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Miroslaw Kisiel

University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2002-0116>

Elementary Music Education in the Era of Remote Teaching – Constraints and Prospects for Development

Abstract

In the discourse undertaken, an attempt was made to indicate the limits and perspectives for the development of music education of distance teaching. The specificity of music education based on experience, emotions in action, a creative approach to an artistic creation and expressive action requires special attention in this regard. The teacher is expected to develop a new strategy for action, which in the existing educational situation will result in an increase in students' interest in music. Obtaining satisfactory results should be seen in the use of teaching methods and forms appropriate for the given situation and means of communication.

Key words: childhood education, teacher, music, distance learning.

At present, as technology evolves, the education in Poland is changing. The slow but systematic presence of e-learning as a new teaching method in our country has become popular and necessary (Hyla, 2012, p. 20). This method has proven to be the only possible effective way for teachers to work during the world pandemic of COVID-19 and the nationwide lockdown. From day to day, schools had to shift to a new teaching and learning technique and use the available electronic media and communication platforms. Music education, which deals with fleeting and

abstract values based on impressions, creations, experience and skills training, has also been included in the subjects which underwent such a change (Ruokonen & Ruismäki, 2016, p. 109). The child who needs support, motivation, peer-to-peer contact, role model as well as reinforcement of positive reactions and behaviour styles is crucial throughout the entire music teaching process. Likewise, the teacher and the parent play significant roles, as they are not only guardians but also educational partners in the early school education stage.

Children as Recipients of Music in Elementary Education

Children observe the world through a direct perception of the reality which surrounds them, whereas media provide an indirect way to know various phenomena, processes and facts perceived and communicated by other people (Juszczuk, 2002, p. 16). Children commune with virtual “reality” every day, devoting more and more time to it. Young people increase their media experience by spending lots of time with their computer, tablet or mobile phone. In many cases, these devices influence the creation of behavioural patterns in children, form their tastes and opinions and become not only a learning environment, but also an upbringing environment, affecting the recipients’ activities (Jorgensen, 2003, p. 63).

Music in early school education is an important part of the educational and didactic process. Its place at the level of early childhood education is different; it is dictated by the needs and capabilities of the individual, and to some extent by the expectations of teachers, schools and parents (Kisiel, 2012, p. 20). Music, singing and dancing in elementary education stimulate the overall development of the student, while at the same time support young people in preparation for participation in a broadly understood culture. The tasks of the music class described in the related literature are aimed at arousing long-lasting artistic interest among the young generation in the future. The overall developmental value of music is also significant; it stimulates activity, improves memory and concentration, trains persistence engagement and observation. Music also helps people to express their feelings, practise motion coordination and good body posture. By stimulating creativity and imagination, it develops communication skills. The role of the school and the properly qualified teacher is extremely important in this area (Green, 2006, p. 101). In many cases, teachers act as the only music educators to bring a child into the world of artistic values. It is also important for the teacher to be the organiser of the didactic and educational process, the music animator and the trainer for acquiring skills in basic forms of musical activity (Weiner, 2010,

p. 33). Professional teacher-oriented performance will only produce the expected results, if the teachers carry out their tasks as a specific musical dialogue in a multi-dimensional communication channel.

The core curriculum is the basic educational document that sets out the procedures in the area of music education in elementary classes (Journal of Laws, 2017, pp. 44–46). The content of the curriculum in this area comprises five sections. The first section “Listening to Music” is about receiving and identifying sounds, responding to music signals, distinguishing sounds and voices, listening to and analysing simple songs. The second section “Musical Expression” contains guidelines for: humming and singing children’s songs, creating children’s own melodies, attaching importance to voice emission and performing some of the recommended songs, including the Polish national anthem. The third section “Motion Improvisation” proposes the presentation of musical and non-musical content with moves, the creation of musical and motion choreographies as well as learning the steps of a chosen dance. Music education is also practising music understood as: the ability to use school percussion instruments, creating the children’s own sound toys, experimenting and creating musical accompaniment to songs, motion, games and learning to play melody instruments: the chime, Western concert flute and flageolet. The last section refers to the skill to “record sounds.” It includes learning different ways of recording sound and music, saving simple rhythmic and melody diagrams while playing through the use of pictograms, colours, numbers and simple notations.

