

THE LOST ART OF LISTENING

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Abstract

One of the functions of education is the transmission of culture from generation to generation. (Taba, 1962). Yet it is questionable whether music educators are fulfilling this mission... Listeners at concerts of classical music (whether of Western or other traditions) are dwindling and the crowd that frequents the concert halls is mostly older. It seems that educational policy does not invest enough to preserve the gifts of previous generations. In many schools, teachers prefer to please their students by focusing on music that the students listen to (with great enjoyment and expertise without any need for guidance from their teachers) rather than challenging them to become acquainted with musical worlds that are not closed to them and thus complex, classical music is pushed to the margins. Yes, the ones who composed this music were mostly men, mostly white and are mostly dead. However, these unfortunate facts do not negate the fact that the music they created is a gift.

In this paper/presentation we will argue that what prevents teachers from introducing their pupils to this music is not political correctness but rather the absence of teaching methods that make listening to unfamiliar music challenging, engaging and fun. This introduce pedagogies for teaching classical music in primary schools and preschool. The rationale behind the methods will be discussed while looking at the applications in teaching complex music among elementary and preschool children.

One of the innovative methods for teaching is the "Musical Mirror Method" which was developed by Veronika Cohen (Cohen, 1997). This method is a tool for teaching music listening using simple movements. Based on the principle that movement gestures are the source of musical gestures, the movements project into space, make visible the underlying source of the musical events. The children observe, and join in the movements of the mirror which to evoke an intuitive and spontaneous understanding of the music. As children develop their own musical mirrors, they learn to reflect deeply about their own musical experience, their hearing of the particular piece. Alternatively, graphic representations are presented to the children and later developed by them. Children play, sing compose in these lessons – all develop familiarity with great music and some feel a deep connection which can enrich their lives. They learn how to construct music out of sound.

Keywords: Musical mirrors, involve musical listening, constructivism, musical cognition, emotion.

1. Introduction

Educational policy in the Western world does not appear to invest enough effort in preserving the arts. Arts education in schools is often relegated to outside the core curriculum (Dewey, 1919; Dewey, 1934; Heilig & Cole & Aguilar, 2010; Jorgensen, 2003; Katona, 2016), Even though one of the functions of education should be the transmission of culture from generation to generation. (Taba, 1962). Schools most often fail to fulfill this obligation in general, and very often in the case of transmission of musical culture. School music teachers prefer to teach other styles so that Western classical music is pushed to the margins. The music taught in schools is increasingly focused on teaching popular music, folk music, rock, etc. It seems that educational policy does not invest enough in preserving the gifts of previous generations. In many schools, teachers prefer to please their students by focusing on music that the students listen to (with great enjoyment and expertise without any need for guidance from their teachers) rather than challenging them to become acquainted with musical worlds that are closed to them. Thus complex, classical music of most cultures is pushed to the margins.

From a survey conducted in four countries (England, Germany, USA [in the state of North Carolina], and Finland) it was found that only in one place surveyed (North Carolina) was general music taught in elementary schools by music specialists. It is likely that general teachers who are not musicians do not have the ability to teach complex music and use methods for teaching music that require above-average musical skill. (Shvadron, 2019).

We believe that the main reason why children are not exposed to classical music is the lack of appropriate, profound, interesting, and creative teaching methods and learning strategies. This study will present the impact of the concert program "Touch the Music" which exposes preschool and elementary school children to classical music using a variety of active listening techniques, including "Musical Mirrors" a method developed by Veronika Cohen (1997). In this article we examine the impact of the "Touch the Music" concert program on music teachers who participated in the program and re-examined this impact ten year later.

1.1. Pedagogic approach

The goal of music education is to enable students to derive meaning from a musical experience, and to use music as a means of self-expression. Wiggins (2001) explains that in order to learn, one needs opportunities to construct personal understanding. In schools where the principles of constructivism are applied, students' original ideas are valued along with those of their teachers. Students are encouraged to be independent thinkers and decision makers who develop ideas and discuss them collaboratively. The social context of learning rests on ideas conceived by Vygotsky (1978). In the "Social Constructivist Theory" Vygotsky explains that everything we learn is absorbed first at the inter-psychological level and then at the intra-psychological level. Each student's unique awareness requires the lesson to be designed so that each student can participate on a different level of expertise, within the same experience (Wiggins, 2001). Moreover, since we perceive everything we do through the lens of our previous experience, we are, in essence, a summary of our previous experiences. Musical concepts should be taught in the context of a specific musical piece in which they appear (Wiggins, 2001). Studies show that when children listen to a musical work, they perceive the music as a whole and not as a collection of separate sounds. Thus, the teacher must not only engage in musical activities in a holistic approach that perceives the music in its entirety and addresses all of its components, without breaking it down into components, but must do so according to the child's level of development (Cohen, 1980).

