

REHABDRAMATICS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHALLENGED CHILDREN IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF SELECT APPLIED THEATRE PROJECTS

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Abstract

The concept of the psychosocial and physical wellbeing of children and young adults appear critical to the actualization of holistic human development. However, the problem of this paper lies in the inadequate attention paid to the wellbeing of challenged children in Nigeria by families, agencies and government institutions. Hence, the paper aims at forging more inclusive modules for the learning and development of challenged children in Nigeria. It also includes engaging the concept of Rehab Dramatics to chart a new course in the already thriving area of theatre-driven education. The researcher's engagement of Rehab Dramatics in the applied theatre projects evaluated, attempted not just to utilize Drama and performance based learning to educate and motivate right creative and social impulses in children, but also to include these and more in rehabilitating at-risk children and young adults who may have been exposed to debilitating experiences, practices and environmental constructs that may have in turn impaired healthy psychosocial, emotional and creative development. The study is anchored on The Transformative Learning theory. The mixed research method was adopted for the study. The primary data for the study were sourced through two Applied Theatre projects carried out in designated locations across Anambra. The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, IPA as well as participant observations were also engaged during the course of

research. The study finds that co-ordinated theatrical activities as expressed through Rehab Dramatics, possess unique qualities in fostering progressive psycho-social, attitudinal and communal change such that should promote a more qualitative life for challenged children in Nigeria.

Key Words: *Rehab Dramatics, Challenged Children, Theatre, Drama, Performance, Applied Theatre, at-risk Children, Development, Creative Dramatics, Theatre-in-Education.*

Introduction

The concept of development as it concerns the young is one that could be best described as dynamic. Scholars have overtime worked on concretized formats in not only what should be learnt as well as what is expected of the Teacher-facilitator in given situations, but also on the question of what environment is befitting for child learning and development. Indeed, these concepts may vary from race to race and from one cultural enclave to the other, but often times, have similar underlining features or even results. Theatre scholars have over time made contributions on the use of the Theatre in community and human development. The question on whether theatrical activities can be used to address social ills, reform mundane norms and even educate young minds have been answered with postulations from Theatre scholars the world over. Fields of study such as Theatre in Education and Creative Dramatics are still being explored to shape the ideology of child development and learning using theatrical forms. Tony Jackson for instance speaks of the Theatre in Education programme as:

Not a performance in schools, or a self-contained play, a one off event that is here today and gone tomorrow, but a coordinated and carefully structured pattern of activities, usually devised and researched by the company around a

topic of relevance both to the school curriculum and to the children's own lives (4).

The Theatre also addresses psychological development in children from the educational perspective. Theatrical situations can be used to solve simple and complex problems as they relate to the immediate needs of the child. Nellie MaCaslin further corroborates this:

Few adults would deny the importance of arts in the education of their Children. To enjoy the arts and appreciate the richness they can add to human life, however some preparation is needed. For most children, the preparation is or should be given in school. In summary the theatre arts are the least difficult of the arts to implement, with the greatest potential for learning. (4-5)

From the above assertion, it appears that the use of drama provides an enabling environment for child learning and development and could be utilized as a viable instrument in bringing other art forms such as role playing, singing, dancing, improvisation, together in the learning process and to the consciousness of the developing child. As a relatively fully unengaged educational tool, this method of learning engages the child in a wholesome, creative and practical experience that deviates from the age long teacher/ pupil norm, where the child is said to be seen and not heard. The aim of Drama in Education thus, allows for the development of the child, socially, intellectually and psychologically as he grapples with the demands of formal Education. Hoetker James observes that "Drama increases creativity, originality, sensitivity, fluency, flexibility, emotional stability, cooperation and examination of moral attitudes, while developing communication skills and appreciation literature". (192)

Thus, the concept of RehabDramatics also attempts to bridge the gap between the prospects for both rehabilitation and education to occur simultaneously. Indeed, the rehabilitative potential, of drama may not be as widely used as an approach within the Nigerian educational system even though it is also generally accepted that a percentage of Nigerian children do not undergo any form of formal education. Worse still is the indication that many children could be best described as “at risk”, due to the debilitating environment they are being brought up in. It is not common for a Nigerian child even today to be diagnosed with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder) or PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) whereas the conditions that escalate these tendencies and psychological deficiencies appear quite prevalent as they are around the world.

