



Documentation of Some Musical Plays and Their Educational Importance to the Growing Child

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses how children acquire developmental skills through musical activities. Using some Akan folk tunes, the author posits that children learn through music and its related activities. The authors used participant observation and unstructured interviews to collect primary data from five basic schools in the Ashanti and Central Regions of Ghana. The findings are that children learn better when they use indigenous resources from their local communities. The writers recommend that teachers at the basic schools should employ the local songs in the teaching and learning activities.

Keywords: music education, developmental skills, children's games, children's music, Akan play songs, Akan folk tunes.

INTRODUCTION

A play could be described as a well organised activity which depicts a thought which is carried out in sections or scenes. It is also an activity which participants (children) carry out to acquire some experience to aid their holistic development. In the words of Ohene-Okantah (1990) children love to play and with anything that come their way. They play all sorts of games and learn as they play them. Through games children develop varying skills and attitudes. As a result one can revere play as an essential means through which children develop physically, mentally, socially and emotionally. In this way they are able to discover themselves and the world around them. Mackett and Paskins (2008) observed that children are averagely twice active when they are out of home. This is an indication that children learn better when they move out to play. They further explained that, attractions of children to stay at home are increasing with the expansion of home entertainment technology such that children now have opportunities at home to listen to music, play electronic games and watch multichannel television. They therefore are of the view that these inventions have and will reduce the relative attractiveness of children going out to observe and learn from the environment.

Agreeably, plays differ according to thought or themes, for instance in children plays, activities are done to develop a specific part of the body for future use. It is therefore very important to study and analyze various actions and activities children go through during recreation and also happy moments. This will help to properly organize children's thought which hitherto is considered as time wasting into good use, hence, the need to document children activities to aid teaching and learning in schools and centers for children.

The documented musical activities are grouped under headings such as hand clapping, story game, and squatting (stone passing) games.

AKAN PLAY SONGS AND RELATED ACTIVITIES

Hand Clapping Games

There are several hand clapping games worldwide however, two local types such as Robert Mensah, goal keeper No. 1, and *Obiarawôwo no kwasida* (day born game) are considered.

1. Robert Mensah

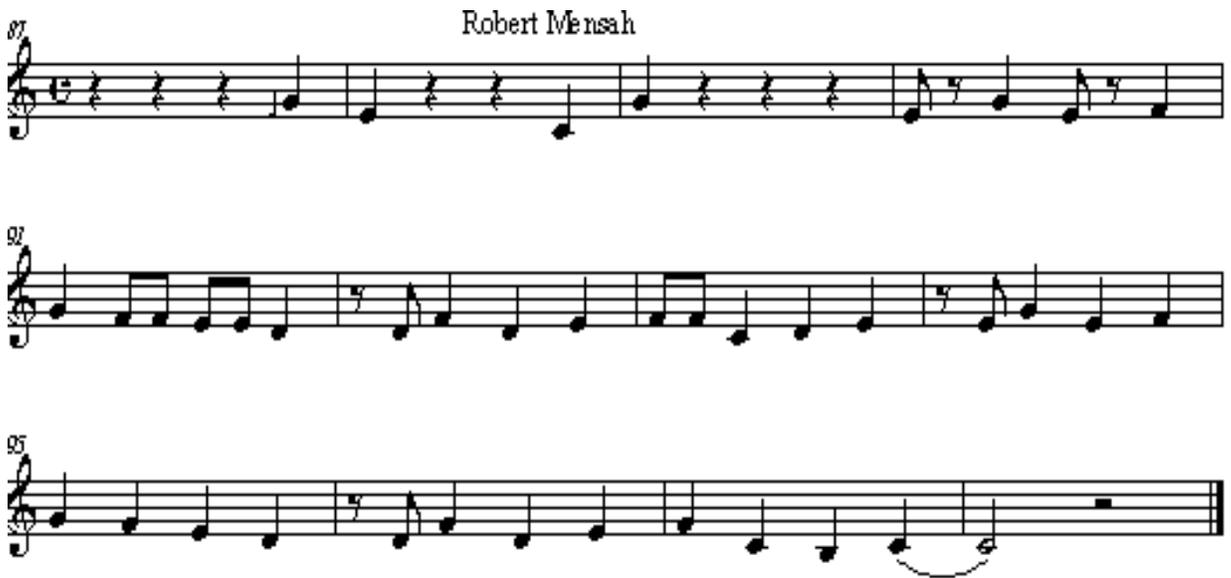
The first activity in “Robert Mensah” is organised in pairs or more for both male and females. They face each other in a standing position with both palms fixed in each other’s. They sing the first phrase “Robert” and clap individually three times and continue the clapping in alternated hands between members whiles the singing goes on till a member misses a beat. The one who misses then drops and the game is re-started till all except one who is able to maintain the clapping and singing to the end is declared the winner.

