

# THE FUNCTION OF THE COMPONENTS OF CONTENT IN MUSIC EDUCATION

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## Abstract

*The main distinguishing factor of a subject is its content, which is also known as subject matter or the bulk of knowledge which that subject entails. In curricular work, the selection of content is carefully done as that would specify what the educands are expected to learn in order to possess the kind of behaviour expected of them by the society. Content selected for every subject has some components around which information revolve. This paper assesses the role of these components in music education.*

## The Meaning of Content

Matthews (1989) states that the meaning of content is the answer to the question, "What kind of things should young people experience in their curriculum?" In answer to this question, he opines that content should be based on knowledge itself – the term that is used to denote the totality of human experiences, subject – the specific area of experience; that is, the culture of the society in which the curriculum is set, employment – things that will lead to good jobs, and the child for whom the programme is being designed. Content can simply be termed as the subject matter or the ideas that are contained in the curriculum to be taught the educands.

## The Place of Content in Curriculum Development

In curriculum development, content is considered after there has been situational analysis as well as aims and objectives formed to address the problems and/or needs detected during the diagnosis of the situation. For instance, Taba (1962) opines that it is after national or general aims of education has been translated into more specific operational goals that related content that can yield good outcome in the teaching/learning process could be selected. In curriculum planning, selection of content serves as a bridge between the selection of aims, goals and objectives and the selection of learning experiences; that is, methodology. The reason is that after setting objectives, what must be taught should be considered before how to teach it is looked at.

## The components of content

Tamakloe (1992) intimates that "the selection of content has to do with what knowledge, principles, concepts, theories, laws, generalizations, values, attitudes and skills are needed to fulfil the objectives selected" p. 147. He further states that to facilitate the selection of content, the principles, knowledge, generalizations, concepts, theories, attitudes, values, skills and laws must be grouped in a specific way: either according to subject areas which is limited in scope or according to the taxonomy of educational objectives which take care of the subject area, themes or design based either on subject area, themes or topics, interests and activities or the core approach.

## The role of the components of content in music education

Leonhard and House (1972) state that the objectives for Music education "serve to assure positive relation of musical instruction to the broader aims of the school, form the basis for planning educative experiences, control the daily adjustment of methods and materials and provide criteria for evaluation of instruction" (p.178). Thus, it can be said that

the Music curriculum is aimed at ensuring the achievement of the general aims of the school. One could ascertain the veracity of this statement by taking a look at how Music is used in the general life of the school. It is used to correlate subjects, for worship, during opening and closing sessions of the school, speech and prize giving days, sports and entertainments, field trips and excursions as well as during cultural displays.

Objectives of general Music education encompass those musical competencies which have broad application to the enrichment of living and which are not readily acquired through ordinary social interaction (Leonhard & House, 1972). A Music programme, therefore, is to produce heightened musical responsiveness in learners by equipping the individual with knowledge of a variety of music to make him understand many things about the subject; and to have the ability to participate in making music and to develop musical habits and appreciations to sustain him musically throughout his life.

Again, the Music programme is to equip the learner with knowledge of musical compositions and styles, acquaint him with musical patterns and usages and understanding of how music is composed, performed and interpreted. Objectives in music, therefore, cover such necessary skills in singing, playing or performing on an instrument and listening. They specify the conduct of the musically educated person as regards his reaction to musical programmes, practising, invitation to sing or perform, and so on.

For these objectives to be derived, the role of the various components of content must come to play. This is because, as Manford (1996) states, the Music curriculum, like all other subject areas, should be based on the broad general aims of education: promotion of skills, knowledge, understanding, and appreciation or value of the world or our environment. All the components of content, therefore, reflect in a music programme. But for this paper, principles, concept, skills, attitude, knowledge, theory, generalizations and laws would be discussed.

## **Principle**

Sloboda (1985), states that a principle is a rule of action based upon pertinent information. In educational circles, it is a fundamental truth regarding the relationship of factors with which a teacher deals. There are levels of principles some of which seem to affect a great area. In order to produce the sort of principle that may apply in a variety of instances, inferences from a great number of facts must be organized. Principles are stated as laws or concepts and are concerned with different levels and aspects of the teacher's work. Principles in general, serve to express the meaning of a fact or set of facts so that one can decide what course to pursue. An example of a principle in Music could be "Music education should enhance the expressive values of music".

