

ANIMATED FILM AS A CATALYST FOR CHILD-CENTERED EDUCATION: THE KINGS AND QUEENS NURSERY AND PRIMARY SCHOOL NKPOR EXPERIENCE.

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Abstract

*One of the major objectives of education is to focus on the individual child's development and the impact on society. For this reason, it is necessary to consider the techniques and forms of teaching from pre-schools to higher schools. Traditional, which is the old method of imparting knowledge appears weak and insufficient to match the changes of our time. Therefore, the problem of this study is to evaluate the traditional teaching technique and its limited pedagogic impact in the face of geometric digitization of the contemporary society. The active use of media technique, specifically, animated film, is considered a method that will help children move from passivity to active learning. This study aims at evaluating the potentials of animated film as a catalyst for child-centered education. It is set to find out the extent to which animated film can stimulate effective child-centered education, using *The Honest Girl* as a case study. This work is based on the Reuven Feuerstein's Mediated Learning Experience Theory. The theory emphasizes that the learner's needs and abilities are the central issue of planning and achieving effective classroom*

instruction. The researcher adopted qualitative methodological approach for this research since it involved collection of qualitative data from a sample that was drawn from a given population. The findings showed that a strong participatory method of teaching like animated media, when used effectively, will take care of bringing out the children's potentials more than traditional method. The study recommends that animations be properly linked to existing curriculum as a vital medium of imparting knowledge to children to help improve the quality and standard of education in Nigeria and inculcate cultural identities and values to young children. This study concluded that educators are not to do away completely with traditional teaching techniques but instead to update their current style of teaching to include animated technique.

Key words: Animated, Film, Catalyst, Child-centered, Education, Children, Learning, Media, Learner.

Introduction:

Every child has dreams and aspirations and needs motivation to realize these dreams. Children are encouraged to take charge of their situations and then take action in order to improve their access to resources and transform their consciousness through their beliefs, values and attitudes. Getting a child involved in frequent participatory learning activities is essential in the child's physical, moral, emotional and psychological training. This is because the sooner he develops the ability to control his emotion, actions and thoughts, the sooner he is furnished with valuable tools in life. Nigeria as a nation has been characterized by ethnic, religious, social and civil crisis and these problems call for urgent remedy. To move the nation forward, children have to be given the opportunity to participate co-operatively in solving these

encountered problems. This is only possible when the learning process in its actual sense is shifted from being teacher-centered to learner-centered. In this process, the learner pilots the affairs of learning while the teacher is seen as a facilitator, directing the learners to achieve their education goals.

As children grow and develop, they take in information and acquire knowledge at a rapid pace. As they develop their cognitive abilities also, they internalize new information and add it to what they already know. Children's minds are still developing and the idea of how the world works comes from experience, attitudes and behaviours that are in their environment. Television and cinema make up part of this environment. Films on television and cinema transmit experiences, attitudes and behaviours that children copy. Recent studies show that there is a more complex interaction between media and society. Children form part of society, therefore the overall effect of media on society cumulatively has impacts on them. Studies have it that those children between five to twelve years gain ability to imitate behaviour and events that they come across every day. Therefore, the characters in the films may turn into role models that affect a child's social, mental and psychological state. These children do not merely watch films but grasp what they see and obtain information.

Animation is an interactive form of expression with both manipulative and critical potential. It is a form of expression capable of involving the viewers in a complex sensory engagement. Human beings are always searching for better and quicker methods of getting good results which is based on knowledge acquisition and skill development. New ideas and innovations have been infused into the teaching and learning process. Clara Moemeke in her idea about the changes opines that "Traditionally acclaimed ways of

teaching are giving way to self-paced learning, mediated instruction, field studies and technology-supported teaching and learning modes...”(2).

A child, who is described as a young human being, is also a learner whose learning behaviour tends to change in growth development, personality characteristics and other individual differences. Education on the other hand, is a process of teaching, training and learning in both formal (in school) and informal (outside school), designed to improve knowledge and for development of skills. Chudi Nwabachili and Ngozi Egbue citing C.V. Good defined education as a means through which an individual “develops his abilities, skills, capabilities and all forms of behaviour patterns that are of positive value in the society he lives” (37).

Education is considered as being very relevant in the development of the individual and the society. G. Eneasator, quoting Aghenta L, opines that “Education is the acquisition of knowledge, the aggregates of all the processes through which a person develops abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviours with positive value in the society in which he lives” (1). This means that it is through education that the needed values and skills required for the survival of the individual and the development of the society are acquired.