There are indications that the number of broken homes in Nigeria are on the increase. Worrisome still is the fact that many spouses now jettison the option of legally divorcing their partners by either just staying separated or even going ahead to marry someone else, thereby leaving the child or children born in the original union in very precarious situations. Robert Clarke, quoting the National Bureau of Statistics reports that:

Official statistics suggest that divorce is exceedingly uncommon in Nigeria. Just 0.2% of men and 0.3% of women have legally untied the knot, according to the National Bureau of statistics. And well under 1% of couples admit to being separated yet such counts exclude the vast majority of Nigerians whose traditional marriage ceremonies are not governed by modern law. (1)

In the instance where these marital issues are brought before the courts, it becomes even more evident that certain situations within the home could indeed trigger negative behavioral and psychological traits in children. The Immigration and Refugee

Board of Canada, in a publication on Nigeria's Divorce law and practices, quotes Bambo Adesanya, SAN, in an attempt to underscore the Nigerian Judicial System's Contribution to the growing causes of divorce in Nigeria. It reports that:

The types of behavior referred to include rape, sodomy, bestiality, habitual drunkenness or intoxication, misuse of drugs, frequent convictions, habitually leaving spouse without support, attempted murder, assaults, insanity, humiliating treatment, nagging and the use of juju (a charm or fetish). Adesanya adds that in a 1972 court ruling, habitual intemperate consumption of alcohol and inordinate sexual indulgences of the respondent with all sorts of women particularly housemaids were held to be weighty unreasonable acts to expect the petitioner to put up with. (n.pag)

Indeed, some other unhealthy circumstances at risk children are faced with, maybe through no fault or even active involvement of theirs or their parents. Children who are physically challenged, obese or suffer from biological or genetic disorders such as Down syndrome, Deafness, Albinism, Sickle cell Anemia, and Blindness, are at greater risk to be bullied or exposed to different traumatic experiences. Thus, the need for Theatre Practitioners to create more avenues where the Dramatic arts could be utilized in fostering healthy development and rehabilitation of at risk children becomes imperative. The notion of Psychodrama is not a new concept in psychotherapy and indeed has been widely utilized in addressing psychosocial and learning weaknesses in at-risk children, adolescents and even adults. Developed by Romanian-American Psychiatrist, Jacob levy Moreno in 1910, Psychodrama explores the use of role playing and enactment of real life situations in an attempt to evaluate and redress the mental processes of the individual. This study proposes a critical analysis of the structures

that make up the psycho-dramatic approach to child development as well as other related theories, putting into consideration the socio-economic conditions prevalent in the present African society.

In Nigeria, as well as in most African countries, scholars seem to agree that child development takes root from the indigenous or traditional education system that is inherent within the various socio-cultural enclaves of typical societies. This further implies that unifying structures of indigenous norms, practices and language are usually activated to solve communal issues. Mbachanga agrees when he observes that “Participatory performance on the one hand places priority on working with the people using their own mode of communication to enable small communities look at their own problems with the aim of arousing and stimulating target groups to take desired steps to improve their well-being” (87). The immediate society of a developing child plays a more important role than it is generally perceived to. Even with the influx of western education and its many inventions, African theorists seem to agree that the immediate surroundings of the child is more crucial in shaping his ideology towards life. The activities, therefore of his parents, relatives, teachers and other facilitators become an important ingredient in the development of a child. Ezenwa Ohaeto asserts that “The representation of childhood in African art, has to be approached from the standpoint that the African concept of childhood is profoundly different from that of childhood is profoundly different from that of the western world”. (116)

Children develop socially, intellectually, morally and psychologically and the cultural backgrounds of these children play significant roles in their development. As it concerns traditional education systems in Africa. Scholars seem to agree that activities and forms, such as imaginative play, begin from birth with the parents and other older relations playing the role of ‘leader’ or ‘teacher-Animator’. From this point, children through creative play, should develop socially and begin to develop their imaginative

tendencies as can be expressed through role-playing where they take up roles like fathers, mothers, farmers or doctors. Other ideas could likewise be expressed through mime, music, dance and others. The daily events of children comprise of their relationship with people around their immediate environment such as their parents, friends and relatives. They meet people at home, at school or in places of worship and these relationships help to shape their ideology about themselves and their environment. Fayose P.O. believes that the ability for children to interact with others, enhances their relationship with members of their immediate society. He observes that “children’s interpersonal relationship depend on their ability to express themselves through speech and movement”. (113)

African perspectives on the use of Drama as a Rehabilitative tool

In most African countries, Nigeria inclusive, research centered on Health humanities, with particular emphasis on children who could be suffering from Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) appear to be rather few. Some Nigerian scholars, who have ventured into this line of research, acknowledge that more attention should indeed be drawn to this area. Olusakin et al. note that “The lack of documented Nigeria-based research on ADHD makes this present work to be of relevance to Nigerians” (20). Some of the symptoms generally associated with children suffering from ADHD include, fidgeting with hands and feet, squirming in their seat, difficulty in sustaining attention and waiting for turn in tasks, games or group situations, difficulty in following through on instructions and experiences of a wide range in mood swings as well as having difficulty in delaying gratification.

