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**Postmodernism, Music Literacies,  
and the Function-oriented Music Curriculum**

By

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**Abstract**

*In our postmodern world, music educators deal with questions and problems that need in-depth exploration. As the old certainties are collapsing, today, more than ever, the challenges they face prompt them to reassess students' music knowledge and skills and their connection to real life. This paper argues that many of these challenges can be related to the functions of music, in the context of the new means of communication and postmodernism determinants. Furthermore, it argues that the functions of music are a guiding framework for a music function-based curriculum. Finally, this paper provides examples of how professors may apply such a curriculum in undergraduate music classes at a university context for pre-service general teachers. Music educators can be creative in putting ideas into practice, by taking the functions of music as a theoretical-philosophical base, allowing the functions of music to constitute a space for thinking about music teaching-learning.*

**Keywords: music education, music literacy, music curricula, functions of music**

Education is a cultural, and cultural communication is the function of education. Schools do not just transmit culture; they interpret and create culture. We can view education as a “way of being in the world, or form of life, which integrates words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities” (Gee, 1996, p. 127). Today’s education should take into account social global cultural changes and the formation of the individual in a continuously changing environment (McLaren, 2011; Jorgensen, 2003). Other vital elements of a good education include tolerance, inter-cultural dialogue, and respect for diversity (Bates, 2017).

Unfortunately, today’s school aims at specific skills, most of which refer to the school itself, and their usefulness in real life is limited (Kokkidou, 2017). School is a closed system where ideas and experience from the ‘outside world’ have no place. Such is the case for music education as well.

Moving from Reimer’s aestheticism to Elliott’s praxialism has constituted significant progress in the philosophy of music education. Nonetheless, there are researchers and scholars in this field who have stated that contemporary music education is not appropriate for today’s students (Regelski, 2017). It is in decline, and to a great extent has remained the same for at least the last five decades despite the enormous social, cultural, and technological changes (Gouzouasis & Bakan, 2011; Myers, 2007; Jorgensen, 2003).

On this basis, I make a case for a music function-based curriculum, which might provide students with practical challenges and new ways to investigate various phenomena in music worlds. The philosophical thinking of Jay Lemke, who suggested that researchers should investigate systems they are a part of and should report on experiential insights that come from direct participation (Lemke & Sabelli, 2008, p. 121) influence my perspective.

While the units of the present paper may be stand-alone pieces—each offers its own key ideas, open to further investigation—they share insights and concerns, positing a framework for a music education based in the functions of music.

### **Postmodernism, Popular Culture, and Music Education**

We live in an era of postmodernism characterized by a continuous flow of information, development of digital mass media, and the frenetic speed of social changes. Proponents of postmodern discourse accept diversity, eclecticism, and the unexpected; it sheds light on the way social practices, inherently characterized by discontinuity and contradiction, are being understood (Malpas, 2005; Hassan, 2001). Prominent postmodern scholars are critical of ideas that have been established since the era of Enlightenment, including subjectivity, humanism, and progress (see Felluga, 2015).

In the field of the arts, one distinctive characteristic of postmodernism is the abolition of boundaries between high and low art. Modernism's hostility towards pop culture is widely known and expressed in Adornian philosophy (Adorno, 1949/2003). In the case of music, postmodernism has subverted terminology which had traditionally been established as symbolic, linked to the transformation of peoples' and societies' cultural identities. In this context, choices which were considered as controversial a few years ago are now legitimate. Individuals from all classes visit music halls as well as clubs without any hesitation or guilt. Such experiences are not regarded as dichotomous any longer—as Lacanian schizophrenia. It is widely accepted that each 'music self' is manifested in various ways.

