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The Musical-Aesthetic Situation as a Basis for Music Education Processes at the Primary School Level

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Abstract

Musical-aesthetic education represents an essential hallmark of schooling due to its substantial contribution to society and culture. As understood here, musical-aesthetic education means to make musical-aesthetic situations possible, resulting in musical-aesthetic experiences. In his recently published postdoctoral philosophical thesis from 1930/31 Günther Anders - influenced by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger - comprehends the musical situation as a transformation of the human being into one of his dimensions, that finds reification only in music. Building on this theoretical work the musical-aesthetic situation as a basis for music education processes and its contribution to developments of approaches of musical- aesthetic education at the primary school level will be discussed. By means of guided expert interviews, the meaning, status and practice of music education at the primary school level is examined from the perspective of instructors at the Teachers Colleges and professors at Universities in Upper Austria. It will be shown that aesthetic education should be strengthened as an interdisciplinary tool at primary schools. In order to make musical-aesthetic education possible for all pupils in modern migration societies, new ideas are needed for the aesthetic learning milieu. Furthermore, both the theoretical examination of the topic as well as the empirical results of this paper should raise greater awareness for the inherent worth of musical-aesthetic education.

Keywords: aesthetic, primary school musical-aesthetic situation, cultural diversity

One of the most frequently cited philosophers in the context of educational theory is John Dewey. To gain some new insights, I decided to focus on less known perspectives that contribute to intersections of philosophy, music, and education.

In his philosophical writings from 1930–1931, Anders (2017), influenced by Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger and married to Hannah Arendt at that time, described the musical situation as a cognitive situation in a philosophical-anthropological way. Building on this theoretical work I discuss in this paper the musical-aesthetic situation as a basis for music education processes by combining characteristics of the aesthetic experience with the musical situation and thus showing its contribution to approaches of musical-aesthetic education at the primary school level.

Since primary school can be considered a key institution in making music education possible for all pupils in modern migration societies, the Austrian primary school curriculum is the next step in demonstrating the formal framework for music education and its potential for musical-aesthetic situations.

Finally, I provide analysis of expert interviews to scrutinize the potential provided by the legal framework in Austria and to discuss the main problems and make recommendations to improve musical-aesthetic education at the primary school level.

But why consider a philosophy of music from the year 1930? Buschkühle (2011) said, “The question, what is suitable for education in art, depends on the communication with philosophy” (p. 9). Anders’s philosophical writings fit in a very special way to extend the discussion about musical-aesthetic education with an understanding of music education as transdiscipline (Khittl, 2017, p. 9). Following is an introduction to Anders.

Günther Anders was born in 1902 in Breslau and died in 1992 in Vienna. He was one of the most important philosophers in German-speaking Europe. In his major philosophical work *Die Antiquiertheit des Menschen* [The Obsolescence of Humankind] (or literally, “The

Outdatedness of the Human Species”), Anders analyzed the gap between what we are able to produce and what we are able to imagine. He also emerged as a central figure in the European antinuclear movement. What is less known is that before he immigrated to Paris in 1933 and then to the United States, he engaged in two areas of research: philosophical anthropology and the philosophy of music (Ellensohn, 2014, p. 108).

Anders describes his philosophy of music as a theory of situations. By this he means that he is concerned in his analysis neither with the musical work (the composition in the form of the score) nor the psychological experience of music, but with the musical situation itself. This according to Anders, is characterized by a specific subject-object neutrality. The traditional dichotomies of subject and object or intentional act and intentional object are inadequate when it comes to music; what is specific to music is the coincidence of subject and object, performance and work. (Ellensohn, 2014, p. 110)

In this thesis, Anders described musical situations as cognitive situations that manifest themselves in participating in different kinds of movement (Anders, 2017, pp. 23–24).

Musical listening essentially exists in copformance of musical forms of motion and not, for instance, in a stance of passive receptivity.