Thus, where these traits are misconstrued as “spiritual problems”, the child may be exposed to certain experiences that would further stunt positive development. Agazue Chima, in his review of Aaron Denham’s book on the “Spirit Children of

Northern Ghana', outlines that ethnographic pointers such as the historical, social, psychological, economic and political make up of these societies could be undeniable factors in the misconception of the children born in these localities. He observes that:

The idea of the spirit child, according to Denham, "is intermeshed within *Nankani* material, relational and discursive worlds" (p.26). A spirit child "is not a human possessed by a spirit but rather is a simulacrum of a human, a spirit that only appears to be human" (p.92).the spirit children "are referred to as 'snakes' because many cannot walk; are perceived to be elusive, cunning and deceptive. And are as deadly as snakes" (pg70).they are often feared as spirits who took a human form with the intention of causing misfortune and destroying the family. (n.pag)

Thus, the increasing cases of juvenile delinquency, child abuse, low self-esteem, bullying and drug abuse among challenged children and young adults should be given all the attention they deserve. Though the development needs of both normal and challenged children appeared minimal in the traditional african society, with the wave of urbanization and population increase, their needs have trippled and made worse by ongoing redefinitions of the family support structure to accommodate new economic and technologically driven realities. Hence, some African scholars have continued to call for more parental and government involvement in the provision of educational aid, especially to the plight of challenged children, to forestall rising incidents of juvenile delinquency. There should also be a re-appreciation and integration of indigenous educational systems into new methods of child development. In affirmation of this position, Canice Nwosu queries:

Prior to the enigmatic colonial encounter that ushered in African modernism; did the pre-colonial society experience

Juvenile delinquency or militancy? One would say that the prevalent traditional socio-economic order equated with the type of disorder associated with the child then. There are strong indicators that sophistication in children and youth related crimes come with patterns in social and economic changes. (3)

There are also other examples that put the average African child in an even more vulnerable condition. The diverse religious, ethnic and cultural practices engaged in across the continent as well as high illiteracy levels appear to have created the misconception of certain traits that could rather be termed as socially influenced. These circumstances and others related to it are such that Art driven workshops could be utilized in creating new perceptions about how such problems could be tackled without adverse effects on the child and society.

The Concepts of Transformative Learning and Psychodrama in Child Rehabilitation and Development.

It would appear that the concept behind a transformative system of learning is one that does not view learning as a statutory and fixed exercise. Scholars have over time, formulated concepts on a variety of research enquires about ideal learning systems. Questions such as; who should learn? What should be learnt? How are learning environments created? What is expected in an appropriate teacher/learner relationship and how should the teacher/facilitator respond to certain needs of the learner, have contributed to the development of theories aimed at providing insight to the discourse of learning. “Transformative Learning is a deep, structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings and action” (Transformative Learning Centre, 2004). Developed by American Sociologist, Jack Mezirow from 1978, The Transformative learning theory was born out of the need to address,

shifting behavioral patterns and thoughts due to internalized attitudes and perceptions.

Recent studies have argued that for a broader understanding of the transformative learning theory to be acquired, certain perspectives must be underscored to give credence to the research works being carried out in this area. These perspectives should be such that integrates psycho-analytic views such as the learning process of the individual; the state of understanding oneself, one's inner identity, persona, confidence, self empowerment and responsibility. A psycho-developmental perspective is also critical in understanding the demand aspects of continuous, incremental and progressive growth as well as the appreciation for behavioral differences and the role of relationships. A social-emancipatory perspective is also crucial in giving consideration to the role of social change in the transformative learning process. Scholars like Edward W. Taylor propose that the social-emancipatory perspective of Transformative learning gives a certain level of responsibility to the society in addressing concerns faced by its individuals. Rooted primarily in the Freirean concept of *Conscientization*, which views people as subjects not objects, constantly reflecting on the transformation of their world, Taylor believes that the goal of social transformation could be enhanced by "*demythicalizing reality*"(8)., thereby allowing the oppressed to develop a sense of critical consciousness. This process should not only engender critical reflection and engage dialogical methodologies but must also adopt a horizontal learner/teacher relationship to stimulate a participatory learning process.

Thus, the role of society and indeed the teacher in this context forms an important factor in Transformative learning. The Freireian and likeminded schools of thought propose that teachers should educate for transformation; the Teacher should be adequately prepared to work through concerns and challenges the learning process may present and this includes creating new avenues where knowledge is not only built upon but co-created by

the students. Citing Bailey on the intellectual partnership between mentors and mentees through the lens of the Transformative learning theory, Margareth S. Zanchetta et al submit that:

Intellectual partnerships are built on the beliefs and intentions of social transformation and personal empowerment of student and teachers. From the standpoint of constructivism, this transformation is attained through the facilitation of different ways of thinking and formulating answers. In intellectual partnerships, teachers are able to identify and learn new ways to foster students' education by building on their ideas and facilitating co-creation of knowledge. Students are able to participate in the production of knowledge and pursue their goals in various contexts. (112)

The introduction of Transformative learning in children poses a unique challenge for teachers and facilitators. The need to equip the developing child in facing the demands of society becomes imperative especially when certain present conditions appear to stunt the development process. Within African and indeed Nigeria, present economic realities indicate that today's growing child is currently faced with developmental needs that are crucial for holistic psychosocial growth and well being. The debilitating concerns at national and even continental levels are most likely to spiral down other social structures thereby causing corresponding increase in loss of jobs, disease outbreaks, broken marriages, deaths and so on. In these situations, the vulnerability of the growing child increases the tendency for him to become a causality of circumstance.