In Music, principles enable the music supervisor to define and establish his supervisory programme and to guide his operation. They are direct guides to the planning of every aspect of instruction. Slobada (1985) states that a teacher must consider the changing cultural setting of music in order to relate objectives to actual social circumstances. This will enable him consider skills to be used in family and community music groups more important than the ability to follow field-formation charts for the marching band. Through further application of principles, the music programme will be organized to develop the students' taste and useful skills. It will be taught, administered, supervised, and evaluated on that basis. A music educator's basic principles when they are consciously established by thorough investigation and hard thinking, and when they express his true convictions covering each aspect of his work will enable him possess operating code which will make him have immeasurable advantage over his equally well-meaning colleagues. This will enable him to establish objectives which can consummate the large purposes of education and to create a conducive learning environment which can lead to those specific behaviours expected in his

pupils. There must be a description and illustration and the promotion of the kind of background from which principles will arise in order to develop a system of well-founded principles to work with.

Taba (1962) states that some principles have relevance to particular problems. Problems vary in degrees of magnitude. As the curriculum worker seeks to address the problems of the individual and the society as a whole, he formulates basic ideas or rules that will explain or control how he would achieve his aim. For effective work to be done speedily, he has to identify which of these principles will be more relevant to the problems to be solved.

### **Concept**

Manford (1987) writes that concept can be defined as a set of characteristics which differentiate one group of events, objects, actions, relationships, categories, etc. from all others. He further states that each area of human knowledge is, therefore, distinguished by the concepts which are unique to it. Consequently, the first step in planning for learning in any subject area or discipline thus becomes the identification of those concepts basic to that field of knowledge. Through the analysis of many examples of broad concept categories, a series of concept statements will gradually emerge that hold true for most examples (for most concept categories) within that field. For example, concept categories of Geography are different from those of Music – this is a piece of music, this is a river or this is a mountain.

Taba (1962) once again adds that concepts are complex systems of highly abstract ideas which can be built only by successive experiences in a variety of contexts. Thus, Taba confirms the idea that concepts are mentally oriented and may be deliberately formulated for enhancing educational purposes. She states that concepts in a sound music curriculum should constitute what some have called “recurrent themes”, the threads which run through the entire curriculum in a cumulative and overarching fashion” (p. 178).

Manford (1987) states that since Music is basically an aural art, concepts should be primarily developed as a result of aural experiences. So concept statements in the field of Music must describe the concept in terms of sound. There are, therefore, concept statements related to pitch which specifies the many kinds of rhythm, how they can be heard, felt, seen, organized and expressed through sound movement and visual materials. There are concept statements related to melody and these give guidance to the musician in matters concerning how tones are arranged sequentially to create melodies, depict pitch contour or shape, rhythmic structure organization, unity and variety, vertical combination which results in the production of harmony.

Also, there are concept statements related to musical controls and structure. These direct the young musician to identify comparative loudness or softness of sound, sequences of sounds and their speed, dynamic articulation and tempo changes or contrasts. The learner is also guided on how pattern may be formed by combining tones into a coherent series, how to group series of sounds into a single musical idea, how to combine phrases and motives to form larger musical events. To sum, concepts help to formulate statements to guide instruction and learning.

### **Skills**

A skill is defined as ability to do something expertly. Both Matthews (1989) and Oliva (1992) assert that there are different types of skills some of which are termed social skills which require an individual to do things in socially accepted ways; physical or performance skills which are also sometimes termed as manipulative skills, thinking skills which help the student to learn, for example, how to attack problems, make decisions, analyze issues, and think critically, and teaching skills which help the teacher in selecting

content, sequencing, writing programmes and testing pupils. There are skills to be learned in connection with any area of competency. These skills may either be cognitive, affective or psychomotor. Taba (1962) states that there is a negative area of skills and this pertains to the management of interpersonal relations and conduct of groups.

