

The Film Medium: A Potential Instrument for Improving the Lives of the Physically Challenged in the Nigerian Democracy.

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Introduction

One of the greatest challenges of the Nigerian Democracy is the provision for the needs and interests of a large number of Nigerian citizens who are characteristically so different physically, socially and psychologically that they cannot profit maximally nor contribute fully to social, political and economic development of our great nation. Such individuals are found in the nooks and crannies of our communities and in practically all the school systems in the country. They constitute a special population who are encumbered by numerous challenges aggravated by poverty, unequal opportunities, insecurity and social discrimination, to name but a few.

Although the National Policy on Education section 8 has stipulated 'special education' for all such Nigerian children for the purpose of providing adequate education for all handicapped children so that they may fully play their roles in the development of the nation, only the privileged few benefit from such a programme.

Despite the fact that the year 1981 was observed the world over as the international year of the disabled, in order to draw world attention to the fact that these children are born free and equal with normal children, it is sad to observe that majority of these children are today still victims of public pity and discrimination and are denied equal opportunities to develop

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in a healthy manner. The anti-social stigma which affected the disabled child adversely makes him develop negative self concept and low self esteem which variously lead to withdrawal and social adjustment problems.

What these children need is obviously not public pity but acceptance, understanding and encouragement. They want to be given the opportunity to prove what they can do to solve problems for themselves and to develop a sense of independence. Their needs and interests are practically the same as those of normal children. They equally need challenging experiences which are within the limits of their disabilities.

The purpose of this paper is to indicate the manner in which the film medium can contribute to improving the lives of the physically challenged in the Nigerian society. The scope will be limited to the physically challenged who have functional problems in the execution of motor skills as a result of structural defects incurred either in the womb, at birth from poliomyelitis or by accident.

Attempt will be made in the next few sections to examine the needs of the physically challenged and the role which the film medium could play in meeting their needs and interests.

Needs of the Physically Challenged

All physically challenged persons possess one common characteristic. They are limited to certain degrees in their ability to perform physical activities which normal children of their age and sex can perform. As a result, a physically challenged person is either completely restricted from participation in activities requiring movement or she is so incapacitated that her performances are atypical. As a result she often becomes a victim of public pity or ridicule. She may even be regarded as an idiot, a monster or a cursed one and may be shunned by her peers. Hence, she may loathe taking part in movement

activities partly due to poor motor ability, but more importantly due to the feeling of rejection and fear of insecurity.

It is important to note that what the physically challenged need is not pity or to be constantly reminded that they are different. Rather, they want understanding respect and dignity. Synder (1980) in his treatise of human rights recalled the United Nations General Assembly historic document which declared the "Rights of the child" as

The opportunity to develop in a healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom, to be protected against neglect, cruelty and any form of discrimination, and to be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship and peace.

The concern is that despite these declarations by the United Nations, despite the observations of the years 1979 and 1981 as the international years of the "child" and the 'Disabled' respectively, majority of the physically challenged children in Nigeria are still victims of discrimination by their peers. Yet each child, whether normal or handicapped has certain capacities, needs and interests. The difference is that those of the physically challenged are greater. Notwithstanding the fact that the task before them and their goals are more difficult, they are willing to struggle hard to achieve those ends which come so easily to normal children.

Having realised that the physically challenged are ordinary children with extraordinary needs, it is pertinent that all human and material resources should be mobilised in order to improve their lives. These are the challenges of the Nigerian educational system. Already, Adamaechi and Romaine (2000) have observed that 38,649 primary schools, and 6074 secondary schools would be involved in the Universal Basic Education (UBE). The

purposes of the UBE is to provide free universal and compulsory basic education for every Nigerian child of primary and junior secondary school age (6 – 15 years old) including the handicapped. This is a very bold venture that requires the involvement of the three tiers of Federal, State and Local Governments, as well as the private sector of the economy. The UBE was launched in 1999 in order to correct the mistakes that characterised the preceding Universal Primary Education (UPE) launched in 1976.

