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FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

It is a pleasure to present to you the March Edition of Journal of Early Childhood and Primary Education (JECE). This journal provides qualitative and quantitative research to early childhood and primary education, bridging the two disciplines and addressing issues and challenges related to early childhood and primary education. This journal is the only journal in the field of early childhood and primary education that is published quarterly. The journal publishes peer-reviewed articles on early childhood and primary education, including research, policy, and practice. The journal has particular relevance to policymakers and practitioners working in the field of early childhood and primary education.

I hereby present to you all the articles in this new edition of JECE. I hope you enjoy reading them and that they challenge you to think about the issues raised. I also hope that many of you will seek to share your research over the coming months and years ahead. It is so important that your research and work are heard in the academic arena as we work together to improve the quality of early childhood and primary education. I wish you all the best and I look forward to another challenging year in 2013. "Journal of Early Childhood and Primary Education"

Professor Olatunji E. Alim

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INSTRUCTION TO CONTRIBUTORS

Journal of Early Childhood and Primary Education publishes articles in the areas of Early Childhood and Primary Education and other relevant fields. It is a professional publication for early childhood practitioners such as classroom teachers, child care providers, and teacher educators.

1. Journal of Early Childhood and Primary Education receives all manuscript submissions electronically as an email attachment to jecpekwasu@yahoo.com with a claim that your content is original and free from copyright infringement in part or entirely.
2. Note that you cannot submit your article to multiple journals at the same time.
3. Manuscripts should be formatted as a MS Word document using 12 point New Times Roman font, double-spaced with 1 1/2 inch margins all around and should not exceed 15 pages in length including the reference list. Authors should ensure originality of content and avoid cut and paste materials.
4. The author's name, contact information, and institutional affiliation should appear on the title page only.
5. An abstract of 250 words or less should follow the title page. Reference should conform to the Publication Manual (latest edition) of the American Psychological Association.
6. All manuscripts will be acknowledged promptly. All articles will undergo rigorous peer review, based on initial editor screening and refereeing by anonymous reviewers. The review process takes three months.
7. Articles judged to be of substantial importance to those concerned with the education of children and of the highest quality and ethical standards will be accepted.
8. Submit your final article (if required) before the deadline mentioned in the acceptance letter.

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STORYTELLING AND EARLY LEARNERS' EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: AN EXPERIMENT

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Abstract

Africa is very rich in oral literature which keeps evolving and outliving several decades of human existence. Storytelling is one of the oral literature's oldest art forms. Its main essence is that of a person role playing and interacting with others in an assumed role. This study explored the challenges, contributions, and the solutions inherent in using storytelling in enhancing learning and educational activities within an early childhood learning environment. To achieve the above, the observation method was adopted in the field work based on an experiment carried out at the primary staff school of Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Oto/Ijanikin, Lagos. Open and close ended question were employed to solicit responses from the sixteen(16) randomly selected pupils for the experiment. The study was aimed at exploring the art form of storytelling, its ability at construct role taking, empathy and self concept. It also examined how storytelling enhances the social, emotional and educational development of learners in relation to their cognitive growth. Finally, recommendations were made based on the outcome of the experiment.

Keywords: Storytelling, stories, early learning, early childhood education, educational development.

Introduction

Storytelling is a common form of African oral literature and one that had been in existence since the beginning of man. Storytelling is a crucial activity humans perform to translate their individual private experiences into a public, culturally negotiated form. Storytelling is the historical recordings of important events in the life of a people through verbal transmission from one generation to another. It is a process where a person (the narrator), using vocalization, a narrative structure, and/or dramatic and mental imagery communicate with other humans (the audience). The audience in turn, also uses mental imagery to communicate back to the narrator through verbal and non-verbal responses. (Anderson, 2007).

