

# **THE PERFORMING ARTS IN GHANAIAN EDUCATION: JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL AND BEYOND**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Throughout history, in all cultures, music has been an integral part of human life. Music researchers have found correlations between music making and some of the deepest workings of the human brain.*

*But Ghana's education policy makers have failed to give music the requisite attention so as to make it attractive for students to choose it as a discipline.*

*The writer intends to draw the attention of education policy makers to the fact that if the performing arts were considered serious school subjects with viable career options some children may opt for them while at the same time serving to preserve our rich culture.*

*In this paper the writer will review relevant documentations that emphasize the importance of music, dance and drama and draw his conclusions based on what both professional and amateur musicians produce in terms of music, dance and drama in the education sector and the music and drama industry in general.*

*It is hoped this paper will redirect educational planners to effect positive changes in the teaching and learning of the performing (creative) arts.*

## **Introduction**

Mursel (1932: 10) argues that music is one of the most universal human needs. The impulse to create and enjoy it exists among people everywhere, and has existed always. He contends that it needs no manner of excuse for its existence. Whether or not it may open vocational doorways, the fact is that those who are indifferent to it are outside the main trend of human experience, and those who love it and cultivate it are in harmony with the common sense of our race. Those who imagine that its hold on mankind can be weakened by transitory business depressions certainly suppose a vain thing. Nothing but a fundamental change in human nature itself can impair its essential appeal. While men remain the beings that they are, they will continue to need music.

Ghanaians are music loving people and are very supportive when it comes to helping their children to learn to play musical instruments privately or in school. In the various universities in Ghana, both private and public, music is offered as a course thereby training all kinds of music related professionals including music teachers ostensibly to come out and teach the younger generation.

The Ghana Education service has a curriculum in place which is well designed for use by the teachers in the country. However, in the basic school, i.e. from primary to the junior high school music is non-examinable. The focus of this paper is to draw the attention of education policy makers to the fact that if the performing arts were considered serious school subjects with viable career options some children may opt for them while at the same time serving to preserve our rich culture.

## **The Importance of Music Education**

Costa-Giomi et al. (1999: 32) conclude that it is clear that music study at any age can increase the quality of life, and those who teach it are handing present and future generations a gift whose value is only beginning to be understood.

Further studies are being piloted on the importance of music education for learners of all ages. A lot of commitment is involved in learning to play a musical instrument: as the saying goes practice makes a man perfect.

To give your children the best opportunities to succeed later in life, it is imperative that you recognize the importance of music education for children as young as toddler age. The benefits, even for the youngest musicians, cannot be denied. It improves:

- Muscle, memory and dexterity
- Hand-eye coordination
- The ability to multi-task
- Diction and language skills

Manford (1989: pp. 2) states that music has a place in any educational enterprise since the aim of education is not merely to train, but to prepare us for the art of living and for life-long expression.

There is an abundance of information about the positive benefits of music lessons for children. For example, in their study known as the Mozart effect (Rauscher, Shaw & Ky, 1993, cited in Rauscher, 2003), the researchers claimed that music had a positive effect on the brain. Schellenberg (2004, p. 320) also concluded that 'music listening and music lessons can lead to short-term and long-term cognitive benefits. The strongest benefits were reported to come from music instruction rather than listening to music (Rauscher & Hinton, 2006).

Teachers and researchers make strong claims for the benefits of learning a music instrument. One Suzuki violin teacher and teacher trainer at Oberlin Conservatory of Music, US, noted that in her experience:

*most children who study music deeply eventually become more confident, more sensitive individuals and they are usually better listeners. Often, they are leaders in other areas, and they almost universally do well in other subjects at school (Costa-Giomi, Price, Rauscher, Schmidt, Shackford & Sims, 1999, p. 31).*

Stewart (2007, p. 1) cautioned that music students often come from privileged homes where parents are 'actively involved in their children's education'. Stewart (2007) notes that music tuition has value outside of music itself but reminded us that 'music's intrinsic values are second to none. We teach a language that begins where all other languages end. ...

Music is a way of knowing. According to Harvard psychologist Gardner (1983) music intelligence is equal in importance to logical - mathematical intelligence, linguistic intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily – kinaesthetic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and intrapersonal intelligence. According to Armstrong (1994, pp.5), "Intelligence is galvanized by participation in some kind of culturally valued activity and that the individual's growth in such an activity follows a developmental pattern; each activity has its own time arising in early childhood."

