

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ADOPTING SELECTED DANCE STEPS IN OWHIPA TRADITIONAL DANCE GROUP FOR FIELD TRIP TEACHING/LEARNING OF DANCE

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Abstract

Dance has remained a means of expressing the innate feelings of humans towards sounds produced from various musical instruments irrespective of the genre of the music. The innate feelings are expressed through several dance steps which make up dance movements. This is because the rhythms used for dance is usually very captivating and the entirety of the dance reflects the cultural practices of the indigenous owners of the dance and is best understood by them. Owhipa traditional dance group of Rivers State is used for this study. This group is made up of men and women from Owhipa community of the Ikwere speaking tribe. Over time, the teaching/learning of traditional dance in a classroom setting in the University of Port Harcourt portray the pedagogical approach which applies various teaching methods to creative dance steps, basically for examination and entertainment. This has to an extent, limited the expression of the human body through dance and downplayed promoting culture. This study seeks to adopt selected dance steps of Owhipa traditional group into classroom teaching/learning by deploying the field trip teaching of dance. Through interviews, participant observations and library research, data was gathered and it revealed that deploying the indigenous dance steps and the field trip teaching/learning of Owhipa traditional dance group into the classroom makes the teaching worthwhile and interesting thus variegating the performances through several dance steps with a stress-free teaching mode which in turn will help sustain dance steps from Owhipa community and promote their culture.

Keywords: Indigenous, Dance, Steps, Adopt and Classroom

Introduction

Dance is as old as man and it is an integral part of the African culture. It emanates from the inside of all humans and the urge to release the tension/emotions built up by the rhythms produced by various musical instruments. Dance is inside everyone irrespective of the persons' age or social affiliation. Once a person hears danceable music, he or she will intentionally or unintentionally begin to release some emotions in the form of body movements. It could be in form of nodding the head to the rhythm of the music, tapping the feet or moving the body. One sees him/herself doing something to unleash the bottled up emotions. To explain this, Joe (2012) defined dance as “a response of the physical body to the stimulus of musical sound” p.119. Inyang in Ekong (2001) posited that “dance is an organized body movement in time and space to express human feelings and ideas about musical rhythm and direction”(p.127).

In the light of still expressing emotions through dance, Van Camp (2013) stated that:

dance is the human movement that is formalized with such qualities as grace,

elegance and beauty, to the accompaniment of music or other rhythmic sounds for the purpose of communicating or expressing emotions, themes, or ideas, and with the aid of mime, costumes, scenery, and lightning.
<http://www.csulb.edu/jvancamp/diss2.html>.

Dance cannot take place if rhythms are not provided to spur up emotions in humans which are expressed through various body movements and dance steps. Rhythm is important in dance because it is a motivating factor to all the dance steps and body movements being expressed by humans. Hence Akpabot (1998) asserted that: “rhythm is the regular or irregular recurrence of groups and motions in relation to each other; these relations being in respect of pulse, meter, stress, duration, accent, pitch, contour and design; functioning within the architectural structure of the artistic whole” (p.49).

It is pertinent to note at this point that, dance cannot be performed in the absence of music but music can be performed without dance. To buttress this point, Onwuka (2012) opined that: “It is true, therefore, that music could sometimes go without dancing, dance cannot be meaningfully performed without music” (p. 2). Music is the force that elicits dance hence it is very pertinent to explore the term. Eminent scholars have given several definitions of dance but for this work, few will be explored. Ekwueme (2008) described music as: “a phenomenon using the medium of sound which is organised and manipulated into socially accepted patterns that communicate intelligibly and meaningfully, verbally, or non-verbally, ideas, feelings, emotions and events to people” (p.1).

Baharach (1977) defined music as, “one of the fine arts which are concerned with the combination of sounds with a view of the beauty of form and the expression of thought and feeling” (p.145). These definitions recognize the aesthetics embedded in the combination of sounds to give a pleasant effect thereby affecting human thoughts and feelings. Dance is a means through which some humans' feelings or emotions are expressed.