Child-Centered education also known as learner-centered education is a term that came up as a challenge to traditional method of learning which is teacher-centered and aimed at improving organizational goal without considering what learners needed to know or what methods would be best in facilitating learning for the individual learner. It has to do with methods of teaching that shift the focus of instruction or teaching from the

teacher to the child or the learner. Its primary objective is ensuring that all considerations that facilitate children's learning are of utmost priority. Child-centered education puts the learner's interest first, where the learners choose what they will learn, how they will learn and how they will assess their own learning. In this method, the learners influence the content, activities, materials and the pace of learning. It places the learner in the centre of the learning process. This model also moves children from passive receivers of information to active participants in their own discovery process contrary to teacher-centered method where learners spend most of their time sitting on desks, listening, copying notes, answering questions and so on.

Child-centered method gives learners opportunities to lead learning activities, participate more actively in discussions, design their own learning projects, explore topics that interest them and then contribute to the design of their own study. Great educators and advocates of child-centered learning like Friedrich Froebel, John Dewey, Maria Montessori and Johann Pestalozzi have great interest in the basic goodness of children and have made notable contributions to the practical methodology of childhood education. This means that there is need for showing concern for the welfare of children in all areas of their growth and development. Children are to be used as the starting point for lesson plans and for developing curriculum. They are whole human beings who have academic, social, emotional, physical needs, as well as the need for the development of character. This research therefore is examining animated film to find out the extent to which it can stimulate effective child-centered education using the animated film "*The Honest Girl*" as a paradigm.

Theoretical Framework

This work is based on the Mediated Learning Experience Theory (MLE) by Reuven Feuerstein which holds that a child grabs new experience from each stimulus he is exposed to and then turns it into a source of new and more efficient strategy to learn. It is basically concerned with the interaction between human beings and organisms with their socio-cultural environment. Reuven Feuerstein and Refael Feuerstein defined Mediated Learning Experience as “The interaction of the organism with its environment via a human mediator” (3). From this definition, it seems an essential feature of human cognition is that it is based on the internalized forms of what originally appeared as social interactions.

Mediation stresses the communal understanding of knowledge, not only in the collaborative sharing of experience but in the sorting or categorizing of ideas. The role of the mediator is to help the learner structure, refine and organize stimuli according to Feuerstein, and influence the potential ways that transfer of knowledge occurs in the learner’s thinking. “It assumes that instruction is more concerned with going beyond the information given, connecting the present with both the past and the anticipation of the future, than with mastering specific bits of here – and – now data” (Pressersen and Kozulin, 24).

Mediated Learning experience is targeted towards assisting someone to be a more skilled and independent learner. It occurs when a more skilled person like a teacher, helps a child to understand something that he/she could not do alone. A mediator therefore guides the child to discover his/her own strategy for learning. Alex Kozulin states that the central aspect of mediation is the change that qualitatively influences the learner and enables

him/her to develop, prerequisite for learning on his/her own from direct stimuli” (50). Feuerstein proposes that learners will develop a different view of their own perception of themselves as learners with the success of mediated learning experience; they will become active generators of new information, problem solvers and proactive thinkers. It is not the goal of this study to review extensively the findings of various researchers about this theory but it is necessary to state that it is relevant to this study especially as the strategy offers opportunities for constant interaction between the teacher and the learner thereby creating a supportive and nurturing environment for learners that are at risk for academic failure. In mediated learning, the teachers over all role shifts from that of information provider to learning facilitator, and the learner becomes self regulated, independent and creative.

Synopsis of *The Honest Girl*

Sumiti is a young girl that is loved by her parents. She is being pampered and always gets what she wants. Her parents buy gifts for her whenever they go to the market. She is a bright and polite child and helpful to everybody. But one day, it happens that when she enters her class, other children are gathered around Tina. Everybody is admiring her new pen. Sumiti sees the pen, writes her name with it and liked it, as they are admiring the pen, the bell rings and everybody rushes downstairs for the assembly.

As the children make their lines for the assembly, their teacher calls Sumiti and asks her to bring some chalk from the classroom. When Sumiti enters the class, she goes to Tina’s bag to look at the pen again. She takes the pen and wants it badly, just then she hears a footstep and in a hurry puts the pen in her pocket. Turning around, she sees Vibha enter the class because she is not

feeling well. Sumiti leaves the class with the pen in her pocket. After the assembly, when everybody settles down, Tina starts searching for her pen and when she cannot find it, she tells the class teacher.

