

MUSIC: A MEANS OF INSTRUCTION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Abstract

Music is a universal language well understood by all and sundry especially children; and it remains the best method in the teaching and learning of children from ages one to five years. Children are always interested in singing and dancing even from the time they are born. Singing songs to them makes them happy, even when they are hungry and crying, singing always calms them down and helps them be patient while waiting for the food. This same way that music calms children, it also helps them learn. Teachers can easily teach children subjects for their age with music rather than the remote method of teaching and learning. This, many people especially teachers are very ignorant of. This paper x-rays and proves that music is a good means of instruction in early childhood learning.

Introduction

Music is one subject that is universal and understandable to all humans, young and old, males and females' even animals; as it is said 'birds sings'. Music's universality and easy understanding makes it very appealing to all and sundry, especially to children, which prove music's definition as a universal language worthwhile. Music is the most beautiful means of communication because everyone understands the language. This ability makes it very attractive and easy to be used as a means of instruction to children in early childhood. Perry & Perry in Levinowitz (1998) suggest that it is desirable for children to be

exposed to, trained in and enculturated with music for its own sake. Levinowitz (1998) opined that making music is as much a basic life skill as walking and talking; and that music is a way of knowing (p. 1). And Gardner (1983) believed that music intelligence is equal to linguistic intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily - kinesthetic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence and intrapersonal intelligence. These facts goes to show that music can be of great help in early childhood education, when applied as a means of instruction; as it has the ability to grant children interest in learning, and easy understanding of what is being taught; unfortunately, many childhood instructors do not understand this and hence do not employ it as a means of instruction, leading to difficulty in their teaching and learning activities. This paper addresses this problem.

Music

The subject, 'Music' has many definitions from different scholars. Blacking (1973) defined it as humanly organized sound (p. 57). Elliot (1995) says "it is a diverse human practice of constructing aural temporal patterns for primary values of enjoyment, self-growth and self-knowledge (p. 128). And Walker (1998) believed "it is a living analogue of human knowing, feeling, sensitivity, emotions, intellectual modus operandi and all other life-giving forces which affect human behavior and knowing" (p. 57). The subject of music transcends singing and dancing. It goes beyond organized sound to a therapeutic means of helping the sick, developing the brain and calming the nerves. It is meant to relax, motivate and inspire life and emotions to keep man in path it requires to go. Music actually is very powerful. Everyone understands the language of music and children do most. "Music is a natural and important part of young children's growth and development. Anyone who has worked with young children knows they love and appreciate music and can engage in musical activities at all levels" (Esimone 2012:1).

Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education is an education given to children from infancy to five (5) years of age, usually in an educational institution. It is the most crucial time in the life of a child. Whatever happens to children at this age is of greatest importance to their general development. The Federal Republic of Nigeria in her policy on Education (2004) defined early childhood education as "an education given in an educational institution to children prior to their entering the primary school, usually one (1) to five (5) years of age; It includes the crèche, the nursery and the kindergarten (pre-primary schools)" (p.10). Early childhood on the other hand, could be defined as the age before schooling or entry into primary school, usually from infancy to 5years. A child's needs at this period differ from those of older school children because early childhood sees the greatest growth and development. Levinowitz (1998) asserts:

It is a time when children learn about their world primarily through the magical process of play. The substance of play in very young children is usually comprised of the environmental objects and experiences to which they have been exposed. If the music environment is sufficiently rich, there will be a continuous and ever richer spiral of exposure to new musical elements followed by the child's playful experimentation with these elements.

Early childhood is an important time in the life of every child. It is obvious that children of this age tend to learn through mimicking and of course through what they see the adults do. They find boring the remote method of learning, and they like it when their environment is smart, busy and playful especially when it involves music (singing and dancing). This is why when music is used as a means of instruction in their learning activities, the results are rewarding, because the children find it easy and stress less to grasp what is being taught,

and the teachers find their teaching easy and simple. To this Esimone (2012) succinctly said:

Few things in life inspire more joy and excitement than the miracle of a newborn baby. Whether that child fulfills his or her vast potential is largely in the hands of the family, the community and the country into which he or she is born. The early years of life are very crucial. Hence when children are nurtured and cared for as should be in their earliest years especially with music; they are more likely to grow in a healthy way, develop full thinking capability, language, emotional and social skills that are very useful for their total well-being (p. 1).

