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LEARNING THROUGH ENTERTAINMENT: AN ADVANTAGE TO CHILDREN'S THEATRE. (A FOCUS ON SCRIBBLES)

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Abstract

The cradle of Children's Theatre can be traced to storytelling art of the early men. In Africa, this form of theatre also featured in diverse cultural ceremonies and celebrations. Entertainment in form of stories were re-enacted for children to instil moral, cultural, history, virtues, values and prevailing norms of the society. This was a good medium to fully integrate and incorporate children to the societies as responsible adults later on. At this point in time, little or no attention was paid the concept of children's theatre neither were its features and benefits extolled. However, with the advent of civilisation which education was a rider, new insights emerged on the importance of children's teaching and learning through various means and modes, one of which is Children's Theatre. On a larger scale, Children theatre is targeted at improving children's interest to learn with ease. It is on this background that this paper emerges, to review the entertaining aspect of children's theatre to foster children's learning. To achieve this, a study of Scribbles, an educational children based entertainment organisation, is used as basis for exposition. An episode of Scribbles is therefore the yardstick for measuring the role of entertainment as an element in children's theatre for children's learning. This study will be a guide to child educators in the presentation and execution of lessons in classrooms as well as projecting the importance of children's theatre and its attendant elements in teaching young children.

Key Words: Children's Learning, Children's Theatre, Entertainment, Scribbles, Theatre.

Introduction

Art is an important aspect of culture that most distinctly separates a human being from all other living creatures. It derives from ancient rituals, presenting human communication with gods as a sign of respect and dependence on their will.

Rituals were always expressed by stylized visual appearance (by



costume, masks), symbolic movements and specific sounds. These are the roots of all the arts. Over thousands of years, mankind has accumulated a precious heritage, enriched from generation to generation with new artworks contributed by the most brilliant artists. This heritage fills our lives with positive energy, confronts us with ourselves and provokes us to be conscious and proud human beings. It is therefore of the utmost importance for every child to get a chance as soon as possible to be confronted with the many faces of arts.

According to Porterfield (2018, p. 1), research shows that learning through play is an important part of a child's development. A child begins to find out who they are, through play even during infancy. Children's Theatre possesses embellishments and features which arouses interest in children to learn and improves teacher's ability at pedagogical teaching. The various processes of theatre open possibilities of allowing children to display different skills and help them to learn from diverse sources. Thus, the medium of children's theatre could be exploited as an important tool in this regard for the overall development of the children.

Meaning of Children's Theatre

There is no universal agreement within academic discourse on the parameters in which the term, children's theatre should be defined. Children's theatre has been a field of research by many scholars and definition of the term varies and differs. "Children's theatre is specifically created and performed for children audience, either by children actors or professional adult actors or a combination of both". (Elufeya, 2018, p. 82). This implies that although it states that it can either be performed by child actors or professional adult actors; a performance can only be regarded as children theatre if it is specifically target at children audience. This further posits it as a formal theatrical experience in which a play or dramatic activities are presented for children's audience. Therefore, the goal of children's theatre is to provide the best possible theatrical experience for the child audience. This explains Osakue's conceptualization of children's theatre as "an educational instructional approach which focuses on development through drama" (2013, p. 9). It is a relaxed kind of theatre that is geared towards developing the participants. Its main objective is to enhance learning and intellectual development rather than entertainment of the audience. More so, "... it is principally valued as a learning medium rather than as an art form that is governed and validated through criteria other than aesthetics..." (Iyeh, 2006, p. 9). Generally, the scope of children's theatre as a developmental tool for children should entirely facilitate children's cognitive skills and communication skills in order to offer flexibility and creativity combined with discipline which provides the best combination for a learning process.

Origin of Children's Theatre

The beginning of children's theatre dates from school drama which originated in the ecclesiastical schools of Western Europe in the 13th through 15th

Century, (The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia 1979). From the year 1900, plays suitable for child audiences began to appear more frequently in New York commercial theatres. By 1915, plays such as Peter Pan, The Blue Bird, Little Women, Snow White, and the Seven Dwarf, Alice in Wonderland and Treasure Island had been enthusiastically received by thousands of children. "The established children theatre programs which thrive today can most accurately trace their ancestry to an enterprise which began in 1903 among the Russian – Jewish immigrants in New York". (Davis and Watkins, 1960, p. 42). The Children's Educational Theatre, guided from 1903 to 1908 by Alice Minnie and Herts Heniger produced two plays a year on the little stage of a building which belonged to the parent organization, the educational alliance. Dramatic activities with and for children came to be recognized for the values they brought to average underprivileged youngsters. As the community theatre movement began to sweep the country, several leading organizations began to include a play for children in their regular seasons.

