

Traditional Games of Shona Children

by

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to show the richness embedded in the Shona children games. The Shona children games if not properly analyzed would pass for any other pastime activities for children. However, Shona children games were much more than pastime games. Through the various games, children were afforded the opportunity to exercise their bodies and keep them fit. Children games offered children a variety of skills and knowledge. Cognitive skills were developed as children got involved in games that challenged their cognition. Children learned issues of negotiation, skills to evade potential enemies, skills for quick problem solving and skills for dancing, all which were/are very important for their day to day survival. The games also taught them to live in harmony with others as well as to obey authority and to cooperate with others.

Introduction

The term Shona refers to an ethnic group of the Zimbabwean population which comprises close to 85% of the total population Tatira (2004). They are further divided into sub-ethnic groups namely the Karanga, the Manyika, the Ndau, the Korekore and the Zezuru. All the sub-ethnic groups speak the same language called ChiShona.

In the past, traditional Shona games were performed as part of entertainment. It was in the process of entertainment that Shona children learnt important aspects of life. The games they played not only sharpened their cognition but some were essential for the physical fitness. In some games, especially those that involved physical exercises, children would shout *Koenda nhete, hobvu dzokwerwa nemanda*. (Only the slim will compete, the stout will succumb to fatigue). This provoked the fat children to continue with the game thereby affording them more time for exercises though they might have been tired.

In this paper we are not going only to itemize the games which were performed but we are also going to investigate the social as well as the cognitive functions of such games. It is common knowledge that the western people took the Africans as barbarians who lived in darkness, hence the colonial popularized term "The Dark Continent of Africa" and as such African people were conceived as having no form of education. However, in this paper, it will be argued that the Shona people through children games, among other things, had a way of facilitating learning.

Children's games were not performed outside the normal life environment as we have in the western culture where people go to theatres to watch actors performing. There was no distinction between the performers and the audience. The audience could also be a performer. Everyone who was present found some space in the activity and became a participant. It is pertinent now to list the games that we will discuss in detail which are:

- *Matakanana* (Playhouse)
- *Mahumbwe* (An advanced form of playhouse)
- *Chamuvandemuvande* (Hide and Seek)
- *Mapere akaenda Hwedza* (Hyenas went to Hwedza - to a far away place)
- *Ndakanaka Amai* (Mother I am very beautiful)
- *Du-du-uu muduri, kacha* (A game of reciting people's names in a terrific speed)
- *Fuva/Tsoro* (A game in the family of draft)
- *Kusika nyimo* (A game where children spin groundnuts on a small flat surface)
- *Nhodo* (A game where children fork out small objects from a small hole and returning an object at a time)
- *Gumbe Gumbeve Gumbu* (A game of reciting people's totems and once one's totem is called the person dances artistically until another person's totem is been called)
- *Pakasungwa neutare* (A game in which children attempt to break a human shield)
- *Sunga musoro wedendende* (A game in which a child picked another child one considered to be beautiful).

We will begin by analysing *Matakanana*. Sometimes the Shona elders say *hatidi zvamatakanana isu!* or *ndezyamatakanana*. In both cases they will be protesting that the issues at hand are childish and against adult expectation. In essence *matakanana* is a light-hearted game for the children, where children imitate adult roles. However, in such playing there were lessons to be learnt. The *matakanana* game was played by children who were not of school going age and a few who were of the age of a first grader. The ages were normally from between 4-7 years. Now let us see how the game was played.

Playing the Game

The children who played *matakanana* pretended to be a family normally composed of the father, mother and children but it was also common to find a girl playing alone with her dolls as her children or a boy playing alone with his self-molded cows. In some cases, the children formed fictitious large families which we are not comfortable to call extended families as they are normally called by other scholars. In the African context, we believe that there is no social, neither is there linguistic, space for the term 'extended family'.

This is because the roles and responsibilities undertaken by the so called extended family members, in most cases is the same as those taken by the actual parents and children of the so called nuclear family. There is no social distinction between a father's brother and the actual father in terms of responsibility and society's expectation especially if the actual father is dead. The brother normally takes over responsibility and is expected to do just that. Therefore, even linguistically, there is no English equivalent term for the father's brother who can either be *babamunini* (junior father) or *babamukuru* (senior father).

