



## TEACHING THE PERFORMING ARTS IN GHANAIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A DILEMMA FOR PRE-SERVICE GENERALIST TEACHERS

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### **Abstract:**

Pre-service generalist teachers in Ghanaian Colleges of Education spend two years for studies on campus and one year for practical training in teaching in partner primary schools during which they teach all curriculum subjects. They however express fear and lack of adequate preparation to teach the performing arts. Through action research, nine selected pre-service teachers were guided to plan and implement activity based Performing Arts lessons. Participants' confidence and competence of teaching the Performing Arts appreciated significantly after the study, suggesting that knowledge, understanding and skills of pre-service teachers who did not offered the full complement of the Performing Arts courses in College can be built through training workshops during their practical training session. Regular training workshops and in-service training for both generalist pre-service and in-service teachers in teaching the Performing Arts is recommended.

**Keywords:** Generalist Pre-Service Teachers, Performing Arts, Primary School, Teaching, Ghana.

### **1. Introduction**

In Ghana, Colleges of Education are mandated to train teachers for the various basic schools (Kindergarten, Primary and Junior High Schools). Students follow a three year (six semesters) study programme which leads to the award of Diploma in Basic Education (DBE) by the Institute of Education of the University of Cape Coast in Ghana which acts as the examining body for the Colleges. (Source: Revised syllabus for three year diploma in basic education, 2014, University of Cape Coast). This certificate qualifies newly trained teachers to teach children between the ages of four and fifteen. The DBE programme consist of two years studies on campus and a final year practical

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training in teaching in partner primary schools during which pre-service generalist teachers teach all curriculum subjects.

As a generalist teacher educator for the past thirteen years, I have observed with much concern the inability of majority of pre-service generalist teachers to teach the Performing Arts during the practical training session. They believe that they are “*under-prepared, unmusical or even musically challenged*” (Heyworth, 2014, p. 47) to provide learning experiences to primary school students. This problem is compounded by the fact that these pre-service teachers are placed under mentors (classroom teachers) who do not include the Performing Arts regularly in their classrooms (See Boafo-Agyemang, 2010 and Ampeh, 2011) thereby denying children of “*receiving optimal opportunities for learning and development*” (Howe, 2012, p. 354) in the Performing Arts. Griffin (2014) encountered many teacher candidates who exhibited lack of self-confidence to teach music, and according to Hennessy (2000), students on placement for practical experience are “*not able to teach music*” (p. 184). These suggest a trend of some pre-service generalist teacher’s exhibiting lack of confidence adequate preparation to teach the Performing Arts as part of their practical training.

The purpose of this research is to assist pre-service generalist teachers through training workshops to acquire some basic pedagogical knowledge, skills and understanding to teach the performing arts.

## 2. Literature Review

The study of Performing Arts provide many opportunities for pupils to develop life and intellectual skills (Rowse & Vinden, 2016; Isbell & Raines, 2003) and also help build confidence, promote social interaction, interpersonal skills and self-esteem (Essa, 2003; Hobert & Frankel, 1999; Jackman, 2005; Biasutti et al., 2015). Music as a Performing Art provides children with “*the cultural tools necessary to make sense of their world*” (Custodero, et al., 2016, p. 56). As accessible activities to children, music, dance and drama behaviours help children to initiate actions that turns out to lead them “*negotiate unfamiliar settings*” (Custodero et al., 2016, p. 56), contributing to a well-rounded education.

Although children’s encounter with the Performing Arts begins at home, formal experiences in these arts have become the responsibility of the school with teachers providing these experiences. Notwithstanding, several international research studies indicates that generalist teachers including their counterparts in Ghana fill reluctant to teach the Performing Arts as they perceive themselves as having inadequate training to do so (Stunell, 2010; de Vries, 2013; Henley, 2014; Rautiainen, 2015; Ampeh, 2011). In their research study involving 12 males and 8 females teachers, Opoku-Asare et al. (2015) found that these selected Ghanaian primary school teachers are not able to adopt practical approach to teach the Creative Arts of which the Performing Arts constitute a part. Boafo-Agyemang (2010) also found in his research that teachers in primary schools in the city of Kumasi, Ghana have marginalised teaching the Creative Arts because they consider the content as very broad and beyond their skills and knowledge. Boafo-

Agyemang identified inadequate training of teachers in the subject as a major contributory factor to this phenomenon.