Another characteristic of postmodernism is a change in musical taste. Peterson (2005) described two categories of audiences—univores and omnivores. He and his colleagues have found that people of high educational and financial level (*highbrows*) are becoming more and

more omnivorous, moving away from previous snobbishness to an openness to various kinds of music (Peterson & Kern, 1996). Postmodern permissiveness in music is described as *everybody listens to everything*. However, hierarchies of musical taste are still very much alive in music education. Bates (2017, p.13) argued that popular styles are only occasionally incorporated in school music activities. For Abrahams (2005), the music inside school and music outside school are two worlds that must be bridged if music educators aim to provide meaningful music education for the students.

Expanding musical tastes under postmodern conditions contributed to the marginalization of music education. This marginalization happened because, for many decades, music education supported the idea of classical music as superior (Elliott & Silverman, 2015). According to Thomas Regelski (2007), this idea leads to musical hierarchies and a continuously expanding cultural gap, because it preserves the values of specific social groups over others. In this vein, he encourages music teachers to free themselves from the one-way system of classical music and take other music paths. He wrote that we do not anymore have the right to raise fences between “school music” and “music of the real world” (p. 40).

Relationships between Western art music and popular music is of high interest to music educators, as it can reveal allegedly innocent differences which otherwise preserve and signify social stereotypes. Adornian convictions about pop culture, which refuse its value and importance, is the same as rejecting students’ personalities. Do music teachers have the right to degrade and dismiss students’ preferences? Should there be a battle about which music will dominate, ‘school music’ or ‘daily life music’? These dilemmas distract us from the substantial issues regarding music education. We are instead obliged to re-consider and define music literacy anew.

## **New Music Literacies**

The notion of literacy has undergone many changes, as it depends on developments of people's ideas and perspectives as well as an understanding of nature: literacy has various meanings depending on the era, the society, and the people, as knowledge continually develops. Today, literacy is seen as the social practice and a process in use (skills, knowledge, and stances) (Gee, 1996; Kalantzis & Cope, 2005). It is not regarded as a skill of decoding writings, but as the ability to deconstruct cultural discourses (Pahl & Rowsell, 2012). Eisner (2008) suggests that the concept of literacy can be re-conceptualized to include the multiple ways in which people can be literate or multi-literate (p. 27). Multiple literacies are about a broader view of literacy and constitute the context of 'postmodern literacy' where people attribute meaning to themselves and the world in the new contexts of communication. Multiple literacies are not theoretical constructs and include more than practical expediency. However, what is music literacy in this context?

Traditionally, music literacy referred to music reading and writing (Broomhead, 2010). In Europe of the 19th century and the most significant part of the 20th, musically literate were those who could read and write music, those who could acknowledge its value and admire Western music and performers' virtuosity (Elliott & Silverman, 2015). The musically educated upper class regarded classical music as a means to construct social as well as national identities, and used it as a way to differentiate themselves from lower classes.

Nowadays, music literacy is defined as the ability to create meaningful experiences with music and to interact effectively with musical texts through listening, performing, creating, contemplating, and constructing meaning from musical texts (Broomhead, 2010). It includes

interpreting music practices and considers the importance of social, economic, cultural, political and environmental influences. It also connects learning experiences to personal expression and individuals' identity building (Barton, 2013). Viewed this way, musical literacy could also be linked to individuals' and society's well being, to value systems, and to the participation in cultural-social life.

Low-level literacy is limited to knowing music symbols. Higher levels of music literacy include musical thinking and critical literacy, as well as notions of musicality, ideology, and music *paideia* (Barton, 2013). In these higher levels, music reading and writing become 'invisible': it is not about decoding music symbols but about developing musicality, about one's need to be part of a music community to share a common language with other members.

The above suggests that the musically literate are those who, both individually and collectively, are involved in music at different levels, range, and depth. They have developed an understanding of a range of music notions and issues and can 'read' between and within various media/multimodal texts; have musical skills acquired both formally and informally; are familiar with terminologies which allow them to express their thinking about music; pose questions and think critically about the phenomenon of music and its multiple dimensions; and are aware of their stance towards music and music education. Overall, musically literate people are expected to be more sensitive and responsible towards social matters (social inequality, stereotypes, bias), and to use their knowledge and skills according to moral principles (Bates, 2017; Barton, 2013).