The large families in children's games included the aunt, and the uncles and other close relations. In other cases, such large families also had neighbours they socialized with in their play. In playing this game those children who were older than others assumed the adult roles of the father, mother, aunt, and uncle while the younger ones took the roles of children.

The younger children were the ones that were sent on short errands such as those of collecting "firewood", "fetching water" and "herding cattle" All the activities are in quotes to show that the activities were not real. For example if one was told to fetch water he/she might pretend to fetch it a few metres away and says, "here is the water" though the small container was empty. What was important in all cases was either to perform what one was instructed and if it was not possible then one pretended to do what one was asked to. Children pretended or rather acted the adult life. Those who acted as mothers pretended to cook food for their families using sand and water for *sadza* and leaves for relish. The family pretended to eat the food, older members started to take the first "morsel" as what happens in the normal life situation. In the process of "eating," the younger children were taught to eat according to Shona customs. They were instructed not to talk while eating, to sit in a cross -legged position while eating and to clasp hands before and after eating. After the pretence, the younger children were asked to wash the "dishes".

In brief, in playing *matakanana*, children imitated adult life according to their sexes and ages in society. Girls could be seen with dolls made from rags strapped on their backs while performing domestic chores as "sweeping," "cooking" and "washing". Boys were not left out, you would see them singing with shirts removed doing difficult tasks such as "cutting wood".

Lessons from Matakanana

Through *matakanana*, children learnt by imitation activities, which were vital for their future adult life. It should be borne in mind that in the past the roles played by individual members were clearly demarcated and strictly observed. Children learnt the roles through parental socialisation and by practicing the roles and responsibilities through *matakanana*. It was through *matakanana* that children accepted and asserted their future adult responsibilities.

In the process of imitation, children also gained skills in acting which were vital in other games they played in life. *Matakanana* also helped children to live together in harmony, as it required them to play together each assuming a given responsibility, which depended on others for the game to succeed. As already discussed, children could group themselves into family units with some relatives of the family and this enabled the children to understand relations and the type of roles and responsibilities of different relatives towards one another (Bourdillon, 1976). How to live in harmony with neighbours was also an important aspect that was taken care of in *matakanana* as role players sometimes included neighbours. A member of one family unit might be sent to another family to go and borrow "salt" or just to give them some "delicacies".

As children played as family units, the "father" and the "mother" would send their "children" on errands. If the one who was sent was not cooperative, the sender would threaten to beat or even gave the defiant "child" a light thrash. By exercising such authority, the children taught each other that orders from the adults should be obeyed.

Matakanana offered children an opportunity to socialise with other children from the neighbourhood. Through such opportunities, children learnt from each other rather than from the adults. Those children who were shy, normally with time, opened up and this quickened their development in both linguistic and psychomotor activities that were necessary at their ages. Another important role played by *matakanana*, though not for the direct advantage to children was that of removing youngsters from adult environment so as to enable the adults to concentrate on their activities without unnecessary disturbances from the children (Tatira, 2000). There is an advanced form of *matakanana* that is called *mahumbwe* and this is what we are discussing below.

Mahumbwe

To many people, *matakanana* and *mahumbwe* seem to be one and the same thing but in real sense these are two different things. As we have seen, *matakanana* were the domain of children normally of ages between 4-7. On the other hand, *mahumbwe* were the domain of children who were a bit grown up normally of the ages between 8-14/15. This meant that such children were grown up and did not play with dolls in the case of girls. In playing *mahumbwe*, children imitated what the lives of adult people in the same way as in *matakanana* but in *mahumbwe* the imitation was more realistic such that participants did the exact things, which the adults did and used the actual tools used by the adults. Girls would actually mould earthen pots, fetch water and cook food. Boys would also hunt mice.

Mahumbwe were played during the dry season under a full moon soon after people had finished harvesting. During this time of the year boys and girls would go a distance from their homes and built a temporary village or villages. They would stay there for three weeks or even for a complete month. Boys would make real hunts and thatch them while the girls plastered the huts with mud as well as flooring them with cattle dung.

