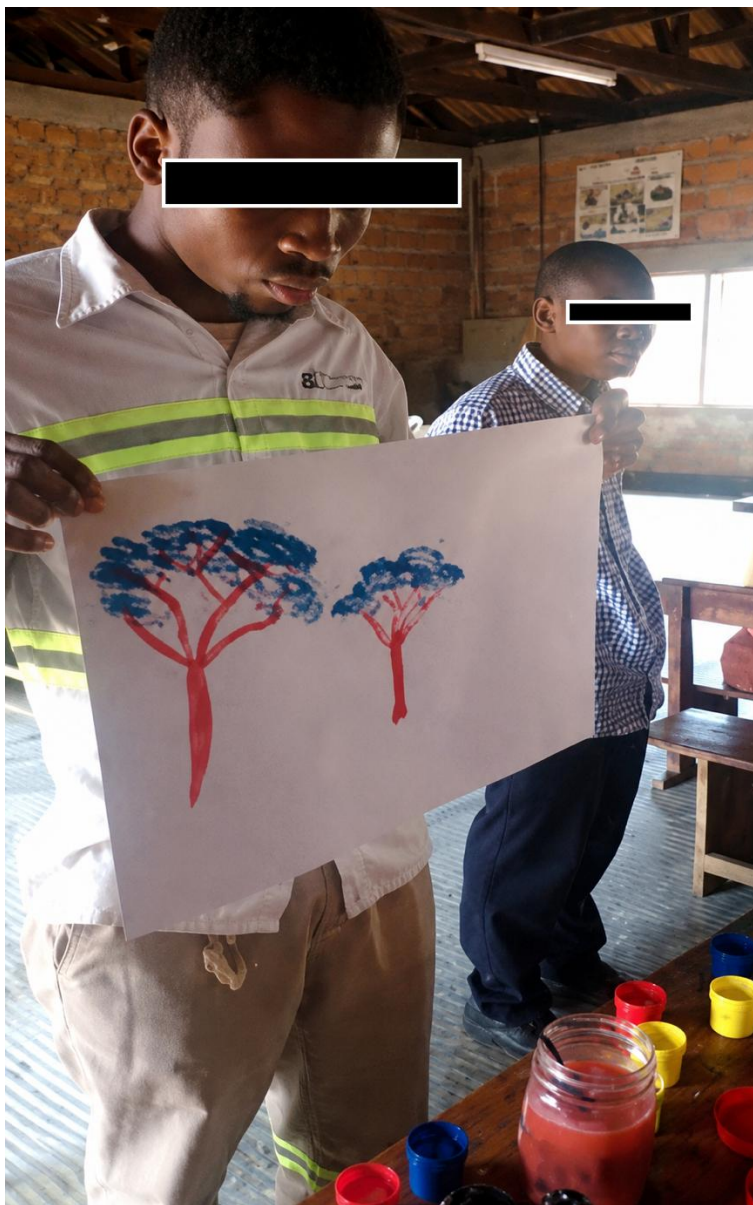


Figure 4 Guidance provided by an instructor at. GCSS. Photo. Credit: Ivan F.

Ferguson-Fotwe

As the sessions progressed, however, participants became increasingly autonomous. The deliberate reduction of researcher control allowed students to make independent artistic decisions and develop confidence in their creative abilities. This transition from dependence to autonomy represents one of the most significant developments observed during the study.

Sources of Artistic Inspiration

The artwork produced by participants were largely inspired by their immediate environments and personal experiences. Common themes included trees, houses, insects, human figures, names, and other familiar elements from daily life. These subjects were rarely represented literally; instead, participants transformed and reinterpreted them through abstraction and imaginative reconstruction.

At GCSS, the initial examples of trees and houses served merely as points of departure. Participants quickly personalized these forms, incorporating additional imagery and symbolic references. Similarly, participants at DLCSVS responded to their surroundings through highly individualized visual interpretations.

These observations indicate that the artistic production of PWID is deeply connected to lived experience. Their artworks function as visual records of observation, memory, imagination, and personal meaning rather than simple reproductions of reality.

Colour Choices and Stylistic Characteristics

Colour played a central role in the artistic expressions of participants. At DLCSVS, many participants initially favored single-colour compositions (Figure 5a). This tendency may have reflected familiarity, confidence, personal preference, or social influence. However, subsequent sessions revealed increased experimentation as participants encountered new colours and colour-mixing opportunities.