According to Lowenthal and Dunlap (2010), "Stories and storytelling are powerful strategies for teaching and learning". Stories help make meaning out of experience. It is these experiences that crystallize into learning. Stories improve the link between prior knowledge and improve knowledge. This explains why good stories are hardly ever forgotten by children. Furthermore, Anderson (2007) opines that "through stories, teachers can learn of their children's cultures, diverse experiences, prior knowledge, and of their connections to family and friends". Characters are depicted by children,

teachers, parents and professional authors and given life through shared mental pictures, and verbal rhythms expressed in personal narratives and stories. Characters are often fictitious and non-humans like animals and can be narrated by men, women or children, depending on the society. Early storytellers told of encounters with animals or other tribes, as well as created explanations for natural phenomena, such as thunder and lightning with members of their community. Descriptions of the supernatural, through deity, animal, and nature worship, deemed the position of storyteller as a spiritual translator between the known and the unknown worlds. Most stories find expression in myths, legends, folk songs, proverbial sayings and so on.

Oamen (2008) attempts to trace the origin of storytelling to "the need to transfer values, norms, history, songs, poems etc. from memory to memory as there was no means of written records of man's events. This was before the art of symbolic representation, which came before writing started". The necessity to transfer societal history and values and record its development led to the need to entertain while giving such facts. Stories are therefore told for entertainment, by some creative and imaginative individuals in the society and performed orally before live audiences. Stating the importance of storytelling, Anderson (2007) says

Historically, storytelling has been used as a pedagogical tool to impress moral and cultural values and norms, as well as, in literacy instruction and oration. Overall, the message conveyed from the historical and theoretical framework suggested that narration and storytelling are methods of enhancing children's development of a moral and cognizant self. Storytelling and narration, however, were tools not exclusionary to other important instructional tactics.

Stories and storytelling help make meaning out of experience. They are both powerful strategies for teaching and learning. Students always remember good stories because the experience gained serves as keys to learning. It is this same value of sharing of experience that spans generations and helps to connect people around the world. Through storytelling, personal information is disclosed and is used in relating to each other's common experiences, in terms of social presence.

The orality of a story is portrayed through its unrehearsed state, mass audience and performance. Storytelling depends greatly on the memory of the performer, improvisation and interaction between him and his audience. There is no gain saying that to effectively tell stories, the narrator must have an in-depth knowledge of the culture and language of the society he is depicting. It is worthy to note that exposure to cultural practices and language begins predominantly during the early childhood stage. The social and moral messages embedded in stories are present in human verbal and non-verbal exchanges that occur in everyday life. In view of vital roles of storytelling there is a link between it and early learning. However, there is the need to examine the concept of early learning and its relationship with storytelling.

Early learning

Early learning is a period before a child's concrete learning. Children in this category usually find themselves in Nursery schools where they spend two or three years before proceeding to primary school. Early learning could also be regarded as a:

Semi-formal education arrangement, usually outside the home, whereby children from about the age of three are exposed to play-like developmental stage until mandatory age of government approved for formal learning
(Maduewesi, 1999)

This is also the stage where the child experiences psychomotor development as he learns to run smoothly, climbs stairs, jump, draw, fold etc (Adedina 2007). This attainment of growth at this stage allows a fairly accurate prediction of the progress he/she will make as an adolescent or adult. At the same time, there is physical growth in height, weight strength and muscular activities. Children at this stage are curious, inquisitive and highly expressive which is vital to their education. It is during these years that children experience rapid learning. At this stage children love to hear and tell stories. They imitate adults and engage in role-play. Any opportunities given to a child in the classroom to listen or tell a story is unique to him/her. It produces an immediate and prompt response from such a child and is one of the surest ways of establishing rapport between him and the teacher. (Fowowe and Adeleke, (2007). Unfortunately most parents' see early learning (or what is referred to as Nursery education in Nigeria) as an escape from the mischief of their children while they attend to other pressing issues. Contrary to this, it is "a structural element of education reform, early learning standards shape the content of instructional curriculum, set the goals of professional development, and establish the focus of outcomes assessment" (Drew, Christie, Johnson and Meckley, 2008)

Storytelling, early learning and educational development

"Stories are the lifeblood of human existence and it is important that storytelling supports children's early lives" (Hendy and Toon, 2001). Storytelling and stories are the heart of human experience. Through stories there is a sharing of events, beliefs and values that constitute our makeup and relationships with families, communities and cultures.