Indeed the child-learner should be encouraged through activities that will propel development. This can be through exercises that will not only sustain their interest but enable them confront given problems and proffer solutions to them. Children

appear to enjoy learning where there is an attempt to make the process enthusiastic and lively. However, since a greater part of their thinking is still tied to what is seen and heard, the teacher/facilitator is challenged to employ deft skill within the educative endeavour to sustain their interest in the creative process. The Transformative learning theory in this context provides for learning that is both task-oriented and communicative. The essence is to allow for the learners to engage themselves constructively in the learning process as supervised by the teacher/facilitators while being able to communicate their feelings and needs. Scholars prescribe that for a holistic learning process to be achieved there should exist a detailed application of curricular content so as to ensure that the performance of the learners is appropriately evaluated. Richard Cullata posits that:

Applying transformative theory to curriculum evaluation, one looks for evidence of critical reflection in terms of content, process and premise. Content reflection consists of curriculum mapping from students and faculty perspective; process reflection focuses best practices, literature-based indicators and self efficacy measures; premise reflection would consider both content and process reflection to develop recommendations. (2)

Transformative learning with the aid of Drama and theatrical or performative activities appear to have a stake in child learning and development. The ability to utilize drama in mirroring society places the Theatre on a uniquely distinct plane in addressing issues of individual and social transformation. Drama allows us to understand the complexities of human behaviour; Relatively, Transformative learning as E.O. Sullivan observes “involves experiencing a shift, such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves, our location, our relationship with other humans and the natural world” (4). Indeed, scholars have proposed that educative

processes even in the context of formal learning can be further enhanced with the integration of creative, dramatic activities. This has given rise to concepts such as Theatre in Education (TiE), Creative Dramatics, Drama in Education, Applied Theatre, Play-House Theatre and many others which among other things, propose for an engaging participatory frontier to learning in order to foster, creativity, spontaneity, ingenuity and propel positive social responses to the process of learning and development. Chiduo Obadiogwu further corroborates this, indicating that the qualitative research designs would be adequate in evaluating the level of participation in this area of study. He affirms that, “Since theatre education for transformative learning focuses on participation and exploration of voices of the learners, qualitative research designs is appropriate for children’s real participation in the classroom”. (29)

Theatre scholars seem to agree that concepts of drama within educational systems are capable of stimulating positive responses to learning challenges. Through creative play, children develop socially and begin to explore their imaginative tendencies on addressing simulated problems, institutions of learning provide. Drama achieves this through exercises of role playing and interpretation, thematic construction and so on. Fayose opines that “drama tells a story through actions and because the issues connected with the story are acted out by human beings, the message is brought more realistically home to the reader or viewer” (13). Transformative learning thus, through drama could serve as an indispensable tool in facilitating the development of thinking and language skills in children. Through positive metacognitive development, children master rules for directing their own attention, thoughts and behaviour thereby fostering positive forms of expression.

Data Sourcing and Preliminary Research Activities

Two Applied Theatre workshops are to be carried out in selected locations in Anambra, Nigeria, namely in Amaenyi and

Nawfia. In order to ensure a detailed system of data presentation as well as a holistic and empirical approach to the research work, the researcher engaged preliminary research instruments and activities which provided background information about the objective of the research work as well as the course of action in actualizing the individual-group projects. These activities are outlined as follows:

Consent forms/Approval letters: Since the study is to involve extensive interaction with participants who are in most cases children with special needs as well as their administrators, teachers, parents and care givers, it is expedient to obtain proper approvals for access within the scope of time for the research work. The approval letters thus were designed to ensure that the consent of these somewhat closed populations were adequately sought and obtained. The letters included the contact details of the researcher(s) and department, a brief summary of the research objective, the concepts, theories and methodology being relied upon, a brief outline of the process to be engaged and an attestation to protect the identities and privacy of the participants during the course of the project.

Interviews: The researcher conducted a number of interviews in the course of the study. These interviews were either structured or unstructured depending on the approach utilized or the given circumstances available at the time of research. During the preliminary visits for instance, interviews were conducted with key officials of various institutions both related to and where the Applied Theatre projects were to be carried out. The sessions provided the researcher ample opportunity to explain in detail the objective of the research. Explanations on the rehabilitative potentials of dramatic activities were shared and espoused on. The inclusion of African Oral tradition such as indigenous folklore, games and songs were also explained as agents with instructive material through dramatic enactments; and as co-facilitators of

rehabilitative and developmental change in *at-risk* individuals. In other instances, the interviews were also tailored based on the special composition and needs of the school or center being evaluated as at the period of research.