Musical education, which improves the recipients’ listening perception, emotional sphere, aesthetic sensitivity and creative expression, is recommended for use in integrated education in the daily curriculum. The core resources in a teaching and educational institution, in particular classrooms equipped with modern media and teaching materials, play an important role in the organisation of the educational and upbringing process. They make it possible for teachers and students to carry out more effectively the process of acquiring music skills in terms of reception, recording sound and music, seeking valuable artistic presentations and information to enhance their knowledge of music. Multimedia can be an excellent teaching aid, if used reasonably. Using them should follow from the theory of learning music based on experiencing, acting and learning (Kisiel, 2016, p. 109). The use of multimedia in elementary education can make a significant contribution to: facilitating the combination of learning with playing, increasing motivation for learning and allowing individual learning. Key multimedia features are as follows: activating/motivating, cognitive/creative, practising, control, upbringing and therapeutic (Juszczuk-Rygałło, 2013, p. 80). In pedagogical practice, the teacher generally uses methods that make children actively participate in the teaching and learning process. The combination of interdisciplinary, pedagogical, psychologi-

cal and neurodidactic approaches shows that the basis for obtaining information is an active exploration, where the senses working together in registration of the sensations play a crucial role (Gołaszewska, 1999, p. 29). This also applies to those areas which we know through the media. In such a recognised perception, there are intertwined periods of activity, reception, observation and experience.

Methodology of Research

The conducted research was of a qualitative nature, the text includes the quoted statements of selected respondents and the results of the Internet query (Flick, 2008, p. 36).

The aim of the study was to show: the state of music education in grades 1–3 following the introduction of the lockdown, constraints and prospects for developing methods and forms of work carried out in remote teaching of music and the results of education and professional satisfaction with the performance of such work. The purpose of the query was to present information on the music education during distance learning.

The test sample was selected in a targeted manner as a non-random selection of respondents. The survey was completed by teachers with different musical training background, various experience in working with media and multimedia instant messaging clients as well as different professional seniority.¹ The data presented in this chapter were obtained by a partially categorised interview (Babbie, 1992, p. 327). The analysis of the collected data is presented in the following parts of the work.

Teachers and Students in the Face of Remote Teaching – Search for Data

Rapid social changes, mainly caused by the World Health Organisation's declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in perturbation in Polish education. It was due to the regulations by the Minister of National Education published in the

¹ The survey was conducted in July and August 2020 among early school education teachers in selected towns in the Agglomeration of Upper Silesia and Zagłębie.

second quarter of 2020, which announced the introduction of the remote teaching policy (Journal of Laws, 2020). According to these documents, the e-textbooks platform and programmes broadcast by the Polish Television (TVP) and the Polish Radio supported this type of teaching. The use of resources designated and prepared by teachers was also permitted. The class could be delivered in such a way that students undertook certain activities as assigned by the teacher to confirm that they were familiar with the material and this provided the basis for grading. Online lessons did not necessarily mean real-time classes via a selected instant messaging client. The students were able to complete certain assignments at home, such as filling in their workbooks, making notes and preparing a project. In the case of children of early school age, these classes could be carried out by informing their parents of the available resources and possible forms that could be adopted to perform the tasks at home. A new “children teach parents” movement has emerged to encourage the youngest ones to stay at home and study together with adults.²

In the opinion of practitioners and some teachers-researchers, remote training managed to achieve, more or less, the learning objectives of the existing core curriculum. It was much more difficult with the educational function of school, and the worst one was with the caring function, as was pointed out in the public debate by Sylwia Jaskulska.³ Following many discussions, the educational authorities decided that, despite these shortcomings, distance learning would be carried out until the end of the school year. Primary schools also introduced caring and educational activities for pupils whose parents continued to work despite the ongoing pandemic.

