

## The pedagogical value of art and music in the past and the present

*Olga Denac*

*(Faculty of Education, University of Maribor, Maribor 2000, Slovenia)*

**Abstract:** Pedagogical theory and research practice tend to confine themselves to study the cognitive aspect of a child's personality and to focus on his/her productivity, while forgetting about other dimensions. The ability to experience artistic contents and the creative capacity of our society are decreasing. People are in a continuous search for spiritual balance and therefore the task of the contemporary school is to help people get out of this crisis and pay more attention to the realization of educational tasks and goals as well as individual school subjects. Art has always played the role of purposefully influencing the experiencing, feeling, creating and enjoying of beautiful things. It therefore provides a counterbalance to the rationalized world of today. Especially music plays a special role in all periods and all human societies, however, not because it encourages various experiences or notions in the listener or a pleasant atmosphere, but because it presents a challenge to the development of spiritual perception that does not occupy an important, enough place in the present school system. Based on different historical understandings of the pedagogical value of music, the author tries to determine what pedagogical value was ascribed to music in the past and what pedagogical value it is being ascribed today.

**Key words:** art; music; pedagogical value of music

### 1. Introduction

The historical development of aesthetic thought and the pedagogical concepts of aesthetic education bare witness to the highly educational value of music education: Plato considers art as the indispensable and a component part of the character development and education of the free individual; Sulzer mentions art as a means of good upbringing and education of mankind; Schiller reflects on the nature of beauty and the pedagogical effects of it in art; Herbart speaks of art which influences the inner harmony and balance of the personality and associates it with moral education and interests; Read emphasizes that art is an important element in the education of children, and Munro reflects on the humanist ideal of esthetic education and on the education of cultivated citizens (Gilbert/Kuhn, 1967). Throughout history and even today, numerous authors have attributed significance in terms of value to art. This holds particularly for the field of music. Namely, the attempt to explain the influence of music on the person's character by means of various scientific disciplines (e.g. philosophy, aesthetics, psychology, physics, etc.) resulted in the shaping of the pedagogical idea of music. Already ancient myths report on the influence of music on man, the way it touches man with its presence, on the search for truth, that music originates from the cosmic event and that it is a gift from God. These origins of cult have in the course of the centuries developed into humanized elementary forces, into a presentation of the spiritual enrichment of the human kind achieved through music.

Based on various historical notions of pedagogical values of music, the present paper wishes to explore what

---

Olga Denac, Ph.D., Faculty of Education, University of Maribor; research fields: didactics of aesthetic education, general and special musical didactics.

pedagogical value people attributed to music in the past and the value it is attributed today. With this ratio, we shall try to popularise individual pedagogical ideas from the past and provide guidelines as to how to implement them in the present school system.

## **2. The pedagogical value of music in the past**

### **2.1 Education through the ethos of music**

The origin of the idea of music goes back as far as ancient Greece. We find it in the teachings on the ethos of music. These teachings stress that not only the entire nature but also the human soul are enveloped in a special movement defined by the ratio among numbers. The numerical ratio of the movements of the human soul and of music is in harmony—each melodic and rhythmic movement has a corresponding movement of the human soul. This provides music with ethical power. With the analogy of the numerical ratios of its movements in relation to the movement of the human soul, music can influence its equilibrium. The harmony of the numerical ratios between/of music and the world as a whole can also be explained in this manner. Consequently, music occupies a special place among the arts. The ancient teachings on the ethos of music were an attempt of an empirical explanation of the influence of music on the human soul, of how to develop artistic taste, and of how to influence the moral development of the individual. It represented the starting point of lesson planning.

The notion of the significance of music in education, namely, the pedagogical idea of music, is in the ethical teachings of music employed with a specific purpose. Plato and Aristotle grounded the pedagogical idea of music, which then resonated for several centuries to come. The significance Plato attributes to music becomes paramount with his statement that music should serve the interests of the state and that music can help develop a morally perfect human being (Albert, 1968). Plato names the first stage of education the musical stage. It is followed by the mathematical and philosophical-academic stages.

Aristotle, on the contrary, does not relate music with the interests of society and state, but acknowledges its significance in the development of the individual. The amount of meaning that he attributes to music depends on the age of the person. Young people can still experience the ethical power of association with music, since studying and learning usually does not mean entertainment, whereas the adults can also experience the entertaining power of music. During leisure time, music can produce a pleasant atmosphere. This means that not only the ethical, but also the hedonistic dimension has been recognized in music.