Some of the huts looked even better than the village huts. The children arranged themselves into different families each family having a "father", "mother" and "children". These "children" were sent on errands to fetch firewood and water for domestic use. The same "children" were sent to look for mealie combs, vegetables, groundnuts, pumpkins and finger millet in the already harvested fields. Each household fended for its self. As the "children" run their errands, the head of the household would be busy making hoes and axe handles, yokes and all sorts of tools, which one would use when is back home after the *mahumbwe*. The heads of the households sometimes would go fishing and hunting, bringing with them a lot of food for their "families".

The *mahumbwe* couple assumed all the responsibilities of married couples as expected by the Shona culture except anything that involved procreation or related to it. It was strictly prohibited for the couples to extend their socialisation to sexual intimacy. It was possible that the two might fall in love during the process of *mahumbwe* but the two were supposed not to go beyond the verbal expression of love. After *mahumbwe*, the couple who would have fallen in love would make arrangements to formalise the relationship as well as the subsequent marriage through their respective relatives, in the case of the girl her paternal aunt and the boy his paternal uncle.

Lessons from Mahumbwe

Mahumbwe has more or less the same lessons as we find in *matakanana*. In both cases, the children imitated the adult life. The only difference was in the way children imitated adult life in that in *mahumbwe* they used real implements and performed the actual activities of life. *Mahumbwe* can be called a laboratory stage of the Shona youngsters shortly before they were released into adult life.

We can observe that *mahumbwe* helped children to have a hands-on approach to real adult activities. The *mahumbwe* game can be said to be similar to teaching practice, nursing practice and doctors' horsemanship where the personnel is given an opportunity to prove his/her skills before one goes to practice. Each child especially those who played the father or mother's role had the opportunity to face real life situations and make a self assessment as to whether one was ready to start his/her household. This was a reflective moment, a period of self - searching and self - interrogation if one was really ready for marriage. Children were given this opportunity to be alone and discover how difficult it was to fend for the family. By the same spirit, children were jostled into appreciating the roles played by their parents when they went back home.

Another important lesson that was learnt from *mahumbwe* was that of self - control. Even though the boys and girls were all by themselves for weeks, they were not supposed to be intimate. The expected restraint taught boys to respect girls and not to view them as sexual objects to be abused. The children also learnt to work together and to build friendship. During the evening "parents" and their "children" shared stories and in the process learning a lot more about life. Below we are going to discuss *Chamuvandemuvande* (Hide and Seek) and *Mapere akaenda Hwedza* (The Hyenas have gone Hwedza- a far away place).

Chamuvande-Muvande and Mapere Akaenda Hwedza

In order to play this game, children had to form two groups. One group would field a member to hide while members of the other group did the searching. They would exchange roles, and the group which did the searching, then did the hiding. This game was normally played immediately after sunset though it could go on up to about seven o'clock. However, playing the game into the late hours of the evening was discouraged because adults were afraid of accidents and also that the children might be beaten by snakes or other predators. In short children were expected to be able to see where they hid and the terrain upon which they moved.

How the Game was Played

The participants had to agree in broad terms the boundaries of the hiding places. There were marked features they agreed upon, for example, they could say the boundaries would be to the east a big tree, to the west a small rock, to the south a granary and to the north a big stub. This meant no one was not allowed to hide beyond the specified boundaries and also meant that the searching team had a defined space in which to seek those who had hidden.

After this children would give each other a chance to hide. The group, which was the search group, was ordered to a point where they could not see others hiding. After the person hid himself/herself, the members of his/her group would then invite the searching group to start the search. They would search all the places they would speculate a person could have hidden. Those who had no skills in hiding were found in no time while others who were crafty gave the searchers a hard time before they were found. In the process of searching, the searchers would create jokes and make fun dances or movements so as to induce the person who would have hidden into laughter. The moment such a person laughs, he/she would be exposed. In some cases, one would even call the search over pointing to a certain direction pretending to have seen the person being sought. This was a psychological warfare in which the sought person might think he/she had actually been seen and then moves out of the hiding. The searching group would then celebrate. However in some cases the group would fail to find the person and it would announce that it had failed and that the person should come out. The group with such a member would then celebrate.