### **Music Education and Digital Multimodal Literacy**

In our postmodern era, new forms of literacy are necessary, especially those related to new technologies—digital literacy, mass media literacy, and social media literacy. Digital mass

media dominate our lives at a personal, political, financial, aesthetic, social and psychological level and the dimensions of music literacy are varied, complex, and multimodal (Barton, 2013). Thwaites (2014) documented that children and young people come in touch with multimodal contexts on a daily basis (mainly video games and music videos). They are ‘native speakers’ of the digital language, while many adults are still spelling out the words. In this world, as John Richardson (2011) claims, there is no such a thing as pure sonic experience, pure visual experience, or pure anything. Everything is more multimodal than it was in the past.

Most students, especially between 11-17 years old, share, play, learn, and teach each other music, through YouTube, Facebook, and other digital means of communication (Gouzouasis & Bakan, 2011; Thwaites, 2014). In social networks, they express musical preferences, quote song lyrics to make comments, and discuss and exchange information about music. These practices are becoming more and more part of students’ musical identity construction, as well as their music knowledge and skills. In the digital era, we notice a subversion of traditional meanings of music learning and creating; we witness changes in music practices through multimodal forms of representation in performances; we gradually become aware of the new factors which influence music practice (Gouzouasis & Bakan, 2011; Broomhead, 2010).

What does this mean for music educators? Is being familiar with digital media, and new software for music writing and music creation, the answer to our deadlock? Should technology be considered as a danger, or as an opportunity? Answering the above questions is not an easy task, because the world of education is still shocked by vast amounts of technological progress. Technology is indisputably part of modern life, yet there is still uncertainty about how to use it.



Gouzouasis & Bakan (2011) uses the metaphor of tsunami to describe the impact of digital means of communication on music education and music itself.

Technologies, such as computer software for composing and participatory music communities, allow students to perform entirely new things (Partti & Westerlund, 2012), things that were impossible without it. For example: using YouTube, students can share their artistic ideas with the world and receive direct feedback. To align with students' reality, music educators should explore in depth music cultures that are formed in digital, multimodal contexts (Partti, 2014). Thwaites (2014) notes that the incorporation of new technologies in music lessons sometimes looks like technological education rather than music education; the use of digital means in music teaching and learning is valuable only within ethically-oriented musical and educational goals.

### **Music Literacy and Critical Theory**

Felluga (2015) stated that more and more people are functionally illiterate as they rely on information from oral media sources. Today, students have access to vast amounts of information and knowledge; thus, the school should encourage them to be critical towards it. In the philosophy of critical pedagogy, students—as well as educators—seek to address questions such as: who assesses this knowledge as important? Who will benefit from legitimizing this knowledge, and why is it presented in such a way? Does this kind of knowledge aim at a specific social group? Dealing with such issues requires more than just a new way of thinking—it requires a total restructuring of schools as well as a re-consideration educational systems and policies (White, McCormack & Marsh, 2011).

In critical theory tradition, education is not a neutral activity; it is ideologically charged (McLaren, 2011; Regelski & Gates, 2009). Advocates of critical theory and pedagogy are aware

of the fact that their actions in classrooms have political and ideological consequences. They continuously reflect on their views through interactions with students, colleagues, and parents. They create teaching and learning conditions where knowledge comes from consciousness and evokes a critical stance towards reality. They are aware of the forces shaping experience, tend to resist perpetuating stereotypes and actively participate in solidarity groups in the educational field (McLaren, 1995; 2011). Abrahams (2005) suggested that according to critical pedagogy, all educators should ask themselves: 1) Who am I? 2) Who are my students? 3) What could they become? 4) What could we become together (p. 63)?