Sample words: Akan

Robert (clap 3x) Robert (clap 3x)
 Robert mensa goalkeeper No1
 Aka nansanaw’a k4abrokyi
 Obi di pentua w4nemfi
 Ammaw1ntu mi annkoabrokyi

English

Robert (clap 3x) Robert (clap 3x)
 Robert mensa goalkeeper no.1
 was left with three days to travel abroad
 was stabbed with broken bottle in the rib
 therefore was not able to travel abroad.





Development of Listening skills

In considering the role of listening in human life, Nadig (2010) observed that “we were given two ears but only one mouth, because listening is twice as hard as talking” (p.1). He mentioned further that, expressing our wants, feelings, thoughts and opinions clearly and effectively is only half of the communication process needed for interpersonal effectiveness. The other half is listening and

understanding what others communicate to us. As a result in this musical activity, children are expected to pay maximum attention in order to blend the tune with words, rhythmic pattern, eye-to-eye contact and composure to be able to stay in the game. The exercises demand that participants listen well so to synchronize timing and partners of the game; by so doing, children gain and develop most of their senses. When the child continuously engages in such a hearing and listening activity, he/she will gradually improve the listening abilities. **Strengthening of aural discrimination**

Agreeably, one will side with Nadig (2010) as he postulates that,

There is a real distinction between merely **hearing the words** and really **listening for the message**. When we listen effectively we understand what the person is thinking and or feeling from the other person's own perspective. It is as if we were standing in the other person's shoes, seeing through his/her eyes and listening through the person's ears. Our own viewpoint may be different and we may not necessarily agree with the person, but as we listen, we understand from the other's perspective. To listen effectively, we must be actively involved in the communication process, and not just listening passively (p.3).

Similarly, Kuster (2009) is of the view that, "there is only one rule to become a good talker - learning how to listen" (p. 26). Though, to the scientist this might not be enough and might add some more processes/findings, the fact remains that listening is a 'must-do' activity and an important skill in the life of every individual.

As children alternate clap with different palms of playmates to generate different sound and sing along with their kind of voice, such that when one stops singing while clapping goes on she is questioned by participants almost immediately, children mature gradually in analyzing what they hear and listen as they engage in the activities. This process effectively aid aural discrimination in children.

Enhancement of Memory

Indeed as children actively indulge in their kind of play and enjoy themselves, they also learn a lot of things and as such go through series of sections which induce memory enhancement. Loop (2014) said, while putting your hands together and clapping them may seem like a no-brainer, the complex coordination that it takes to clap can help your little one to improve his motor and cognitive development. In like manner, this type of activity require that participants memorize words and tune of a play song and be able to synchronize with a clap pattern which serves as an accompaniment to the game. Such an activity goes far to improve the thinking ability of children and does aid memory development.

Helping children speak clearly and pay attention

This is a type of handclapping game where children blend words with accompaniment (clap), it is a fertile ground for participant to grow their skill of speech and attention. This is because the saying that "practice makes man perfect" is put to test as children repeatedly say same words and steadily clap a rhythmic pattern over a period of time. As children engage in this activity oriented game regularly, they tend to perfect their speech and attention span.