Vibha, who was in the class during the assembly, is accused of stealing the pen. She cries bitterly even after her bag is searched without the pen found. The class teacher asks her to produce the pen the next day which makes her sad. Sumiti is afraid to speak up and goes home that day but could not sleep at night. The next day, she comes to class and comforts Vibha. After assembly, she stands before the entire class to narrate what happened. She tells the class teacher that the pen is with her and she has been afraid to speak when Vibha was being scolded. She pleads for forgiveness and promises never to do such again. Everybody is surprised at her attitude. The class teacher commends her for being courageous and saying the truth.

Experimenting *The Honest Girl* as a Medium for Child-Centered Education

This learning began with warm-up exercises aimed at arousing the interest of the children. They jumped up and down, flew like airplanes and kicked the air repeatedly. The activities which lasted for five minutes got them excited and more importantly, enabled them to exercise their psychomotor skills. To make it fun, the exercise was done as a team and the children were made to lead the warm-up sessions. The exercise helped to prepare the children both physically and mentally for the next stage which was the actual learning through film animation.

The researcher created a positive and safe environment for learning and allowed the pupils the opportunity to learn how to

learn instead of what to learn. She made them sit quietly even as they were excited and eager to learn. Before the video clip was played, the researcher paused to assess what the pupils knew how they can be more effective in the learning process by asking questions like:

- i. Have you seen someone who stole before?
- ii. What happens to a person who steals?
- iii. Have you told a lie or seen someone who lies?

When they had responded to these questions, the video clip was played to them and then paused at intervals. The pause technique was continually used by the researcher to build a community of learning and give them opportunity to direct their own learning on the topic. Just as the starting pause helped to get the attention of the pupils in the class, a mid pause helped to keep it. The mid pauses helped to prevent pupils from experiencing cognitive overload. The researcher while facilitating the learning process posed further questions thus:

- i. What do Sumiti's parents buy for her from the market?
- ii. What were the children doing in the class when Sumiti entered?
- iii. When the bell rang, what did the children do?
- iv. Who entered the class when others were in the assembly?

The questions were beneficial to the pupils as they remembered and understood what they learnt. The researcher benefited also as the questions enabled her redirect her own energy for a time and recognize where the pupils were in understanding the presented material. When the video clip ended, the researcher moved into final discussion and evaluation of the lesson with the

pupils. The researcher designed more questions to ascertain if the objectives of the lesson were accomplished thus:

- i. Why did Sumiti steal the pen?
- ii. Was Vibha truthful?
- iii. How does an honest person behave?
- iv. Is it good to be honest?
- v. What are the likely things to happen to a child who tells lies?
- vi. Will you like to behave like Sumiti?

These evaluating questions enabled them share what they learnt, the reflection session centered on the theme of the story-Honesty, attributes of honesty, ways of showing how to be honest and consequences of being dishonest. Their responses showed that they can apply it to their lives and that they had an enjoyable learning experience.

Analysis and Interpretation of *The Honest Girl*

The story of *The Honest Girl* is entertaining and didactic and is aimed at helping the children gain basic knowledge of the physical world, as well as inculcating in them the moral principles of the society in which they live in. This is because a child depends on other adult members of the society to learn the values and behavioural pattern necessary in the society in which he lives. Mathew Umukoro in support of the above idea explains that “A child must learn the skills, knowledge and accepted way of behaviour of the society in which he was born. He must learn his people’s ways of life”(48). The argument of this work is based on Feuerstein’s theory in agreement with the idea that children come to school to do things and live in a community which gives them real, guided experiences which foster their capacity to contribute to

society. Dewey in his social theory of education believes strongly that children should be involved in real-life tasks and challenges, and so schools should be organized in such a way that the activities of the outer world are reflected within. To him, education is not preparation for life but life itself and every new experience is education. The struggle in life for existence is a continuous process. Therefore it is necessary that children are exposed to these life experiences because it will help them in the present. The content of this film filled the children with deep natural truths and they could learn much from the characters. Animated film like this one educates, supports the feelings of children, helps to expand their thinking and could put them in problem solving activities. Another philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau who is advocating for child-centered learning postulates that adults should always be truthful with children, and that first impulses of nature are always right. He argues that learning takes place internally based on the individual's needs thereby giving the teachers the position of facilitators.