The above questions may be answered through a notion of music literacy of consciousness. The starting point for this kind of literacy is based on the principle that students need consciousness—knowing the self, our desires and needs as well as others’—so that they understand what music could mean and do in one's life and become aware of the fact that music has different meanings for different people. The promise of this kind of literacy is a realization that music experiences contribute to the ways we see the self and the world, and the ways music becomes a symbol of freedom or suppression, unity or exclusion.

In this context, music teaching entails moral responsibility towards students’ present and future needs (Regelski & Gates, 2009; Bowman, 2007). Alternatively, as Wayne Bowman put it recently, ethically orientated education "extends well beyond technical concerns, implicating questions like *when-to*, *whether to*, *to-whom-to*, or *to-what-extent-to*. If music is to be a required feature in everyone’s education, its contribution to nontechnical abilities [...] should be the basis for its claim” (Bowman, 2012, p.33).

This literacy could help students to view things in non-dogmatic ways and to become able to analyze procedures of meaning construction. In the study of music culture, literacy is

related to issues of power and social justice (McLaren, 1995). Specific repertoire choices in music class instill social and cultural values. Bowman (2007) poses a critical question: “What kinds of music, values, ideas, and people are excluded from our practices?” In his thinking, music exclusion leads to social exclusion. Thus, music education is related to issues of social justice and can contribute to shaping students' social and cultural consciousness (p. 119).

Incorporating all these elements in school music education is not easy. It is easier to teach general and technical knowledge, but it is harder to teach consciousness and reflective thinking. Consciousness and reflection are things that students should pursue themselves. What educators can do is support students so that they become aware of this fact.

### **Considerations and Proposals: a curriculum based on the functions of music**

Postmodern meanings are social and cultural constructions. Students, as bearers of social and musical meanings and interpretations, bring to the music class their own experience, knowledge, musicality, and practices they acquire outside school (Regelski, 2017; Regelski & Gates, 2009; Green, 2006). Thus, their various literacy practices outside school should be taken into consideration. Not only can such acknowledgment lead to a re-thinking of music educator's role, but also it promotes a strong link between music in class and music in everyday life. As music practices are being transformed, instruction should change accordingly.

Unfortunately, music curricula do not take into consideration new multimodal digital environments where students' music identities are constructed, and their music development takes place (Kokkidou, 2009). While teachers attempt to connect school knowledge to everyday knowledge, they do not provide students with the necessary experiences to form critical thinking skills. It is undoubtedly a difficult task to address the hybridity and intricacy of postmodern culture—to deal with issues such as race, gender, terrorism, or refugee crises, to encourage

students to take part in critical discussions about music, to question inherited values of dominant cultures.

I am suggesting a curriculum based on the functions of music. According to Alan Merriam (1964), the functions of music are emotional expression, aesthetic enjoyment, entertainment, communication, symbolic representation, physical response, enforcement of conformity to social norms, validation of social institutions and religious rituals, contribution to the continuity and stability of culture, and contribution to the integration of society (pp. 219-227). These functions overlap. For each one, Merriam provides examples from various musical traditions.

What possibilities does the music-function model offer to music classrooms? In my view, the study of the functions of music provides the students with opportunities to investigate processes of interaction evoked through music in everyday life, to explore various sources from different music cultures, and to move away from an ethnocentric perspective. On the one hand, as there are many different musical aspects and functions, there are different literacies dependent on the context (Barton, 2013). On the other hand, music literacies reflect human needs and abilities, and, thus, are firmly related to the functions of music.

Music spans a wide range of human experience. Music functions imprint in a broader way how we experience music and define the contexts where its applications (listening, performing, creating, dancing) are unified. Moreover, functions are never neutral. Their notion includes ideological, cultural and personal-emotional dimensions, and has to do with the reasons about why a kind of music or practice is used, as well as the aim it serves. The same use of music (i.e., listening) to different groups may have different functions. In this view, the functions of music are never non-musical or extra-musical.

