

CHAPTER 20

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL MUSICAL ARTS EDUCATION: ONWUEKWE'S APPROACH TO TRADITIONAL MUSIC AND DANCE PEDAGOGY

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Abstract

African traditional music and dance are widely practised in all communities and each community has music and dance that reflects the cultural practices and lifestyle of its people. The music and dance are usually communally owned and this is the reason why people from a particular community perform their music and dance with ease. African traditional music and dance cuts across all communities in Africa but for this article, we shall concern ourselves with Nigerian traditional music and dance. The method/s used in teaching Nigerian music and dance in the classroom usually speaks volumes of its success or failure. The subjects of the study are some students of the Music Department, University of Port Harcourt. Over time, students have been taught some rudiments of dance which is the foundation to dance practicals. Despite the effort of the instructor, some students still find it difficult to understand what was being taught let alone blend with other students during a dance performance. Data gathered from students through the observational method and interactive section revealed that there was a little gap between the instructor and the student's communication more so, the method applied by the instructor was also instrumental to some of the students' performances. Prof. Onwuekwe's approach was deployed and a whole lot of positive differences were recorded. The paper concludes by applying the right method to every teaching situation and having a rapport with the students to achieve the objective of the lesson within the shortest possible time.

Keywords: African tradition, Musical arts education, Onwuekwe's approach and Dance pedagogy.

Introduction

African traditional music and dance is indigenous music and dance that is communally owned by people of a particular community. It can be performed by the indigenes or by any other set of persons. It is pertinent to note that, when the music and dance are performed by the community members that own it, the people perform it effortlessly because it is their heritage.

Music deals with sounds from various musical instruments and it is the sounds that propel the human body to move in form of dance. Music is sounds that are well arranged and produced by any of the musical instruments that are pleasant to the ear and at the same time create some kind of emotions. Ekwueme (2008) described music as; "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). Music as an art is practised everywhere by different people and music is used for various events. Despite being used in different communities for various events, music is a cultural carrier. Thus, Okafor (2004) submitted that;

Music is, unquestionably, the most widely practised of the traditional arts in Nigeria. At any time of night or day, somewhere in the land, some music is being made. Cardinal to this type of music is its integral relationship to the life, lifestyles and life patterns of individuals within certain communities and societies themselves. It is not made for its own sake or sheer exhibition of intellectual or physical dexterity or endowment (absolute music). It is a manifestation of culture (p. 84).

Okafor (2005) further stated that "Music may be a universal language but different communities, across different cultures, give it different cultural definitions and men and groups use it to express their identity- their historical evolutions, the continuity of their being and the horizon for which they are set" (p. 89).

In light of the above definitions, it can be established that, apart from music dealing with sounds, it expresses emotions, passes across messages to the people who listen to the music and it also reflects the cultural practices in our indigenous communities thereby creating some form of identity for the community that owns the music. There is scarcely any occasion that goes on in various indigenous communities without being accompanied by music that suits the occasion hence, the need to explain folk music. Thus, it is indigenous music that is familiar to members of a community and is written in our indigenous languages. Most of the traditions of the community are embedded in folk music. Nzewi in Akponome and Nwosu (2012) asserted that:

Folk Music is the perpetrator of people's systems and beliefs, a reposition of their folk philosophy historical records world and general knowledge; the recorder of their mores; the gazette of their past and current life events; achievement of folk instruction; an educational agent for moral, spiritual, artistic aesthetic, matrimonial lessons, for instruction on sex, propriety, self-control, self-discipline and physical fitness (p.65).

Having explained what music is, the explanation of dance becomes germane since it goes side by

side with music and can never be performed or achieved without music.

