

ISSUES AND STRATEGIES IN CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



B.C. Emenogu
O.V.N. Okoroh
M.O. Ofoefuna
G.C. Nwaeze

(c) 1992 B. C. Emenogu et al
First Published 1992

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronics, mechanical, including photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

Hybrid Publishers
Oguta Road Onitsha

Printed in Nigeria by

ISBN 978-2116-38-6

THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

Chapter 20

By

Queen Obinaju (Mrs)

Dept. of Pre-primary & Primary Education

University of Uyo

Akwa Ibom State

This paper shall try to relate music in its basic sense to the teaching/learning situation in the nursery school. It shall try to find out when it is necessary, its uses and its weak points while in use. Hornby (1974) views music as "an art of pleasing combination of sounds in rhythm and harmony" and as "the art of controlling and organizing sounds into intelligible patterns." Many just refer to Music as "an art of sound". Music being an art or the use of words such as "controlling" and "organizing" suggest that music is highly structured.

With the above definitions, it becomes clear that music has a unique quality; that of pleasing and rendering an individual happy. To both adults and children, music serves the functions of pleasure although the type of music may differ. Basically, music connotes pleasure. In this write up, music would not be used as a subject on the time table, rather, as a method or an aid to a method.

Nursery education is a very recent development in Nigeria. Its aims as put down by the *National Policy On Education* (1981) include:

- a. effecting a smooth transition from the home to the school;
- b. preparing the child for the primary level of education;
- c. providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work;
- d. inculcating social norms;
- e. inculcating in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through exploration of nature and the local environment, playing with toys, artistic and musical activities;
- f. teaching co-operation and team spirit;
- g. teaching the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc. through play;
- h. teaching good habits especially good health habits.

A nursery class teacher is faced with how best he can fulfil the objectives stated above. His work becomes more and arduous as almost all the children are leaving home for the first time and feel abandoned in this new environment to be taken care of by a strange face. School phobia develops in most of them. Wailing and crying prevail.

Problems arise with the parents' misconception of the role and function of pre-primary education. It is often argued that nursery school children only spend their time singing, dancing and playing with toys, without achieving anything worthwhile. These complaints have the parents teachers association meetings as a fertile ground. Some parents go as far as threatening to withdraw their children from the school and sending them to "where they are taught".

Arising from this misconception, the second problem emanates. This involves the teachers of these nursery children and the proprietors. Nursery education is left in the hands of individual entrepreneurs. The goal of these proprietors among all other

flamboyant ones put across by them includes to make profit. They would not sit and watch parents take away children from their schools for reasons stated above. Therefore, they introduce subject matter and methods other than what is stipulated by the document and force children to move along with them.

One stops at this point to ask: Is the *National Policy On Education* correct to recommend the play approach with music and musical activities as its basic ingredient? Or are the teachers, proprietors and parents right to consider the use of music and musical activities as a mere waste of the child's time?

Bee (1981) contends that a wrong start lays a wrong foundation and no amount of correction at the top would remove the effect of the wrong foundation laid. It is pertinent to examine whether music has any educational advantages on the physical, social and cognitive development of the nursery school child. Put otherwise, can music be used to achieve the generally accepted aims of pre- primary education?

Music and Social Development In The Pre-primary School Child

Hess and Croft (1981) summarize it all as follows:

Music has an integrating power on the individual and the group.
The withdrawn child tends to relax his guards and is more ready
to participate with the others, while the hostile child seems to be
less aggressive, so that each is helped to become a contributing
member of the group.

The child comes into school with the initial fear of a new environment. He is tense, withdrawn and often aggressive. Music and musical activities break him in and force the different children to belong together. In this regards, music could be seen as a means of effecting a smooth transition from home to school.

Olson (1959) in recognition of the social importance of music stated "one of the most valuable social aspects of music is that children of varying talents and backgrounds can participate together". They bury their differences and join together. Musical activities also help them in their choice of friends. Each child's capabilities are elicited and children are attracted one towards another.

Team spirit encouragement could be seen even in the simplest and most common musical activity like. Form a circle, a big circle. During this activity, one child joins hands with another and in the process they "form a circle, a big circle."

Music and Physical Development Of The Pre-primary School Child.

Most musical activities require action. The children dance, jump or gesticulate according to the rhythm or the instructions of the music.

There is fire on the mountain

Run, run, run

A big, big, fire

Run, run, run

The fire is out (Then the children will stop running and squat down).

Running and squatting of a child in this song has a double fold advantage. Here only the physical advantage will be discussed while the cognitive advantage of timing will be discussed in the next sub-heading. Mitchell (1984) describes the physical growth of the pre-primary child as "alarming". He recognizes the need for exercise for this child as a means of gaining control of muscles formed and getting them ready for their eventual functions. By running and squatting which the child does in response to this song, the child is actually getting himself stronger and mastering the use of his muscles.

