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## REVIEW ARTICLE

### MUSIC, MOVEMENT AND DRAMA IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: AN ASSESMENT OF THE MOI UNIVERSITY CASE

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#### ABSTRACT

According to Hannaford (1995), learners tend to remember more when they are actively involved in the learning process than when they are passively involved. According to this model, also known as: *Dale's Cone of Learning* (<http://www.soundpiper.com/mln/elements.htm>), we tend to remember 10% of what we read, 20% of what we hear, 50% of what we hear and see, 70% of what is discussed, 80% of what is experienced and 95% of what we say and do. Therefore, we tend to learn more when we see, hear and participate or do real things in the learning process. It is on this basis that this paper advocates for the use of music, movement and drama in early childhood education – a learner centred method that encourages total participation through seeing, hearing and doing. In this regard, Hannaford observes that music gets the whole child involved in the process of learning. In Kenya, Early childhood education degree programs are offered by various universities. In particular, Moi University, School of Education, offers Bachelor of Education in Early Childhood and Primary Education. In the four year program course, there are only four courses which focus on the use of music, movement and drama in early childhood education. The first course, which is done in second year of study, introduces students to the very basic fundamentals of music, drama/play, movement/dance with reference to their efficacy in early childhood pedagogy. Thereafter, two courses follow in third year: one discusses methodology of using music, movement and drama in early childhood education and the other focuses on creation, choice and use of music, movement and drama materials in early childhood education. The last course zeros in on elementary techniques of music composition, and script writing for dance and drama with particular reference to early childhood education. It is last course in the series and is offered in fourth year. It builds on the earlier third year course by introducing relatively advanced techniques in music composition and script writing, and interpretation in drama/play and dance/movement in early childhood education. This paper discusses challenges and shortcomings in the programme offered at Moi University and thereafter it suggests the way forward.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Early childhood development is a foundation on which Education for All (EFA) and especially basic education should be built. In this regard, Early Childhood Education (ECE) is very important in our endeavour to achieve the targets for EFA, the major target being: quality early education and care. In this regard, this paper argues that comprehensive programs focused broadly on cognitive development rather than solely on academic skills have better long term effects on social adjustment (Chambers *et al.*, 2010). According to Chambers, recent brain research and research on cognitive development are reinforcing evidence that early education is crucial in getting children off to a good start in life.

The paper endeavours to answer the following questions:

- How do children learn?

- What kind of preschool program is most effective for young children?
- What particular programs have positive outcomes and what elements of effectiveness contribute to these programs?
- What role do music, movement, dance, drama and play have in early childhood education?
- Are early childhood educators at Moi University and other universities that offer the early childhood education programme in Kenya, adequately trained in the aspect of the role of music, movement and drama in early childhood education?

This paper is a follow-up and response to the global endeavour to prioritize early childhood care and education as a foundation for later learning and development, as evidenced by the Global Guidelines for Early Childhood Education and Care in the 21st Century (Association for Childhood Education International, World Organization for Early

Childhood, 1999). According to MENC, the National Association for Music Education (2010), music is a natural and important part of young children's growth and development. Early interaction with music positively affects the quality of all children's lives. Successful experiences in music help all children bond emotionally and intellectually with others through creative expression in song, rhythmic movement, and listening experiences. Music in early childhood creates a foundation upon which future music learning is built. These experiences should be integrated within the daily routine and play of children. In this way, enduring attitudes regarding the joy of music making and sharing are developed. According to Connors (2009), when one listens to the singing, the laughing, and the shouting; the jumping, stomping, and clapping... children making music, it's easy to hear they're having fun. Children, unlike adults, learn primarily through sound. They naturally focus attention more easily on sound than on visual stimuli. The rhythmic sound of music, in particular, captures and holds children's attention like nothing else, and makes it a valuable learning tool. Music education increases children's intelligence, academic success, social skills, and even physical fitness.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

### Types of learning

Children learn to feel, think, act, relate to others, and control and co-ordinate body parts. All these aspects of learning are controlled by the brain and are grouped as follows:

- Affective learning which involves feeling and relating with others. It also involves acquisition of values and therefore influences the development of attitudes and personality.
- Cognitive learning which involves the mental processes of reasoning, remembering and recording, problem solving, analysing, interpreting, evaluation and decision making.
- Psychomotor learning which involves the development of skills used in body and muscle coordination and control such as balancing, walking, holding things, reading and writing.