The general understanding of children's theatre in Africa differs from the Western one. The features of children's theatre in Africa are different from the children's theatre practiced in the Western part of the world. This is largely due to differences in cultural environment as well as perception. The early mode of children performances in Africa were majorly storytelling, dance and ritual. Many different African traditions have relied on oratory, stories that are passed down communal histories and myths and were also intended to share important morals and values to children. In West Africa, story tellers are often called 'griots'. Each storyteller must use his or her charisma, vocal imitation, chanting and music to make the stories engaging for children. Often, the stories follow predictable plot patterns such as the use of call-and-response so that the children participate. It features trickster characters like, tortoise and animist gods to ultimately deliver a proverb or moral lesson at the end of a story. "... a good teacher who tries not to make his lectures or lessons boring borrows a leaf from the act of storytelling/ Theatre." (Adedina, 2007, p.11). Across the continent, people practice very elaborate rituals that include ornate costumes and marks, music, dancing and storytelling. Through rituals, communities pass down social patterns and rules to their children, recite history and encounter with gods. Rituals in African Children's Theatre informs children of culture, historical events and morals. Often times, the dance is communal rather than partnered, and audience (children) participate along with the designated performers.

Children's Theatre as Entertainment

Theatre, besides schools, can be another medium through which children can develop morally. Theatre can stimulate children to learn as music does. Theatre in schools creates lots of exciting moments for learners. This is mainly to stimulate interest and entertain children. Entertainment is a form of activity that holds the attention and interest of an audience or gives pleasure and





delight. It can be an idea or a task, but is more likely to be one of the activities or events that have developed over thousands of years specifically for the purpose of keeping an audience attention. Therefore, children entertainment is centred on play which is significant for their growth. Entertainment is provided for children or presented to them by adults through activities that appeals to their senses. Children's theatre is aimed mostly at stimulating children to learn by exciting them with various aesthetics in children's theatre. Morals are also equally learned by children as they get entertained. "The morality in children's theatre can be more effective than the one learnt in book." (Eluyefa, 2017, p.88). For example, the moral in children's theatre's performance could be that it is always good to help the elders in the society. The children should be able to connect with the performance to learn from it, hence the need for entertainment experience. The entertainment that children's theatre produce cut across various forms such as, games, music, dance, exercise, design and so on.

Brief on Scribbles Entertainment

Scribbles Events and Entertainment was established in 2015 but came into the social media platform in 2019 following the desire to teach children through music and entertainment. Its emergence was from Australia but gained ground in Lagos, Nigeria. The word, scribbles means to write or draw in a hasty or careless way or to make meaningless marks, scrolls, lines, etc, with a pencil, pen or the like. The definition was a contributing factor to the motivation for the creation of the organization. Many a times, children do and carry out certain activities on paper or with words that looks so meaningless before the eyes of their parents and teachers. It is believed that they are ignorant of what they do when they act that way. Scribbles Entertainment believes that children have the right to do what they love and value. So it is with this desire to value children with what they think, feel and love that the organization intends to teach them what they ought to know. Hence, the name of the organization, scribbles. The concept behind this unique innovation came about from a real concern for children's learning. Most children get negatively influenced by what they see on the television screen. Many spend time watching the television without a productive learning accomplishment. More so, for every child/kiddies show, there is always a sole target which is creating fun in learning. This target is not different from Scribbles as it poises to possess all necessary features that satisfies this target. However, for every organization to have its uniqueness in content and its delivery, there is the need for narrowed specific aims and objectives of that organization. Scribbles entertainment has the following as their objectives.

- To convince parents on the need to give room to their children to learn norms and values through kiddies shows. Scribbles show contents that would also be of great interests to parents of children that they would see the need to allow their children identify with scribbles entirely.
- To create memorable events, outings, excursions or celebrations for

children.