These exercises help the child to shed excess fat as well as increase body metabolism. The child who engages in exercises is found fit, strong and healthy. What relationship has music with exercise? Music maintains the timing; provides rhythm, issues instructions to be followed. For instance:

Eh jimmy, Eh jimmy-----
Eh Jimmy clap one-----
Clap two
Clap and turn around
Clap and shake your head, etc.

Generally, children are enticed to join in musical activities by the rhythm and the activities themselves and music maintains their stamina. Music in this regard serves a therapeutic function.

Music and Cognitive Development In The Pre-primary Child

Olson (1959) found music in early childhood education to be "a means of self expression" Music offers to each child an opportunity to express his ideas, thoughts and feelings. Music, they say, offers children another satisfying means of communication. Infact, the pre-primary child has limited vocabulary. He learns a lot from music; He increases his speech competence and finds another avenue of expression.

Musical activities provide avenues for the child's self assessment. "By expressing themselves through music, children can develop an appreciation of self. Through actual participation in musical activities, the child develops a feeling of competence in his ability both to express musical ideas and to win group acceptance" (Olson 1959).

While contributing to the part music has to play in cognitive development. Leeper et al (1974) have this to say: "Music can contribute to young children in many ways by offering opportunities for listening creating, singing, rhythmic responses and playing instruments" Through these activities, the child experiences joy and creative expression, develops listening skills and auditory discrimination. In the classroom situation, while teaching parts of the body, shapes, colours and other types of discriminations, the teacher finds it most suitable and less taxing to use musical activities.

"I have one head, two eyes
One nose and one mouth ---"

In the example above, music has been used to deliver some content. Music is by no means a waste of time. It is high in content validity.

To teach health habits, songs like this are used.

This is the way I brush my teeth-----
early in the morning
This is the way I comb my hair-----
early in the morning.

This song teaches the child what to do, when to do it as well as offering the child an opportunity to practice how to do it through accompanying musical activity.

Psychologically speaking, lessons reduced into a musical activity form has already chunked and structurized the material for easy passage into the long term memory. This material would also be recalled easily and in a systematic order.

In conclusion, music and activities have been found to be indispensable for nursery schools if these schools must fulfil their aims. Physically, children are exercised so that they keep fit and healthy. Socially, music breaks the barriers of individuality and motivates children to belong one to the other. In the cognitive domain also, music encourages attention, increases stamina, fastens retention and recall, improves speech and ensures early self concept attainment. In these three domains, music and musical

activities, singularly as a methods and combined with other methods achieve to a great extent the agreed objectives of pre-primary education. It is, therefore, strongly recommended that parents should not withdraw their children from pre-primary schools and send them straight to primary schools because these children would be missing quite a lot of worthwhile formation. Secondly, teachers should resist pressures from proprietors to change their methods from the use of music and musical activities as they can testify to the potency of this method in pre-primary education. In workshops organized for proprietors of these schools, it should be stressed that music and musical activities are quite indispensable for the nursery classes. The benefits should be outlined so that this awareness may lessen in them the urge to mislead the teachers of the pre-primary classes. If all these are done, it is hoped that pre-primary education would lay the foundation expected of it.

References

- Bee, H (1981) *The Developing Child*, New York: Harper.
- Herron, R.E. and South-Smith, B. (1971) *Child's Play*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Hess, R.D. and Bear, R.M. (1970) *Early Education Chicago*: Aldine Publishing Co.
- Hess, R.D. and Croft, D.J. (1981) *Teachers for Young children*. (3rd ed.) Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.
- Hornby, A.S. (1974) *Oxford Advanced Learner's dictionary of Current English*. Oxford University Press.
- Leeper, S.H. (1974) *Good Schools for Young Children* (3rd ed.) New York: Macmillan.
- Mitchell, J.J. (1984) *Child Development Toronto*: Holt and Rinehart.
- Helson, M.J. and Tripton, G. (1982) *Music for Early Childhood* New York: Silver Bunnnett.
- Nye, R. and Nye, Y. (1970) *Music in the Elementary school* New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc.
- Olson, W.C. (1959) *Child Development* (2nd edition) Boston: D.C. Heath.
- Schickedane (1977) *Strategies for Teaching Young Children*. Eagle Wood: Prentice-Hall Inc.
- Britannica Junior Encyclopaedia (For Boys and Girls) Vol. 2* Chicago: University press. 1975.
- Encyclopaedia International Vol. 1, No. 13*. New York: Grolier 1975.
- National Policy On Education*. Revised edition 1981.