### Stages of Learning

- **Sensory motor learning (birth – 2 years): Baby class/Kindergarten**

Most of learning takes place on a concrete physical level. During this period, the child learns by touching, tasting, seeing, smelling and hearing real objects. Learning is mainly through the senses. Children use all the body parts and senses to explore and experience the world around them. Children need to be provided with things they can see, hear, smell and feel. They need opportunities and space to crawl, stand, walk and explore. Their language needs to be stimulated. They also need encouragement, love, attention, safety and security so that they can begin to understand who they are and acquire self-esteem.

- **Perceptual learning (2 - 5 years): Middle class**

The children continue to learn through concrete experiences. They also use language to learn and to

communicate. Children begin to relate to pictures and models. They use things to represent something else as we see in their pretend and make believe activities. This shows further development of the child's thinking ability, that is, the child has formed images in the brain, which he can recall at will. This is what helps the child to use a symbol to represent an object, person, action or situation that does not exist at the moment. During this period, the basic attitudes, language skills and social habits, basic knowledge and concepts, skills needed for formal learning are acquired. Children need guidance, love and attention. Additionally, children need opportunities, materials and peers to play with. They also need to interact closely with adults to acquire social and language skills. They should be exposed to pictures, books, stories, rhymes and music to help them acquire a lot of general knowledge and pre-literacy skills.

- **Conceptual learning (from 5 years): Pre-unit**

Children still need to use concrete materials and situations in order to understand fully ideas and concepts. They, however, also understand many symbols. They reason logically and their language is well developed to express ideas and clarify thinking. At this stage children learn through hands-on experience. They need to see things happen and to make things happen and not just to be told how things happen. Children begin to reason logically and to think deductively. Reasoning deductively involves using a general principle or rule to solve a particular problem. For example, from experience, children see that most birds fly. They can draw logical conclusions and make decisions about things within their range of knowledge and experience. They can benefit from formal education and can follow instructions clearly. They can learn to read, write and do mathematical operations. They can also undertake various responsibilities at home and in school. At this stage, they have gained a lot of social skills, and can relate well with friends (usually of the same sex) and understand rules and regulations.

### How children Learn

Children learn through their five senses. They need security and experiences that encourage them to touch, smell, taste and hear. Images of whatever they experience through their senses are formed in the brain. These are called schemas and can be recalled at will both in the presence and absence of the object.

### Children learn through the following main ways:

- **Learning through play**

This is the most natural way in which children learn. It is one of the most effective kinds of learning. Play is serious business and sometimes called 'work' for children. Through play children acquire new knowledge, social skills, concepts and attitudes. They also learn social skills, concepts and attitudes. They learn independence and responsibility. They develop

muscle strength, and coordination and build their self-esteem and confidence.

- **Learning through games**

Games are activities engaged in for pleasure that include rules and often competition between individuals. Pre-school age children may participate in social games and play that involve simple rules of taking turns or sharing materials. Games become important during the middle or later childhood when children fully understand rules and regulations.

- **Learning through exploration and discovery**

Children use their senses to explore the environment, manipulate objects and discover the nature of things – how things work and how they relate to each other. They discover likenesses and difference between things and people.

- **Children learn through imitation**

Children observe adults and other children in their life. Therefore, adults should provide good role models so that children learn how to behave, to use language and express their feelings and emotions appropriately.

- **Children learn through repetition**

Children practice skills over and over again until they master them. They should be given opportunities to repeat activities – games, songs, dances, poems, movements etc.

- **Children learn by trial and error**

Children learn through trial and error and they make mistakes as they try out many things. They should be exposed to many types of materials, people (resource persons), activities and environments (such as tours to animal orphanages, railway station, airport etc)

- **Children learn by learning how to learn**

Children learn how to learn through practice, observation, imitation, exploration and problem solving through which they discover new things and new ways of doing things. Learning how to learn means identifying the best ways of learning new concepts/ideas. Therefore, they should be encouraged to explore and experiment new ideas and activities.