Encouragement of children's co-operation, thinking and problem solving skills

Hand clapping games are usually organized between two or more interested individuals of the same or different ages. As a result there is the need for participants to understand the rules and regulations of the game and by this, children at play monitor and assess themselves to identify and offer punishment by eliminating those who go contrary to the rules with maximum understanding from the defaulter.

The activities of the game are such that participants must try at any point in time to provide correct answers to questions put to themselves either through singing or clapping. This exercise undoubtedly promotes quick and high level reasoning among children who partake in this activity and this will reflect in all other chores they undertake in their various outfits.

As kids enjoy themselves in musical activities, they also learn and acquire a great deal of experience such as problem solving skills. This occurs especially in this game when participants who are very conversant with the game, challenge themselves in an argument as to how the game and the activities are organized even before they start. Again in the course of the game, those who still show signs of confusion and cause blander are further coached by the experienced ones to get them on board.

Enhancement of children’s literacy skills

In the words of Hladczuk and Eller as cited by Feret and Smith (2010) literacy is “the vehicle of education, the means through which ideas, information, knowledge and wisdom are expressed and exchanged”. Feret and Smith maintain that,

literate individuals possess the capacity to function fully in the society: to make reasoned choices, to acquire meaningful employment and to participate in civic affairs. Reading and writing represent literacy in its fuller forms; the process of scanning letters or symbols to gain meaning and the recording of thought in a somewhat permanent form. Listening and speaking is the second pair of language skills that identify a literate people. Speech is a mode of oral communication, expressing thought; listening assumes a thoughtful consideration of sound whether verbal or musical. Listening is also an attribute of student conduct, which is the core of classroom management plans (p.5).

Additionally, in the area of Music Education, Woody (2004) suggested a spiral curriculum for music education programmes to develop student’s abilities to respond emotionally to the expressive properties of sound. He explained that in this model, children are expected to develop musical literacy skills and parallel language literacy skills by exploring sound through singing, moving, playing instruments, composing and improvising with increasing sophistication from one stage to the other, so as to make “language literacy-music” possible.

2. Day born game (obiarawôwo no kwasida’ nônkotow)

This hand clapping game rather accompanies more singing coupled with waist twisting sessions. The number of children involved in this kind of game is usually three and above, in a circular standing order both boys and girls mixed up and a cantor begins the singing with the first day of the week (kwasida) while other members respond “4ns4re”.

All participants accompany the activity with a two crotchet beats clap intermittently as the singing unfolds. Those born on a day mentioned get up and dance, twist their waist in a fanciful way to show how proud he/she is to be born on such day. They resume their position in the circle and join in the singing till all have had their turn. However, if a day is mentioned and those who are concerned do not come to the middle of the circle to dance, it is considered as an offence so culprits are punished by asking them to stay out for the rest of the session and sometimes they are hooted at for not knowing the day on which they were born.

Sample words	Translation
Obiara a wcwo no Kwasida (2x)	Anybody born on Sunday
Cnkotowensore (2x)	should squat and stand up
La lalalalalala la	lalalalalalalala
La lalalalalalalala la	La lalalalalalala

Dayborn song





Development of listening skills

In this activity, children are required to know their names and most especially the days on which they were born in order to respond to the action when the days are mentioned. Again, the whole activity is music bound therefore children are supposed to listen attentively and respond accordingly as they sing and chat through actions. Any misinterpretation in singing and miming is regarded as loss of attention and the culprit faces elimination until the session is over. As participants are pushed by the rules of the game to persistently follow, keep information and react to instructions throughout the activity, these greatly ensure improvement of one's listening skills.

Strengthening of aural discrimination

Auditory discrimination is commonly taken to mean the capacity to distinguish between phonemes, or individual sounds used in speech, better still, one's ability to recognize the different phonemes of spoken language even when the phonetic structures, especially the sound-wave patterns, of the sounds to be discriminated are highly similar in nature (Wepman, 1960, pp. 325-333). This view portrays the ability to decipher between words to form sentence and to gain control over language. It is agreed by researchers as mentioned in game one (Robert Mensah) that one of the main tools of developing listening and use of language is through musical activities such as the one under discussion. In this game children same song(s) and same words are sang over a period and as they change games, songs and words also change and expectation is that participants make meaning out of the new words to sail through the session. This phenomenon goes a long way to fortify the aural discrimination of the child.

