

UDC 37.03:78

## CHILDHOOD CULTURE AND ARTS EXPERIENCES AS EDUCATION FOR SPIRITUAL SECURITY

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*The physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual aspects of the human being are so intertwined that development in one area influences the others and impacts on the wellbeing of the whole individual. Learning is cumulative and experiential in many areas of knowing. Learning in one area contributes to knowledge in other areas, because the human being does not necessarily compartmentalise knowledge. Skills are, further, transferable to areas of performance different from the domain in which they were first developed. Culture and arts experiences in childhood therefore contribute significantly to dispositions of later life, including perceptions, world view, beliefs and attitudes that affect the people's relationships and response to their surroundings. In contemplating the place of childhood cultural experiences and arts (music) education in enhancing spiritual wellbeing, I interrogate my childhood experiences, noting specifically my exposure to sacred music at an early age that formed the foundations of my music learning. The experience of music as a cultural phenomenon further enhanced my readiness for the reception of experiences of a spiritual nature. This article embraces the concept of transformative education seen as facilitating consciousness raising, critical reflection, personal development and individuation, (J. Dirks) to underscore the value of arts and culture experiences as education of the individual towards a meaningful spiritual existence.*

**Keywords:** Childhood experiences, culture, music education, transformative education.

### Childhood Cultural Experiences and Arts Education

A child's environment is known to contribute tremendously to the formation of his/her worldview. Childhood impressions influence our opinions and perceptions and our articulation of the things we experience. This phenomenon can be to our advantage or disadvantage, depending on the nature of the experiences associated with the environments, and the relationships formed as a consequence.

Among the Luo of Kenya, an instrumentalist learned to play his instrument through apprenticeship. He was surrounded by the activities that

formed the context of the playing of the instrument. Starting with tasks that were appropriate for his age (from as early as seven years of age), the youth picked up, through observation and participation, the ideas, events, and sounds that made up the culture of the instrument that he was learning to play. This education went beyond playing and making the instrument to embrace cultural norms, interpersonal skills, and values that allowed him to forge horizontal and vertical relationships.

The environment thus plays a large role in the formation of the individual. The childhood environment shapes what perspectives an adult will have because it shapes the individual during his/her formative years. The arts are cultural expressions imbued with cultural meanings and symbols. An experience of the cultural (arts) expressions cultivates tendencies and dispositions in individuals that make influence their response to new encounters.

Today, childhood is spent in school, an environment that does not support the total immersion in the context of cultural arts practices because it is shared with various elements of formal education. The child's education is not necessarily deficient, but is nonetheless compromised with respect to cultural-artistic preparation and engagement. Exposure to the arts in early childhood places the learner in a cultural space that affords engagement with elements of the culture that have for centuries been employed in the training and empowerment of members of the community. Bringing the artistic experiences to school may help bridge the gap that going to school (separation from cultural practices) may have created, thereby socialising learners from an early age.

Exposure to the arts in a learning environment is known to make learners receptive to new experiences, especially those associated with the practice of these arts. Religious practices associated with worship among Kenyan communities involve the use of various types of music. Song is prominent in the musical expressions, and access to the beliefs and teachings of a number of (Christian) denominations is often made through the use of music. Spiritual security is thus a factor of religious activities, some of which are facilitated through music performance. A firm grounding in values and beliefs fosters spiritual security due to insights gained from practices that foster their acquisition.

**Related Research.** There is limited literature locally on cultural music as an element of arts education, and its role in facilitating spiritual development. The experience of music as a cultural phenomenon in education has been articulated with reference to the socio-cultural space in

which it is experienced. One notes R. Mulindi's analysis and classification of the musical activities of the *Logooli* children [18] with respect to their educational roles. H. Mwaniki [19] discusses the educational and developmental role children's music within the context of the music of the Embu people of Central Kenya. E. Akuno [3; 2] further articulates the elements in these songs that are useful for cultural and aesthetic education, noting their usefulness in facilitating both personal and social growth.

The authors provide insight into how cultural experiences and music education shape the child, making it possible for him/her to engage in various activities. G. Zake [25] provides information on the music of Kenya, touching on each community's music and thereby exploring the different types and roles of age-related music activities. He clarifies a link between childhood music and that of adults, as does J. Simako [21], who says that Tswana children's songs and dances replicate those of adults. This evidence of continuity in music practice strengthens the position that music learnt in childhood may facilitate adult spiritual security.

