

PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT: NEW TRENDS IN THE EVALUATION OF GHANAIAN JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' MUSICAL ACHIEVEMENT.

Isaac R. Amuah

Introduction

Measurement and evaluation are of great importance to the teaching/learning process (Borg and Gall, 1989). In recent years, the assessment of students' academic achievements has been receiving increasing attention all over the world including Ghana. The recent media coverage of, and the parliamentary debate on the 1994 senior secondary school examination results are indices of the high premium placed on the evaluation of students' academic achievement by the Ghanaian public.

The worldwide search for better strategies for assessing students' academic achievements has been the focus of attention of prominent educators in many countries in the world (Roth, 1977). Ghana is not dawdling in this search and has initiated programmes geared towards the improvement in the quality of assessment procedures used in the junior secondary schools (JSS).

It must be noted that the search for effective assessment strategies has assumed wider dimensions and involved both educators and non-educators in the latter years of this century. By the 1960s some theories and practices had emerged in the development and administration of evaluative tools. In 1967, Michael Scriven developed a useful assessment model for evaluating educational products. He observed that product evaluation serves two different functions:

(i) Summative and (ii) Formative functions.

Summative Function

According to Scriven, summative function of evaluation occurs after the product has been developed. It is conducted to determine the worth of the final educational outcome or product (1967). For instance, at the end of a music training programme--say at the end of a three-year music education programme at the junior secondary school (JSS)-- summative evaluation (Basic Education Certificate Examinations) is conducted to determine the level of the knowledge acquired by the student vis-à-vis the goals of the programme and public expectation. Other standardized examinations, like the General Certificate Examinations, administered by the West African Examination Council are also examples of summative functions of evaluation. Boyle and Radocy (1987) note that:

Summative evaluations include not only assessments of performance groups and the achievement of individuals, but may also include attitudinal data from various perspectives: students, teachers, parents, the community, and other members of the profession, both within and outside the school district (p.18).

Summative assessment, therefore, involves all stake holders of education. The main concern here is an answer to the question, "What is the worth of the ultimate educational product?"

The other function of evaluation identified by Scriven is the *formative* function.

Formative functions

Borg and Gall contend that:

The function of formative evaluation is to collect data about educational products while they are still being developed. The evaluative data can be used by developers to design and modify the product. In some instances the evaluation findings may lead to a decision to abort further development so that resources are not wasted on a product that has little chance of ultimately being effected. (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 764).

It must be noted that two key elements emerge from this definition of the functions of formative evaluation---**process** and **development**. As regards the process, evaluative procedure should be carried on in the course of the educational endeavour. The educational product should be subjected to periodic examination with the view to identifying its quality, its status--its strengths and weaknesses. The data gathered from the formative assessment should serve as the basis for further solidification of the strengths of the material or for designing remedial strategies to ameliorate its deficiencies.

In a general music class, for instance, it is the responsibility of the music teacher to help each student to develop his or her ability to perceive the expressive qualities of music. To achieve this ultimate goal, there is the need to investigate, periodically, the status of each student vis-à-vis the instructional objectives. Data gathered in this process should guide the facilitator to formulate strategies that will be of benefit to the student. Beneficial in terms of helping the individual student to consolidate his or her strength in the ability to perceive music or beneficial in terms of designing remedial exercises in music perception to help improve the student's ability to perceive the expressive qualities of music.

Research has shown that formative evaluation data appear to be more useful than summative not only for facilitating change and improvement in a programme but also for improving the lot of students. It is for this reason and, among others, that the Ghana Education Service (GES), since the inception of the new educational system, has adopted and implemented the formative evaluation procedure as a strategy for improving the quality of students' learning. The issue now is "What evaluative tool should be used in gathering data on students' achievement within the framework of formative assessment procedure?"