Enhancement of memory

The day born game demand that children taking part, be on the alert with instant reaction to command from the cantor. In view, each person including the cantor thinks ahead to find answers to possible commands or questions. As this persists and children regularly participate effectively, they stand the chance of sharpening their thinking acumen.

Helping children speak clearly and pay attention

Once a child is able to discriminate between words and be able to formulate somehow meaningful sentences through musical activities, obviously he/she would want to perfect the pronunciation as well as

the usage of those words. Agreeably, one of the means by which children can build their language and attention span is through games such as the one under discussion. This is because in the day born game, same song is repeated for a longer period of time depending on the number of people forming the circle. Also, the child is urged to pay attention through collective singing and the corresponding stylistic actions to depict uniqueness and brilliance among their peers.

Encouragement of children’s co-operation, thinking and problem solving skills

The musical activity promotes socialization among peers and as a result mutual understanding is paramount. This condition paves way for participants to co-operate with one another as the game unfolds. As part of the “day born game”, every participant is charged to be original in the free style section and this calls for deep thinking in order to create unique gestures to accompany the singing and clapping. The whole idea of creativity in this musical activity is meant to solve the problem of creatively responding to the call of one’s day of birth with twist and dance. The skill of creativity and problem solving in children as they go through the game will be enhanced and the impact felt in their daily activities.

Enhancement of children’s literacy skills

As alluded to by Feret and Smith (2010) literacy is “the vehicle of education, the means through which ideas, information, knowledge and wisdom are expressed and exchanged” (p.5). Therefore one would agree that in this musical activity, as participants turn on their creative thinking ability, share new dance moves and gestures, engaged in problem solving session as they try to correct themselves when mistakes persist, socialize in a mutual manner, then dissemination of information, thought and ideas as well as skills are shared between partakers of the game; this goes a long way to boost children’s literacy skills.

Story Game

3. Mo mmay1n k4 hw1Adwoa Ata

This is a story game which talks about importance of visitation and socialization. It is organized among children of different ages and classes. Though the title of the game is directed at females, the composition is for both male and females.

The game is organized for five people and above. Participants form a circle whiles standing and a chair is placed in the middle of the circle; two people then get into the middle of the circle, one acting as a parent and the other as a sick child. The rest of the group members sing and move round them and stop at a point to demand an answer to a question put to the parent. He/she responds in singing to inform the visitors (members) about the condition of the sick child until the child passes on and the ghost wakes up to touch any of the members who have come to visit. The new person then chooses a partner to act as a parent and the game continuous.

Words of the song

Momma y1n k4 hw1 (Adwoa Ata) 3x
Momma y1n k4 hw1 Adwoa Ata
Ne ho te s1n ni?

Responds

Adwoa Ata (4yare) 3xAdwoa
Adwoa Ata 4yare
Mo mfi me so nk4

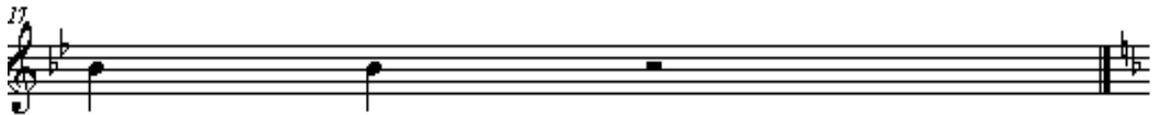
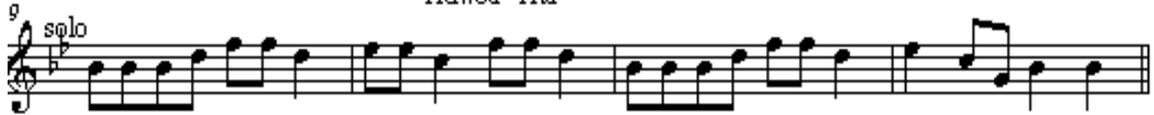
English

Lets go to visit (Adwoa Ata) 3x
lets go to visit Adwoa Ata
how is she doing?

