Thematic Article

Encouraging Musical Creativity in Montenegrin Primary Education – A Case Study

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Abstract

The need to change the paradigm of music education, which primarily relies on performing and listening to music, implies a more systematic introduction of activities that would enable the direct involvement of children in the exploration of sounds and the creation of their own music. By analysing the curricula and textbooks for music education in Montenegrin primary schools, as well as examining the attitudes of teachers about the realisation of musical creativity in teaching practice, it was found that these activities are not given enough attention. In order to introduce innovations in practice, an action research study was conducted, during 2017/2018 school year with 30 fifth grade pupils in one primary school, belonging to the Southern region of Montenegro. The obtained results, based on the qualitative findings, showed the connection between the categories that make up musical creativity in the classroom: acquiring musical knowledge, developing musical skills, encouraging problem solving, developing critical thinking, supporting collaborative creativity, motivation and integrative teaching. Hopefully, the conducted research will contribute to a wide range of understanding of musical creativity in the classroom context, as one of the leading topics of contemporary music pedagogy.

Keywords: musical creativity; general education; primary schools; teaching methods; Montenegro.

Introduction

Music education in primary schools in Montenegro is defined by the curriculum for the subject Music Culture (Subject Curriculum Music Culture, 2017) which is realised through three musical activities: performing, listening and creating. Primary general education in Montenegro lasts nine years and is divided into three three-year cycles. Music Culture has the status of a compulsory subject, represented by one lesson per week within all nine grades. In order to encourage musical creativity, from the school year 2019/2020, the elective subject Music Workshop (cnr. Muzička radionica) was introduced, which is realised in the third cycle. Through the introduction of creation in the curriculum, from 2003 until today, a formal framework has been created for musical creative activities to be part of teaching practice in Montenegrin primary schools, but the question of their realisation still remains open. Reasons that may hinder the systematic implementation in school practice are: insufficient number of music lessons, 45 minutes of school lesson, but also an extensive curriculum and a large number of pupils in one class, which can range up to 30 in Montenegrin schools.

In order to examine the possibilities for systematic and methodically designed implementation of musical creativity, it is necessary to conduct more research studies in a specific educational context, which was the main goal of this research.

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<u>2</u> Martinovic Bogojevic, J.

Theoretical framework

The very term "musical creativity" is a complex construct that has sought to be explained and more precisely defined in music pedagogy over the past twenty years. The generalisation of musical creativity would lead to simplification and misinterpretation, so Hargreaves (2012) suggests using the concept of multiples creativities. Burnard (2016, pp. 13-17), similarly, views musical creativity within the "real world practices and creative industry", defining several categories: individual, collaborative (group), communal, emphatic, intercultural, performance and computational creativity in music. Webster (2002) suggests that the term "creative thinking in music" is much more precise, presenting a model that contains aspects that more clearly explain and define it.

Despite the fact that great attention has been paid to musical creativity in recent research studies (e.g. Borota, 2013; Burnard, 2016; Burnard & Murphy, 2017; Črčinovič Rozman, 2009; Gidzijauskienė & Stakelum, 2017; Higgins, L., Campbell, P., & McPherson, 2010; Kratus, 2017; McPherson, 2016; Odena, 2016; Rotar Pance & Igličar, 2017), the paradigm of music education is still predominantly based on performing and listening to music, while creative activities, such as creating of sound images, short musical units, improvisation or composing, are sporadically represented in practice. Activities by which pupils are directly involved in the creation of their own music represent a holistic approach to music education which develops the "meaningful musical thinking" (Wiggins, 2002). Slovenian music pedagogue Breda Oblak (1987) was among the first in the former Yugoslavia to point out the importance of creative musical activities in both cognitive and psychological development of a child. She, therefore, divided musical creativity into two basic forms: creativity in music and creativity with music. The first form represents the direct involvement of the pupil in music making, from spontaneous to guided creativity, while the second form represents the manifestation of the musical experience of the listened composition through other media (verbal, artistic or through movement/dance). Musical creativity, represented in the Montenegrin curriculum through the activity "creation" is based on activities that involve both of these forms.