Learning is social. It involves engagement with other people (B. Nyland and A. Acker) [20, p. 328]. Involvement in music as a space for and agent of learning allows the child to develop social skills because of activities that involve other people. Participation in music generates a vocabulary of experiences that facilitate the negotiation of other experiences, music being 'one of the many languages of childhood' (B. Nyland and A. Acker) [20, p. 329]. In view of the role of socialisation and the need to engage with others in cultural activities, childhood music activities may be the best tools for developing spiritual security. J. Tafuri [22] talks of music as a phenomenon that is a human activity. It is a shared event with values that are visible on the playground. I have observed music retain children's interest in otherwise dull learning activities (E. Akuno, L. Abunge and D. Karoki) [4], entrenching other values such as enjoyment (K. MacKenzie and S. Clift) [17, p. 229], engagement, playfulness and the opportunity to practice choice. Further, music participation creates confidence, a sign of self-understanding.

Childhood cultural experiences involving music are significant in the development of children's social skills and cultural understanding. 'Children learn, interpret and understand...culture through their musical communities (where they) use integrative musical skills to engage in musical and cultural education' (A. Emberly and J. Davidson) [11, p. 266]. Music education introduces children at an early age to a 'musical community that celebrates the arts as an integrative and engaging foundation in their lives' (A. Emberly

and J. Davidson) [11, p. 266]. These are arts that enable the individual to make meaning of their surroundings, and apply analytical skills in accessing values embedded in their experiences. The musical (arts) experiences allow children to experience elements of culture 'that express ideas that belong to other spheres of human activities (such as) social (and) religious' (J. Blacking) [5, p. 64] events, because music speaks to and facilitates relationships. Not only does music allow the individual to relate to him/herself, it also facilitates the negotiation of other relationships, the latter seen in songs (and dances) of praise, petition etc.

Music, a sociocultural product, has both political and moral meanings and implications (Woi-Chung Ho) [14]. As a product of culture, it has custodians - the culture bearers who are role models. The role models are vital and crucial for moral education, which music education facilitates. As a repository of socio-cultural values, music has a bearing on social relationships, politics and religion. In much of the world, 'collective socialist, ethical and family values are still emphasized in moral and music education' (Woi-Chung Ho) [14, p. 78]. These include spiritual values that are embedded in socio-cultural teachings.

Character development has been a focus of education especially in early childhood. Musical activities are used to enhance this in the education of pre-schoolers, where character development activities are focused towards developing the qualities that lead to caring, respect, courage, honesty, responsibility and cooperation (A. Lee) [16, p. 340]. It is established that drama and songs 'have the power to enhance children's ability to learn to care for others and their own needs' (A. Lee) [16, p. 345]. The capacity to identify and care for others' needs is a tenet of many faiths and when music education can develop this in childhood, it is deemed crucial in developing social and spiritual virtues.

In reference to J. Piaget's schemes, D. Hargreaves [13] provides insight into how children actively and continuously seek to make sense of their environment. One experience leads to the capacity to negotiate the next, thanks to the 'framework that the child uses to assimilate new knowledge and experiences' (D. Hargreave) [13, p. 12]. As more knowledge and skills are assimilated, the child's status (capacity) changes, and new knowledge builds on old, thereby presenting a continuum of growth and development, an unending transformation of the individual towards receptivity. The new knowledge and skills characterise the individual, determining how he/she perceives things and responds to new matter. Once assimilated, the new information makes one a person with additional knowledge. Knowledge

therefore transforms the individual. Transformation through music includes change of attitude, cultivated aesthetics and capacity to deal with diverse issues. It prepares one to deal with more complex concepts, such as those concerned with negotiating relationships. Positive encounters with music are enriching developmental experiences that lead to the development of positive attitudes.

One of the values of music is found in its agency 'in the formation of contemporary identity' (J. Kidula) [15, p. 3]. This is evident in its central place in the spread and adaptation of Christianity in Kenya, in this context helping communities negotiate colonial and cultural challenges and traverse matters of politics and nationhood. The issue of identity is further negotiated through music in its performance and in education because of its cultural content that grounds the participant in contexts of its making.

