

AFRICA-SENSED MUSIC EDUCATION AND CREATIVITY: EXAMINING CHILDREN'S MUSICAL CREATIVITY IN PLAY AND GAME IN NIGERIAN TRADITIONAL SETTING

Bernadette C. Ugochukwu, Ph.D.

Introduction

Creative thinking is a gift of God in human persons, most times this gift starts at the early stage of life. Most children exhibit this in their extraordinary day to day activities, showing this talent in arts such as music, drawing, sculpture, dance, drama, in languages and technical works. They do this act unintentionally, playing the role of adults in their plays, making original songs and creating more from the existing ones by adding one thing or the other into their game and play, producing an intelligible art.

“Life is full of situations that call for creative problem solving” (Slavin, 1997:295). It is obvious that there are problems that may arise that do not need settlement but rather be solved and settled creatively. We are in a changing world today with digitalization and creativity. People now dwell so much in this modern act and style of living. That is a style of life children admire and imitate in creating and solving their own problems. Creativity is no longer a matter of age, but a matter of what one can do with his brain and how far he can go with his ability.

Today, we can see and witness the action and performances of people with creative mind all over the world especially in arts, (i.e. in music, drama, art drawing and other arts). It is interesting to watch children as they create and exhibit the art of creativity in them especially in their act of play and game. It is interesting as well to know that children's game creates fun and entertainment. That is where they display their natural talents through music, for whatever play or game children have is always accompanied with music. These games and plays (musical) are

initiated by children themselves of their own volition, controlled by them, the plays have no rule, they are structured and being motivated by the children themselves. It is of importance to know that these children's musical play is wholly on child-centered-education and involves in a day to day form of musical activities. This forms part of the children's life which is also inevitable for children.

However, these activities are not for dull children but for children who are highly gifted or talented in different areas of art, for it takes only a child who has a high skill in coordination to put different items like tins, bottles, stones together to make up a set of musical instruments that can produce a good sound for listening. It therefore means that there are Children who are gifted in creativity and there are some who are exceptional.

Africa, and in Nigeria in particular, and mostly in our local environment, you see children play on their own and exhibit creativity. Let us not quickly forget that the Federal Government of Nigeria stated it clearly in the National Policy on Education (2014) that "early child care development and education includes the inculcation of the spirit of enquiry and creativity in the child through the exploration of nature, environment, art and music" (7). This is exactly what a Nigerian child does even before he/she formally goes to school. In the traditional setting children use this opportunity to create things for themselves which includes music making of all styles and forms and all other game activities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this paper is therefore to examine the African/ Nigerian child's musical creativity in children's play and game by answering the following questions;

- Who is a creative child?
- What makes that child creative in music?
- What type of game and play do children perform creatively?
- What do children do locally in their environment?

This study was facilitated by observation, participatory and interview methods of research.

Theoretical Framework

Piaget theory of cognitive development as it applies to music education is adopted in this study. This theory stresses on “mental growth by observing the behavior of young children... in interaction with their environment, focused on the development of language and forms of thinking in the child” (Jerome Bruner, 1962:37). Woolfolk (1993) explains that:

Piaget believed that young people pass through four stages as they develop: Sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete-operational and formal operational. In the Sensorimotor stage, infants explore the world through their senses and motor activities and work towards mastering object permanence and performing goal-directed activities (59)

The Sensorimotor stage is between birth and eighteen months, while preoperational stage is between eighteen months and the age of six. It is also assumed that the pre-operational stage is an active stage of a child where he manipulates the symbols representing things within his environment. Abeles, Hoffer, and Klotman (1994) refer to Piaget’s theory as directly relevant to music education, shedding light on the development of musical concepts and providing insight into the development of musicality and also the application of both his clinical and experimental techniques to the study of musical learning and concept formation.

It therefore indicates that development of a child’s musical ability begins in early childhood with the exploration of his environment that brings about the child’s creativity. The trio Abeles et al (1994) therefore agrees that “if education is delayed past this critical stage, the child can never fulfill his potential” (156).

African Child Education

To understand the history of education in Africa, adequate knowledge of the traditional or indigenous educational system which existed before the arrival of Islam and Christianity is needed... But indigenous education persists even today, showing no sign of disappearance from the scene of education. (Manlyacademia.wordpress.com)

African traditional education which has been in existence since the creation of human (African) on the planet earth, actually started at home (traditional home) and revolved around the culture of the people in the traditional setting and the social behaviour of the people through what we can call “Oral techniques” (Informal). African traditional education which an African child is so involved in seems to be the first education a child receives as a valid system which on the other hand can enhance formal education.

