CHAPTER SIX

USE OF WOODBLOCK AS INSTRUCTIONAL AID IN TEACHING SIMPLE RHYTHM

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Abstract

Observation has shown that many students in the secondary school lose interest in studying music especially when they have challenges that bother on rhythm and time signature. They seem to enjoy many other aspects of music studies It, therefore, stands to mean that time and rhythm which are very imperative in the study of music should be made paramount topics that should be given maximum concentration to gain students' interest. This paper explored the principles of Horowitz model for the teaching process with the use of woodblock as instructional material. The model encourages participation, interaction and general knowledge sharing between the teacher and the students as active participating learners. Thirty-three (33) JSS 1 students of Unizik High School were used as a sample for this study and two (2) woodblocks were provided that served as instructional materials. During the cause (period) of this study, it was observed that all the thirty-three (33) students attempted a notated rhythm on a monotone. Their approach to the lesson on rhythm using the woodblock and hand-clapping methods were impressive. By implication, children of junior secondary school age will learn and enjoy music lessons better when they are taught with simple musical instruments like the woodblock.

Keywords: Woodblock, Students's Interest, Instructional aids, Rhythm and Time signature

Introduction

Rhythm is a strong, regular, or repeated pattern of movement or sound; and the arrangements of musical noted according to duration and stress. According to oxford concise dictionary of music (2007) rhythm is defined thus:

> (rhythm, in the full sense of the word) covers everything about the time aspect of music as distinct from the aspect of the pitch, that is is it includes the effects of beats, accents, measure, a grouping of notes into beats, a grouping of beats into measures, grouping of measures into phrases, etc. When all these factors are judiciously treated by the performer (with due regularity yet with artistic purpose – an effect of forwarding movement and not mere machine-like accuracy) we feel and say that the performer possesses a sense of rhythm (p. 622).

According to Nwafor (2010), the term rhythm refers to "the movement of a piece of music" (p. 109). Although, rhythm in the context of this paper does not only mean the flow or movement of music from up to down and vice versa; it encompasses note values, stress and duration. Rhythm means so much to an average African, and that could explain why Africans play, dance and understand even complex rhythms. An African child is not left out in this discussion as well because, from the time of birth to when the child is weaned, the child gets involved in one form of music or the other that contains different rhythmic movements. When the child's mother is cooking, she makes some music with some of the cooking

paraphernalia like the pot cover, long spoon (*eku ofe*), mortar and pestle (*odu na ikwe*), etc. Even when the baby is crying, he or she is greeted with music that in most cases deceives the baby into listening rather than crying, when it's time for a baby to sleep mostly at night and it appears that sleep is not forthcoming, the mother or any other person can sing the baby a lullaby which in most cases lures the baby to sleep.

Definition of Concepts

According to John Dewey in Mbanugo (2014), in teaching children music we are primarily concerned with three (3) kinds of learning. They are as follows:

- Cognitive learning: what one knows, how one thinks and use symbols in reference to music.
- Psychomotor: performance skills such as playing instruments and singing.
- Aesthetics: having to do with feeling and awareness of 'a deep reality of the world in which we live in our ordinary experiences.

Concept of Music According to John Dewey

Music is not those static notational symbols on paper (musical notes) only, a score is incidental to certain kinds of music in that it facilities performance. Music is not all about the score not the source of sound but, about the experience of the sound as perceived by the person also. Music should not be taught in any form, it will cause children to love it less – it should be taught only when the child can see the Joy and beauty that can result from music learning.

According to Blacking (1973) music is defined as "a humanly organized wound" (p. 57). And this has been one of the foremost and most used definitions of music by several scholars and Musicologist. In support of this Ekwueme (2008) posits that

> Music is a phenomenon using the medium of sound which is organized and manipulated into socially accepted patterns that communicate intelligibly and meaningfully, verbally, or non-verbally, ideas, feelings, emotions and events to people (p. 1).

