

DANCE: A PSYCHOSOCIAL TOOL FOR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

The phenomenon of change is a major attribute of any society. Therefore change is naturally in built in the developmental process of man and his environment. Change is simply transformation form one state of being to another, thus change may trigger off positive or negative consequences. Since the emergence of the society, man and the emergent social institutions have continued to respond to the dynamisms of socio-political change, motivated by prevalent factors within each geographical area, Nigeria for instance is large and vast and is therefore faced with the problem of size yet the basic socio-political unit of the acclaimed giant of Africa is the family.

The family is an important social institution that functions as the organizer and stabilizer of social values of a given society. The University of the Family therefore makes it the primary social institution common in very communal enclave, thus the family according to Mezieobi is:

A social group in which there are sexually cohabiting men and women with possibly off-springs or children resulting from the cohabitation (171).

This definition obviously reveals three different members of the family, the father, mother and the children.

The father and mother are dependent adults capable of fending for themselves; while the child is a minor, who is helpless and depends on the parents for support and upbringing. Evidently, the child is the weakest member of the family. The place of the child in the family entitles him to social welfare, participation, protection and survival rights. But the question to be answered is: who is a child? According to Canice Nwosu, a child is:

A designated member of the family, whose status attracts certain degrees of sentiments, these sentiments cannot be ignored when the family is changing, because the family is an important social institution that functions as an organizer and stabilizer of social values of a given society (31).

The right of the child therefore comprises the entitlements, privileges and obligations of the child as stated by conventions, natural justices, fair play and the laws of the land. The deplorable state of most families in Africa notwithstanding government and non-governmental organizations in Africa, appear to be responding to the global call to better the condition of the child. The United Nations report on the state of the world's children (2012) lends credence to this clarion call when it calls on the international community to undertake the urgent actions that are necessary to realize the rights of every child everywhere without exception. Hodges confirms that:

Child right movement gained recognition only in the 90s, but it advocates the autonomy of children and constructs them as free agents capable of walking important decisions regarding their own lives (660).

The child is a minor therefore; it is commonly recognized in most cultures that the child is of subordinate status. Thus in most communities, children are meant be seen and not to be heard, even when they are ever heard, the views expressed by the child may not carry much weight when held against views expressed by men. In some culture, birth order can affect a child's behaviour, personality and position in the family. Keen affirms that:

The importance of birth order has its effect on a child's behaviour, personality and performance (2).

In most African societies, a first-born is in a ***revivify but somewhat difficult position in his or her family. They are often burdened with exceedingly great parental expectations particularly if they are boys. Based on their impact in family position they are the only children who gain undivided attention from their parents. Their every move is under scrutiny, for instance a quick check of most family photo albums will probably show twice as many photos of a first born child than any other child particularly when they were babies and toddlers. First-born children are also trailblazers for the siblings that follow.

Many children complain that their parents are often more strict and more anxious about raising first-borns than they are with the children that follow. The developmental view in a child is the psychological perspective emphasizing changes that occur across the life span, Smarts sees human development as:

The scientific study of systematic psychological changes that occur in human beings over the course of their life span (36).

The development view is originally concerned with infants and children it also includes adolescents, adult development aging, and

the entire life span. The developmental psychology in children include issues such as the gradual accumulation of knowledge versus stage- like development or the extent to which children are born with innate mental structures versus learning through experience.

The Practical use of Dance as a Psychological tool for Child's Development

In most schools, different dance movements are used to develop the psychosocial retentive memory of children starting from 0 months to 2 yrs old. In Hopebay Group of schools Lagos state, dance movements are employed in teaching children in their Nursery school. The dance movements are called the la, la, la dance. The sole aim of this type of dance at this age is to teach the children, how to remember things and also the ability to say something meaningful to a certain extent. The teacher or dance instructors always make use of every possible means like symbols, movement, drawings etc to actualize the aim of these dances. To achieve this, various steps are involved. These steps are:

Step 1: The children are dressed in different colourful and attractive costumes, especially colours that portray the different colours of the Rainbow.

Step 2: The teacher or dance instructor will also dress up in colourful attire depending on what is to be taught to the children.