The original ancient idea of the ethos of music has been changing from the beginning up to the present as the more recent history scholars adjusted ideas from antiquity to the language of their time. Antholz (1981) assigns greater importance to Aristotle's musical-pedagogical thought than to Plato. Aristotle draws attention to the possibility of addiction to music, he deliberates on the question of the significance of musical and esthetic experiences, and on the educational dimensions of music education. Abel-Struth (1985) finds that the ancient justifications of music and its significance in the education of young people were in the last centuries limited primarily to individual segments of education. Notions of the power of music which would educate and shape the human being appeared in schools merely in association with solving concrete, such as, cases of children in stressful situations, with lack of motivation, lack of attention, with no persistence; music was also an aid in reducing aggressive behaviour....

### **2.2 Humanization through music**

The idea of the humanization of man through music appeared in the period of German idealism in which the

political interest and the pedagogical thought became interrelated. Man is defined as a free being. Education should have the capacity to improve social circumstances (Menze, 1970). Herder speaks of a movement of humankind, of nations and humanization. Art was believed to play an important role in the humanization of humankind. Being a classical thinker, Herder (1877 to 1913, adopted from Abel Struth, 1985) was the first to offer the option of humanization of humankind through music to which he attributed special importance. W. von Humboldt, too, claims that special attention should be paid to the arts when it came to the education of young people, since they help the individual in his search for the ideal (Menze, 1965).

We should also mention Goethe's "pedagogical province" or the novel *Wilhelm Meister's Years of Travels* (1821), in which the author justified the significance of art for the individualization of man. The practical example of including young Felix into the pedagogical community is seen as the "ideal concept" for music pedagogy. In the "pedagogical province", Schünemann (1968) identifies Goethe's unconditional faith in the educational power of music—music as the unsurpassable means of planned, systematic education. Preussner (1959) understands the "pedagogical province" as a modern education facility, as a concrete example of "elementary music education". He recommends this novel to students as a "constant companion in life and in art".

In time, visible differences between music began to show as a pedagogical idea and the reality of the school music practice. The past music practice despised these differences. In the present, however, attempts can be observed of music teachers actually carrying out the humanizing of the school with the help of music, e.g. by interrelating the rational and emotional approach to music, by stressing the importance of music in the life of the individual and in the socializing of peers, in making contacts between students and teachers, in encouraging patience towards oneself and towards other, in developing creativity, emotional intelligence, and in shaping the competence of music teachers (human instance) ... (Richter, 1991).

### **2.3 Education through art**

In the course of history, the artistic idea frequently changed shape. Herder's initiative of humanization with the help of music fostered the process of music becoming a means for shaping the personality of the individual. At the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century, the notion "artistic" won its place in the theory of music pedagogy, especially in the German speech area. The reasons the movement "education with art" emerged, according to Haase (1951), lie in the desire to restore the "roots of the human essence", in overcoming seclusion of individual amidst masses of people, in the destruction of contemporary culture and the spiritual harmony in the human being. Correspondingly, professional literature from the beginning of the 1930s increasingly contained notions like artistic education, the esthetic, the ethical and the pedagogical. Based on the philosophical reflections on man and art, the leading representatives of the artistic movement combined various artistic fields into a whole. Among all the arts, the link between the art of music and dance and the art of poetry needs to be emphasized, since, as Krieck (1928) puts it, these fields are spiritually and emotionally related and connected with the rhythmic dimension. Particularly music brings about wavering of the spirit and leads to the kingdom of freedom without which a human being cannot imagine his existence in this world. The artistic idea of restoring the human spirit with music puts forward the emotional dimension of art forms and not artistic skills or the rational dimension, which are not so important here. Art education is education of the senses and with the help of the senses the soul, too, is educated (Messerschmidt, 1954). With the school reform, the artistic idea blossomed also in the school curricula. Arts subjects were renamed as arts education subjects. The students are not merely shown the path leading to music, but are geared towards the artistic dynamism of man as a whole. The unity music, language and movement are brought about by the inner sense for music, dynamics, and this is the goal of

arts education (Götsch, 1953).

The pedagogical idea of arts education resulted in the fact that in practice artistic fields began losing their subject. In the integration of artistic subjects, it is possible to follow the goals of arts education only under the condition that the general and specific characteristics of each subject are accounted for. Only when the autonomy of each individual arts subject is assured, the integration of these into poly-aesthetics at a higher level is possible with the goal of developing general sensitivity for cultural values. At the decline of psychological pedagogy, it is possible to observe the retreat of the arts from the concepts of general education.

### **3. The pedagogical value of music in the present**

In a post-modern society encouraging the culture of masses and mass consumption, where the individual is in constant search of his own identity, art is losing its value. Presently, education is facing a crisis of global dimensions. The basic question keeps reappearing of how an individual is to assert oneself in a world he has created: In the masses of audio-visual means and information systems. When young people question the goals and orientations, they should pursue in their lives, pedagogues should ask themselves questions as to which sources to draw faith in the correctness of handling from in order to prepare future generations for the uncertainties they are facing and will face. Education should enable a person as an individual to acquire an independent and fulfilling existence in order for him to contribute his part to the free and democratic community of which he is member.

