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# Improvisation and Production of Fantasy Play Prop through Creative Arts for the Alleviation of Covid 19 Trauma

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## Abstract

Children in their early years have had their own share of the stress and trauma inherent in Covid 19 pandemic. Without early intervention, traumatised children become traumatised adults who abuse drugs, break laws, and have relationship problems. Fantasy play as a method of teaching the African child has also been recognized as one of the most effective tools for dealing with the trauma. This is because children love to fantasise and fantasy play encourages the release of some hormones that makes children feel happier and calmer. Opportunities to talk about the cause of the stress from a heroic point of view is also created. Due to the fact that fantasy play requires the use of some unusual props such as animal masks and some invisible creature's costumes, there is need for improvisation and production of props. The methodology for the production of the props involves different stages which include pre- modelling stage, molding stage, post-moldelling / drying stage and painting/ finishing stage. Some locally available materials were used and waste materials were recycled in the production and improvisation of fantasy play props. Recommendations were given to the government, Parent Teachers Associations, Non-Governmental Organisations and teachers.

**Keywords:** Covid 19 Pandemic, Stress and Trauma, Fantasy Play Props, Improvisation and Production

## 1. Introduction

There are lots of stress and trauma inherent in Covid19 pandemic. Even when it seems that the stress of the pandemic is easing off all over the world. People, adults and children alike, who have witnessed pain or death of family member, relation or neighbor are going through a traumatizing experience caused by the pandemic. Covid-19 has suspended normal life and has caused every human being a lot of unexpected turmoil. The 'new normal' way of life characterized by the use of face mask, isolation, reduced social activities, among others are a few of the experiences the world is still struggling to adjust to. Due to the social restrictions, children are exposed to excessive screen time. They were left with the television screen for entertainment, telephone and computer screens for online school and other interactions (Araujo, Veloso, Souza, Azevedo and Tarro, 2020; Ghosh, Dubey, Chatterjee and Dubey, 2020) [1, 3]. This new normal way of life has caused emotional stress for the children.

Campbell (2020) [2], submit that the pandemic has hit both children and adults with great trauma. People have started seeing the world as a dangerous place. People feel unsafe, negative thoughts and feelings increase, people have problems with sleep and concentration. During the lockdown there was increase in domestic violence resulting into child abuse. Also, there was loss of routine, disruption of school where children socialize with friends, peers and classmates. Family gathering was not allowed. All these led to inability to interact with loved ones. Those disorienting experiences by children are dangerous. These and other circumstances, which are beyond normal experience, lead to stress, anxiety, fear and a feeling of helplessness in everyone. They can also have mental and physical health effect if not dealt with (Singh, Roy, Sinha, Parveen, Sharma and Joshi, 2020) [14].

As the popular saying goes, "a sound mind is a sound body". The child must be sound emotionally before he can enjoy all round development and function well as a good citizen in the society. In other words, the trauma must be dealt with by giving support to the child before tangible learning and development can take place. Dealing with trauma and adversity is a gradual process that demands consistent efforts. If the approach and therapy are not interesting, the result will be disastrous both on the child and the society at large. The effects of trauma include: memory problem, poor verbal skills, excessive temper, trouble with learning and focus in school, regressive behaviours like thumb sucking and bedwetting, learning disabilities, scream and

cries, headaches and stomach aches among others. Without early intervention, traumatised children become traumatised adults who abuse drugs, break laws, and have relationship problems (Walden University, 2021).

In order to avoid all the problems associated with trauma and stress, play is one of the most effective ways of dealing with the trauma inflicted by Covid 19 pandemic. Every child has the right to play. This is quoted in article 31: "That every child has the right to leisure, to engage in play and recreation activities appropriate to the age of the child and participate freely in cultural life and the arts." (IPA, 2012; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2013; UNICEF, 2016) [5, 9, 15].

Play is a biological imperative like food and sleep. It is voluntary and pleasurable because it is an innate, creative, joyful, interesting, and recreative activity in which the natural urges of children find spontaneous expression (Wang and Aamodt, 2012) [16]. Play reduces stress hormones and anxiety. It encourages the release of 'feel good hormones' oxytocin and serotonin, which makes children feel happier and calmer. Play reduces lack of control because children feel in control during play. They create the kind of world they desire and they are completely in control of everything (Hamid, 2018) [4]. Therefore, play has the ability to deal with stress and adversity.

Play is a powerful tool for helping children build resilience and support them to cope with and heal them from trauma. When children are supported to engage in pretend play such as fantasy play, they reenact their worries and put their traumatic experiences under control. They can play out being the hero of the traumatic experience and opportunity to communicate their fears is also created. The release of excess energy from the brain and body through singing, dancing, swinging, running and other gross motor activities relives children of stress and trauma (Nicholson, 2019) [7].