Responds

Ata is (sick) 3x
Adwoa Ata is sick
leave her alone

Adwoa Ata



Development of listening skills

The game has a story line which is told in a form of singing and acting or miming by both parties (the two people acting as a family and the rest of the group members acting as the community). The activities children engage themselves in, considering the game under discussion requires deep listening and comprehension to get the game going. Therefore as children regularly partake in such an activity, one would agree with Ohene-Okantah (1990) who suggests that once playing games involves the use of language and since language is learnt by using it in natural situations, playing games will help develop children's language in a most informal way. In this direction the art of listening is fostered and oral expression is also encouraged.

Strengthening of aural discrimination

The term aural discrimination could be viewed as the capability to identify spoken words and use them appropriately in speech or conversation. Indeed as children play, they learn and acquire a lot of skills and experiences which includes reciting of words repeatedly as the game unfolds and the phenomenon unquestionably ensures mastery over identification of words used in everyday language and new ones as well. Additionally, children gain experience in the use of different types of rhythmic patterns and tunes.

Enhancement of memory

Research has shown that children learn better through plays especially musical games such as the one under discussion. Musical activities come with tunes, rhythmic patterns, words and actions which participants are to commit to memory and it when playing. This means one's inability to acquire these requirements naturally dissociates him/her from the activity and no child would want to suffer the ordeal. Consequently, every child makes the effort to learn and commit all the necessary requirements to memory so as to be part of the daily children plays. The practice naturally improves the absorption and recovery rate of the participating child, thereby enhancing the memory of the child.

Helping children speak clearly and pay attention

The position statement of MENC-The National Association for Music Education (2000) indicates that, "Music educators' are fortunate that the pursuit of musical learnings seems to enhance a variety of positive complementary values" (p.31). This thought undoubtedly, would have necessitated the need for educational authorities to opt for a music curriculum for young children which will offer enormous openings for them to explore sounds through playing of instruments, moving, singing, listening, in addition to preliminary proficiencies with verbalization and visualization of musical concepts.

The view of MENC goes to buttress the research finding on the influence of music and musical activities on the child's speech and the attention rate. As the child is exposed to experiences with verbalization and visualization of musical thoughts as in the case of "momma yln ko hw1 Adwoa Ata" a story game the child is introduced to playing around with words and music which ensures mastery over speech and for a reason that speech goes with listening and hearing in order to communicate effectively, the child's attention rate is improved tremendously as they regularly use words and sing.

Encouragement of children's co-operation, thinking and problem solving skills

Usually stories are told among people /children and interactions are expected from listeners or participants to clear doubts and share thoughts to make the whole activity meaningful and comprehensive. The encouragement of such an activity between children in musical games breeds mutuality and enhance co-operation during and after the game. Regular interaction among children as they play builds in them the thought of role playing and socializing. This is seen in the part played by "Adwoa Ata" and family and those children who represent the community in the activity. In all these activities, children stand the chance of sharpening their thinking and problem solving skills, for instance the number of times the children (community) go to visit "Adwoa Ata" and the response they get from the family, call for the sense of re-strategizing and perseverance. This attitude cultivated by children through musical activities/plays prepares them for successful lives in the future.

Enhancement of children's literacy skills

In their research Feret and Smith (2010) are of the view that current music research indicates that purposeful listening not only improves solo ensemble performances but also enriches lifelong listening experiences. They further comment that some researchers' link listening naturally with speaking and

reading in the music class while others link music composition with writing. Their study however, revealed that infusing literacy skills as integral elements of the secondary musical classroom impact performance on many levels. Therefore in the instance of the musical activity under discussion, children are able to acquire and improve upon their listening, speaking, interpreting and compositional skills as they interact and share ideas musically through playful activities, thereby improving upon the level of their literacy skills.