During the pandemic crisis, educational television programmes, radio programmes and webinars were introduced in the public media addressed to students of different educational levels. What should be emphasised is that music education applications such as Music Education for Children, GoNoodle, Kids and Motion, Virtual Instruments, Music Games, Colourful Virtual Piano, etc. were made available on websites.⁴ Teachers carrying out music education for grades 1–3 could use the Music Inspiration for the Textbook package available on the Internet (Hamerski et al., 2014, pp. 6–11), which aimed to stimulate educators to undertake various musical activities. Another aid for published assignments included music notes and lyrics for the month-to-month learning and the related games, practical advice and tips on how to learn and use songs, games to be played throughout the school year and ideas to help introducing the children into the world of music (Jóźwiak

² <https://crl.org.pl/2020/03/12/dzieci-ucza-rodzicow-w-domu> [accessed 26.08.2020].

³ <https://www.wirtualnemedia.pl/artykul/na-zdalnej-edukacji-najbardziej-ucierpiala-funkcja-opiekuncza-szkoly-dlaczego-koronawirus> [accessed 22.08.2020].

⁴ Internet inquiry: <https://www.edumuz.pl>; <https://www.gonoodle.com>; <http://interactivesites.weebly.com>; <http://www.colorpiano.info> [accessed 23.08.2020].

et al., 2015, pp. 7–13). The additional content also contained suggestions for songs to be listened to and interesting forms of visualisation. The authors also inserted references to associated audio tracks, such as a sample for vocal practice, audio material of various sounds and beats, links to audio and video tracks which illustrate playing the chromatic chime or teaching steps of a selected dance, as well as links to websites of institutions which promote music culture (Muzeum Dźwięku, Muzykoteka Szkolna, Narodowy Instytut Fryderyka Chopina, Scholaris – a portal addressed to teachers, and others).⁵ A collection of vocal songs prepared by methodical consultants was published as visual resources (musical notes and song lyrics) as well as soundtracks written in vocal-instrumental and instrumental versions. The resources were available for teachers to download as separate files, print or present in PowerPoint. With a multimedia table (by directly connecting to the indicated website), the teacher received access to all the resources posted (Kisiel, 2018, p. 60). The teacher’s broadcasting to the student’s home could be done by software or video transmission from an external video camera. During this period, some publishers started to work on preparing their own multimedia proposals for the programmes and textbooks that were developed. They were designed to help the teachers organise varied and effective activities so that each lesson would be an extraordinary adventure.⁶

An objective view of the available analysed educational content leads to a moderate, albeit critical reflection. The content of the selected web pages shows that the creators of the virtual space resources were those of the “digital immigrants” generation. Despite having excellent technology and resources to fully exploit the potential of multimedia, publishing institutions offered young recipients a text-based message, with minimal reference to the combination and smooth transition from broadcasting to interactive resources. In some cases, a video camera-shot talk was referred to as a “multimedia lecture,” intended for listeners attending a meeting with a teacher. Also, the resources that were supposed to be interactive, referred to as “games” or multimedia instructions often proved to be a text-based summary of information or a collection of illustrations. The virtual space also offered programmes where a young person could graphically present the melody using the basic music symbols, build the students’ own rhythm diagrams and create the students’ own composition with the option to listen to it. An interesting application seems to be a musical class, where teachers and students can play an improvised melody after adding an additional keyboard, changing and correcting it several times. Later, it could be saved in a musical form and redirected to the computer to play it as a readable melody on the selected instrument. This phenom-

⁵ Educational resources, <http://www.ore.edu.pl> [accessed 12.12.2017].