Advocacy Sessions: The Researcher also organized larger sessions with teachers, care givers and parents in the various locations where the projects were to take place. These sessions afforded the researcher the opportunity to explain the objective of the projects as well as to interact with the participants on the various socio-economic and environmental factors prevalent within the communities as they affect at risk children and adolescents. The sessions also include an appraisal of the Oral folk tradition in the communities and its importance to social *conscientization* and development. The essence of dramatic enactments as key tools in mobilizing needed support against certain phenomena, were also discussed. Mock rehearsals of indigenous folk games and songs were carried out to give the teachers and caregivers a contextual appreciation of the scope of the workshops. The researcher took down notes and learnt some of these indigenous songs and games. Oral consent was then sought to kick start interactions and rehearsals with would-be participants.

Preliminary Interactions with the Project Participants: Across the two locations where the Applied Theatre workshops are to be carried out, the researcher interacted with the participants and these sessions were either held in group settings or on one on one basis. Questions were asked on the acknowledgment, perceptions and tendencies towards certain phenomena such as stigma, bullying, societal norms and so on and how these affect the day to day living of at-risk children within the environment. The Researcher employed the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in inquiring from participants, particular experiences or perceptions of

certain phenomena, how they affect them and the desired responses or behaviours they would properly want introduced.

The “Free” Project, Psychiatric Hospital Nawfia

The project was initially drafted to span a period of maximum of 4 months due to the sensitivity of the research area. However, continued interaction appeared critical in gauging levels of social as well as dramatic engagements from the participants as the study progressed. There was a need to ascertain how changes observed could be sustained using dramatic activities as utilized within the research timeline. The project therefore lasted for a period six months with a 2-session weekly contact period lasting for about 1 hour each session.

8 participants aged between 15 to 26 indicated interest in joining the workshop after it was clearly explained to them with their parents or guardians present and with the assistance of the medical officers within the Hospital and research assistants. The sessions metamorphosed from interview stages to group discussions on given phenomena and then to theatrical engagements and activities which included games, songs, dances, role playing etc; which culminated into full blown rehearsals with a “statement” production in mind.

Observations emanating from preliminary interactive sessions and group discussions revealed a range of incidents and circumstances contributory to the plight of the participants. These factors ranged from effects of illicit drug and substance abuse to episodes of psychological breakdown resulting from a traumatic event such as the loss of a loved one and so on.

The participants were given pseudonyms and profiled from the youngest as follows:

Table 1

No	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Notes
1.	“Glory”	15	Female	Was brought by a relative. accused of being a witch.
2.	“Blessing”	17	Female	Slipped into depression after giving birth.
3.	“Champion”	19	Male	Depressed after the loss of his father. Got involved in hard drugs.
4.	“Rich”	20	Male	Involved in Hard Drugs.
5.	“Peace”	21	Female	Receives regular treatment at the Hospital. Claims spiritual manipulation from extended family.
6.	“Dave’	23	Male	Suffers from bouts of depression. Claims to have been abandoned by family.
7.	“God’s gift”	24	Female	Suffers from substance abuse.
8.	“Bluesky”	25	Male	Claims spiritual manipulation by uncles. Lost his father & inheritance. Suffers from depression. Has written two novels.

Dramatic activities were introduced as the study progressed and this was geared towards increasing social awareness and

participation. The researchers included activities such as folk games, dances, as well as singing and poem rendition sessions. By the fourth week the researcher along with his research assistants had begun the story creation process ahead of the theatrical production slated for April 2019.

The production, a one Act Play centers on the various perceptions about inmates of the psychiatric hospital. The story x-rays the notion of depression as an outcome of other circumstances and choices within and outside the control of everyday people, as well as the need to see and explore good attributes amongst the inmates themselves through constructive and collaborative-group activities. The story revolves around Chuks also known as “Bluesky” who loses both parents tragically. The pain becomes too much for him and after episodes of nervous breakdowns, relatives “abandon” him at the psychiatric hospital. Within the hospital, he finds it difficult to associate with others and a couple of incidents make him even more withdrawn. Another character played as Kingsley helps Chuks to gradually increase his confidence in himself and in others; this is intermittently supported by songs and chants from the orchestra in driving home messages addressed within the play. The story hits a climax when Chuks, having found renewed vigour, defeats a bully aptly named “depression” in the Hospital in a mock – Arm wrestling contest but shows magnanimity in victory by advocating for inclusiveness and cohesion in their common struggle against vices such as depression. There is a call by the narrator at the end of the play for communal effort in engendering more productive ways of accepting and working with persons who may have one mental challenge or the other.

The “I am Special” Project, Amaenyi. God’s Care Special School

The project was carried out at the school in Amaenyi, Umuayom; Awka South Local Government of Anambra State. The project involved working with the children in school, with the assistance of

the school administration, teachers and research assistants in using the medium of drama to represent and assess different phenomena associated with the plight of challenged children especially as it concerns those with hearing and speaking difficulties. Initial observations revealed that while the major population of the children in the school suffered from different degrees of deafness and/or dumbness, the school has over the years, had to provide care for children with other challenges such as mental, biological and neurological deficiencies like Down syndrome, Albinism and so on. The project lasted for 3 months with a contact period of one hour daily, twice a week. Some of the students were noted to reside within the school premises for a number of reasons ranging from incidences of child abandonment to the total lack of specialized and constructive care for the said challenged children by their parents or guardians.

