

THEATRE IN EDUCATION AND TECHNOLOGY DIALOGUE: A PSYCHO-CYBERNETIC APPROACH

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Abstract

Theatre and technology have been inseparable from antiquity collaborating in terms of the tool, the performer and the performance. It is on this collaboration that the research has deemed it fit to expand the multi-disciplinary dimension by examining the psycho-cybernetic angel of the Theatre in Education. The psycho-cybernetic professes “self-image” using feedback techniques by blending digital innovations to create immersive experiences. The study examines the Umudioka Theatre in Education Project using the psycho-cybernetic theory to re-examine the feelings and behaviors of the individuals especially the audience. The study focused on steering the individual to a productive and self-assured individual through participatory theatre approach. The study discovers that psycho-cybernetic and theatre in education marriage leads to individual’s self discovery and improved intellectual power. The study concludes that steering the individual projects a mirror of the distorted self and offers an opportunity for self-examination in real-time.

Key Words; Psycho-Cybernetic, Theatre in Education (TIE), Technology, Dialogue

Introduction:

Theatre in education has been practiced within an established formula over the years. But in recent time, technological development has emerged and changed a lot of mode of operations in theatre practice especially in theatre in education. These changes stems from advancements in practice, in concept, in theory, and in technology to assimilate the most viable trends or methods in TIE. This idea leverages the child’s building and development especially the child’s personal development and engagements through steering. The technology creates or provides a high-level face-to-face interactive platform that drives the child’s learning and development. According to Anthony Nnalue, “this approach offers the children the opportunity to contribute, be part of the solution to their problems through interaction with the people during and after performance” (7). The technology dialogue hinges on the application streaming technology in theatre in education that will offer the child of opportunity for growth and self development. The technology application provides for the child’s user a mix-discourse of arts and technology. The knowledge stems from the variety of the breath of technical setup that becomes diverse as either from a single-camera setup to a much larger multi-camera production with switchers using the encoder as stand-alone-player or a plugging that works as part of a web browser. Nnalue calls, it “the zeal, the hunger, and the enthusiasm to shift from the old to accommodate the new” (45).

Its multimedia form includes but is not limited to; video footage and interactivity. Exploring this process in a Theatre in Education Project becomes stimulating and builds social foundation for child’s cognitive development. The Child education and development is considered a very important aspect of their growth by letting them create and not just consume which requires a nurturing technology-driven environment that fosters physical, emotional, social and intellectual well-being. The technology acts as a supplement not the main thing: the drama is the main thing because of the age of the children. This is why providing children with a safe and supportive environment that encourages participation and learning is crucial to foster their development. Adopting an effective approach in educating the child helps to make learning more interesting and engaging them while expanding their intellectual horizon. The TIE Participatory learning approach plays a critical role in child’s development by providing a creative outlet for self-expression and promoting social, emotional and cognitive growth through the technological integration in TIE.

At this point, Theatre in Education is positioned as most effective means of enhancing child's learning ability. Studies have explored the benefits of educating children through dramatic activities like role playing, music, dance, drama, drawings and have come to the conclusion that active learning starts with participation.

The Deconstruction of the Psycho-Cybernetic

Psycho-cybernetic is a human psychological theory that advocates for self-image and self improvement propounded by Maxwell Maltz. It later become one of the greatest works on human behaviors, identity based actions, and self-

improvement. Maxwell Maltz Psycho-Cybernetic centers on 'self-image' using 'feedback loops' to develop cognitive learning which is achieved through interactivity and participation. This method or concepts transforms our Theatre in Education children of Umudioka Primary School into, "responding to the question of what did they understand?" and then, how they understand it is the needed self-improvement and the understanding of self which can easily be achieved in immersive theatrical engagements.

According to Maltz, "the self-image then controls what you can and cannot accomplish, what is difficult or easy for you, even how others respond to you just as certainly and scientifically as a thermostat controls the temperature in your home" (14). He juxtaposes "self-image" with "will-power" he continues:

The control of yourself image is absolute and pervasive. The snapback effect is universal. The self-image is a 'premise', a base, or a foundation upon which your entire personality, behavior, and even your circumstances are built. As a result, our experience seems to verify and thereby strengthen our self-image... (65).

Self-image is not about changing the physical appearance of the individual but the changing of the inner appearance of the individual that results to the positive or a responsible individual. So it is obvious that, according to Maltz, self-image is the determining factor for personal development. The inner self reforms the outer self and thus change becomes inevitable.

