ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO TEACHING MUSIC IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

**John Kofi Brewu[1],
Benjamin Adjepong[2i]**
[1]Rev, Akrokerri College of Education,
Akrokerri, Ghana
[2]Wesley College of Education,
Kumasi, Ghana

Abstract:
Music contributes significantly to pupils' growth and development. They interact and respond to it in a way that can form the foundation to consolidate their skills and knowledge in this art form. Research indicates that a good number of classroom teachers who are tasked to provide learning experiences in music to pupils consider themselves as having inadequate education to do so, thereby resulting in ineffective music education in the primary schools. The purpose of this study was therefore to explore alternative approach available to teachers for providing effective learning experiences in music to pupils in a primary school in Ghana. The result suggests that some teachers can draw on pupils' relevant experiences in music to inform their teaching. However, there is the need to organise in-service training workshops for these primary school teachers in the area of identification of alternate approaches in teaching music.

Keywords: alternative opportunities, teaching music, ICT, primary school, Ghana

1. Introduction

The contribution of music education to pupil's growth and development is well documented (Dzansi, 2002, 2004; Essa, 2003; Gardner, 2011; Levinowitz, 1998; Mayesky, 2002). Boamajeh and Ohene-Okanta (2000) are of the view that, educating pupils without music results in an incomplete education. Although some teachers express lack of adequate knowledge and skills to teach music (Rautiainen, 2015; Sarfo & Adusei, 2015; Stunell, 2010), it is justified to teach the subject in primary school irrespective of the level of the teacher's knowledge, skills and understanding in the subject.

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[i] Correspondence: email ben.adjepong@yahoo.com

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Pupils interact with music in various ways which presents opportunity for teachers to help them (pupils) learn effectively. In the light of teachers' limited knowledge and skills to teach, this study concerns the exploration of alternative approaches available to primary school teachers for guiding learning experiences in music to pupils in Ghana. Findings will help primary school teachers to identify alternative strategies of providing learning experiences in music to pupils. It will also contribute to the existing knowledge of music education in primary schools.

Pupils acquire musical experiences through active participation in play (Manford, 1996; Spodek & Saracho, 1994). On the playground, they engage in spontaneous singing, clapping, dancing and playing of musical instruments (Countryman, 2014; Dzansi, 2002) which are embedded with many experiences that are very significant to classroom music education (Dzansi, 2004). Vincente-Nicolas and Ruair (2014) have identified through their study that pupils prefer playing musical instruments to reading and writing music. This is a confirmation of their passion for practical participating in this art form.

The inquiring nature of pupils and the revelations of their musical world bring to light how they could be engaged in the classroom. It presents an opportunity for teachers to *"adopt the play method of music performance to achieve music literacy in their classrooms"* (Dzansi 2004, p. 90). Dzansi explains further that teachers could allow their pupils to be co-teachers by inviting some of them to demonstrate their musical skills in the classroom for their peers to observe and imitate just as it happens in the playground. Indeed respecting, valuing and taking into consideration what learners do to make meaning out of their musical experiences can provide an insight for the teacher to guide pupil's learning in music (Cape, 2014). As noted by Mills (1995), teaching music in the primary school is about pupils learning music and not teachers performing for them (pupils). Again, music education is for both teachers and pupils and, therefore, *"the teaching skills that teachers use to facilitate children's learning in mathematics, English, and so on can be applied to music too"* (Mills 1995, p. 4-5). It is, therefore, important for primary school teachers to focus on what they can do by considering the teaching of music as the teaching of any other curriculum subject through the application of their general knowledge and skills of principles of teaching.

The advent of information and communication technology (ICT), especially the internet, social media, including television, radio, and various electronic devices such as the computer and the mobile phone provides a range of mediums and opportunities for teachers to provide appropriate musical learning experiences to their pupils (Ko & Chou, 2014). The literature suggests that application of ICT in the classroom enhances teaching and learning (Acker, Nyland & Niland, 2015; Buabeng-Andoh, 2012; Cohen, Manion, Morrison & Wyse, 2010). In discussing the use of ICT in teaching and learning, Sutherland (2004) describes how learners use various music software programmes to compose contemporary musical styles that are within their social and cultural lives during their out of school experiences. Such learners may come to the classroom with a great deal of musical knowledge, skills and awareness that sometimes may exceed their teacher's knowledge in that particular area. This provides an opportunity for teachers to draw on

their pupils' expertise to enhance teaching and learning of music in the classroom by allowing them to be co-teachers as suggested by Dzansi.

2. The Method

A semi-structured interview was adopted to collect data in the month of November, 2018. Smith and Osborn (2008) consider semi-structure interview as a flexible data collection tool which allow investigators to engage their research participants for information. The purposive sampling technique (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003) was used to select a primary school teacher from the city of Kumasi, Ghana to share her opinion about the phenomenon being studied. This participant agreed to take part in this study after studying the participant information sheet. She was assured of confidentiality and anonymity of any information she will provide, and signed a consent form to that effect. Data was transcribed verbatim in Microsoft Word and was validated by the informant as a true reflection of her narration. Multiple readings were done with reference to the aim of this study and the following interview question to come out with the findings.

Q1: Apart from your competency in teaching, what other strategies have you identified in helping you to guide your pupils learning in music?