The purpose of the project was explained in detail at a special PTA session on the 20th of April, 2019 at which all the parents and teachers present were informed of the objective of the project. 18 students were selected based on their levels of willingness in engaging dramatic, playmaking and other theatrical techniques in aiding learning processes as well as evaluating issues concerning them. The students are profiled thus:

Table 2

No	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Notes
1.	“Samson”	11	Male	Deaf and Dumb. Has a twin brother who can hear and talk. Became deaf and dumb at age 7.
2.	Martha	12	Female	Deaf and dumb from birth
3.	“MJ”	12	Female	Deaf, dumb and mentally challenged slow in comprehension.

4.	"J-Boy"	12	Male	Became deaf and dumb at the age of nine. Parents claim it is a spiritual attack. Dreams to be professional dancer or footballer.
5.	"Clara"	12	Female	Deaf and dumb abandoned as the school for 4 years.
6.	"Tim"	13	Male	Became deaf and dumb at age 4. Suffers from frequent bouts of convulsion.
7.	"Oprah"	13	Female	Deaf and dumb from birth.
8.	"Dave"	14	Male	Became deaf and dumb at 6. Family claims it is a spiritual problem.
9.	"Clems"	14	Male	Deaf and dumb from birth. Wants to be an engineer.
10.	"Joe"	14	Male	Mentally challenged. Suffers from down syndrome. Resides in the school.
11.	"Sammy"	14	Male	Deaf and dumb from birth. Wants to be a professional footballer.

No	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Notes
12.	“Nuella”	14	Female	Deaf and dumb from birth. Was reported to have been affected by drugs the mother ingested during pregnancy
13.	“Mark”	14	Male	Deaf and dumb from birth.
14.	“Divine”	14	Male	Deaf, dumb and mentally challenged from birth.
15.	“Miracle”	15	Female	Deaf and dumb from birth.
16.	“Terry”	15	Male	Suffers from down syndrome.
17.	“Naomi”	16	Female	Deaf and dumb from the age of 7.
18.	“Bobby”	16	Male	Deaf and Dumb from the age of 9.
19.	“Vincent”	16	Male	Deaf and dumb from birth.
20.	Charity	17	Female	Deaf and dumb, became pregnant at 15. Abandoned by family. Resides in the school after her baby was adopted.

The research group adopted a story creation process that would engage the participants individually and as a part of the group. The overall performance took a quasi-pantomimic approach; this was in order to surmount the hurdle of communicating through

speech which many of the participants were challenged with. However, some of the other activities such as singing & dancing within the project were carried uninterrupted and intermittently while the wordings of the songs were both translated through sign language and inscribed on card board paper for the benefit of larger audience. Through initial interactive and interview sessions, researchers were able to extract workable thematic materials for the Applied drama play project, these include challenges posed by Bullying, diverse socio cultural constructs and perceptions, inadequate knowledge on the learning needs of children with hearing and speech difficulties and so on. Dramatic representations of these themes were infused in the rehearsals and participatory engagements that followed.

The eventual story created tells of “J-boy” a boy who grapples with the menace of bullying and discrimination within and outside his school. This causes him to develop a low esteem of himself as evidenced in outbursts of anger and frustration. In the first scene, we are introduced to J-boy’s predicament where he is refused from joining a game of football with his peers because of his disability. He engages in a fight before his brother wades in. In scene 2, the fight incident, which is one among many, is reported to J-boy’s mother who is obviously exasperated about the plight of her son. The situation takes more challenging angles as the boy’s father believes that his son’s case is a spiritual one and that the gods may be out to cause his family harm through his son. To further make things worse, J-boy’s grades continue to drop in the face of continued depression and frustration. In the penultimate scene, a friendly neighbour advises the family on the need for specialized care and training for J-boy. The family agrees and books an appointment with the school administration. Months later, there are remarkable changes in J-boy including renewed self belief and expression, improved cognitive abilities and better grades. The play comes to an end with a call to parents, guardians and children

themselves to seek proper and inclusive ways to improve the well being of the challenged child.

Rehabilitative Approaches through Drama in the *Amaenyi* and *Nawfia* Projects.

In the *Nawfia* and *Amaenyi* projects, the issues of stigma, discrimination and in some cases, exploitation were also examined. Some participants expressed how they have been misunderstood and discriminated against even by individuals they feel should know better. The “play” experience afforded them the opportunity to tell those present who they are and what they are not. In the dramatic piece at the Nawfia Psychiatric Hospital, “Uju” gives voice at defining herself “I am beautiful within and outside. I am special. I am not limited by my situation or hindered by my environment. I appreciate God who created this world and thought it wise to put me in it”.

In the *Amaenyi* project, another participant makes a stand at self definition when he tells his audience through sign language “I refuse to let challenges stop me in life. I know within myself that I am not useless. I will study hard and achieve my dreams”.