Music as Instruction Tool

Music as earlier noted is the easiest and the simplest means of instructing children in early childhood. Paget (2006) reported that "music can do 60% of the teaching work in about 5% of the time (p. 5). This is a fact. When early childhood children are engaged with singing and dancing of what they are being taught, it is very obvious they grasp what they are taught than when the remote style of teaching is employed.

Idolor (2002) observed that "children are taught the norms and values of the society through music, to foster self-usefulness and facilitate the performance of expected roles in the wider society. And children's music repertoire teaches varieties of norms, values and skills" (p. 6). Okafor (2005) in supporting Idolor noted:

Music is central to many of the activities of life in our traditional society and because music is integral with life activities. The music that was learnt at childhood is important as a foundation for learning other things to come - art, craft, science, human relations and social

practices. It was a system that worked and worked very well. It was a system that laid a foundation of life to come. It was a system that was wholly utilitarian - everything it contained was useful to life in the society in which the child must move, live and have his being. People of all times have recognized the importance of music in education (p. 225).

Okafor (2005) further noted that Western educators taught children many things through songs. Primary health education was taught and how things were supposed to be done was taught through songs. Examples of such songs are:

Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy and wealthy and wise.

The old Mulberry bush song: *This is the way we brush our teeth, brush our teeth, brush our teeth, this is the way we brush our teeth, early in the morning. This is the way we comb our hair, comb our hair, comb our hair, this is the way we comb our hair, early in the morning and so on.*

Children were taught the simplest of prayers before eating through songs. *Some have food and cannot eat, some have no food and can't eat, we have food and we can eat, glory be to God on high...* (p.226).

Parts of the body were also taught children using songs thus: *Head, shoulder knees and toes, and ears and eyes, and mouth and nose, head shoulder knees and toes*

Okafor (2005) further observed that there were mnemonics for remembering things and the one for remembering the days of the year goes thus:

Thirty days hath September, April, June and November; February has twenty-eight and all the rest has thirty-one. And the months of the year were taught thus: January, February, March, April May June July, August September, October, November December.

To count the mathematical numbers of one to ten; they were taught using images that can easily be identified thus: *One two, buckle my shoe, three four, knock on the door, five six, pick up the sticks, seven eight, lay them straight. Nine ten a big fat hen.*

Children learn better through songs than the traditional method as can be seen from the examples above. This is because music comes natural to children and it is a more fun way to learn. Children love music and find it more entertaining and relaxing. As Okafor (2005) observed that children learning through songs or music makes learning very attractive to them, because they learn easily (p. 224). Everything can be taught through music (songs), from norms and values of the society, to simple daily hygiene at home and in school, to the letters of the English alphabets and even to the numerals of Mathematics. Everything is possible through the instrument of songs (music). Thus Okafor (2005) noted:

The folktale was full of songs which were very attractive to children because through the vehicle of the songs, they learnt easily without mental stress. They learnt through mnemonics and through simple game-songs, complicated subjects, numerology or numeracy, even to articulate words and use their language beautifully. All these were very simply taught to children through music (p. 224).

Ekpo (2008) also observed:

Children are inclined to be more interested in music, and possesses more positive attitude towards an

appreciation for music; when they are brought up in homes in which there is regular singing, in which various types and qualities of music are heard, performed, discussed and enjoyed and most importantly, in which they are guided and encouraged to respond or participate (p. 28).

Music no doubt has a natural inherent attraction which makes it attractive to all humans. Virtually every personality in the world, young and old, consciously or unconsciously responds to music positively. Music has provided people with opportunities for self-expression and rich rewarding enjoyment, especially children. It is a well-known fact that children naturally love music and are attracted to it, whether they are crying or laughing, eating or hungry, a mere musical sound pulls them out from their hidden areas; hence the importance of using music in their teaching and learning activities.

