

CHAPTER TWO

TEACHING MUSIC WITH ALL HER HUMANITY

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Abstract

Our essence as human beings is in being; not in thinking, as Descartes had thought. Not in doing things. It is man's ontological priority to keep being who he or she is. Recognizing this pervasive nature can only be sustained through an elevated sense of awareness or consciousness even for music teachers in particular and teachers in general. This brings together random thoughts provoked by reflecting on the unique model of teaching music closely observed while Professor Young-Sook Onyiuke spent her active years among her many students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University. Her special wand was to be found in her overflowing love for music, her subtle insistence in making the violin a well-received member of the ensemble at a time when the instrument meant nothing there, unquenchable desire for performances, her great deal of attention to minute detail and the rare disposition for interaction towards all she mentored. Beyond having deep knowledge of the subject matter, contents and methodology required of a professional teacher, she laced it with a modicum of devotion, commitment and grace found only in the vocations. For this, she stood out among a people whose music was different, most ancient, deep, following alternate laws and defying a lot of what the West is talking about music.

Keywords: Teaching music, Humanity, and Professor Young-Sook Onyiuke.

Introduction

There is no perfect image of the teacher. There is no one way to be a teacher. Teachers come in various packages. Pedagogy and all the allied fields that teach about teaching have always aimed at the standardization of the teaching profession. Yet, every now and then, a teacher appears who does not fit into the straitjacket of theories and assumptions. Such a teacher understood not in terms of the classical iconoclast, but in the sense of who we are supposed to be, human beings make lasting impressions on those he teaches and learns from. This is the view that captures the mould and style of Professor Young-Sook Onyiuke, who breezed through many students in her very productive years of nursing a new department and nurturing both the enthusiastic and lukewarm students. Such was the nature of the music classroom which had this inchoate and uncouth mix in the tougher days of the now blossoming department.

Things that look simple are often the most mystical, like the basic elements of the universe, earth, air fire, water and space. Just like music. There are those who teach that we choose what we become in life, there are others who hold that for a great number of people, what we do chooses us. A teacher of music may therefore embark on the story of his or her journey into music and why he or she chose to be a professional music teacher whereas the reality is that music chose that individual before he or she became aware of the possibility of a life-long career in music. There seems to be a calculated attempt to put things in the reverse from the introduction of this article undertaken at the instance of this worthy festschrift project in honour of Professor Young-

Sook Onyiuke. Being one of the foundation lecturers in the department and having mentored numerous students at the undergraduate and post-graduate levels, accolades are fit and proper to her for the long years of meritorious service at Nnamdi Azikiwe University. Looking back through the kaleidoscope of the times when teachers of her kind were moulded, one is compelled to reassess the uncountable and, I daresay, confusing opinions about what the effective teacher should communicate, information or life.

Perspectives in Music Education

It is the view of Anderson and Campbell (1996) that music education has been and still is multicultural. The truth of music education is such that the unique identities of cultures, their ontological right to define and describe their musical experiences ought to remain sacrosanct. Such a position, however, does not relativise the well-known subject matter of music and education. This means that the concept of the bull's eye is usually referenced in the philosophy of science as verisimilitude is an elusive concept in art. I was reading an article from the USC Thornton School of Music (April 23, 2019) on Four Effective Music Teaching Strategies for Today's Diverse Classrooms and according to them, these are contemporary strategies. They include:

- a. The need to incorporate technological tools.
- b. Creating an inclusive classroom means that the teacher understands inclusivity and versatility
- c. Focusing on engagement which sustains interest and talent, the basic requirements
- d. Embracing the artist-teacher within. (<https://www.music.usc.edu> retrieved, 24/03/22,)

These are thematically brilliant but in pushing the point that these should replace the traditional strategies, one is forced to actually look more critically at the 'novel' strategies. Are they really new except for the push towards the unending breakthroughs in technology? For countries where the living experience is different, where the very basic needs are scarcely met, how far does the push towards the strengthening of the tech market go? Not really far enough. Must they suspend the teaching of music until the perfect conditions are met? No. This is where the humanization of the teaching profession needs a robust adaptation. Only those who understand teaching not just as a profession but also as a vocation make such adjustment possible. It is an adaptation that bears the marks of raw genius. This is the scenario within which we can locate Young-Sook Onyiuke.

