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Dance, A Sociological Tool in a Child's Moral Development: Dancing Monster and Uzoas Aparadigm

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Abstract- The use of dance in contemporary society has seriously gone beyond mere movement of the body and entertainment. Before now, parents and teachers in secondary and primary schools see the essence of dance as a mere form of recreation, relaxation and body flexibility amongst the pupils, thereby de-emphasizing the socio-communitive purpose of dance. However, from the scholarly research point of view, dance in children's theatre was and still remains an indispensable tool in developing their sociological, psychological and religious co-existence amongst themselves in school. At this juncture, interpretative dance movements become a didactic tool in sensitizing the children from saying no to evil and embracing good deeds. In order to understand and achieve the sociological essence of dance in child's development, a qualitative analysis will be carried out on (The Dancing Monster and Uzor) as a working metaphor. This paper, therefore, will critically look at the sociological potency of dance in children's theatre.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The family is an important social institution that functions as the organizer and stabilizer of social values of a given society. The University of the Family therefore makes it the primary social institution common in every communal enclave. Thus, the family according to Mezireobi is: A social group in which there are sexually cohabiting men and women with possibly off-springs or children resulting from the cohabitation (171).

This definition obviously reveals three different members of the family -the father, mother and the children. The father and mother are independent adults capable of fending for themselves, while the child is a minor, who is helpless and depends on the parents for support and upbringing. Evidently, the child is the weakest member of the family. The place of the child in the family entitles him to social welfare, participation, protection and survival rights. But the question to be answered is: What makes one a child? Canice Nwosu observes that a child is;

A designated member of the family, whose status attracts certain degrees of sentiments, these sentiments cannot be ignored when the family is

changing, because the family is an important social institution that functions as an organizer and stabilizer of social values of a given society (31).

The right of the child therefore comprises the entitlements, privileges and obligations of the child as stated by conventions, natural justices, fair play and laws of the land. The deplorable state of most families in Africa notwithstanding government and non-governmental organizations in Africa, appear to be responding to the global call to better the conditions of the child. The United Nations report on the state of the World's Children (2012) lends credence to this clarion call when it called on the international community to undertake the urgent actions that are necessary to realize the rights of every child everywhere without exception. Hodges confirms that;

Child movement gained recognition only in the 90s but it advocates the autonomy of children and constructs them as free agents capable of walking important decisions regarding their own lives (60)

The child is a minor and is commonly recognized in most cultures as a subordinate status. Thus in most communities, children are meant to be seen and not to be heard; even when they are even heard, the views expressed by them may not carry much weight when placed against the views expressed by adults. In some culture, birth order can affect a child's behaviour, personality and position in the family. Karen affirms that; The importance of birth order has its effect on a child's behaviour, personality and performance (2).

It is widely understood that during the pre-school period, that young children begin to understand who they are in relation to others. It is at this time that they move away from their parents, expanding social relationships and taking on the developmental task of building friendships with peers through communicative dance movement that will always serve as a watchdog to them in their daily activities towards their effective growth. The social use of communicative dance movement by children at their tender age, promotes a range of cognitive and learning skills such as taking turns, cues, sharing and understanding the perspectives of others. Pugh as cited by Deans Jan observes that;

Social dance is for all children, it broadly educates, it embraces all aspects of dance that have educational

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value, it increases aesthetic education and it affects the total education of the child. (24)

Dance based on its sociological potency educates and inspires the young. It stretches the body and the mind of children to it helps them see beyond their superficial state and inspires them to develop a critical mind towards understanding what gave risk to the emergence and sustainability of any dance movement being thought to them. Deans expresses that;

Social dance can be seen as the interpretation and expression of a child's ideas, feelings and sensory impressions expressed symbolically through natural, spontaneous and individual movement forms (143).

