



MUSICAL PROCESSES IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM

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Abstract:

Music is a strand of the Creative Art curriculum content for Ghanaian primary schools. Composition, performance and listening forms part of the methods or strategies that are supposed to be used to teach this art form in the classroom. Elsewhere, it is argued that these three musical processes constitute the starting point of music activities in the classroom. Having some knowledge and practical insight of each of these processes is therefore very significant for the teacher's professional practice in the music classroom. This article attempts to describe these processes and highlights some activities that can serve as a guide for the teacher to engage pupils in music activities under each of these three interrelated activities for effective musical learning and experiences.

Keywords: music, composition, performance, listening, teaching, primary school, Ghana

1. Introduction

Music is a compulsory study area which is taught as part of the Creative Arts curriculum content in Ghanaian primary schools (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NaCCA] of Ghana's Ministry of Education, 2019). As suggested in the curriculum document (the syllabus) that guides the teaching of the subject, all teaching methodologies and strategies that should be applied during teaching or lesson presentations in the music classroom should include composition, performance and listening (Amuah & Adum-Attah, 2016; NaCCA, 2019; Mills, 1995). According to Isbell and Raines (2003), music is learned through musical behaviours of singing, playing of musical instruments, movement, creating, and listening. Spodek and Saracho (1994) also state that, "*music programmes for the early years of school generally consist of singing, playing simple instruments, listening, and creative movement*" (p. 473). This highlights the

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importance of emphasising composition, performance and listening in teaching process in the music classroom. The three interrelated musical processes or activities through which people participate and engage in music (Willoughby, 1996) constitute some of the bases of techniques of teaching music in the primary school.

Composition, performance and listening are interrelated processes and activities in the sense that when composing, the ideas are tried out by performing, while making judgement about the ideas being included in the composition results in listening (Mills, 1995). Willoughby (1996) states that “*when music is improvised, it is simultaneously created, performed, and listened to by the performer*” (p. 15). As children engage in spontaneous musical play, they compose through improvisation within the context of performance, and listen to what is being performed. Amuah and Adum-Attah (2016) have noted that in *Akan* (one of the Ghanaian tribes) story-telling sessions, the narrator sings *mmoguo* (a musical interlude) and improvised rhythmic accompaniment to the *mmoguo* on the *donno* (hour glass drum) while participants listen and respond in chorus. This represents the integrated nature of composition, performance, and listening in musical learning and experiences. In effect, engaging in one of these musical processes triggers a response in one or both of the other two.

Mills (1995) consider composition, performance and listening as the starting points of musical activities in the classroom. This paper attempts to highlight some activities that can be performed under each of these three interrelated musical processes within the Ghanaian context and also serves as guide for the classroom teacher to provide musical learning experiences to pupils.

2. Composition

Composition is the process of creating music (Mills, 1995). According to Willoughby (1996, p. 15), it is the process of “*choosing elements of sound and organising them in some way to achieve a desired result: the creator’s own piece of music*” and “*the process may be spontaneous and immediate or painstakingly deliberate*” (p. 16). Amuah, Adum-Attah and Arthur (2002) define composition as “*causing into existence a new piece of music*” (p. 121). It is an activity that develops children’s creative skills and sharpens their perceptive powers, hence supporting the development of their aesthetic sensitivity (Amuah & Adum-Attah, 2016). Mills (1995) emphasised the existence of endless opportunities in the classroom for nurturing pupils’ creative skills through music composition without necessarily adult interference. Indeed, opportunities for composing emerge naturally as children are engaged in music activities on the playground (Countryman, 2014; Dzansi, 2004). Here, it is important for the teacher to identify learners’ needs and abilities in order to provide a developmentally appropriate environment to support their sound exploration activities both individually and in groups (Mills, 1995).