Looking inward, story patterns and characters intertwine with the hard-to-perceive forces that shape our lives. Looking outward, story-threads join us to a larger cultural fabric. The most important stories may be those we share with family and friends, but all help preserve memory, explain our present, and imagine our future. have been briefly overviewed and analyzed.
Anderson (2007).

A further explanation of Anderson places storytelling in the realm of narrative, creative and imaginative thinking by children. During storytelling sessions, discussions could be based on the environment, design, technology, science, citizenship and so forth. Although these stories are fictions, they take place based on reality. All activities are controlled by natural law. There are times

when there could be suspension of reality because of the fantasy, yet life experiences and factual knowledge are applied in an active way, frequently providing a genuine "need to know" (Hendy and Toon, 2001).

Referring to storytelling as narratives, McKcough (2008) explains that

narratives allow us to organise and represent our experiences by providing an account of events over time, express them in a sequential and diachronic order; understand behaviour that is sometimes contrary to some culturally defined norm and the human plight that results; and, provide a way to reflect, examine, and interpret the underlying intentions behind action.

Therefore storytelling is about learning and turning points in life. Young learners are introduced to new materials (both factual and objective), which they later employ to solve problems and take decisions. This is the whole essence of education.

Storytelling, Early Learning and Educational Development

The preceding Paragraphs shall discuss the common grounds where storytelling, early learning and educational development find expression.

Cognitive development

Humans are believed to be logical and possess the ability to make choices that make the most sense to them. Atherton (2010) identifies the three domains of cognitive theory as:

- Aptitude and capacity to learn (thus fringing onto psychometrics and testing)
- And learning styles (the reference is to one of the few apparently valid styles)
- It is the basis of the educational approach known as constructivism, which emphasises the role of the learner in constructing his own view or model of the material and what helps with that.

Speaking in broad terms, cognitive theory is interested in how people process an understood material and consequently act on it. This is probably why some scholars also see it as critical thinking. The main idea behind cognitive theory is to affect the behavior of the learner ultimately. From an early age of 18 months pretend-play starts emerging in children and rapidly becomes frequent and complex as they develop. Therefore, the art of pretend play and storytelling as methods of cognitive and social development is innate in the nature of childhood. Anderson (2007) agrees with the above by stating that, "early cognitive development is concerned with children's increasing flexibility and competence in understanding the relationship between the concrete and abstract worlds" Pretend plays and stories serve as avenues for children to practice and understand complex emotional, social and situational experiences.

Language skills acquisition

Language existed long before writing. Ancient people and races used sounds and symbols to communicate ideas, feelings and expressions. Old stories were shared and transmitted through verbal expression. From the age of two, children begin telling fictional and factual stories even before entering a classroom (McCabe 1991 in Andersen, 2007). Also, engaging children in re-telling stories improves their abilities and competence at language learning which at this stage is paramount in skills acquisition. Language is the only channel through which they can gain full expressions of innate feelings and improve relationship with their peers. Language find expression in speaking:

Speaking is characteristic to humans and is a tool for communicating. As socialized individuals, human beings spend much of their lives talking, or interacting with other people" ... For young children learning is still a question of experiencing rather than committing information to memory so it is important to provide them with experiencing language to ensure successful learning (Sarac, 2007).

At this stage, all aspects of children's early language and talk activities are to be taken seriously and conducted in a climate where their opinions and contributions are respected. This is important because, talking can help them develop perspective and meaning and at the same time build vocabulary and grammatical understanding. Storytelling for early learners gives opportunities for both verbal and non-verbal language skills. Stories are told through the mediating power of words. This is what gives it a narrative attribute. Narration involves orderly arrangement, careful selection of words as well as vocalization. It involves a narrative structure and mental imagery communicated to young learners. The emergence of stories in the contexts of relationships serves as opportunities for small children to acquire the potential to verbalize experiences for themselves and others. When children are involved in narration it helps them build and initiate relationship with others.