Music does what people do with it. Christopher Small (1998) introduced the concept of musicking and stated that music is not a thing but an activity through which individuals and groups acquire the sense of their identity. If we understand what people do as they take part in a musical act, we can realize the function music fulfills in human life (p. 8). For North and Hargreaves (2008, p. 139): “It would be surprising if people therefore did not use specific pieces of music to achieve very specific ends in very specific circumstances.” According to Schäfer, (2016), music preference is mainly informed by the functions that music fulfills in people’s lives (e.g., to regulate emotions, moods, or physiological arousal; to promote self-awareness; to foster social relatedness). Bates (2017) contributed to the discussion stating: “Recognizing the utilitarian nature of all musical experiences is essential. [...] Bottom line: musical experiences satisfy a wide range of human needs, one of which is not higher than the others.” (p. 19).

Investigating music functions is not a matter of either/or, because every function is the result of a complicated network of cultural codes, events, social needs, and aims. Functions suggest a shift from ‘reading music’ to ‘reading the music worlds conscientiously’. All the above are consistent with the principles of critical pedagogy, and with the notion of music literacy as a social and cultural construction. In the praxial approach to music education, Elliott and Silverman (2015) underscore that music is always pluralistic and fluid, dictated by the situated circumstances of its use. Without shared understandings of music systems and their socially-related behaviors and uses, we would not understand music as anything more than random sounds.<sup>1</sup>

Haack (2005) and Hodges & Haack (1996) advocated for the development of a model based on the functions of music. However, both remained confined by Merriam’s account and did not

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1 An interesting recent study (Savage et al., 2015) may feed the discussions in music classrooms about the cross-cultural structural regularities of human music.

consider today's world. As Estelle Jorgensen puts it (2003, p. 62) educators need to reassess old ideas to see what they offer for the future and decide what to preserve. Then, they should devise new approaches that meet the needs and challenges of the present world.

Given the present situation—let us not forget that there have been 50 years since Merriam's study—there is no question that musical functions need updating. There have been considerable changes in music environments and the nature of the music experience. I wish to add three more functions of music: identity construction (*becoming* through music), music activism, and the interaction in digital multimodal contexts. I would also like to add to Merriam's communication the aspect of isolation (non-communication). Thus, we can look at old ideas in new ways.

Each music function becomes real when it fulfills specific personal and social needs. The function-based approach is consistent with praxial conceptions of music in ways that music exists, is experienced, and understood in relation to contexts of socio-musical practices. Music teaching-learning should be based on students' knowledge and values about music and should promote 'real' musical practices, ensuring continuity between school and everyday life (Elliott & Silverman, 2015; Regelski & Gates, 2009). This praxial approach finds support in DeNora's studies (2000) about the uses of music in people's personal and social life, and in Green's ideas about the social structure of music. Tia DeNora's (2000) studies helped us to understand how individuals use music in everyday life, how this use can shape their social identities, and how one uses music as a cultural tool to organize behavior, actions, and interactions among humans. According to Lucy Green (2006), music education must take into consideration the social organization of music practices as the society consists of a variety of groups and each individual belongs to many groups at the same time.

Taking the functions of music as a starting point, repertoire expansion does not take place in an ‘artificial’ way. Instead, it takes place naturally, always depending on the context. In this view, popular music in the music classroom is not just another genre in the repertoire (Regelski, 2017). Popular music promotes new terms in music understanding and music practices, such as informal ways of music teaching-learning, and sheds light onto certain ideological tensions regarding the musical material and its relation to identity, stereotypes about gender roles (to name a few).

From a practical point of view, this approach may provide us with the chance to get rid of music educational practices which are uncritically reproduced and to focus on the importance and functions of music in society and students’ daily life. This means starting from the context, not from the music work. This also means addressing questions about meaning. For instance, in the case of multimodal texts (web-pages, music videos, films and so on), we can pose questions such as: How is a medium used? How do the meanings fit into the larger world of meaning? Whose interests are the meanings skewed to serve? (Kalantzis & Cope, 2005). All these align with postmodern discourses, which show great interest in the subjective, the local, and the context (Hassan, 2001). Different contexts and functions require different angles of approach. Bowman (2007) explains that everything, including knowledge, skills, musicality and teaching methods, become substantive within a specific cultural context.