⁶ Multimedia for a new primary school, <http://www.nowaera.pl> [accessed 7.01.2018].

enon should be interpreted as a valuable change in the presentation of the music teaching material.

Music in Remote Elementary Education – Intentional Study

The analysis in this part of the report includes reflections by elementary education teachers on music education in remote teaching.

As a general rule, elementary education classes should be conducted under an integrated education strategy. Hence, the teachers' opinions refer to the included general views regarding remote teaching that are the same for the entire educational and upbringing process. For the surveyed teachers, the period of the lockdown and remote teaching was associated above all with uncertainty, chaos and attempts to find themselves in a new situation, so that they could do their best in performing their work. The search for effective forms of work resulted in a choice of communication methods, such as sending short text messages, e-mailing, using e-logs, as well as experimenting with a variety of applications and platforms designed for remote communication. The surveyed teachers admit that they were initially afraid to conduct remote classes because they had no competence in this area and that such activities were omitted in schools they work for. Only people who had private experience with communicating with Messenger, Skype or Facebook had a seemingly easy task. As they themselves admit, for each of them the time taken to carry out remote teaching became the time of searching, testing and struggling with IT issues. The teachers quickly understood their limitations and felt the need to improve their digital communication skills. They received help from their colleagues, their life partners, or their family, including their children. Unfortunately, the period of seeking effective tools to implement the forms of work that are affordable for students was not coordinated by educational institutions.

The respondents point out the technical limitations reported by parents of the youngest students, one computer station for all the family members, limited access to a fixed Internet connection, no camera or printer. There are also opinions stating that the remote education for young pupils forced parents to be more involved in the preparation of their child's home work station, ensuring that their child's time is efficiently managed in front of the computer, preparing materials, explaining difficulties, monitoring work and maintaining constant contact with the teacher in order to send the work and assignments completed by the children. The surveyed teachers observed low motivation among their students over time, which resulted from missing contact with their peer group. Another reason was, as one of the re-

spondents explained, the congestion of the information provided, the instructions without the possibility of consultation or exchanging views. In the early education period, the process of acquiring knowledge by a young person usually takes place through games, discovery, experience and mutual observation. The relationships created in this type of activities become the core of shaping behaviour for students, add faith in overcoming difficulties and make them mentally stronger. No one, even the highly engaged parents, can replace the peer group, which is a source of positive energy for children.

Throughout the entire period of the lockdown, a shift in the form of remote teaching could be observed. The teachers' initial reference to the textbooks, workbooks and scanned resources sent by email was enhanced by providing educational videos and e-textbooks to students or initiating remote contact lessons. The surveyed teachers indicate that the online activities did not solve all the problems and did not effectively replace traditional teaching. In the interview, the respondents highlighted interferences preventing smooth lessons both on the part of the teachers and the learners, including different quality and technical fitness equipment, a lean time frame as well as limited capacity of internet connection. The situation made teachers uncomfortable and frustrated, while parents were upset and dissatisfied, which sometimes resulted in difficult situations and symptoms of a feeling of exclusion. Several respondents admit that they tried to develop their own lessons, encouraging students to participate in project activities, leaving room for expression of their emotions, creating an area of autonomy and self-assessment and fitness. Such events did not fully deliver the expected results. Technical, premises-related and teaching aid constraints on both the teacher and student working at home, as well as the small number of online recipients did not encourage them to be the only contact form. It can be assumed that the majority of the activities were mixed, where the teacher on the one hand contacted the students via a selected platform such as ZOOM or Clickmeeting, and on the other hand used an e-log and email, sending the relevant resources to his or her students. Despite these drawbacks, the respondents claimed that if necessary again in the future, remote teaching would now be easier for them. At present, the surveyed teachers declare to have a better knowledge of digital tools and a greater understanding of access to communication platforms and online resources. They also appreciate the value of the innovations undertaken and made available to allow them for the freedom to experiment in pedagogical practice. Some of them have also developed effective ways of assessing student's activities and the art of transforming exercises and content in such a way that it could be used for remote learning. Not without significance is the value of the collection of teaching resources in electronic recording: pictures, boards, videos, programmes and broadcasting. Remote courses on online learning provided to the surveyed teachers were also very helpful. Webinars