Lessons from Chamuvande-Muvande

In the Hide and Seek game, there were many lessons, which were learnt by the participants. In the first place children learnt to obey the rules of the game. If a participant hid outside the demarcated area one was disqualified. Those who searched also had to limit themselves to a specified area otherwise they wasted their effort in searching out of bounce. In demarcating the area for hiding and seeking, the children were taught the science of map reading as well as the four cardinal points, the EAST, WEST, SOUTH and NORTH.

Children also learnt the hiding skills, which were vital in the past. People needed these skills in order to hide from their enemies in times of strife. Children also learnt how to contain their laughter when in hiding as they were expected to withhold their laughter although the searcher performed fun actions. Children, through the game, also learnt how to control their breathing when a person came close to them during the search. These skills became vital when children were in trouble as in situations where they were required to hide from enemies during civil strifes. Such strifes were common during the pre-colonial period.

The game also helped to keep children awake while waiting for supper. It also kept children out of adults conversation at the *dare* (an outside court for male adults where serious societal issues were discussed). There was also another game, which was played in the early evening as Hide and Seek and this was *Mapere akaenda Hwedza*.

Mapere Akaenda Hwedza (The hyenas went to Hwedza - a far away place)

This game was played while children were waiting for supper. Children would group themselves into two groups, one group pretending to be hyenas while the other were human beings who were preyed upon by the hyenas.

How the Game was Played

As already indicated, the children got into two groups. The group, which was of human beings, would have their mother calling them from a distant. However, between the mother and the children there were hyenas which waylaid them. The game went as follows:

Mai: Vanangu huyai!

Vana: Tinotyia mapere!

Mai: Mapere akaenda Hwedza!

Mapere: Humwi-iii

Mother: My children come over here!

Children: We are afraid of hyenas!

Mother: The hyenas are not there, they have gone Hwedza, a very far away place.

Hyena : *Humwi-ii*(sound made by hyenas)

Upon this invitation and assurance that the hyenas had gone to a far away place called Hwedza, the children would run to their mother. However midway, the hyenas intercepted the children and they had to run for their lives. Children would run as fast as possible until they arrived at a place of safety where their mother would be. Those who could not run fast enough were caught and once caught one was knocked out of the game. The game continued until all the members were knocked out. The groups would then exchange their roles, the hyenas becoming human beings and the human beings becoming hyenas. The game would continue to rotate until the children were tired or called to abandon it by the adults for the reasons, which might range to eating supper or assigned other domestic activities.

Lessons from Mapere Akaenda Hwedza

Apart from playing and the excitement derived therefrom, this game kept children fit by affording them an opportunity to vigorously exercise. Children learnt the skill of evading the enemy by running away sometimes in a zigzag fashion, from the hyenas that would have intercepted them on the way. Children learnt to be always vigilant as the hyenas came from nowhere but in all directions.

The game also reminded children that whenever they travel, they should take precaution and move in groups, so that they could help each other in times of attack. At this juncture we will discuss two games which involved speech, memory and dance all at the same time. These games are *Gumbe gumbewe gumbu* (A traditional song which one sang and nominated a totem and all who belonged to the totem would dance artistically) and *Du-du-uu muduri* (A traditional song which one sang naming in a fast manner all the people present)

Gumbe Gumbewe Gumbu

The children would be in a single group and one would start singing while the others backed him/her. The lead vocalist would name people's totems and all who belonged to the named totem would dance to the song. The game would go as demonstrated below.