Social skill development

"In terms of social presence, storytelling helps people connect to others by disclosing personal information and relating to each other's common experiences (Lowenthal and Dunlap, 2010) Thus, by

representing events, narratives necessitate reflection and analysis, requiring us to interpret and make meaning of experience. As such, narrative is a powerful tool (for socialization) and an effective way to transmit cultural knowledge, values, and beliefs.

(McKeough et al. 2008)

Man is a social being. Through storytelling, a child "develops a deeper understanding of the social world of how others think, why they behave the way they do, and the implications people's action hold for others" (McKeough et al. 2008). This is a pointer to the fact that stories are important mediums not only for learning but also for social development. As a social activity, storytelling serves as a channel for children to develop and use social skills. It allows for organization and representation of experiences by giving an account of event over time. This requires that young

learners make meanings out of the narration, interpretation and the underlying intentions behind actions. This further enhances the rate and extent of social integration of a child into his immediate environment. Gradually, the child is able to connect stories to people, places and develop a capacity to remember. These memories go a long way in re-defining the essence of purpose, unity and identity in a child. Hence, storytelling is a powerful tool for socialization at this stage of educational development in early learners

Playing and Learning

Another angle to early learning is playing and learning. It is a concept adopted in early childhood education. This is a period of playful learning through various creative activities like, paintings, word games, songs, movement, exercises and others. As Sarac, (2007) posits, "all situations are learning situation for a child and are usually prepared to enjoy the activities the teacher has prepared for them". Playing as well as learning, are natural components of children's everyday lives. "From children's own perspective, playing and learning are not always separate in practices during early years" (Samuelson and Carlson, 2008). Early childhood educators need great and careful handling of children at this stage because they serve as role models. Learners imitate them as a result of their admiration for them. In this learning environment young children under the age of six learn as they play with materials and share experiences with other children and teachers. They listen, observe, remember and practice personal and shared experiences. The development of a young learner is a continuous process that is affected by the child's experiences. Therefore, the quality of experience a child receives during early learning is closely related to his/her teacher or caregiver.

Entertainment

For stories to truly hold the child's attention, it must entertain him and arouse his curiosity (Hendy and Toon: 2001). A creative activity for children in the classroom needs to be spiced up with amusement by the teacher involved. Very importantly, children must be able to enjoy the stories they hear from their teachers. This is the propellant for their full concentration and attention. Children at this stage love to fantasize and over-exaggerate stories they hear and have particular interest in their ability to re-create them at a later date. It is therefore very essential that the teacher spices up his/her stories with songs, larger than life gestures, voice modulation, sounds, movements and role playing. This is not to say that all these attributes must be embedded in a single story but the use of two or more could make a lot of difference during story telling. For example, African story tellers intermittently spice their stories with songs to further drive home a point and also make the story more interesting and entertaining. In some cases, especially when the audience is mainly children, the song is repeated as often as possible. At times, it may even involve a bit of percussion (like, clapping or drumming) and dance by the children. This is what makes storytelling sessions memorable and something to look forward to.

Moral Instruction

Every society has its own norms and values which are derived from the prevailing culture. Storytelling is thereby an avenue for the preservation of culture. Stories enable children understand the cultural demands and expectations of the society through the ideas and ideals inherent in stories. There is hardly any African story that does not have an underlining value which is expected to result

in behaviour modification of the audience. There is always a lesson to be learnt at the end of every storytelling session. It could be on ethics, respect, forgiveness, kindness and honesty. The list is endless. All these and more are part of the morals values children are expected to grow up with, in order to have good relationships with people they come in contact with, either within the family or in the larger social circle. Good stories help to nurture children into respectable and responsible adults.

Objectives

This research investigated the extent to which storytelling can be adopted in teaching early learners. It also examined the impact that storytelling has on early learning by adopting this art form during teaching and learning in an academic environment.