The competencies of music teachers, as key drivers of change, should be extended to a higher level of knowledge in the field of psychological research of musical creativity, such as aspects of creative thinking (fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration) and artistic criteria of creativity (originality, structure and expressiveness) (Črčinovič Rozman, 2009). Thus, the creative teaching strategy itself would be aimed at encouraging "mini c" creativity, which is process-oriented, and "little c" creativity, which is gradually focused on the creative product (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2009). As creative processes in music are extremely heterogeneous, it is difficult to give general didactic recommendations to teachers, so one's own creative experience is the best way to acquire competencies (Jorgensen, 2008; Odena & Welch, 2009).

Although important music pedagogues from the early 20th century considered children's music creation an important segment of their methodological systems (e.g. Dalcroze, Kodály, Martenot, Orff, York-Trotter, Willems), Randles and Webster (2011) point out that musical creativity in teaching and learning practice must be posed as one of the most important issues for researchers and practitioners in contemporary music education.

Research design and Methods

Considering that the problem of insufficient implementation of creative musical activities should be investigated from the inside in the "classroom context" (Crow, 2008), the research was conducted in one primary school in the Southern region of Montenegro during the 2017/2018 school year. Due to the connection between research and practice, the qualitative methodology of action research has been applied, which represents systematic and participatory research in real conditions (Bognar, 2006; Mesec, 1994). The research was divided into two cycles according to school semesters.

The main goal of the research was changing practice by systematical implementation of musical creativity in teaching and learning process. In relation to the research goal, we sought answers to the following research questions:

- 1. Which musical skills did creative activities help develop in pupils?
- 2. Do pupils understand the learning content they acquire in their creative activities?
- 3. Do creative activities help pupils develop their critical thinking and problem solving?
- 4. Do creative activities help pupils develop their skills of cooperation?
- 5. How do creative activities carried out during lessons affect pupils' motivation?

Participants

Participants in the research were pupils from one fifth grade class (N = 30), 15 girls and 15 boys. The average age of the students was 10 years at the beginning of the study. Their music teacher participated as a practitioner.

Instruments

The following instruments were used to collect data for qualitative analysis:

Research diary (RD): One of the procedures was systematic observation and writing of a RD. Direct and participatory observation was applied, in which the researcher observing the pedagogical situation also participates in it.

Teacher's reflective diary (TRD): During the research, the teacher kept her diary, recording her impressions and reflections, which contributed to a more comprehensive view of the situation from multiple angles and to an objective observation of what was happening in practice. TRD was written in a free form, without previously specified categories on the basis of which reflection is made.

Pupil's impressions (PI): The pupils made short anecdotal notes at the end of the class, giving us feedback on their impressions. This type of short notes provided us with information about how the pupils experienced the lessons, but it also encouraged their self-reflection.

Brainstorming (BS): Refers to the pupils' associations and observations about the compositions they listened to, transcribed from their notebooks and used in the analysis.

Video materials: The collected documentation consisted of video recordings of class fragments, which were subsequently analysed. Qualitative data represents transcript for the parts of the lesson where the participants' speech was recorded, along with their comments. The video material contains both the recorded creative processes and pupils' creative musical products.

Pupils' works: During the lessons, a large number of different works was created, which represented the creative products of the pupils: drawings that the pupils made while listening to music, sound images created with Orff instruments, and melodies they created in group work.

Questionnaires for pupils: At the end of the first cycle, the pupils answered a short questionnaire consisting of 6 closed and open-ended questions, in order to provide us with a deeper insight into the first research cycle, based on the answers we received. At the end of the second cycle, the pupils answered a questionnaire consisting of 9 open-ended questions about their impressions of the activities.

Data analysis

One of advantages of action research is its allowing of pluralism of methods used for data analysis and interpretation of findings (Mesec, 1994). According to research questions, data were classified into triangulation matrices (Bognar, 2006). By deductive analysis, the material is coded according to the following categories: Understanding of music knowledge, Development of musical skills, Learning through problem-solving, Development of critical thinking, Collaborative creativity and Motivation. Then, by inductive analysis, after the first cycle, a sub-category for Collaborative creativity opened up — The role of the teacher. After the second cycle, the category of Integrative teaching opened. The report was made available to the teacher who participated in the research, in order to receive feedback, suggestions and affirmation of credibility. A triangulation method was used to verify the validity of the answers given to the research questions.