Step 3: The children are made to wait for their teacher to come out. This la, la, la, dance movement is always exciting to the children, so they always look up to it. The teacher must also bring himself down to the level of the children for the exercise to be entertaining. Before the teacher comes out the children will be playing, trying to repeat what the teacher taught them the previous day. This exercise

normally takes place every Wednesday in Hopebay group of schools. According to John Ike:

I use this dance movement to teach the children about colours, alphabets and shapes which they will never forget in their life.

The dance is accompanied with a little musical instrument, the dance itself goes thus:

La la la A for Apple
 Chorus La la la A for Apple
 Teacher "La la la" B for Ball
 Children (Chorus) "La la la" B for Ball
 Teacher La la la C for Cat
 Children (Chorus) La la la C for Cat
 Teacher La la la R for Red
 Children (Chorus) La la la R for Red
 Teacher La la la Y for Yellow
 Children (Chorus) La la la Y for Yellow.

This goes on and on until it is time for break. The principal Obidike Samuel confirms that: "The children tend not to forget things taught to them using this format". This music like dance movement seems as a psychosocial tool in developing the ability of the children to know the names of objects, shapes and colours of things. The dance movement is so unique, that each of the steps represents a particular object, with this the children develops their ability to remember things and also improve their ability in pronouncing names of objects, animals and places.

The second experimental dance in Ojoalaaba, Lagos. Three triple P's Day-care Nursery School located at Festac town Lagos, is

yet another school which employs dance in teaching its pupils. Pupils in this school are usually between the ages 0-6 months. The dance movement is called "Thank you Jesus" and it is used in developing the brain of the children which is still "tabula rassa". Okafor, Philip confirms that:

The child's brain at this stage is clean, a tabula rassa with no past experience. So with the dance movement it can develop in myriads of directional flow to attain a stable personality.

The sole aim of this dance at this tender age is to consciously familiarize the children with their environment and also get them accustomed to certain situations like; action reaction and cause and effect. This psychosocial dance movement "Thank you Jesus" interpretatively teaches the child how to give thanks to God in every situation. Ugochukwu says that:

Even, though their parents bring their children to day care as mini-school. We purposely use that medium to develop their brains.

The movement for "Thank you Jesus" is unique and semiotically interpretative. The teacher claps his/her hands three times and raises his/her hands and says "Thank you Jesus". The environment is always noisy here due to the cries of the children, noisy toys, etc. This makes assimilation of the song difficult for the children, but with constant repetition by the teacher, the song will gradually register in their minds. The children at this tender age find it difficult to talk, but with the dance movement as a psycho-social tool for development the children will gradually recognize the action. This is why whenever their parents unconsciously raise their hands up, the baby will try to say "Thank you Jesus" but in an uncommunicative manner. This he/she does with smiles and

clapping of hands. According to Umeh:

I noticed whenever I raised up my hands, my little baby will be smiling clapping his hands, try to say something and still raise up his own hands.

Another aim of this dance is to train the children on how to give thanks to God at any given time. The teachers during this dance exercise use every possible means to impact the knowledge to the children. For instance, some of them use pictorial drawings of children dancing raising their hands to say "Thank you Jesus". Some use musical noisy joys built to be saying "Thank you Jesus" All these techniques are used to develop and sustain retentive memory in children. Dance as a psychosocial tool for child development helps in developing the children in every aspect of human existence. The primary focus of psychosocial dance is as follows:

- It develops the children's capacity to make sensory and motor decisions. Also how to use feedback to modify and eliminate errors from their behaviour.
- It helps in developing their emotional growth.
- It helps in teaching the children some non-loco-motor movement like bending, stretching, twisting and turning.
- It helps to develop the child's flexibility.
- It helps to develop children's endurance capability.
- It helps to develop the necessary skill needed in human existence which is balance, speed and coordination.

- It also develops auditory perception and auditory spatial awareness in children.
- It develops visual perception and visual spatial awareness in the children.
- It develops kinesthetic perception in the children.

Dance is one of the first human activities which did not directly serve the mere survival of man. The experience of dance came as man's effort to express individual and collective feelings; such existence of dance in the early periods of man may be witnessed only by pictorial representation and carved images of early people on the walls of the caves. Abraham is of the opinion that:

The pictures were created in phrases showing the developmental stages of man with his cultural environment (29).