Dance as a term is well understood when the human body is making several moves in tandem with some rhythms. However, the dance steps and moves by the human body can be taught and learnt as well. This goes to confirm that, teaching and learning go together and should be given proper attention because that is the only means through which knowledge or skills in any given area can be transferred from one person to the other and from generation to another. Premised on this, a community chooses a style or mode of teaching dance based on how it appeals to their dancers and how relevant the dance steps are to their community.

Teaching is the ability to effect changes in some individuals through imparting knowledge. Onuora-Oguno (2007) affirmed that the “teaching process is the selecting, organizing and making available the perceptual and informal input of arranging the physical setting of influencing the social and psychological environment of the learner so that optimal learning takes place” (p. 79). Formal teaching is guided by the curriculum. Onyiuke (2011), asserts that, “curriculum is a planned and guided learning experiences and intended learning outcomes formulated through the systematic reconstruction of knowledge and experience under the auspices of the school, for the learners' continuous and willful growth in personal social competence” (p.14).

From the definitions above, it could be deduced that learning is the knowledge gained through study or practice. This could also be related to teaching and learning dance steps. The result could be visible if the dancers can reproduce the dance steps that have been taught them and this can

only happen if dancers are consistent in attending rehearsals. One important thing about indigenous dance steps and moves is that they can be newly created by the owners of the dance in line with the cultural practices of the community in question or some dance steps can be borrowed from another community contingent on the closeness of the other community or the cultural contact with the community. At times dance borrowing or adopting are done fully or partially with some form of discrepancies on the dance steps and moves on the borrowed dance. Hence, Onwuka (2012) posited that:

every cultural dance has a traceable source or point from where it started. This commencement point could be original or primarily new, interesting and different from what had existed before. On the other hand, it could be sourced by copying and blending of some prevalent dance patterns from another community (culture) or adopting in its entirety, an existing dance that exists in another culture/community (p.17).

This work hinges on adopting selected dance steps from Owhipa traditional dance group for classroom teaching/learning through the field trip method. The work will bring to limelight the dance steps in Owhipa traditional dance group and the procedures used in teaching this dance and, it will be adopted in the teaching/learning in the classroom at the University of Port Harcourt to project the culture of Owhipa and to preserve the dance.

Traditional Dance Teaching/Learning Procedures in University of Port Harcourt

Traditional dance at the University of Port Harcourt is embedded in Ensemble studies as one of its components. The course has a theoretical aspect where philosophies and facts on traditional dance are taught and the practical aspect where the dance proper is showcased. At the initial stage when the dance was introduced, different teaching methods were presented but the field trip method was more projected which afforded students the opportunity of visiting any community of their choice, researching a particular dance group. They creatively added few steps and movements to what they had gathered from the field, especially if the group under study allow such practice. But at some point, it was observed that students became reluctant to go to the field and most times, they usually leave it in the hands of a few who took it upon themselves to see that, the dance project is successful for examination purposes.

During dance examination, students were seen appearing in the very costumes that were used by the community they visited and performing various dance steps. The instrumentation and the songs that accompanied the dance were also fully performed. Through the performances of these dances by the students, anyone who watched them would at a point be sceptical of the community that owns the dance probably because of creativity added to the dance.

The dance instructors also noticed some of the students were lousy because it was always reflected in their dance steps and movements which were not aligning with others. At times, some particular students will always be lazy by hiding themselves amid the instrumentalists playing the clapper.

Based on these observations over time, the dance instructors at the University of Port Harcourt re-strategised and made one of the core objectives of the course to be students' creativity in their skills of dancing and manipulating various traditional musical instruments. It was at this juncture that, the approach to teaching traditional dance changed. What is obtainable now is that students in each level are divided into two groups to ensure that everybody in the group work. This has been helpful because students now tend to have healthy competition amongst themselves. Each

of the groups tends to work hard to see how their groups' performance will be more presentable than the other.

