

## CREATIVE DRAMATICS AS AN EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL TOOL IN CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION: A PEDAGOGICAL DISCOURSE

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### Abstract

*Creative dramatics remains a relatively new and burgeoning phenomenon in contemporary education. It is an attempt to use drama for more functional purposes. This paper surveys the instrumentality of creative dramatics as a classroom experience and as an effective educational tool in contemporary education. It carefully considers its meaning and implications, scope, aims and objectives as well as its values to the growth of the child in all development gamut; as well as the vital and invaluable role of the teacher in permeating the world of the child to understand and assist him to master the realities of his surrounding as he is being prepared for the real world and a better living in life.*

**Keywords:** Creative dramatics, child centeredness, pedagogy, educational tool, instrumentality

### Introduction

Creative dramatics, otherwise known as educational drama is a relatively new phenomenon and an attempt to use drama for more functional purposes; and has so rapidly grown in recent years. Harvel (1987: 163) in affirmation attributes this development to the “wider movement towards the ‘new’ or ‘progressive’ principles of education; which as Worugii (2006) notes grew out of research in behavioural psychology in education. It presents an effective approach in pedagogy. From the perspective of meaning and scope, let us take the initiative by asserting that creative dramatics implies any activity which presents a situation involving people in active role playing, and which emphasizes attitude rather than character. This is because when a child takes on a role, he only adopts an attitude rather than a character.

Attitude here can be viewed from Johnson’s (1979: 130) perspective as:

*A combination of concepts, verbal information, and emotions that results in a predisposition to respond favourably or unfavourably towards particular people, groups, ideas, events, or objects.*

The chief concern of creative dramatics is the child [children]. In other words, creative dramatics upholds child centeredness. Hildebrand (1986), a renowned child educationist, in an attempt at a definition sees creative dramatics as the spontaneous imaginative role playing taking place in schools for young children. Koste (1978: 6), in leaning credence to this view sees it as “involving the mental act of imagination transformation”. Uka (1982: 201), in citing Professor Brochet, has observed creative dramatics as a phase of improvised dramatic situations, as stimulated in children.

From the foregoing, it becomes pertinent to draw a line at the age bracket with which creative dramatics involves. This is basically the infant level up to six for whom in Peter Slade's opinion, drama as an art form becomes a natural way of discovery for the real world. Creative dramatics therefore, a purely classroom experience, is concerned with helping children to gain mastery over their intellectual and linguistic powers. It helps them to develop the ability of effective words usage in ordinary conversation, and at the same time allowing them to express and affirm their perception of reality and surrounding – the world around them. Koste (1978: 95) on a summary note opines that its essential aim is to master reality.

Therefore, early involvement in dramatic activity is essential in child's education. It expands the child's vision beyond his own experience. Through creative dramatics, the child is able to find himself, to discover his personality, his potentialities and limitations, his movement and language capacities and his particular interests. For the sooner he develops the ability to control his emotions, opinions and thoughts, and learns to verbalize and communicate his ideas spontaneously, quickly and adequately, the sooner he is being equipped with a valuable aid tool in life without which he cannot project himself as a fully integrated adequate personality.

### **Creative Dramatics as an Effective Educational Tool**

Creative dramatics is a most valuable tool in contemporary education. Abone (1990: 105) posits that it is a powerful instrument in promoting qualitative primary education. As an educational tool, she observes that "it is a process of developing and acquiring artistic skills", and stresses that "it is those skills that enhance effective drama"; and further asserts that "creative drama is a learning process". Here, two key words: *developing* and *acquiring* become pertinent and worthy of note. Perhaps, they seem to bear the whole strength of creative dramatics.

Earlier observation has been made that creative dramatics or educational drama is more recent: an attempt by people to use drama for more functional purposes. It is this utilitarian background therefore that predicates it as an educational, besides recreational tool. Thus informing the recent departure from what used to be the earlier dramatic convention for instance in Nigerian primary schools: a convention which Onyekuba (1995: 5) observes, engages children in dramatic activities only when they prepare for occasions like the parents day celebration etc, which are basically for entertainment, by the status it has recently assumed in model primary schools.

Uka (1982: 201) asserts that:

*If according to some philosophers that the mind is a tabula rasa on which one may print anything, the child's mind as he grows into society and its values, is one of the most malleable tabulea.*

At this level, the child is still at an impressionable age. Creative dramatics therefore seeks to embed and inculcate on him those attributes that are positive. Dramatic activities in early childhood enable the child to be more alive and sensitive to his environment. Through it, he not only discovers himself, but becomes more aware of other people and situations around him and develops sensitivity towards them.