Dance is generally seen as the movement of the human body to accompany the music. Onwuka (2012) defined dance as "the expressive medium of the body, an outward interpretation of musical rhythms and movements that is sensuously carried out by the human affective domain" (p. 4). This in essence means that there must be a chasm between just moving the body and dancing. For the movement of the human body to be qualified as dance, the human body must move to a rhythm. Bakere in Ibekwe and Ojukwu (2014) stated that "dance is a language which expresses the geographical locations, biological temperament, religious beliefs, political and historical experiences, social practice and economic peculiarities of the people that own it" (p. 76). Akas (2014) opined that "indigenous dance in traditional African societies is the expression of beliefs, attitudes, norms and values of a particular culture. It is what is embedded in the culture that can be reflected in the dance moves of a community" (p.193).

The above definitions are explicit of the features of traditional dance. Merely watching the dance being performed, one will be able to link the dance to the community that owns it because of the cultural practices of the communities embedded in the dance and the music that accompanies the dance.

Methods Deployed to Teach Music and Dance in our Traditional Societies

In Nigeria, the way our indigenous music and dance are taught in various communities is quite interesting and commendable and, produces good results as well. The teaching deployed in our indigenous communities is a whole way of life where people learn through participation and imitation. It could happen in various compounds at moonlight where some games are introduced, folktales are told and accompanied by music and dance. There could also be some groups in the community established to make music and dance. Interested persons who love what is done in the group will always be around to listen to the music and watch the dance. When this is done consistently, the persons in question will find it easy to blend with the group if he/she decides to join the group. People are free to join the group with some restrictions which are peculiar to different communities. Apprenticeship is another means that is devised to teach in traditional societies. This is a situation where someone that has an interest in any musical instrument of his choice or dance will be required to practically go to stay with the master instrumentalist or mother musician or lead dancer to learn the art of making music, playing musical instruments or dancing.

Methods used in Teaching Music and Dance in the Classroom

Our classrooms are modern and as such different from what is obtainable in our indigenous communities. Despite our indigenous and modern settings, the objective is teaching the learner and ensuring that the learner can make music and dance.

In the classroom setting, the teacher or dance instructor commences with the theoretical aspect of music and dance first, to ensure that students have an in-depth understanding of music and dance to get them prepared for the task ahead. The teacher does this by deploying some teaching methods from numerous teaching methods available. At times, two or three teaching methods are combined to enable the teacher to achieve the desired result which is, students being able to make music and dance. More often, the teacher deploys the class method, team method, Demonstration method and Play way method to teach the music and dance.

Class method; this is a situation where the teacher picks out salient and fundamental points on music and dance and, teaches the students. In this process, questions are entertained by the teacher from the students and duly given proper explanations to the understanding of the students.

Team method; this involves the teacher and students working together as a team to ensure that music and dance rehearsals are well organized and successful for presentation. This method affords students the privilege of working as a team, being creative and pursuing a common goal. More important is the fact that it creates the spirit of togetherness in the students which in turn will be useful to society because wherever they find themselves working with other people, they will easily blend with others and will be very creative in the such group they find themselves.

Demonstration method; this method has to do with the teacher demonstrating some of the dance steps by certain movements and gestures to the students for them to imitate her. In this method, it is expected that the students put in the best concentration to enable them to grasp the various dance steps alongside the music that goes with the dance moves.

Play-way method; this is a teaching strategy that allows the teacher to have a good rapport with the students by coming down to their level using play, but not losing focus of the original intention which is the application of knowledge gained through various activities. After deploying these methods to teach, the teacher encourages the students to create their music and dance steps. She achieves this by splitting the class into two to stir up healthy competition amongst them and at this point, the students come up with wonderful production which is then shaped by the teacher or dance instructor to align with their concepts.