It crystal clear that the cybernetic is about the individual self discovery, through the combination of the body and the working of the mind for a self realization through talent developments according to T.F. James,

".. the psychology of the self can mean the difference between success and failure, love and hatred, bitterness and happiness, the discovery of self can rescue crumbling marriage recreate a failing career, transform victims of personality failure. On another plan, discovering your real self... (23).

Similarly, an individual self discovery is premised in the ability for him to realize the potentials he/she is made of through creative activities.. The self-image becomes that which is achieved through participation and creative visualization. It manifests through subjecting people especially the children to roles that enhance their creativity, improve their intellectual power, and confidence building. it involves practical and participatory dimension to achieving the desired result. The psycho-cybernetic application to Theatre in Education forms a prosthetics and a more immersive expression that will involve the self –discovering through merging human stories and experiences.

Theatre in Education: Holy Star Primary School Example.

Holy Star Primary School is one of the private schools in Umudioka, Oyi Local Government Area of Anambra State. According to the information gathered from the school's head, the school was founded in April 2017; they had about two hundred (200) pupils as of 2022 when the project was carried out. Most of the teachers live close to the school, same with the pupils. Based on this findings, one had expected a high level of connection between the teachers and their pupils as children tend to be comfortable when they are used to the person(s) they communicate with.

The researcher and other team members drafted to Holy Star Nursery and Primary School for a Theatre in Education Project. The first effort was preliminary visitation on 20th March, 2022. Having the informed the school management about their intended project, the Theatre in Education team was allowed to meet with the primary two pupils. The team took some time to interact with the pupils with the aim of finding out what challenges they faced with as regards learning. The team discovered that the pupils had phobia for learning due to the approach used in teaching in the school. They complained that the teachers used cane and acted more like police men. The team also found that some pupils were slow learners and therefore needed more than the methodological classroom approach to learn what they are taught.

Having gathered all this information the team returned to brainstorm on how to help the pupils surmount these challenges. To this end the team designed a module that involves the use of dance, drama, music and fine arts as tools for effective teaching and learning.

An Overview of the Theatre in Education Projects

The Dramatic skit was entitled *Gods Time*. The aim is to inculcate the art of participatory approach to learning and teaching the children. The story revolves around man called, the story-teller who informs the children of a new disease outbreak in town. The fear and panic filed the air. The next movement was the children, playground where they are playing and chatting. Suddenly a silhouette of a disease walks past them and everyone is frozen.

Eventually the disease infected so many of the students, some parents came and took their sick children home for treatment while the best were treated at the school clinic. The school authority when everyone has been healed, they declared a mid-term break so as to fumigate the environment. The health personnel that were meant to fumigate the school were represented by an image of a nurse who was a symbol of health and healing. The drama end when the school resumed all the children came back completed, hale and hearty. The dancers and the drummers let a procession of dancers to celebrate the victory of the disease outbreak.

Fine Arts as a Tool for Learning

Investigations revealed that some of the pupils were talented in Fine Arts but are however not given the opportunity to exploit such potential even through Fine Arts is clearly captured in their curriculum. It was also found that both the teachers and parents are culprits in this regard. While the teachers do little or nothing in teaching the pupils how to either draw, molds or carve for a reason best known for them. Either it is stressful and time consuming or lack of knowledge of the arts of drawing. The parents are not left out; they don't allow their children to explore their talents when any practical take home assignment is given to them. Rather, they do the assignment for them or even go as far as paying artists to do it for children thus depriving the children the opportunity to learn. The Theatre in Education team therefore took out time to identify such talented pupils and then engage them in some training on drawing. After this stage, they were guided to draw some objects both visible and invisible.

On the sculptor aspect of it, the students were guided to mould kitchen utensils like spoons, forks, knives etc. We provided things for molding such as: starch, paper, and cartons.

Music and dance:

This was another artistic tool used in teaching the pupils. They were taught songs that are related to the topic being taught them. The Theatre in Education team also taught the pupils dance steps in consonance with the movements. The pupils learned the songs and dance steps after a short period of rehearsals. They sang heartily, clapped and danced to the rhythm of the music to the amazement of their parents who were presented during the presentation and their teachers because of how easily they were able to understand and master the movements.