How the Game was Played

Mushauri: Gumbe gumbewe gumbu
Vabvumiri: Kamutambo kari pano he-ee kamutambo
Mushauri: Hekanhi Gumbo!
Vabvumiri: Kamutambo kari pano he-ee kamutambo
Mushauri: Tamba tione
Vabvumiri: Kamutambo kari pano he-ee kamutambo
Mushauri: Tambisa tione
Vabvumiri: Kamutambo kari pano he-ee kamutambo
Mushauri: Ramba uchitamba
Vabvumiri: Kamutambo kari pano he- ee kamutambo
Mushauri: Chibuda tione
Vabvumiri: Kamutambo kari pano he- kamutambo
Mushauri: Hekanhi Moyo Chirandu!
Vabvumiri: Kamutambo kari pano he-ee kamutambo

Lead Vocalist (L.V.): *Gumbe gumbewe gumbu* (words to signal the start of the game)
Backing Vocals (B. Vs.): There is a small fun game hey! Come and dance

L.V.: Hey come on and dance all who belong to the Gumbo totem
B.Vs.: There is a fun game hey! Come and dance
L.V.: Play and let us enjoy
B.Vs.: There is a fun game hey! Come and dance
L.V.: Continue artistically and let us enjoy
B.Vs.: There is a fun game hey! Come and dance
L.V.: Continue like that!
B.Vs.: There is a fun game hey! Come and dance
L.V.: You can now stop dancing
B.Vs.: There is a fun game hey! Come and dance
L.V.: Come on and dance all those of Moyo Chirandu totem

The game would continue until all the totems, which were known to the children, were finished. Each person whose totem was called proudly danced to the totem. The lead vocalist would prolong the time one danced by singing exhorting the person to continue. A person was only allowed to stop dancing after the lead vocalist sang him out of the ring.

Lessons from Gumbe Gumbewe Gumbu

The game helped children to learn and practice dancing which was an important aspect in traditional Shona culture. Dancing was an important component of many rituals such as *Kurova guva* (The ceremony of bringing back the spirit of the deceased), *mukwerere* (Rain making ceremonies) and *Kupira mudzimu* (Ancestral worship rituals). For more details about the above ceremonies, see Kileff and Kileff (eds), 1970; Gelfand, 1965; Gombe, 1986). People also would sing and dance before they went to fight. The singing and dancing psychologically prepared the fighters for the impending war. The songs and dances were also used to scare rivals into submission. Shona novels that have a pre-colonial setting and having war themes document war songs. A case in point is Mugugu's *Jekanyika* (1968), which documents a war song called "*Yave Nyama yeKugocha*".

In Shona culture, a totem is very important as it separates relatives from non-relatives (Tatira 2007). The game helped to prevent children from falling in love with the people they shared the same totem with since to do so is a taboo among the Shona people. In Shona society, every individual is proud of his or her totem. In no incident would you find a Shona person wishing if he/she was of a different totem.

Therefore the game under discussion gave children the pride to dance for their totems. The children were also afforded the opportunity to identify their relations, those who danced with them for the same totem.

Children also learnt not to be shy because every child had to dance for his/her totem. A child who was shy could be ordered to continue playing by the lead vocalist who would say *ramba uchitamba* (continue dancing) or *hausati watamba* (you have not yet started dancing). The game helped children to remember people's totems by heart as well as to nurture the art of singing and composing. The lead vocalist had to create additional verses of his/her own to keep the game exciting. Above all, children learnt to socialise with people from different parts of the village. We are now going to see another game which is closely related to the above discussed and this is *Du du-uu muduri* (A game in which people's names are recited)

Du du-uu Muduri

This game, as the *Gumbe gumbeve gumbu*, had a lead vocalist and some backing vocalists. The game went as follows:

How the Game was Played

Mushauri : Du duu muduri

Vabvumiri: Kacha

Mushauri : Chifeke muduri

Vabvumiri: Kacha

Mushauri : Tatira muduri

Vabvumiri: Kacha

Mushauri: Mhuru muduri

Vabvumiri: Kacha

Mushauri: Sithole muduri

Vabvumiri: Kacha

Lead Vocalist (L. V.) *Du du-uu muduri* (words to signify the start of the game)

Backing vocals (B.Vs.): Pounded

L. V.: Chifeke in the pounding mortar

B.Vs.: Pounded

L.V.: Tatira in the pounding mortar

B.Vs.: Pounded

L. V.: Mhuru in the pounding mortar

B. Vs.: Pounded

L.V. Sithole in the pounding mortar

B.Vs. Pounded.