Onwuekwe's Method

It is pertinent to note that, whatever methods that have been existing and are recognized as teaching methods, were introduced by some individuals. As researchers, we are aware that, any topic that is being researched now, must have been dealt with by a researcher some time ago. The only difference made to these topics now is the perspective from which a researcher views a particular topic and the approaches that are being used by the present researcher to address the topic in question. Having given some thoughtful background on the former issue, 'Onwuekwe's method' will be explicated. It is simply the approaches given to teaching by our estimable Prof. Agatha Onwuekwe which usually makes her teaching very productive within the shortest possible time. Scholars who have been through her tutelage will attest to the fact that her teaching had always been interesting. This is because she ensures that all hands are on deck at any point she is teaching. She does this by giving every student a role to play in her class. It is either you are reading, explaining or demonstrating an act embedded in the topic treated in the class. Whenever this goes on, she corrects any student that is not getting it right and this cuts across all levels of students from first degree to PhD level. For instance, if she asks you to read from a particular material used for the class and you make any mistake in your pronunciation, she will immediately correct you and by doing that, other students in the class would have gotten the right pronunciation

for that word. Her classes are usually very interesting and she ensures that any examples or explanations she provides, are usually with items or things that could be found in the environment and not abstract examples. There is hardly any time you go to her class without humour being integrated in course of her teaching and this makes students relax and assimilate better and faster. Another thing that is striking about her is that she makes use of the simplest words and sentences and this has helped to erode ambiguity in her classes.

Think of Onwuekwe and you will be thinking of reading because her name is akin to reading. She usually has more than enough materials for all her courses and as a matter of fact, you must read all. Invariably, she makes reading very wide becomes part of you and you dare not expect any area of concentration. In essence, she makes you read with all amount of concentration. Apart from these, she also makes you a good writer by setting exam questions that will give you ample opportunities to express yourself via lengthy writing. In all, you will always look forward to attending her classes because she will always treat you as a child but does not spare the rod to spoil the child. She will hit you hard to bring out the best in you. Most often, the play-way method is incorporated in most of her classes. There is hardly any assignment submitted to her which will not be read thoroughly by her. The most amazing part of her is that all the students she had supervised at one time or the other, will attest to the fact that, she reads every page of their project, thesis or dissertation and design with a red pen or highlights with red colour on the system and correction proffered side by side the designs.

From the account of Onwuekwe's teaching pattern, it can be deduced that her method is all-encompassing, wrapped up with simplicity and good rapport with her students which always makes her teaching productive within the shortest possible time.

Application of Onwuekwe's Method to Teaching of Music and Dance in the Classroom

The knowledge they say is power but any knowledge gained without its application is a complete waste. It is in the application of knowledge that the learner will find fulfilment and ascertain the fact that, he or she has learnt. The application of knowledge gained is what distinguishes the learned from the unlearned. The teacher is pivotal to achieving the set objectives hence, the teacher is expected to have a wide range of teaching strategies to motivate and engage the students. For this to be achieved the teacher's knowledge is paramount and essential. Hence, Andrzejewski (2009), thought of teachers' knowledge as "the collection and intersection of professional orientation, intellectual capacities, and professional knowledge of teachers" He explained further that, "professional orientation is the constellation of a teacher's affective traits that give aim, direction, and focus to educational decision making and practice. These effective traits include attitudes, values, beliefs, priorities, preferences, positions, and dispositions" (p.17). Classroom teaching before now has been interesting and yields results but the incorporation of the "Onwuekwe's method" has made teaching and learning more interesting and results achieved within the shortest possible time.

The exposition of how this method is being applied is enumerated below as thus;

1. The dance teacher now sees to it that, every material given to students on music and dance is discussed extensively in class ensuring that, all the students in the class are actively involved either in reading or explaining a line or two that has been read by any of their classmates. This is to ensure that nobody is left out in the process. Corrections on the pronunciation of words are done by the teacher or some students that are very good at the pronunciation of words are asked to do the pronunciation and this affords others the privilege of getting to know the right pronunciation of the question words.
2. The reading culture or habits of students are improved or enhanced by the teacher ditching out many materials and ensuring that these materials are discussed in class.
3. The teacher ensures that during dance rehearsals, she poses in front of the students to show them some dance steps in synchronization with the rhythms provided on the traditional musical instruments. In course of doing this, more rapport is established between the teacher and the students. Explanations of the dance steps are provided by the teacher and students are made to produce the dance steps being taught by the teacher.