Dance to the Africans is not just a road side art or biological urge; rather it is a process of exposure and training which being at birth, a child begins to appreciate dance as an art with help of kinetic sense; he or she gets within his or her environment whether consciously or unconsciously. According to Obonguko:

An Africa woman fastens her baby on her back and goes about her daily activities. As she executes these activities the kinetic sense of her child on her back is gradually being tuned. The child is gradually exposed to the world of colour, costumes, rhythm, patterned awareness and shaped human bodies, through this he develops the ability to communicate with the world around him through this elements which

around him through this elements which ignited by powerful rhythm of dance (2).

In every work of art especially dance, what makes it more effective is its ability to follow a particular rhythm. So the rhythmic nature of dance is always ever-green in the minds of the people. Dance in every community is appreciated, because of its aesthetic appeal as well as its religious and sacred significance. According to Ejike:

Sacred dance is the only effective means of communication between the ancestral spirit and the living. And also the easiest way to awaken them from slumber especially with ageless movement accompanied with the Iroko drums (4).

Dance as an art uses non-verbal forms to communicate with its audience. These non-verbal forms always come in form of gestures, movement and more. In non-verbal communication, rhythm and movement are important. The rhythm in every dance tells us the situation of event at a particular time. Rhythm in dance is not static, it changes. We have fast rhythm, slow rhythm depending on the situation of events. For instance, in ceremonial occasions, the rhythm of the dance movement is always slow; to showcase the majestic nature of the ceremony at that particular time the movements in dance are very communicative in nature. Movements in dance vary, depending on the culture of the people.

For instance, some movements concentrate on the waist only, some on the feet only, shoulders, chest and some on their facial expression. In all these movements, its rhythmic nature concentrates more on those parts of the body that serve as the communicative point. For instance, in Ohofia war dance, the rhythm is always fast

and the concentration is on the chest and shoulder. Rhythm and movement in dance are indispensable. According to Primus:

Dance in African content translates every day experiences of Africans into movement and therefore concludes that dance in Africa is totally of African life (29).

Dance is always colourful and enjoyable, when performed with the actual costume and make-up which may suit the existing dance at that particular moment. With the right costume and make-up, the audience will be able to appreciate the dance fully. Dance in modern theatre is not just a part time engagement; it is also an economy boosting centre, both for the dancers and their managers. Dance makes a statement about the society that owns it. It could be used to highlight the experiences of the society. Thus, it actualizes with the use of the human body as a tool. According to Traore:

Dance uses human body, to reproduce the action and passion of man in order to express a collective emotion to teach a religious rite (27).

The communal aesthetic nature of dance shows the real philosophy of dance. That is why no matter how developed a society is, dance is still sacred, because of its ability to date the beginning of development and its ability to associate, infuse and adapt to the new development trends.

The Psychosocial Development of the Child through Dance

The psychosocial effectiveness of dance in child development is obvious in every aspect of their daily activities be it personal relationship or inter-personal relationship, between their biological parents, teacher and dance instructors.

The psychosocial implication of dance amongst the children at tender ages, has metamorphosed beyond its aesthetic and semiotic effectiveness, to a decisive developmental tool both in their learning, behaviour, understanding and interpretation. The psychosocial effectiveness of dance is incomparable. It is a social tool for enhancing the three "Hs" in children at their early stage of growth. The three "Hs" are the head, the heart and the hand. The importance of dance as a social tool in child development of the three Hs cannot be over-emphasized. According to Heathcote:

Dance as psychosocial tool has altered greatly during the last twenty-five years and it is still changing. There has been a shift in direction from an interest in the personal development of the individual through the acquiring of theatrical and improvisational skills to the recognition of dance as a precise teaching instrument, which works best when it is part of the learning process (17).

In recognizing dance as a powerful psychosocial tool for development of the child, Paul states that;

Dance in classroom, is an activity aimed at producing human beings who are more alive to ... and sensitive to their environment (24).

He goes further to say that dance is educational, as well as a recreational tool in its own right. This is corroborated by Dadirep, when he said:

Dance stimulates relaxation for proper learning

and gives the child the opportunity to choose what he wants to learn from a given dance movement and experience (37).

Dance as a psychosocial tool can be used to arouse interest to learn, from children who before this time have lost interest in education, and make them describe the thoughts in their mind to be more effective and lively again. We are concerned not with dance as a mere aesthetic movement, but dance as a vehicle for teaching and learning in the classroom. One of the important benefits of dance as a social tool for development is the enjoyment and feeling of success the child gains from it and it is this enjoyment and feeling that the teacher or dance instructor should capitalize on, in handling issues concerning under schooled and unschooled children, because of its overall effects. If dance amongst the children is to serve its social purpose, it should be practical, meaningful and relevant to the context in which it is needed.