Methodology

This research was carried out as a field research involving observations by the researcher and her 200 level students of the Department of Theatre Arts, Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education. It is a build up to the final assessment and evaluation of these students on a course THA 212- Drama in Education /Children's Theatre in the first semester of 2010/2011 academic year. This class, made up of Twenty-six students were grouped into four. Each group consisted of six (6) members except for one group made up of seven members. They served as observers, participants and teachers in the classroom. This teaching exercise lasted eight weeks and students were involved weekly for one hour (in classroom work with young learners in the primary school within Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, (AOCOED Staff School Otto/Tjanikin). Visits to school were made twice a week and each session lasted thirty minutes. The pupils of nursery two (2) and primaries one (1) to three (3) were beneficiaries of this exercise throughout the duration. But for the purpose of this study, nursery two pupils will be focused on. This is due to the fact that they were the sole beneficiaries of the storytelling technique in teaching.

Sample Instrument

Open and close ended question techniques were employed by the researcher and pupils provided answers with either a 'yes' or 'no'. For example, "did you enjoy the story, is it good to steal, Will you obey your parents?" and so on. At times brief explanations were allowed if necessary.

Sampling technique

The simple random sampling was adopted so that every element of the population could have equal opportunity of being selected for the study. A list of all sixteen (16) individuals who made up the population was made and numbers were allotted to them. This was used to select the random sample.

Validation of instrument

Test experts in early learning and drama in education examined the items and found them to be valid to measure appropriately. The items were the short stories and their appropriateness to the lessons and the questions asked each time the assigned student teacher for English Language had finished teaching by adopting storytelling technique. The responses from pupils were used as a yardstick to measure the success of the teaching. Also, the researcher was personally involved as an exchange student during the research which gave room for personal assessment and evaluation of memories, values, experiences, understanding, views and opinions in the course of this study.

Procedure of Data collection

Several stages were involved in the research work. The first task was to familiarize researchers with the scheme of work based on the curriculum for English Language in primaries 1-3. The lesson plan for English language for nursery two (2) and primary one (1) to three (3) pupils were studied and creative activities such as, drama, word games and stories were integrated into them to enhance learning. For nursery two, storytelling was adopted basically due to their level. Situations whereby young learners could easily associate with contents and topics via stories, for example, the story of the sound, 'a', where a story was coined around 'ant' and 'antelope' were created. Questions that demanded a simple 'yes' or 'no' were asked and pupils provided answers. Answers to these questions were noted and recorded by student teachers. At the beginning of teaching sessions for the first two weeks, folktales were narrated as appetizers to arrest the attention of learners. Such folktales include the tortoise and the elephant, the sun and the rain, the Lion the king and so on. For the next two weeks the tales came in the middle of teaching sessions as part of the main course. The preceding two weeks had stories at the end of lessons. However learners do not always have prior knowledge of this arrangement and thus suspense became a propellant for learning here. Irrespective of when the tales were told during lessons, it was always worth the wait. However, it was not in all cases that the stories suited the topics of the day. At times, tales were told based on events or activities going on in the classrooms as at the time of teaching. An example is the story "Kilewei, Kileso?" (meaning, what did you say?) which highlighted the need and importance of being attentive to instructions. This story was told when it was noticed that some learners were not paying attention to the teaching in the class. The last two weeks were dedicated to encouraging young learners' narration of their own folk tales which they were expected to source for from their respective cultural backgrounds.

Observations

It was discovered during the experiment that:

- Young learners were already conversant with stories read to them by their class teachers from comprehension passages in their English textbooks.
- Majority of them found the narrated stories incredible and could not link them to daily living at first. This was seen in the variety of questions asked by the pupils at the end of some of these stories. For example, the story of the 'marriage contest', where a suitor surreptitiously and wisely allows the hot

soup to cool before drinking it and emerged as the husband of the princess. Learners asked questions like, 'was the soup hot while he was holding it, was there meat in the soup? Did he swallow bone? And so on.