Students are being encouraged to be creative and have a good rapport amongst themselves. This the teacher does or achieves by splitting students into two or three groups, depending on the number of students in a particular class. This act gives rise to healthy and productive competition among the students.

Sometimes, the teacher asks the students to go and study the music and dance of a particular community and come back to reproduce it. This way, knowledge of different cultures is enhanced in the students and they are exposed to research which is vital to their education.

Results of Onwuekwe's Method being Applied in the Classroom

The objective of any teaching/learning activity is to produce a noticeable result. Hence, the definition of teaching in its simplest form is imparting knowledge to the learners and learning is producing a permanent or desirable change in behaviour. In essence, the learner is not expected to behave in the same old way before the teaching/learning took place. There must be some kind of transformation and this is what education is all about.

There are myriads of definitions of education by scholars but for this write-up, we shall concern ourselves with definitions that will buttress the points already established in this article.

Akumah (2013) viewed Education as the process of discipline through training and study in the acquisition of skills and knowledge" (p.252). He further posited that "Education whether formal or informal, is the fulfilling of our endowed intellectual capacities" (p.251).

Spencer in Adeleke (2014) opined that “education is closely associated with change, is its pioneer, is the never-sleeping agent of revolution, is always fitting men for higher things and unfitting them for things as they are” (p. 129).

Having explored some definitions of education, it is obvious that education is concerned with positive change, adapting to new patterns of carrying out the task, being creative and enhancing already endowed intellectual capacities of humans to better the individual and the society at large. Application of Onwuekwe's method, simplified the teaching/learning process thus; enabling students to express themselves via asking questions and through various dance steps to traditional instrumental rhythms. Students are now exposed to various methods of teaching and have ascertained for themselves the efficacy of these methods on time.

From my observation and interaction with the students, they have expressed astonishment as to the level of productivity in terms of their creativity of various dance steps and rhythms and; they have found fulfilment concerning their achievements.

Conclusion

Education deals with teaching and learning and, acquiring skills for the good of the individual and the development of society. This can be acquired if the best methods are applied in course of teaching and, teaching cannot take place without the learners hence, the need to have a very good rapport with the learners to facilitate learning. Application of appropriate methods to teaching is fundamental because that is the only way to easily achieve success. Onwuekwe's approach is all-encompassing and more importantly, places the learners high on the ladder of advancement of knowledge hence the need for the adoption of this method.

Recommendations

Pedagogy deals with teaching and learning methods hence, Onwuekwe's method is also pedagogical. It is pertinent to choose methods that will bring about the desired change in line with the learning objectives. The following recommendations will be helpful to teachers in general and dance instructors.

- i. A teacher or instructor should take his or her time to have a lesson plan for his or her class without which the lesson will be muddled up and the objectives of the topic to be taught will not be achieved.
- ii. Any method/s chosen by the teacher or instructor must be followed procedurally to a logical conclusion to aid in ascertaining the efficacy of the methods. This will guide subsequent choices of the instructor/teacher.
- iii. African traditional dance instructors should afford students the privilege of travelling to various communities to get firsthand information on our indigenous music and dance as this will expose them to various cultural practices.

- iv. The students should be encouraged to reproduce the music and dance researched as this will help in projecting the community that owns the dance.
- v. Creativity is one paramount thing that should not be treated with kid gloves because it is key to our everyday lives as it will spice up our lives. Students should also be encouraged to create music and dance steps to reflect some activities in their communities and it will enable the students to discover their hidden potential in them. This can be achieved with a little guidance from their dance instructor.
- vi. No matter the methods are chosen, good rapport must be established between the teacher and the learners and this is where Onwuekwe's method comes in. Remember, even if the best method is chosen and there is no good rapport between the teacher and the learners, the objective of the lesson will not be achieved.
- vii. As a teacher, always assume that not everyone in your class has knowledge of the new topic or lesson to be taught hence the need to always start from the root or scratch should be mandatory to carry every member of the class along.

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