The Dance Performances

The performances took place at the primary school hall with the school's headmistress, lecturer-in-charge, Dr. Anthony Nnalue, the parents and teachers all in attendance. The production started with music and dance presentation during which the pupils exhibited impressive dance and musical skills. Beyond the entertainment essence of the performance, the lyrics of the songs as well as the steps went a long way in making the audience understand that music and dance can be effective tools of communications salient information to the public. The virtually protect rhythm of the pupils body movement and choreographed steps showed further that the pupils are talented and may become professional dancers and choreographers in the future if adequate attention is paid to that area.

The camera and the display of the visual dimension of the dance synchronized with the place of technology in theatre practice. The "digital medium using the camera, the encoder, the live streaming application and the social networks to transmit" (Nnalue: 45).

The plate 1 below further buttresses this point.



Pupils who had initially been identified to be talented in this area were trained on how to draw as well as mould using paper mash. The training sessions paid off as the pupils later molded various objects like cup, mask and so on under the guidance and supervision of the lecturer in-charge, Dr. Anthony Nnalue. The items as shown below were inspected as well as other members of the audience during the exhibition. The pupils were commended for such display of talent while the course lecturer advised the teachers and parents to pay more attention to the innate skills of the children as creativity as one of the ways children excel in this digital era

Plate 3A: Objects Molded by the Pupils



Plate 3B: Course Lecturer Inspects the Molded Objects



The Psycho-Cybernetic: The Neural Substrates Approach to Visual Imagery.

The neural substrate approach to psycho-cybernetic simply means the behavioral and cognitive interpretations that occur in humans as a result of application of inputs and outputs in the brain. This involves the conscious and the unconscious which include responsiveness to sensory inputs, motor control, attention, language etc. During the post performance evaluation, the children ability to create and interpret mental images or visions of things, people, places, objects that are not present at the child's current location was tested. They acted according to the suppressed images created

Process:

The children who played the roles in the drama skits were called to re-visualize the roles they played during the performance. The sculptors and the dancers worked on the imaginative creation of their arts through recollections of events or objects.

Findings:

1-4 of the children were able to vividly re-visualize the images of their roles. The pupils still remembered all that were taught them in spite of the passage of time.

Psycho-Cybernetic Impact:

This is a mental process by the use of visuo-motor imagery which the child rehearses or stimulates a given scenarios. The aim is to rest the improvements of the mental cognition, behavioral changes mental retrieval and integration. Considering their participation in the project, there is a greater, visual and deeper understanding. They see the opportunity as a way of building more vocabularies and retentive abilities. The theatrical participation enhanced their embodied experiences.

The Power of Imagination

The children act according to what that has been impacted on them especially what they imagined to be truth about themselves. In this situation, the children have already taken part in the drama skit; their imaginative power is to be tested to ascertain the impact of the performance on them.

Process: The child is asked to demonstrate the actions of the past performance or draw images of unseen objects.

Findings: After the child has been told to act the stories or represent the images of the last production, the power of imagination set to work by interpreting the message into believable images. The child who performed the drama presentation easily recited their lines with ease. The dancers and the sculptors all re-present and imagined art.

How it works:

The brain and the nervous system begin by reacting to the message to find meaning to it. According to servo-mechanism, the brain and the nervous system interprets the message sent to it by picking the information and triggers action in the system by sending the desired feed information to the automated mechanism. The nurture and not nature is the basis for the success.

The reactions are usually between idea and emotions. The sense organs alerts the nerve impulse who begins the self-image (discovery and made available its finding through the brain in form of image or idea.

Psycho-Cybernetic Impact:

When this self-image is discovered, there is an improved basic talents, happy individuals, sudden change in character and behavior on the child. This is because the self-image is the truth about something experience has shown that when people know their self-image old inaccuracies of the self-image and move to the correct one. So the action steers them to a goal and the realization of something new.

Conclusion

In psycho-cybernetic approach, the manifestation is through subjecting the child to creative exercises and roles-playing through dramatic improvisation to enhance and broaden their creative acumen and to improve their intellectual powers through practical and participatory approach. The performance steers the children to a goal and the realization of something new; learning skills through trial and errors. So the creative and participatory Theatre in Education approach structures the neurons to receive information or signals for self improvement. For instance, the self-image becomes an object of shame and disgrace when one tries to hinder it than express it. The creative expression is blocked and the child becomes hostile or aggressive and difficult to get along with others.

The therapeutic role of theatre in education heals the children of fear, unhappiness, anxiety, lack of self-confidence and increase their self esteem, self confidence, and improved character and personality. The child's self-discovery arises from the child's realization of his or her potentials and talents.

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