

Judit Györgyiné Koncz

Teaching Songs or Educating Children through music?

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Z ZAGRANICY...

Judit Györgyiné Koncz, PhD hab.
Faculty of Human Sciences, Institute of Pedagogy
Gál Ferenc Theological College, Szeged (Węgry)

TEACHING SONGS OR EDUCATING CHILDREN THROUGH MUSIC?

The traditions of teaching songs in the school have orientated the teachers of this subject towards handing down the solutions concerning method and content of a constant, well-elaborated and ready system, while at some places adapting it to their particular circumstances, whereas not departing from the traditional logic of what this special subject means in the narrow sense and from what basically the development of music facilities and skills constitutes. Due to these facts, the teaching of this subject has become quite *l'art pour l'art*, thus not taking advantage of opportunities offered by this subject. The changing social and educational environment itself has generated the demand of taking the children's point of view and looking at the subjects and areas of culture included in the curricula as a whole. This circumstance has had quite an imposing effect on each person responsible for a given area of culture, including teachers of music. As a result of a complex thought and a change in our points of view, we become able to extend children's way of thinking and dissolve the obstacles the effects of which have resulted in children being able to recall knowledge merely in the given subject area and are able to apply it under some certain circumstances. By the dissolution of this tension, the child is able to recede from the circle of thoughts typical of a well-framed subject and through this process their general knowledge and acquaintance are amplified. It is a typical phenomenon that the child can read only while sitting in a class of reading; they can spell only when they are having a class of grammar; they can sing well only in Music classes and they are only able to reproduce and apply each area of knowledge in the given context. A primary school teacher who is in the privileged situation of being able to conduct the development of a child as a whole may effectively exercise influence on these barriers that have been built around the thinking of a child between the different subjects and be able to remove them, thus integrating and synthesizing the contents of the applicable areas of culture effectively.

These days, Hungary is facing the job of re-elaborating the national basic curriculum; however, the one in operation and the earlier curricula have also definitely pointed at the situation described above from a point of view that



emphasized the different areas of education that needed to be considered while teaching each and every school subject. This fact demanded complex thinking from both primary and secondary school teachers, the realization of which in practice is a very comprehensive job that calls for consideration.

Subsequently, this present study emphasizes some ways in which music education may contribute to the harmonious development of a child and highlights some circumstances of music classes that conceal opportunities for education.

Music classes offer an innumerable number of opportunities for the self-understanding and realistic self-picture of a child to evolve. Thus music classes should exercise such a motivating force on the little one that an inner impetus unroll in them and that they themselves want to try their musical abilities. Therefore, it is essential that they have an opportunity to weigh up and compare how much they can individually unfold in activities connected to singing and rhythm; what are they capable of and which fields are those in which they prove to be less talented.

By its very nature, cultivating music enhances one's sensibility; the contents of many songs make it possible to interpret moral and ethical norms. These feelings, emotions, and circumstances arising from different situations of life are experienced by the child in real when they become part of the stories coming from the songs in a form of tableau and when after a long practice, their ability of sympathy develops to a high level. With time, these moments of practice, during which even inner and hidden contents within the child become clear, trigger the urge for personal development, for the development of oneself. Thence – as we have already emphasized – it is essential that the child have an opportunity also in music classes to test themselves, to compare themselves with their mates and through this process a realistic picture evolve in them concerning their accomplishment and their abilities. Within the same correlation, it is imperative that the child should not consider their own accomplishment concerning music to be a mere proportional result achieved within the framework of a school subject but find the musical knowledge acquired to be an organic part of their personal growth. All these are very important since provided that the child acquires knowledge of music as part of their learning schedule using this approach and thus becomes a participant in their own musical education, then they may not consider music classes to be a useless kill-time during school years; they do not look at this subject as something that takes away useful time spent on preparing for secondary or higher education. Kindergarten pedagogues and masters/mistresses teaching in the first form of primary schools have great responsibility in forming this positive aspect since it is here where the attention of parents should be called to the fact that by its particular methods, musical education contributes to the integral development of a child. Provided that both children and their parents are faced with this point of view at the initial stage of primary school, perhaps this situation



does not deteriorate so much as to come to a point which is unfortunately palpable in many schools i.e. that singing and music become an insignificant engagement.

Seemingly, physical education and training for a healthy way of life do not have much in common with musical education; however, several points of connection may well be traced between the three.