In this game the lead vocalist names all the people present in quick succession. The backing vocalists shout *kacha* (pounded) to signify that the lead vocalist can then shout another new name. If the lead vocalist stopped reciting, the other member in the backing vocals took over as a lead vocalist and the game went on like that. Now we would like to find out the lessons, which were derived from playing the game.

Lessons from *Du du-uu Muduri*

It is a common fact for educators that calling people by names adds affection. Even animal such as dogs, donkeys and cattle do respond when their names are called. This particular game enabled children to learn other children's names. It is unlike these days when quite a number of people know each other very well facially without knowing each other by names. In no way were children strangers to one another after having played this game.

The game sharpened children's memory by requiring them to remember all the names of children present. The children who were present would be as many as twenty or even thirty. The number was large and this enabled children to know and socialise with children who lived a distance from them. Once one knows the other's name, friendship could easily develop. The idea of knowing one another by name assisted children in identifying the troublesome persons by their names and having them dealt by the adults.

In the following section we are going to discuss four games which are, *Apa pakasungwa neutare* (A game in which children attempted to break a human shield, *Ndakanaka Amai* (Mother I am very beautiful) and *Sunga musoro wedendende* (A game in which a child picked another that one considered to be beautiful).

Apa Pakasungwa Neutare (A game in which children attempted to break a human shield)

This game had no specific time of the day on which it was played though it was normally played during the day.

How the Game was Played

The children would form a big circle by joining hands together while another child was left alone in the middle of the circle. The child in the middle of the circle was supposed to break himself/herself free from the human shield. As one tried to break free, the children and the encircled child would be singing, *apa pakasungwa neutare apa zinyekenyeke* (Here it is as strong as iron but here is weak).

As the singing continued, the encircled child would be trying his/her strength in different directions. Finally when he/she found a weaker exit he/she bolted. He/she would then join hands with others, while another child gets in the circle. The process would continue until all or many of the children got the chance to break free from the human shield. It was possible that some children failed to break the human shield and they would simply plead to have an exit.

The stronger children brought excitement to the game, when they broke loose with a great force that in most cases left other children falling on their backs. Thunderous laughter and praises would follow this. Sometimes it was not the strength that was required for one to succeed but the skill to break at a point which was least expected. One needed to pretend to be going in a certain direction only to go to a totally different direction.

Lessons from Apa Pakasungwa Neutare

The most important thing that children learnt was how to escape out of danger, whether the child was strong or weak. The children through the game also learnt how to prevent the captive from escaping. Above all, children exercised a lot in playing the game and this helped them to keep fit.

Ndakanaka Amai (Mother I am very beautiful)

Of all the games discussed so far, this one was the only game which had a legendary story about how it began. Old people have it that a girl saw her reflection in the river when she had gone to fetch some water. As you know long back there were no mirrors and upon the girl seeing her beauty for the first time in life, she was very excited. She went back home singing about her beauty. The other girls who saw her excitement were amazed and inquired from her what the matter was but she continued singing. She continued singing leading all other girls to the river who also saw their images in the river and joined the in the singing of *ndakanaka amai*. This is how the game is said to have begun. Girls then played it without going to the river. The game was played by girls only.

Probably the game was only for girls because in Shona culture, males were not expected to have good looks as girls. The society looked upon for strength among males not beauty. The Shona people even took very beautiful females with mistrust and suspicion hence the proverbs, *Mukadzi munaku akasaroya anoba* (A beautiful woman if she is not a witch she is a thief) and *Matende matsvuku mavazva doro* (Beautiful women spoil marriage) (Humutyinei and Plangger, 1987). Now that we have seen the background of the game let us now see how it was played.

How the Game was Played

The girls would come together, dance and parade their beauty to each other singing the song, *Ndakanaka amai*. Each girl had a chance to model before others. What they did can be compared to today's beauty contests though in this case no prizes were attached. Girls would laugh as well as encourage each other. More so it was a fun game, which had no winners and losers. We would like to discuss lessons, which were derived from the game

Lessons from *Ndakanaka Amai*

Through this game, girls learnt how to be presentable. They also learnt how to carry their bodies as they walked. The game also afforded the girls time to be on their own as girls as well as an opportunity to learn from each other. The game offered every girl an opportunity to praise herself as a result no one was discriminated on perceived ugly looks. In this particular game, it should be remembered that beauty was something not quite judged by an outsider but the participant had to declare herself beautiful and dance to her beauty. Therefore, it can be said the game boosted each girl's self esteem, the factor which is vital for a balanced emotional development. It is pertinent that we now discuss a game that was concerned with the appearances of both girls and boys.