Dance as a psychosocial development tool can be used positively to promote language development with young children. This can be seen within teacher/child interaction and child/child interaction; during these interactions a great language development takes place.

To achieve effective language development cum good communication with dance in classroom, the teacher after preparing his lessons should use meaningful movements in passing his dynamic ideas to the children. Through this the children will not forget the lessons for that day. It has been proven that "children do remember more with visuals than written text". Dance movement is arranged in sequence for the purpose of instruction or transmission of knowledge, ensuring a uniform progression through a predetermined sequence, is of paramount importance. Dance as a

psychosocial developmental tool offers an exciting range of opportunities and possibilities for the development of children, not only of bodily, spatial and dynamic concepts, but also for language and learning process.

It is therefore a worthwhile enterprise to try to identify those contexts which allow the teacher of dance to engage mostly in genuine and collaborative interaction. Dance provides children with the opportunities for social development, through dance section the child can express his problems, wants and dislikes. Dance helps the child to overcome ignorance, in the face of social ethics as the child becomes conscious in matters that relate to manner and behaviour. He also acquires a wider social awareness. The saying that no man is an island comes into play here, as children come to realize that the success of their learning needs a communal effort.

Through meaningful dance the children learn to cooperate with others, to plan together, enact ideas together and to tolerate one another. Participation in dance sections in classrooms gives children confidence in themselves. It boosts their ego and gives them an improved self concept of their person. This is because; dance rehearsals encourage them to think, try and fail. Through this, the child learns to open up and to trust his ability.

There are different traits associated with man in his environment that require tolerance to deal with. Those traits can be anger, deformity, poverty and otherwise. Dance acquaints the child with these diverse character traits in people, just as it enhances his understanding of these physiological defects and deficiencies in human existences. Therefore dance as a psychosocial tool promotes the child's tolerance attitude towards himself and other people.

In dance movement rehearsals, children always choose the familiar roles before going into the unfamiliar roles. They at times

dance to imitate various professions like; Doctors, Lawyers, Engineers, Priests and at times a woman in labour about to deliver. Dance with its psychosocial effectiveness helps the children to know and learn that every child has a right to live like himself.

Dance as a psychosocial tool amongst children is more than the exploring of different ways to make a shape or learning a series of steps to music; rather it is a way of proving that the body is as an instrument of expression and communication. Through dance, children learn teamwork, focus, and improvisational skills. Dance in its developmental form awakens new perceptions in children which help them learn and think in new ways. Children need to express and communicate their ideas and to be given the opportunity to make creative decisions, even at a young age. This decision making promotes self esteem and independent thinking for children. According to Karen,

Learning dance movement of others expand the child's movement vocabulary, while creating one's own movement will put the child in a teaching role and give her the chance for her voice to be heard (28).

Dance as a psychosocial tool for child development, enables children understand themselves better and also the world in which they live. Through the acts, teachers often teach children to recognize the contribution of all cultures to the fabric of their society and increase their understanding of diversity and values of all people.

Dance in its psychosocial form also helps children learn traditional folk dance and create new ones based on children's ideas. It also enhances skills of perception, observation and concentration which will undoubtedly help children in all their school subjects. The children in their development stages, with the aid of dance become coordinated and physically fit. By teaching a child early in life the importance of dance movement and its psychosocial essence, the

teacher helps to instill the ability to remain physically fit throughout the course of his or her life. Dance uses its psychosocial essence to tell stories to children change their moods and help them to identify cultures. It can also be used in the conscious and subconscious mind of the children to evoke memories that can be re-lived and revisited throughout their lifetime.

Conclusion

Based on the researcher's findings, it is clear that dance is a psychosocial tool for child development: Dance for children is a great tool for building incomparable psychosocial skills. It affords one the opportunity to teach the children the importance of being part of something only few children really understand and that will serve them as they flow and become adults.

If you're a teacher and you really want to use dance as a teaching technique, excellent emphasis should be on using dance for the personal development of the children more than competitive opportunities particularly in younger years. As the child's talents and enthusiasm for dance grow, the dance teacher can now channel its experiences, for core competitive opportunities and money Making Avenue. At this level, he dances to communicate, to be appreciated and also to earn a living.

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