Through drama, other subject areas could be explored for the awareness of the child. For instance, literature as a form of life experience is initiated in children's plays, since it expands the realms of the child's vision beyond what he has actually observed to reach places, times, and people he cannot

directly know. Biblical stories could be made more exciting by dramatization. Historical events could also be brought to a more realistic level. People of other lands and their activities can be staged in geography pageant much as teaching in other subject areas could be reinforced through selected topics and themes to aid children's understanding.

Therefore, when we consider the instrumentality of drama as a springboard to other knowledge experience, either through exploration or imagination, it becomes apt to absolutely assert that creative dramatics is indeed, an efficient, effective and most valuable tool in contemporary education.

### **The Place of Improvisation**

It is important to note that creative dramatics posits a group situation in which individuals create with others within the group towards a certain resolution. This creative or composing process therefore much as it encourages and enhances such individuals' skills in the process makes a greater demand on their independent intelligence. This is the level of the *inner resources* which Peachment (1976: xiii) emphasized: a situation which predicates improvisation as an indispensable part of the process, in which participants attain both transition and imaginative transformation in their role playing as they *develop* and *acquire* such skills.

The emphasis here as upheld by Heathcote (1988: 45) is on the use of improvisation to aid a learning or teaching experience. In other words, what becomes of the role taker (the change) from the confrontation and challenge of such situation as he spontaneously organizes his responses in living through it. Simply put, the knowledge (learning) he acquires.

In this process therefore, the insight and adaptation through improvisation into such situation as then created all contribute to learning as well as to language development as the participants find words to communicate within the group.

### **Communication as the Life Blood of the Process**

*Communication allows men ... to be inclusive of one another ... to integrate their meaning for each other ... (and) to share more fully in communion with their natures. Communication between two human creatures is an act of interlocking their emergent knowings in the sequence of upcoming moments as they share them. (Heathcote, 1977: 43)*

Communication emphasizes reciprocity – giving and receiving in turn. Creative dramatics as a classroom experience does not just demand an effective communication among children, much as it enhances it, it involves a communicative system between the teacher and the child (children): an intercourse and feedback between each other. The two engage in constant communication in reciprocity – encoding and decoding, vice versa.

The teacher is a sender and a receiver as well as the child, both in the provision of the stimuli and responses and in clarifications. Heathcote (1977: 44) clarifies that as one party encodes, the other receives and reorganizes his response in relevance to what the former should next receive and use in turn. It is not a one-way traffic, but a continuum process of giving and receiving which holds as far as the drama lasts. Hence communication through reciprocity enhances the educative process to which educational drama aims. It is the center that holds the system: a fulcrum on which it revolves. Thus its failure only translates to the overall failure of the system.

### **Creative Dramatic as an Educational Mode into other Art Forms**

Creative dramatics activities undoubtedly develop children's interest in other art forms, thus making these forms instrumental in facilitating it as an educational or learning process. For instance, the use of story as an invaluable art form became necessary because of children's enthusiasm about it. This stimulates their interest in literary art. Such story which must be well chosen must be charged with appropriate theme, situation and atmosphere which should have a consideration that should be suitable to the child's intellectual development.

The value of creative art activities also to the general development of the child as they are being employed in creative dramatics cannot be ignored. The child's power of imagination and observation is sharpened much as he gets introduced to early forms of writing and reading as well as movement. Art activities therefore not only reflect a child's inner self, they help to form it.

In creative dramatics, as the child engages in active role playing, such other form as language is inevitable. Therefore, through the complementary role of other art forms in creative dramatics, much as interest in them is enhanced, its educational objectives are most fully realized.

### **The Values of Creative Dramatics**

Creative dramatics is an invaluable activity. It contributes to the child's growth in all gamut of development, much as it affords the adult the opportunity of helping children in resolving their problems.

### **The Values of Creative Dramatics are Numerous; these include:**

#### **1. *Cognitive Development of the Child***

Creative dramatics can be highly instrumental to the development of children's awareness and sensitivity. With their dramatic roles expanding as their world broadens, children gain insight and experience and master realities around them. In mastering these realities, their sensitivities are sharpened alongside. Language skill becomes inevitable in this process and is developed as well.

#### **2. *Developing Sound Mental Habit***

Creative dramatics encourages and fosters development of children's imaginative and independent intelligence. Through the world creative dramatics creates and the demands of such world, a child although he works in concert with others, uses his individual imaginative thinking. He is enabled to crystallize his own impression about life and is encouraged to work out solution to his problems in the process.

#### **3. *Developing Creativity and Talent***

The child's imagination and thought is stimulated in dramatic activity from which words and actions are so spontaneously expressed. The child is therefore led into a creative process which encourages him to work out solution by himself to that creative discovery.