1.2. Musical mirrors

Cohen created an approach, that she calls "Musical Mirrors", for learning music, through movement that allows a holistic perception and response, A musical mirror is the movement analog of the cognitive and emotional process of the listener. Mirror movements express an analysis of all the important aspects of a musical piece and reflect the organizing action of the listener (Cohen, 1997). The musical piece is presented to the learner as a gestalt and he/she intuitively captures its details from the movements. Next, the teacher asks questions that raise awareness of what the student has intuitively understood. At the end of the process the student is invited to present his/ her creative response through a dance, a graph, his/her own mirror, or a piece of music that he or she composed, each of these based on the musical ideas the student has learned to recognize in the piece.

1.3. Concert programs

Various scholars review live concerts for school children, but only a minority describe significant preparation for them. Brand (2000) writes "concerts of live music in various ensembles are perceived as part of music education around the world, and are considered as an effective way to develop musical appreciation, musical perception and appropriate behavior" (Brand, p. 2). Wasiac (2005) recommends deepening and exploring the educational effectiveness of children's concerts, as well as comparing different teaching methods. He also recommends close collaboration between music educators, musicians, and researchers - to maximize the educational value of children's concerts. The study presented below on "Touch the Music" program exemplifies such collaboration. The following explanation appears in Cohen (2004, p. 47-48):

Music educators should prepare the children for the musical encounter they will experience at concerts provided for them. The children should prepare for this active (mentally active) musical encounter with the same intensity and clarity of purpose with which they prepare for other musical events such as a school concert where they themselves perform. The principal of one of the schools where such an active partnership exists summarized the value of the project as follows: "The lessons give meaning to the concerts, the concert in turn give direction and meaning to the music curriculum."

The role of preparing the children for the concert is entrusted to the music teachers, while the selection of the repertoire and the preparation of the teachers are the responsibility of the academic team from the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance.

The program itself includes 1) Selecting a rich and varied repertoire; 2) Creating experiential pedagogic methods in accordance with the educational theories reviewed above; 3) Workshops with music teachers, including presentation of activities/lesson plans, and exchange of ideas between teachers;

4) Classroom implementation of “Touch the Music” at schools and kindergartens; 5) Presentation of pieces studied, in live concerts performed by professional musicians.

2. Procedure

The research reported here has two parts- a mixed method study conducted in 2011-2012 (Shmuelof, 2012) and a quantitative study conducted in 2022. In the first part, teachers from Jerusalem and the northern district of Israel were interviewed. These teachers participated in “Touch the Music” Program for several years. In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 teachers. In addition to interviews, written evaluations and personal reactions by teachers who participated in the program were examined. The interviews were analyzed for common themes regarding teacher satisfaction with the program, perceived success, suggestions for improvement, etc. Following the interviews, the principles that distinguish the plan became clearer, what’s in it that contributes to the teachers’ satisfaction as well as questions about how best to conduct future workshops. Following the analysis of the interviews a questionnaire was sent to other teachers who participated in the program in order to gain as full a picture as possible. The questionnaire was responded to, anonymously, by 30 teachers, who were asked specifically about the effect of the program on their teaching and also to answer two open questions.

Since the programs in Jerusalem has been ongoing for over 30 years and in the North for 18 years, we felt there was a need to re examine how teachers evaluate its effectiveness and its impact on their teaching today. For this purpose, questionnaires were distributed through digital platforms using WhatsApp teachers’ groups in the northern part of Israel and Jerusalem. The questionnaire had 5 items. The questionnaire data were transferred to an excel program.

3. Objectives

The quantitative study conducted 10 years ago presented a very favorable picture regarding the main questions we wanted to examine in this study: does the program encourage and support teachers in making the teaching of classical music an integral part of their teaching? Does the format of written materials, workshops, and live concerts prepare and support teachers so that they feel comfortable teaching complex music which expands their pupils’ musical horizon?

In the follow-up study this year we wanted to examine the effect of the concert program “Touch the Music” on teachers, 10 years later. Do teachers still feel confident in including listening to classical music in their teaching because of the program?

4. Findings

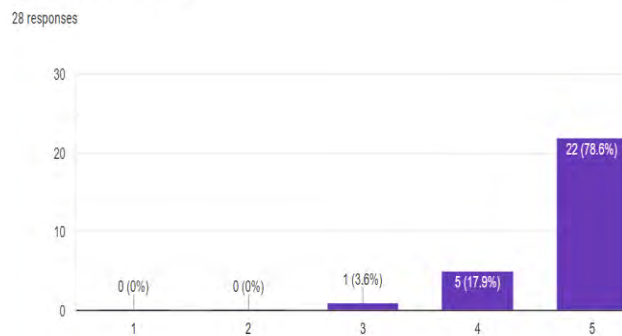
The original research revealed that participating in the program of “Touch the Music” put listening to complex artistic music at the center of the music lesson and improved the professional self-esteem of the teachers. In the words of one teacher: “Professionally, [participating in the program] upgraded me as a teacher, in active listening to classical pieces. It upgraded the lessons - brought interest and something new”.