The concept of child-centered education or learner-centered education came up as a challenge to traditional method of learning and it stipulates that “Central to all decision making in education, is safe guarding the interests of the child. Therefore, the decision of what to teach, when to teach, where to teach, who to teach and how to teach must be such that the best interest of the child is taken into consideration” (Peace Enueme, 162). This means that a child is allowed to take part in the content and construction of his knowledge (democratic participation). That does not mean that opinions of teachers for instance are not important anyway. What this means is that involving children in learning makes them grow to become independent and critical thinkers that have the ability to reason constructively, originate ideas, and relate well with other

people in the society. According to Gustave Weltsek-Medina, learning takes place internally based on individual's needs and a teacher is responsible for helping a student explore those intrinsic needs that are critical to his/her well being. In this way the child's needs are placed at the center of the educational experience relocating the teacher to a position of a guide or facilitator. The innate potentials of the child cannot produce a strong development system if it is treated in isolation. Nonetheless, as stated above by Weltsek-Medina, there must be a guide precisely a teacher.

Child-centered education is based on constructivism - a theory that people learn through experiences and reflections. Through constructivism, a de-emphasis on traditional method of teaching is made thereby creating the opportunity for children to take charge of their own learning and then the need for a move towards developing critical thinking skills is stressed. This view of learning also stresses that knowledge is not a thing that can just be given by a teacher situated at the front of the class, while the learners merely seat and listen; rather knowledge is constructed by learners through active involvement, and exercise of their mental capability, thereby leading to increased cognitive development. Constructivism opposes behaviourism - a theory that places the teacher as the sole authority figure that leads the lesson.

Animated films are important tools for bringing out the creativity in children. This is because children are flexible and can easily be taught. Using animated films in classroom facilitates the children's learning and development. A child who is being taught through animated films has the ability to remember what is being taught and as well apply the lessons obtained in his/her daily life. That is why these films are not primarily aimed at entertaining alone but educating children positively. Children learn and are

greatly influenced by what they observe from people around them through their creative ability. Elizabeth Wood and Jane Attfield in their opinion about creativity submit that;

Creativity and imagination are both important cognitive processes which serve to direct influence and generate the complexity in the role play. The roles which children create do not just involve actions and speech; they also generate feeling states which link both effective and cognitive processes. This reflects the argument that children use stories as a powerful means of making sense of the world. (147)

The act of creativity reinforces the healthiest source of self-esteem. As a result of playfully exploring a wide range of situations in a full-safe context, young people would be empowered in a healthy way to be open to continuously reviewing and revising their own sets of assumptions. This is what would be the ideal for an educational curriculum aimed at developing the skills needed for dealing with the changes which are inevitable in the coming years. It is also important from the stand point of personality development that man's creativity is viewed as one of the most important weapons in coping with life's daily stresses, emergencies and crisis. Creativity if stifled, can adversely affect the development of the child and so have marvelous potentials go untapped.

Animated films when used effectively and appropriately in classrooms, stimulate interest among children. These films also enhance the moral development of a child through didactic messages embedded in them. They are used to teach ethical and moral codes of behaviour. Any classroom process ought to be an interactive one in which learners are active participants in observing, exploring, listening, reasoning and questioning as in

animated teaching process rather than one in which learners are passive recipients of knowledge. In animated pedagogy, children are encouraged to become active learners and take part in their education. With this encouragement their talents flourish and their confidence in their ability increase. Using animated pedagogy will increase the regular attendance of school age children. This is because teaching is made interesting for the children and so their performance will improve as attendance influences children's performances. In this method, children enjoy learning more as they are actively involved thereby making them perform better.

Learners develop thinking skills as well, because they usually tap into their previous knowledge and experience in the process of trying to solve a problem thereby integrating new knowledge into existing knowledge, that is, mental construction. Children learn to question ideas and knowledge through the process of comparing and contrasting different ideas and contexts. In this pedagogical process, children develop communication and social skills. They learn to collaborate on tasks effectively by sharing with other members of a group. They exchange ideas and learn to evaluate their contributions in a socially acceptable manner. This is necessary for them to become successful in real world as they would be exposed to various experiences in their life.