The positive physiological effects of appropriate singing are common knowledge. Thus a great significance lies in making pupils get accustomed to appropriate body posture in all classes, but especially when singing. On the one hand it is because the muscles of a child of 6 to 12 years are still undeveloped; their skeleton is flexible and therefore especially inclinable to distortions. On the other hand it is because one cannot sing well while keeping a wrong body posture. Whether they sing while standing or sitting, it is important that the child's trunk and the position of their head should be straight so that they can make their sound-producing organs and the muscles of their abdomen, their chest and their neck work naturally, automatically, and without a cramped protraction. These usually function well naturally and automatically and so the intervention of the pedagogue is necessary only if some deformity is perceived.

Appropriate breathing and the natural way of keeping the mouth, moving the chin and articulation normally evolve automatically; however, the guiding of the master/mistress concerning the technique of singing is most important since a great majority of children sings the way their teacher does. Choosing the appropriate register and tessitura for the given age bracket serves the protection of the child's vocal cords. Opting for the tessitura suitable for children ensures casual singing with a positive physiological effect; otherwise the child becomes constricted, strains their vocal cords, which later may cause problems of articulation.

For singing, fresh and clean air void of dust and smoke are all irremissible. Fresh air should be assured by constant aeration; however, we should always be careful never to make children sing in a cold classroom. Especially in wintertime, special attention should be made for this to assure that no child are made to breathe in the cold and humid air through their mouths next to a window since nearly all small children tend to catch a cold from this. Children's games connected to music should only be played outdoors while it is still pleasant to be outside without an overcoat.

A well-balanced person is both physically and mentally sane. Psychological constancy and mental well-being are just as significant as the sanity of our bodies. Humans dispose of a soul capable of deep emotions, which occasionally requires the experience of catharsis, i.e. such a state of tense feelings in which one can switch off the problems of everyday life for a certain period of time and can ignore the events of the outwards. This state of mind is characterized by an excellent regenerating effect as it triggers the feeling of happiness and so man longs for it. Thus it is perfectly justifiable for both children and adults to search for it. However, the question lies in where, how and by what means may one reach it. Is



it provided for the pupil within the school? It seems obvious that our artistic and musical education should assure that it is. As far as it is possible for them, every school should organize guided visits to theaters and concerts, which, provided that it is also connected to traveling is the best thinkable class excursion since by attending a good performance it may offer an experience of a lifetime. Nature awareness is yet another similarly vital area, a part of which is provided by getting familiar with nature, making children become aware of the beauties of nature, and by the protection of the environment. Through teaching songs, we frequently encounter various phenomena of nature, different regions of the country, and traditional ancient Hungarian professions; the tunes of the neighboring countries also offer a great variety of these. The fact that countless folksongs have been borne on this topic shows that people of earlier eras were also conscious of nature and the beauty of our environment; so it offers a model for us and for our pupils not only from the point of view of guarding great traditions.

Nature also involves the animal kingdom. Small children are great friends of animals and this age bracket is the most docile for being talked to about the protection of our fauna. Songs about different animals are incredibly effective from this point of view especially since several human characteristic features are often attributed to these creatures and they are described as nice and friendly.

By singing songs in which animals are considered in an affectionate way, we can make sure that in the long run children will feed starving animals and will not in any way abuse or destroy them.

A further task of primary school is to get children to familiarize with their own country, the history of their immediate environment and the peculiarities of the region through the subject taught within the curriculum.

By the teaching of folksongs and a selection of art music, a great deal of knowledge may be transmitted to children. In the case of each piece, school book authors indicate the place where the folksongs have been collected or the name of the composer and, through this, the map of the whole country and even that of Europe progressively evolves within the child. It is important that they should consult the map to find the different localities the folksongs were born in; and through the lives of great and classical composers, children are gradually immersed in European culture.

Within the scope of knowledge of local and national history and that of our people, it is essential to mention songs connected to the traditional order of customs of old village life. These songs attached to different occasions follow the different phases of human life from the cradle to the grave. So if possible, all types of these should be taught either within the framework of the syllabus or at times of some extra-curricular activities. Making children become familiar with these and acquire them may involve an extra task for as long as a full academic year.

An oftentimes applied way of familiarizing children with our home country is organizing study trips to different regions. Unfortunately, however, few



pedagogues consider these to be occasions for teaching music. There are several musical institutes in the country that are worth showing to our pupils, such as of concert halls of more significance and museums and exhibitions displaying collections of music and musical instruments. There are monuments, memorials, statues, musical collections and museums connected to music; children's attention should be drawn to these and whenever an opportunity emerges, it should be grabbed to show them all these.

