

INTRODUCING RECORDER PLAYING FOR EFFECTIVE MUSIC TEACHING/LEARNING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT

The state of formal music education in Anambra state primary schools calls for attention. The situation is such that most of the pupils are deprived proper mental, physical, and emotional development gained through participation in formal music instruction. Five schools within Onitsha metropolis were studied and the problem was traced to the dearth of competent music teachers and basic instructional/learning materials such as piano keyboard and basic traditional musical instruments (*ekwe, oja, udu*, etc.) and all these have led to the gradual demise of music education at the grassroots. This paper therefore has called for the resuscitation of music education in our primary schools using the recorder because of its availability, affordability, portability, durability, attractiveness to children, simplicity and applicability in teaching rudimentary music.

INTRODUCTION

Numerous are the gains of childhood music education (Nye & Nye, 1970; Leonhard & House, 1972; Swanson, 1981; Onwuekwe, 1998; Mbanugo, 2005; Obiecheta, 2007; Onuora-Oguno, 2009; Aninwene, 2009). Among such gains are mental, physical and emotional development, auditory perception and sound discrimination useful in language acquisition, acculturation, self-worth among peers and skill acquisition for the future. These goals are still evasive in our primary schools due to the lack of and inadequacy of basic instructional materials for music such as keyboards, recorders, traditional instruments, music text books, charts, music recordings and playback gadgets as recommended in the National Policy on Education (Agu 2006: 2), and the curriculum for cultural and creative Arts for primary schools (2007). Waiting for the provision of these materials by the government or whoever could be waiting in futility and could endanger music instruction in our primary schools the more. The writer's experience in teaching with the recorder has yielded remarkable results.

A piece of recorder costs about ₦150.00. In fact, at this rate, it is more affordable than most musical instruments for primary schools. A 5-octave piano-keyboard costs between ₦20,000.00 to ₦200,000.00. A set of school assembly band sells at about ₦45,000.00. At this rate, it is doubtful how many schools that can afford these items owing to what Mbanugo (1991: 1) referred to as *Rising costs and Diminishing Educational Funding in Nigeria*. Comparing these with the price of the recorder strengthens the rationale behind the advocacy for recorder playing. The recorder comes in various colors (red, blue, milk, pink, green, yellow, brown, etc) and this feature contributes to its attractiveness and acceptability to children.

The instrument is now moulded in hard plastic (originally, it was wood hence its classification as a woodwind instrument). The advantage of this feature is that it reduces the risk of damaging easily, electric shock and the problem of maintenance peculiar to the piano keyboard and most musical instruments. It's portability makes it a more handy instrument. Children appreciate learning

materials they can personalize, label, toy with, pamper, display at will, and practice at leisure, and the recorder suits!

Historical Perspective

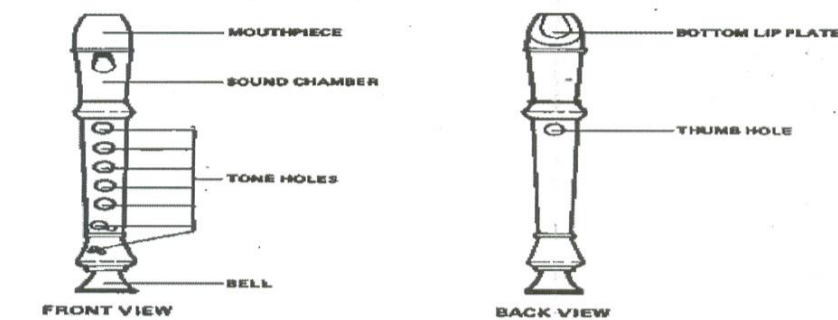
The history of the recorder dates back to the Renaissance era from about (1450-1600 AD). The Renaissance was characterized by a `rebirth` or `awakening` of creativity. Renaissance instruments produced softer, less brilliant sounds than the instruments we hear today. Most of them came in families of three (3) to eight (8), ranging from soprano to bass. Recorders were among the most important, and often several members of a family were played together (sopranino, soprano, alto, tenor, and bass) (Kamien1994: 73). The recorder`s popularity fell into decline around 1750 because it could not compete with some of the newer instruments that came in vogue in the 18th century(Lowe, 2003: 73). However in 1919, Arnold Dokmetsch (1858-1940) revived production of the instrument and as a result of this revival, recorders became popular again as a means of teaching recreating music of the past, for teaching beginning music lesson, and as serious instrument for contemporary music (Harvard Dictionary of Music, 1986: 684).