- Including Nigerian culture and cultures of other places to teach languages, dances, food and music so that kids would also be better representatives of their culture having learnt their norms and values.
- To make the world a better place by building up children to represent positively. Scribbles teach songs, act out short scenes and tell stories on screen and live on stage to teach children boldness and infuse confidence in them as well as to build self-esteem and belief in them.

Basically, the operation mode in scribbles narrows down to production, efforts put together is tilted towards having suitable productions to satisfy the target audience. Preceding paragraphs will discuss the three production stages in details. They are Pre-production, production and post-production.

Pre-production Stage

During the pre-production, scripts are provided by the producer. This script is of course, basically children oriented. The script is edited, typed and sent to the member of the crew and other offices concerned. Thereafter, the management creates audition to get characters to fit in the roles created in the scripts. Auditions which last two to three days mostly are taken to schools and universities, depending on the kind of script written and quality of characters needed. Although, scribbles have some characters who have been finally cast as signature characters, they also cast or feature new characters often times in new productions. Forthwith, actors internalize their lines and roles during rehearsals as locations for shooting the play script are prepared. The scripts are mainly shot in episodes. For indoor shootings, the studio is prepared to meet the demands of the script which is about to be produced. Provisions are made for sets, light, costumes, make-ups and props at this preparatory stage.

Production Stage

At the production process, the operation involved is shooting/filming. Here, the director assistant director assists characters to interpret the line ideally. Various locations are visiting in accordance to the concept provided by the script or the director. The production stage also, for episodes that require songs and any other musical effects for embellishments, involves going into the studio to produce these songs which must have been rehearsed and learnt by whoever would be singing it, characters in the episode or a different person. The songs/musical effects are recorded, mastered and mixed during editing and sent to the film editor for infusion in the





episodes. When shooting scenes where characters would have to sing or a mime a music, it would be played with a musical box for characters to lip sync to get the correct expressions before the music is eventually incorporated into the episodes during the video editing.

Post-production Stage

Operation processes ends at the post production stage. In the post production stage, all camera shots or motion pictures are merged, filtered and edited with the ideal effects and sounds. The editor is of course aware of the type of theatre that is being practiced, children theatre. Therefore, he takes due considerations when editing the shots to suit and appeal to the related sense of the children and maybe, parents. The videos, when ready, are uploaded on social media. The scripts which are not written for screen but stage are presented live on stage, in schools, parties, or other events. Afterwards, a conference is held by the staff to discuss feedbacks from audience. Members of staff then make suggestions on how to improve their services. Payment of salaries are made after financial account on expenditures and expenses is balanced.

Analysis of Episode IV (Safety)

Safety is one essential area of the wellbeing of human lives. As a matter of fact, one of the essence of living is to be safe in order to achieve what one wants to achieve in any area of life. Among the groups of humans, it is unarguable that children are more vulnerable to accidents and injuries at home and at school. Although safety guidelines are most times provided for kids to follow but these rules written in black and white or said as a words would not really establish the consciousness in the mind of the children to remember the rules and follow them. Hence there is the need to present safety rules in an entertainment yet educative and instructive manner to children. Episode IV educates kid on how to observe safety rules in different instances for their wellbeing. The scene opens with the character getting to know what they love to do when playing outside the house. This question is one that would arouse the interest of any kid to talk about what they love doing outside because it seeks for their opinion. The female character, Cindy, then talks about what she does when she plays outside such riding a bicycle. She tells and displays what she puts on whenever she rides her bicycles. Her helmet and knee guide. This, of course, makes Tiktok curious about the reason Cindy wears a helmet and knee guide. Cindy explains to Tiktok the reason she puts them on. Cindy and Tiktok, thereby, encourage children to use seatbelts when they are in the car. These lessons are completely established by the characters through music and choreographed dance.

The dominant theme in the episode IV is taking precaution. Children are taught to be precautionary in various instances. Precaution simply means taking absolutely care whenever something is being done in order to avoid a

problem. Cindy takes precaution by putting on a helmet and knee guide when riding a bicycle. This prevents and protects her from getting injured even if she falls. In their music, they advise children to take precaution when carrying out some activities. They tell the children to use the seatbelt when seated in a car, look at both sides of the road when crossing and wash their hands always with soap and clean water. Also, there is the theme of taking responsibility. In episode IV, children are encouraged to take responsibility to ensure their safety. They don't need to wait to get instructions from their parents before taking precautions during activities. Safety is a very important issue in the society and has to be addressed regularly importantly because it concerns lives of individuals. More so, it is one of the challenges confronted by children thereby making it compulsory for daily life.