Dance as a sociological tool has at its core 'dance as an art' which brings into focus a framework that includes; creating, performing and appreciating. This framework provides opportunities for children to explore and communicate ideas, thoughts and feelings and at the same time involve themselves in creative thinking including imagining, improvising, problem solving, developing a movement vocabulary, decision making, selecting, sequencing, refining and appreciating. Smith Autard maintains that;

In relation to children viewing the dance of others, such an experience allows for the development of more sophisticated sensory awareness and encourages meta-cognition through an analytical process that involves the use of descriptive language, interpretation and critical judgments that fosters reflection upon personal creations and those of others (217).

The use of dance in children's theatre based on these scholarly findings is a holistic and integrated experience where children's cognitive, social and emotional learning is closely linked to their very aesthetic experience.

II. THE ESSENCE OF AWARENESS OF DANCE IN CHILDREN'S THEATRE

The core aim of awareness of dance in children's theatre is to educate the children that dance as an art form goes beyond mere movement of body or a teacher trying to put some steps together; rather, the use of dance while teaching the children helps them to understand its sociological effects of dance in their school curriculum base on the following;

- a. Dance as art represents creative self-expression through the medium of human movement. The essence of dance is to feel, create, compose, interpret, perform and respond. Smith John states that "dance in children's theatre is the physical expression of an idea developed through a process of research, inquiry and movement discovery" (24). So as the children inquire into

dance, they gain skills in creating, performing, viewing and responding using traditional materials or latest technologies as working metaphors.

- b. The purpose of dance education in pre-school through high school is to broadly educate the children/ students in dance to appreciate dance as an art form and also promote physical activity for fitness.
 - c. For the children to see and appreciate their bodies as communicative tools.
- When all these are understood, then the essence of awareness of dance in children's theatre becomes an indispensable tool.

III. THE SOCIOLOGICAL BENEFITS OF DANCE ON CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

This gives a critical overview on how dance contributes in various forms towards the developmental stages of child's growth. The sociological benefits of dance in children's growth takes the communicative, corrective and interpretative essence of dance closer to the parents of the children or the society at large, who are ignorant at times about the importance of dance on a child's growth. Nellie Ma Caslin maintains that;

Dance in particular integrates kinesthetic learning with motivating preschool children to not conceptualize abstract process. They primarily learn to think in the concrete reality of movement. Thus, learning the art of dance helps young children develop knowledge, skill and understanding about the world (54).

So sociological benefits of dance in child's growth can come in various forms such as;

a) *Personal, social and emotional development*

1. Dance aids in enjoyable, exciting and motivating time.
2. It helps children to develop trust and co-operation.
3. Dance helps children in exploring the feelings and views of themselves and that of areas in the culture and belief.
4. Dance helps children in accepting the moral code on which discipline and courtesy within the group is based.
5. Dance helps children to interact with a new social group

b) *Creative development*

Dance helps children to communicate their ideas, thoughts and feelings non-verbally through the movement of their bodies. Dance helps children to use imagination in creating ideas, characters and narratives and It also helps in making movement responses.

c) *Physical development*

Dance helps children in bodily control, co-ordination, flexibility and balance. It helps children in the

development of spatial awareness and dancing with the props during performances helps children in developing manipulative skills.

Based on these, the sociological benefits of dance in children's theatre encourage independent initiative and self-esteem and also contributes to a substantial enrichment in the teaching-learning process and in acquisition of cognitive and socio-emotional skills.

IV. ELEMENTS TO BE CONSIDERED IN CONTEXTUALIZING DANCE IN CHILDREN'S THEATRE

Some elements in contextualizing dance in children's theatre stand indispensable. They are highly important in children's theatre because they guide children's perception, understanding and interpretation while watching a dance performance or participating in it. They are those required elements that state categorically the essence of dance in children's theatre beyond aesthetics, chant and stylized classroom movement.