In recent years, the soprano recorder has emerged as one of the most popular means of introducing music in elementary education. Its simplicity enables even the very young student to play with ease and confidence from the start, and to enjoy the thrill of instant success in performance. The instrument also provides the teacher with a vehicle of instruction for the many aspects of musical training which the pupils will use later on in band orchestra, and most importantly, the relatively low cost of the recorder makes it the one melodic instrument that is accessible to nearly every pupil.

Fig.1. The Recorder

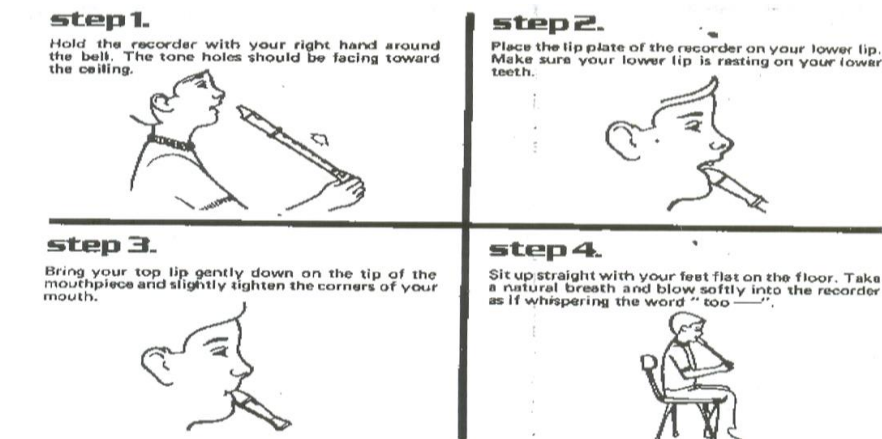


Fig.2 Structural Description of the Recorder



The modern soprano recorder has a long cylindrical shape which embodies the mouth piece, sound chamber, tone holes, and the bell. Some models have two or three separable joints and this feature is useful while cleaning the recorder. This feature is also an aspect of the portability of the instrument mentioned earlier: children find it easy to disengage and reassemble the instrument for easy carriage and safety. The recorder also is usually provided with ten holes: a thumb hole on the back, five single holes and two double holes in front. The instrument is wider at the top and bottom than at the centre, akin to the tibia bone of the leg (from which very early instruments were made) (The new Harvard Dictionary of Music 2001: 684). The instrument is now provided with a plastic stick which basically serves for cleaning the instrument even though it can serve as conducting stick as well. In fact, this added feature has made the recorder experience thrilling and rewarding to children, as they never forget taking the stick along with the recorder to music classes in order to conduct!

Fig. 3. How to Play the Recorder (Preliminary Steps)



It is usually a little bit difficult getting children to concentrate to learn the preliminary procedures before the actual playing. The preliminary steps are necessary before a child begins playing.