This leads to a transformation of the human being (Anders, 2017, p. 64). According to Anders (2017) the human being in the musical situation lives neither in this world nor within the continuity of their own life (p. 23f). The center of the musical situation is *being-in-music*, which is only possible if the participants are actively and emotionally involved in the situation (Khittl, 2016, p. 167). The role of music within human existence could be to “experience and learn something in music” (Anders, 2017, p. 64), something that can be exclusively experienced and learned in its participation, because certain dimensions of

existence only become transparent by copperforming or participating in music. To quote Anders,

By participating such movements, human beings are not just changed in their formal time structure but completely modified and transformed.... Just because of this ability to modify, a kind of transformation is possible that goes to make the musical situation. These moods are not just occasional human attributes but colours of human existence. So—aside from their musical function—they are cognitive: kinds of self-awareness of existence. (p. 68f)

Anders described such moods as, for example, *being shaken*, *being moved*, *being elevated*, *floating*, *being separated*, *being thrilled*, *melting*, *being released*, *swimming*, *being dissolute*, or *being carried away* (Anders, 2017, p. 69f; my translations from German). Following, I describe three of the key terms as they are connoted in German: *Aufgelöstsein-in* (dissolution) is an intensively concentrated readiness for and thus an indifference of activity, or passiveness. Intentional listening corresponds to the musical situation that Anders called *Gelöstheit* (release), which he connected to the music of Viennese Classicism. It is finding fulfillment in singing, described as the internal realization of music and thus an indifference of objectivity and subjectivity. *Abgelöstsein-von* (separation) is finding fulfillment in the participation of a strict musical form. That kind of participation involves becoming self-detached and thus as indifferent to distance and identity (Anders, 2017, p. 28ff).

The one feature that is shared by all types of listening is the transformation of the person who is in this state of auditory co-performance of a musical object. In the musical situation as a situation of transformation. The listener becomes the medium. He no longer simply finds himself in the music, rather he is the music. Music “speaks”, as it were, straight through the person, the listener. (Ellensohn, 2014, p. 110)

Anders's considerations could be valuable today. To summarize and apply it to educational aspects I propose the following: To get music education processes going, we need to offer a wide range of opportunities to transform people, to perceive music as a dimension of human being, where one is able to experience and learn something unique. With the analysis of Kleimann's (2002) study on the characteristics of aesthetic experience, I will show that by combining these key features with the musical situation we may arrive at a definition of musical-aesthetic education.

Key Features of Aesthetic Experience

According to Kleimann (2002), three essential characteristics of aesthetic experience are distinguishable: *Sinnlichkeit* (sensory approach), *Gegenwärtigkeit* (presence), and *Erfülltheit* (fulfillment; p. 54f). I applied these to musical-aesthetic experiences:

1. Sensory approach can be translated into musical-aesthetic perception. This means the receptive and active examination of the world of music (Kleimann, 2002, p. 56f). That can involve monosensoric, imaginative-polysensoric, or synesthetic perception (Kleimann, 2002, p. 61), in which perception in a narrower sense can include memories, imaginations, and sense-bounded cognitions (Kleimann, 2002, p. 66).
2. Presence as a key feature comprises fulfilled time, attention to a musical situation, and the "end-in-itselfness" (Kleimann, 2002, p. 67ff) of the musical-aesthetic perception, also called autotelism.
3. Fulfillment as a third characteristic of musical-aesthetic experience covers the complete range of the assessment spectrum between satisfaction and disappointment (Kleimann, 2002, p. 90f).

A great advantage of these characteristics of aesthetic experience is that they allow different definitions of aesthetic education and focus on the situational aspects of learning.

Furthermore, it is apparent that these characteristics are particularly open to artistic disciplines. Based on these general ideas of the musical situation and musical-aesthetic experiences, I have created a base-line operative definition of musical-aesthetic education: Musical-aesthetic education involves participants in musical situations continuously, sensitizing their perceptions with receptive and active examination of music and allowing them to generate intrinsic value and build space for assessment of their musical-aesthetic experiences.

Analysis

That definition is incomplete as it is, so we need to deconstruct it again to formulate key questions and to find out more about the reality of musical-aesthetic education in primary schools. In which situations and to what extent does musical reception and active examination of music happen in primary schools? How do musical situations contribute to the sensitization of perception, and how do these situations contribute to generate intrinsic value of musical-aesthetic experiences for young students? In which situations and to what extent do students assess musical-aesthetic experiences?

