MUSIC IN GHANAIAN EDUCATION

E. James Flolu

In line with the Education Reforms, the Government of Ghana has placed a premium on the training of people who are regarded as imaginative; who can discover new relationships and generate new ideas. For that matter our educational institutions are constantly being reminded of their obligation to encourage their students and to ensure that their graduates develop an overall capacity for, and a growing sense of creative thinking. Indeed creativity is the tool with which we seek to improve our environment. Our success lies in the totality of human creative efforts from which no one is excluded.

Both the arts and the sciences contribute substantially to human achievements; they represent different dimensions of creative work. They provide an avenue for the development of critical thinking and imagination, and constitute vital areas for exploring the latent talent of school students. Yet in education certain disciplines are called 'creative arts'. Which are the non-creative arts?

Virtually everyone must be involved with at least one of the arts. Paynter (1982, p. 94) suggests that creativity is important to all who are in any way involved with music, poetry, dance, drama and sculpture; that is to say, the entire business of 'art-making' and 'art-understanding' or appreciation has some overriding importance for individuals.

However, many educators have expressed concern about the low respect accorded the arts in school education. The status of music, for example, in Ghanaian education is mirrored in the following common saying among secondary school leavers: "I was good at music but I refused to pursue it in the secondary school because it had no prospects for my future." Consequently, both teachers and students of music are looked down upon as less intelligent, less academic, because it is thought that they cannot grapple with the sciences which eventually provide the most prestigious jobs in medicine, engineering and industry.

As society becomes increasingly materialistic, education becomes more and more vocation-oriented. Subsequently, teachers, students and parents are seldom confronted with the puzzle of why we study science, mathematics and language. It is the study of the arts for which justification is constantly being demanded. Curriculum planners making a case for music in Ghanaian education have recently argued that "Music making can be taken as a vocation or as a life-long career. Some musicians, through their performances abroad, have not only won for the nation respect but also brought in some foreign earnings" (CRDD, 1990, p. II).

Curiously, however, those who normaly play their music abroad for foreign currency are pop and dance band musicians who have no certificate in music: most of them were even drop-outs from the school system.

It is easy to measure, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the contribution of mathematics and literacy to human development. We can observe, and express in words, objectively, the value to modern society of automobiles, electronic equipment, computers and so on. But that sort of objective analysis is not possible with artistic objects. This is because since human beings are different, the arts affect us individually in different ways and our expressions of their impact on us are subjective. For example, the same piece of music may mean different things to different listeners and even different things to the same listener at various times.

Nevertheless, objectivity and subjectivity are in dialectical relationship; they are inextricably important for the growth and development of human minds and emotions. Do we have to justify the place of the arts in the school curriculum on the same lines as language and the sciences before they can play their roles adequately in education? Is it easy to assess the arts in terms of the contributions they make directly to the teaching of language, science and mathematics (Hoffer, 1992)? The unpopularity of the arts in schools can be attributed to arts educators forcing them to conform to the academic traditions and teaching styles of mathematics and science.

To live contently in the modern world, some basic skills in numeracy and literacy are essential. At the same time we need to understand and master the totality of the society in which we live. The arts constitute unique aspects of the totality of our lives. They inform us about society and culture in ways that the sciences are incapable of doing. Our whole existence is shrouded in the limitless dimensions of space and time resulting in several contradictions and lack of synthesis in our experience both of the external world and our inner worlds (Storr, 1975, p. 13). Through experiments, discoveries and inventions scientists are engaged in endless efforts to unravel these puzzles.

The artists, on the other hand, are confronting the problem of uncertainty by "making models of perfection . . . [and] trying to give meaning to existence by forcing intractable diversity into forms that can be retained or that might in some way give the illusion of resisting . . . the unstoppable flow of time" (Paynter, 1991, p.16). Thus artists present the world to us in the way they perceive it according to their own experiences as trained, sensitive, courageous, individualistic and confident persons (Copland, 1952, p. 41; c.f, Kaplan, 1990, p. 29).

Whether following a vocation or not, educated or uneducated, rich or poor, we all experience the arts in one way or another. Years ago human societies survived - and some non-literate societies still do - without modern technology and industry. There is no evidence that, without the arts such societies would have been extinct. Nevertheless, the purpose of cultural and educational revolutions in most African countries today is to retrieve, not the lost technology, but the lost cultural heritage which is held in their arts.

Throughout history music and the arts have played significant roles in society, providing for pleasure, enjoyment and self esteem. They are part of rituals,

festivals, religion, social activities and entertainment. They provide outlets for creative expression, and help to reinforce social identity and solidarity.

As creations of society, music and the arts have been regarded as valuable possessions of any culture or nation. Amu's Yen Ara Asaseni" composed for a Speech and Prize Giving Day celebration at Peki Avetile, his home town, is now more or less a second national anthem. Sculptural works - for example, Ofori Doudu's Sankofa Pot - have been exhibited as symbolic of national achievements of artistic excellence. Similarly, the poems of Attukwei Okai and others have been presented and appreciated as dramatic articulations of the spirit and rhythm of the nation. In the past, the capture of musical instruments and other artistic ornaments in tribal war was a great victory (Nketia, 1963). Such objects were, and are still, important aspects of the chief's regalia. Steps have been taken by the Government to recover works of art taken away to Europe during the colonial era or "illicitly transferred from the country since Independence and provide for the restitution of any stolen work of art" (CNC, 1990, p. 14). National pride is now being asserted in the work of traditional artists, musicians and craftsmen and women.

The arts represent a significant medium in which the development of creative expression in children can be pursued. They enable individual children to express their ideas. Through the arts, children's capacity and potential for creative thinking can be more readily manifested, students have greater opportunities for enriching their own experiences and fostering their perception of culture and society. Creative activity in the arts can be a source of motivation. It is true that most of the artistic works appreciated in concert halls and art galleries do not include those of children. However, when children recognize the products of their own efforts - whether accepted by adults or not - they become more interested in the things they do Generally, confidence is cultivated, interest in continuous learning is heightened.

Of all the arts, music is perhaps the most powerful in imposing itself on us. We may easily turn our eyes away from a painting if we do not like the colours. Perhaps few people would display a piece of sculpture on the dining table, yet music serves as a background companion to meals and many other daily chores. Whether we like it or not, want it or not, we hear music every day - from the radio and television, the shops, street orchestras and choirs, and often from ourselves as well: music pervades both our personal and social lives. In the same way music should form an integral part of our education.

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