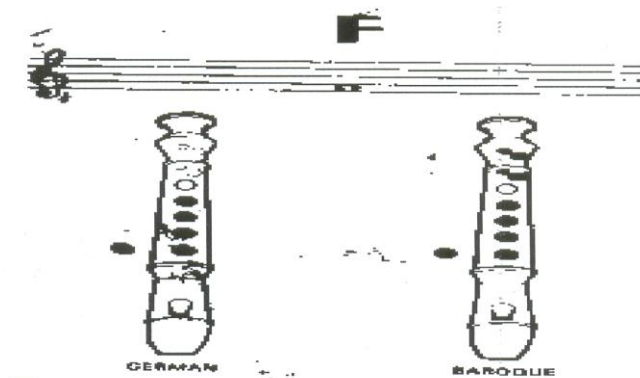
Tonguing

Perhaps it is more appropriate to learn how to tongue before fingering. Tonguing is usually not as easy as most pupils presume. Most children whistle and some blow on the recorder mistaking it for tonguing and some entirely abandon their recorders because of their inability to articulate properly. Tonguing means setting the tongue in contact with the upper teeth and sounding 'too' or 'tuh' or 'taa' which ever, provided the 't' starts the tone and 'oo', 'uh', or 'ah' follows it.

Fingering Techniques

Two systems of recorder playing have evolved as a result of controversies over the best fingering technique to use. These systems are the Baroque (or English) and the German system. One of the differences between the two systems is the fingering for certain notes (e.g. first space F).

Fig. 4. German and Baroque Fingering Systems



Although the controversy still lingers, the baroque system is usually preferred by professional players because it gives a clearer and more precise pitch; but the German system is similar to the fingering system of the flute, clarinet, and saxophone, and which pupils could graduate into later in life (Sueta, 1992a; Sueta, 1992b).

Fig. 5. Recorder Fingering Chart (German System)

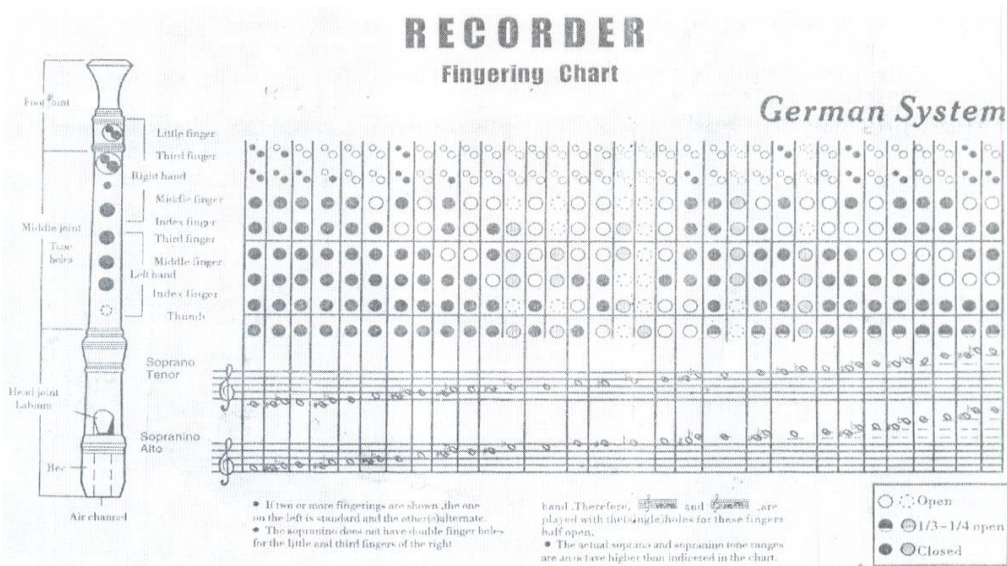
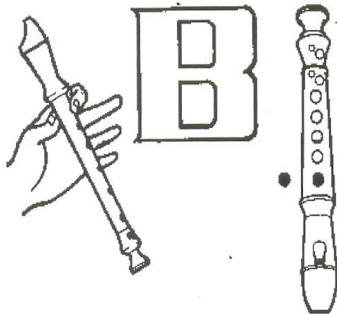