4. Duaduantokura no mu

This musical game is about friendship, co-existence, love and the need to show courtesy to people one meet on one's way as well as those one knows. It also teaches about the meandering nature of life and the hassle and tussle therein.

This is a children game organized by both male and females usually in prime numbers. Participants stand in a circular formation with spaces in between them; the game begins with a song and a move by one of the partakers simultaneously. The person moves in a meandering order around all the persons forming the circle while those standing do the singing. When the first phrase ends, the singers issue instruction such as "gyina d4fo n1 nyim"; he/she moving is obliged to take all instructions given while standing in front of the person after which the person takes over the movement and repeat the order as done by the previous person till the last partaker takes his/her turn.

Fante

Duaduantokura no mu (3x)
 Ansaana ak4.
 Gyina 4d4fo n1 nyim (3x)
 Ansaana ak4.
 Kyia 4d4fo ne ns1m (3x)
 Ansaana ak4.

Words

English

Pass through the window/hole (3x)
 before you go
 stand before a lover (3x)
 before you go
 shake hands with a lover (3x)
 before you go

Duadua ntokura no mu





Development of listening skills

The game is an instruction based one and when partakers fumble they are mocked. Therefore since children do not take kindly to mockery, they make frantic effort to listen with rapt attention so as to synchronize well with the singing and the instructions that follow. Indeed as children habitually pass through this kind of activity, they become so alert holistically in almost all their endeavours and as a result grow to become good hearers and listeners and are able to pass appropriate and precise judgment on situations they may encounter in their interactions with others.

Strengthening of aural discrimination

This involves one's ability to make out spoken words, interpret and used them accordingly in their daily communications with colleagues in transactions. "Duaduantokura mu" is an activity which seeks to equip children in becoming very conversant with words and for that matter language for daily and future activities. From the start to the end of the game all partakers are engaged in singing and the use of words to instruct the person doing the movement and expect reaction. Therefore while instructions are given and the corresponding effect is achieved as the game unfolds, children learn and equip themselves with known and unknown words, tunes and skills to improve the level of their interactions.

Enhancement of memory

The musical activity exposes participants to series of skill acquisition such as creative skills, problem solving skills, language skills. Each of these skills require the use of the memory especially when it comes to commitment of words and tune as well as the rhythmic patterns, movements and changes in a games to memory. All skills work towards boosting the alertness level of the individual and therefore improves the thinking ability of the child to enable him/her pass better judgment in their endeavours.

Helping children speak clearly and pay attention

Once children acquire words and language, the best way to keep those words is through practice and application. Among children however, one of the appropriate means through which speech and attention are enhanced is through plays and games such as musical games. In respect of the musical activity under observation, partakers who are mostly children use same and similar words repeatedly throughout the game period and even after the session. This encourages mastery over language and speech which also ensure attention span because children usually make every effort to listen well in order to make comprehensive contributions to a conversation.

Encouragement of children’s co-operation, thinking and problem solving skills

Researchers have observed that children develop better through interactions. This is because they share and learn a lot when they get together. Socialization is almost always at its best when kids get together to play and have fun. In relation to the musical game “Duaduantokura mu” instructions which hitherto are unfavourable are put to a colleague in the center of action and it is expected that a responds is given almost instantly. In this case, the colleague need to fully co-operate to offer the responds, also thinking and problem solving sessions are encourage as occasionally the one at the centre refuses to carry out some instructions of the group. As a result, sometimes the session comes to a holt; and members get into a thinking mood to resolve issues among themselves before continuing the game.

Enhancement of children’s literacy skills

Literacy skills are considered by researchers as the ability to develop reading comprehension and verbal memory, listening skills, acquisition of vocabulary including writing. Agreeably, these skills are perfectly developed through musical activities and plays of children both at school and home. Gromko (2005) opined that the implication for schools is that music instruction, while valuable for liberating the artistic and musical potential of every child, may significantly enhance children’s language literacy as well.