The battle against distinctive rationalism and the neglect of the emotional dimension in schools, against uncritical acceptance of the media and the irrational appreciation of trivial music does not yet win. The modern school is still directed toward the development of professional specific knowledge and abilities based on intellectual actions, but it has forgotten the remaining personality features of the pupil (emotions, senses ...). Arts subjects frequently draw from artistic techniques and do not include goals and processes of the aesthetic dimension such as aesthetic perception, experiencing, creativity, evaluation, and development of aesthetic sensitivity. Consequently, there is too much theorizing in the educational process of arts subjects on account of experiencing, evaluation and creativity. Already renowned pedagogues warned against the excessive attention paid to rationalism and to the accelerated cognitive development of the child and young person. All the critical periods in history and partly also in the present see a way out of this prevailing rationalism in emphasizing the importance of arts education, which would in moments of the loss of balance in the integral development of the child or youth be the "safety net" for the re-establishment of balance among the individual fields of the child's personality. Lenzen (1992) recommends guidance towards art as a means of anti-scientification of educational contents. He claims that only then will it be possible to consider the educational process an artistic activity rather than a production process, and correspondingly the human being as a work of art and not a production result (Lenzen, 1992, p. 18). Kroflič argues that the "price of art in the spirit of post-modern epistemology and value directives should go up since it represents the key tool for the ability of empathetic recognition of various value perspectives and the raising of existential questions" (Kroflič, 2007, p. 14).

Although music education frequently plays a marginal role among school subjects, it is the centre of the lives of young people outside school. Protest, identification, socialization, fun and entertainment, and movement could be the reasons justifying the central meaning of music in the lives of adolescents. Looking into the past, we observe that people from different cultures fought against violence, demons and gods who threatened them by dancing, playing and singing. Adolescents, too, give themselves in to/indulge in musical impulses in their

increasingly difficult search for their self/essence, in their striving for intensive experiencing and feeling of the self. Music helps them survive through the tensions and troubles of this world.

In the postmodern culture, popular music plays an important role. However, it concentrates primarily on superficial relationships in the presence of which we might experience pleasure, but it does not move us with any kind of perfection. The process of general and music education of children and young people should thus shape and encourage an interest in listening and carrying out artistically valid musical contents. The educational value of art is conditioned by the artistic value of the piece of music and the subject accepting the work of art. The artistic creation can be educational only when it arouses aesthetic feelings, imagination, in short, whenever the subject experiences it. The artistic experience links the creative process of the artist with the process of the subject's experiencing the work of art. This gives each contact with the work of art an anthropological and thus also a pedagogical and aesthetic value. "Aesthetically valuable moments are usually found in extraordinary or momentous relationships such as conflicts, contrasts, interruptions or unexpected complications, or even in ones like harmony, an unexpected merger of inorganic and organic antagonisms" (Strehovec, 1990, p. 18). The aesthetic effect of a certain work of art is stronger when there are more positive and negative elements, if they have different origins and if the most intensive relationship possible exists between them in terms of harmony and of counterpoints or interruptions. It is particularly the case of moments, which stimulate, are thrilling and which encourage evaluation.

Music pedagogy should choose the appropriate works of art in accordance with the developmental abilities of the children and the characteristics of particular age groups and their interests. The teacher plays an important role in this process with her/his socio-emotional competences expressed in the positive attitude towards the culture of music, the art arts, in the expression of joy, in an interest in listening, carrying out and creating musical contents and the development of musical abilities, skills and knowledge. The teacher should be able to provide a stimulating environment and motivate the young to choose not merely to passively listen to commercial music but actively participate in artistic activities, where they will be able to express their feelings, thoughts and understanding for others through their own participation in music. She/he should be able to open to them a completely new world of music as an option in which they will find answers to the numerous questions they have about their identity. The International project The European Identity of Multiple Choices offering an original use of multiple approaches to the development of the identity of the young people and employing music and aesthetics as a means for the cognition of the self and of reality is happening in an appropriate time to become an aid in appropriate keeping (Kratsborn, 2007).

Music has a harmonic influence on man and helps them in their search for the equilibrium in life they wish to achieve in the world they live in. A changed world needs music as an element of experiencing, creativity, humanity and education. The emerging information society is increasingly taking control of the world and thus requires a different type of man. We know today that we need to bring changes to the school practice in order to exploit all human holistic (emotional and cognitive) abilities. Music as a mediator between emotions and the rational is a field of extreme importance for the integral development of a person's character. Music in the life of an adolescent should thus represent an enrichment of his emotional world, it should have influence on the development of creativity and encourage otherness in thinking, understanding and solving problems. As a motivational tool, it should also stimulate activities in other subject fields. The art of music fills a person with a sense of inner peace, which is the basic category of each act of creation.