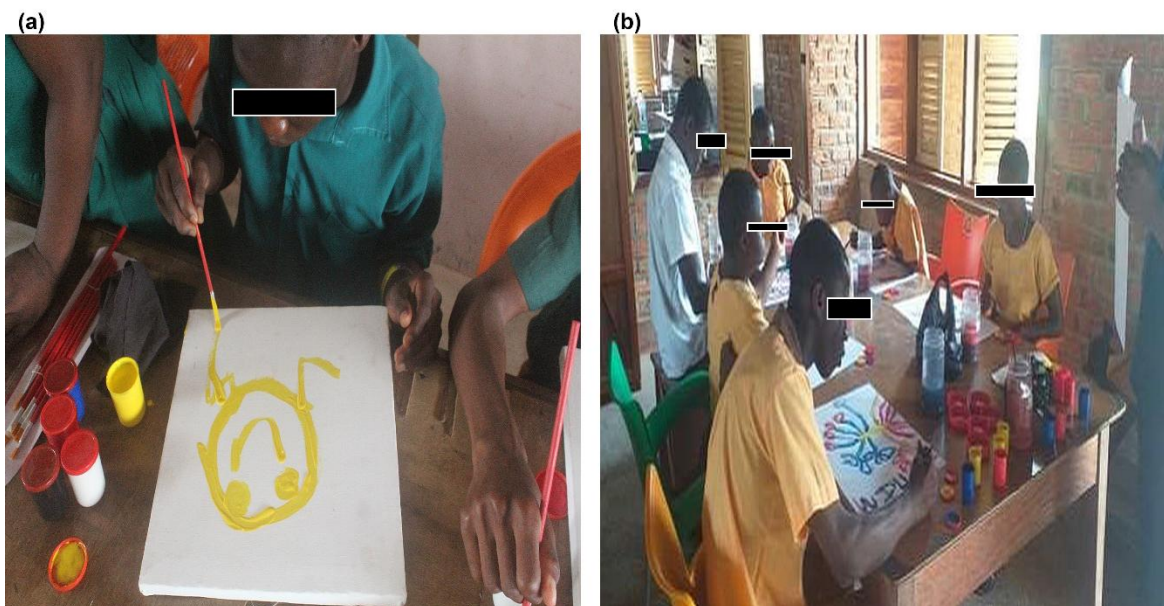


Figure 5. (a) Participant from DLCSVS using single color for his artwork (b) Participant from GCSS using multiple color for his artwork. Photo credited to Ivan Fiifi Ferguson-Fotwe and Joshua Edem K. Nyatefe

At GCSS, participants readily employed multiple colours from the outset (Figure 5b). Although unintended colour mixtures frequently resulted from inadequate brush cleaning, these accidental combinations often enriched the visual complexity of the artworks. Red, blue, and yellow emerged as dominant colours across both schools and were frequently combined with expressive lines, shapes, letters, and symbolic forms.

The diversity of colour choices and stylistic approaches demonstrates that artistic expression among PWID is highly individualized. No single style or aesthetic dominated the artworks. Instead, each participant developed a distinctive visual language that reflected personal preferences, experiences, and creative intentions.

Individual Artistic Expressions

The individual artworks further illustrate the diversity and originality present within the participants' creative outputs. Participant 1 D's compact black tree emphasized structure and contrast through bold forms and fibrous roots. Participant 1 E's blue tree extended beyond the boundaries of the working surface, introducing expressive distortion and scale. Participant 1 F transformed the tree motif into an abstract form resembling a mushroom cloud, demonstrating a highly personal interpretation of the subject.

Participant 2 A combined representational and symbolic imagery by incorporating a tree, an insect, and textual references to his own identity. Participant 2 B employed decorative patterns, vibrant colours, and intricate surface treatments to create a tree

resembling a coconut palm. Participant 2C integrate architecture, landscape, human figures, and personal inscriptions into a unified composition dominated by red (Figure 5 (a-c) and Figure 6 (a-c))



Figure 6 artwork of trees at DLCSVS, (a) Participant 1D, tree, Acrylic on Canvas. 2018. (b) Participant 1E, Acrylic on Canvas. (c) Participant 1F, tree, Acrylic on Canvas. . Photo credit: Joshua Edem K. Nyatefe



Figure 7 artwork of trees at GCSS 1 (a) artwork by Participant 1A (b) artwork by Participant 2B (c) artwork by Participant 2C. Photo credited to Ivan Fiifi Ferguson-Fotwe

Collectively, these works reveal substantial variation in composition, symbolism, colour use, and representational strategies. The diversity of outcomes demonstrates that persons with intellectual disabilities are active creators capable of generating unique and meaningful artistic responses.

