

UNEARTHING TALENTS AND CREATIVITY IN CHILDREN THROUGH CREATIVE DRAMATICS

Evans Asante

Lecturer, Department of Theatre Arts,
University of Education, Winneba. Ghana.

ABSTRACT

Many children do not reach the full potentials of their lives; their God-giving gifts, talents and creative abilities are left undiscovered. This is most often true among children living in orphanages and other institutionalized homes. Factors such as lack of financial resources, quality parental control, favourable environment for talents discovery and stigmatization are often cited as major hindrances. Talents, gifts and special abilities in children should be nurtured, shaped and encouraged to promote full utilization for the benefit of the child. Drama in Education, an area under the arts has been recognised as a significant model of learning by children. It provides children with an opportunity to work together cooperatively on a common inexpensive platform. This article is a report on how talents and other creative skills of children, particularly children living in orphanages have been discovered and giving the necessary nurturing process. Creative Dramatics as a process in Drama in Education was employed by the researcher. The role of drama in education in talents discovery has been extensively discussed.

Key words: Talents, creativity, drama in education, creative dramatics, participatory drama, orphanage, Rafiki Village.

INTRODUCTION

Each child comes into this world gifted with one or more talents. When nurtured and developed, this talent can really help the child shine and become a gifted individual in their field of interest. Sadly, the gifts, talents and creative skills of most children are simply left to lie dormant, never to be used in their lifetime, because no one took the interest to identify them. It is extremely important that as adults we help children develop their true potential, so that they can become productive individuals in life.

A child's experiences in his early life greatly influence his eventual adult development.(India Parenting, 2013). Cook and Cook (2013) in their study stated that 50% or more of a child's mature knowledge is developed by the time he turns four. This has been confirmed in the article by the India Parenting stated above. It is no wonder then, that a child's early years are called his formative years. These years should therefore be given the needed guidance and fine tuning in

order to shape the child's life for the future. In today's society, creativity and imagination are essential skills, not only for the artist, but for people in all walks of life.

It is the wish of parents to provide every possible benefit to their child during their early formative years to ensure success in later years. However the case is different regarding children living in some orphanages since they do not enjoy *one-on-one parenting*. The case of Methodist Rafiki Village, an orphanage in the central region of Ghana is a clear example. Experiences gathered by the researcher in working with children especially those in orphanages inform the basis of this study. It is interesting to note that, the children living in the above 'home' are as normal as any other child living in any part of the world, the only difference is children living in orphanages either have lost both parents or do not have responsible/sound parents. These are not children who are sick or deformed in any way; however, there is a perception that all children living in orphanages are children who needs special care. "They are often bundled in the same bracket as children with special needs" (E. Sey, personal communication, February, 2015). This perception works negatively against the children living in orphanages. Because they are put in the bracket of children with special needs, the right approaches in discovering and nurturing their God-given abilities are not given much prominence.

Since time immemorial, children learned how to adapt successfully by acquiring practical skills from their elders. It is only during the last few generations that young people started to become more and more dependent on schools for acquiring the information necessary to cope with their environment (Allantias, 2014). But as our environment becomes increasingly complex and ever changing, new and effective solutions need to be generated.

There are too many demands on children of today. The amount of things that they need to learn at school and the competitiveness that pervades our society can make it quite tough for children these days to naturally exhibit their talents. They are constantly being told what to do instead of being left to think on what to do. They hardly have a moment to spare to sit and think things through as opined by Williamson and Robinson (2006). Of course, this is the age to acquire as much knowledge as possible, but children are not given time and opportunity to espouse that knowledge. Knowledge is just being dumped into the mind both at school and home. This kind of knowledge will never get used effectively unless it is digested and becomes processed information.

Talents like any other ability must be noticed and nurtured to blossom. Some children show talent in a particular area from a very young age, while others discover their talents as they grow. It takes special attention to discover some of these potentials hence the need for a project to help unearth and nurture these creative potentials.

The concepts of imagination and creativity could be said to be essential ingredients in drama. These are usually focused on understanding human behavior in terms of how people feel and behave in certain situations (Ustundag, 1997). The whole process of drama is simply creativity. From the conception of idea, to creating the story, characterization, assigning dialogue to various characters, introduction of mood and atmosphere, and plot sequence all involve creative thinking.

McCaslin (2006) agreed when she asserted that, a fine dramatic production nourishes as well as gives pleasure and, moreover, holds up a standard of excellence; and thus creativity. The process of creating dramatic piece is very liberal and could be inexpensive; no matter the environment one finds him/herself drama can be created. With this understanding, drama can be used as a platform for identifying creative skills and talents among children even more so in children living in deprived and not so called favorable environment.