There are diverse ways of gathering data on students' progress within the framework of the formative assessment procedure. However, the often used assessment tool is the *paper-and-pencil* test. This strategy of assessing students has come under severe criticism by scholars of education (Gardner, 1986; Wolf, 1989). It is argued that the results obtained from the administration of paper-and-pencil tests are not true reflections of students' academic achievement. Further, it alienates students from participating in decisions affecting the evaluation of their academic achievement. It also makes teachers and students "examination conscious." Rather than making students benefit from the rich experiences of the educational processes, teachers tend to spend most of their valuable teaching periods to coach students in strategies for passing examinations. Yes, paper-and-pencil tests fail to make the educational process a purposeful and beneficial to the recipient. It is on the basis of these disadvantages, *inter alia*, that many educators, especially those concerned with the design of assessment tools, have embarked upon a search for better ways of assessing students. Arts educators, especially music educators are no exception.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss new trends in the assessment of students' musical achievement. It also seeks to address the adaptation of some of the current assessment strategies to assess JSS students' musical achievement.

Since assessment is inextricably linked to educational objectives I will briefly discuss the ultimate goals of Music Education as a means of illuminating our understanding of the processes involved in the evaluation of students' musical achievement. A knowledge of the goals of music education will also serve as a basis for the selection of effective evaluative tools to assess students' musical achievement.

Many contemporary music educators believe that the ultimate goal of music education is to enhance children or students' ability to perceive and react feelingfully to the expressive qualities of music. They also contend that this goal may be attained through the achievement of musical objectives (stated in terms of seven behaviours):

(1) Perceiving---the bedrock behaviour in the realm of art; (2) Reacting; (3) Producing; (4) Conceptualizing; (5) Analyzing; (6) Evaluating; and (7) Valuing (Reimer, 1989).

The first two of these behaviours--Perceiving and Reacting are end behaviours, while the rest are means behaviours.

To assess the level at which students have acquired skills in the behaviours outlined above, the teacher needs to gather and analyse data on students' performance. What strategies does he adopt in observing the level of attainment of these behaviours? Many evaluative tools have been proposed by scholars in the field of testing and many teachers have adopted diverse ways of assessing students' musical achievement (acquisition of means behaviours and attainment of an end behaviour). The popular assessment tool used by Ghanaian music teachers is the paper-and-pencil tests as indicated earlier on.

As pointed out in the preceding discussion, much attention, than ever before, has been directed towards research in the area of evaluation. And in the arts, researchers are seeking out best ways to evaluate aesthetic sensitivity which involves intense cognitive processes and feelingful reaction. The evaluation of students feelingful reaction poses a formidable problem to arts education scholars. However, it has been demonstrated that it is possible to assess the thinking processes characteristic of the arts and humanities in rigorous, but undistorted, ways. One of the powerful tools for evaluating students thinking processes in the arts is the *portfolio assessment* (Wolf (1989)).

Portfolio Assessment

The portfolio assessment process involves the keeping of records--students are required to keep records of their work. They gather "biographies of their works, a range of works, and reflections." (Wolf, 1989, p. 37). The compiled biography of a piece of work contains *genealogy* of different moments that underlies the production of any major project. In a music composition class, for instance, students are required to keep records of any moment in the compositional process. This could include the style of music in which the composition is written, the motifs and the various extentional devices used in the compositional process. In addition to musical notation (traditional or non-traditional) that represents the composition, students may be required to write short stories (diary) indicating how they proceeded. Such reflections could be documented or audiotaped.

From time to time the student, with the assistance of the teacher, reflects on his/her record of work, taking up the stance of an informed critic or autobiographer, noticing what is characteristic, what has changed with time, or what still remains to be done. At the end of every semester or year, teachers offer students time to study their compositions, selecting several works that best exemplify what has changed in the student's compositional behaviour over a period of time. Reflections on the anecdotes also serve as an opportunity to revisit events that have shaped the compositional trend of the student. After this session, the teacher adds her written observations to that of the students and the portfolio is complete for transfer to the next class.

From the foregoing it could be noted that the "portfolio" is a formative type of evaluation. It is an ecologically valid assessment tool to evaluate students musical achievements. Students' projects are continually tracked by themselves with the help of teachers and hence any problem envisaged in the course of the students' progress is addressed immediately. In addition, it depicts real life compositional behaviour exhibited by expert composers. Most composers, if not all, keep notes on their compositions. These notes include not only musical ideas recorded in traditional or non-traditional notation but also records of events that may have influenced the compositional process.