From a curricular perspective, methodological tools can derive from the MayDay Group’s “action ideals” (see Regelski & Gates, 2009) that go well beyond “methodolatry” and are inspired by Dewey’s idea of democracy. They can also borrow from Regelski’s (2005) conceptualization of praxis-based curricula and its spiral development. The function-oriented curriculum relies on three essential premises: a) learning is grounded in personal and cultural

codes b) instruction should be based on students' prior music experiences (teachers need to value and accept the literacies that children bring to the classroom); c) children should be encouraged to explore musical experiences on their own terms. The curriculum structure may follow Kalantzis and Cope's (2005) model of multiliteracies, and can be developed in four cores: a) experiencing the known and the new (e.g., utilization of students' music discourses from their varied lifeworlds), b) conceptualising by naming and by theorising (e.g., acquiring and consciously using terms for the understanding of music as an object and a function), c) analysing functionally and critically (e.g., approaching a music situation in a more in-depth fashion, process and critical interpretation of music discourses in various contexts of music communication, taking always into consideration the socio-cultural context within which music is produced, transmitted and received), d) applying appropriately and creatively (e.g., following a function to create music, transformation of knowledge, addressing music questions in a broader sense, transfer and adjustment of knowledge and skills in new contexts). Music activities should revolve around the core aim of the conscious construction of musical identity.

As a lecturer within the field of Music Pedagogy for more than 15 years in tertiary education in Greece, I have had the privilege of working with hundreds of pre-service teachers. Looking for new pathways to music teaching and learning in graduate and post-graduate level, I discovered that students know few things about the functions of music. This discovery was critical for me to start thinking about how music functions could be a new starting point for curriculum development. The following paragraphs provide an overview of a function-based curriculum project, which took place in the academic years 2015-2016 and 2016-2017. All classes were instructed by me. I will summarize specific activities and content that are part of the curriculum, which I implemented for four semesters with promising results.



**Emotional expression.** We explored the emotional significance of music, and we addressed question such as: Is there ‘happy’ or ‘sad’ music? How does a music work make people feel happy? Is it possible to know what a composer feels when composing music? Can we use music as a means for emotional arousal, mood regulation, or reducing stress levels? Is it all about our brains and the bio-acoustic components of music? Students improvised music and found out connections between musical creativity and emotional expression. They also acted as directors in classroom performances and acknowledged the power of expressive gestures.

**Aesthetic enjoyment.** Students brought to class a music work that made them feel aesthetic pleasure. We compared those different works and identified factors that influence aesthetic experiences such as familiarity, cultural background, and openness to new experience, (and music as “sublime” or otherworldly). We contemplated the question: Are there music qualities that produce a sense of discomfort? We also went through an interesting brainstorming activity trying to explain the Kantian maxim: “Art is purposive without purpose.” Students were given the opportunity to investigate the nature of aesthetic pleasure through performing and improvising music.

**Entertainment.** We listened to and sang songs from various genres proposed by students. We made distinctions between passive and active music listening. We addressed questions such as: Is the way we use music for entertainment imposed by mass media? Can music entertainment be a flow experience? What about the use of music in sites such as shopping malls? What about the use of music in other media (commercials and movies)? Are these cases about entertainment or do they serve other extra-musical purposes?

**Communication.** How does music affect our cultural understanding of how we relate and interact with other humans and objects? We discussed new means of music communication

(web 2.0 participatory music communities, sharing music through social media). Students exchanged views about using of headphones to create their own music spaces, forbidding any intrusion.

**Symbolic representation.** We made a collection of musical myths regarding the birth of music in various cultures (Greek, Arab, Chinese). We examined the symbolic roles of music in religious traditions and societies (hymns and anthems). We watched cross-listening clips in order to understand new options for music visualization. Students realized that every symbolic music representation bears meaning and needs interpretation.