In order to address the issue of generalist teachers' confidence, knowledge, skills and understanding to promote children musical learning in England, the United Kingdom Department of Education (DfE) through a National Plan for Music Education introduced "*a new primary initial teacher training add-on module to boost new teachers' skills and confidence in teaching*" (DfE, 2011, p. 8). The Institute of Education, University of London was one of the educational institutions that implemented this module to train new teachers who were about to enter the profession through "*expert lecturer-led workshops...followed by opportunities to try out suggested music activities in their placement school*" (Welch & Henley, 2014, p. 16). Biasutti et al. (2015) has also given a comprehensive report on an 11 day Intensive Programme called International Summer School in Educating Music Teachers' offered at Padova University in Italy. The Summer School attended by 23 pre-service generalist primary school teachers from various universities across Europe aimed at developing "*students' skills, knowledge and understanding to use a creative and learner-centred approach in their music teaching*" (Biasutti et al., 2015, p. 147.) At the end of the Intensive Programme, results of rating students' confidence in teaching music showed a significant improvement. These interventional programmes are basically designed to meet the educational needs of pre-service teachers. They play crucial role in equipping trainee teachers with knowledge, skills and understanding which makes them functional in the classroom.

In the following paragraphs, I present brief overviews of the Primary School Performing Arts Syllabus, Performing Arts in the DBE programme, the methodology adopted for this study, the intervention process, findings and discussions, and the conclusion and recommendations.

### **3 The Primary School Performing Arts Syllabus**

The Performing Arts which is an integration of Music, Dance and Drama and forms part of the Creative Arts curriculum (Curriculum Research and Development Division (CRDD) of Ghana Ministry of Education, 2007). The syllabus prescribes and guides the teaching of the Performing Arts in an integrated manner through composition, performance, listening and observation, a strategy which is also emphasised by Jeanneret and Stevens-Ballenger (2013). The syllabus is designed to reflect the Ghanaian Performing Arts culture in order to provide Ghanaian children with knowledge, skills and understanding of the traditional music, dance and drama of their own environment (Nketia, 1999). It is also intended to unlock and develop pupils' creative abilities and potentials in the Performing Arts for national development (CRDD, 2007).

#### **3.1 Performing Arts in the DBE Programme**

There are three Performing Arts courses offered in the Colleges of Education. Each of these courses weighs one (1) credit. A summary is presented in the table below.

**Table 1:** Summary of current Performing Arts courses offered in Ghanaian Colleges of Education

Course Code	Course Title	Credits	Semester Mounted	Status
PRA 121	Elements of Music and Dance	1	2	Core/ Compulsory
PRA 221	Principles and Methods of Teaching the Performing Arts 1	1	3	Elective/ Optional
PRA 211	Principles and Methods of Teaching the Performing Arts 2	1	4	Elective/ Optional

As outlined in the table, Elements of Music and Dance is a core course for all pre-service generalist teachers (with the exception of students who offer special programmes in science and mathematics, French, and technical). The other two pedagogical courses, Principles and Methods of Teaching the Performing Arts 1 and 2 are elective courses and therefore students have the option to either offer or not to offer them. Elements of Music and Dance which constitutes one credit out of the total sixty five credits of the DBE programme therefore becomes the only formal study of a Performing Arts course by students who decide not to offer the other two Performing Arts pedagogical courses.

### 3.2 Methodology

The research design adopted for this study is action research which helps teachers through practical experiences and reflections to develop their teaching practices and ideas (Mok, 2016). According to Mertler (2014), action research is an activity of critical reflecting on one's own teaching experiences in the classroom. It is described as *"any activity into practice undertaking by those involved in that practice, with an aim to change and improve"* (Hall & Keynes, 2005, p.4). As part of teacher education, action research remains a focus of debate among educational researchers (West, 2011; Cain, 2010; Crawford-Garrett et al., 2015). Crawford-Garrett et al. (2015) are of the view that as pre-service teachers learn through action research, a space is provided for them to develop their teaching strategies and ideas. Mertler (2014) outline the process of action research as planning, acting, developing and reflecting (p. 21). In this study, the researcher collaborated with selected pre-service generalist teachers to plan, implement, observed and reflects on their practices for the purpose of developing their competency in the area of teaching the Performing Arts.

Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was applied for and gained from the teaching practice committee of Wesley College of Education, Kumasi, whose final year pre-service generalist teachers on placement in various partner primary schools for practical training were recruited as participants. I also sent consent letters to all the selected participants, including their mentors and the head teacher of the school in which the pre-service teachers were placed for practice. In a follow up meeting with the head teacher, mentors and the selected pre-service teachers, the aim and purpose of this study were explained by this researcher. Participants were informed that they could

withdraw at any time they feel uncomfortable about the study. However, all the nine selected participants volunteered to participate in the study.

### **3.3 Participants and Data Collection**

I collected data by means of semi-structured interview from nine female final year pre-service generalist teachers with average age of 21 years of Wesley College of Education, Kumasi, who were on placement at Ebom-Bomfa District Assembly Primary School in the Afigya Kwabre District of the Ashanti Region of Ghana for a one year practical training in teaching. This school is one of the primary schools in partnership with Wesley College of Education for provision of practical training in teaching for pre-service generalist teachers. The interview period spanned five days within the second term of the 2017 and 2018 academic year of primary schools in Ghana (22nd January, 2018 to 26th January, 2018). The one-on-one conversation focused mainly on their perceptions about teaching the Performing Arts in primary schools. Pre-arranged meetings for data collection were held with respondents at their convenient times, with each meeting lasting for approximately thirty minutes. Participants also completed a questionnaire to identify their content and pedagogical knowledge of the primary school performing arts curriculum.

Data collected through interviews were transcribed verbatim within twenty four hours in Microsoft word. Once transcription was completed, it was printed out and hand delivered to the respondent for validation of accuracy of information given. This was done to avoid the researcher's bias creeping in.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

An inductive data analysis approach was applied to interpret the interview scripts with two main themes emerging: inadequate training in the Performing Arts and lack of confidence in teaching the performing arts. They expressed fear of not performing well in the event of being observed by College supervisors during lessons presentation which they believe could negatively affect their teaching practice scores. All the nine female participants had taken the Elements of Music and Dance course in semester two. However, none of them opted for the other two Performing Arts pedagogical courses which are mounted in semesters three and four. These courses are designed to provide pre-service teachers with basic knowledge, understanding and skills of teaching the Performing Arts. It is therefore not surprising to find majority of pre-service teachers not willing to teach the subject. In England, Hennessy (2000) found music to be the subject in which generalist trainee teachers had the least confidence in teaching and identified school based training as an activity that influenced the confidence of these trainees to teach.

### **3.5 The Intervention Process**

Rohwer and Warren (2004) are of the view that collaborative and continued research between tertiary educators and students helps to prepare the students to become effective teachers. In order to make it easier for the participants to teach, they were

engaged in series of workshops in the form of discussions on the structure and requirements of the performing arts section of the Creative Arts syllabus for primary schools. The learner-centred approach dominated the interactions throughout the period by placing the participants' at the centre of the learning activities while this researcher played a facilitator role. Participants were engaged in questioning and cooperative learning with the content of the primary school performing art syllabus serving as reference and guide for the learning activities.

Each day's learning activities lasted approximately sixty minutes for twelve school days, that is 14th May, 2018 to 30th May, 2018. The purpose of this activity was to assist generalist pre-service teachers to identify appropriate teaching strategies that can be adopted to provide learning experiences for pupils in the Performing Arts. The fifth and sixth days of the workshop saw presentations of two model lessons, each lasting 30 minutes by this researcher for participants to observe. The first lesson focused on listening and observing a traditional Ghanaian artistic performance (*Adowa: an Akan music and dance type which involves singing, drumming, body movements that exhibit poetic stylisation and gestures that convey messages*) using a digital video disc (DVD) and a television set. The second lesson focused on creating rhythms through sound exploration, using *apentema* (Akan drum), *dawuro* (Akan bell) and *frikyiwa* (Akan castanet). The two lesson presentations were supposedly for classes three (age 8) and four (age 9) respectively. A thirty minutes post lesson presentation discussions and reflections through questions and answers created space for full participation by participants. By this time, participants had begun showing enthusiasm for preparing to present their own lessons.