The question is this: What are the things involved in the African child education? Traditionally a child between the ages of 1 to 6 who curiously watches the mother do everything including her gestures, expressions learns virtually everything from her and understands every action she takes. At the same time, this little child manipulates things around him, playing with objects and toys. Note that in the traditional setting, the type of toys used then were the ones made with clothes, wood or clay and objects like rope, tin or bottles and the like which were used by children to produce or create things by themselves.

Apart from these, the child is trained traditionally to fish, farm, cook, carve, knit, drum, dance, wrestle and hunt which are learnt by imitation, recitation and demonstration. The child also learnt the act in physical training, how to respect the elders, peer group training, character moulding and vocational training. It is however the intentions of the Africans to make their education a means to an end. According to Fafunwa, (1991) “Education in old Africa was not rigidly compartmentalized as is the case in the contemporary system today” (p.16).

However, Western education which has dominated the most African countries was brought by European missionaries who established Christian schools in the late 15th century. In most African countries, education is administered by ministries of education. In the year 2000, the United Nations (UN) adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) – a developmental target for education targeted at the year 2015 to ensure that African children will be able to complete a full course of primary education i.e. achieving education for all by 2015. But these goals encountered so many problems including inequality, poor enrollment of children in schools especially in primary schools, and the world felt short of meeting its goal of Universal Primary Education (UPE). At the expiration of MDG in 2015, UN adopted another “Sustainable Development Goals” for the year 2030

this is “to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all”. (Manlyacademia.wordpress.com). The importance of African child education is therefore to make a child learn his right, power to make decisions, brings improvement in the degree of citizenship, helps in achieving economic growth, and bring technological advancement.

Creativity

There are so many definitions of creativity which draws its’ meaning from “Create” meaning “to make something exist that did not exist before” and “Creative” “involving the use of imagination to produce new ideas or things”, which leads to creativity, meaning “the ability to use your imagination to produce new ideas” (Longman:2005) p.368. Using one’s imagination to produce something new, unique or extraordinary is what creativity is all about. The ability for one to do this is as a result of being gifted in one hand and able to do something on the other. Creativity is a personal trait or quality but Woolfolk (1993) says that:

Creativity is not a Personality trait but a skill or a process that produces a “Creative” product, such as painting, invention... At the heart of all concepts of creativity we find the notion of newness. Creativity results in new, original, independent, and imaginative ways of thinking about or doing something. (p. 305).

A skill, using imaginative thinking is the highest expression of human psychological functioning this is very necessary for coping with various problems of living today in the world. In fact, Nwokwule (1988) describes creativity as “one essential quality that is likely to make the critical difference between the technologically developed and underdeveloped and dependent societies and survival from the twenty-first century upward” (p.215). The focus is on producing something valuable, new and real for the societal benefit. It is characterized by the ability for one to perceive the world in new ways and generate solutions as well.

Creativity includes the production and use of new, varying and effective ideas by both instructor and learners. An ability to analyze a problem from different perspective is creativity. Conducive environment is needed in a creative world, because one needs a lot of concentration to make things new.

A Creative Child

Today's world needs creativity and creative mind to move it forward. Who then is creative and has a creative mind? A creative person or creative child is that person or that child that has extensive knowledge, flexible and continually reorganizing ideas to solve problems. This person must be practical and have the ability to generate new ideas that are unique and with artistic value that has worth to others. Some of the child's characteristics may be the ability to rearrange elements of thought to create new ideas, having a large number of ideas to solving problems, ability to see things differently from the way others see them, ability to modify existing ideas, ability to enjoy being different, ability to ask too many questions at an early age and getting answers to the questions to develop a new idea or ideas.

Is creativity inborn, or is it a skill that is learnt? It is an obvious fact that some creative children are born with creative trait, while some people could learn it. It has been noticed that preschool children who spend more time in fantasy and pretend plays are more creative than those children who do not do all these.

Musically Creative Child

Musical creation is generally accepted as one of the oldest and most fundamentals of human socio-cognitive development. Musical creativity in children has to do with improvisation, where they pick all sorts of materials to create and make music for themselves.

A child who sings or plays music by himself that does not exist anywhere is musically creative, a child who is an exceptional when it comes to music making is a musically creative child, and a child who organizes things around him/her to produce a musical instrument is a creative child. This child must have new ideas at any time.