One of the challenges with allowing freestyle creativity is that, no particular culture is being projected and the philosophy of society is very important to establish the identity of a community. Hence Ogunbodede (2001) opined that: "Culture is the patterned way of life shared by a particular group of people. It includes people's economic organization, political organization, religion, language, law, kinship, education, arts, morals, machine technology etc" (p.25). In the same vein, Ogene (2011) affirmed that: "A common denominator about Nigerian dance is the fact that whenever dance is occasioned or commissioned, it acts as a visual data resource not only a synthesis of other art forms but a fusion of cultural elements which end up telling a story about each society" (p. 185).

Based on the instructors' observation on culture, it was then concluded that students should project traditional dances the way it is done in various communities but with little modification which will not conspicuously alter the culture of any community being projected. In a bid to achieve this, it was made mandatory for students to adopt the field trip method.

Procedures for Teaching Dance in Owhipa Traditional Dance Group

The teaching of indigenous songs and dance steps in Owhipa were done by the dance leader of the group in the person of Amadi Chinze. There is a lead singer in Ozurumba dance group who provides the group with songs. The instrumentalists are also found in this group and they provide the group with various rhythms that accompany the dance. However, the emphasis on this sub-title is how the dance steps are taught.

The dance leader deployed the traditional teaching method which includes; observation, participation, imitation etc to teach the dance steps. He does this in consonance with the rhythms provided on various traditional musical instruments from Owhipa community. The chief instrumentalist is Mr Levi Amadi begins the section by playing on the lead drum and directs other instrumentalists to produce captivating rhythms. As the instrumentation goes on, the leader demonstrates a particular dance step, members observe him first and then reproduce the same. He introduces a second one and asks them to do the same. He continues with several steps and moves and members follow suit. Not all members can demonstrate all the dance steps taught them immediately but as the rehearsal continues, most of them picked up and progress is made. One pertinent thing to note is the fact that each of the rhythms produced by the instrumentalists is being interpreted by various dance steps which directly have some links to the cultural practices of the community.

The dance leader introduced the first dance step which was flinging of the right leg first, followed by the left leg and wriggling of the waist in a circular stage formation and we the dancers danced exactly the way he danced.

PLATE ONE



Picture showing the first dance movement in circular stage formation with the researcher participating in the dance.

The dance leader introduced the second dance step which was in a parallel stage formation showing how the dancers expressed their bodies by standing side by side, swinging their two hands first, to the left and then to the right with their white handkerchiefs. This was demonstrated by the dance leader and a member of the group.

PLATE TWO



The dance leader and one of the group members showed one of their dance movements

The third dance movement was in a semi-circular stage formation and the dancers had to sit on the floor, with their two hands together swinging to the right and the left like as one paddling.

PLATE THREE



Dance Leader showing one of the dance movements

The next rhythms ushered in other dance steps/movements which were the dancers wriggling their waist thereafter, turning backwards and to their normal position. This was followed by shaking their hands and letting go of their hands as they were changing their positions. This was performed in a parallel stage formation.



Dance steps/movements demonstrated by the group leader and a member of the dance group

At a point, the chief instrumentalist came up with some improvisation on the drumming and this spurred up the dance leader to come up with more dance steps which he introduced to the group members. The dance steps/movements were dancing in a semi-circular form, turning to face each other and clapping of hands with a dance partner, twisting of the body while standing, to kneeling down and still twisting the body while the two hands were up and standing up by jumping and lifting the left leg first, followed by the right leg and continued by wriggling the waist to the rhythm produced.

The chief instrumentalist took his time to teach the instrumentalists the new rhythm until they were able to perfect it. The dance leader also taught the dancers by way of doing as I do and it was very easy for them to catch up with the new dance steps. The repetition of the dance

steps/movements continued till the dancers were perfect. This took much of the time. One thing worth noting is the fact that the dance leader also worked so hard to ensure that, the dance steps/movements were reproduced by the dancers. He poses more in front of the dancers that were not getting some of the dance steps right and this helped those set of persons.

Summary of the Stages

The researcher observed the followings;

1. The group learnt faster by observing and doing what was observed.
2. Different dance steps and movements were learnt.
3. The dancers spent more time learning dance steps that were complicated. The same thing was the case with the instrumentalists.
4. The dance leader and the chief drummer played major roles in dance teaching.
5. Most of the dancers easily grabbed the various dance steps that were taught while a few found it very difficult.

