ISSUES IN MUSIC EDUCATION IN GHANA: THE WAY FORWARD

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ABSTRACT

Music is said to be useful to students in four major areas: success in society, in school, in developing intelligence, and in life. It is advocated that music be included to some extent in all school curricula. The aim of the music, dance and drama sections of the Creative Arts syllabus under the 2007 Education Reforms is to strengthen social identity and discover the cultural heritage as well as unify the nation. This is because all Ghanaian pupils are to be exposed to the music and dance cultures of the major ethnic groups in the country. What remains an issue is a working philosophy for the strengthening of the social identity. This paper discusses issues that militate against music education in Ghana taking into consideration the historical perspectives of music education, what the government of Ghana has laid down as a policy or philosophy of music education in Ghana, teacher preparation, use of technology in delivering learning activities, thus, providing students with richer and more personalized learning experiences and the way forward.

Keywords: Apprenticeship, Philosophy, Context, Content, Connection, Creativity, Syllabus, African/Western Music, Indigenous

1. Introduction

It is said that we live in a society where music is intimately intertwined with our day to day life. Music and dance starts from the time a child is born to the time of death. But it takes an effort to unlock the passion that helps certain individuals to connect it to life itself and thereby see its creative potentiality. Research has shown that one-year-old babies who participate in interactive music classes with their parents smile more, communicate better and show earlier and more sophisticated brain responses to music McMaster University (2012, May 9) Music can unify a people almost instantaneously, etc. In Ghana, there are two main ways through which we deliberately unlock the gift of music in people:

- Apprenticeship
- Formal Education

Apprenticeship was very much seen among the traditional music and dance band music cultures where the mode of knowledge transmission was mainly done through long periods of observation or apprenticeship. Today, social change has affected these trends in significant ways. There are less and less traditional music groups because our culture has become attuned to the loud sound culture of the West. We pay less attention to our own music by way of promotion; so it appears to be more and more inferior. We do not teach or learn our own music as a way of building the basis of musicality. Rather, we keep juggling our traditional music with that of the West, whereas the Western pupil begins clearly with his or her music and then branch into other world types. (This particular point is raised to speak to music specialization. For instance, how many concert pianists do we have in Ghana? And at which age did they begin their process of "self-study?") Live highlife
Music and concert parties are also becoming increasingly obsolete because of the introduction of computer-application-based music culture in which we have sharply been ushered in our generation.

Music education is a field of study related to the teaching and learning of music which aims among other things to train or prepare people for the art of living and life – long expression. It is indeed among the few subjects in schools, which deals with both the affective, cognitive and psychomotor domains. In every nation, the incorporation of music training from preschool to colleges of education is common because music is considered a fundamental component of human culture and behaviour (Manford, 1993 pp. 1)

2. Historical perspectives of Music Education in Ghana

Even though Reindorf (1895 pp. 282) has stated that formal schools were established in 1868 by the missionaries, Amuah (2015) contends that there is no historical record of the exact date when formal music education commenced in Ghana, however, evidence suggests that it included the teaching of singing in a manner analogous to existing practice in Europe, this being in the 19th century. Early European Music teachers taught the songs they brought with them from Europe. The immediate purpose being to train Africans to teach simple hymns and songs to the various church choirs which had begun to emerge. In fact the teaching and learning of traditional music was de-emphasized because it was considered not suitable for use both in church and in the schools.

Traditional music predates formal music education in Ghana with great influence on the people. Ellis (1887 pp. 325) has argued that music is amongst the Tshi – speaking tribes limited to airs possessing an obvious rhythm. It is, in fact, music in infancy. This is to say that before the advent of formal Western music education in Ghana traditional music appreciation had already taken centre stage in the communities. Ellis contends that in the first case the priests have early seen its influence, and have applied it to their own purposes; chiefs and rulers utilize it in the second case; and the youth in the town and villages in the third, when the drums sound for moonlight dances. It is clear that as orchestral instruments played major roles in Western music, drum orchestra of different sizes and shapes also were used for varied purposes in Ghanaian traditional music.

What is clear, however, is the fact that in almost all the missionary schools singing became an integral part of the school curriculum. The accentuation was on the Singing of hymns and British patriotic songs, and these were supposed to satisfy the needs of the church. The denomination that established the schools encouraged pupils enrolled to study the hymns and songs intended to be used in church.