Animated film as a catalyst for child-centered pedagogy will of course produce independent thinkers who can make constructive contributions to a participatory democracy and adapt to changing circumstances. It will help in producing children who will be job creators in future rather than job seekers. The method promotes intrinsic motivation to learn. It recognizes the learner's point of view which generates confidence and self-esteem as the learner gets motivated to tackle more complex problems. Studies by some

scholars like Samuel Mousari and Richard Mayer provided evidence that presenting some difficult concepts to learners in both auditory and visual symbolic modes results in more efficient (quicker, easier) learning than information presented in either mode alone for high visual ability and low prior knowledge learners. Giving information in two different methods that is, visual and auditory, results in storage by two different sensory-based memories, and increases the duration and quality of information available to learners while they mentally process the information. Therefore, providing key instructional information in both pictorial and auditory (narrative) forms might extend the duration of thinking during learning for some learners. Animated media technique can significantly influence the cost of learning. High visual but low verbal ability learners may learn faster from pictures than from narrative descriptions. Richard Clark in his analogy submits that Evidence is that media are mere vehicles that deliver instruction but do not influence student achievement ... Basically, the choice of vehicle might influence the cost or extent of distributing instruction, but only the content can influence achievement” (13). Animated media pedagogy helps children to interact with module which can be paused, played, re-played, and jumped to offer space for little brains to cope up with subject’s complexities. The process makes learning more enjoyable and interesting thereby removing phobia from the poorly performing children.

Because no individual is superior or inferior to the other, no one teaching method should be implemented rather the use of varied methods that will accommodate the various styles of learning have to be adopted, especially the method that empowers and engages the learner. Animated film, no matter how it is seen can be used as an effective educational tool for child-centered learning to

improve the world's teaching and culture. Its success as a legitimate learning device is well established and the benefits it offers are crucial not only to Nigerian children but to children in other African countries. When properly used, animated media completely involves the child (learner) in an active learning process. It makes demands upon him/her which he/she meets willingly, eagerly because of his/her interest in the process. It draws on the child's creative impulses, imagination, innermost intellectual and emotional resources. Besides, there is a recognition that only by offering activities that are worthwhile can there be a hope of education being meaningful and therefore, lasting for the learners. It is necessary therefore for the professional educator to carefully structure informal educational activities with as much care as should be devoted to formal educational pursuits.

Conclusion

This paper has examined animated film as a catalyst for child-centered education using "*The Honest Girl*" as an experimental model. The process of watching and discussing the film encouraged the children to work as a team. Life is mirrored through the film, giving children the tools to deal with real life social and school situations. It is very clear therefore that animated film can be used as an educational tool to improve the world's teaching. Its success as a legitimate learning device is well established and the benefits it offers are crucial not only to Nigerian children but to children the world over. When properly used animated film completely involves the child (learner) in an active learning process where he/she is not merely taught, receiving passively the knowledge transmitted to him/her by the teacher but rather becomes a partner in the learning process.

Considering that children's academic successes are dependent, not only on their cognitive development but also on their physical, social and emotional well being. Programs that coordinate responses across all these components produce the best results. Animated film seen as a catalyst to child-centered education, should be tailored to suit the taste of the child in terms of subject matter, language and tone. There is need to empower children at the grassroots so as to create enabling conditions for a more productive assets among citizens. Animated film from every indication has proven to be a vital educational method that is all about giving a child the opportunity to develop his/her personality through the enjoyment of doing things his/her own way. In child-centered education, children are more interested in learning activities where they can interact with one another, participate actively, direct their own learning, ask questions and complete tasks independently.

Recommendations

Having seen the effectiveness of using mediated teaching technique as a catalyst for child centered education, educators who handle children especially at basic levels should get them involved in a learning activity that will enable them participate fully. It has been observed that animations if properly linked to existing curriculum, become vital mediums for imparting cultural identities and values to young children.

Curriculum planners should ensure that a well coordinated curriculum is in place that sets high expectations for academic achievements at every level. The study is advocating for the use of educational animations as teaching material through mediated pedagogy for all subjects. The goal is to ensure children's

satisfaction in constructive or collaborative learning among peers. Policies geared towards integration of animations into education curriculum would serve as a catalyst to bringing out innate potentials in young children through mediated learning. This cannot be achieved if trained personal are lacking in the educational institutions. This research therefore advocates for the employment of experts in the use of animations in schools to help in the sustenance of mediation in teaching and learning processes. In the course of this research, the researcher discovered that majority of the schools she intended using for the experiment lacked the required facilities for the project. As a result, this study recommends that government should provide facilities to be used in classrooms for teaching children and should also improve the school environment for more efficient and effective teaching and learning activities.

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