If you travel from Nigeria to the United States, the perspective shifts. Once you are introduced as a music teacher, the first question they ask you is: what is your instrument? There is nothing wrong with that but everything is wrong when their anticipation is for an answer like the piano, the violin, the trumpet or any of the instruments in the western categorizations. This is really not a problem because chances are that they have never heard anything like the oja, or the ekwe or other African or Igbo instruments. This has affected many Africans trained in the western education system in the way they understand the systems and contents of education modules. Sometimes one is tempted to wonder if their pro-western epistemological orientation is not a result of simple bewilderment caused by cultural and environmental shocks experienced during the time of their sojourn.

It is this perspective that in so many ways hijacked the processes for investigating new areas in the attempt to expand the frontiers of human knowledge. The consequence is that researchers have to conform to given methodologies in the form of APA, MLA or Chicago style in the ways they carry out investigations. Existing theories of learning must be set as frameworks. This is why in so many schools the perspective of reference, for instance, the Classical and Operant conditioning theories, Cognitive and Social Learning theories are safely in place. The immense contributions of Ivan Pavlov, Edward Thorndike, Lloyd Morgan, B. F Skinner and other great theorists are by

some of these remarks not diminished. Their perspective in some derogatory sense, however, ensures the imperialist nature of school research whereas the unsuspecting researchers may have evolved very novel approaches suited for their environment where music is part of life, not just a mere merchandise an agency for advancing the course of the musical art through a colonialist prism.

Those who still hold that the job of the teacher as the name implies is to push down knowledge to the student in the form of provision of information. This model of learning-teaching interaction is traditional and is still in place. I do not subscribe to the view that the classroom is merely for interaction in the sense of mutuality of information sharing. The teacher, of necessity, should possess more information than the student. So, expecting the teacher to offer the needed sense of direction for the student is proper.

Who should read this article?

By the time you get to this point, you would have read a chunk of the work. It is even in itself a strange thing to attempt to draw a line between who should and who should not read a piece openly put out for the public in a festschrift that celebrates one of the finest humans to teach music in Nigerian tertiary institutions in the last four decades. The attention of this article is on the way life evolves through the teaching of music. It is on the essential relationship between what we do as music teachers and life itself. Teachers generally share their lives with their students; likewise, students share their lives in the interactions with their teachers. In this symbiotic flow of energies, teaching and learning take place for both parties. This piece is not written for the conscious academic. No. He or she should just skip this one and look for those articles where they must suffer before they put down one word so that the barrage of criticisms is greatly reduced. It is not written for academics who in supervising students' projects and writings, fail to allow the ideas of the students to blossom but insist on injecting or super-imposing or entirely replacing the ideas of their students with theirs. In the end, students are unable to recognize their work as original creations.

We are confronted in our African corner with horrible complexes which have stuck to our cells and genes on account of the over-structuralization of the process by which knowledge is sought, gained and accepted. This has bred and keeps breeding less self-confident academics not because they lack requisite knowledge but because the knowledge they claim is clearly divorced from their understanding of life itself. Teaching is an aspect of living. Learning is an aspect of living. This is why great teachers never die because they always live in their students and their works. This piece is not written for those who do not understand this position. What we say about teachers, in general, apply to music teachers even more. This is on account of the nature of the object they handle. Music is ancient and new, crude and subtle, sacred and profane at the same time. It can be sublime at one time and it can debase at the other time. Alas! There are teachers today who ought to have had nothing to do with school or teaching. The students, unfortunately, have to suffer them gladly.