Manford (1989: pp.2) argues that music can easily be correlated with many school subjects – mathematics, science, language, art and social studies are typical examples. Additionally, he contends that music students learn about the cost of sacrifice necessary for accomplishment; they learn the cost of loyalty and responsibility to a group (choir, band, orchestra, etc.) and they learn of tremendous self-discipline and co-operation required to be a member of any successful ensemble. In short, music should form an important part of the basic curriculum in all schools because it provides a means of self-expression, an emotional outlet, and a means of communication that is unlike any other.

In the case of teaching drama in the classroom Dowdy et al (2011: pp. 1) contend that when teachers harness drama's power with accurate learning outcomes, a precise structure, and appropriate drama techniques, drama activity can become a fertile method for integrating reading, writing, speaking, listening, researching, technology applications, and art experiences.

### **Current Structure of Junior High School Curriculum**

The Basic Education Certificate Examination (herein referred to as BECE) examines students in 10 subject areas namely: Mathematics, English, Social Studies, Integrated Science, Agriculture, a Ghanaian Language, Religious and Moral Education, French, ICT and Pre-technical (comprising Basic Design, Home Economics, Visual Arts, Pre-technical). This is a heavy load of subjects for children aged between 12 and 15 years.

Many years ago, the Ghana Education Service used to have the following subjects: English, Mathematics, History, Geography, Bible Knowledge, PE, Music, Civics, Art, Craft, Hygiene and Nature Study. However, pupils were not externally examined in all of them. The Middle School Leaving Certificate (MSLC) Examinations examined only the subjects English, Mathematics, History and Geography. Thus, children of today have an uphill task passing the BECE. The last MSLC examination was held in 1990 and the JSS started in 1987, so the first BECE was also held in 1990.

Sakyi (2012) in a feature article pasted on the Ghana Web and titled Curriculum Reform of Secondary Education in Ghana – Part 4, dated 16<sup>th</sup> April 2012 intimated:

*I recommend that the subject Entrepreneurship be added to the BECE syllabus because we want graduates who create employment and not those who want to be employed. **I will also recommend that Music be added to their subjects** (emphasis mine). However, if it is possible, the kids should be given the choice to focus on writing examinations in a minimum of 8 subjects, so that only those who are more capable can opt to write in all 10 subjects. After all, in the former O Levels, tertiary institutions required credits in 6 subjects, including English, Mathematics and a Science subject. It is unfair for our present crop of students to be examined in a myriad of subjects.*

This is where I presume the problem of “non-examinability” of music as a subject or vocation emanated from.

## **The Performing Arts and the Junior High School**

In one of Kodály's lectures delivered to his students in December 1940 he reiterated that:

*This perception of the educated man is derived from a paradigm often referred to as "The Greek Triangle." The three primary areas of development which the Greeks believed resulted in a well-educated person included math for the development of a healthy brain, physical education for the development of a healthy body, and music for the development of a healthy sensitivity".*

*"This multi-dimensional model of the educated person would serve well today. Often the primary emphasis in contemporary education concerns the development of a mind which focuses on the "basics" of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Even physical development continues to receive a good amount of attention in the natural course of daily play and in the abundance of opportunities for children to participate in sports. Music, however, appears to be occurring less frequently in the daily lives of families. Music teachers strive to provide effective musical influence, even though there continues to be ever decreasing time allocated to music enrichment. An educational framework that emphasizes mental and physical development while neglecting the musical development of a culture will promote the development of a two dimensional society rather than the three dimensional model proposed by Plato. And as Kodály said, "There is no complete man without music Kodály (1940: pp. 127).*

In the Junior High School, though Music, Dance and Drama exist as a subject with a syllabus and Teacher's Handbook duly commissioned, published and distributed to schools by the Ghana Education Service, yet because the subject is "non-examinable" at the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), it is not being taught in most schools in the country. This indeed is a great disservice to our children and, to some

extent defeats the aim of developing the potential of every child as well as nurturing critical and creative thinking skills in them.

When it became imperative that Anamuah-Mensah Committee Report on the review of the 1987 Educational Reforms is implemented, it became necessary to develop new curricular and revision of existing ones. This called for taking a new look at the content of education at all pre-tertiary levels. The concern was to come up with programmes, which would prepare pupils either for further academic work or equip them with employable skills. And it was in this regard that attention was given to Technical and Vocational education.

A major concern was to unearth and improve children's creative and critical thinking as well as problem solving skills.

One critical innovation in the review worthy of commendation, especially with regard to the development of critical and creative thinking and problem solving skills was the evolution of Creative Arts consisting of Visual Arts (drawing, weaving, modelling, casting, carving, painting etc.), Sewing and Performing Arts (music, dance and drama) at the Elementary Level (Basic 1 – 6).