There are different types of play, which include: dramatic play, fantasy play, role-play, active play, passive play and manipulative play among others. All these types of play touch all areas of children's development, which includes physical, intellectual, language, emotional, and social development are shaped by play experiences (Olusola, 2006) [11]. Fantasy Play is one of the types of play that helps the child forgets adversity. It is one of the oldest and most popular instructional strategies in the traditional African society. Children were acculturated through fantasy stories that were used to teach moral and values of the society. The word fantasy comes from a classical Greek word, *phantasia* which means, "making visible". Fantasy play is purely imaginative. It evokes mental images of physical or social situations not actually present (Ojoko, 2019) [10].

As a literary genre, fantasy refers to stories that have certain definable elements that make the story unreal. Fantasy is also described as a story in which at least one element cannot be found in the human world. It is very prominent in many folk tales where animals and inanimate objects could talk and behave like human beings (McGowen, 2016) [6]. In Fantasy play, the invisible becomes visible. For instance, germs and viruses which are part of the invisible organisms present in the world can be made visible in fantasy play. According to Ramirez (2008) [12], fantasy play amounts to about 33% of children's play but, as they grow older, the amount declines. They do this as they re-enact traumatic and troubling events. For instance, when children feel lonely, they think about imaginary friends as they talk to their dolls.

As noted by Seo (2010) [13] this is why psychiatric researchers define fantasy as a defence mechanism for the fulfilment of wishes and the resolution of conflict.

Fantasy play, makes use of props, face painting and animal costumes to achieve the purpose of teaching and learning. Props are materials used by actors in performing in a play. They are the physical objects used in drama to make things real and enjoyable. They help to say the story and enhance better understanding. They help the child to be engaged in the lesson (George, 2020). Many of the props for fantasy play are not readily available; some are not popular in the western culture because of the peculiarities in culture. This is why improvisation and production are important.

**Improvisation and production of Fantasy Play Props**
Improvisation is described as the preparation and the provision of alternatives to real materials as teaching aids. Where materials are to be improvised, emphasis should be laid on using cheap, locally available materials and the recycling of wastes. Improvisation helps in using adequate and appropriate teaching materials for effective teaching and learning in the classroom. The ultimate purpose of an effective teaching and learning is to bring about learning on the part of the learner. Therefore, the teacher's task to provide experiences that support, stimulate and structure children's learning to bring about a progression and understanding appropriate to the child's needs and abilities. It is therefore very important for the teacher to use teaching materials to make teaching and learning meaningful. Improvisation of instructional materials increases the resourcefulness of the teacher and he forms the habit of converting what would have been regarded as useless materials into useful forms (Odu, 2013) [8]. Due to the fact that the props are not readily available, the creativity of the teacher is required for improvised props.

**2. Methodology**
The method of improvisation and production of the costumes entails a systematic and artistic manipulation of waste papers, which were recycled into what is known as paper Crete. Paper Crete can be used for the creation of form and shapes. Paper Crete, according to Yogesh and Mahavir (2017) [17], is the mixture of paper, cement, sand and other adhesive substances. Paper Crete was first developed in the late 1920s. In 1976, John Hall, an art student majoring in sculpture, experimented with paper mache and added gypsum plaster in the mix. Paper Crete got its name from the very formula used to make it is a mixture of cement with cellulose fiber and water. Paper Crete is applicable to building of structures and objects. It is usually achieved by recycling paper, gathered from newspaper offices, junk mail, used phone books, etc. a mixer is used to turn the paper into a fibrous pulp. Cement, adhesive and locally made or synthetic starch is often mixed with this pulp and the mixture is placed to dry in the sun.

Paper Crete has over the years, been used as building materials for building homes, walls, fence and it's easy to form into objects. This medium was discovered to be explorable for artistic modeling and casting process. Considering it's lightweight, durability and sturdy nature. It was found most appropriate for production of artistic objects such as costumes and other utilitarian and aesthetic objects. Through this (paper Crete) medium, props such as animal masks, Hawk's wings, butterfly's wings and turtles' shell

were produced. Other materials used alongside paper Crete include the followings: adhesive (top-bond), local starch, separator, cement, water, clay, binding wire, polythene, water based colours, vanish. etc.

The tools used for the process also include the followings: spatulas (modelling tools), cutting knife, painting brushes, hand dryer and plier. The process of production can be categorized into four different stages which includes:
1. Pre- modelling stage.
2. Molding stage
3. Post-moldelling / drying stage.
4 painting/ finishing stage.

