



THE IMPACT OF GAMES ON COGNITIVE IMPAIRED CHILDREN IN GHANA: CHILDREN FROM THE DZORWULU SPECIAL SCHOOL IN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

A closer look at Ghanaian games and their benefits disclose an enormous potential in educating both regular and special needs children. These games help in effecting positive attitudinal and/or behavioral change as well as imparting in them the necessarily values of life. This research explores games for both didactic purposes as well as to improve upon the lifestyle of children with special needs, mainly in the category of cognitive impairment. These children have frequently suffered rejection, stigmatization, and marginalization, and have often been branded under the notion that 'nothing good can come out of them'. This study therefore encourages children with special needs in the Dzorwulu Special School in Ghana to explore a few of these games to their benefit, thereby allowing them to interact proficiently with their social environment and to change the negative perceptions about them.

Keywords: games, cognitive impaired children, special education

1. Introduction

Various processes in Drama in Education are employed as educational tools to achieve development intellectually, psychologically, socially and politically either directly or indirectly in many ways. Games, Children's plays and Creative Dramatics which were most often seen only as entertainment have been identified in recent times as unique educational strategies to help children in and out of their classrooms attain progress. These exceptional approaches to education help to achieve the ultimate purpose of drama in education as stated by Siks (1977); thus "*to open children's minds, stimulate their imaginations and language abilities and to spark their enthusiasm for continued personal development and discovery*". (p.6). Children who get involved in these activities whether 'regular' or in the category of the special needs are able to overcome challenging

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experiences they perchance encounter in and outside the classroom in order to develop holistically.

According to Deh, (2016) *“games have been accepted universally as a form of entertainment; however, games offer more than just a distraction. Games also offer users, edification, reformation, motivation, inspiration, and healing”*. As a source of teaching intervention, games explored for didactic purposes are aimed at developing both regular and children with special needs socially, emotionally, intellectually and physically.

As stated by Boal (2002) *“studying and using such techniques, exercises and games help students’ imagination, relaxation, concentration, observation and alertness etc.”* Each game employed in this study with the cognitive impaired children in the Dzorwulu special school is aimed at achieving a unique purpose depending on the interest, strengths and weaknesses of the special needs children.

Darko (2012) notes that; *“my core objective was not necessarily to seek ways of preventing mental challenges, but rather to explore non-medical ways to relieve the afflicted persons, as well as effectively integrating them into the larger society”* (p.3)ⁱⁱ She affirms that dance is an effective catalyst for healing the mentally challenged because it helps them to associate, to acquire discipline and most crucially to re-integrate them into the social order. The creative arts therefore, must not be seen as mere entertainment, of [concert] as commonly referred to but as an adjunct healing process.

Hargo (2012) stresses that; *“dance educational experiences have therapeutic values in providing opportunity for mastery, spontaneity and growth”* (p.35). In his dance therapy research, Hargo explored dance with the Deaf and Dumb, where rhythm became the main focus for assimilation and healing. The special needs children in the case study, danced to the rhythm with enthusiasm; not because they listened to the music or understood the lyrics in the songs that were sang, but because they were able to appreciate and connect their contentment through the rhythm of the music. In this instant, the creative capabilities in these special needs children are transformed into honest creative expressions that can offer them strength and progress.

Rogers (1993) emphasizes that, *“the creative process as experienced through the Expressive Arts is one path to self-discovery, self-esteem and self-empowerment”* (p. 22). In this case, the arts are used as tools for training these children to achieve social change, personal transformation and growth.

There are several segregated schools for the various segments of special needs in Ghana; namely, the cognitive impaired, the visually impaired; the deaf and dumb etc., this research focuses on the children cognitive impairment. Some of these children still live under very unacceptable conditions in the communities, where negative attitudes and perceptions about them are detrimental to their progress. Even though, these

ⁱⁱ Darko, Janice in a dance therapy session at the Pantang Hospital in Accra shows how patients’ attitudes and behaviors improved. Psychiatry follow-ups after her dance project revealed that some of these patients began integrating in the mainstream society.

children are better off in the segregated schools, an inclusive education which has just been implemented is the better option.

2. Objectives

The main objective is to help them to improve them socially, intellectually, psychologically and physically generally, and in specific terms help to enhance their level of concentration and attention span as well as help them to progressively acquire values such as contentment, sincerity, courage, endurance, perseverance etc. These values also help them attain social and emotional healing which can assist them to overcome such problems as low self-esteem, inferiority complex, resentment, animosity, hostility and other negative attitudes and behaviors from society.

In sincerity, I must say that not all of these have been achieved in this study. However, the children gained confidence and their social interactions with one another improved as they repeatedly took part in these games. Most of these games are vigorous and energetic and they helped these children to become physically active, strong and healthy. It is important to stress that once they are healthy; they will have sound mind this will in turn trigger their intellectual capabilities. The games used are explained below.