A musically creative child is that child that has degree of originality and ability to elaborate on existing ideas musically. A child who perceives, thinks and feels different and also produces or performs music in an extraordinary way is a musically creative child. These and many others are some of the traits in a musically creative child.

A child with musical traits loves improvising and does this act very well; there is always originality in his/her performances. He/she stands out when it comes to music making generally. An African child who is musical improvises with the things in his environment. Most at times he imitates anything around him and produces music out of it.

Pretend Play

What is pretend play? It is an activity of children where they use any object, ideas or any form of action to represent something (object). They imagine and assign duties or roles to inanimate objects or people. I have a girl child who pretends to be a teacher, teaches the flowers and other objects around her anything she learns from her teacher in the classroom including teaching inanimate objects how to sing songs, and asking them questions. Children of the ages 3, 4 and 5 are more involved in this type of activity. Some use chairs as drums to play with as a result of their earlier observations made as they watch adults perform their duties.

Pretend play is imaginary and not real. Piaget indicated that children out grow pretend plays as they grow older. It creates fun, entertainment and very educative in the lives of children.

Children's Plays/Games Songs and Creativity

Slavin (1997) said a lot on children's play, according to him, he mentioned the solitary play by Mildred Parten (1932) as a:

Play that occurs alone, often with toys, and independent of what other children are doing... They found out children engage in more complex types of play as they grow older, advancing from simple forms of parallel play to complex pretend play... children use their minds when playing because they are thinking and acting as if they were another person... Play is also associated with creativity ... Play also gives children safe situations in which to express ideas and feelings ... (p.78, 79 &80).

Children's play that is free from rules and regulation are created out of their own make-believe dialog and songs while playing with each other, or their toys and

dolls. In the course of their play, they are always actively involving themselves in one children's song or the other. Why are they called children's play? They are so called because children are involved and the plays or games are purely that of children and remains child centered activity. In short they are mainly for children and by children. Children's singing game songs are one of the most profound examples of their creativity, children's song repertoires are some of the most imaginative and interesting thing, they are also important expressions of children's live in different cultures and eras. These children's games are creative and meaningful social artifacts embedded with children's culture, history, attitudes and relationships. (Children's musical play: Musicality and creativity... milnepublishing.genesco.edu)

Looking at the first five years of a child (fundamental age before proper schooling). It is the most important age in a child, and it is also the time a child develops gradually from preschool to primary. They develop in language, physically, intellectually and in social skills. I called it "the age of children's game or play". Their lives are full of plays and games in all ramifications; they are full of hyperactivity and more behavioral difficulties. At these ages 1to5, learning takes place in the life of children.

This early stage of children is the stage of active exploration of their environment, as they develop in language; they learn and know the names of objects in their environment. There is a rapid physical and intellectual development at this stage of the child which includes cooperation and interaction with others and mixing with their peer groups, they also experiment and explore with anything they come across in their environment.

As they grow and develop and reach the age of formal schooling, they begin to learn numbers, letters, objects, they also learn these through music. This is because as a very critical time for children to learn music,

they are improving their gross motor and fine motor skills, which gets them interested in art, crafts and all kinds of ride-on toys ... The most important mode of learning during this period is playing. Make believe play of all kinds. is attractive and fosters the development of language, socialization and creativity ... They

also like to build things out of items around the house (The ages and stages of child development: Birth – Teen. (childdevelopmentinfo.com)).

At this stage of life children learn how to exhibit the attitude of exploring in so many things in their environment through play and game. They learn how to collect things from their environment, use them to produce one thing or the other especially in the making of musical instruments and thereafter play together as a teen or group in children ensemble. For instance, in our local setting, children cut trunks of banana or plantain, arrange them on ordinary ground, placing wood on top to produce xylophone which they play. They also form small groups to perform dances of different kinds, they play masquerades, and they also create their own music/songs which they sing as solo or in group singing using the ordinary events (i.e. the happenings) in their environment. In fact this is another event of real creativity in children where they act their local drama or play with music.

Children socialize with others especially other children through children's music games. Some of these music games are: Animal dancing, Pass the Parcel, Music cloths, Little maestros, Freeze dance, Play homemade drums, Musical hot potato, Random rhythms and so many others. For children, it is all fun and it makes them to be very creative and able to learn their counting, language very well. It therefore means that children's game is very educative because music plays a very vital role in their physical, mental, social, and intellectual development. They also have the tendency to hear music others sing or play and immediately imitate and sing or play that same music whether they understand the language, lyrics or not. There are children also who are very rhythmical in nature, whatever sound they hear, they are able to produce by either clapping, beating with any kind of thing around them. Such children can never stay without drumming to any kind of rhythm that comes to their minds.