The contextualization of dance movement in children's theatre helps clarify sociologically the essence of 4ws of "what, why, where and when", thereby making the children to understand and appreciate any movement they are doing. Those elements are;

- a. Occupation
- b. Folklore
- c. Cultural sacredness

a) *Cultural sacredness*

There are some dance movements that are not meant for everybody, not of any aesthetics, and strictly out of bound for non-indigenes. The children are taught that, when such dance movements are being performed, it is strictly to actualize its ideal purpose. At this point also, the children are meant to understand that the dance movement becomes strictly for the initiates who are well trained in the choreographic movement of the dance and know how to interpret the communicative potency of the movement.

b) *Folklore*

Folklore serves as an important tool in creating dance movement in children's theatre. Some of the dance movements when contextualized in children's theatre are reenacting the popular folklore stories into dance movements. The re-enactment of folklore into serious dance movements presents it as a didactic tool in the lives of developing children's moral standard.

c) *Occupation*

The people's occupation also affects their style, form and pattern of dancing. It is from the various dance styles or movements that people can differentiate where

each dance performance emerges. The occupation of a particular community clarifies what gave rise to its dance movements and also it automatically aids in exposing the sociological potency behind the creation of that particular dance movement.

V. DANCE, A SOCIOLOGICAL TOOL IN A CHILD'S MORAL DEVELOPMENT: THE DANCING MONSTER AND UZO AS A PARADIGM

a) *Synopsis*

This is a practical class production of 3rd year students in Theatre Arts, NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka. It is a fifteen minutes dance production that centers on sensitizing the children using children's theatre performance on the side effects of disobedience, greed, lying, fighting and stealing. In the dance performance (the dancing monster & Uzo), Uzo being the lead character is a victim of all these vices. The mother of Uzo is seen as the person that misled him, According to the mother, Uzo is 'always right in anything he does, so he should not be punished at all'. In order to show how much she loves Uzo, she fondly calls him the "Special Egg". The over-protective nature of his mother, which his father is not in support of eventually lands Uzo into serious problems which he later regrets.

VI. AN INTERPRETATION ON THE SOCIOLOGICAL ESSENCE IN THE DANCING MONSTER AND UZO TOWARDS CHILD'S MORAL DEVELOPMENT

a) *Favouritism*

Uzo is the only child and son of his parents and is highly favoured by his mother in so many ways. The issue of favouritism by Uzo's mother makes him to see himself as a "golden child" that cannot be touched by anybody. Based on the rhythmic dance movement, Uzo's mother semiotically assures him that 'he is free to do anything and as far as she exists that nobody born by a woman can harm or harass him including his father'.

b) *Clash of Interest*

This is the conflicting interest between the both parents on either to correct him or spare him. The symbolic dance movement of his father shows punishment and correction, while that of his mother shows that it is an abomination to flog or punish her son. On several occasions in the scenes of the dance performance, the mother is seen fighting her husband for beating or harassing their only child. This clash of interest really makes Uzo to see his father as a beast, while he sees the mother as a priceless treasure on earth.

c) *Lying*

The dance movement here portrays Uzo as a "professional liar". His high level of lies at any given time is always portrayed by the tempo of the drum. It was made clear in the performance that each time he lies, the tempo of the drum will go high and drop back again. Based on the symbolic interpretative movement of Uzo on stage, he was caught severally stealing, bullying or trying to commit one offence or the other. In any of the offences he commits, the mother is always there to protect him and make him feel that he is right. The mother can go any length to fight anybody that calls her son whom she fondly calls "special egg," a liar. The protection and over assurance from the mother motivates Uzo to continue lying at free will.

VII. THE DANCING MONSTER

The dancing monster is just an imaginary symbolic figure. It is like a punishment that awaits any child that decides to disobey his/her parents. At a point in the dance performance, Uzo was so stubborn and so much under the protection of her mother that the father is no longer comfortable. As a result, his father decides to correct his son, his only child and make him independent and positive-minded. To help he achieve this, he employs some strong young men who kidnap uzo, flog him rhythmically for 3 days to serve as a form of corrective punishment.

When uzo was released, he turned a new leaf and his mother, having recovered from the shock of not seeing her son for days, then decides to de-emphasize the so much attachment she has on her son and embrace the adage of 'spare the rod and spoil the child'.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The essence of dance in children's theatre is to awaken their conscious that even though they are been entertained, they should also understand and appreciate dance based on its informative potency. The core importance of dance in the performance, sociologically, is to develop the children religiously, mentally and morally to run away from evil and accept virtues as their working maxim.

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