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Music education of the present: Does popular music develop learners' values?

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Abstract

The article discusses possibilities of improving music education through application of popular music and use of personal meaning and emotional imitation methods. On the basis of research results educational practice is reflected discussing links of music activities and formation of value-based attitudes, improvement of music education. Research results show that pedagogical prerequisites for music education of junior school children integrating popular music and nurturing learners' value-based attitudes are as follows: link of goals of music education with topical issues of the socialisation process; application of innovative methods as striving for self-cognition; maturity of teacher's personality; sincere, respectful, benevolent relations between the teacher and learners based on mutual understanding that provide meaning to musical experiences and activities.

Keywords: Popular music; value-based principles; innovative music education methods; junior school learners.

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1. Introduction

Under conditions of changes in social cultural life, development of information society, shifts in values, variations in music forms and content, popular music reveals itself as an organic factor in school learners' life experience and becomes an integral part of their life. Fascinated school learners tend to accept the diverse musical information declared by contemporary environment, which naturally derives from their practical activity but does not always favourably contribute to development of esthetical taste. Challenges of changing society encourage to stay in close contact with musical environment, which is close to school learners, as well as to employ the potential of music while searching for closer interaction of between musical culture and education.

It should be noticed that the lack of scientific research on the pedagogical potential of application of popular music during music lessons is observed in Lithuania. However, educational potential of popular music is more frequently the focus of researchers in other countries. The educational practice suggests adhering to changes in style development (Nilsson & Folkestad, 2005; Davis & Blair, 2011; Sepp & Ruokonen, 2013; Springer & Gooding, 2015), it is also recommended to follow structural shifts of multi-dimensional musical culture in terms of content and context searching for closer interaction of musical culture and education as well as to clarify the role of music in the life of society (Wright & Finney, 2010; Mantie, 2013; Mark & Madura, 2014), decrease in the gap between educational programmes and musical interests of contemporary school learners initiating a new context for teaching music is encouraged (Hedden, 2010; Juvonen et al., 2012; Law & Ho, 2015). Lithuanian researchers in education address various problems of music education discussing musical activities and perspectives of their improvement (Piliciauskas, 1998; Straksienė, 2009; Sakadolskienė, 2012; Balcytis, 2012; Vitkauskas et al., 2012; Girdzijauskas, 2012; Girdzijauskienė, 2015; Tavoras, 2015). Therefore, searching for creativity, attractiveness and modernity of music education curriculum and seeking its compatibility with school learners, it is appropriate to find activity methods integrating popular music not only to improve curriculum but also to nurture value-based attitudes of maturing personality of a child perceiving the situation of change in music education curriculum in the context of contemporary musical culture.

1.1. Problem Statement

The analysis of literature sources allows to formulate one of relevant problems of music education in a contemporary school: development of value-based attitudes of junior school learners through integration of popular music.

1.2. Purpose of Study

The aim of study is to reveal possibilities of music education improvement employing innovative methods and integrating popular music into this project.

2. Methods

2.1. Application of innovative methods of music education

The educational project (Mertler, 2012) aimed to more precisely define and to practically test several strategies for optimisation – applying *methods of personal meaning* and *emotional imitation* – of influence of music activities on value-based attitudes of primary learners. While implementing the project, the idea of music education (method of personal meaning) that emotional experience or emotional sensation is an important link in music cognition of school students suggested by Piliciauskas (1998) was considered as the main one. The method of emotional imitation introduced by Navickienė (2005) is a way to promote school students' musicality and music abilities as well as self-education through imitation of the content of emotional intonations or experiences of an imaginary character. During the educational project attempts were made to ensure that music experiences acquired through

popular music enhance school students' fascination with human values, their motivation for moral maturity, sensation of the good and the beautiful.