Children therefore enjoy being part of any musical game or play by so doing; they discover a lot of activities. This, on the other hand increases their social skills and group performance.

(a) Creative music games

Title: Animal dancing

Age: 2 – 5 years

Activities: Some music is played for the children to dance, as they dance, a name of an animal is pronounced or mentioned. At this particular point, the children start dancing like the animal mentioned.

(b) Creative music games

Title: Freeze dance

Age: 2 – 5 years

Activities: Music is played while children dance to the music, as soon as the music is stopped suddenly, the children freeze in their dancing positions and they are allowed to check out funny poses of each other.

(c) Creative music games

Title: Homemade drum

Age: 2 – 5 years

Activities: Children can create music through playing home-made drums together. These drum would be in the form of milk empty tins, plastic plates or even empty bottles, boxes and containers of all kinds. (20 fun music games for the classroom activities www.kidactivities.net)

Traditionally, children play folk games informally with minimal equipment and they learn without rules by examples from other children. They pass from child to child, generation to generation and by word of mouth. These games involve creativity (List of traditional children's games en.m.wikipedia.org)

What Children Do Traditionally

Children in general learn by imitation and immediately practice what they see. Ogunjimi (2015) opined that “children imitate an activity or thing by performing what they think the music or call leader asks them to do”. He went further to explain that “these types of activities are many, they assume different format, procedure, duration and operation depending on factors like culture, environment, nature of participants and level of exposure” (119). Nigeria as a country has many cultures and languages but the way children play is always the same with little or no difference in cultures and tradition. Creative thinking manifest in children

greatly, especially when they are on their own and thinking of how to explore the world with new ideas within their environment.

Educational Implication

The need for creative process of teaching and learning music cannot be over emphasized in the educational sector. According to Ekwueme (2010) "In line with current educational thinking and practice on creative thinking and problem-solving, music educators have recognized the importance of the creative process approach as a method of music instruction" (57). In fact, creative teaching is the best form of teaching music where children are allowed to do things for themselves but with the aid of the teacher. Children come up with new ideas, unique and special, they develop constructive criticism, self-initiative, there is open-ended method, but they must be encouraged and guided by the music teacher who oversees what they do in class. Creative method of learning music creates way for the students to express themselves the way they like without rules and regulations. This is good for the children who are very creative and also paves way for the ones that are not too creative to also express themselves the way they are in order to be corrected and guided by the teacher.

Observation and Oral Communication

In the course of this study, it was observed that most of the creative children in our Nigerian traditional homes do their creative activities technologically and especially in art such as singing, drumming, dancing, drumming and singing together, playing musical games without being supervised by any adult. They sing original songs created by themselves, create rhythm for the songs and most at times play together to create fun for themselves. A single child can do well in solo performance adding colour to the musical activities, forming band sets with items around him/her. The types of music activities they carry out include sacred and secular music they must have heard from church, radio, or hear people sing.

In a personal oral communication with an eight year old girl "Paulette" who creates her music alone without assistance, she disclosed that nobody teaches her those songs she sings alone and why does she make her own song, she replied that it is to create new ideas from the existing ones. She said that she was taught that: "creative thinking is the ability to create new ideas and methods and that in making new things, you must be unique, unusual and sensible".

Come to think about it all, it is an obvious fact that Nigerian children are very creative in all things, that at their early age, they are able to make out something new from the old existing things in their environment. And if they are assisted they can do better technologically.

Summary and Conclusion

In the Africa sensed music education, children do their games and plays in their own creative way and style; they create their own plays and games without attaching any importance to rules. Children play freely, associating themselves with other children and always like to play together with each other. They make use of toys and every other object within their reach. It is therefore important to know that an African child is very creative in nature and explores his environment. This therefore implies that music education should be very much included in the pre-nursery and primary education of Nigerian education; this will enable children to represent music well in schools as they grow up.

Suggestions

This paper therefore suggests that in the children's musical education, creative process of teaching should be employed in combination with other methods of learning music that will bring about musical success. In schools, teachers should include different types of music in the children's play and games to make them understand the importance of the natural play of children and music.

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Appendix



Nigerian Children's Creativity
Courtesy of TVC Lagos Nigeria
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