The Hungarian music teaching primarily rests upon folk music; its way of thinking and noble simplicity embraces and entwines the soul of the child. According to Hungarian composer and music pedagogue Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967), the education of the European art music may solely be founded upon an absolutely firm basis of Hungarian folk songs and thus it should be started not earlier than at the age of eleven or twelve. Music schoolbooks in Hungary are structured more or less like this.

However, folksongs and art songs of foreign origin can also be found in the textbooks, the nationality of which should be highlighted; otherwise the foreign characteristics of the song vanish within the mind of the child. From the music itself, children cannot perceive this; their knowledge of style develops much later.

It is important, however to point out the universal nature of some great composers like Bach or Beethoven and tell children that their works are listened to in all corners of the world: they composed some of their works for eternity. Song teachers should call children's attention to musical broadcastings on television where many countries are involved in the transmission. Around Christmas and other church holidays there are always programs like this. Such a Christmas or a New Year's Day concert makes even an adult think since it may be watched in up to 20 or even 30 countries by many millions of people.

The universal culture of music greatly contributes to the experience of our Europeanism, a great part of which was conceived in some other countries of Europe. Thus only a minor fraction of this inheritance is constituted by the Hungarian culture of music. Education should follow this proportion; after having provided a basic knowledge of folk music, teachers should be encouraged to teach European art music, our choirs should sing pieces in foreign languages since we cannot limit ourselves to the musical material of our own nation.

Besides its several other effects pointing towards development, musical education also improves the communicational culture of children. It is through communication that our human and other social correlations, connections and even our thoughts become alive and impose their influence on the world around us. The cluster of information acquired, perceived and streaming through us may be at a level of ordinary, everyday communication; however, it can also be of aesthetic or scientific nature. Since this part of the study deals with the communication problems of the song and musical education in the first to the sixth forms of primary school, it is obvious that the first two kind of transmission



of information characterizes the work of education. For music and singing is a subject of art, it seems only natural that the aesthetic feature prevails over the others; however, I would like to point out, beyond its artistic feature, the importance of this subject concerning the education for everyday communication answering social requirements and the acquirement of cultural behavior, pleasant appearance and self-assertion.

While teaching children's games, interpersonal communication constantly takes place between the participants. Mutual relation or mutual influence is being born here, which is called interaction, within the frame of which our relationships with other people are formed. The lack of interaction, however, makes it impossible for one to integrate in the society, in a community of people or even in the family. It is common knowledge and for us, pedagogues it constitutes a basic thesis that one can become what they really are exclusively through the interference of others. It is during this long process that we learn some certain forms of behavior and some codes of conduct. Within interactions, people basically reflect each other, i.e. they reproduce samples of attitude.

Examining a simple children's pair-game shows us what educational possibilities it may offer. Determining which child should play with which at the beginning of the game can be done in a number of ways from a kind of dictatorial allocation to free choice. At the same time, it is possible to teach the children and it can become a custom within a community to invite each other politely to play and to thank each other the participation of the other once the game is over. It serves as a sample if the pedagogue chooses a pair this way for themselves, rather than launching out into explanations; thus children will automatically imitate the behavior desired. During the game, metacommunicational signals come to the fore. By their look and their smile, children express their happiness and other feelings. It is essential that the pedagogue is able to play with the children intensely and without giving a thought to anything else. Thus they should not merely be an external guide but should join in and be part of the group of the children playing. While on the one hand the aim for the pedagogue is to try and mingle with the children, on the other hand they should not forget about the fact that, after all, their face expressions, their body posture and their body-mind come to the center of attention, which constitutes a base for children to imitate.

Another great pedagogical advantage of these children's game is constituted by the fact that we are also able to get into contact with children who have problems of integration when they start school. On the one hand, the active participation in a game like this makes the relationship between the pedagogue and the child become more relaxed; on the other hand, it also helps the adaptation to the community develop. It is advisable to think it over what thoughts and feelings may pass within the child during a game like this. Children mutually sense the manifestations of the other; they automatically interpret and evaluate them, and this generates a series of reactions. Generally, the interpretation of a small child is



limited to establishing the dichotomy of good and bad, i.e. they either accept their partner or they do not want to go on playing with them. After a few occasions, they establish their own system of references, with the help of which they make evaluations based on experiences later. The pedagogue plays an important role here also; they should make an effort to help and adjust the child's system of references to become accepting, understanding and capable of accommodation. Education is needed for the child so that it should not be their individual desires, needs, latent objectives that prevail in their perception of other persons; they should see each other objectively, accepting and understanding each other.

It is essential that we make sure that during the game no asymmetrical personal dependence should evolve: none of the children should dominate the game and nobody should get into a situation where they are defenseless. At the same time, children should experience the feeling of interdependence and mutual responsibility; that they depend on each other within relationships and that their objectives – within the game – cannot be achieved without the active participation of all. The achievement of the goal may only be reached by complementing each other: for a successful realization, co-operation is needed.