Although the cited literature covers diverse themes in cultural experiences and arts education, their role as elements of education towards spiritual security is not explicit. It remains to this paper to demonstrate such a link.

**Statement of the Problem.** C. Doddington [10, p. 60-61] advises that the 'sensing, human body...allows us to be both conscious and open to the world'. This sensing individual can perceive things in the environment. Perception allows the individual to commune, to interact with others (persons, things, objects) and through this, the individual is enabled to build a sense of self and of the world.

From the literature above there is no clear statement or indication that childhood cultural and arts experiences contribute towards education for spiritual security. This calls for an interrogation of the experiences and their transformative educational powers. Transformative education (J. Dirks) [9] is orienting the individual towards change not only in behaviour, but also in perception and attitude. Spirituality is fundamental to an individual's total perception. The latter influences the types and quality of relationships that the individual forms. It is recorded that music has been used to enhance spiritual development throughout the centuries as church ministers endeavoured to improve congregational singing (C. Abril and J. Kelly-MacHalle) [1]. The crucial question interrogated in this article is the transformative role that childhood culture and arts experiences play in facilitating education towards spiritual security.

**Aim of the Paper.** The paper is designed to interrogate the possibility of childhood cultural experiences and arts education fostering spiritual security. It outlines the value of childhood exposure to culture and arts

experiences; articulates how these work to enhance a sense of community and belonging that lead to a desire and scope for participation in spiritual activities. The paper argues that these experiences prepare the individual to receive and work with materials that lead to activities that impact on their attitudes and responses to the world.

#### ***Singing I go – the Musical Exposure***

This paper's data derives from aspects of my personal experience. As a child, I watched my mother sing in and lead the church choir, while I participated in the children's choir. I later learned from her that her own mother was the source of this musical talent that obviously trickled down to me and my siblings. Apart from that, two contexts serve to highlight the themes of this discussion.

1. First scene is a socio-cultural situation. A group of children, aged 2 to 14 or so years, gathered under a tree singing songs derived from and that further explained the Bible story they had been told. The song challenged the children to think through the story and its implications for them, inviting them to understand the story at a personal level. The children participated in singing, and responding to the questions that the teacher posed, questions that were easier to answer thanks to the song text that made it easy to remember the storyline. The songs we sang led us into activities that explained several concepts like God's abundant love, forgiveness, missionary work, giving of tithes and offering, hospitality and encouraging one another.

2. Second scene is in school where, following auditions, a school choir was formed. We learned a number of songs from a wide cultural background, including *Sister awake close not your eyes* by Thomas Bateson, *Joseph Dearest Joseph Mine* a Christmas carol, and *The Fisherman's Night Song (In the calm Hour of Evening)*, poem by L. A. G. Strong and arranged for female voices by Reginald Jacques. We also sang (Kenyan) folk songs, selected from a repertoire that was appropriate for girls of my age (9 – 12 years) in terms of the themes of the song text. As I look back, I note that the songs increased in complexity, demanding more concentration for one to master and hold their part against the other voices (the English songs were SSA arrangements), and technique to negotiate the technical demands of the songs.

These two sets of experiences demonstrate the childhood cultural experiences and music education that I believe fuelled my desire to study music in high school, and that have kept me in choral groups singing sacred music. The latter has had an effect on my religious expression, and my

attitude to things spiritual because much of what I experience, know and practice finds expression in music. Through song, I participate in worship, thanksgiving, supplication and affirmation of faith. In song, the character of the focus of worship is explained while God's dealing with created beings and instructions on godliness and appropriate relationships are communicated. In singing, communication takes place, and joint participation in religious (cultural) activities is encouraged.

#### **Transformative Education through Cultural and Arts Experience**

The experience above presents a couple of themes worth interrogating. These revolve around the experience of music, through participation in church singing activities from an early age, and the systematic exposure to music elements from primary school. Whereas the former gave me a repertoire of experiences and feelings, the latter led to aesthetic development. According to D. Hargreaves [13], aesthetic development leads to the appreciation of and familiarity with the notions of beauty, order and harmony. These are vital elements in spiritual experiences that today characterise my song selection.