Types of Music Teachers

This is not meant to be an exhaustive taxonomy of teachers. The types referred to here are based on the mere phenomenological perception of the interplay between their human package and the responsibility they bear towards their students. Two broad divisions of teachers come immediately to mind – the conscious and the unconscious teacher. The conscious teacher is very aware of the humongous size of the responsibility entrusted to him or her. Being aware is to be constantly mindful of the impressionable nature of the students' minds. Consequently, what the teacher says, does and thinks are done with complete presence of mind. The conscious teacher helps the students evolve in the best way possible in the bid to live a full life. He opens their minds but understands that the target of education is not merely the human mind but the total human

being - the body, intellect, emotions and life energy. Education prepares students for life. The conscious teacher knows this and helps the students under his or her watch to realize this.

The unconscious teacher is not always present in the things he says, does and thinks. He may even make the learning environment unhealthy for some of his students without knowing the extent of the damage he is wrecking on the fragile minds. He has little or no regard for other teachers as well. He is always at his best when the lecture time is converted to mere storytime or self-praise while unwittingly denigrating others. The unconscious teacher is not bothered by those who do not follow the lessons or students with special needs or attention. He works more or less like a mercenary whose sole interest is in the remuneration or salary.

Is teaching music a Profession or a vocation?

The well-known difference between a profession and a vocation is that the former requires a lot of skills and training which when certified, qualifies one to earn a living through that knowledge. A professional is, therefore, paid for the rigorous training and skills which identifies him as such. The word vocation comes from the Latin vocation (meaning 'a call' or 'summons'). Though some people use the two terms synonymously, which is an avoidable mix-up, vocation was a Christian term alluding to that to which a person is drawn principally as service driven by dedication, devotion and commitment. Answering the question which is the sub-topic of this discussion is very important. A teacher of music is a professional teacher. There is, however, a perceptible cloud of indifference always hanging over this reference like the proverbial sword of Damocles. Again when we see one of the most current uses of the term "professional" among footballers, the impression is that professionals are peopled out to make the highest amount of money playing for clubs while being disposed to switch loyalty and allegiance once a higher bidder knocks on the door. A teacher who has this type of professional disposition may achieve the satisfaction that is merely driven by material and financial gain. Another teacher may be driven by the passion engendered by the process through which he watches his music students grow.

Teaching music in Africa is a global challenge

The overriding power of the skewed media space, economy and indeed the politics of democracy and capitalism playing out clearly in the Russia-Ukraine war which I dare call World War III, have all painted an erroneous picture of the expectations that cultures have to bring along to the global table. The overthrow of informal and semi-formal education by the formal type is one clear example of how traditional forms of education were not considered as part of an authentic human experience. Traditional music education in schools is a recent thing. Even at that, attention is given more to Western musical tradition. The reasons were mentioned earlier. Colonialism never stopped. It merely changed guards. But the real global challenge in music education should begin with an authentic articulation of the various traditions, contents, methods and purposes and bring them to the global table. If some nations are not wanted on that global table, they should do well to at least let their knowledge serve its purpose in the cultures that own them. This is the only approach that can give music education of global character. When shall we see students who come into studies because there is African music that is music and not a music programme that tolerates some courses in African music? The Western stereotype taught in many schools in Nigeria is nothing but a sad commentary in view of the mounting challenges. The idea of Campbell (2004) is that global teaching of music should focus on experiencing music and expressing culture. The Nigerian music-teaching culture, for instance, is based on teacher-to-student learning through imitation and repetition and not on the understanding of musical scores. The view of Campbell is poignant on this:

As musicians learn their craft, they employ techniques that appear widespread across traditions and cultures...people become more musical through their enculturation, training and learning. Learning is a

multisensory experience and the aural, visual, and kinesthetic capacities are called into play in acquiring techniques and repertoire.... Imitation is a critical device in learning music in formal and informal settings...notation is simply not helpful in some traditions, where the direct teacher-to-student passage of music-making is the key. (2004: 6-7)

The issue of global challenges is not, therefore, mere conformity to the musical experiences of dominant Western cultures. It is rather recognizing and harmonizing the local and global musical identities and making them part of the theories and strategies for music education. This is more so because the resilience of the musical traditions of Nigeria shows that in real-life situations, traditional music is closer to the hearts of the people than music learnt within a formal school. I heard this story in one of the public lecture videos of Dr Wayne Dyer, the inspirational mystic. It captures the kind of music teacher that carries so much humanity. That's what we need.