The merit of the portfolio assessment is seen in the opportunities offered to the student. It encourages the student to play an active role in assessing his/her work and particularly his/her progress. By keeping records

of progress on a project a student is in a position to pause, reflect and have a sense of his/her progress.

In addition, the portfolio assessment provides the optimum indicators of student's learning outcomes. Since the portfolio assessment is organized in a non-threatening environment it allows students to behave naturally and thereby exhibit their natural tendencies without superficialities. Another merit of the portfolio assessment is that it helps students to sharpen their critical judgment.

In connection with the role of the teacher in "portfolio" assessment process, Wolf (1989), indicated that teachers assume the role of advisers or counselors whose major concern is to guide the student to review and evaluate his/her progress. The nature of this assessment technique requires teachers to view their students as collaborators with whom they work to achieve a common purpose--the overall development of the student. This does not mean that students are left to do whatever suits their whims and caprices but that teachers have clear sense of purpose and offer the highest quality of guidance while the child make decisions as to the direction of his/her progress.

The current strategies for collecting continuous assessment data on students' musical achievement at the JSS level is woefully ineffective. The popular paper-and-pencil test organised on rudiments of music-- with recall questions on names of lines and spaces, clefs (treble and bass) to the construction of major scales of G, F and D and minor scales of E, D and B do not produce any reliable information on students' musicality (as effective listeners, performers and composers). At best they test on frills of music and do not in any way help students to establish a firm foundation for future training as musicians nor effective music consumers. In effect, the data gathered with the current assessment tools in JSS do students more harm than good; they tend to thrust students back and make them develop disinclination for the subject. To increase the efficacy of the existing continuous assessment procedure the writer suggests that the portfolio assessment scheme be used within the framework of continuous assessment of students' musicality. By means of the portfolio assessment strategy, students will be assisted to acquire skills in performance, composition and listening.

The reliability of the portfolio assessment procedure in providing information on JSS students' musical achievement cannot be contested. However, its usage in JSS will require a basic knowledge of its operational strategies.

A study of the new trends in evaluation procedures has revealed that formidable ideas have been generated to improve on the traditional methods of assessment. In the field of the arts and music in particular the participating researchers of the "Arts Propel" project believe that the portfolio method of assessment is project oriented. Besides learning to play an instrument, students do compose original pieces over the course of the year, so they have a "finished product" when the course ends. Students also do special projects on topics of their choice and keep journals of their progress.

Summary and Conclusion

Evaluating students' musical achievement especially their aesthetic response to the expressive qualities of music has occupied the attention of music educators in recent years. Currently, new approaches to the evaluation of the arts are actively discussed in educational literature including literature in music education. Among them is the "Arts Propel" which approach the evaluation of the arts by means of "portfolios." This approach affords the student the opportunity to fully participate in the evaluation of his or her progress. Teachers serve as counselors and collaborate with the students in evaluating students' progress. The "Arts Propel" places much emphasis on formative evaluation and encourages the application of immediate remedy.

In conclusion, I would like to reflect on the generally accepted view that evaluation is based on well defined objectives. Well constructed objectives, no doubt, revolves on the axis of a well founded philosophy. Consequently, evaluation should have a philosophical base. If this deduction is accepted then one will expect that the evaluation of the affective response to music's expressive qualities would be based on sound philosophical theories which explain the nature and value of music. I do support the view that the effort of music educators is to help deepen and broaden students aesthetic sensitivity. Hence, to evaluate our programmes and students' progress along the lines of this view, we must look beyond the assessment of perceptual aspects of music, which invariably has been the practice of music educators in Ghana, and find better ways of assessing students sensitivity to music's expressive qualities. To me the "portfolio" strategy of assessment should be carefully studied by music educators in Ghana and adapted within the framework of the continuous assessment programme in Ghanaian JSS.

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