## Learning and Play

Play is any action that is done for its own sake, for enjoyment and for no rewards. According to Piaget, play is the life and work of children. Because of their high imagination and energy, children enjoy playing very much. They like outdoor play a lot because it involves adventure. Learning is a relatively permanent change in behaviour as a result of experience, observation, instruction, and practice. It is an

ongoing process, which begins at birth and continues throughout life. It involves all things that people see, hear, feel, smell, taste, and experience within their surroundings. A change in behaviour should be observed in the individual for us to say that learning has taken place. Learning is also a process by which we acquire knowledge, skills and understanding. The capacity to learn and the rate of learning are influenced by inborn (hereditary) as well as environmental factors. Young children learn best through senses. They learn when they look, listen, touch, taste and smell. At the beginning, the child understands concepts and ideas when presented in the form of real objects (realia), actions and situations. Gradually, the child gains the ability for abstract thinking and learning.

## Importance of play

As children play, they learn new things, and also develop their mental social, language and physical abilities. Specifically play helps in:

- **Intellectual development**

Play helps children to concentrate, explore, reason and organise their thinking. They learn to solve problems and make decisions as the play. They acquire concepts and ideas about space, objects, relationships and time as they play.

- **Social development**

Through play, children learn to live harmoniously with others. They learn to share play materials, to take turns, listen and respect others. They also learn empathy and concern for others as they play. They learn negotiation skills, how to solve problems and leadership skills – especially in role play activities.

- **Emotional development**

Children develop positive self image as they play. They develop skills and abilities that make them feel good about themselves. Play provides opportunities for children to discover their emotions of joy, anger, frustrations, guilt, insecurity and anxiety.

- **Physical development**

Through play children develop strong and healthy bodies. They acquire muscle strength and learn to control and coordinate their bodies through play. They learn to use their bodies to express themselves and to communicate with others through body movements.

- **Language development**

Children develop a lot of vocabulary during play. They learn to communicate with others, to listen and express themselves through play.

- **Understanding adult's roles**

Role playing is one of the most frequent plays for young children. They like to play adult roles. They

act 'mother', 'teacher', 'father', 'doctor', 'nurse', 'driver', etc. Through engagement in role play, children start to understand and appreciate adult roles.

- **Knowledge and appreciation of self**

As children play, they learn what they are able to do. They also compare themselves with others - which helps them to understand their potentials even better. Understanding of self is important for development of self identity, self esteem and confidence.

- **Knowledge and appreciation of culture**

Through indigenous/traditional toys, other materials, songs, games and plays children learn about their culture and traditions. They also acquire values, beliefs and attitudes that are associated with culture and other people's way of life.

## MUSIC AND MOVEMENT

The term 'Music and Movement' often especially denotes the use of rhythmic song and dance in education, thought of as beneficial for childhood development. Research has shown that even infants can appreciate music and dance, illustrating a connection between body movement, rhythm and awareness. Physical movement helps balance, coordination, self-esteem and body awareness. Movement associated with drama leads to improvements in adaptive social behavior, body movement and gestures help children absorb ideas better and can act as memory aids both in learning and recalling one's personal past. Teachers often implement music and creative movement to help young children count, remember the alphabet, days of the week etc.

- Children are the greatest lovers of music. Kids seem to really respond to music in the classroom and enjoy it thoroughly. Isn't it interesting to see how many of us remember, to this day, how important music was in their learning experiences when they were young children?
- Music is so important in the early childhood classroom. It has the power to relax children if necessary, but also stimulate and motivate them. Songs can be used to reinforce knowledge of the days of the week and months of the year.
- Music is extremely important when it comes to Early Childhood Education. Music is another outlet to stimulate the mind in school. We all know younger children have a lot of energy, and learning movements and dances to songs can help release some of it. Using songs to learn about something helps the students remember it quicker. For example, most children learn the alphabet from a song. There are many songs about different subjects that can be used in the classroom and many more can be composed.

### The importance of Music in early childhood

- **Music has a positive effect on young children's development**

New research (The Nemours Foundation, 2008) shows that music has a positive influence on young children's cognitive

skills such as reasoning and memory. Research also shows that providing children with a rich and stimulating environment involving all the senses, including the auditory sense, can support children's healthy growth and development. The Nemours Foundation (ibid) research report notes that research has shown that children who are actively involved with music (who play it or sing it regularly):

1. Do better in reading and math when they start school.
2. Are better able to focus and control their bodies.
3. Play better with others and have higher self-esteem.

Here are some ways music can be used in the early childhood classroom.