“There's a story from many years ago that tells of an elementary school teacher whose name was Mrs Thompson. As she stood in front of her fifth-grade class on the first day of school, she told her children a lie. Like most teachers, she looked at her students and told them that she loved them all the same. But that simply was not true, because they're in the front row. Slumped in his seat, was a little boy named Teddy Stoddard.

Mrs. Thompson had watched Teddy the year before and noticed that he didn't play well with the other children. His clothes were messy and he constantly needed a bath. Teddy could be unpleasant at times. It got to the point where Mrs. Thompson would take delight in marking his papers with a broad red pen and making bold X's and finally putting a Big “F” on the top of his papers. At the school where Mrs. Thompson taught, she was required to review each child's past records. She put Teddy's off till last. When she finally reviewed his file, she was in for a surprise. Teddy's first-grade teacher wrote, “Teddy is a bright child with a ready laugh. He does his work neatly and has good manners. He's a joy to be around.” His second-grade teacher wrote, “Teddy is an excellent student and well-liked by his classmates. But he's troubled because his mother has a terminal illness and life at home must be a struggle.” His third-grade teacher wrote, “His mother's death has been hard on him. He tries to do his best but his father doesn't show much interest. His home life will soon affect him if steps aren't taken.” Teddy's fourth-grade teacher wrote, “Teddy is withdrawn and doesn't show much interest in school. He doesn't have many friends and sometimes he even sleeps in class.”

By now, Mrs. Thompson realized the problem and she was ashamed of herself. She felt even worse when her students brought her Christmas presents wrapped in beautiful ribbons and bright paper, except for Teddy's. His present was clumsily wrapped in heavy brown paper that he got from a grocery bag. Mrs. Thompson took pains to open it in the middle of the other presents. Some of the children started to laugh when she found a rhinestone bracelet with some of the stones missing and a bottle that was one-quarter full of perfume. But she stifled the children's laughter when she explained how pretty the bracelet was while putting it on and then dabbing some of the perfume on her wrist. Teddy Stoddard stayed after school that day just long enough to say, “Mrs. Thompson, today you smell just like my mom used to.” After the children left, she cried for at least an hour. On this very day, she quit teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic and instead she began to teach children. Mrs. Thompson began to pay close attention to Teddy as she worked with him. As time went on, his mind seemed to come alive. The more she encouraged him, the faster he responded. By the end of the year, Teddy had become one of the smartest children in the class. Despite her lie, he had become one of her teacher's pets. A year later she found a note under the door from Teddy telling her that she was the best teacher he had ever had in his whole life.

Six years passed by and to her surprise, another note came from Teddy. He wrote that he had finished high school third in his class and that she was still the best teacher that he had ever had in his whole life. Four years later, another letter came, saying that while things had been tough at times, he stayed in school and stuck with it and that he had graduated from college with the highest of honours. He assured Mrs. Thompson that she was still the very best and favourite teacher he had ever had in his whole life. Four more years passed by and yet another letter came. This time, he explained that after he got his bachelor's degree, he had decided to go a little further. Again, assuring her that she was still the best and favourite teacher he ever had. The letter was signed Theodore F. Stoddard MD.