Plate 1

1A



1B



***Nawfia* participants' attempt at self definition**

The integration of oral and performative art forms prevalent within the communities where the Applied Theatre projects held provides avenues for expressions of shared beliefs on certain phenomena. The intermittent use of folk songs and dances at intervals sought to drive home salient points discovered and evaluated during the pre-production processes. The integration of oral art forms such as the folk medium into the play making process formed an integral part of discussions and was deliberately infused as a mechanism to foster socio-cultural cohesion and interaction as well as an increase dramatic participation, self awareness and rehabilitation. In the Nawfia project, the researchers engaged folksongs and games within the rehearsal periods and utilized them as scene changing mechanisms in the eventual production. Examples of folksongs interlaced with dancing and dramatic activities include:

<i>Onye bu Nwannem</i>	Who is my sibling?
<i>Ayoro Mma Mma Ayoro</i>	Chorus
<i>Emeka bu Nwannem</i>	Emeka is my sibling
<i>Ayoro Mma Mma Ayoro</i>	Chorus
<i>Mma no n' iru</i>	He is handsome within
<i>Ayoro Mma Mma Ayoro</i>	Chorus
<i>Mma no n' azu</i>	He is handsome outwardly
<i>Uju bu Nwannem</i>	Uju is my sister
<i>Ayoro Mma Mma Ayoro</i>	Chorus
<i>Mma no n' iru</i>	She is beautiful within
<i>Ayoro</i>	Chorus
<i>Mma no n' azu</i>	She is beautiful outwardly
<i>Ayoro mma mma</i>	Chorus till fade
<i>Ayoro ma yoro yo</i>	
<i>Ayoro mma mma Ayo</i>	

These songs were accompanied with drumming and dancing activities to engender more inclusive involvement from the participants. However, some participants were observed to have

increased participation as the rehearsal processes progressed. This could be classified into stages of indifference, partial participation and then to full participation and engagement.

Evaluations from the Projects

The Amaenyi project engaged participants on similar issues as it concerns the menace of bullying and discrimination. Some of their sentiments were expressed before and after the production and noted below:

Question: How would you want people who have bullied and discriminated against you to be treated?

Table 3

S/No	Before Dramatic Engagements	After Dramatic Engagements
P1	I wish that they become deaf and dumb so that they knew how it feels.	I forgive them. I will grow to be better so that they will know they were wrong.
P2	They should be arrested and put in jail.	
P3	I don't like remembering those things.	I pray they understand that I did not decide to be born this way.
P4	I don't even want to have contact with such people.	I forgive them, but I will not give them another opportunity.
P5	I leave them in the hands of God. Only they know why they do those kinds of things.	They should be taught that we are also human beings.
P6	Let their children suffer the same thing, then they would understand.	They should ask for forgiveness and know that what they are doing is wrong.
P7	They should be beaten up.	If they will listen, they

		should be taught better how to treat children with this disability.
P9	Let them be disgraced.	They should not be allowed to stay near children.
910	My aunty said that I'm possessed. She called me all sort of names. I prayed for it to happen to her child.	If it happened to her child, she won't be like that.
P11	If I could, I will make them like me for 1 week, then they will understand.	We should all be alive, they will see what I will become in future.

Observations revealed that prior to actual dramatic engagements, participants expressed general feelings of resentment and thoughts of retribution towards individuals that were found culpable of bullying children with hearing and speech difficulty. About six participants prescribed that such individuals be subjected to the same disabilities as appropriate punishment. These positions appeared to change as the project progressed. The infusion of dramatic enactments was aimed at developing and improving self worth to ensure that possible scenarios for discriminatory actions to occur are minimized.

Furthermore, a total of one hundred and twenty questionnaires were also distributed to adult-respondents within the Awka metropolis. As stated earlier, these questions sought to measure general perceptions on social attitudes towards the plight of children living with speech and hearing challenges as well as other forms of disabilities as they affect children and adolescents. Some of the responses retrieved are evaluated below:

Table 4: Do you agree that children with hearing and speech disabilities are more likely to be bullied and discriminated against?

S/N	RESPONSE	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS
1	YES	98	81.6%
2	NO	4	3.3%
3	MAY BE	18	15%
	TOTAL	120	100%

As table 4 projects, in answering the question on whether children with hearing and speech disabilities were more likely to be bullied and discriminated against, 98 respondents comprising about 81.6% of the surveyed population answered in the affirmative, 4 respondents making up 3.3% of the population answered “No” while 18 respondents making up 15% of the population answered “Maybe”. The general trend of answers thus, depicted an acknowledgment of a greater possibility for children with these disabilities to be bullied and discriminated against. Some of the respondents during interview sessions, provided further reasons how these children were and are still being treated differently because of their disability. The proprietress of God’s Care Special School, Mrs. Justina Ndife notes that “Some persons believe that the children are cursed and were sent to their family to bring ill luck”. The next set of tables attempted to evaluate some of the reasons children living with hearing and speech disabilities appear susceptible to diverse forms of discrimination from some members of the society.