Agu in Esimone (2014) posits that music is "an aesthetic art if combining or putting together sounds that are pleasant to the ear" (p. 65). Mbanugo (2014) in support posits that "music is not the stimulus but the response" (p. 2). Mbanugo furthermore opined that there are four (4) major factors amongst others that should be taken seriously whenever it comes to teaching children music. Those factors include the following:

1. **Perception**

   This is Central to all types of learning. This is the process by which the individual beginning from infancy collects information through the senses (feeling, hearing, touching and seeing) and code this information for storage in the brain. Each of these buts of information is associated with a feeling quality or effect.

2. **The teacher's attitude**

   The teacher's positive approach and attitude to musical experiences are crucial factors in

the young child's success in music education. Interest in and enthusiasm about music are the most important teacher's attribute. Mbanugo upholds that students are great imitators, if the teacher becomes involved in music and uses it in a variety of interesting and challenging ways, the young child will become interested too. Active participation in music by both the teacher and the child ignites the fire which stimulates further exploration and discovery of the world of music. This participation must begin in the early childhood years. Onuora-Oguno (2007) holds that "the characteristic of the teacher of the teacher are factors that either augment or limit the learning process" (p. 79).

3. **The teacher's ability**
   Emphasizing on the teacher's attitude above does not translate to mean that the teacher's musical capabilities and knowledge are unimportant, therefore, the capabilities of the teacher are as essential as the content for the teaching process and planning and organizing appropriate musical experience. Teacher's with little musical skills, can extend it by attending workshops, conferences and seminars, asking for help from colleagues, taking lessons in singing or playing, using carefully selected teaching aids, capitalizing on musical abilities of the children in the group and committing themselves to their musical growth.

4. **The teaching process**
   The nature and value of musical experiences depend largely on the interaction which takes place between the child and his teacher. Ehlert in Onuora-Oguno (2007) observed that teaching is a process whereby one individual enables another to learn something more quickly than he would be based on his trial and error (p. 79). Supporting this Hart in Onuora-Oguno (2007) also upholds that teaching is the process of selecting, organizing, and making available the perceptual and informational input, of arranging the physical setting and influencing the social and psychological environment (of the learner) so that optimal learning takes place (p. 79).

Concept of Time

Oxford Concise Dictionary of Music (2007) defines time as "the fundamental rhythmical patterns of music" (p. 761). It can also mean the calculated duration of sounds, measures, tempo, rate of movement, rhythmic division, etc. The time of music is better understood with the time signature. Time is, therefore, (a sign placed after the clef and key signature at the beginning of a piece of music, or during the cause of it, to indicate the meter or duration of the music). Normally, time signature comprises of two (2) figurative numberings one below and the other above. The lower number indicates the unit of measurements concerning the whole note, whereas the upper number indicates the amount of those units in each measure (bar). Thus the time signature ¾ indicates three (3) quarter notes (crotchets) in a bar. The diagram below buttresses that assertion very well.

In other words, having a good knowledge of time signature is as good and equivalent to an understanding of rhythm. Time inculcates rhythm into students and guides them towards

maintaining accurate and steady rhythmic flow. Time defines the value of notes in a bar and perhaps the value of other notes to be anticipated in the course of such music. Okeke (2014) contributing his quota on teaching children music, likened Skinner's three-part instruction process or what he termed "kernel" to mean "Skinner's reinforcement theory. This reinforcement theory can be effectively applied in music for instance, when a learner's behaviour (singing in time or playing notated rhythms accurately is positively reinforced by the teacher's smile, nod, or positive comment, that behaviour will be maintained, increased and repeated, and vice versa.

The Woodblock

An oblong block of wood, sometimes about five (5), seven (7) and eight (8) inches long with one or two slots cut into it. Struck with a stick of a snare drum or a light-weighted stick of metal and when struck, gives a hard hollow tone. The woodblock can also be referred to as a tap box or clog box. One of the basic features of the woodblock is in the material from which it is produced and the hollow carved into it. The woodblock is an instrument in the percussion family a typical example of idiophone. Going by Eric Hornbostel and Curt Sach's classification of African musical instruments, the woodblock is a rhythmic idiophone and struck idiophone respectively. This is because rhythmic idiophone instruments like the woodblock must be struck to produce sound.