- A substantial number could attempt to tell stories at the end of the experiment. This they did with a lot of alterations either by adding or subtracting which is typical of the oral nature of storytelling.
- Pupils could easily link the content and message of the stories to the lessons. The accompanying story for a topic on 'myself' was the story of 'all of us'. The ever wise tortoise re-named himself, 'all of us' so he could eat all the food presented to him and other animals at an outing. They could comprehend their uniqueness as individuals within a group system.
- There was renewed and genuine interest at learning. Judging from the enthusiasm on the part of learners, each lesson period was always a new experience.
- There was great involvement and participation of learners. This included the slow, average and fast learners.

Result and Discussion of Findings

A pre-assessment test of young learners to evaluate their levels as at the beginning of project was carried out. This was achieved by asking pupils to narrate stories they have heard before or to create their own story. At this stage only a fraction of pupils were bold and confident enough to narrate stories and when they did, they were incoherent. Out of a total of Sixteen (16) pupils in Nursery Two, only Three (3) could attempt storytelling. This implies that although pupils knew about stories they could hardly narrate them. During the last week, another assessment was carried out where pupils were asked to narrate their own stories to determine the level of change in behaviour to learning. There was a drastic change when Eight (8) out of Sixteen (16) pupils were able to tell complete short stories that they had heard before in the class or at home even though they came with a lot of alterations. Out of the remaining Eight (8) pupils, Two (2) could start their stories but stopped halfway while the remaining Six (6) pupils still found it difficult to tell stories. It was observed that learners had improved greatly in their ability to tell short stories. They could also link stories told in the classroom during teaching and learning sessions of English Language to the topics taught.

Early learning could be quite an interesting and result oriented venture. All that is essential is to adopt the right methodology that will suit the age brackets involved. This story telling experiment at the time of study was the most effective approach to reach the nursery two (2) grades especially considering the limited period of time spent with them in the classroom. Storytelling sessions are not just meant for storytelling. It comes with a whole lot of other benefits that would accrue to the learner who is the centre of teaching and learning. It is fully participant oriented and also interactive. After the first four (4) weeks of storytelling by the researcher, it was quite amazing to see the level of improvement in learners as they told their own stories or recount a previous one. Gradually, the narration became coherent and smoother. The ability of pupils at imaginative role and pretend play had greatly improved by the end of this exercise.

Conclusion

Storytelling is not completely alien to young learners rather what they need is an early exposure and nurturing of this art in the classroom setting so that it can aid their educational development. Stories tend to please, instruct and arouse certain feelings or emotions in the learner. This depends largely on the extent to which the teacher is able to achieve these effects on the learners. Teachers of early learners have a lot to do in terms of developmental process at this level by actively engaging in what concerns the child and supporting learning through this means. Storytelling is readily available and appropriate for this feat.

Recommendations

At the end of this experiment the following recommendations were made:

- Teachers and parents alike should create time to tell stories to young learners
- Topics in various subjects should be interwoven with interesting tales.
- Pupils should be encouraged to re-tell stories
- Pupils should be encouraged to create their own stories
- The learning environment needs to be made lively through storytelling

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Wahrheit ist das Ziel

Անտառայինը Բ՝ ժողով գեղանայից, Բ՝ ՕՐԻՍԻՍ ԴԻՄԻՏ ԴՈՒՆԵՎ ԵՄ Կ ՎԵՐԱՆԵՐ ԼՈ ՎԱՐՔԻ ընդհանուր ԻՄ ԸՆԴԵՐ
 խնամելու և ԼՈՒՆԱ: ԲԵՐԱՆԻՔԻՆԵՐ ԿԵՆՏՐՈՆԻԿԱԿԱՆ ԴԵՐՈՒՄ ԺԱՅԻՆԻՔԻ ՎԵՐԱՆԵՐԻՆԵՐ՝ ԻՄ ԴՆԻ ԵՎԵՐԻՆԵՐ ԻՄԵՋ ԻՄԵՋԻՆԵՐ
 ԷՆԴԻՄԻՆԵՐԻՆԵՐ: ԴՆ ԴՆ ԵՎԵՐԻՆԵՐԻՆԵՐ ԴՆ:

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