2.2. Data collection and data analysis

While organising the research (Creswell, 2014), the proposition that value-based attitudes of primary learners may be developed applying musical activities was employed as such activities may carry out cognitive and moral functions (Piliciauskas, 1998; Navickienė, 2005). The topics that are relevant to school students were analysed during the lessons applying the criteria of the good, the beautiful and the true, i.e., attempts were made to create imaginary situations, to recognise and specify the experienced emotions, to decode the meaning and content of senses in a musical composition (Girdzijauskas, 2012). Taking into account the musical interests of school students, characteristic works of music were selected. Specific goals of education aimed to ensure that knowledge of music links with school students' practical activities and their personal experience are ensured. The attitude that verbalization and identification of experiences is an important means of cognising influence of music was followed (Rauduvaite, 2014). Primary learners of second and third forms participated in the musical educational project.

In addition to the educational project, the following methods were applied: theoretical analysis of pedagogical, psychological, philosophical scientific and subject didactics literature, school student reflections, observation, conversations with participants in the process of education, generalization of educational experience.

3. Results

3.1. Popular music in the context of general music education: theoretical insights

Solving the pedagogical dilemma of popular music, the questions arise if popular music can teach something; in what ways it can teach and what factors increase the educational influence of the popular music? How to differentiate good music from bad one? Is popular music the problem of society's culture, then how to solve this problem? Is popular music a bad taste? Will we be able to perceive values in popular music under changing moral norms? Is music evaluated applying norms of "elite" music?, etc. Answering the question what music is, Regelski (2011) poses it from the philosophical perspective: does the meaning of music have esthetical, autonomous, immanent nature and belong to sounds of musical compositions or does it emerge through the link of the person or social use, status or function of music? Thus, the formulated questions allow to state that music is art, development of musical (artistic) taste, which is predetermined by education – the quality of educational process.

The relation of school learners with music in a contemporary school is regarded as highly multidimensional. Stoskuvienė, Balciunas and Žalys (2009) emphasise that school learners living in the space of improving technologies and socio-cultural changes do not perceive the experience of previous generation as absolute value because the constantly changing environment around them results in building up of new values and needs. Therefore, it is natural that there emerge cases of incompliance between curriculum and school learners' needs, when what is declared as a value in the curriculum, is understood as irrelevant and relic phenomenon in the environment surrounding the learner. Another research study revealed that school learners relate the use of music with six thematic categories: memory, spiritual needs, sensory experiences (e.g., pleasure), change in mood, mood improvement and activity (exercises, washing, work, eating, communication, reading, sleeping). The research discloses the methods how music is used as means of continuous self-creation and creation of social, psychological and emotional states. According to Regelski (2011), the conception of music reflects the real role of music in individual's life. Thus, all the kinds of musical practice are evaluated and they embrace all musical meaning and values. The author emphasises that music, which is learnt at school, may be understood as "music for our sake", for the sake of life, for the sake of our "good time", which would not reject but would engage winning greater recognition.

Juvonen et al., (2012) point out that research in music education and search for new methods have to be essential developing music abilities, conveying knowledge in the practice of music education. The foundations of philosophy of music education have to be linked with contemporary music culture, whereof changes are reflected in the content of educational programmes embracing musical expression, musical attitude and thinking, motivation, learning environment, development of musical taste and other factors. Schippers and Campbell (2012) state that music teachers seek successful development of learners' musical abilities and meaningful understanding of music perception, open up the path for learners to the perspective of cognition of musical cultures and traditions; therefore, modelling teaching of music it is necessary to convey the comprehensive knowledge of musical cultures embracing world arts, traditions and popular music.

The research carried out by Law and Ho (2015) is of utmost relevance to practice of contemporary education. The results revealed that, solving cultural dilemmas encountered by school learners, listening to popular music at school and outside it is prioritised. However, next to pop music, classical music is distinguished, which is also included into the programmes of music education. These findings can be interpreted as indicating that music and music education in formal or informal settings are complex cultural constructs that can be reinvented through the intertwined interplay of different actors concerned with the selection of music elements in a multileveled, multicultural world. According to W. Bowman (2012), culture, society and music are volatile phenomena, which are in constant change and will change in future regardless of their current states. This means that the abundance of popular music manifestations and formation of new expressions allocate a dominating role to this kind of music and, simultaneously, have influence on learner's personal maturity.