The story doesn't end there. There was one final letter that Spring. Teddy said that he had met this girl and that he was going to be married. He explained that his father had died a couple of years ago and he was wondering if Mrs. Thompson might agree to sit in the place, at his wedding, that was usually reserved for the mother of the groom. Of course, Mrs. Thompson did. She wore that bracelet, the one with the several rhinestones missing. She also made sure she was wearing the perfume that Teddy remembered his mother wearing on their last Christmas together. After the wedding, they hugged each other as Dr. Stoddard whispered in Mrs. Thompson's ear, "Thank you so much for making me feel important and showing me that I could make a difference." Mrs. Thompson, with tears in her eyes, whispered back, "Teddy you have it all wrong. You were the one who taught me that I could make a difference. I didn't know how to teach until I met you." – Author: Elizabeth Silance Ballard 1974. HomeLife Magazine, work of fiction

Teacher of a kind

Professor Young-Sook Onyiuke loved to work with students on so many fronts. She loved to do each one well. She appreciated every little effort and never pretended but showed her surprise when a student caused such. She taught the piano, violin and voice. She adapted so well to the country that she adopted through marriage. Born in South Korea, she grew up full-blooded Asian. She has been to Europe and North America but lived most of her years in Nigeria. She is truly a world citizen. Her many students were the greatest beneficiaries of these international experiences. It is good to observe, on a lighter note, for some yet unknown reason, Young-Sook did not speak a lot of the Igbo language. And so, on one occasion, some students were speaking among themselves and because they wanted to be mischievous, resorted to speaking in vernacular, (native Igbo which was not the formal language of communication on campus). And whatever they were saying had to do with their lecturer and the course they just had. Unfortunately for those students, they did not know that Young-Sook understood every word they uttered. She looked at them and simply smiled before coming to the rest of the staff to report the incident. For the students, it was another life lesson outside the classroom.

In the dying years of the 20th century, (1999) we planned a music concert to usher in the new democratic dispensation which eventually took place at the ground hall of the then 'Ikenga Hotels' Awka. This hotel was later to go up in flames during the political upheaval of November 10, 2004, when the sitting governor of Anambra state, Chris Ngige was abducted by assailants. The performance was of such scale that two gentlemen who walked into the hotel for another function walked in when they heard the unusually beautiful sounds filtering out from the hall. They happened to be men of letters. Uche Ezechukwu (now late) and C. Don Adinuba, the current Commissioner for Information, Anambra state were freelancers, veteran journalists who reported the music event on the pages of the national dailies. It was a concert that made headlines featuring the Master Voice Chorale from the commercial city of Onitsha. The works performed cut across different musical epochs and included popular pieces by Mozart, (Ave Verum) Charles Gounod, (Ave Maria), Bach's Prelude (Jesu joy of Man's desiring) and Handel's bass solo why do the nations so furiously rage together? There were many of such organized for the few who had the love for music.

On one occasion, it was a quartet held at the university auditorium within the context of a Christmas carol. Young-Sook played the violin. Kenechukwu Onuorah, then a gifted student played the viola part whereas late Dr Ruth Okechukwu (a Brazilian married to an Igbo man) who was a lecturer in the Department of Mathematics was on the cello. I played the organ part adding density to the violin and the cello. The piece was Pachelbel's Canon in D. It was a very memorable outing. Then I was a Master's student. There were other times Young-Sook played alongside students at Cana House in St Patrick's Cathedral. Beyond the time spent on sourcing, arranging and directing the rehearsals, she enjoyed herself a lot doing them and in that way made music appreciation easy for those she mentored.

Conclusion

Music teachers ought to be happy people. They are not supposed to regard what they do as work because they merely enjoy what they do. Isn't that what it should be? The quintessential harvest of these random thoughts evoked through a reflection on the unique contributions of Professor Young-Sook Onyiuke is that we do more when we do whatever it is with so much humanity. Students are at the beck and call of teachers for most of their interactive hours. It will be of profound benefit for all if musical professionalism is tamed with that which defines us, humanity. Only this will give life to the music we make, teach, play, dance and share. When we begin to slave for the dumb letters of the rules about music while forgetting how it all started, we may succeed in teaching music that thrives only on paper.

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