Teacher's Role in Using Music as an Alternative Method to Teaching

The importance of manpower in any important venture in life can never be over emphasized. The ages one (1) to five (5) years have been identified as a very critical period. Anuka (1998) believed "this age is very crucial in the learning process of the child and therefore demands children be provided with an enriched and scientifically sound early experiences" (p. 135). If scientifically sound experience must be provided, then the agent for this provision must be qualified and trained. Teachers in early childhood education need be professionally qualified and scientifically sound to teach early childhood children. They should be musically sound as well to be able to use music in their teaching and learning activities. Although it is not compulsory for early childhood teachers to have the knowledge of music with regards to acquiring a certificate in music, if they do, that is really good; but it is very necessary for such teachers to know how

to sing and dance, and have the ability to turn their lessons into songs.

Learning Environment

Children learn through interaction with their environment, as the teacher is a better facilitator than a dispenser of knowledge. Children no doubt may acquire knowledge through instructions from the teacher but learning makes more meaning through personal discoveries. To this Igboabuchi (1998) opined:

The whole environment of the child should be educative and so serve as a resource for learning. Within the classroom and even at the playground, there will be sufficient things to generate curiosity which leads to learning. Environment plays a more important role than heredity in a child's education (p. 49).

A good learning environment for early childhood education should have enough instructional materials such as picture books of different things, numerical posters, alphabetic posters and flash cards for their age, which serve as teaching aids. Such posters are spread about on the wall of the classroom where these children can see them every day they are in school. Provided for should also include some Western musical instruments such as toy pianos, toy guitars, trumpets, recorders (flute) and drums; and also indigenous musical instruments such as the ichaka (rattles), obere ogene (twin metal bells), ekwe (small slit drum) and so on, specifically for their age. As the children consistently see the pictures, and manipulate the musical instruments, what they are seeing are appealing to the variety of their senses as well as increasing their motor skills; these coupled with explanations from their teachers through songs are improving the effectiveness of teaching and the quality of learning. Onyejemezi (1998) in supporting the above noted:

Whether instructional materials are real or representations, their main purpose is to improve the effectiveness of teaching and the quality of learning. Specifically, they are used to appeal to a variety of senses, stimulate the learner into engaging in other related useful activities such as further observations, modeling, reading, writing and drawing; promote acquisition and longer retention and provide opportunities for independent and individual learning (p. 163).

The learning environment should also be spacious for running around of the children; since such motivates their desire for school and makes them have a healthy life. To this Igboabuchi (1998) asserts that:

Physical training and games are very important to ensure healthy function of the body and mind. It also makes for balanced formation, moral and character training. They should increase in complexity as the child advances in years. The school environment should be well stuffed with a variety of games equipment (p. 49).

Eze (1998) also opined that "plays, indoors or outdoors are natural and basic to health and the development of motor skills that order children's body movement - running, jumping, climbing, bending, throwing, turning, twisting, and with play equipment like swings and slides, musical toys and other types of toys that can help them be creative and explorative". These play equipment makes the environment for learning very attractive and interesting for the early childhood children, thus, increasing and motivating their desire for learning. It also helps them to associate with one another and appreciate one another as it helps them to initiate friendship with one another.

Moreover, when the outside environment is made available, it is also important to make the inside environment more attractive and desirable for learning. This could be done by making sure that the classrooms are spacious enough, has enough comfortable seats and tables, and well ventilating windows to allow for fresh air. All these make for comfortable and excellent conducive learning environment.

Benefits of Music to the Child

Every full-fledged man or woman today was once a little child, and hence had to go through a lot of experiences and influences to be where they were and who they were today. Whether they were privileged to have a music family or not, they all had the opportunity to hear music being made; and hence could say a lot of things they learnt as a result, which to a greater extent had helped shape their lives as adults. To this Perry and Peery in Levinowitz (1998) says:

Music making is a basic life skill as it is with walking or talking. It has so much to do with man's emotions, moods, feelings, attitude and opinions. It is desirable for children to be exposed to, trained and enculturated with music for its own sake. In other words, it is a birthright for all people irrespective of age, to be able to sing in tune and march to a beat (p.35).