'Social and cultural education was conducted in private and public through stories songs and by example' (J. Kidula) [15, p. 7]. My experiences of Biblical stories and songs contributed to my social and cultural empowerment. The significance of music has been its 'possibilities for mutation and use' (J. Kidula) [15, p. 9] noting that it is adaptable to various contexts. Both church and school used music towards one goal – educating my senses and sensibilities. J. Kidula further points out that 'Christianity and its music constitute a part of...national Kenyan identity (J. Kidula) [15, p. 9]. Notions of personal, cultural and national identity are central to psycho-social stability, and are developed from childhood in the children's songs (E. Akuno) [2]. When you consider that, for the adult Christian singer, 'the songs are not able to express anything that does not already exist in the experience of the singer' (J. Blacking) [6, p. 31], the role of childhood cultural experiences becomes more significant if spiritual security is to be achieved. By the time one is becoming adult, they have a lot of experiences that have provided the vocabulary through which they relate to new encounters and facilitate the making of choices. With songs as 'part of society... academic study (is) a route to personal development' (S. Ward) [23, p. 109] and one can experience self-actualisation through music.

The activities that facilitate access to spiritual security are diverse. My childhood singing allowed me to be in groups of peers, with older and

younger people and under the guidance of an older role model in the form of teacher or choir master, 'Musical behaviour... covers a vast middle ground in which relationships between self and other or between the individual and the collective are played out' (M. Clayton) [8, p. 35] and music plays a great role in managing these relationships. One of the principle functions of music is enhancing relationship between the self and others (E. Akuno) [3; 2] and validating 'social institutions and religious rituals' (M Clayton) [8, p. 36]. It is hence a powerful tool for mediation [8, p. 41], and one's ability to participate effectively in the music activity allows them access to the cultural (spiritual) event that the music facilitates. As observed with children at play, children will participate freely in the song games whose music they know. The learning of the music positions one for effective participation in the musical event. Religious activities that cement and validate spiritual security of my experiences incorporate the use of participatory music making. An education that has included training in making and appreciating music enables one to make meaning of a spiritual experience, by facilitating effective participation – either as an individual or as part of a group. My early exposure to music making allowed me to relate to the people around me and gave me glimpses of the One to Whom, and about Whom, I sing.

In providing music education to children, a fundamental belief is that 'every human being has a social and biological guarantee of musicianship and ... that everybody can communicate through music' (S. Hallam and R. MacDonald) [12, p. 472]. This fundamental premise anchors the decision to provide musical experiences within educational contexts to all children, irrespective of ability or background. I learnt that the talent for music came from my grandmother. I believe, though, that the early and consistent exposure and organised participation developed my abilities and raised the benefits that I gained from this shared music heritage. The provision of opportunities to make music for children and youth results in the participants' development of skills that serve later in life [12, p. 472]. This education, exposure and provision of opportunities needs, however, to be focused on well-defined and articulated goals. In the West, the early years of music education in public schools aimed at developing students' repertoire of religious songs and singing skills (C. Abril and J. Kelly-McHalle) [1, p. 24], a process replicated in the colonies where song material was primarily English folk and children's songs and Sunday school songs (E. Akuno) [2]. The performance of songs nonetheless have educational outcomes, significant ones including a particular worldview, and the assimilation of a particular tradition, the two implying religious and spiritual orientation.

**Conclusion.** From an African perspective, J. Chernoff [7, p. 164] notes that participation is indicative of active effort and contribution that gives life and meaning, and that it contributes to religious practice. Participation is characteristic of music making of all age groups. Music is an important part of our religious heritage and 'religiously considered, participation adds the value and strength of a person to the continuity of commitment that creates a heritage' [7, p. 164].

Transformative education is realised through culture and arts experience when learners are sensitised about their environment and how the structures therein influence their thinking. When participating in cultural activities, the mingling and sharing of roles lead to an understanding of what is what and how things relate to each other, giving learners the opportunity to develop informed opinions. This gave a new dimension to my perspective because as I critically reflected on my experiences, role, expectations and aspirations, my beliefs, values and assumptions were redefined. I questioned my motives, placing so high a value on music experience that it influenced my choice of studies, career and musical engagement.