Importance of the Woodblock to this Study

The woodblock helped the students to understand the lessons on rhythm better. Initially, some of them about fifteen (15) out of the total number of thirty-three (33)students were having difficultly in clapping the rhythm with bare hands even after they had been repeatedly taught lessons on rhythm. But, at the sight and sound of the woodblock, those students started advancing towards the front row of their class. Just like in Pavlovian classical conditioning experiment, the least student in that class of thirty-three (33) pupils insisted on clapping the notated rhythm on a monotone using the woodblock. Experimenting on Ivan Pavlov's classical conditioning which is a reflexive or automatic type of learning in which a stimulus acquires the capacity to elicit or evoke a response that was originally evoked by another stimulus. This study applied same with the woodblock and discovered that even students who pretended not to be interested at the very beginning of the class all of a sudden became interested. Those who distanced themselves for whatever reason best known to them started gravitating towards the front row as well to make sure they have a feel of what it was like to play rhythm on a monotone using the woodblock. They now became passionate about learning the lesson on rhythm, they made efforts to notate their rhythms very accurately and the class became an interesting one.

Jean Piaget theory of "Cognitive development" was also explored. It holds that children construct their views and understanding of the world they are in, then experience discrepancies between what they already know and what they discover in their environment. By implication, the introduction of the woodblock to the students eliminated fear and discouragements in those students who initially deserted the lesson on rhythm. It goes a long

way to mean that if a proper teaching and learning method is applied, and a good learning environment is created or maintained, children will love music lessons more. Piaget is also of the opinion that teaching children anything (music, language, and arithmetic) must take a progressive and comprehensive procedure and to him, that is called cognitive development because it is about the nature and development of human intelligence.

In his theory of Cognitive development, Piaget explains how a child constructs a mental model of the world, he also disagreed with the concept or notion that intelligence is a fixed trait. He rather regarded cognitive development as a process which occurs due to biological maturation and interaction with the environment. By implication, children that are raised in an environment where music-making and learning is the order of the day, may not find it very exciting nor fun in aligning themselves to it but, when they do, they become matchless when compared with their peers elsewhere. This is simply because the biological maturation and interaction with the environment of music-making will enhance and widen their horizon and perception of music. He further proposes that the music teacher or instructor ought to employ the constructivism theory which is a theory based on observation and the scientific study of how people learn. This means that children have different learning capabilities and as such should be handled based on their abilities and not otherwise.

This perhaps explains why some children detest some subjects and the teachers who teach them as well. Because observation has shown that certain teachers do base their judgement on the ingenuity of one or a very few of their pupils to assess the rest of their students. Such practices can easily create bias and frustration in those students too. The constructivism theory advocates for fairness and equal opportunities. A good tutor and one who is good in observing his or her pupils, ought to device a way of approaching them both as a group and individuals. Some children as observed, perform creditably well when they perform with or among their peers whereas some are good solo performers. Some also perform well when they are allowed to explore on their own. Some children as observed, when they are criticized heavily would lose concentration and such affects their psyche terribly. Suffice it to say that a good tutor is expected to be friendly and decisive.

The woodblock plays some important rhythmic roles when it is used alongside other musical instruments. Using it as a teaching aid brings the lesson on rhythm closer and clearer to the students. Also employing its use enriches the rhythm of any musical performance be it band music, traditional music, even the African orchestra group explores the rhythmic use of the woodblock. Any musician who can handle or play the woodblock reasonably well must have a good sense of rhythm.

Conclusion

Rhythm is an interesting topical issue in music studies and as such should be given priority and concentration. Using the woodblock, a model like Horowitz and employing Piaget's constructivism theory could serve as simple but effective methods to boost students interests. Also using indigenous musical materials like the woodblock (uko, okpokoro) as

aids and tools to practically draw the lessons closer to the students could boost musical studies at the junior secondary school level.

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