The post independent era saw a rapid expansion in the educational system in Ghana. Besides the Accelerated Development Plan of 1951 ushering in a proliferation of primary schools in Ghana there was also the development of a new curriculum to respond to the needs and aspirations of the emerging new nation. However, there was no significant change in the structure of music teaching and learning in the primary school for the simple reason that the influence of the missionaries in the area of music education in the primary schools was so strong – the focus of music education being singing of English hymns and patriotic songs. In fact there was the lack of connecting music to all other disciplines as the exemplified discipline that made difficult things plain. Let us note that this is why its emphasis was strong in the educational structure of the colonialist. Many teachers were able to play the harmonium or teach choirs after training college because they were trained to do so for their denominations.
The Ministry of Education issued three syllabuses for four – year and post – secondary training colleges in the 1970’s in an attempt to change the direction music was going. These were: (Evans, 1975)

i. Suggested music syllabus for four – year teacher training colleges.


Interestingly, these syllabi focused on the teaching and learning of rudiment of Western music theory where upon music tutors had no choice than to resort to the teaching of rudiments of the theory western music. The content of the materials studied had no applicability for the student – teacher in so far as the teaching of music in elementary school was concerned. For instance, in all the syllabuses, students were required to recall harmonic intervals of major and minor 2nds and 3rds, perfect 4ths among others as heard from a piano or any harmonic instrument which in many cases are not even available. So the question may be asked: of what relevance were these aural cultures to the teaching of music in any primary one class.

In this part of our world one would have expected to see some African musical examples in the curriculum material, but none of the syllabuses listed above had sections that dealt with pedagogical strategies for the teaching of African music and for many years this has been the norm.

In spite of that the music curriculum in the training colleges, as well as that of the now basic schools, was unresponsive to the call to the cultural reawakening. Amuah, Adum-Attah, Arthur (2001, pp 118) have noted that only cosmetic additions of African indigenous musical practices were provided in the curriculum of both elementary school and teacher training college music programmes. African music was treated as a mere appendage to an existing Western curriculum. Even today one is likely to observe the performance of African music traditional drumming and Dancing conducted outside of the school curriculum. The study of African indigenous performing arts is thus considered an extra-curricular activity meant for a few selected students and pupils who perform a couple of dance patterns during festivities like Speech and Prize Giving Days and Open days after which rehearsals cease to exist.

Amuah (ibid) have hinted that the Cultural Studies Syllabus (1993) made no provision for the study of pedagogical approaches to the teaching of music in Ghanaian basic schools. In fact, the content of the syllabus reflected lack of commitment on the part of the designers toward the perpetuation of African music among school children. The need for a comprehensive programme focusing on the adequate preparation of teachers – in – training to enable them run the gauntlet of executing African performing arts programme in Ghanaian primary schools cannot be over emphasised.

2.1 Philosophy of Music Education in Ghana

Okanta (1997 pp. 2) has argued that a philosophy of the curriculum will help to determine what goes into the curriculum. He contends that a philosophy of education thus deals with values; what is important; what all students must know; what will make students into whole, all-rounded adults; what is basic to learning; as well as the nature of what is to be learned. These two words, “value” and “nature”, could guide our quest for a national philosophy of music education.

It is very excruciating to say that policy makers, education officers, politicians among others do not exhibit understanding of the most important issues in music education which is the value of systematic and successful music learning in the life of a person, especially our children and the young people. Philosophy and education are inseparable in any society. All societies, succeeding generations, whether advanced or not, are handed down some facts, information, skills, attitudes
and values. Why, how and what the society transmits is based on philosophy. Reimer (1989 pp. 7) has emphasised that philosophy of music education serves as a guide for daily professional decisions and choices. Without clear understanding of the content, teachers’ decisions and choices are rather idiosyncratic. The deeper the understanding, the more consistent, the more focused, the more effective the teacher’s choices. Once a teacher, one needs a systematic statement (or a set of philosophies) which clearly defines the nature and value of music. It is clear that a set of principles or a philosophy may change as the society grows, and people may differ in their ideology or opinions about music education. But as music teachers, we need a philosophy to constantly remind us of Why, how and what the society requires of us.

2.2 Relationship between theory and what is on the street
A report from the world conference on “Building creative capacities for the 21st century” (2006) states in part that one of the obstacles that arts education faces is that it is often taught theoretically at the primary level, and as elective subjects in secondary schools. Artistic practices are based on children’s artistic expressions, which are the foundations for creativity, problem solving and critical thinking. The challenges for implementing arts education in Asia include a lack of teacher training, resources and a solid government plan. Moreover, “western” models, which are used in most Asian countries, do not take into consideration Asian traditional cultures, which are not separated from everyday life, and are performed with local materials in a more playful atmosphere outside of formal educational settings, so that children can develop their skills of observation, expression and imagination.

I am introducing an assessment tool for looking at the relationship between theory and what is on the street. It is called the triple "C": Context, Content, and Connection.