Creative dramatics abundantly enables children to creatively develop their physical and expressional skills besides mental abilities. They gain mastery in language arts through constant manipulation of words in their dramatic roles in addition to dexterity in body

movements and action. Put succinctly, creative dramatics fosters the physical, expressional, and creative skills of the pupils as an educational process.

4. ***Development in Socialization***

Creative dramatics engages the child in active role taking situations. The child begins to develop a concept of his own role. This enables him a better understanding of both himself and others, and to develop sensitivity towards them. In this sympathetic climate, he is allowed to open up to himself for a better cooperation with others.

5. ***Play is the child's natural medium for self expression.***

The child's bursting emotions are released in a healthy manner in dramatic play. Among the range of feelings which burst to be released through child's play are: joy, love, fear, rejection, anxiety, anger etc.

In child education therefore, creative dramatics has become a tool: an expressional mode that is not only enjoyable, but also satisfying. Thus, it satisfies the cognitive, affective and the psycho-motor domains of learning. Through it, the child's cognitive domain (intellectual and mental level) is sharpened and made more sensitive and alert to functioning; the affective domain (feelings and emotional level) becomes more positively inclined to both reception and response to the cognitive experience; while the psycho-motor (mind activation level) similarly activates, externalizes or expresses this affectively conditioned cognitive experience as the child solidifies growth in them, as well as his ultimate personality.

**Creative Dramatics as a Teaching Method: The Role of the Teacher**

Understanding that children are active constructors of knowledge and that development and learning are the result of interactive processes, early childhood teachers have been recommended to recognize that children's play is a highly supportive context for their developing processes (Piaget, 1952; Fein, 1981; Bergen, 1988; Smilansky and Shefatya, 1990; Fromberg, 1992; Berk and Winsler, 1995). Play gives children opportunities to understand the world, interact with others in social ways, express and control emotions, and develop their symbolic capabilities. Creative dramatics, therefore, is a learning process. This is no doubt manifest in dramatic play as children engage in role playing which not only places them in other people's shoes, but also enables them to learn in the process, as they work out these roles. As a teaching method, creative dramatics lays a solid base for effective language development in children as it inculcates effective expressional skill in them as well as the control of action in achieving desired characterization.

Through exposure to literature, creative dramatics expands the realm of children's vision beyond what they had observed to that which they do not know. It solidifies their responses to arising conflicts in them as well as in real life as they pit themselves against these experiences. It provides an easy method of enlivening and linking most subjects in children's lesson in the school and subjects come alive as children discover and remember essential facts during the process of acting out and retelling the basic facts; thus spurring children's imagination which they try to recast in their story telling and creative writing as well as representations in drawing.

To successfully realize the foregoing, the role of the teacher becomes pertinent. He becomes drawn with the child in a mutual metaphor where the child becomes the seed, and he the gardener.

Abone (1990: 111) summarizes it this way:

*It is the teacher who creates the teaching situation, employs suitable teaching techniques, (and) understands the nuances of the pupils and the situation by asking questions*

The teacher must be friendly, tolerant, alert and creative as well as responsive to be able to adequately create a conducive atmosphere. Also, the teacher should be guided by an acute sense of selection through which he clarifies the setting, plot and characterization to the children and then withdraws to the side line; though it might not be absolute, as situations might dictate otherwise, to observe and judge and provide any necessary assistance. The teacher who keeps close to the children, observing and listening to them, can more meaningfully plan the highly motivating worthwhile program that each of them deserves. In other words, the dramatic activities initiated by the children determine the degree of motivation that was available to them.

So, the teacher must be very sensitive to the need of his group as well as the particular need of individual child. He must be able to permeate the world of the child to get aware of the social attitude within which the child exists, both within and outside the school, as to not just make him adjust, but also adapt, as he lives through the dramatic experience.

The role of the teacher, therefore, in the educational medium which creative dramatics has become is invaluable and cannot be underestimated or ignored – it is indispensable.

## **Conclusion**

Assiduous effort has been made in this paper to explicitly highlight creative dramatics as an effective tool in contemporary education which had resulted from the *new* and *progressive* educational principles: an attempt to satisfy the utilitarian and functional need of the *new* order. Obviously therefore, creative dramatics is an invaluable activity which involves children in active role playing situation: a natural way of discovery (mastering reality) and preparation for the real world, which contributes to their growth in all developmental gamuts. Through creative dramatics, children learn about themselves as well as their environment.

Creative dramatics also provides adults the opportunity of understanding children's inner thoughts and feelings which predicates the teacher's role indispensable in the process; as he, through a worthwhile program, is afforded the opportunity of assisting the children in finding solution to their problems.

In the light of the above, therefore, the merits of creative dramatics as an educational tool and learning process are invaluable and innumerable; they cannot, indeed, be over-emphasized. It no doubt provides an effective approach in pedagogy in contemporary education.

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