“Kyekyekule, Tuwe tuwe and Dentsegbona” are the main Ghanaian traditional games employed in this instant to the said goals. Apart from the above benefits, these games were also designed to test the children’s readiness, their level of concentration, observation, imagination and attention-span even before the commencement of the other improvisations. These games were also used as an indirect method of auditioning. As the games progressed, it was easy to discover the children’s responsiveness, alertness and their distinct and unique creative capacities.

Kyekyekule is a popular childhood game in Ghana. In this activity, the leader stands in front or in the middle of the rest of the players and recites/sings the popular Kyekyekule recital/song while performing a variety of actions for the other children to imitate. The leader places his/ her hands on the various parts of the body; head, shoulders, knees, waist, elbow and feet and swings from side to side with a specific rhythm. The leader may invent other gestures, just to check the players’ level of concentration.

The lyrics of the song; ‘Kyekyekule, Kyekye Kofi Sa, Kofi Salanga, Langatilanga, Kum a le le’ show a call and response kind of activity. The game’s arrangement in the diagram below shows variations in gestures, however, in the game proper, one activity at a time.

Figure 1 below show the real performance of Kyekyekule.

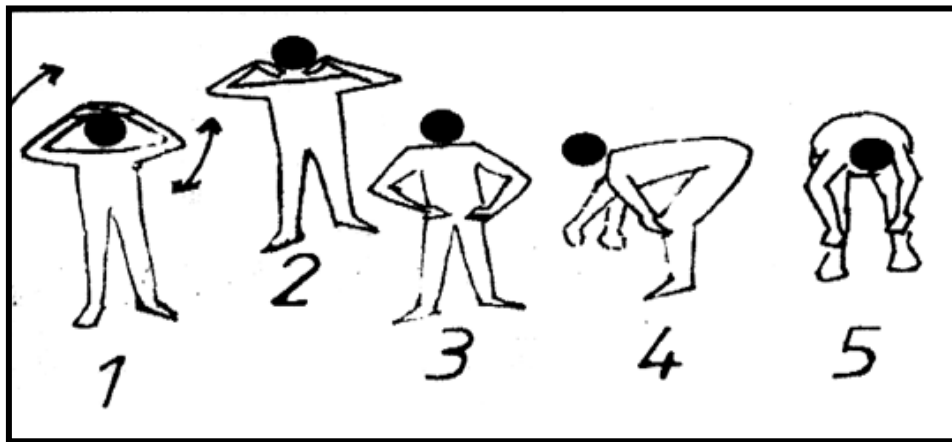


Figure 1: Kyekyekule



Plate 1: School pupils playing Kyekyekule



Plate 2: School pupils playing Tuwetuwe Salama Tuwetuwe



Plate 3: School pupils playing Tuwetuwe Salama Tuwetuwe

Plates 2 and 3 show children demonstrating another game called “Tuwetuwe Salama Tuwetuwe”.

Another game called ‘Tuwetuwe Salama Tuwewe’ is a dancing game which is popular among most tribes in Ghana. A minimum of two people play this game facing each other. The title of the song provides the name of the game. This game also uses precise tempo for its activity and once the rhythm and tempo are followed, the game moves on.

2.1 The Stone Game

In this game, the entire group of children squat in a circle and each of them hold a stone, as they sing the song. Each child moves his/her stone to the clockwise direction. In this game also, the tempo determines the success or failure of the game. When a player misses the rhythm and has more than one stone in front of him or her, he/she is eliminated and the game re-starts. This is continued until a winner emerges. The ability of all players to move all the stones round with the same rhythm without any hitch is the fun derived from the game. The special needs children who partake in this game are given another chance to re-enter. Most often, they improve and stay longer in the game. Regular children may not be given this chance. Any song can be used depending on how fast or slow the leader wants the rhythm to go. A common Ewe song usually sung is below.

Tuwe Tuwe

Tu-we, tu-we ___ Sa-la-ma tu-we, tu-we ___ Tu-we, tu-we ___ Sa-la-ma - tu-we, tu-we A-bo-su-
 wa A-ma-da-wura-ma Tu-we-tu-we A-bo-su-wa A-ma-da-wura-ma tu-we tu-we

Dentsee Gbɔna

Den ʒ tsee gbɔ - na kpa - li - me den - tsee gbɔ na De - la le mɔ - dzi ne va
 yie na va kpɔe da Den ʒ tsee gbɔ - na kpa - li - me den ʒ tsee gbɔ - na

The illustration of the game and the photos of children from Dzorwulu Special School playing are below.