2.1 Implication of Teaching Composition in the Classroom

As opposed to Western model, experience suggests that indigenous Ghanaian music compositions are “*product of society and ownership as such is seldom an important*

consideration" (Strumpf et al., 2003). These same writers continued: "*it is also common knowledge that particular individuals or group of individuals in a community may initiate the nucleus of an idea, which may consist of the basic lyrics and tune*" (p. 131). This signifies a collaborative effort during the compositional process where each participant or a collaborator makes a significant input to achieve an acceptable product. Transferring this artistic behaviour to the classroom may contribute significantly to aid the teacher to provide effective musical learning experiences to pupils.

Guiding pupils to create rhythmic patterns to accompany indigenous songs and dances, creating of rhythms using available traditional musical instruments such as *donno* (a membranophone) and *frikyiwa* (an idiophone), and setting the created musical product to a poem, and improvisation on a rhythmic phrase played by peers are some composition activities that can be carried out in the primary schools (Amuah & Adum-Attah, 2016). Other activities through which the teacher can guide pupils to develop their compositional skills include imitating, practice and extending rhythmic patterns clapped by the teacher, exploration of sound in the environment, and improvising on various sound patterns (Amuah & Adum-Attah, 2016; Amuah et al., 2002). Specifically, the teacher may organise the class in groups of between four to six pupils each. Each group is then allowed a specified period of time to compose a song for presentation to the whole class for peer critique. In upper classes, each learner may be tasked to describe the process used to achieve the final product (song) through writing for portfolio assessment (Amuah et al., 2002).

3. Performing

Performance is the interpretation of created music (Mills, 1995; Willoughby, 1996). It is the reception of instruction from the composer (Mills, 1995) which is exhibited through improvisation but consists of intentional and unintentional creative elements (Willoughby, 1996). This signifies composition within the context of performance.

Teaching performance seemed to be the most preferred activity among teachers (Ampomah, 2001; Mill, 1995). Since providing learning experiences to pupils proceeds from known to unknown (Cohen, Manion, Morrison & Wyse, 2010; Flolu & Amuah, 2003), musical materials selected for pupil's performance activities may be chosen from his or her (pupil) immediate environment, and should be graded according to length, difficulty and complexity (Amuah & Adum-Attah, 2016). Again, Flolu and Amuah (2003) explained that the playing of musical instruments in the classroom should begin with what pupils usually play before extending to unknown materials. Indeed, performance provides opportunity for pupils to experience music practically and this contributes to "*the training and development of the finer muscles of*" (Amuah & Adum-Attah, 2016, p. 104) their body, especially when the performance consists of playing of musical instruments. Again, Amuah and Adum-Attah (2016) note that "*when pupils are able to play a few patterns on their instruments they are ready to play as an ensemble*" (p. 100). This can give pupils the confidence and motivate them to venture into performance of varieties of music that contributes to the development of their creative skills.

3.1 Implication of Teaching Performance in the classroom

In the primary school classroom, music performances consist of singing, movement in response to rhythmic patterns being created, and playing of musical instruments (Amuah & Adum-Attah, 2016; NaCCA, 2019; Mills, 1995; Spodek & Saracho, 1994;). Some musical activities that can contribute to pupils performance skills include:

- Playing of time lines of selected indigenous musical types
- Playing of supporting drums of selected indigenous musical types
- Playing of short and simple tunes on the bamboo flute
- Singing of familiar songs in groups, pairs or individuals
- Singing of their (pupils) own composed songs
- Playing of their (pupils) own composed songs on available musical instruments
- Playing their (pupils) own composed rhythmic patterns on indigenous drums
- Playing of known melodies and rhythms to accompany their (pupils) singing (Amuah & Adum-Attah, 2016; Amuah et al., 2002).

4. Listening

Active engagement in music is underpinned by listening (Mills, 1995). Majority of people are listeners/consumers rather than creators or performers (Willoughby, 1996). This make listening a very essential activity in the experience of music and therefore an indispensable factor to be considered in the development of pupils perceptual skills (Amuah & Adum-Attah, 2016) and their *“ability to perceive the expressive qualities of music, including African music”* (Amuah, et al., 2002, p. 121).