Course of the research

The first cycle of research began in October of 2017/2018 school year, and lasted until December 2017. According to the annual plan, 15 lessons of Music culture were held in the first semester. It was planned that a number of lessons would be held by the teacher on her own, and within the research, we would hold 8 lessons (51%) in which creativity was represented as a central activity. The block lessons contained one lesson of integrative teaching (teaching unit "I'll even come from the woods") with the subject Montenegrin Language and Literature, while the second block lesson was realised through an inter-curricular correlation with teaching of Art Culture (teaching unit "Let's meet string instruments"), and the third block lesson was realised through two linked lessons of Music Culture (teaching unit "Let's meet little Mozart"). I as a researcher, was actively

<u>A</u> Martinovic Bogojevic, J.

involved in the teaching process, planning and preparing the lessons, which included the selection of musical material and working methods, on the basis of which the teacher as a practitioner realised the teaching process. During the first cycle, the focus was more oriented to the pupils' creative process, by observing how the pupils were accepting activities and how they influence their motivation. I was also wondering if they were better acquiring their musical knowledge through creativity, including experiential/analytical listening to music, which was, in a number of activities, a stimulus for creative processes. It was, also observed how creativity contributes to the development of their collaboratively and joint problem-solving.

The second cycle ran from late January to mid-May 2018. A total of 18 lessons were held, out of which 8 lessons were realised as part of the research. In the second cycle I focused more on pupils' creative products, as pupils were more willing to focus more on creative tasks, and to show a higher degree of social and musical interaction in group work around the selection of shared ideas. Since the competition "Let's choose the most singing class!" was organised at the school level in March (19/03/2018), the pupils expressed their desire to participate and together create a stage performance by which they would present products of musical creativity, such as melodies for the recorder, sound effects and choreography. In this way, we selected and synthesised the obtained outcomes of creative processes, which aimed to develop critical thinking and encourage problem-solving in the process of preparing public appearances.

This action part of the research was followed by a comparative phase of analysing the results obtained in both cycles and obtaining answers to the research questions posed.

Results and interpretation

With regard to a large number of collected data and the resulting categories, the most significant findings will be presented.

Creative activities and developing of musical skills

From the analysis of the video material, the impressions of the teacher (TRD) and my diary (RD), one of the basic skills that developed during the creative processes was playing the rhythmic and melodic Orff instruments. Kashumb and Smith (2009) in their description of compositional context believe that playing skills are developed effectively because pupils spend significant time playing what they create. Creating sound images was the first task in which pupils were engaged in music itself. The theme of the lesson dealt with the treatment of poetry and listening to compositions from a multimedia collection "I will even come from the woods" (Martinović-Bogojević, 2015). The collection contains 16 songs about different animals and 16 compositions of contemporary music. We will present some of the impressions that the pupils wrote down about this activity:

"For me it was great. We used various instruments. I played wooden sticks. Adagio was our tempo. Mezzo forte was our dynamics. We didn't have many discussions, but our performance was excellent. We also used two sheets of paper to present the flight of falcon." (L3-4/PI26)2

"I have great impressions. My group and I imitated the monkey. Some played tambourine, percussions, triangle and rattles. I mimicked the monkey by voice. It was great! Everyone clapped and we were satisfied." (L3-4/PI25)

In the second cycle, they developed the skills of music-making, which dominated in relation to playing, so a significant number of pupils (12) pointed out that they "learned to compose" in music lessons. The development of the music reception took place gradually, through both cycles. Creative listening (Kratus, 2017), or experiential and analytical listening was encouraged, and the brainstorming technique (Osborn, 1953) was used to freely express one's observations. The pupils showed that they noticed the tempo, dynamics, musical instruments, and character of the heard compositions. By expressing their musical experience by artistic means, it was noticed that the pupils showed a sense of musical form and timbre in their drawings.

² Description of the abbreviations: L3-4 – lessons 3 and 4; PI – pupil's impression; 26 – number of coded unit.

Picture 1: Creative expression of musical experience while listening to the composition Syrinx by Claude Debussy



Pupil's commentary: "The black colour of the lines are low tones, and these lighter ones a little higher, and all together it seemed to me like an ensemble, as if all the colours were connected." (L10-11/vid.7)

Kaschub and Smith (2009) consider listening, singing, movement and spontaneous improvisation as "co-compositional activities", where listening is the most influential activity that provides musical stimuli, where through more listening music reception is developed, and through drawing, movement or the verbal contents their personal representation of the musical work is created.