**Physical response.** How do we use our bodies when listening to or performing music? How is musical understanding embodied? Why are choir members not allowed to move while performing classical repertoire? Is musical meaning grounded in body involvement? We tried to describe embodied reactions and understandings of music. We tried to dance while listening to world music and concluded that music is a global phenomenon, but it is not a universal language. We played with Orff instruments and discussed musical instruments as natural extensions of the musician.

**Enforcement of conformity to social norms.** We talked about politics in music, and we investigated forms of music propaganda in mass media and social organizations. We also examined existing practices in school music education to further understand how music performances that typically take place in school serve as dominant cultural models.

**Validation of social institutions and religious rituals.** It is widely accepted that religious practices cannot be considered without music. The main questions we negotiated were: What role does music play in peoples' religious lives? Can we identify how transcendent functions of music and religious meanings of songs determine people's emotional reactions?

**Contribution to the continuity and stability of the culture.** I encouraged my students to find a song from any era or genre and discuss its impact on the stability of the culture. We focused on questions such as: Has music evolved as a sexual selection apparatus? Does every music work reflect the values and culture of its era? We also discussed utilitarian notions and legitimate conventional forms of music performance in school settings (patriot songs, religious songs, traditional music songs). A key point in our discussions was that music education does not start in schools; it starts in communities.

**Contribution to the integration of society.** We talked about the capacity of music to both bring different people together (bonding effect that facilitates cooperative activity), and to keep them at a distance (analysis of discrimination through music) through particular cases. We also talked about ways music may become a symbol of freedom or suppression, unity or exclusion. Students had different opinions on what being a good citizen means and on how music education can contribute to this end.

**Identity construction (*becoming through music*).** We focused on the ways individuals construct and affirm their cultural identities through music. We addressed questions such as: How do societal and technological changes affect how we construct our identities, including the musical ones? Students described how their music experiences contributed to the way they see the self and the world and discussed the transformative power of particular music experiences. All students were asked to write a song (a verse and a couple) based on their personal music experiences.

**Music activism.** Taking as an example the *Thirty Seconds to Mars* rock band and the social-political-musical *El Sistema* project in Venezuela, we investigated how one music could use music for anti-war purposes or maintaining boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘others.’ We all

agreed that it is vital to promote social action through music. But, how? We all know about the Syrian families arriving in Greece and attempts for agreement between the European Union, Greece, and Turkey intended to ameliorate the refugee crisis. These families suffer from a range of issues such as emotional trauma, losses, and social and economic difficulties. My students and I concluded that these issues need much more than building intercultural awareness. They need practical solutions. We realized that the inclusion of a single Syrian song or dance does not suffice to promote social action.

**Interaction in digital multimodal contexts.** We discussed new acoustic ecologies of our lives, and we tried to capture something of the unyielding complexity of today audiovisual musical worlds. Students described when and how they use digital media to communicate and develop musical understanding. Music videos added a lot to our discussions and made this set of lessons a multi-media experience. We watched *The Wizard of Oz* with Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* music as an example, which depicts the digital encounter of cultural objects that were created to be autonomous works. Students created a music video, with the help of their mobile phone camera. They realized that analyses of music in audiovisual contexts allow us to examine how music contributes to the comprehension of visual information. They all agreed that multimodal decoding is a critical skill in the context of screen-based music culture.

Students worked mostly into groups of six to eight. As they began to construct their understanding of functions of music, they became aware that all functions are intertwined in reciprocal relations, influencing and being influenced by each other, and that this list is hardly exhaustive. They realized that the function-oriented curriculum includes ideological, cultural and personal-emotional dimensions, and has to do with the reasons why one uses a kind of music or practice, as well as the aim that it serves. They concluded that there are various music genres

with different structures, but regarding their functions they resemble each other. On the other hand, the same music may have different functions depending on the context. A Bach chorale, for instance, can be heard in a commercial, a film, a video game, a waiting room and so on. The listen-play-create musical activities were found to be more meaningful and interconnected in a natural manner because they were implemented through the presentations of real-world challenges with direct personal connections.