The situation is different with games where although the objectives of the participants are the same but the objective itself cannot be divided, i.e. there is a contest between the parties: e.g. who reaches the finish-line first or who is the most habile.

All these games of different types are characterized by the parties' evaluating the results and placing them into their own system of values. The results constitute a sample and some information; it is almost certain that the next time they will pinpoint an objective with the achievement of quality of the others as a level to be reached. Since all abilities and skills evolve through activities, we need to try and achieve that the relationships of human communication to be formed through the help of games are given an appropriately wide space and that there are occasions when children are able to practice these. Children's games involving movements have a featured role in the musical education of children between the ages of three and ten.

The games involving questions and answers as well as role plays have an inestimably great pedagogical significance. They can well be complemented by drawings or puppets might be used according to the text contents. This has proven to be an astonishingly effective pedagogical method for the evolution of a child with inhibitions since it is really rare that a child would even be reluctant to play with puppets.

Through movement and game, even a shy kid can get into the limelight and forget about their negative feelings. An even greater pedagogical success can be ours provided that we can make these children invent questions or answers on their own. A much easier way to make a reserved child communicate is through a text learned by heart rather than spontaneous questions directed towards them.



Knowledge and familiarity provide a feeling of security for timid children. With a regular repetition, the effect of this reaches beyond the frames of the game and this releases the tension emerging from insecurity. The game may have a particularly great significance if we are able to make the child forget about their environment and act out the story of the game with empathy, becoming one with and identifying themselves with the characters. This, on the one hand, creates some pleasantly exciting tensions and on the other hand releases the unpleasant ones connected to anguish which have remained in the child without being treated. After a bigger mental or physical challenge, the attention of the child can be drawn away in no time from problems by the choice of an appropriate children's game.

These opportunities to act and to manifest themselves help children become self-assured and be able to stand in front of the class without being self-conscious or shy. They learn how to speak and sing at a volume and cadence of the voice that enables all members of a bigger audience understand and enjoy their performances.

Musical education greatly develops the child's ability to learn. When accommodating or performing music, memory has a central role; thus when educating, it should also be in the focus of attention. A great number of practices are known for the development of musical memory. For passive accommodation of music, memory at a level of recognition suffices; however, for creative musical thinking an active memory capable of "communication" is needed since new musical thoughts are constructed from images of earlier memories. Therefore if do not want our pupils to merely reproduce music schematically, but to re-create and create, we need to deal with the development of their memories regularly for several years. Memory practices at music classes develop the memories of rhythm and tunes; learning a new song develops, beyond these, their text memory. Memorizing a song has a general effect of developing the mind; however, it is also essential because at moments of reunions children are only able to recall songs that have been well memorized beforehand. As a matter of fact, there's no point in making children learn a song from a music-sheet since it won't have any practical use; their music book most probably won't be at hand whenever needed.

The independent production of two-tone rhythm practices at music classes are generally considered to be a neglected area. In a number of areas of life, the division of attention constitutes an irremissible condition, for which a two-tone rhythm practice is an excellent pre-training. Progressing from simple to more sophisticated practices, even children with weaker musical abilities are able to cope with these practices provided that they constitute a task to be repeated over and over again. Making the two hands move independently from each other, dividing attention and the development of memory are all the results of these activities; and these all have a positive effect on the education of other areas of culture.

Listening to music regularly provides a great help concerning the progress of becoming accustomed to and develop an inmost need for self-improvement. The



child educated to regularly visit and listen to music concerts will surely be open to other areas of humanities and the acceptance of inner contents become part of their inner self-demand.

Hopefully, the thoughts elaborated above will assert the reader that musical education within the child's system of activities is not merely a school subject limited to a small proportion of time but an experience, an activity, knowledge and means of communication entwining the textile of the contents of all culture and that it has a decisive role in determining personal development.

Judit Györgyiné Koncz, PhD hab.

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SUMMARY:

Teaching Songs or Educating Children through Music?

In Hungary, the present curriculum and the previous ones have accurately specified those educational tasks that must be taken into consideration when teaching all subjects and these tasks should also have an influence on the entire educational process. This, however, requires a complex way of thinking, a resolute change of view of the teacher and its realization in practice is an intricate task that calls for consideration. The study shows how musical education contributes to the harmonious development of the child and what kind of possibility of personality development is implied in moments of the singing lessons, respectively.

Key words: music teaching, development of personality, complex approach, special methods.