In children's drama, just like adult drama, plot has five main parts in this order.

- i. Beginning (where exposition, or setting and characters are introduced)
- ii. Rising action
- iii. Climax (the most exciting part)
- iv. Falling action
- v. Resolution.

Episode IV opens with the characters greeting the children and welcoming them. Cindy asks Tiktok if he likes to play outside and Tiktok responds in the affirmative. He further exposes what he does when he plays outside, jumping, turning around, and hopping like a kangaroo. As children would always do in every conversation with their mates, Tiktok also asks Cindy what she does whenever she plays outside too. Cindy tells him that she rides a bicycle. This section of the episode is seen as the expository part of the episode. Then the episode takes a higher turn when Tiktok asks the need for Cindy to think of safety all the time. This question poses and reveals the innocence of most kids and their ignorance in certain matters which could be dangerous to their lives if they are not taught and enlightened. Cindy makes it known to Tiktok the inherent danger that could be prevented when safety measures are observed when playing outside. Cindy gives more scenarios where kids are expected to be safety conscious such as, car, by using a seat belt; she says she has a song to sing on safety. This excites Tiktok and they dance happily to the music. The whole episode comes to a resolution and ending when both characters bid the children goodbye.

Apparently, the directorial approach employed in episode IV is the Brechtian style which is otherwise called the alienation method involving the breaking of the fourth wall. This is where the imaginary wall between the audience (children) and actors on stage is broken. Rather than allowing the audience to sit passively and get lost in the show, the actors, Cindy and Tiktok sometimes, directly





address the audience with a speech, comment or questions, such as "What do you do when you play outside the house? The director made use of montage to highlight the issues he is trying to communicate. He made use of video clips of moving vehicles, where passengers wear seat belts. Finally, all through the episode, the director made use of songs, music and dance.

Children learn morals and lessons better through songs. In this particular children's show, by Scribbles, rhymes and moral songs are predominant. As a matter of fact, a large number of songs which are sung to children are composed by Scribbles and produced in musical studios and sometimes live on set. The song in this episode sheds more light on how children need to keep safe when playing outside. The genre of music employed in the song is called "Funk". The sound of the combination of the instruments is child friendly and can be used as a lullaby. The song comprises of 12-13 lines. Its lyrics are easy to understand and can be easily mastered and remembered by children. This is achieved through repetition of lyrics.

To accompany the music, very simple dance steps which are very easy to learn by children are adapted. The choreography depicts lines in the songs through easy routines and demonstrations like raising of hands, rolling of fists and swinging of the body from side to side. These dance steps are performed by both characters who that would have held several rehearsals before performance. More so, the dance is arranged to suit the genre of music whether pop, reggae, jive, afro beat, highlife, jazz, rock and so on. This is to ensure proper alignment to pass the intended message effectively without discord or confusion.

There are only two main characters in this children entertainment. Tiktok, is a male character that is very possessive, stubborn and turns deaf ears to Cindy's advice. He, of course, learns his lesson after getting into trouble. Another notable characteristic of Tiktok is that he sleeps a lot. His character is easily identified with by the male children because it relates with their personalities. Most males want their views to be seen and respected. Boys see no harm in some irresponsible actions they take but learn their lessons after getting into trouble, hence the need to teach children from this perspective with Tiktok's character. In episode IV, Tiktok plays the role of a child who doesn't necessarily see any use keeping safe when playing outside. This can be seen when he asks Cindy, "Do you always have to think of safety all the time?" At the end of the episode, he learns the need for ensuring safety when playing or doing other things.