Continued involvement with music gave me knowledge and skills that further replaced my old perspectives. This personal development was not confined to aesthetic awareness, but embraced cultural values that led to a new awareness and construction of my Self (J. Dirks) [9, p. 7]. The question of my place in the complex of existence is a constant in my conscious. This allows me to stand apart and savour a knowledge of my Self, the individual within the social. From the early exposure to the way society works through participation in music (socio-cultural) activities, I have learnt to acknowledge that there are, within each context, limitations and facilitators of our understanding of who we are as individuals and communities.

We can use the knowledge, skills and attitudes developed through the various forms and phases of education, to influence decisions about and activities that enhance spiritual awareness, practice and security. It is through this early exposure that I have (slowly) built the capacity to function in a spiritual, as well as physical, emotional and psychological sphere. In this manner, it is possible to fulfil the objectives of education defined as 'the harmonious development of the physical, the mental and the spiritual powers' (E. White) [24, p. 13].

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### ДИТЯЧА КУЛЬТУРА І ДОСВІД ЗАНЯТЬ МИСТЕЦТВОМ ЯК ОСВІТА ДЛЯ ДУХОВНОЇ БЕЗПЕКИ

Емілі А. Акуно

Фізичні, інтелектуальні, емоційні і духовні аспекти розвитку людини настільки взаємопов'язані, що розвиток в одній області здійснює вплив на інші і позначається на добробуті людини в цілому. Навчання є інтегральним і емпіричним в багатьох областях пізнання. Навчання в одній області сприяє отриманню знань в інших областях, тому що людина не завжди поділяє їх на складові. Крім того, навички, переносяться в області дій, відмінні від області, в якій вони були вперше отримані. Тому культура і досвід занять мистецтвом в дитинстві в значній мірі сприяють формуванню укладу життя в літньому віці, включаючи сприйняття, світогляд, переконання і відносини, які здійснюють вплив на характер взаємин між людьми і реакцію на те, що їх оточує. Розглядаючи місце дитячого культурного досвіду і художньої (музичної) освіти в зміцненні духовного благополуччя, ми аналізуємо свої дитячі враження, приділяючи особливу увагу знайомству з духовною музикою в ранньому віці, яка сформувала основи нашого музичного навчання. Досвід музики як культурного феномена ще більше підсилює нашу готовність до сприйняття духовного досвіду. З метою акцентування уваги на цінності занять мистецтвом і культурного досвіду для виховання духовної особистості, яка живе повним життям, у даній статті дається детальна характеристика концепції трансформативної освіти, суть якої полягає у розвитку розумових здібностей, критичного мислення, особистісному розвитку та індивідуалізації (Дж. Діркс, 1998).

**Ключові слова:** досвід дитинства, культура, музична освіта, трансформативна освіта.

### ДЕТСКАЯ КУЛЬТУРА И ОПЫТ ЗАНЯТИЙ ИСКУССТВОМ КАК ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ ДЛЯ ДУХОВНОЙ БЕЗОПАСНОСТИ

Эмили А. Акуно

Физические, интеллектуальные, эмоциональные и духовные аспекты развития человека настолько взаимосвязаны, что развитие в одной области оказывает влияние на другие и сказывается на благополучии человека в целом. Обучение является интегральным и эмпирическим во многих областях познания. Обучение в одной области способствует получению знаний в других областях, потому что человек не всегда разделяет их на составляющие. Кроме того, навыки переносятся в области действий, отличные от области, в которой они были впервые получены. Поэтому культура и опыт занятий искусством в детстве в значительной мере способствуют формированию уклада жизни в пожилом возрасте, включая восприятие, мировоззрение, убеждения и отношения, которые оказывают влияние на характер взаимоотношений между людьми и реакцию на то, что их окружает. Рассматривая место детского культурного опыта и художественного (музыкального) образования в укреплении духовного благополучия, мы анализируем свои детские впечатления, уделяя особое внимание знакомству с духовной музыкой в раннем возрасте, которая сформировала основы нашего музыкального обучения. Опыт музыки как культурного феномена еще больше усилил нашу готовность к восприятию духовного опыта. С целью акцентирования внимания на ценности занятий искусством и культурного опыта для воспитания духовной личности, живущей полной жизнью, в данной статье дается детальная характеристика концепции трансформативного образования, суть которой состоит в содействии развитию умственных способностей, критического мышления, личностном развитии и индивидуализации (Дж. Диркс, 1998).

**Ключевые слова:** опыт детства, культура, музыкальное образование, трансформативное образование.

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