and Teach Meets with teachers were appreciated by those who wanted to share their ideas on solving difficulties and sharing the results of good practice. There is no doubt that the motivation of students to learn, increasing their involvement and strengthening their independence, while paying attention to computer hygiene, remains to be considered and improved. In the statements, the essence of building and maintaining peer relationships for full educational processes was emphasised.

Discussion

Music education was in the background of the combination of events. It is particularly difficult in the remote teaching system, as even the best-ever instant messaging client will not replace the natural contact with the teacher. The practice of making music together and learning through imitating the appropriate performance model becomes hardly possible. Transferring too much theoretical content does not support the basic idea of developing musical sensitivity, building students' music skills and increasing curiosity and interest in music. The surveyed teachers indicate first of all that there was no professional equipment for recording music and playing it back that would allow the curriculum to be properly implemented. A lot of concern was placed on several instruments at the disposal of the student at home. Therefore, most of the information on music classes was limited to citing the content and instructions from the textbooks, workbooks, or websites and YouTube videos with music, or children's songs. As the respondents pointed out, in a traditional class, students typically listen to pieces of work that they later comment on and learn to express their opinions. However, earlier, the teacher points to what the students should be aware of during the listening process and assigns the tasks to be done, which usually facilitates the perception. The creativity of the surveyed teachers suggests that their students could also be encouraged to play music remotely using various attributes, such as a scarf or a coloured band of tissue paper. As they themselves admitted, this required educators to prepare an appropriate comment that would be understood not only by the students but also by their guardians. Some of the respondents recommend that their students make a visual illustration of the work being listened to or reflect the mood of the music with a colour. Others focus on the possibility of making a rattle from groats and, for example, a yogurt box. Plastic rice bottles were a great substitute for maracas, which children could use in playing a song. In the opinion of the respondents, it was the perfect time to play home music on anything, invite siblings and parents, or even go for a recording of their own percussion song. This task was carried out

with a greater interest by boys. In their feedback to the teachers, some parents were not happy with the proposals the teachers made, others on the contrary, admitted that these musical activities brought the family members closer together. Not all the students submitted their own music productions for assessment. Following the interview of the respondents and its analysis, we jointly conclude that perhaps the guardians missed sufficient determination to go to such lengths or there was a fear of being ridiculed. But there were exceptions. As one of the respondents points out, in her class the girls selected a song by one of their favourite artists and, with the help of the adults, they recorded their own performance and sent a video to the teacher as a result of their collaborative work. The situation with dancing was not so optimistic, but also in this area there appeared some creativity. One of the teachers recorded the “Chocolate” dance and game, performed by herself and her children, and posted it as a video on her Facebook profile, sharing it with her students. It turned out, as she reported later, some children, both girls and boys, accepted the idea with a positive attitude. They encouraged their parents and presented their own performance with an equal volubility. This was not the case with playing a melodic instrument: the chime, flageolet or flute. The teachers claimed this aspect to be a failure. The lack of direct contact with learners and the negligence of parents in this respect are the main reasons for such an omission. In the study group, only one teacher, fascinated with the flageolet playing, boasted that despite the limitations of remote teaching, she was able to maintain her children’s musical activity in the third grade. This was possible thanks to the earlier systematic work with the instrument and the availability of the tablature needed to read the melody of the track being learned and the recorded music pattern.

The assessment of the student’s work seems obvious when carrying out studies on the implementation of the educational process. When they initiated remote teaching activities, the teachers promoted interesting ideas, motivation and encouragement to playing music, thereby as they claimed, they wanted to encourage students and their parents to act. In the opinion of one respondent, the fun and the music played together, and subsequent attempt to register and edit the video was a good way to manage the time of the family.