Table 5: Do you agree that spiritual forces could be responsible for hearing and speech loss in children?

S/n	Response	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
1	YES	55	45.83%
2	NO	38	31.6%
3	MAY BE	27	22.5%
	TOTAL	120	100%

Table 5 depicts that in answering the question whether “Spiritual forces” could be responsible for hearing and speech loss in children. 55 respondents comprising 45.83% of the population answered “Yes”. 33 respondents comprising 31.6% of the population answered “No” while 27 respondents comprising 22.5% of the population answered “Maybe”. The trend of frequency of the answers, thus show that even in urban areas such as Awka, there appears to be a quite evident belief in “Spiritual attacks” or supernatural incidences as capable of causing speech and hearing challenges in children. A respondent asks, “how then do you explain that a children learns to speak, then at about the age of six, totally loses the ability to speak and hear”. The researchers further enquired if reasons such as these were the only ones responsible for discriminatory actions towards children with speech and hearing disability as the table below would show.

Table 6: Which of these do you think is more responsible for discriminatory actions meted out towards challenged children?

S/N	RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT AGE OF RESPONDENTS
1	COMMUNAL/RELIGIOUS PRACTICES	15	12.5%
2	INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOUR	44	36.6%
3	BOTH	61	50.83%
	TOTAL	120	100%

Table 5 projects that in answering the question on which factor are most responsible for discriminatory actions meted out to challenged children, 15 respondents comprising 12.5% of the population believed that communal and religious practices were more responsible for this behaviour. On another hand, 44 respondents comprising 36.6% of the population stated that individual behavior and beliefs were more responsible for discriminatory actions towards challenged children. However, 61 respondents comprising 50.83% of the population registered that religious and communal practices as well as individual behavior were both capable of inducing discriminatory actions towards challenged children. The slight variance in the trend of responses as against the previous table showed that while a majority of the surveyed population in Awka, believes that “spiritual” or supernatural occurrences could be responsible for speech and hearing disabilities in children, an equally large majority of the population, believe that individual actions and behaviour strengthened by instituted communal practices were mostly responsible for discriminatory actions meted out to challenged children in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The study recommends that more effort should be made to involve relevant stake holders such as parents, care givers, policy makers and indeed the general public on the need to engage inclusive and qualitative avenues of enhancing the quality of life of challenged children and adolescents. Indeed, there exists an apparent need to provide specialized and child-centered teaching techniques and care for children who suffer from different individual disabilities but who are often classified and diagnosed in group. Better attention should thus be paid to the different strands within these disabilities as this would further promote qualitative approaches in dealing with them. Average members of the community for example may not be able to easily distinguish

between presentations of Attention Deficit Hyperactive disorder ADHD and General Anxiety Disorder GAD, in children or differences between Postpartum Depression and Schizophrenia in young adults and this may lead to incidents of wrong stereotyping which could eventually result to the formation of negative communal practices. Concepts such as RehabDramatics could be employed as interventionist measures in bringing to the fore the need to give particular attention and care to evolving challenges in today's child.

The study also recommends that Applied theatre concepts and techniques such as RehabDramatics should be engaged within the curriculum development of formal and non-formal educational establishments. These establishments such as primary, secondary and specialized centres of learning provide as important avenues of engaging developing children and as such, concepts like RehabDramatics could be instrumental in engaging challenged children on issues ranging from self representation to qualitative response to tasks and societal attitudes or practices. Similarly the study of Applied Theatre in Nigeria should be broadened in tertiary institutions to encourage more scholarly input in the area of Drama Therapy as a viable specialization area. This is to engender the utilization of the dramatic arts within multidisciplinary discourses and studies and thus encourage increased research interests particularly in the application of Theatre to health care delivery and practice.

Conclusion

It is hoped that the concept of RehabDramatics should contribute to the knowledge and practice of Applied Theatre research endeavours. Theatre as we have seen, possesses unique qualities in breaking boundaries of status, literacy, religion and so on. Applied dramatic concepts such as RehabDramatics thus, advocate for the integration of various art forms and performances

with the aim of raising needed consciousness and activating discussions and actions towards productive change.

The need to continuously engage the community on social values, norms as well as established cultural practices using the dramatic medium provides as a viable alternative for theatre researchers and change agents. Indeed, until some of these practices are reenacted in a way that community members are brought in full glare of short or long term repercussions, many of the phenomena responsible for the seeming under-appreciation and underdevelopment of challenged individuals in society may continue unabated. It is therefore very likely that qualitative change in communal behaviour and attitudes could induce improved personal psycho-social responses that could foster better outlooks to life or as Levy Robb and Jindal Snape submit “Inclusive arts can support personalization in practice when it is conceived of from a social justice perspective (254). This inclusiveness as well as unique quality in engendering needed action, defines Applied Theatre techniques as a very effective medium.

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