Music memory developed through the performance of products at the end of the lesson. This included performing songs, choreography, rhythmic accompaniment, melodies, sound images and a public performance at the competition, in which they had to memorise all segments. Expressing the musical experience of dance and performing choreography also contributed to the development of a sense of rhythm, coordination of movements, physical expression of the musical experience and the development of motor skills. Girls have been shown to be more inventive than boys when it comes to this activity. Similar observations were made by Oblak (1987) in her research with this age group.

Understand the learning content in creative activities

Research has shown that when children create sound images, melodies or rhythmic accompaniment, they think about using the acquired knowledge on the characteristics of music, tempo and dynamics. In order to encourage the use of musical knowledge, it is necessary for the teacher to have a constructivist approach in the teaching process (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2014; Webster, 2011; Wiggins, 1999, 2002). By asking questions, encouraging the analysis of a creative product or asking pupils to write short impressions about the conducted process, a better interaction between the teacher and pupils was achieved, which gave us an insight into the ways in which pupils think musically. Of the knowledge they acquired, the pupils state in their answers: that they learned to sing new songs, play instruments, gained knowledge about some great composers, got acquainted with string and wind musical instruments, learned to play the recorder. Among the 28 answers, in 12 answers, the pupils stated that they had learned to create music or compose. One pupil replied that he had learned "that music is demanding".

One of the activities was about creating the melody using the recorder. The teacher had the following observation:

"With the help of the recorder, they tried possible variants of their solutions and chose the ones that best suited the final solution. In this way, they were able to recognise the benefits of their skill and to apply their knowledge of playing, knowledge of notes and reading from the sheet. Then they comment and correct." (L12/TRD1, 14. 03. 2018).

There was not always time left for discussions, which is one of the aggravating circumstances in the implementation of music creativity in school conditions and the limitation of lessons to 45 minutes. Block lessons of 90 minutes, therefore, provided more opportunities for comments and analysis. By applying musical knowledge, they tried to understand musical phenomena more deeply, which was more pronounced in the second cycle. In musical creativity, pupils of this age can express themselves spontaneously and freely, without a clear knowledge of exactly what musical elements they use, so Kaschub and Smith (2009) call this knowledge "intuitive knowledge". This type of knowledge was manifested by the pupils especially in the first cycle.

6 Martinovic Bogojevic, J.

Creative activities and motivation

Pupils' motivation was manifested through all activities during the research. A lower degree of interest was related to the verbal expression of the musical experience, in relation to the artistic expression, the design of choreography or in relation to the processes where pupils are directly involved in the creation of music. This confirmed the importance of creating meaningful musical tasks and musical activities (Lowe, 2002; Wiggins, 2002). The pupils pointed out that their tasks were not difficult, which was of great importance for their sense of comfort and for the absence of fear and insecurity in order to enter the creative processes. Their products were not graded, which showed more relaxation and less anxiety, as well as the fact that pupils prefer to create in a group rather than in individual forms of work (Martinovié Bogojevié, 2020).

The expression of motivation was also reflected in the expression of emotions, drawing smileys, hearts, stars, or statements such as: "I love you so much, teacher; Music is my favourite subject; This is the best lesson in the whole year; I learned that music is something magical, great and interesting; Music is my favourite subject, because we all communicate together and, even when we are a little too noisy, you don't mind". (PI/ the end of the 2nd cycle)

"I had a great time during last lesson. It wasn't difficult nor boring. My partner and I loved composing. When we played to listen, it sounded spell-binding. We were proud of ourselves and helped others to save their compositions. When I grow up, I'd like to be a real composer." (L15-16/PI12)

During the second cycle, their self-confidence was expressed, so they stated at the end of the research that they consider themselves musicians and believe in their ability to create music. A strong connection between the categories was shown in the relationship between motivation and collaborative creativity. Working in smaller groups was stimulating for most pupils, they had more fun during the creative process.