RELATED LITERATURE

DRAMA IN EDUCATION/CREATIVE DRAMATICS

Kim (2011) recommended that schools and other places of learning for children should encourage creative thinking and expression. Opportunities should be available for children to be active and have critical discussions instead of the *normal* drill exercises and standardized testing. Children become less creative and narrow in thinking. By this it becomes difficult to unearth their creative abilities either by the children themselves or their teachers or instructors.

Drama in Education is regarded as the “play way” to education (Ustundag, 1997). This means it is a methodology through which a child learns through playing games. It is a means of making drama the centre of classroom experience for children.

Drama in education taps into the talent abilities of the child to create ideas that will help improve upon what they do (Bolton, 1998). As children participate fully, lasting impressions are created in their minds which can speed up their creative thinking. Drama in Education focuses on experimental attitude, in which mistakes, failures, weaknesses, strengths and exercises that in normal sense may not work are all viewed as useful learning tools for the child. One process under the Drama in Education as a methodology for educating the child is Creative Dramatics, ‘a democratic process for children education and self consciousness’(Baldwin and Fleming, 2003, p.13).

Children create and play roles in order to measure themselves and their experiences as against those of others in drama. In doing this, they are not only in to see where they differ but also to discover where they are more active. Through this, children achieve a sense of belonging especially in those aspects of living which is not communicable by words.

Creative dramatics sometimes referred to as ‘drama of ‘spontaneity’ (McCaslin, 2006) is well grounded in the fundamentals of personal development especially amongst children. It is an art form and a group experience for children in which every child is guided to express himself or herself as he/she works and plays. Creative dramatics helps children to test their life without fear because as a medium it allows both the weak and strong to work together leading to the discovery of each other’s strengths and weaknesses. This process of art encourages children to use their senses of concentration, observation, imagination, recalling and emotional abilities. Ozbeck (2014), said that, dramatic methods, which have the potential to arouse excitement, curiosity and interest toward a subject matter, can be quite effective in capturing the imaginations and attention of young people. It is through this discovery path that most children realize the great talents and special skills or creative abilities they possess. Teachers, parents, caregivers, are also able to identify such in-born qualities in children through creative dramatics and can easily find means of harnessing such qualities.

Creative dramatics gives children the opportunity to practice democratic ideas by learning through meaningful experiences which encourage them to be self conscious for their social and personal living (Worugii, 2006). Drama created through the creative dramatic process therefore is mostly improvisation with spontaneous dialogue and acting. The fundamental ideal is that, the story and everything concerning the drama is created by the children and played by them as well. This democratic participation of children in creating their own stories as well as acting them out presents the opportunity of identifying each child’s area of special abilities and in some cases talent discovery. In a creative learning environment of drama children are provided with rich experiences and their active role in learning is emphasized. This make the learning process more interactive and in the end making the learning itself a social activity(Toivanen, Halkilahti, Ruismäki).

THE CHILD AND CREATIVE PROCESS

Children may be able to discover their talents and other God-given gifts; creativity is the ability to use these talents to achieve a meaningful goal. With children, creativity is genuine and comes from their inner being (intuition). They are not exposed to many works of art and so what they bring out in terms of creative skills can be said to genuinely intuitive. The first approach to the child’s creative process is *freedom*. Children should be given the freedom to express their feelings and intuition. As adults, we should not bind them with too much technicalities and perfection. *Exploration* can be the next approach. Children who are able to explore become more creative in the end. A child who has the gift of dancing should always be encouraged to try out different dance movements and dance styles. *Experimentation* forms a major part of the creative process of the child. As the child experiments on different creative ideas, we are able to identify his/her strongest areas of creativity. *Creation*, the stage the child is allowed to create new things they have pictured in their “mind’s eye”. After exploring and experimenting with

things surrounding his/her environment, the child should be encouraged to create something new from what already exist (Russ, 2003). The idea here is not to look out for perfection but as a way of measuring the child's intuition about his/ her environment-thus how the environment is seen by the child. The last approach on the creative process is the ability to *evaluate* the creative skills/abilities of the child. Evaluation involves showing appreciation of the creative work done by children. Children should always be motivated and praised with the little effort they put in their quest for creativity. A simple creative process of children has been identified and summed up as Freedom, Exploration, Experimentation, Creation and Evaluation. (FEECE).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Research has revealed that talents and creative abilities in most children living in orphanages are left untapped. Children residing in these *isolated* environments are not given the same platform and opportunities for talents discovery and development as that of their counterparts living in *ordinary* homes. Creativity is said to be dependent on the surrounding environment, and the beliefs and ideologies held by the people within it. The belief of many is that, orphanages due to many factors including large numbers and fewer resources are not suitable environment for the discovering and nurturing of talents of its residence-the children. Most philanthropist and even the care givers therefore think about providing the material and financial needs of children living these homes but care less about identification and nurturing of talents and creative skills these children may possess.