Amuah and Adum-Attah (2016) define listening as *“the reception of information through the sense of hearing”* (p. 109). Willoughby (1996) opines that *“listening requires commitment, energy, and a desire to become involved in a personal and intense way with music”* (p. 16). In this sense, listening depends on concentrated effort. As a consequence, the teacher is required to plan developmentally appropriate musical activities that will engage pupils in purposeful listening (Mills, 1995) of varieties of art, indigenous and popular music. Such experiences for pupils enhance their aural acuity (Amuah & Adum-Attah, 2016) which is very necessary for effective listening to music.

4.1 Implication of Teaching Listening in the Classroom

It is assumed that majority of primary school pupils will eventually end up as music consumers or listeners rather than composers and performers (Amuah & Adum-Attah, 2016). Teaching listening is therefore very critical for the development of pupils' perceptual and listening skills. According to Amuah and Adum-Attah (2016) and Amuah et al., (2002, p. 77), some classroom activities that can contribute to the development of pupils listening skills include:

- Listening to instrumental music and identifying the characteristic tone colours heard
- Listening to instrumental music and singing the tune heard

- Listening to pieces of music and clapping the rhythmic patterns of excerpts from the music
- Listening to pieces of music and singing portions or excerpts of it
- Listening to pieces of music and identifying the form and structure of the music
- Listening to pieces of music and identifying instruments used in performing the music
- Listening to drum music and describe the variations that occurred
- Listening to pieces of music and identifying elements of sounds such as high and low (pitch), loud and soft (volume), slow and fast (tempo), light and thick (texture), short and long (rhythm)
- Listening to a variety of songs and describe the changes in dynamics (Amuah & Adum-Attah, 2016; Amuah et al., 2002).

5. Challenges

Evidence suggests that a number of teachers feel uncomfortable teaching composition as part of music lessons. In his causal comparative research study, Ampomah (2001) found that majority of both pre-service music teachers and practicing teachers preferred teaching performance to composition *“because it gives them enjoyment and engages their participation”* (p. 13). Mills has identified a similar challenge when she states that *“music in school traditionally has stressed performing and listening at the expense of composition”* (1995, p. 24). This calls to question the perception some teachers hold about the teaching of composition as part of music experience for pupils in the classroom.

The use of teaching and learning materials, especially musical instruments such as *atumpan, kwadum, donno* (Ghanaian indigenous membranophones), *frikyiwa, dawuro, trowa* (Ghanaian indigenous idiophones), *atenteben, odurogya, mmenson* (Ghanaian indigenous aerophones), *seprewa, goje, benta* (Ghanaian indigenous chordophones) and other related musical instruments play a very critical role in teaching music in the primary school. Evidence suggests that these materials are not readily available for teaching and learning purposes in the schools (see Adjepong, 2018), resulting in ineffective music education.

6. Recommendation

Nzewi (2003) explained that learning is better achieved through exploration and practical engagement in the phenomenon being studied. He further states: *“theoretical knowledge is experienced in practice and not in passive reflection of content”* (Nzewi, 2003, p. 14). This is an acknowledgement of the importance of achieving knowledge, skills and understanding by means of practical experience. It is suggested that music education courses for pre-service primary school teachers should emphasise more practical activities and experiences, especially in composition for these future teachers to acquire the necessary confidence and competence to enable them provide effective learning experiences to pupils.

In-service training workshops for primary school teachers for effective teaching of music should be considered as one of the priority policies of Ghana's Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service. This will provide opportunity for teachers to gain further and improved competencies in teaching the subject.

Provision of adequate and necessary teaching and learning materials, especially musical instruments to the primary schools should be considered. Availability of various types, kinds and shapes of these instruments will create a developmentally appropriate learning environment and opportunities for pupils to engage effectively in the music processes of composition, performance and listening.

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