In our function-based curriculum, every lesson was not an isolated teaching and learning episode. Students appeared to be looking forward to the next lesson and were always open to further exploration. Above all, students had ample opportunities to speak for themselves, to investigate their own music stories, while discussing the meaning of music in their lives. They realized that music has a profound effect on how humans think and behave and that people across cultures sing, play, listen to, and create music for a variety of purposes. Most significantly, they became aware that experiencing music and thinking or talking about it are not identical. In fact, they are quite different from each other. This is in line with Dewey's thinking, which argued that "We don't learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience" (Dewey, 1938/1969, p. 78). It is imperative that we see learning-by-doing approaches as learning-by-doing-and-thinking approaches. Thinking is a dominant function. Being part of a music world means reflecting on it.

I derived the presented data from my personal field notes through the implementation of the curriculum. However, this should not be seen as a research study—as I did not use any assessment tools (i.e., interviews, questionnaires)—but rather as an exploratory, ongoing project, which provides preliminary data and could form the basis for more detailed and consistent

analysis in the future. An action research study should be implemented to measure the potential of the function-based curriculum and its impact on students' musical engagement and learning.

The project, as it is presented here, is most likely to match students aged eleven to sixteen years (upper classes of the elementary school, secondary school classes). Younger students can also benefit from this approach; yet, with younger students, thinking and conversational activities may be fewer to give space to more practical ones.

All in all, the function-oriented curriculum can be considered as a contextual one, which should be determined by dialectic relationships among students and teachers. It allows flexibility and diversity in our pedagogical actions and could be a form of creative pedagogy requiring educators to be facilitators and mentors, responsive to emerging practices, ready to juxtapose contrasting ideas, and willing to embrace multiple identities of themselves and their students (Abramo & Reynolds, 2015). This curriculum can also be seen as an integrative, multidisciplinary one, because it may offer many opportunities to link various parts of the curriculum into a coherent whole. It can engage students in social discourse, which fosters critical thinking and new music literacies. Moreover, understanding the big ideas that connect otherwise isolated facts, skills, and experiences, enables learners to make sense of their personal experiences and to meet new challenges. In this vein, school should start with the music educators not teaching but learning—getting to know their students, their views about music, their music identities. We cannot teach students effectively if we do not know them well.

### **Coda**

New music environments and emergent new music literacies raise critical questions about music education. There is a need to expand our vision of music pedagogy so that learners can develop autonomous music thinking, make conscious choices about their music lives, and

become musically literate in a broad way. This cannot be accomplished just through music making and appreciation activities; music literacy should no longer be viewed as only being a music reading or performing activity. The functions of music form a musical language of real life. Students should be involved in a multi-layered analysis of music functions in order to understand music as a complex system—the cultural contexts of music works, music-cultural codes, music-social practices, the diversity and pluralism of musical cultures, and ideological issues. The function-based model may be not a silver bullet for music education—clearly, there is much more research to be done in this area—but in my opinion, it is worthy of consideration.

The ability to move forward depends on teachers' willingness to re-examine earlier ideas about music education. When thinking about the future of music education, the main questions remain: Which musical experiences are meaningful in students' lives? How can we help students to 'live musically' and to see the 'big picture'? Should music educators think anew about 'good' and 'bad' music? Should we review the musical and pedagogical criteria about music teaching and learning? Which general music skills and knowledge will make student active citizens and allow them to lead a happy life as adults? What is at stake in music education in a postmodern society?

At any rate, reality shows that we are going through a period in which values are changing, and we lack the time and knowledge to understand the transformative forces which affect our lives. This makes our responsibility towards education, society, and culture even greater.

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