Skills perform a vital role in Music education. They are employed in performance – playing of musical instruments, reading or learning to read music, singing, listening to and appreciating music. Skills are also employed in musical compositions. Slobada (1985) writes that cognitive skills are very essential to the realization of sound musical outcomes. He opines that, to be moved by the music one hears, one must have passed through the cognitive stage, which involves forming an abstract or symbolic internal representation of the music. The nature of this internal representation and the things it allows a person to do in Music is the central subject matter of the Cognitive Psychology of Music.

More common place activities, such as the ability to whistle a familiar melody or to detect a 'wrong sounding' note in an unfamiliar melody, are complex skills which are capable of shedding light on the nature of internal representation in music. The skill to listen to a piece of melody or song and to either sing it or write it, or play it back on an instrument involve cognitivity. Also, the identification of well known melodies or songs or recalling them is cognitive work.

Again, there is the need for basic musical skills. Students should possess the skills of aural awareness and discrimination (Leonhard & House, 1972). This means the ability to be able to recognize the various notes of the scale, triads and chords in their appropriate progressions, melodies, mood – when a piece of music is rendered in a minor or major mode, by ear, all need some skills to do.

Thirdly, students should possess relevant skills to enable them solve technical problems associated with performance and composition. Learners must be able to read musical scores and syllables accurately, perform scales and vocalize, hold the baton effectively during performance, and also be able to compose pieces either oral or written without difficulty.

Skill learning in Music, therefore, is aimed at sharpening cognitive, affective and the psychomotor domains of the educand. When equipped with these skills, the individual turns out to be a good composer of quality music for public consumption and a good consumer of music, which also breed adjudicators for musical contests.

### **Attitude**

Leonhard and House (1972) intimate that "attitude refers to a generalized emotional reaction for or against a specific object' (p.19). Attitude, therefore, can be said to be the way of feeling, thinking or behaving. It can either be negative or positive. Attitudes have a direct effect on learning of all kinds and have much to do with efficiency with which knowledge and understanding are developed. Leonhard and House state that attitudes are products of education and that progress toward any objective in music education depends on the attitudes developed in children as a result of their musical experience.

Music instruction is geared towards the development of positive attitudes in learners so that they have respect for the musical preferences of other people. Individuals have different preferences for music. Some prefer choral music to instrumental music and vice versa. Others are more at home with secular music while gospel music is the taste of others. Some are of the view that traditional music should be given pre-eminence. Room must be created for the accommodation of all these preferences and music instruction cultivates this attitude in the young musician.

Again, students should cultivate the attitude of recognizing musical efforts of their associates. Individual differences in students result in the production of diverse compositions

both in and outside in the school. There is the temptation for some individuals to look down on other people's works. The Music programme, therefore, endeavours to inculcate in learners the attitude of recognizing and accepting the efforts put up by their associates as being something of worth to be used in the field of music.

Lastly, students should be taught to develop the desire to improve their musical competencies. Many people become complacent of what they are capable of doing and the musician is no exception. There is the need for revisiting and improving upon what has been achieved sometimes through criticisms. The music programme aims at inculcating this attitude in learners.

### **Knowledge**

Knowledge, according to Hornby (1996), generally means understanding of or information about a subject which has been obtained by experience or study, and which is either in a person's mind or possessed by people generally. Thus, it can be said that one's knowledge about something or somebody depicts the degree to which one can testify about something or somebody.

Dukeworth (1989) states that musical knowledge comprises the facts about Music; and enhances one's understanding and enjoyment of Music. It also encourages one to listen to music rather than just hear it. There are certain components in music which make it more pleasing to ear. Knowledge about them helps the individual to listen to music critically rather than just hear combination of sounds. Musical knowledge enables the individual to discuss music objectively rather than merely describe one's emotional responses. Fine musicians are a unique blend of musical talents; they are two different things which need to be developed through hard work.

Slobada (1985) adds that knowledge enables the music teacher to ascertain procedures which must be followed when the instrumentalists are out of tune. The musician must have some personally tested conclusions for diagnosing and solving intonation problems based upon an acquaintance with instrument construction and embouchure development. To Leonhard & House (1972), every musical activity should be aimed at producing outcomes which include knowledge of terminology, facts, beliefs, trends and categories. This will, among other things, enable the musically educated person to be acquainted with a variety of musical compositions, recognize basic musical patterns and usages, and recall essential facts in music's development as an art.