Sunga Musoro Wendende (A game in which a child picked another of the opposite sex that one considered to be beautiful)

As already mentioned, the game was played by both sexes. It seems contradictory to find males paraded for beauty when we have noted that beauty was not considered for males. The observation still subsists. The beauty, which the girls were looking for among the boys, was particularly the beauty of the heart though facial looks seldom came into play. It was not uncommon to have a very handsome boy who was not popular with girls because of his bad character. Therefore it can not be over emphasised that what was more important was one's character than outward appearance. Below we discuss how the game was played.

How the Game was Played

Children would form a big circle and sing a song, *sunga musoro wedendende sunga wakanaka mukomana* (tie the head of a beautiful boy). This song would be sung if it was a girl who was choosing a boy. If it were a boy choosing a girl they would sing, *sunga musoro wedendende sunga wakanaka musikana* (tie the head of a beautiful girl). The child would tie the person he/she desired and put him/her aside. The game would continue until all or as many participants as possible got involved. Those who remained or who were last to be chosen were laughed at. At times some children were ashamed to choose people they liked but participants would continue to sing urging them to make their choice.

Lessons from the Game Sunga Musoro Wwedendende

The children learnt not to be shy of one another. The game opened the opportunity for the children to openly show their affection towards members of the opposite sex. If we take cognisance of the fact that girls chose boys primarily for their good character, we would agree that the game encouraged boys to behave well so that girls could pick them. If a boy was of bad character he would not find a girl to pick him and this usually attracted derision from others.

On the other hand, girls were encouraged to be smart and of good character. Boys would shun picking girls who were dirty. The fact that girls and boys played together helped both sexes to adjust to each other especially those children who came from families, which had children of the same sex. The children had an opportunity to learn from different sexes.

All the games, which were discussed from the beginning of this paper, did not quite involve competition at individual level. However the games which we are going to discuss below, right up to the end involved individual competition.

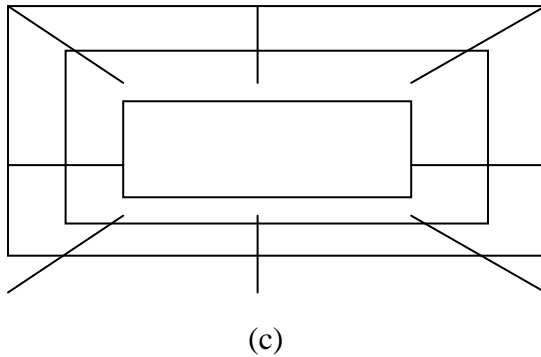
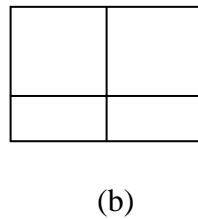
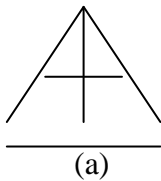
Fuva/tsoro (A game in the family of draft), *Nhodo* (A game where children fork out small objects from a small hole and return an object one at a time) and *kusika nyimo* (A game where children spin groundnuts on a small flat surface).

Children of different age groups played the above three games, however *fuva* and *kusika nyimo* were dominantly adolescence games while *nhodo* was predominantly a pre-adolescence game. *Fuva* and *kusika nyimo* were the preserve of boys while *nhodo* was mostly a game for the girls with small boys often involved. It is rather difficult to explain why some of such games were gender- classified. However, one can speculate that the sitting position taken when playing such games and the intended skill outcome determined the sex of the participants.

The playing of *nhodo*, required children to sit cross-legged and this was the culturally acceptable sitting position for females and small boys. Girls were supposed to sit in that position for the obvious reasons of dignity. Small boys were expected to sit in a cross-legged position as a sign of good manners and a show of respect. *Fuva* and especially kusika *nyimo* were played with legs apart or any other positions, which could have compromised female dignity. Therefore now we are going to discuss how the games were played beginning with *fuva*.