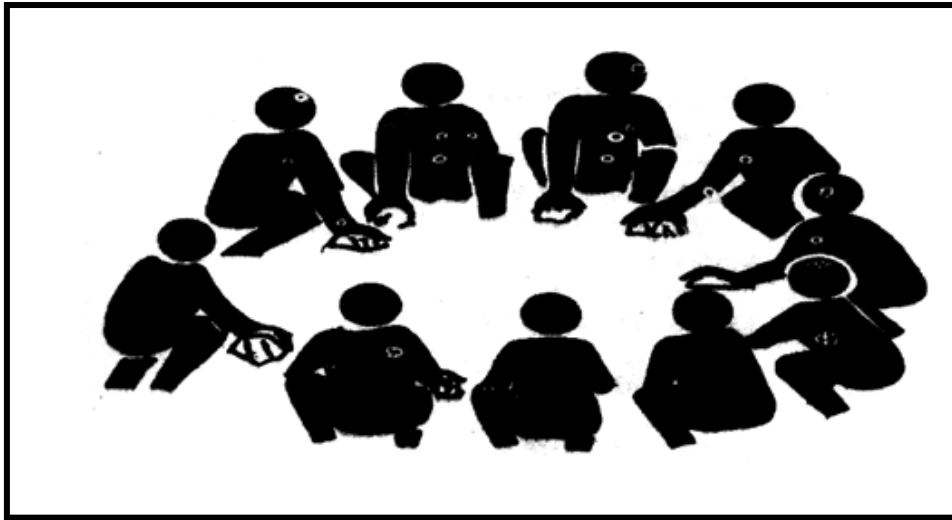


Figure 2: The arrangement of the children before the game



Plate 4: The picture above shows the game with children of Dzorwulu Special School and Mr. Osam their teacher

2.2 Song

*“Dentsegbɔna kpalime, Dentsegbɔna, Dela le mɔdzi, N’ evayie, Na va kpɔeda
Dela le mɔdzi, N’e evayie, na va kpɔeda, Dentsegbɔna Kpalime. Dentsegbɔna”*

The song means Dentse (name of a male) is visiting us, but Dela (Ewe name of male/female) is on the way; same direction, pay him/ her visit first before coming home. All the three games create fun while exercising the body, while helping to build the children’s level of concentration and attentiveness. The games help to build their

confidence in doing collaborative work. It is important that these children are given a second chance for replay, because this helps to improve their creative skills, level of concentration and attention-span.

2.3 The Walk Game

"We mechanize all of our daily movements and it alters according to the place we find ourselves". Even though we have our own individual gait, particular to each of us, certain areas, environments and situations oblige us to walk slowly or swiftly (Boal, 2002, pp. 70-74). I adapted the Walk game from Boal (2002), to suit certain situations here in Ghana and allowed the children to take part. The objective of these walk games is to challenge the children with Special needs, and other users to develop their senses of observation, imagination, and recall. In these activities, I asked the children with special needs to imagine walking in Amedzofe, a mountainous area in Ghana; Aflao, a sandy area; Afife, a marshy area; and Alavanyo a stony/ rocky area.

Once the description of the area is vividly depicted, as mountainous, marshy, rocky or sandy, children are expected to imagine a movement that is exactly or close to their understanding of the concept. These activities were rather challenging from the onset but gradually, the children were able to imagine and do the actions. There was however, more fun when I involved them in the Animal walks game. For instance, walk like a duck, a monkey or a kangaroo. Their ability to imagine and recall the particular activity is the essence of these games.



Plate 5: One of the students positioned to do the Elephant walk

2.4 Observation

The major observations after all the games are that; the children with special needs require constant practice in order to get immersed in the games. In other words, they need to repeat the activities severally. They do not require complex techniques to 'master' simple actions. Patience is required in the activities to enable these special needs children develop these pertinent values that can help them achieve contentment

and restoration. In this research, I focused on the group, however, the individual output and contributions of these special needs children as well as their interaction with each other in the group aided to the success of this research.

3. Findings

My utmost purpose for exploring these games for cognitive impaired children is to offer them the opportunity to create and practice meaningful actions that have the capacity to enhance their intellectual, psychological, social and even physical development. Children with cognitive impairment may not originate their own ideas, and execute them but they enjoy doing things for themselves, once the opportunity is created. Although they may tend to learn very slowly by making use of their unassuming abilities of imitation, reasoning and generalization, they are capable of building on what has been initiated.

The special needs children were guided to participate in the various creative activities both realistically and symbolically to arrive at solutions using action methods. These action methods offer them the chance to willingly work playfully and use the feedbacks to achieve creative breakthroughs. The excitement after employing the creative arts is the appreciation of a deep sense of discovery, initiative, empowerment, and self-esteem. The intellectual shortfalls of these children nevertheless did not hinder them; however, the fact still remains that these children may never achieve anything except deliberate and guarded measures are applied.

Children with cognitive impairment do not require complex techniques to 'master' simple actions; flexible options rather than rigid constraints are the best options. For instance during the games, it was observed that, the children with special needs require constant practice in order to get immersed in the games. They needed to repeat the activities severally to enable them develop pertinent values that can help them achieve contentment, independence and restoration.

4. Conclusion

The major conclusion is that such educational interventions with cognitive impaired children should aim at developing in them values for life that can help them become independent individuals and useful citizens to themselves and the society at large. The games therefore, have become a vehicle through which the children with cognitive impairment have improved so that public perception about these special needs children can change.

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