RESEARCH QUESTION

- ✓ What role do participatory drama and creative dramatics play in the discovery of talents, creative abilities and skills of children living in orphanages?
- ✓ How can artistic and creative skills of children be properly nurtured for their benefit in future lives?
- ✓ What dramatic programmes/activities can be used to nurture the identified creative skills?

OBJECTIVES

The purposes for this study are

- ✓ To find out common talents and creative skills among children living in orphanages through the principles of creative dramatics
- ✓ To provide a common platform for children and caregivers to share and exhibit their recognised talents.
- ✓ To develop an effective nurturing programme for the recognised talents and skills.

METHODOLOGY

THE STUDY AREA

The area for the study was the Methodist Rafiki Village. An orphanage owned by the Methodist Church of Ghana. It was established on 26th July, 2007. It is located at Gyaahadze, a farming community about 10 kilometers from Winneba, Central region of Ghana. The 'Village' has about forty-two residential children with six care-givers and a child care officer. The ages of the children ranges between two and fifteen years. The 'Village' has considerably enough facilities to support the number of children in their social and personal development. The village has school and other educational facilities which is opened to the public especially children living in the Gyahadzie community. Children residing in the 'Village' have different cultural, religious and ethnic background, coming from about six different regions in the country.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Children are quite different from adults and as such different methods of enquiry are required to elicit information from them (Gauntlett, D. 2005).

The project was designed using the qualitative approach as the main reference point. Qualitative research design is more naturalistic which allows for subjects to interact with their environment.

The research was divided into three phases. Each phase employed a different method of engagement.

Phase 1 was for the baseline survey and data collection. The methods used were unstructured interviews, library research, document analysis and non-participant observation.

Phase 2 was familiarization with the children. The methods used were creative visual method, game playing, participant observer, reflective practice, children's drawing and focus group games.

Phase 3 is where the children were guided to come out with the final products they created.

Role playing, improvisation, participatory practice and children dramaturgy were used.

SAMPLING AND SAMPLE TECHNIQUE

All the children and their caregivers in the 'Village' form part of the population of the study. The researcher concentrated on children within the ages of five and fifteen for the purpose of the study. These sample sizes was picked because children within this age bracket were able to express themselves more freely and were able to come out and perform various activities without the supervision of their caregivers. Including the caregivers, thirty five people were used for this study. The techniques used in selecting the subjects for this study were *simple random* and *purposive* sampling methods.

THE UNTASIC PROJECT

ENGAGING THE CHILDREN

The project dubbed “THE UNTASIC PROJECT” (Unearthing and Nurturing of Talents and Skill in Children) lasted about twelve weeks. After series of familiarization programs, a sizeable number of the children had become acclimatized to the researcher. Through some theatrical games and other children games, some hidden natures of the children were beginning to be shown. The road to the discovery of the true nature and creative skills were coming to the fore. Most of these children games were selected from Boal (2005) *Games for Actors and Non Actors*. The games included *play to deaf, stop, listen, think, interrogation, reconstruction of the crime* etc, some dances and other sensory games.

As part of our discovery process a Talent show dubbed “*Do what u kan*” was organised and the children came out with different pieces of entertaining activities, ranging from craft work, dance piece, singing, acting, reading and writing. The talent show gave the researcher a fair knowledge of some of the creative abilities of the children. The main aim of the project was to discover talents and possibly create a platform for nurturing such talents through creative dramatics; with this in mind, four groups were formed to begin the dramatic process. Each child was given the opportunity of choosing a group of his/her choice. The four groupings were *Actors club, Great Designers, Writers Guild* and *All for All*. The *All for All* group was for children who could not find themselves in any of the three groups. To encourage them, the researcher constantly referred to them as the utility group.