#### 4. Conclusion

In the past as well the present, the pedagogical idea of music has existed in the role of a spiritual restorer of society and the individual, and in the search for a balance in life. The development of an integral and balanced personality by no means defines merely the power of art as we have observed in the survey of the various views of the pedagogical value of music. Music cannot entirely protect man from the inconsistencies of the world they live in, but it can help bridge some of them or rid of them. This is also one of the points justifying the significance of art in the life of the individual and the society also in the present time.

Since music plays a central part in the life of an individual, general education should fulfill some sort of musical mission in each young person, which is why a structured system of music classes is of vital importance in the education of the youth.

Considering the various aspects of the pedagogical value of music throughout history, it is necessary to point out some pedagogical ideas, which need to be realized in the present concepts of the institutionalized version of music education, namely:

- (1) The importance of the experiential, emotional and ethical dimension of the art of music;
- (2) The importance of the art of music in the formation of the identity of the individual;
- (3) The importance of the art of music in encouraging creative abilities;
- (4) The importance of the art of music as the central part of education in the humanities;
- (5) The importance of children and adolescents associating with artistically valid music pieces;
- (6) The socio-emotional competence of the music teacher;
- (7) The inclusion of arts subjects as the obligatory component of every educational program.

Indeed, thorough reforms of the educational system have been and will be necessary in the future. Naturally, every change is preceded by extensive debates of the basic goals of general education, the basic goals and tasks of the school, of the goals of each individual teaching subject, and of new didactic approaches. The central problem, which should be discussed in the framework of the European school system, is in the defining of the basic goals of general education. Socio-emotional competence, educational competence, self responsibility and maturity, teamwork, communicativeness, ability to learn, ability of the aesthetic perception, experiencing, evaluation and expression of the beautiful, an integrated development of the personality, and readiness for all-life education are only some of the general tasks and goals which should receive the same amount of attention in the educational process as the professional goals of individual teaching subjects.

It is our belief that only a cultural policy or steadfast emphasis of “humanity” in the conscious encouragement of creative power in our youth can provide a sensible guideline into the future. Despite the fact that in the quantitative sense the present world may still be governed by triviality, hope remains that the requirements of creative work and the changing school structures will create a somewhat different way of socializing with objects of art.

#### References:

- Abel-Struth, S. (1985). *Introduction into music pedagogy*. Mainz: Schott.
- Albert, H. (1968). *Perceptions of ethos in greek music*. Leipzig: Tutzing.
- Antholz, H. (1981). *Aristotles or: The prudential music mediation and education*. Mubi 13, 1.
- Gilbert, K. E. & Kuhn, H. (1967). *History of aesthetics*. Ljubljana: DZS.
- Goethe, J. (1949). *Goethe's work: Wilhelm Meister's years of travel (1821,1829)*. Issue VIII. Zürich: Artemis.

- Götsch, G. (1953). Whole in music education. In: Music instruction. *Witness of a Journey*, 1.
- Haase, O. (1951). Music life. *Hannover: Educational bookshop*, Issue 19.
- Kratsborn, W. (2007). *Teacher's route for the European project "Multiple choice identity" human rights and democracy in citizenship education*. Retrieved Apr. 20, 2008, from <http://www.europemci.com/songs>.
- Kriek, E. (1928). *Music education*. Berlin.
- Kroflič, R. (2007). The educational value of aesthetic experience. *Contemporary Pedagogy*, 3, 12-30.
- Lenzen, D. (1992). Pedagogy as art? *Art and Lessons*, 159, 18-22.
- Menze, C. (1965). *Wilhelm von Humboldt's theory and picture of mankind*. Ratingen.
- Menze, C. (1970). Instruction. In: *Handbook of pedagogical concepts*. München, Issue 1.
- Messerschmidt, F. (1954). *Music instruction—Being and limits*. Würzburg.
- Mollenhauer, K., Dietrich, C. & Mueller, H.-R. (1996). *Fundamental questions of aesthetic instruction, theoretical and empirical findings to aesthetic experiences of children*. München: Weinheim.
- Otto, G. (1974). *Methodology of aesthetic education*. Braunschweig: Westermann.
- Preussner, E. (1959). *General music education*. Heidelberg: Music Pedagogy Library.
- Read, H. (1945). *Education through art*. London.
- Richter, Ch. (1991). Teacher's exercises in a human school. *Humanity, music, education*. Mainz.
- Schünemann, G. (1968). The history of German school music. In: *Handbook of music education*. Köln.
- Strehovec, J. (1990). Ideal artistic skills, unexpressive aesthetics. *Anthropos*, 5/6, 15-21.

(Edited by Max and Lily)