Music is a means of voice development. Consistent singing on one's own develops the vocal cord and makes the voice finer to picking higher pitches. When this is introduced in the early childhood learning, the result in the later years of life is very enormous hence, using the singing voice is a learned complex skill. Also, learning to sing is a great skill for children to imbibe. It is a way in which they are able to express themselves. It helps them ease any stress in their lives and gives them a boost of confidence about their own ability. Besides, early childhood children are naturally curious about their world and like to experiment anything and everything; even the most archaic

activities they enjoy can make them very lively, hence singing in any activity is fun to them. To this Brendan Dunne (internet source) noted:

Not only does singing leave a deep trace in the memory but it also allows the children to be actively involved in their learning. Also, singing as an activity can address the whole child and not just the language learner, as songs often draw on their common experiences outside the language classroom. There are songs for almost every theme or occasion, not only can we practice common language topics such as numbers, colours, animals, food, actions etcetera; but we can also explore a range of emotions (such as excitement, joy, fear, anger and so on) and situations that are part of the child's everyday life. Songs linked to calendar events such as festivals may also give the children insights into their own and other world cultures. Music therefore affects the general development of early childhood children (<http://www.xtec.cat/cirel>).

Intellectually, music (singing) expands the memory of children and assists in the development of their language ability. Also, the effect of music on the brain and thinking are demonstrable and research has shown that during an electroencephalogram (EEG), music can change brain waves and make the brain more receptive to learning. Music connects the functions of the right and left hemispheres of the brain so that they work together and makes learning quick and easy. Brain function is increased when listening to music and studies have shown that music promotes more complex thinking. It can make connections between emotions, thinking and learning (Davies 2000).

Music has also been proven to help in the development of mathematical skills in children. Maxim (1989) noted: "singing games

such as counting rope jumps could help a small child to understand how to count" (p.289). Music is also essential in the acquisition of reading and writing in early childhood education. It is another outlet to stimulate the mind, for that's the only better way to gain knowledge and confidence in oral language and writing. Oral language is an interactive and social process, and music is a natural way for children to experience rich language in a pleasurable way. Children have a lot of energy, and learning movements and dances to songs always help to release some of them. The use of music for reading instruction allows children to easily recall vocabularies, facts, numbers, colours and shapes as the case might be.

Emotionally music provides stability for children. It is a fact that children introduced to music early in life has been found to be happy children later in life. It is really amazing seeing babies to toddlers who by mere listening to music (songs) makes them stop crying if they are crying, makes them happy if they are sad and makes them obedient if they are stubborn. This benefit made Plato as quoted by Abeles, Hoffer and Klotman (1984) to say:

Music is one of the most inspirational form of arts; their power is contained in its ability to by-pass reason and penetrates into the soul and the subconscious, manipulating ones feelings. It is a potent instrument than any other because rhythm and harmony find their way into the inward places of the soul of which they mightily fasten; imparting grace and making the soul of him that is rightly educated graceful (p. 4).

Music indeed is very potent and simple to be used in learning especially with children, because it has to do with their emotions. A child will always want to start dancing at any melody he or she hears, even when the child is crying, a melody makes the child stop crying and start dancing because the song touches the child's emotion. Thus,

to develop emotionally and socially, children need to feel worthy and confident; therefore the freedom to experiment and to respond in creative ways to music can produce these feelings. Songs properly sang can provide opportunity for children to learn appropriate ways of relating to others. It can provide ways of doing things with little or no fear of threat. And the easiest to gain self-expression and self-confidence is through music.

Summarily, music is a great tool in the instruction of early childhood children. Obviously from all the above facts, this book chapter has provided greater insights on the importance of using music (songs) in the teaching and learning activities of early childhood education. It has also revealed the ways through which this can be carried out. It is assured that when facts in this chapter are applied, rewarding results as explained will be recorded.

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