



SETTING

The Gambia is the smallest country on the mainland of Africa. Since achieving independence from the British in 1965, the country has remained relatively peaceful. Tourism, followed by agriculture, is the primary industry. English is the official language of the Gambia, but many other indigenous languages are spoken at home and in communities. Music in the Gambia emphasizes rhythmic expression and improvisational creativity. This richness and creativity is a part of everyday life, creating an environment in which children are encouraged and expected to be musical.

METHODS

This study of children's music making used ethnographic techniques such as cultural immersion and participant observation in addition to interviews and the collection of songs and chants. Dr. Koops collected audio- and video-recordings of children's music making and play. The study participants included 101 children and adults who lived in a neighborhood in a community which Koops calls "Baatikunda" (this is a pseudonym to protect the anonymity of her participants). Koops conducted participant observation with children age 5 to 13. This involved observing children during formal music education in school as well as during the playing of music games on the playground and at home. She also observed children participating in adult-centered music events. Children, older

siblings, parents and teachers were interviewed about children's music making.

FINDINGS

The study's main findings relate to three categories of children's music making: 1) What children do musically, 2) How children learn and teach music, and 3) The role and meaning of music in children's lives.

1. What children do musically refers to the form and content of children's music making activities. Dr.

Koops observed that Gambian children eN29 (about) 20 (s) -20() -2

pating in musical activities. She hypothesizes that

Dr. Koops' work in the Gambia has practical implications for music education in a general elementary setting. The results of this study can contribute to culturally informed music education, and also have some lessons for music instruction in general. In-depth study of specific music making practices can be used to improve music education by bringing together theory, or an understanding of the context and meaning of music, and practice. It is essential that students understand something about the meaning and relevance of music to the people who created it in addition to gaining practical experiences of music making by engaging in song, dance, instrument use, and listening. Improving children's experience and uptake of music education will require additional research and adjustments in the teaching of music.

This research also provides insight into ways to address the disconnect between music inside and outside of the classroom. This disconnect hurts music education and leads to missed opportunities to encourage learning through participation and the use of music making that is relevant to children's lives. In addition, by observing the ways children exhibit agency in informal music making, educators can increase

opportunities for children to practice leadership and decision-making in the formal educational setting. An additional insight from Dr. Koops' study was the presence of a musical environment, in which Gambian children were encouraged to be musical in all aspects of their lives. Teachers could adapt this element of Gambian musical culture to increase the presence of music in their teaching environments.

Dr. Koops has identified three teaching pathways to improve culturally informed music education based on the results of her ethnography (see figure 1):

- 1) Improving the methodology used in teaching music from practices other than one's own