Lyrics of Ozurumba Songs and English Meanings

Ozurumba songs were sung in Ikwere dialect and the call and response form was used. Below are the lyrics of some of the songs in Owhipa dialect used during the dance teaching learning and the English interpretation of the songs.

Song 1

Call	English Meaning
Vernacular	
Avurule, avurule	We are carrying; we are carrying

Response

Oweh Yes oh
 Oweh, oweh, avuruleoweh Yes oh, yes oh, yes oh, we are carrying, yes oh.

Song 2

Call	
Owhipaawiyalaeri, awiyalaeri, awiyalaeri eh	Owhipa we are ready to dance; we are ready to dance, we are ready to dance, yes
Response	
Eeyeowhe (5 times) eeyeoo	Yes oh, yes oh.
Eeyeowhe (5 times) eeyeoo	
Eeyeowhe (5 times) eeyeoo	

Song 3:

Call	
AayaiSarahoo (3 times)	Oh Sarah oh (3 times)
Sarah zuruokwuokamarunahi, mind yourself.	Sarah if you are talking mind yourself

Implementing Owhipa Traditional Dance Steps/Movements into Classroom Teaching/Learning deploying Field Trip method

The researcher while on the field took some snapshots and videos of some of the dance steps/movements of Owhipa traditional dance group. The researcher is one of the dance instructors at the University of Port Harcourt, sensitized the students on the need for our cultures

to be preserved through dance. She also let the students know that they will be going out to the field to observe the dance groups by themselves and their collective efforts are needed to make things work out the way they should be.

The students were taught through the traditional method; listening, observation, imitation and demonstration of what they had watched on the dance video. The researcher observed the following stages in course of teaching the students owhipa dance.

Stage 1: The teacher selected some of the students to handle the traditional musical instruments. She made them listen to the instrumentation and reproduce the same. The rhythms were learnt in bits for easy mastering.

Stage 2: Students were instructed to watch the dance video and then, the instrumentalists were instructed to produce the rhythms. Each of the rhythms was accompanied by the appropriate dance steps and movements. However, cognizance was taken concerning simple and complex dance steps and movements. The student started from the simple dance steps to the complex ones.

Stage 3: For some of the selected dance steps and movements that the students had a challenge in reproducing, the instructor demonstrated the steps for the students to see and imitate. It is pertinent to note that, several rehearsals were held to enable the students to perfect the songs, dance steps and instrumentation.

The traditional musical instruments used in Owhipa group were not left out during rehearsals in the classroom and at the time of examination, the costumes were worn by the students.

Conclusion

Teaching and learning are very important in the lives of humans. Learning takes place every day and no knowledge gained is a waste except it is not applied. The teaching and learning of Owhipa traditional dance adopted traditional teaching methods which were gathered on the field and these methods were used in course of teaching the dance in the classroom. The essence of adopting the dance steps and movements of Owhipa dance to the classroom was to enhance the teaching of dance and to project part of Owhipas' culture through performing their dance. Admonishing the students on the importance of protecting and preserving part of cultural practices through dance with the method that was deployed to teach the students, made the students learn through a stress-free medium. This also made the students fully participate in the dance and helped to move their attention from being examination conscious to enjoying what they were doing, thereby projecting a particular community's culture.

Recommendation

Dancing is an integral part of human existence and so, should be not be treated with levity. Likewise, the methods used in imparting knowledge hence the following recommendations.

- Ø Students should be encouraged to visit different communities to study their dances to get exposed to part of the various cultural practices of communities.

- Ø Teaching/learning should be enjoyed by students/teachers by carefully adopting some teaching methods that will bring out the best from the learners/ teachers.

- Ø Both students and teachers should be encouraged to be involved in dance as it is a sure way to keep fit.

Ø A dance instructor must exhibit a high level of skills and should be ready at all times to impart the same knowledge and skills to its group members so that, peradventure he or she is unavoidably absent during rehearsals, someone will be there to do the teaching.

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