1. Use a song to greet each child or all children in the morning.
2. Use a song or instrumental music during transition times such as clean-up time or snack preparation time.
3. Play background music during free play. Be sure the music isn't too loud or distracting from the children's activities.
4. Play quiet lullabies or soft classical music during nap time or rest time.
5. Use music to teach letters, shapes, numbers or any other concepts in the curriculum.
6. Sing songs and play instruments as part of the daily routine.
7. Use music to enhance games and movement activities.
8. Use music to help children learn about other cultures and other lands.
9. Use music to celebrate special events and holidays.

- **Young children enjoy making music with others**

Making music with others gives children a wonderful feeling of belonging to the group. Children who might have difficulty joining in activities with others because they are shy, have limited English ability (language delayed) or special needs, can freely participate when it comes to a music activity.

- **Music makes young children happy**

Children seem to experience much pleasure and joy listening to music, making music and moving to music. Whether they are singing along to a CD, playing a rhythm instrument or skipping to music around the classroom, most children seem to thoroughly enjoy participating in a music activity. How wonderful it is that with very little effort, a teacher can bring such happiness to children each day just by providing the opportunity to do a little something with music.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN KENYA AND MOI UNIVERSITY

According to Mwonga (2010), the ever increasing pedagogical demands and lack of preparedness force teachers to have occasional inclusion of just a few songs in the educational process instead of using them systematically to aim at the creation of such a system of instruction as would optimally contribute to the development of every child. Such a system would consider employing a variety of children's singing games due to the plurality of cultures represented in most preschool institutions. The songs can become envoys between

different communities by drawing different communities together thereby promoting deeper mutual understanding and respect for each other and make it possible for every child to satisfy his or her need for playing and learning in the company of other children. In Kenya, a variety of institutions are charged with the responsibility of training early childhood educators. These institutions fall under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) and the Kenya Institute of Special Education (KISE). For logistical purposes, these institutions range from local training centres (the DICECE – District Centres for Early Childhood Education) to national training centres (the NACECE – National Centres for Early Childhood Education) and local universities, Moi University, where we teach being one. The training levels are organized in such a way as to cater for the various needs of the ECE professionals, offering prospective teachers short courses, two-year diploma courses, a four-year bachelor's degree, and master's programs (Ibid).

Graduates of the ECE course at Moi University are expected to be equipped to teach at any Early Childhood Education (ECE) level or work in curriculum development centres where they are expected to develop materials for use in early childhood education centres and also train ECE teachers on how to use the material developed with a focus on emphasizing a holistic development of the child, rather than formal rote learning (learning or memorization by repetition, often without an understanding of the reasoning or relationships involved in the material that is learned). However, much attention should be given to the central role of music and movement in stimulating young children's development. Never-the-less, follow-up of students who graduate from this program reveals that there are numerous problems that bedevil ECE programs in Kenya despite efforts so far made toward training personnel at undergraduate and postgraduate level hence the necessity for this study. For instance, our 2009 graduate, Magut (Personal Interview, 15<sup>th</sup> April, 2010), who teaches at the Nandi Hills ECE diploma training centre says that, like in many other centres of a similar nature he knows of in Kenya, there is an acute shortage of up-to-date, reliable and relevant reference material and resources. Moreover, there is no uniformity in curriculum instructional material and evaluation procedures. In such circumstances, Magut (ibid) contends that he ends up using the Moi University lecture notes as his only available detailed reference resource. From our experience of teaching the four courses at Moi University for the last four years, this problem starts right at the university level where relevant and reliable references resources are hard to come by. In most cases we have relied on the Internet sources and making our private arrangements to order reference materials.

## CONCLUSION

Music, movement (dance) and drama (play) have a central role in early childhood education. In order set a firm foundation for pupils, relevant materials should be utilised and appropriate methods should be employed.

In addition a careful consideration of pupils' needs, their developmental stage and their cultural orientations should be taken into account.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

- Music, movement and drama courses, at college and university level, should be taught to all ECE teacher trainees from the first year to the final year of study. In this regard, the courses should be evenly spread over the entire course. If music and movement courses are taught in every semester of the entire course, the trainees are likely to be well grounded theoretically and practically.
- Courses for ECE teachers, especially music and movement courses, should put emphasis on practical approaches through projects and presentations.
- ECE teacher trainees, at college and university level, should undertake at least a one term (three months) attachment at an early childhood centre where they should be supervised by their instructors as they get exposed to Hands-on experiences.

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