

## **Teaching Music, Dance and Drama in Schools as Compulsory Subject: Some Issues**

**K. Mantadin**

**Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Moka, Mauritius**

---

---

In our schools in Mauritius, teaching/learning music, dance and drama is a required and compulsory subject. Even as this subject meets the need for and requirement of developing skills, sensibility and appreciation for fine arts, the curriculum also has wider and deeper goals. Mrs. Gyan, GOSK, Director-General, Mahatma Gandhi Institute and Rabindranath Tagore Institute clearly implies that Indian Music is for all and that Indian Music must be taught, learned and performed crossing ethnic, religious and caste barriers: "Students come from a variety of social and cultural environments which expose them to different types, genres and registers in the arts. ... at a time when the country is looking at new avenues for continued economic development and more importantly at new avenues to enhance equity, social justice and inclusion, it is our small contribution to the 'grande aventure' of holistic education" (

Music and Dance play a crucial role in defining, preserving and improving upon the ethnic identity of various groups of Indians in Mauritius. This, indeed, is an important function.

While it may not be possible for all students to become highly skilled and versatile in music and performing arts, all can certainly develop a sense of appreciation for music and performing arts, even as they merely listen and watch. However, listening to music and watching performing arts will be more entertaining and productive when we all know also the tunes, steps, etc., and their significance and implications.

Pfizer Medical Team offers 10 reasons:

<https://www.gethealthystayhealthy.com/articles/10-health-benefits-of-music>

1. Improves mood.
2. Reduces stress.
3. Lessens anxiety.
4. Improves exercise.
5. Improves memory.
6. Eases pain.

7. Provides comfort.
8. Improves cognition.
9. Helps children with autism spectrum disorder.
10. Soothes premature babies.

Most of our students in schools may have no explicit and formal background in singing or performing arts, except through watching movies and TV programmes. Some families do have a tradition of singing and participating in performing arts. At the same time almost all families in Mauritius are familiar with some traditional folk music and dances through religious rituals and festivals. Singing in ethnic Indian languages, whether we know the meaning of the verses we sing or not, during rituals is quite common.

This background becomes an essential step for formal training in music and performing arts. I would encourage teachers and learners to refer to the tunes thus acquired and use them as often as possible in classrooms and conversations.

Listening actively and attentively to the music lesson is an essential first step. In day to day conversations, or even in classrooms where non-music subjects are taught, not all students actively listen. They are in a hurry to go to the next item, inwardly expecting what would be the next. At times, they may be preoccupied with their own thoughts when the teacher is giving her lessons in the class. They may also be distracted by other students and what goes on between students even when the lecture is on. In other words, attentive and continuous uninterrupted listening is something very hard to achieve and practice. So, attentive uninterrupted listening must be cultivated in students in music class. Perfection is not possible, we should confess. But honest effort both by students and teachers will bring in impressive results.

Listening does not mean just the physical act of listening through our ears. Through listening we discern the tunes/melodies/ragas, etc. We begin to distinguish between varieties of movements within the music we listen to. We distinguish one tune from another. We distinguish between emotions involved. We distinguish between the sound generated by the instruments and also how these sounds are combined and modified. We also listen to “silence”, which certainly plays an important role both in normal conversations and in music and performing arts.

Just as training our ears, we also need to train the tongues of our teachers and students. Since use of our own Indian ethnic languages is not very strong in Mauritius in day to day interactions, most of our students learn, no doubt with great love and interest, Indian ethnic languages in classrooms and perhaps most of us may not use such languages frequently outside the classroom. So, training our tongues to produce music and perform acts would need extra care and extra exercise when compared with students learning music in India. There also classical

music could be in a dialect or language not well known or with which the learners may not have been well acquainted with. Yet, the surrounding in India is different from the surrounding in Mauritius. So, meaning of words uttered, repeated pronunciation drills, and skill in distinguishing one sound from another carefully -- all these need to be focused upon on a regular basis in our classroom.

Standard Accent expected from singers must be acquired steadily step by step. While repeated practice may help, need for someone, say the teacher, to listen what the students perform and make instant corrections by offering right models is very important. We must remember that complexity of learning a foreign language is easily noticed in learning music, especially in Mauritius situation.

Actually, learning music is more complex than learning a foreign language. Change of accent is desired, but more than that, making others understand the meaning we want to communicate becomes the focus of learning and using a foreign language. In music, it is not just the meaning that is focused upon. It is how the words and sentences are wrapped with tunes that is focused upon. How the songs flow and become an integral part learning to perform. Though this sound hard to achieve, with practice and inherent skills students and teachers can achieve some good results.

---

### References

Mrs. Gyan, GOSK, Director-General, Mahatma Gandhi Institute and Rabindranath Tagore Institute. **Foreword. Grade 7 Textbooks to Learn Indian Musical Instruments *Sitar and Tabla***. Mahatma Gandhi Institute, Mauritius, 2018.

Pfizer Medical Team. 10 Health Benefits of Music.  
<https://www.gethealthystayhealthy.com/articles/10-health-benefits-of-music>. Downloaded 17 January 2019

---

K. Mantadin  
Project Coordinator for the preparation and Publication of  
Textbooks to Learn Indian Performing Arts, Indian Musical Instruments and  
Related Matters  
Mahatma Gandhi Institute  
[mantadinkmgi@yahoo.com](mailto:mantadinkmgi@yahoo.com)