The question is what is the Ghanaian musical world context like? For instance, what are the percentages in terms of music heard on radios and on the streets – Traditional, Concert Band, Classical, Hymns, Hip Life, Rap, Gospel among others. So the area of context seeks an understanding of what is actually happening on the ground. It simply suggests that, as course designers or teachers, we must acquaint ourselves with where the student/pupil is. Not necessarily that the student's understanding dictating the course of study, but in order that an effective communication, helpful examples can happen. The advocacy here is an understanding of music education that begins with a clear understanding and appreciation of where the pupil is in terms of music appreciation. For instance, if we are able to know that a child's love and or appreciation for "Kofi Kinaata" is so strong, we may find a connection between the hip hop artist and Mozart, if that were what we were teaching the whole month. So the beauty of "the triple C" is that it operates in a cascade format: which means when one part is properly established, it opens the way for the next to be set as well. A genuine understanding of the child's context then informs the content. That means even if children's musical types and artists are not mentioned in syllabus, the understanding of context helps to take an effectively informed approach that communicates deeply with the pupil. This is an already established educational priority called "teaching from the known to the unknown”.

2.3 Context
How knowledgeable or in tuned are we with the reality of our society, where music is concerned?
  i. For example, are the characters in our syllabus (as representative of music creation, such as Beethoven, Koo Nimo, etc) those whose music are often played or heard by our students?
ii. How knowledgeable are our music educators in the music that is mostly heard on the streets and in town?
iii. Who is the 21st century Ghanaian child and what does he or she want from music and what does music do in his or her life?

2.4 Content
How do we plan or adjust to the syllabus to respond to our knowledge of our "Context"?

i. How do we connect Mozart to Okomfour Kwaadei? How do we sort out the pupil's Africaness from his or adherence and love for hip hop?
ii. Is our approach to music education one that strives on "being the giver" instead of "dialogic"? I say all this mindful of the fact that the West still practices well-structured syllabus in which classical composers are studied. But theirs become a sweet continuation because of the foundation they lay from childhood.
iii. How much can we make of the time allocated to music on our syllabi?
   Our content must be friendly to the form of reality held by pupil.

2.5 Connection
Let me use the following scenarios to illustrate the point of "Connection" as used in this “theoretical framework”.

Scenario one
Teacher: Good afternoon, Class. Mr. John Abam. I'm your new music teacher. Our topic today is Melody.
Pupil: Sir, can't we learn something more fun?
Teacher: Like what?
Pupil: like watching a nice American movie.
Teacher: (frustrated) Leave my class immediately! Report yourself to the head teacher.

Scenario two.
Teacher: Good afternoon, Class. Mr. John Abam. I'm your new music teacher. Our topic today is Melody.
Pupil: Sir, can't we do something more fun?
Teacher: Like what?
Pupil: like watching a nice American movie.
Teacher: (frustrated) Leave my class immediately! Report yourself to the head teacher.

Scenario three.
Teacher: Good afternoon, Class. My name is Mr. Arthur. I'm your new music teacher. Our topic today is Melody.
Pupil: Sir, can't we do something more fun?
Teacher: Like what?
Pupil: like watching a nice American movie.
Teacher: what is your favourite movie?
Pupil: Air force One.
Teacher: I'm going to start my topic today.
When you go home, listen to the music in the movie and come to describe how you relate to it after our discussion today.
Connection, for me is meeting the pupil where they are. It does not mean compromising authority. It means finding a point of practicable connection. Connection is being able to link student to
music. The syllabi will continue to be structured as we have it. But, how often do we make it work from a realistic point of view?

Music education is not simply performing music by playing instruments or singing in a choir. So also is it not just lecturing on facts and information about music or other such ways of giving musical concepts abstractly. Instead, music education flows from the experiencing of music, and each student given the opportunity to discover personally, the fundamental structures or principles of the musical art through interaction with a variety of music.

2.6 Teacher Preparation – Colleges of Education

Courses in music education have been poorly taught more often than they have been well taught. Bodegraven (1946 pp 28 – 29). Bodegraven further stated that four years is a short time in which to prepare a person for a career in music education. This wonderful expression fits our situation here in Ghana in that Ghana’s Colleges of Education music and dance is taught in two semesters out of six in three years that a student has to spend in the college. It is compulsory for all colleges of education students to take music and dance in the first semester of the first year. In what may be described as the content, the student is taught elements of music, Fundamentals of Dance and Drama, Fundamentals of Labanotation, Traditional ensembles, music and dance in Ghana and biographies of some Ghanaians in the arts.