What are the experiences that teachers underwent in the workshops that led them to feel that they “upgraded the lessons”? The interviews revealed two significant aspects that contributed to upgrading the lessons. One is procedural and the other relates to pedagogical approach. From the procedural aspect, defined goals and clear stages in the teaching/learning process gave teachers a sense of direction and purpose. A teacher explained: “When you have something organized - Step-by-step, you know what you are going to do, it gives you confidence and a better feeling – that I am more significant – I know where I’m leading my students.” The second relates to the inclusion of activities which were experiential and creative. As another teacher explained: “Most significant the children in my class had personal connection to the music. Before [participating in the program] I taught in frontal manner, I gave very little room for the experiential way to be manifested. The program gave place to the child – the creative and the experiential part of the child”. This teacher recognized that teaching while using the methods she learned in the workshops involved her students in the music lesson and the pieces she introduced to them.

Results from the recent research: Most of the participants had over 8 years of experience in music teaching, but there were quite a few novice teachers as well.

1. 100% of teachers indicated that the program had a positive impact on their teaching.
2. In response to the question about how confident the teacher feels about teaching classical music in your lessons 78.6% agreed strongly with the statement: *“I feel confident in including listening to classical music in my teaching, because of the suggestion of activities presented in the workshop/ booklet of the program”* (See Figure 1 below).

Figure 1.

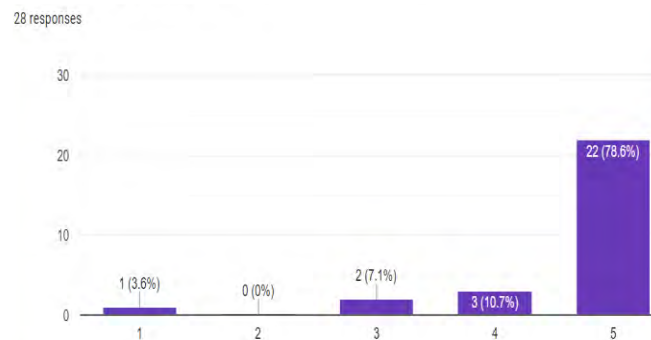


3. 74% of the respondents agreed strongly with the statement. *“Teaching with Musical Mirrors makes me feel that I teach music in a meaningful and deep way”.*

4. 89% agreed strongly with the statement *“Musical Mirrors enable children to be active listeners”.*

5. 78.6% agreed strongly with the statement *“Learning musical mirrors/ graphs brings me personally also closer to music I did not know/ like previously.”* (See Figure 2 below)

Figure 2.



5. Discussion

We found that teachers who participated in the "Touch the Music" concert program experienced improvement in their professional abilities to engage their pupils in in-depth listening experiences with complex music and in their students' attitude to the music lessons. In terms of the importance of workshops (in addition to written materials), the findings confirm that the learning process is a social act. A teacher explained: "There is a great importance in mutual learning, sharing, and creating experienced in the workshops by all the teachers who teach the program". In the program's workshops the atmosphere of enthusiasm affects the attitudes of the teachers who may find learning new pieces and new teaching methods difficult. In addition to sharing ideas with each other, participants become convinced that it is possible, fun, and worthwhile to teach complex music.

What is the role and importance of the live concert at the end of the program? This is where the need for a 'visible goal' arises in a program focused on musical listening. "For ... learning to be meaningful to young children, they need a 'visible goal'. A visible goal defines the path - the learning process, and gives meaning to lessons" (Rusinek, 2008). And indeed one of the teachers explained: "When there is preparation of the children for something, and they are waiting for it, it creates a fertile and fun learning atmosphere. Not only do children need a 'visible goal', so do teachers". The concert itself is the goal towards which the learning is oriented.

One of the teachers said that the concerts created a time frame and commitment for the entire curriculum, including the more challenging pieces. The very fact that the piece would be performed at the concert did not allow her to give up on herself and the children: "Before that if something did not work in a certain class, I would give up. Here I must look for and find something that will work". Another teacher, one whose school no longer participates in the program recounted how without the commitment to concerts she stopped teaching listening lessons: "... so without the program I unfortunately do not really

get to teach classical pieces". This finding underscores the importance of the concert program for preserving the "classical" artistic content of music lessons.

The concert is an opportunity for the teacher to exhibit the success of her work in the classroom. Through the observed engagement of the children with the music supervisors and organizers of the program can gauge the quality of the work done in the classroom and provide teachers with feedback and appreciation.

6. Conclusions

In a field where innovations come and go with great frequency this program has lasted for over three decades. Our research has revealed that the concert program and the "Mirror Method" are effective over time, the responses to our recent questionnaire were as positive as the responses of teachers ten years ago and meet a genuine need.

Our research shows that participation in such a program is essential for teachers. It refreshes and strengthens their sense of professionalism and their confidence in teaching complex classical works in an experiential way. It is important to constantly keep an open channel of communication between the organizers of the program and participating teachers and allow a place and time for exchanging ideas and experiences from the field. As we saw from both the in-depth study ten years ago and the recent study- the teaching of complex music is a worthy challenge that can be met with a program that is sensitive to both children and teachers' needs.

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