Squatting games

5. The stone game (Densureyiri me)

This is a squatting game for children of about three years upwards. Participants squat in a circular order with each having a stone and with a song the stones are passed on from one person to the other from left to right. The movement of the stone is done rhythmically such that a pulse is created using the strong beats of the song. The rule of the game is that no partaker is to distort the rhythmic flow of the stones and for that matter the beats by having more one stone before him/her; otherwise depending on the vacation agreement, the defaulter is given another chance to stay on or dismissed and the game continues. Therefore partakers are always alert and ready to pick and pass on the stone almost immediately it gets before them. Indeed the beauty and excitement of this musical activity is portrayed when the passing of stones and singing persist without hitch for a longer period.

Akan

Densu e, reyiri me o, reiyiri me o (2x)
 Densu1yiri me 4d4fo brao, d4fo brao
 Densu 1 yiri me o.

Words

English

Densu is over flooding me (2x)
 Densu had flooded me (help come 2x)
 Densu had flooded me

Densu reyiri me





Development of listening skills

The main activities of the game which are squatting, singing and the rhythmic movement of stones seem to excite partakers and non-partakers. However, both groups tend to acquire certain skills which enhance their human interactions. Such skills include the ability to listen and effect appropriate feedback to make the communication process complete. The listening skills of the children who partake in these musical activities is effectively improved as children manage to follow the passing pattern of the stones, singing and pulse of the music of the game in order to avoid dismissal.

Strengthening of aural discrimination

As children combine the three main activities of the game to get it going, they practically analyze words phrases and sentences to make meaning in their communications. These actions of the children effectively build their vocabulary level and the use of acquired words in their present and future interactions.

Enhancement of memory

The partakers in a stone game sometimes suffer minor bruises on their fingers which is usually considered as 'part of the game' by both participants and onlookers. Notwithstanding, the condition seem to occur

due to lack of attention and indecision in following the passing order of the stones. The situation however, urges children to be mentally alert in counting the beats, follow keenly the hand movement of partners, the rhythm of the song and the tune as they play. As children defy all odds to take part in the activity, they stand the chance of greatly enhancing their reasoning power which is very beneficial in their daily interactions with orders.

Helping children speak clearly and pay attention

In this musical activity, there are rampant arguments among children as they try to sort out misunderstandings. For a participating child to argue out his/her case intelligently, clear language usage is very paramount. Agreeably, language skills are also developed through this game as vocabularies are frequently used and acquired by children/partakers. The habit of paying attention and listening before passing comments are also acquired as argument and the corresponding resolutions persist.

Encouragement of children's co-operation, thinking and problem solving skills

The musical activity "stone game" comes with series of interactions between children as they engage and challenge themselves in the game. The interactions escalate especially when partakers make mistakes and all attempts are made by the rest to correct the situation. The condition breeds co-operation and a skill in problem solving among the children as they agree to disagree but still manage to carry out the activity to the end. Much as children develop thinking and problem solving skills, they also build their muscles which give them the physical strength to go about their daily chores.

Enhancement of children's literacy skills

Indeed when children get together, they learn a great deal of skills one of such is acquisition of literacy skills. A research conducted by the Institute of Education, University of London (2013) suggested that empowering teachers with the skills to use music in the classroom can boost not only music skills in children, but also helps to improve aspects of literacy, particularly reading. The New London Orchestra's flagship education project Literacy through Music aims at improving primary school teachers' confidence and skills in using music in the classroom, and provide them with methods and activities that they can use to support literacy development. The use of musical games whether formal or informal comes with the use of words, phrases and sentences which are eventually adopted by the children in their encounter with others. This phenomenon largely enables children to build a store of vocabulary, learn to spell, write them, and find their meanings (synonyms and antonyms) usually for fun yet lifting their confidence and literacy level.

CONCLUSION

The article indicates that music oriented activities for children impact positively on the developmental process of the child. This is so because from the article it is evident that musical activities contribute to the development of the child's literacy skills, thinking and problem solving skills, enhances retention and aural discrimination as well as listening skills. This to a large extent supports the holistic development of the growing child to fit in to the dynamic culture of the modern society.

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