In the second year, second semester, whether the student is sufficiently grounded in the course or not those interested, and having chosen it as an elective course would then be taken through some aspects of methodology ostensibly to prepare them as music and dance teachers. So the students go out there in the third year with a deficient exposure to both teaching and learning of music and dance to practice teaching what they do not understand.

According to Parr (1999 pp. 59) becoming a teacher requires making the shift from procedural knowledge, or learning how and what to do, to propositional knowledge, or understanding why something is done and the ability to make procedural judgments. Many of the problems we face are quite possible of solution provided we focus our attention on them and take positive action to strengthen obvious weaknesses. To do this, Performing Arts Teachers Association of Ghana (PATAG) must inspire its members particularly those in the colleges of education to reorganize their work so as to make the training of public school music teachers their chief function.

2.7 Use of Technology in delivering musical learning activities

Today our lives are increasingly interwoven with digital technologies. Technological literacy for students should be a major concern of every government. The Ministry of Education as well as other agencies which focus on school reform should highlight the importance of technology to ensure that students have the knowledge and skills essential for successful living, thereby, setting national standards in technology for students, teachers, and school administrators.

Music educators need to be proficient and knowledgeable concerning technological changes and advancements and be prepared to use all appropriate tools in advancing music study while recognizing the importance of people coming together to make and share music (Madsen, 2000, pp. 219)

An analysis of 40 years of educational research that has examined the differences between traditional and technology enabled instruction, Tamim, Bernard, Borokhovski, Abrami, and Schmid (2011) found a small to moderate increase in achievement for students who used technology. However teachers in all disciplines appear to be challenged when attempting to incorporate technology into student learning experiences, citing a lack of computers, inadequate
technical support, and insufficient professional development as barriers to its integration (National Education Association, 2008).

Colleges of Education that train the country’s basic school teachers face serious problems when we talk of the use of technology in delivering musical learning activities: knowing very well that advances in digital technology enhance student's ability to create and analyse music. In deed the resources are either non-available or inadequate – not even a piano. If you see a nice Yamaha table-top organ in any of the Colleges of Education it is not for teaching purposes but religious because it belongs to the chaplaincy board. Even though African music and dance are part of the curriculum, drums and other resources are hardly available to facilitate musical learning. One may only find a small CD player, belonging to the teacher, which he/she uses to play back musical samples sent in by the examining body for students to study and pass their examinations.

3. The Way Forward
To accept that prospective teachers need to be able to see more, hear more, and sense more suggests that they should engage in activities that help them become more observant, especially musically observant, and learn how to pick up on non-verbal cues.

Again, (Amuah, 1997 pp.2) has argued that the perpetuation and development of indigenous African music is, to a greater extent, the responsibility of the educational system. To avoid a total eclipse of Africa’s rich musical heritage, there is the need for a formalised programme for the study of indigenous African musical practices at all levels of the educational system. The ultimate goal of this programme is to expose every Ghanaian child to the fundamentals of the African performing arts. The teacher’s role toward the achievement of this goal cannot be overemphasised.

The history of music education in the United States is integrally linked to general educational policies and initiatives, as well as American culture and society. Rationales for why music is an important component of students’ education have utilized utilitarian, aesthetic, and paraxial arguments, often attempting to connect the goals of music learning with the educational priorities of the day. In the “data driven,” high stakes testing milieu of today’s educational reform movement, music educators find themselves having to defend not only music programs, but also the teaching profession in general. Ghana is still in search of philosophy of music education that will guide teaching and learning. It is unfortunate that the importance of music education has not gained the attention of Ghana’s policy makers. To make music and dance more meaningful, the government of Ghana should desist from resorting to superficial reasons for music’s inclusion or otherwise in our school system. Again, the Performing Arts Teachers Association of Ghana (PATAG) should utilize Ghana’s most successful Ghanaian music scholar and the icon of African Music – Prof. Nketia in the fight for appropriate recognition we are seeking for. That music and dance should be made compulsory, equal opportunities must be offered all children of school going age to participate in musical activities that include creating (composition), performing, observing and listening to music. As Karl Gehrkens, former president of the Music Supervisors National Conference, stated in 1923, “Music for every child; every child for music.”

Also, the leadership of the music education in the country should set some standards for the attainment of skills in music at the different levels of education particularly colleges of education and the basic schools. There should also be journals that carry the voices as well as research findings of music educators.
Another concern of mine is the need to institute bi-annual Festival of Music and Arts for tertiary institutions at which awards can be made to talented and promising students as well as excellence in research into traditional music and arts. The hosting of this festival will rotate among the universities every two years. The Awards can be made in the names of Dr. Ephraim Amu and Prof Nketsiah the two doyens of African music.

4. References:
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