At the Junior High School level there is Pre-Technical (metal, wood, block & concrete & technical drawing) and Pre-Vocational consisting of Visual Arts (basketry, bead-making, calabash & gourd work, graphic design, leatherwork, picture making, pottery and ceramics, sculpture, textiles, paper craft), Sewing and Catering options intended to equip pupils with basic skills which may be further developed at the Senior High School level, after which, it is expected children would have acquired some useful and employable skills. Unfortunately at this point, the place of the Performing Arts seems unclear, whereas at the Senior High School music is an independent option studied and examined.

### **The Performing Arts and the Junior High School**

Once a performing arts (with special emphasis on music) teacher, one needs a systematic statement (a set of principles) which clearly defines the nature and value of music. It is

clear that a set of principles or philosophy may change as the society grows, and people may differ in their ideology or opinions about music education. Manford (1989: pp.3) posits that we need a philosophy of music education to guide us in our work as professionals. According to him what a country does so far as education is concerned is actually based on a set of principles (philosophy).

Dowdy et al (2011: pp. 2) argue that Ken Robinson, a path-breaking educator and internationally acclaimed leader in the development of human potential, has for years been lobbying for a national education system that thrives on an expanded perception of human intelligence and academic achievement. While Robinson reveres the serviceable abilities and subjects promoted through conventional academic programs, he believes that an education system would far better prepare students to cope with this century's rapidly changing innovations in science, technology, and global thought if educators raised students' instruction in creativity, the arts, and the humanities to a status on par with the training currently provided in mathematics and the sciences, which dominates school life.

This is where I think Ghana's education policy makers have failed to do so as to give music, dance and drama the requisite attention so as to make it attractive for students to choose it as a discipline.

In the Junior High School, though Music and Dance exists as a subject with a syllabus and Teacher's Handbook duly commissioned, published and distributed to schools, yet because the subject is non-examinable at the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), it is not being taught in most schools in the country. This indeed is a great disservice to our children and, to some extent defeats the aim of developing the potential of every child as well as nurturing critical and creative thinking skills in them.

It is my intention to draw attention to this anomaly and to call for a redress, especially at this crucial time of educational reform. I believe that a safe framework for the inclusion of the Arts in education is Problem Identification, Imaging, Preparation and Problem solving, which constitute the creative process. So that whether it is looked at as Vocational education, Performing Arts education, development of children's

potentialities or laying the foundation for further academic study, it appears inconsistent to omit the Performing Arts (music, dance and drama) at the Junior High School level as a valid option available to pupils to be taught and properly examined.

### **The Performing Arts in Schools and Career Options**

The performing arts are part of the liberal arts which include areas like drama, music, studio art, etc. It is a field of study for those who wish to make a career out of their creativity. One who is creative might enjoy a career in the performing arts. According to *Dictionary.com*, performing arts are arts that involve physical movement, such as acting for a play or film. As with other arts, there are a number of creative paths one may choose from. One may, for instance, choose to study and recreate classical pieces, create pieces that reflect current trends, or create something entirely original and unique. While some artists consider art as their hobby, others make a living from it, selling pieces of music or doing pay shows.

While a degree or formal training is not absolutely essential for all artists, it can certainly help. One who has a steady hand and a keen vision may have a knack for painting, but unless he or she learns how to manipulate the oil or canvas to actually create a piece reflecting that vision, he or she may be disappointed with the final project. Still others, particularly those going into photography or film, need some sort of formal training in order to learn how all the equipment works and how to go about the processing the film after shooting.

It may be necessary to look at the career potential of the performing arts. It is common knowledge that it is only after Senior High School, when people are looking for a career training option that they discover they have talent in the performing arts. Many candidates enter into, e.g. Music careers or tertiary education in music without adequate foundation. Those who opt for Music in the few Senior High Schools which offer it have to strive against several odds. It is mostly at the goodwill of the headmaster, and the students study it out of sheer interest against a Junior High School background where Music and Dance was non-examinable; and thus they are mostly without the necessary theoretical and practical foundations. In most secondary schools headmasters do not

allow the combination of Music with some other subjects, or even the offering of the subject by students at all. The Music teacher is usually on standby teaching only choir and other subjects until it is time for Speech and Prize giving day or Cultural Festival. Teachers of other subjects have been known to disparage Music, the Music teacher and Music students to the point of discouraging students from studying the subject.

However, it must be realized that Music can combine with virtually every subject in the Senior High School curriculum for career development. For example, combining Music with Mathematics and Physics could lead to a career in musical instrument technology – the scientific and industrial manufacturing of musical instruments; Music and biological sciences could produce Music Therapists, who are in short supply even the world over; Music and business studies would lead to a career in Art Administration and Management, which is hugely lacking in the country, and the list goes on. In fact, in some cases, it is possible to follow two professions one of which is in the performing arts. There are many doctors, lawyers and other professionals who are also accomplished musicians or actors; and even if they do not pursue the music professionally it serves at a very valuable pastime.