Pursuing improvement of education curriculum and perception of specifics of popular music, attempts may be made to evaluate the value and attractiveness of it as cultural value (product of culture) as well as its importance to people on the basis of following existing indicators (Pruskus, 2005):

- Susceptibility of visualisation: in what way a composition is linked to social, physical and geographical context;
- Cultural adaptability: to what extent a composition may be comprehensively inserted into the existing cultural system and becomes recognisable among members of society members in such a way. Namely this mostly predetermines the relation between people and a composition;
- Positive recognisability: in other words, to what extent a composition is objectively important and significant from social and spiritual perspective to separate social groups and society.

Establishment of value is rather problematic because most frequently evaluation is conducted employing theories of beauty and harmony or conceptions of grandeur and chaotic state. Moreover, popular music as a product of culture as well as its services enters the market. Therefore, usability is a feature characteristic of this kind of music. Undoubtedly, the aforesaid indicators are not the only and absolute ones but they facilitate understanding of logic of establishing the value of a multi-dimensional music composition. However, the responsibility of an artist for the esthetical impact of the created work remains in all the cases. Public education contributes to understanding and revelation of the spiritual value of product of culture.

3.2. Preconditions for integration of popular music in general schools

The educational process without the importance of understanding of the variety of reality is hardly understandable in a contemporary school of general education. While implementing the project, the idea of music education (method of personal meaning) that emotional experience (emotional sensation) is an important link in music cognition of school students suggested by Piliciauskas (1998) was considered as the main one. During the educational project attempts were made to ensure that music experiences acquired through popular music enhance school students' fascination with human values, in other words, communication with music has to facilitate the dialogue between feelings and mind to enable a learner to determine own ideals in a conscious way as well as to remember and consider them as frequently as possible, i.e., children as if enter the musical picture, act in the imaginary situation, live

through own feelings employing the content of music, seek to clarify the meaning of experiences as encoded in the music composition as well as their development. Moreover, learners have already accumulated a certain musical thesaurus of intonation and during the project they were encouraged to share the possessed knowledge of music experience (favourable performers, music genres, etc.), to systemise and supplement it. Taking into account learners' musical interests, characteristic compositions to strengthen suggestibility of learners' experiences by mood of their favourite works of music were selected. Setting specific educational goals attempts were made to relate knowledge to learners' practical activities, to enable them as if naturally "discover" and internalise it. Learners' ability to approach music of different kinds as well as different people and phenomena, from various positions, in a tolerant and unconventional way is developed in parallel. Verbalisation or identification of experiences, is considered to be a relevant pedagogical means for cognition of influence of music.

On the basis of acquired teaching experience, the studied literature, the indicators that reflect the value of culture, the criteria for selection of the value of popular music repertory for junior school children were formulated:

- Aestheticism (artistic expression), which is reflected in the following qualities: beauty, harmony and form. These components may be supplemented by others, which show the esthetical value (style, fashion). In this context the following aspects are important: harmony of music (instrumentation) and poetic text; compliance of music form, its content and peculiarities of learners' age (structure of melody, rhythmical picture, limitations of voice range, etc.); building up of intonation vocabulary (based on the Lithuanian folk music); artistic experiences, as possibilities of content of a composition, which allow to experience esthetical value of music.
- Historical value (historical links) indicates how compositions reflect conditions and circumstances of the period during which it is being created and how it reflects continuity of the past. Attempts are made to ensure that: the themes of compositions meet learners' interests and relevant issues of their lives, etc.; the content of compositions familiarises with heritage of musical culture, roots of musical creation, etc.
- Authenticity (originality) indicates that a composition is true, original and authentic. However, each music composition has roots, teachers, etc. This puts emphasis on: a) performing (distinctive relation with music and conscious striving for its conveyance), the variety of means of expression; b) a link with other elements of curriculum (consistent and systematic adoption of music knowledge, interdisciplinary integration, etc.).

The popular music in the educational project is perceived as well known and frequently performed musical compositions of various genres and styles, which demonstrates the popularity of music. It is also appropriate to single out one more structural element in the variety of popular music, i.e., *popular music for school children*. In other words, taking into consideration the topical issues of the epoch, it is also meaningful to single out and define the popular music, which targets at improvement of curriculum, i.e., at music for school learners to listen to and perform as well as at enhancement of dynamics of their value-based attitudes.