As the reports show, the period of remote teaching from a time distance was a stimulus for the teachers in question to develop a creative approach to the implementation of the core curriculum content. It also gave them an opportunity for educational experimentation, acquiring new competences and overcoming their own weaknesses and limitations.

Conclusion

The educational practice presented in the interviews shows that in the age of remote teaching in elementary education classes both positive and negative aspects of implementing the musical education are observed. Progress is identified in the selection of games and exercises as well as the possibility of free availability of sound resources. In the case of music skills presentation and actions in the area of diverse forms of musical activity and delivery of performance experience, there is a significant regress. Some teachers appreciate the possibility of flexible working time, but most of them complained about work overload and stress due to the use of new means of communication on such a large scale. The surveyed teachers demonstrate creativity and entrepreneurship in providing themselves with work tools, but they also report numerous limitations in their musical activities. Among the problems mentioned, they point out limited contact with parents and pupils, difficulty in motivating all students to engage in music activity, confusion and helplessness related to the large number of directives, information and recommendations, difficult control of the effectiveness of the actions undertaken and inability to fully implement the recommended music activity areas. The analysis of the available resources made it possible to prepare recommendations. These relate to both the choice of a single communication platform and the setting of harmonised standards for remote teaching, including the assessment of student activity in different spheres.

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Mirosław Kisiel

Podstawowa edukacja muzyczna w erze nauczania na odległość – ograniczenia i perspektywy rozwoju

Streszczenie

W podjętym dyskursie podjęto próbę wskazania granic i perspektyw rozwoju nauczania na odległość edukacji muzycznej. Specyfika edukacji muzycznej opartej na doświadczeniu, emocjach w działaniu, twórczym podejściu do twórczości artystycznej i ekspresyjnym działaniu wymaga w tym zakresie szczególnej uwagi. Od nauczyciela oczekuje się opracowania nowej strategii działania, która w istniejącej sytuacji edukacyjnej spowoduje wzrost zainteresowania uczniów muzyką. Osiągnięcie zadowalających efektów należy upatrywać w stosowaniu odpowiednich do danej sytuacji metod i form nauczania oraz środków komunikacji.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja dziecięca, nauczyciel, muzyka, kształcenie na odległość

Мирослав Кисель

Начальное музыкальное образование в эпоху дистанционного обучения – ограничения и перспективы развития

Аннотация

В данном дискурсе была сделана попытка определения пределов и перспектив развития дистанционного обучения в музыкальном образовании. Особого внимания в этой связи требует анализ специфики музыкального образования, основанного на опыте, эмоциях в действии, творческом подходе к художественному творчеству и выразительному действию. От учителя требуется разработка новой стратегии действий, которая в существующей образовательной ситуации приведет к повышению интереса учащихся к музыке. Достижение удовлетворительных результатов следует видеть в использовании методов и форм обучения, соответствующих данной ситуации и средствам общения.

Ключевые слова: начальное образование, педагог, музыка, дистанционное обучение

Miroslaw Kisiel

**La educación musical elemental en la era de la enseñanza a distancia –
limitaciones y perspectivas de desarrollo**

R e s u m e n

En el discurso emprendido se intentó señalar los límites y perspectivas para el desarrollo de la educación musical a distancia. La especificidad de la educación musical basada en la experiencia, las emociones en acción, el enfoque creativo de una creación artística y la acción expresiva requiere una atención especial en este sentido. Se espera que el docente desarrolle una nueva estrategia de acción, que en la situación educativa existente resultará en un aumento en el interés de los estudiantes por la música. La obtención de resultados satisfactorios debe verse en el uso de métodos y formas de enseñanza adecuados a la situación y los medios de comunicación dados.

P a l a b r a s c l a v e: educación infantil, docente, música, educación a distancia