In agreement with Mok (2016), it is very significant for pre-service teachers to practice teaching and not just learn how to teach theoretically. The seventh and eighth days were used to guide participants to select any Performing Art topic of their choice and plan activity based lesson that focused on the formulation of appropriate behavioural objectives that are measurable and achievable, design appropriate teaching and learning activities for achieving the lesson objectives, and selection and preparation of appropriate teaching and learning materials for the proposed lesson. The last four days of the workshop were used for lesson presentations. With the consent of their classroom mentors, each participant was supervised to present a thirty minutes lesson to pupils and all other colleague participants in the classroom followed by a thirty minutes post lesson presentation reflections and discussions with all the participants.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

In Mills's own words, "*class teachers, given the appropriate preparation and support, are capable of teaching music*" (1995, p. 2). At the end of the workshop, the selected pre-service teacher participants rated their understanding, knowledge and skills for teaching the Performing Arts higher than they had previously perceived. Their fear and perceived lack of adequate preparation for teaching the subject changed over the course of the workshops to an appreciable level of confidence and competence to teach the

subject. Observations made during the lesson presentations and post lesson presentations discussions and reflections suggest that pre-service teacher participants were adding cumulatively to their knowledge and skills in teaching the Performing Arts. They had embraced all the procedures and ideas shared during the workshops to inform their actions during their own teaching. Pupils centred approaches through which they presented their lessons created space for full and active pupil's participation. Pupil's background experiences were linked to the integrated practical music, dance and drama activities provided in the classrooms.

The use of teaching and learning aids played a crucial role in the implementation of the performing arts. Despite the non-availability of these resources in the school, it was very exciting to witness participants guiding pupils to prepare improvised drums, bells and castanets for practical lessons using locally available materials such as polythene sheets, empty tins, pieces of wood and sticks. These actions which resulted in animating the classroom atmosphere during the lesson presentations demonstrate participant's acquisition of basic skills for teaching the Performing Arts. This gives evidence of the possibility of training pre-service generalist teachers who did not offered the full complement of the Performing Arts courses in College to plan and implement practical Performing Arts lessons during their practical training in partner schools.

One participant commented: *"I never thought presenting Performing Arts lesson could be lively, exciting and interesting. I have done it and will continue to do it in my classroom"*.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

As the teaching of all curriculum subjects in the primary school rest with the responsibility of the classroom teacher in many parts of the world including Ghana (Manatsa, Gorongo & Gatsi, 2013; Hennessy, 2000; Sarfo, 2015), the need for adequate preparation of generalist teachers for planning and implementing Performing Arts lessons in the primary school classroom cannot be downplayed. The first objective as recorded in the revised syllabus for the DBE (2014) programme states: *"the curriculum is intended to produce generalist teachers capable of teaching all subjects at the Primary and Junior High School level"* (p. 4). It is therefore important to adopt innovative and pragmatic ways including training workshops to equip both pre-service and in-service generalist teachers with the necessary competencies for teaching the Performing Arts.

This study might contribute to an understanding of the role of training workshops as a complementary strategy of building pre-service teachers' capacity to teach the Performing Arts. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations associated with it. Considering the time frame within which the research was conducted, emphasis of the training workshops was on pedagogy rather than on student's knowhow of the subject content. Moreover, considering the small sample size of the participants, additional research that will employ a larger sample size to build the capacity of pre-service generalist teachers on placement in primary schools for practical

training to plan and implement Performing Arts lessons through training workshops is needed in order to make a more valid generalisation.

It is recommended that stake holders and managers of the Colleges of Education consider making the two pedagogical courses in the performing arts: Principles and Methods of Teaching the Performing Arts 1 and 2 core and required courses for all pre-service generalist students to fully develop their understanding, knowledge and skills in teaching the Performing Arts during the practical training programme and also in their future career after graduating from college.

The present state of Performing Arts education in primary schools can be improved through planning and implementation of regular in-service training workshops under the supervision of the Ghana Education Service in collaboration with the Colleges of Education for practicing classroom teachers to develop their knowledge and skills in teaching the subject effectively.

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