Skills of cooperation

Collaborative creativity as the most common form of teaching proved to be extremely important for encouraging creativity, as pupils felt safe when working in a group. They stated that they learned from each other and that they helped each other in their activities. In the first cycle, in a couple of situations, some specifics of the work of the groups were shown, they did not accept that any of them should be the leader, and in some tasks the interaction on the boys-girls axis was difficult. When leading collaborative creativity, the teacher should be not only a facilitator and someone who supervises the work of groups, but also be more intensively connected with groups, monitor the dynamics of their work and as a moderator help social interaction, if it is difficult. In one situation it has been shown that the change of group members during the creative process is delicate and that advanced peers, who are trusted to do a task better than others, feel increased responsibility, which can be a burden in circumstances where they adapt to a new group and a new task for a limited period of time set for a given activity. Collaborative creativity also developed empathy among students during the joint creation of the product, which was also reflected in the help they provided to each other. This way of music-making experiences could be defined as "interactive compositional partnership" (Cross et al., 2012).

The pupils point out that they prefer working in a group because they have more ideas, they can agree, and what they come up with turns out better. In their answers, but also in the teacher's observations and in my diary, it was felt that the pupils had built a relationship of togetherness, friendship, which was encouraged through both cycles.

Development of problem solving and critical thinking

In order to encourage critical thinking, in addition to talking to pupils during lesson, their notes, public presentation during the second cycle, we asked them through a questionnaire what they learned during lessons. From their responses we can see that the activities in which they expressed themselves contributed to the overall sense of satisfaction and connection with the music itself: "we learned that music is something special" (P2); "something miraculous, something great and interesting" (P30); "that it can be performed in many ways" (P12); "that music is not just to be listened to, but to be sung, played, created and entertained" (P25).

The development of critical thinking and problem solving came to the fore in the second cycle. This was expected, given that the pupils acquired new music knowledge and developed skills, so the attention was more focused on the quality of the creative product. Encouraging pupils to create in music, through inventing a melody and correcting the notation, creating a melody for a given text, as well as public performance, gradually

developed their conscious use of music knowledge and decision-making during the creative process. In an effort to encourage their critical thinking, reflection on the process after a certain amount of time, possible revisions, we asked them what they would change in the public performance they devised. Here are the answers of those pupils who suggested what changes they would make:

- I would change the space. To get some balloons and a disco ball in.
- I would change... for example, when our friends and I played, it was better for those who didn't play, to dance around us.
- I would change the introduction.
- I would like the rain to last longer.
- I would like only to hear the piano.
- I would like all to stand and sing as a choir.
- I wish we'd had more audience.

Since the research included musical creativity as an activity in the teaching process with this class for the first time, it could not be expected that pupils would develop critical thinking in a short period of time by evaluating their products with more objectivity. Webster (2016) considers it very important to encourage revision in the process of pupils' music-making in order to develop over time their creative thinking in music. Working in groups contributed to the joint solution of problems, so collaborative creativity proved to be an important form of work in which this skill is developed through joint agreements, opinions that everyone can express, and more ideas that are generated later.

Conclusions

Research has shown that musical creativity, with certain strategies possible, can be implemented in the real conditions of Montenegrin primary education system. Creation is combined with activities of listening to music and performing, so the skill of playing Orff's instruments is developed through creative musical tasks, such as creating a rhythmic arrangement for a learned song, supplementing a melody, creating a new melody using a recorder, or some other melodic instrument. Working in groups develops collaborative creativity, which encourages both musical and social interaction (Martinović Bogojević, 2020), through joint problem solving and adoption of ideas. Although minor disagreements may occur in groups of this age, such as not accepting that one member of the group stands out as a leader of misunderstandings between boys and girls, working in groups has proven to be very productive. Teachers in these activities, in addition to being facilitators, take on the role of moderators. Integrative teaching, as a form of upgrading the acquired knowledge, through the occasional connection of two or more subjects, provides pupils with the opportunity to connect the acquired knowledge in a constructive way through various activities. The advantage of integrating into two connected school lessons also enables the creation of a time frame of 90 minutes, optimal for creative music processes to be carried out and a certain product created. Music served as a stimulus for artistic expression, but it also encouraged a higher degree of musical reception through careful listening and noticing the characteristics of the listened composition. The public presentation of the results of these activities could encourage not only the critical opinion of the pupils, but also their motivation and confidence that what they create could be worth presenting publicly. The feedback we received from the pupils was valuable for further planning of the activities, but also for a better insight into the ways in which they think and evaluate the activities we have implemented. Finally, this paper aims to encourage teachers to be researchers within their own practice and to embark on new and creative musical endeavors together with their pupils.

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<u>8</u> Martinovic Bogojevic, J.

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