How *Fuva* was Played

Before we discuss how the games were played, we would illustrate by show of the diagrams how the games looked like. Below are three illustrations.



The games, (a) and (b) were played using any of the following objects, pebbles, seeds, or even small wood splinters. Both games were played by two people at a time. Each person would have three objects and the first to have the objects in a straight line would be the winner. Game (c) was more complicated than (a) and (b). This game required competitors to use twelve objects instead of three. The requirement was the same as in games (a) and (b), that in order to win the objects should be in a straight line.

Lessons Learn from Fuva

The games had particular rules, which were followed in order for one to succeed so children learnt how to follow instructions. The games demanded concentration and quick decisions thereby exposing children to rigorous thinking which helped in cognitive development. The skill of concentration, which the game required, was also a necessary skill which children would require late in life when for example they became sculptors, woodcrafters and blacksmiths.

The games also trained peoples to accept defeat. All the games discussed so far did not have a clearly defined loser. This is because most of the games were played as group games and the impact of losing was borne by group members rather than individuals.

The drawing of the diagrams of the game on the ground was an architectural design exercise that was necessary in the future lives of children in shelter construction. A critical observation of diagram (a) indicates that the game represented the roof structure of a Shona hut. Diagram (b) represented a super structure of a Shona house with the two lines across representing the poles upon which the roof stood. The last game to be discussed is *Kusika nyimo*.

Kusika Nyimo (A game where children spin groundnuts on a small flat surface)

This game was played during the dry season, after people finished harvesting. During this period of the year, children would search the fields for the groundnuts, which were accidentally left during harvesting. These are the groundnuts that children used to play the game. Below we will discuss how the game was played.

How Kusika Nyimo was Played

The game, as earlier on noted was played by spinning groundnuts on a flat small surface. The surface could be one of the following, a grinding stone, a flat iron sheet or any small flat object. When the spinned groundnut knocked the other off the spinning surface, the owner of the knocked nut lost it to the one with the nut, which knocked it out. Children of up to five or more could be involved in spinning the nuts as one group. It was, therefore, pertinent that each child kept a sharp eye in order to closely monitor the movements of the nuts and the proper outcome of the game.

If one failed to properly see what happened, there were serious arguments about whose nut knocked the other and sometimes the argument degenerated into a fistfight. Normally, among the whole lot of nuts a child possessed, there were some of the favourites nuts, which they named. The nuts became favourites for many reasons such as its attractive colour, that it was abnormally big, or it had an unbeatable record of knocking off other nuts. Some of the common names were *svindu* (brown), *ndora* (yellow with a black eye) and *ndunduveri* (a very big nut). In playing the game, children praised their nuts in the same manner the Shona boys would praise their bulls when they fight. If one's favourite nut was knocked off, one had an option to get it back by giving the winner two or three nuts depending on what the winner demanded and the bargaining skills of the loser.

Lessons from Kusika Nyimo

Children learnt bravado poetry as they praised and described their nuts in action. The game also sharpened children's linguistic skills as well as negotiating skills. Children learnt the importance of value and exchange by exchanging some nuts for the valued nut. Such skills were particularly important in a society that predominantly depended on barter transaction.

Children learnt how to solve misunderstandings, which often were part of the game. The game afforded children space to make friends as children involved in the game normally came from different villages. Through such interactions, children learnt more about other people's temperament and how to contain it. The skill was necessary in the future village life where above everything harmony was the golden rule (Gelfand, 1973).

Conclusion

The foregoing argument was an attempt to show that the Shona people had many different games in which children participated and through play, the children learnt important things that mattered in their lives. Some of the games also offered children a space to exercise. Fit bodies were vital in an economy that largely depended on manual labour for survival.

In some games, linguistic and cognitive skills were sharpened as the games involved different speaking skills such as praises, persuasion, arguments as well as puzzle solving. The games had the advantage that they involved everyone, in this respect there was no difference between the audience and participators.

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