The Role of Film

The Nigeria National Film Policy (2001) defined film as a unique means of communication whose usual bias gives it the most universal appeal and impact. Actually, the visual elements of the cinema need no translation; they give the motion picture a universal power of communication. It is this power of communication and other values of the film that this paper strives to recommend for alleviating the problems of the physically challenged in the society.

The Uses of Film in Education

It is perhaps in education that the film plays its most outstanding role. It is used in education in lieu of or in addition to formal instruction and texts. Film is one mode in which people can record images and events and organise them to imply meaning and through them communicate to others. However, before one can assess the role that film can play in education, it is necessary to examine its uses in socio-cultural, artistic, political and scientific endeavours. Yet some argue the primary role of film on social and psychological grounds. Most of the current discussions and justifications for the use of film in schools can be traced to its psychological primacy, socio-cultural primacy, communicative primacy and sensual primacy.

According to Worth (1996) the uses of film in a wide range of educational contexts – schools, churches, labour unions, the armed forces and in the mass media in general has been going on since 1918.

The concern is that in Advanced countries such as the United States, film has been used in grade schools since 1918 and taught in high schools and colleges since the 1930's, but its blossoming into a full-fledged subject, integrated into the curriculum was not achieved until the 1960s. Most boards of education now have sections headed by media specialists whose job is to help teachers design, develop, teach and use film in the classroom. These teachers come from almost every field of education specialisation.

Without media specialists and film teachers it may be impossible to reap the enormous values of film in education and communication to the benefit of the physically challenged in Nigeria. It is a happy development that some institutions across the nation such as the University of Ibadan through the department of Special Education have been making concerted efforts to train special education specialists as teachers as well as teaching the physically challenged/ handicapped children – the blind the dumb the deaf etc to be more useful to themselves in their life endeavours. Some of these students have attained academic excellence up to doctorate levels. It is therefore pertinent that the Federal government of Nigeria should in her budgetary allocation; approve adequate finances for these special institutions of excellence. It is hoped that the ongoing UBE scheme would not gloss over the production of film teachers on whom the hopes of reaping the said educational benefit depend.

However, the National Film Policy (2000) has raised hopes by directing that "in order to give a positive orientation to locally produced film, the state should encourage the use of

film potentials to encounter prejudices and misconceptions" especially against the handicapped children in general and the physically challenged in particular.

The policy also stipulates that the state shall through appropriate legislation encourage the adoption of themes which shall emphasise the desirable, rather than the negative aspects of our present social existence, including belief in the capacity of our people (especially the physically challenged) to overcome extreme adverse conditions of nature and socio- cultural arrangement; (Sec. 4. 1.4(b)).

The author believes that if these policies are fully implemented, the physically challenged will reap the full benefits of our educational objectives. When that happens, the era of catering only for the able bodied in the society would have been over.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is concluded that the practice of providing education budgets without regard to the handicapped may be a thing of the past if the uses of film in education is properly utilised in our education practices as is the case in advanced countries of the world. The UBE scheme which is a corrective programme should be able to guarantee equal opportunities for the development of all citizens whether normal or handicapped. It should be able to grant equal opportunity for the development of the Nigerian child in a healthy and normal manner. The UBE programme should provide for the protection of the physically challenged against neglect and cruelty and any form of discrimination.

It is therefore recommended that in order to alleviate the sufferings of the disabled in our society the following provisions should be made:

1. Education budget should provide adequately for the education of the handicapped in the society especially the

- physically challenged; all should be granted automatic scholarship.
2. Special Education Centres should be limited to those who are so incapacitated that they cannot benefit from normal education such as the blind, the deaf, the dumb and so on. Such centres should be located in all the local government areas in Nigeria.
 3. In order to plan effectively for the handicapped in the society the correct census of all kinds of handicaps should be obtained in all the local governments.
 4. The need for training of teachers who would use film in classroom instruction cannot be over emphasised. Such teachers should be able to substitute films for books or lectures by teaching through film.

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