According to A. Piliciauskas (1998), the art of music may be approached as a harmonious and unified family, which consists of at least four members. Folklore is seen as the source of viability of arts. It is the head of the family characterised by experience and wisdom. Academic music is regarded as mother of the family rich in subtle experiences and thoughts and full of riches of spiritual world. Children, as real descendants, resemble of their parents (in appearance, ideals and interests). Jazz is the son, who has inherited a lot from the father, and is open to life problems and solves them in a sincere and unusual way. Pop music is the daughter, the youngest member of the family, fascinating everybody by its charm and sincerity as well as juvenility, which does not mean superficiality or levity. It encounters problems, possesses own attitude towards life and ideals, which correspond to her experience and age; it offers non-traditional solutions to relevant problems as well as alternatives. All the "members of the family" are unique and multidimensional "personalities", everything depends on our attitude towards them, their experiences and thoughts. Thus, they may have influence on listener's personality the way

the latter approaches them, i.e., cognises and understands them. Similar association is needed in the process of teaching, which would facilitate understanding that each kind of music contains artistically valuable and socially relevant compositions, which are capable of enriching the spiritual life of everybody.

3.2.1. Directions of integrating popular music in primary classes

The examples of musical activities on the basis of popular music are presented to illustrate the expressed statements grounded on the idea of personal meaning and principles of emotional imitation. Primary formers are already able to express own attitude towards music, to better perceive it, to express internal feelings through emotional expression. That is why, during music lessons not only teaching directed towards the sound of music is important but also discussions initiated by the teacher, which encourage a child to justify own opinion and to make important decisions. Therefore, a set of informative and laconic questions was applied for each music composition, which embraced and focused on various spheres of life. This process consisted of: 1) introductory information; 2) presentation of the prevailing attitude of musical activity; 3) listening to music; 4) discussion.

The episode of teaching the song "Mom" (music by R. Sileika, lyrics by D. Teiserskytė):

Introductory conversation. The prevailing attitude: "Sincerity". Do you know that your appreciation, support and sincerity are the greatest gifts to your mom. You are Love, Concern and Anxiety to your Mom. How many nice nuances the word "mother" may have: mummy, mom, mam. This word sounds in your language daily. But sometimes it happens that children say some disrespectful and insulting words (perhaps not deliberately and without any bad intentions). I think that you agree with me that such behaviour is inappropriate. I would like to believe that you do not behave like this. The future of our society depends on the relation between the mother and the child (relations of people). The value of a person is predetermined not by his/her appearance but rather by the internal world and attitude towards the life values.

We are going to listen to the music (instrumental phonogram) of the song "Mom" written by a contemporary composer. While listening to the sounds of music, try to empathise with and imagine the world of mom's (grandma's) thoughts, the state of her feelings (perhaps she is happy: her children are good learners and help her at home; perhaps she is worried or calm). Having listened to the song and discussed the lyrics, the melody is taught. Later, after learning the melody, heuristic elements are presented; school learners express characteristics of related emotional states (e.g., conveying the feeling of sincerity to mom) changing ways of singing expression (voice timber, dynamic changes, mime, etc.); school learners get possibilities for self-expression as well.

Singing of junior school age children is manifested in suggestive expression of verbal and music intonations. The descriptions of their musical experiences highlight their attitude towards singing: "singing trains the voice and helps to relax"; "while singing one can train the voice, to sing low and to sing high, fast and slowly"; "singing for me is a pleasure but to achieve high level of singing is difficult, it requires training"; "the meaning of singing is the same as the fairy tale about Johnny and Gretchen, this is a story told through singing"; "singing for a person is necessary in order to have a nice voice"; "singing expresses person's wellbeing, mood; singing provides joy"; "when a child starts singing, he/she should feel music"; "when we grow up, we'll be able to sing in the song contest The Song of the Song"; "when you sing, you also listen to singing of other children"; "when I learn to sing, I'll sing to my parents".