## 2.1 Pre-Moldelling Stage
This stage can also be referred to as preparative stage. Just as the name implies, it is the stage at which proper preparations were put in place before the commencement of the modelling of forms. At this stage, relevant materials such as clay, cement, separator, adhesive as well as local starch were sourced. After this step of preparation, it is worth to note that there are two other interdependent preparative stages, which includes; preparation of clay and preparation of paper Crete components.

## a. Clay preparation
The first to be prepared among the materials is the clay. This is because, it is the first material to be used in the process of producing mask and she'll related costumes.
Clay preparation according to Banjoko (2011), is the process of working a clay body into, a homogeneous mass by removing lumps and other foreign bodies such as stones, pebbles, sticks and other impurities within the clay body. This process thereby enables plasticity and workability of the clay body and as such, renders the clay suitable for manipulations.

## b. Preparation of paper Crete
This is the second step of the preparation process; it entails the proper and proportional mixture of soaked papers with other components, which includes adhesive, local starch and cement. This element when properly and proportionally mixed, will produce a soft, smooth, plastic and workable clay-like body, which can be used for casting or direct modeling of shapes or forms.
The mixture is usually achieved through the following proportion of mixtures presented in a table form.

**Table 1:** Proportion of mixtures

| S. No | Materials | Percentage | Ratio |
|-------|-----------|------------|-------|
| 1. | Soaked paper | 65% | 6.5/10 |
| 2. | Local starch | 20% | 2/10 |
| 3. | Adhesive | 15% | 1.5/10 |
| 4. | Cement | 5% | 0.5/10 |

## 2.2 Modeling Stage
Modeling is an aspect of visual arts, which deals with creation of forms in three dimensions. The forms could be created either through additive or subtractive methods of clay modelling. Costumes or mask relating to animal facial forms or shells are created through the art of modelling. This is the process by which the artist represents or depict the real image of a desired animal or human form through the manipulation of clay or another related medium.

The process of modeling a mask takes a more different dimension and approach, this is because, mask is meant to be worn to bear a different identity and as such, it must be hollowed in other to cover the bearer's head. In view of this utilitarian purpose of the mask, the production process is categorized into three practical steps which comes in three layers as seen in the diagram Bellow:
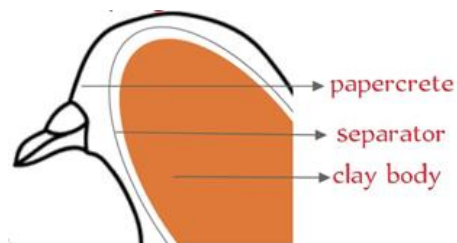


**Fig 1:** Dove

The following are the three practical steps considerable in the moldeling of animal mask costumes:
**Step 1:** Creation of the actual shape of such animal to be depicted in clay.
**Step 2:** Application of seperator to mediate between the clay and the papercrete.
**Step 3:** Detailed modelling of pictorial forms and features of the particular animal to resemblance. The artist makes a detailed representation of such animal's facial forms and features on the outer layer (paper crete) and thereafter, the work is left to dry.

## 2.3 Post Modelling /Drying Stage
Paper crete dries a bit faster because of the presence of some components such as the cement and adhesive. The drying process can be achieved by exposing the work to the direct sunlight or through the use of electrical appliances such as fan, blower, or dryer. After the drying process, the clay part as well as the seperator is gently removed and the mask is ready for the finishing stage.

## 2.4 Finishing/ Painting Stage
This stage deals with the application of appreciate pigment (colours) to depict the natural colour(s) of such animal. Application of colours can be stylized or naturalistic but the basic purpose, which is to create aesthetics and resemblance value, remain the same. The mask after the painting process is left to dry at a low temperature. Thereafter the hanging rope is installed and the mask is ready for use.

## 3. Conclusion and recommendations
The importance of Improvisation and production of Fantasy play props are numerous. It is very effective in making teaching easier and making learning more meaningful. The curative power in dealing with emotional or psychological problems through the release of the "feel good hormones" is the right treatment for trauma. Teachers' creativity is enhanced and wastes become treasures. Pupils' are happy while they enjoy the lesson and learn by doing. Learning through play is effortless learning.
Based on these, it is recommended that government should encourage the teachers to improvise play props and other instructional material by paying allowances that will help the teachers to buy materials and also organise in-service training for the teachers to improve their skills. Non-

Governmental Organisations (NGOs) should assist the public and private school by sponsoring seminars and workshops that will enhance the creativity of the teachers The Parents Teacher Association (PTA) should send some waste materials that can be recycled as play props to the school and also render other assistance when needed. Teachers should be creative so that they can produce and improvise Fantasy play props. Private school owners should encourage the teachers through constant seminars and workshops on improvisation and production of play props.

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