Cindy is a very impressive female character. She always compliments Tiktok. Most times, she attempts to teach and correct Tiktok in love. She is always ready to accept Tiktok back and help him out of trouble. She wakes Tiktok up with the chorus "Wakey wakey Tiktok." With this character, she would help children, especially female children to tolerate one another thereby fostering love,

patience and oneness among them. In the episode, safety, Cindy exposes the need for safety. She plays the role of a careful child who plays by riding her bicycle but ensuring that she is safe by using her helmet and knee guide. Costumes used in children drama are usually colourful, attractive and very bright. These appeals first to their sense of sight after which they get to understand why the characters are putting them on. In this episode, Safety, the male character, Tiktok puts on a purple turtle-neck shirt baring three white stripes on both sleeves, from the shoulder down the wrist with the scribbles logo inscribed at the front of the shirt. It is worn on a pair of long black trouser with three white stripes on both sides too, a pair of black socks and black sneaker. Cindy puts on a bright pink turtle-neck shirt baring three white long stripes on both sleeves, from the shoulder to the wrist. Cindy's shirt also has in front, scribbles logo, black leggings, a short wide, black tommy skirt and black sneakers. These costumes for both characters are signatory. They are worn most times in episodes except for some special episodes that need the inclusion of other kinds of costumes.

Majorly, the background of episodes to be presented on screen makes use of Chroma. This Chroma is used to enable the editor place any kind of objects or material on the background. These objects or materials are not life but fictional. For example, an episode which is to be shot in a garden is done in the studio with the use of a Chroma at the background. The editor then places artificial trees and flowers at the background of the scene when the video is being edited. Nevertheless, these episodes could also be shot real backgrounds depending on the director's style and idea. In this particular episode, the setting is in a beautiful classroom with various colourful learning charts on the wall. The relevance of this particular setting to the episode is to show the children an important location where they should observe safety measures. Children play in their classes, playground and during break hours, hence the basic need to set the episode in a classroom.

In children theatre, words used by characters can help establish a distinct voice and 'style'. The tenses and sentence structures used in episode IV is a simple present tense, habitual verb tense with very simple sentence structures respectively. In other episodes, idiomatic expressions are included in dialogues to teach children certain moral lessons after a story. For example, "A stitch in time saves nine". This informs children to do things on time without procrastination to avoid damages. The language used in this episode is English Language because it is produced for children to improve the spoken English of Children. Moreover, the official language used by language used by the teachers in classroom settings is English. The importance of communicating with the use of English in this episode is to reach out to a larger percentage of children all over the world with the message that is passed, safety precautions are basically written in English in classrooms and other places in the country.



Conclusion

This study reveals the use of children's theatre as an entertainment tool to inspire and motivate learning in children. The organisation of Scribbles Entertainment serves as a yardstick for thorough assessment of aesthetics embedded in children's theatre. This in no small measure enhance. This in no small measure enhances teaching and learning enterprise to stimulate expected responses from children in the school environment. Furthermore, the analysis of episode IV exposes the intrinsic personalities of children and how they exhibit these traits in different scenarios. Children, who are extroverts or introverts, can find an outlet and balance for their different behavioural characteristics at various instances as related to their personalities. In the episode studied, a bellicose Tiktok and an accommodating Cindy, re-enact daily routines of safety and applicable measures at home, in school and the environment. The advent of Scribbles Entertainment like many other children entertainment shows has brought a greater value to screen content, while promoting at the same time, entertaining teaching and learning through children's theatre. This achieved by the incorporation of various drama elements like, dance, music, design, language and so on, to attain teaching and learning situations through films or stage productions. This further affirms that good learning can take place as entertainment for children in schools.

Recommendations

Having highlighted the process and contributions of entertainment as a window of opportunity in children's theatre enabling children's learning, recommendations are made. Children educators and trainers needs to be exposed to the many benefits inherent in children's theatre. This will enable them discover other interesting avenues and approaches to teaching that will endear children to learning. This is an indicator that the use of theatre as an entertainment tool can motivate children into learning.

There is the need to create, establish or organise more children outfits such as Scribbles Entertainment as a tool that can motivate children into learning. Moreover, the case study, Scribbles Entertainment has revealed the aesthetic elements which are embedded in children's theatre to receive expected responses from children when they are in a teaching and learning situation.

There is also the need to evolve and adopt an all-inclusive and participatory learning which is the order of the day in modern times. This will afford children, irrespective of their challenges, good opportunities for self-discovery and self-expressions towards development in all areas.

Children content on TV, Cable networks and other social media must be carefully targeted to address peculiar issues that would enhance children's

social integration into the society. Value should be added to screen content and at the same time entertainment in teaching and learning situations through films or stage production with music, songs and dance as indispensable elements.

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