In their imagination junior school students are capable of comparing incredible situations, to ascribe such qualities to things, which are not characteristic of them. After evocation of children's imagination they become more active and susceptible. Since the experienced musical images are individual, it is important to develop this personal ability in a subtle way, opening the context of general life values to child's experience. Therefore, during the educational project it was important to present various moral situations, to choose related compositions, which provide opportunities: 1) to emotionally live through the listened to or performed music composition and to picture the imaginary

situation; 2) to discuss characteristics of acting characters justifying their behaviour and searching for links of personal meaning; 3) to open spaces of moral cognition and motivation actions to learners; 4) to evoke associations close familiar to learners on the basis of their experience and concepts, to help discover the path to music as well (in its broad meaning) and to the unity of the context of topical social issues.

Applying the methods of personal meaning (Piliciauskas, 1998) and emotional imitation (Navickienė, 2005), a teacher has to become “director” of planning, implementation and improvement of own activity. The illustration of the chosen exercise for solfeggio (fragment of the song) is presented in this context.

The prevailing attitude: “School learner’s daily routine”. In the classroom four different versions of intonation of the melody are presented, which are able to illustrate emotional conditions in the related situation: 1) I am excited as I am in a hurry (I’ll be late to school), I also encounter some obstacles (the trolleybus is late); 2) I’m standing alarmed and anxious (at the classroom door), doubtful (to enter the classroom or to go for a walk); 3) I am calm and sort of satisfied (I resolved to enter the classroom), I sit down; 4) I am sincerely grateful (to a teacher, who understood my being late: “It can happen to anybody”). The situation is addressed where the following aspects are revealed: 1) suggestion of moral impact (a sense of duty, courage, human behaviour of the teacher, etc.); 2) prerequisites for applications of various means of expression.

Similar versions of melody intonation may be presented by school learners themselves, who also are able to choose themes that are relevant to them. Such exercises are important not only for training of intonation hearing but also provide school learners with an opportunity to think about what is important in life or to rejoice over the success of classmates’ activities and to notice the value of such activities.

The chosen exercises for solfeggio may be referred to as the beginning of the unfinished sentences. Having completed their sol-fa, the school learners further continue the thought on the chosen/suggested topic. Later this thought is written down on the sheet of paper. Examples of describing emotional images of primary learners are presented: to be responsible for somebody/something means to me <...> “to defend somebody/something”; “huge responsibility”; “well-performed assigned work”; “carefulness”; “good performance of own duties”; to take care of somebody means to me <...> “love, sincerity, action”; “responsibility”; “joy”; when I take care of somebody/something <...> “I want to do everything well”; “I must look after the order”; a rich person is the one, who is <...> “happy”; “is able to hear and speak”; “has common sense”; “possesses extensive knowledge and a lot of friends”; to be heard means to me <...> “a good feeling”; “respect”; “that this is a good person”; “when a friend listens to me”; “that somebody is interested in me”; “politeness”.

Undoubtedly, during music lessons various and not less substantiated version of teaching may be used but rational words of the teacher open broad possibilities for activities of school learners’ imagination, thinking, creativity and facilitate establishment of conditions for perception of music, to indicate the direction for choosing value-based attitudes.

4. Conclusions

According to Piliciauskas (1998), artistic experiences make up “building materials” of music learning, which are provided with meaning in a sincere environment based on mutual understanding under presence of respectful and well-meaning mutual relations between the teacher and learners. Therefore, during the music lesson, it is appropriate to consider the structure of learning material, its presentation and to establish favourable conditions that promote high-level engagement of school students and collaboration. It is common knowledge that engaged in activities, a learner builds up relevant attitudes, which predetermine motives for his or her behaviour. Since school learners like popular music and are well aware of it, it is possible to expand learning of the musical world by new aspects applying the synthesis of methods of personal meaning as well as emotional imitation and popular music. The

focused perception of popular music nurtures musicality, enhances ability of junior school learners to evaluate and ground their relation with the surrounding environment.

The conducted research allows to conclude that pedagogical precondition for music education of junior school children integrating popular music and nurturing learners' value-based attitudes are as follows: 1) link of goals of music education with topical issues of the socialisation process developing learners' musical activities; 2) application of innovative methods of personal meaning and emotional imitation as striving for self-cognition; 3) maturity of teacher's personality, sincere, respectful, benevolent relations between the teacher and school learners based on mutual understanding that provide meaning to musical experiences and activities.

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