Implications for Disability and Art

The findings of this study demonstrate that persons with intellectual disabilities possess significant artistic potential and can create works that communicate meaning, evoke emotional responses, and engage with artistic traditions recognized within mainstream art discourse. Their artworks should therefore be viewed not merely as therapeutic by-products but as legitimate artistic productions worthy of critical appreciation.

The visual and conceptual similarities observed between participants' artworks and established artistic movements such as Abstract Expressionism reinforce the universality of creative expression. These findings challenge stereotypes that portray PWID as incapable of sophisticated artistic engagement and instead position them as artists capable of contributing meaningfully to contemporary visual culture.

Ultimately, the study affirms that art provides persons with intellectual disabilities with a powerful means of self-expression, communication, identity formation, and social participation. Through artistic practice, they reveal capacities that are often overlooked and demonstrate that creativity transcends the limitations traditionally imposed by disability labels.

Conclusion

This study sought to explore how persons with intellectual disabilities (PWID) express themselves through art and to examine the artistic qualities of the works they produce. The findings demonstrate that, when provided with appropriate support, materials, and an enabling environment, PWID are capable of creating original, meaningful, and aesthetically compelling artworks. Art provided participants with a powerful medium through which they could communicate emotions, ideas, experiences, and perceptions of their environment. As Lewis (2014) observes, art creates opportunities for individuals to transform mental images and emotions into tangible forms, offering limitless possibilities for self-expression.

The study revealed that participants did not merely engage in art as a recreational or therapeutic activity; rather, they functioned as artists who made creative decisions regarding colour, composition, symbolism, and subject matter. Although some participants were initially given prompts, such as painting a tree, many extended beyond these instructions and incorporated elements from their personal experiences and surroundings. This demonstrates artistic agency, imagination, and the capacity for independent visual thinking.

A particularly significant finding was the resemblance between the participants' artworks and recognized artistic traditions, especially Abstract Expressionism and Art Brut. The spontaneous brushstrokes, gestural marks, bold colour applications, abstract interpretations of form, and emphasis on emotional expression found in the participants' works bear notable similarities to the approaches employed by renowned artists such as Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Robert Motherwell, and Hans Hofmann. These similarities suggest that the artistic productions of PWID should not be viewed as inferior or merely therapeutic creations but as authentic artistic expressions that share qualities with works celebrated within the history of modern art. The findings therefore challenge conventional assumptions about intellectual disability and creativity, demonstrating that artistic excellence and originality can emerge irrespective of cognitive limitations.

Furthermore, the study reinforces the communicative power of art. As reported by Baaijens (2011), audiences viewing artworks produced by PWID often experience profound emotional responses and leave exhibitions with a deeper understanding of the artists and their experiences. Similarly, the artworks examined in this study communicated aspects of the participants' identities, emotions, and relationships with their environment. Through visual expression, participants conveyed meanings that transcended verbal communication, affirming art's role as an important language of inclusion and self-representation.

The findings must also be understood within the broader social context of disability in Ghana. Persons with intellectual disabilities continue to experience significant stigma, exclusion, and discrimination. They are often perceived as incapable of meaningful intellectual or creative contributions and are frequently denied opportunities for participation in social, educational, and cultural life. However, the artistic achievements documented in this study provide compelling evidence that such perceptions are misplaced. The participants demonstrated creativity, persistence, imagination, and the ability to produce works of artistic merit. Their accomplishments serve as a powerful counter-narrative to stereotypes that portray PWID as incapable or dependent.

The positive attitudes displayed by participants throughout the art sessions further highlight the value of creative engagement. Participants appeared enthusiastic, motivated, and socially interactive during the sessions, suggesting that art can contribute not only to self-expression but also to confidence building, social participation, and personal development. Consistent with previous studies (Bawa & Osei, 2018; Bawa & Osei, 2020), the findings indicate that PWID benefit from supportive instructional approaches, patience, and environments that encourage exploration and creativity rather than rigid control.

