

Musical Contexts as Bridge-Builders in Early Childhood Music Education in Kenya

Elizabeth Achieng' Andang'o

Abstract

The word “context” generally denotes “the situation in which something happens, and helps (a person) to understand it.” (Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, 7th edn.). In a musical sense, context determines the functions of music in society. In most cases, however, there is an overlap of roles within a single situation. For instance, music may entertain as well as communicate a message. Similarly, music that validates religious rituals may also evoke a physical response from its listeners. These examples illustrate the versatility of music as an art form.

Like every other age group, young children experience music in its many situations. In the early years, they tend to associate certain music with certain activities. While lullabies suggest that it is time to sleep, singing games may be associated with playtime.

This paper suggests that the integration of musical activities from diverse contexts is highly beneficial to music education. It reports an investigation of music in 3 contexts, namely school, places of worship, and homes. Four children, all between 7 and 8 years old, were interviewed concerning their performance in music in school, at home, and in the place of worship, to determine:

- ☐ what musical activities they engaged in within these contexts;
- ☐ whether these activities overlapped within the different situations;
- ☐ In what ways the overlap promoted the children’s musical development.

Finally, the paper discusses principles that may be drawn for music education in early childhood and subsequent stages.

Keywords: Musical Contexts, Bridge-Builders, Early Childhood Music Education, Kenya.

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