Still on the question of the role of knowledge in Music, Machlis (1970) states that the mature music lover is curious to know how the sounds are put together and why one thing is done instead of another. Even though his information need not be as technical as that of the professional musician, he needs some knowledge of the rules of the game in order to be able to appreciate music better. Christ et al (1980) opine that the learner at least needs to be knowledgeable about chord functions. He must have information about the various chords and how they relate to one another.

### **Theory**

A theory, according to Hornby (1996) is a formal statement of the rules on which a subject of study is based or ideas which are suggested to explain a fact or events more generally, an opinion or explanation. A theory explains the general principles of an art or science. Tamakloe (1992) explains that learning theories, which can be divided into two major classes – behaviourist and cognitivist, are of particular importance in the organization of content and learning experiences in curriculum development.

Phoenix (1964) states that music theory specifies what music entails. Music theory is the systematic study of how music works. Basic music theory examines the various parts, or

elements, of a piece of music and ways in which these individual elements combine and interrelate to form a musical composition. For instance, when studying music, components of music like rhythm, melody, note values, intervals and their constituent parts are identified and dealt with. Theoretical knowledge helps the young musician to become a 'better' musician after having set musical goals for himself and proceeding from exercise to exercise with the goal set in mind.

### **Generalizations**

Tamakloe (1992:10) states that "generalizations have to do with thinking which is inductive in that its specific data are used to draw generalizations. That is to say in generalization, general statements based on limited facts are made. Generalizations arise at any point where several instances will allow an inference to be drawn".

In music, generalizations give a summary or organize pieces of information concerning the characteristics of chords and their uses. For instance, every chord written or performed has a root which must never be omitted. Generalizations are also used to predict certain outcomes in music. For instance, whenever chord V (The Dominant Chord) is used at the end of a piece of composition, then the Tonic Chord is expected to follow to form a perfect cadence.

### **Laws**

These can be seen as rules that are used to order the way in which a group of people behave or how certain things should happen. In music, there are laws which govern the use of chords. This helps the young musician to compose his music in ways that will foster harmony to make it more pleasant to the ear. For instance, the third of primary chords should not be doubled or omitted. When the young musician follows this rule, it helps him to avoid what is known as 'bare chord'. But as the composer grows in the art of composition, he is not obliged to follow the law or rules to the letter. Thompson (1964) rightly said it when he states that even though there may be laws of music – physical, mathematical and God-given, the musician or composer has no need of them as he advances in composition.

### **Values**

Values are things that are considered as being of human importance and as such held in high esteem. Taba (1962) writes that there are secular values as well as spiritual or sacred values. She opines that some of the secular values include those that deal with character development and are referred to as "success ethic: acceptance of the value of competitive achievement, the ideal of individual success, and respect for the value of work and work responsibility" (p.222). The rest which are considered from Christian point of view are: cooperation, tolerance, regard for the welfare of others, and respect for individuals. The sacred values are "the traditional tenets, the values which everyone cherishes and presumably wants his children to cherish (p.221).

In Music education, the role that values play cannot be over-emphasized. Through performance, pupils are made to engage in musical competitions and choral festivals. Individuals develop the spirit of competition which helps them struggle in life for success. In such instances, learners learn what is meant to concede defeat. As pupils perform in groups, they learn the art of cooperation and tolerance when in contrapuntal pieces they wait to perform in turns as the music may suggest. Value in music helps learners to do successful appreciation where they are made to listen to pieces played from critical perspective.

### **Conclusion**

In Ghana, the Music and Dance Curriculum, now under the Creative Arts, allows the classroom teacher to use the mutual adaptation approach to implementation to select content

in certain situations (TSCA, 2007, p.vi). That is, the teacher is to add his/or her own content to the officially prescribed subject matter. The foregoing discussion, therefore, is aimed at serving as a guide to the teachers in their choice of materials for content so as not to deviate or add irrelevant facts to what they are supposed to teach in the classroom.

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