The study therefore advocates for increased opportunities for artistic development among PWID. Fine art education, community-based art programmes, and inclusive creative initiatives should be expanded to enable individuals to develop their talents and pursue artistic interests. Importantly, exhibitions of artworks produced by PWID should be organized not as charitable displays intended to evoke sympathy, but as platforms for recognizing artistic achievement, celebrating creativity, and promoting social inclusion. Such exhibitions can serve as powerful tools for challenging stereotypes, fostering public awareness, and bridging the gap between PWID and the wider community.

Additionally, educational institutions and disability organizations should leverage digital platforms and websites to showcase the achievements, artworks, and stories of PWID. By controlling their own narratives, these institutions can challenge negative labels and misconceptions that continue to surround intellectual disability. Digital visibility can help shift public discourse from one of deficit and dependency to one of capability, creativity, and contribution.

Ultimately, this study concludes that persons with intellectual disabilities can be capable artists whose works possess communicative power, originality, and aesthetic value. Their artistic productions deserve recognition within both disability studies and mainstream art discourse. By creating opportunities for artistic expression, public exhibition, and community engagement, society can move beyond stigmatizing perceptions and begin to appreciate PWID not for their disabilities but for their talents, creativity, and humanity.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

Reference

- [1] Aguilar, S. (2019). *Art therapy in a museum setting for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities: A literature review* (Expressive Therapies Capstone Thesis No. 112). Lesley University.
https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/expressive_theses/112
- [2] American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. (n.d.). *Frequently asked questions on intellectual disability*. <https://www.aidd.org/intellectual-disability/definition/faqs-on-intellectual-disability>
- [3] Baaijens, M. (2011, December). The ABC for inclusive tertiary art education. *The Learning Connexion*, 31.
- [4] Bawa, A., & Osei, M. (2018). English language education and children with intellectual disabilities. *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, 7(11), 2704–2715.
- [5] Bawa, A., & Osei, M. (2020). Integrating drawing in teaching English language at Yumba Special School for children with intellectual disabilities. *Journal for Learning through the Arts*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.21977/D916142462>
- [6] Bragge, A., & Fenner, P. (2009). The emergence of the "Interactive Square" as an approach to art therapy with children on the autistic spectrum. *International Journal of Art Therapy*, 14(1), 17–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17454830903006323>
- [7] Kassah, B. L. L., Kassah, A. K., & Phillips, D. (2017). Children with intellectual disabilities and special school education in Ghana. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2017.1374358>
- [8] Caldwell, K., Brinko, K. T., Krenz, R., & Townsend, K. (2008). Individuals with intellectual disabilities: Educators in expressive arts therapy. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2008.01.001>
- [9] Constitute Project. (2013, October 4). *Ghana's Constitution of 1992 with amendments through 1996*.
<https://www.constituteproject.org>
- [10] Fiaku, D. (2020). *We can self-express: A painting exploration with intellectually disabled persons* (Unpublished thesis). Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana.
- [11] Ghana Statistical Service. (2014). *2010 population and housing census report: Disability in Ghana*. Ghana Statistical Service.
- [12] Ghana Statistical Service. (2014). *2010 population and housing census report: Disability in Ghana*. Retrieved from
- [13] Inclusion Ghana. (2011, July). *Report on the level of stigmatization, discrimination and exclusion of persons with intellectual disability and their families in Ghana*. <http://inclusion-ghana.org>
- [14] Inclusion Ghana. (2021). *Equal opportunities and inclusion for all persons with intellectual disabilities in Ghana*.
<https://www.inclusion-ghana.org/special-schools.php>
- [15] Lewis, L. (2014, January 21). *17 amazing art studios for adults with special needs*. Friendship Circle.
<https://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2014/01/21/17-amazing-art-studios-for-adults-with-special-needs/>
- [16] Nyatefe, J. E. (2018). *ABC portraits: An experience with intellectually disabled persons* (Unpublished manuscript). Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology.
- [17] Nyarko, D. P., & Ghana Statistical Service. (2014). *2010 population and housing census report: Disability in Ghana*. Ghana Statistical Service.
- [18] Rhodes, C. (2008). An other academy: Creative workshops for artists with intellectual disability. *The International Journal of the Arts in Society*, 3, 131.
- [19] Vick, R. M., & Sexton-Radek, K. (2008). Community-based art studios in Europe and the United States: A comparative study. *Art Therapy*, 25(1), 4–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2008.10129353>