CHILDREN CREATING THEIR OWN PLAY

The *Writers Guild* made up of three boys and four girls led in the writing of the story. As a group, we shared ideas on the various subject matter we wanted to cover. It was then left for the *Writers* to put it into dramatic scenarios. With the needed guidance from the researcher, a near perfect work was achieved. Figure 2 shows a meeting of the *Writers Club*. The *Actors Club* acted the various scenes out through improvisation. The *Actors Club* was also responsible to learn some dances which could be fused into the dramatic piece. *The Great Designers* constructed the needed stage props, costumes, the set, and also created mask for the dramatic piece. Members of *The All in All* group created their own stuffs and others helped in some other groups which all helped in making our dramatic piece beautiful. The final story created by the children was given the title *ONLY TIME ...* The improvised dramatic piece was a story which reflected the daily lives and activities in the ‘Village’.

SYNOPSIS OF THE DRAMATIC PIECE

The story was about a beautiful, intelligent, and respectful girl, *Araba*, who out of peer pressure suddenly changed from being the good girl to a disobedient child who never took advice from

the elderly. Due to this attitude she lost a life time opportunity in the form of scholarship to another pupil. Figures 1, 3 and 4 are scenes from the final performance of the dramatic piece created by the children.



Figure 1: A scene from the performance



Figure 2: the Writers Guild meeting



Figure 3: A scene from the performance club



Figure 4: A traditional dance by the Actors

SUSTAINABILITY/NURTURING PROCESS

To sustain and create a platform for nurturing the discovered talents and creative skills four clubs have been formed in the 'Village'. They are the Drama club, Reading Club, Creative Art Club and Music and Dance Club. The Talent Hunt Show has also been institutionalized which will be undertaken from time to time as a way of engaging and nurturing these talents and special abilities of the children.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The creative approach to self discovery should aim at making children that we work with more alert, curious, responsive and more independent individuals. Like it was experienced in the dramatic process, they should be encouraged to offer their ideas freely, do hazard guesses and predict outcomes but should always be guided. Through the democratic process of creative dramatics, the children themselves were able to create a dramatic piece together with all the elements that goes into drama productions. The various creative ideas and skill each child has as far as the creative art is concerned been identified.

Irrespective of the environment a child finds him/herself, once the proper platform is created, their hidden talents can be identified and nurtured. Children in this orphanage are full with so much talent, but are not able to express them, partly due to the confinement in one area almost at all the time and the children outnumbering their caregivers. They do not have the opportunities children outside are exposed to. The myth, stereotypical perceptions which hitherto were surrounding children living in orphanages and other institutionalized homes have been broken to an extent. It is now evidently clear that, they have similar abilities like any other child; what is usually missing is the lack of opportunity.

Children seem to be driven by an inner necessity of bringing out ideas be it positive or negative, the inner feelings pushing them to bring out such ideas are their major concern. When they are allowed to bring out such inner *feelings*, we are able to see what these children are made of and are able to give them the necessary guidance.

Children come into group experience at different stages of their lives; they learn as well as exhibiting different skills and knowledge during such meetings. What is learnt and exhibited during these meetings have deep influence on their development. It was made evident that most children are not able to discover their talents and creative abilities due to the fear of being embarrassed by friends and other people. Regardless of a child's age, it is always necessary to minimize all forms of embarrassment especially in group situations. Once they are embarrassed and recoil, it becomes difficult coming back to their former selves.

Most children are not able to express themselves fluently; it does not suggest they are dull. In using the creative dramatics approach, the facilitator must make sure to include both verbal and non-verbal communication media. For children some of the verbal communication mediums are

songs, stories, poems, proverbs while the non-verbal may include dances, art works, body painting, symbols and gestures. With these in place each child gets satisfaction in the learning and development process.

CONCLUSION

Creativity is an important human factor in the development of a child. Children may have many useful talents; but the ability to use these talents creatively requires guidance and a suitable environment. It has been made clear from this experience that creative process is very crucial in children; it is the hinge point where the child's learning process begins. Many people are of the view that institutionalized homes especially orphanages do not present children who reside there with the needed environment for talents discovery and nurturing of creative skills. But as have been demonstrated here, it is the opportunity for the discovery process which these institutionalized homes lack. Once they are introduced to this discovery process, children in these homes can equally exhibit their God-given talents and become as creative as children living elsewhere. Drama in Education has been seen as one of the approaches through which children can be engaged with to bring out their hidden talents and creative abilities. It is therefore important that whoever is the leader, teacher, facilitator, caregiver or mentor must have basic knowledge in child development process so as to be able to provide the needed guidance for the child social, emotional and personal development.

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