As a first step to answering these questions and to show potentials, I have applied these five elements of musical-aesthetic education to the single elements of the educational and teaching tasks in the compulsory music education subject at the primary school level in Austria.

Table 1

Application of the Five Elements of Musical-Aesthetic Education to the Single Elements of the Educational and Teaching Task in the Compulsory Subject Music Education at the Primary School Level in Austria

Elements of musical-aesthetic education	Elements of the educational and teaching task in the compulsory subject music education at the primary school level in Austria (Bundesministerium für Bildung, 2012)
Musical reception is represented by the following elements of the educational and teaching task:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading to intentional listening • Supporting experience capability • Improving the hearing ability
Active examination of music refers to the educational and teaching task by:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The consideration of the acoustic-musical environment • by singing, making music, listening and moving to music • by supporting expressiveness • and the willingness to take part in extracurricular activities by the acquisition of basic musical skills
Which elements do we find if we consider sensitization of perception?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting perceptual abilities by the improvement of the ability of distinction in acoustic-musical sensations: hearing, sight, touch, balance, kinesthetic sense
Which points promise to generate intrinsic value of musical-aesthetic experiences?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative work • Pleasure-orientated musical activities • Opportunities to experience pleasure, enrichment and excitation by early and modern music • The consideration of the individual and the group

And concerning the assessment of musical-aesthetic experiences I have found the following:

- Describing listening sensations
- Supporting linguistic expression
- And the critical and tolerant examination of music

This analysis conveys that the educational and teaching task can be a basis to realize musical-aesthetic situations at an amazingly high level. But of course it does not say anything about implementation. Following, I have examined to what extent these elements of the educational and teaching tasks translate into practice. For that, I interviewed different players in tertiary education institutions in Upper Austria.

Challenges

According to lecturers of education colleges in Upper Austria, the quality of music teaching in primary schools depends considerably on the individual teacher's personality. In Austria, a primary school teacher normally teaches all kinds of subjects. Ideally, the teacher incorporates musical situations several times per week. In this, the teacher's previous experiences, motivation, and approaches play a key part, because it is hardly possible to control if any musical situations are offered at all. Some interviewees also emphasized that there is nearly no musical experience required from those who pursue a career in teaching at the primary school level. The number of music classes provided at the education colleges are decreasing, while at the same time the number of students in various music classes and groups is rising (Pühringer, 2016, p. 65). The assumption is that there is no full coverage of musical-aesthetic education in Austrian primary schools. Although the curriculum offers a framework, it is entirely up to the teacher which opportunities they offer, or if they offer any musical situations at all.

In view of the marginalization of music education and artistic subjects in general, educational research should focus on the examination of music, art, and culture at schools providing a general education. Therefore, it is important to examine the framework as well as the actual quantitative and qualitative state of aesthetic education at schools and educational colleges in more detail, especially the issue of quality education.

Recommendations

Based on the expert interviews conducted (Pühringer, 2016), I have several recommendations for how musical-aesthetic situations can happen more continuously in Austrian primary schools and consequently lead to profound music education processes.

There should be sufficient musical-aesthetic education at a high level for future primary school teachers as well as sufficient continuing quality education programs in musical-aesthetic education for practicing primary school teachers. There should also be improved cooperation between educational colleges and music universities, between primary schools and music schools, and between primary schools and cultural institutions. Well trained music teachers and musicians should be integrated, and the primary school music curriculum at educational colleges should be further developed in cooperation with music universities.

Which plans of action are practicable depends on the current culture, the institution, and the situation. To quote Greeno and Sawyer,

From a situative perspective, learning is the gradual appropriation, through guided participation, of the ability to participate in culturally defined socially situated activities and practices. And because every culture has its own unique set of practices, learning outcomes will be different within each culture. (Greeno & Sawyer, 2009, p. 354)

Individual concepts are needed for the current musical-aesthetic learning milieu in order to make musical-aesthetic situations possible for all pupils in modern migration societies. The cultivation of the musical dimension is an essential hallmark of school, which requires further research.

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