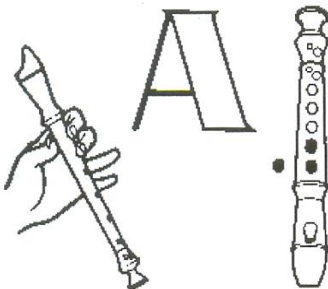
Fig. 6. Playing the first few notes

your first note...B



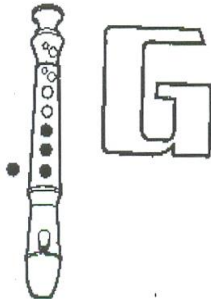
- With your left thumb, cover the thumb hole on the recorder.
- With your first finger, cover the top hole on the front side of the recorder.
- Now, to play B, softly whisper the "too" sound into the recorder and hold it.
- Play B over and over, holding it each time you play it.

your second note...A



- Cover the thumb hole and the first two holes of the recorder as shown in the diagram.
- Be sure to curve your fingers and cover the holes firmly.
- Take a natural breath and hold.
- Now, softly play the new note A and hold.
- Play the note A several times and then play the note B several times.

your third note...G



- Cover the thumb hole and the first three holes of the recorder shown in the diagram.
- Be sure to curve your fingers and cover the tone holes firmly.
- Sit up straight, with your feet flat on the floor.
- Take a natural breath and hold.
- Softly play the new tone G and hold it.
- Play G several times and then play A and B.

Playing the first few tunes

Having learnt the first few notes on the recorder, children can happily proceed in playing simple tunes such as *merrily we roll along* on their instruments using notes B, A, and G. This is called the 'BAG' concept in recorder teaching/playing. They can also enjoy some folk tunes like *Urioma* on their instruments.

Fig. 7. (*Merrily we roll along*)

The image shows a musical score for the song "Merrily We Roll Along". It is labeled as "Track 4" and "Traditional". The score is written in 3/4 time and consists of two staves. The first staff has the lyrics "Mer - ri - ly we roll a - long, roll a - long, roll a - long." and the second staff has the lyrics "Mer - ri - ly we roll a - long, O'er the deep blue sea." The music is written in a simple, melodic style with a key signature of one sharp (F#).

Fig. 8. (*Urioma*) (Excerpt from *Soloist's Companion I* by Alvan-Ikoku Nwamara)

The image shows a musical score for the song "Urioma". It is written in 3/4 time and consists of two staves. The first staff is labeled "Call" and has the lyrics "U - rio - ma lee ----- le le". The second staff is labeled "Response" and has the lyrics "U - rio - ma". The music is written in a simple, melodic style with a key signature of one sharp (F#).

Care of the Recorder

Children are naturally careless and they tend to extend this behavior to virtually everything around them. Most pupils lose their recorders each term due to carelessness. Some also share their instruments with friends and thereby getting it damaged very easily. These measures are usually taken and inculcated in children to ensure the safety and durability of their instruments:

1. The recorder is not a toy and therefore should not be kept carelessly or used to hit on objects.
2. It should be carefully kept in its packet after playing and when not in use.
3. It should not be kept close to fire or under hot temperatures to avoid melting.
4. The instrument is washed in warm soapy water, rinsed and cleaned periodically.
5. The instrument should be kept out of reach of young children to avoid breaking it to pieces or even swallowing the parts.
6. Care should be taken not to chew the instrument to avoid damaging the mouth piece because this creates air leakages and distorted tunes on the instrument.
7. It should not be shared with friends and peers to avoid contracting disease.

Conclusion

The call for resuscitating recorder playing in our primary schools for effective music teaching/learning was informed by the instrument's affordability, availability, portability, durability, attractiveness to children, ease in learning, simplicity and applicability in teaching rudimentary music. Reactivating recorder playing in schools would foster the development of aural sensitivity, pitch awareness, and general musicianship among the learners. Teaching children to play recorder would also guide them into a successful instrumental experience, which they really enjoy, and this offers them a means for self-expression and self-worth. Also giving children a foundation in recorder playing enhances basic fingering techniques which relate directly to the techniques of wind instruments and which can prove very vital in playing such instruments later in life.

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