When the School of Performing Arts started at the University of Ghana, Legon, it was given all sorts of funny names. Now the school attracts numerous foreign students earning the university much foreign exchange. Who would think that playing the xylophone was a big deal? But KakrabaLobi achieved international fame playing the *gyile*. Amuah et al (2011: pp. 101) contend that KakrabaLobi hailed from highly gifted *gyile* (xylophone) performers from Nandom in the Upper West Region of Ghana. According to them, Kakraba has toured several parts of the world, especially Europe and the United States to give recitals on the xylophone and is sometimes invited to foreign universities to teach the students how to play the instrument. Now he is dead, and there is no replacement. Gilbert Berese, who used to teach xylophone at the University of Education Winneba is also no more, and without replacement. These men were

traditionally trained. But if the performing arts were considered serious school subjects with viable career options some children may have opted for them while at the same time serving to preserve our rich culture.

### **Other career options in the Performing Arts include:**

#### **Music**

Soloists, orchestral players, singers (e.g. professional choirs like the Winneba Youth Choir), conductors/music directors (almost all the Music Directors of the Security Services in Ghana trained at Winneba), composers, arrangers, church musician, military bands, session work, popular music (PaapaYankson and Bessa Simons) An area which is fast becoming established is ICT and Music. Most recording studios require technicians who are also musically trained. They do a better job than non-musicians who know only how to manipulate electronic gadgets. There are numerous software packages for music and music education.

After some further training musicians can move into related fields, such as music therapy, teaching, or arts administration.

#### **Drama**

Repertory company (e.g. Ebibigroma), commercial theatre (e.g. Concert Party), film acting, television acting, radio acting and disk jockeying, advertisement, contemporary dance, choreography, teaching. Drama as therapy is also possible.

#### **Dance**

Dance teaching, contemporary dance musical theatre, dance education, choreography, dance therapy, etc.

### **Further Studies**

The University of Ghana, Legon; University of Education, Winneba; University of Cape Coast, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology and the Methodist University College Ghana have departments that offer programmes in the Performing Arts. Entry is available to candidates with Senior High School Certificate Examination passes in relevant subjects in addition to the three core subjects. Relatively few usually possess, for instance Senior High School Certificate Examination passes in Music, though they desire to study it. This has necessitated the institution of six-week Pre-entry programmes at some of the universities.

### **Cultural Festivals**

Cultural Festivals exist for Basic and second cycle schools. The disciplines overall include choral music and sight reading, drumming and dance drama, and vocational exhibitions. These programmes are well supported by the Ghana Education Service and are well patronized. Ideally the festivals should serve as exhibition of what children learn regularly in school. However, this is so only with the vocational aspects. But for the performing arts it is when the festivals are due that personnel are mobilized to pick out students to prepare them for the programme. After the programme nothing much goes on in the schools as far as the performing arts are concerned. Do we expect that children will take such important cultural subjects seriously?

### **Conclusion**

That music education and academic performance are tied is unquestionable. What's more remarkable is that the skills music teaches can be learned at a very young age. Children are inherently drawn to musicality, and are able to absorb and retain song lyrics easily. To give your little ones the best chance to succeed later, introduce them to music as early as possible. The effects are not only immediate: they have the potential to last a life time.

It may be realized that the TV3 Mentor I, II, III up VI shows, Future Stars of GTV, and Dance Fever shows are very indicative of the youth's interest in the Performing Arts where both amateur and professionals combine to give those wonderful productions.

Indeed the majority of the amateurs, however, have no educational background in any of these performing arts. It would do the country a world of good if the opportunity was made available for the serious study of these disciplines within our educational system.

### **Recommendation**

The Creative Arts Curriculum, designed by the Ghana Education Service, should set the expectation that all students in the public schools would become proficient in understanding the arts and communicating in at least one arts discipline by the time they graduate from the basic school. In order to achieve these goals, it is recommended that students begin their study of the creative arts from the basic school which includes the kindergarten, and continue to study one or more of the arts disciplines throughout primary and junior high school. They would thus discover their talents earlier and lay the necessary theoretical foundations for developing it. It is always good to catch them young.

I wish, therefore to recommend that the Performing Arts be made available as an option at the Junior High School level. It could be conceived of either as within the Vocational skills option or a third group of options – Technical skills, Vocational Skills and Performing Arts.

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