A non-participant observation was also used to observe two thirty minutes music lessons during the period of the study. The primary aim was to gain a general impression and a feel about music activities in the selected research site.

3. Findings and Discussion

Several research findings suggest that generalist teachers lack adequate confidence and competence to teach music (de Vries, 2011; Stunell, 2010; Webb, 2016; Welch & Henley, 2014) primarily due to inadequate training to teach the subject (Ampeh, 2011; de Vries, 2013; Russell-Bowie, 2009). It is expected that teachers who perceive themselves as having inadequate education to teach music identify other alternative approaches available to be employed to provide learning experiences to pupils. The teacher participant of this study was asked to share her opinion on this issue and a direct quote from her narration which reflects the theme of this study is presented below:

> *"I know my pupils are very curious and they apply this curiosity in their musical play during break times and even at home. In fact, I consider this as an opportunity which can aid my classroom practices and in most cases I create space for them to display their self-acquired musical skills during music lessons in the classroom. Indeed, sometimes, I become marvelled at their display in knowledge and skills in performing some contemporary songs with the dance accompaniment. So, I draw on their expertise in that direction to aid teaching and learning. I allow them to perform such musical forms in my classroom and I have realised that whenever I adopt this strategy, my classroom becomes very lively and interesting. During such activities, almost all of them take active part in the lesson which I consider as very good."*

This teacher's actions and practices are in line with the thinking of Dzansi (2004) which explains that pupils experiences gained through informal music learning in the playground are very significant for classroom music education and therefore teachers should allow their pupils to become co-teachers to boost teaching and learning music. Countryman (2014) is of the view that "*it is important to progress from having children imitate the teacher's rhythmic movements to providing children with regular opportunities to inaugurate their own rhythmic responses and to respond to peers*" (p. 15). Allowing pupils who seemed to be musically competent the opportunity to display their skills in the classroom "*provide[s] powerful modelling for their classmates*" (Countryman 2014, p. 15). These pedagogical strategies will in no doubt "*maximise children's chances of success at participating in and initiating musical play*" (Countryman 2014, p. 15).

4. Recommendations

This study has shown that some teachers can identify the musical potential inherent in pupils and can adopt strategies to utilise this potential in the classroom to enhance teaching and learning. However, as already indicated in the literature section of this article, a number of primary school teachers consider themselves as 'unmusical' to teach music. It is therefore suggested that the Ghana Ministry of Education through the Ghana Education Service organise workshops to coach teachers as to how to identify alternative approaches available that can help them to teach music irrespective of their level of competence in the subject.

The advent of technology and the development of various teaching software make it imperative to assist teachers in terms of application of these innovations in their professional practice. Almost three decades ago, Moore (1992) identified that students are "*greater users of technology outside school than they are during the school day*" (p. 43). Choi and Piro (2009) are also of the view that "*modern youth*" (p. 32) are more users of technology than "*previous generations*" (p. 32). Waddell and Williamon (2019) state that "millions of instructional music videos can be found via online portals such as YouTube" (p. 2). Observations made during teaching and learning sessions of this study revealed that ICT was not being fully employed to aid teaching and learning in the music classroom. The impression created by this researcher is that some teachers lack adequate knowledge in using technology to teach music. Based on this, there is an urgent need to consider the integration of ICT in the Performing Arts courses in the Colleges of Education in Ghana to equip pre-service teachers with the necessary skills to be able to apply these skills in their future music classrooms.

De Vries (2017, p. 20) state that "*informal networks such as Facebook groups have the potential of allowing novice teachers of music to interact and support each other and draw on the expertise of more experienced teachers of music.*" Indeed, this constitutes another dimension within the context of using ICT in teaching music. Teachers should be encouraged to link up with such groups with the purpose professional development in teaching music to improve upon music education in the primary schools.

Availability of various ready-made music software packages that allow teachers to provide listening and observing experiences to learners also require very minimal programme knowledge on the part of teachers. With a computer and any sound output equipment, learners working in groups, pairs or individually can explore, imitate and practice musical skills through listening and observing various music performance style. Primary school authorities should priorities the provision of such teaching and learning resources to aid music education in the classrooms.

Again, there are various appropriate musical programmes for pupils that are aired and telecast on various radio and television networks in Ghana. Teachers are encouraged to use these to draw pupil's attention to musical elements and concepts to enhance their knowledge, appreciation and understanding of music in their lives.

The internet is a source which allows users access to vast styles, genres and traditions of music that can be used for teaching purposes in the classroom. These materials present a number of opportunities for the teacher to teach music effectively in the classroom to ensure pupil's growth and development. Primary school teachers should be assisted to explore this resource (the internet) to find worthwhile music materials for teaching purposes.

5. Limitation and Further Research

Collection of data for this study was limited to a period of one week from one primary school teacher. Related study in the future should consider the inclusion of more participants and also use a relatively longer period of time for data collection and analysis for a more reliable and better understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

About the Authors
John Kofi Brewu (Rev) is a teacher and music educator at Akrokerri College of Education in Ghana. His research interest is in the area of musical culture in the Ghanaian Society.
Benjamin Adjepong is a teacher and music educator in Wesley College of Education in Ghana. His research focuses on music education in pre-service teacher education and in the primary school.

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