

# Through Musical Communication to Development of Competence in Culture Awareness and Expression

Barbara Sicherl-Kafol

University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia

Olga Denac

University of Maribor, Maribor, Slovenia

This study presents an example of a music workshop which brought together pupils and students of different music schools, students of musicology, composition and classroom teaching, teachers, professors and composer on the common topics in contemporary music. The purpose of the workshop was to encourage an active and creative participation of everybody involved in a way that went beyond the usual practice used in cultural activities in education. In this respect, the workshop emphasised the importance of the creative expression of experience, ideas and emotions in the field of music. The results of the interview, which were conducted by some of the workshop participants, point out the complex occurrence of various indicators, which at the level of personal and social factors have determined the nature of communication through contemporary music and indirectly influenced the development of competence in cultural awareness and expression. Challenges identified included students' lack of musical experiences for contemporary music at all educational levels, the low priority given to contemporary music in schools as well as teachers' lack of professional knowledge in this field. The study highlights the need for more experience in contemporary musical language in general and music professional schools.

*Keywords:* musical communication, motivation, contemporary music, competence in cultural awareness and expression

## Introduction

“Today’s society is quite sick. General dehumanisation can be observed everywhere. There are numerous mechanisms in our society that encourage uniformity. Many people today have problems with socialisation and communication”. (Uroš Rojko, composer)

“We live in a globalised world which promotes uniformity and contemporary music is a victim of such uniformity. Music is a mirror of our society and uniformity is not really comfortable with it. It keeps us in touch with reality, shows where we come from, what we want, what we fear and what infuriates us. It encourages us to look within and communicate feelings we may have buried”. (Professor of music)

The above views show that the modern society continuously puts a series of questions before us on how to orientate ourselves in the abundance of information, which values and what type of knowledge enable our survival and a higher quality of life, as well as how to achieve all that. The answers to the aforementioned questions presuppose a shift in the understanding of the concept of knowledge and an upgrade of its level.

International and national strategies for the development of society<sup>1</sup>, which includes the fields of science, education and culture, contain strategic documents and operative proposals for the way out of the labyrinth of possibilities, and highlight that knowledge, which is holistic, creative, innovative, reflective, autonomous, lifelong, etc., characterises every single junction between the various paths. If the above adjectives define knowledge of high quality, which is (also) necessary for our survival in the future, we must ask ourselves whether arts and culture can contribute to obtaining such knowledge and how. The answers, which include the psychological, sociological, phenomenological, musicological, pedagogical, anthropological art and other dimensions of it, can be summarised by stating that holistic, creative and reflective thought is the axiom of our engagement in arts, which also defines the competence in cultural awareness and expression as one of the key lifelong competences.

The competence in cultural awareness and expression is, just like other key competences, defined as the combination of “cognitive and practical skills, creative abilities and other psychosocial resources, such as attitudes, motivation and values” (Definition and Selection of Key Competences, 2002, p. 8). It includes other important factors, such as critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem-solving, risk assessment, decision taking and constructive management of feelings. Its definition also stresses the “appreciation of the importance of the creative expression of ideas, experiences and emotions in a range of media, including music, performing arts, literature and visual arts” (Recommendation of the EU Parliament and of the Council, 2006, p. 9).

The awareness regarding the advantages of cultural and art education in Slovenia originates in strategies for the development of cultural and educational policy with a range of legal bases and measures<sup>2</sup>. However, we could claim that the implementation of these strategies requires better cultural programmes in the field of education and educational programmes in the field of culture which should benefit from greater financial support. At the same time, we need to provide a broader and better network of partnerships and coordinators of

---

<sup>1</sup> European Commission’s White Paper on Education and Training “Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society” (COM/95/590); A memorandum on lifelong learning, commission staff working paper. Commission of the European Communities, October 30, 2000; Education & Training 2010 (EU); Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (2006); The Bologna Declaration on the Creation of a European Higher Education Area by 2010, Road Map for Arts Education 2006, etc.

<sup>2</sup> The National Programme for Culture 2004-2007 already recognizes cultural education as one of the important priorities of the Slovene cultural policy. In 2005, the MC (Ministry of Culture) and the MES (Ministry of Education and Sports) have established a closer and systematic cooperation in the field of cultural and art education. The website of the MC contains information on the range of cultural programmes since 2006. Since 2006, there have been numerous presentations of cultural institutions at the annual national conferences for headmasters of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools. The period between 2006-2007 saw the implementation of a project entitled “The Year of Culture” in all kindergartens, primary and secondary schools. In 2007-2008, following a recommendation of the MES, the appointment of coordinators for the cultural and artistic activities in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools was conducted (an analysis carried out by The National Education Institute demonstrated that kindergartens and primary schools were more successful in implementing the recommendation than secondary schools). Since 2007, more attention has been dedicated to the programmes of in-service training in the field of cultural education (also for the coordinators of cultural and art education). Currently, there is a range of education and training seminars focusing on cultural awareness and expression, financed by the European Structural Funds. The MC and the MES drafted the National Programme for Culture 2008-2011 where they jointly declared that cultural education is one of the priorities of the Slovene cultural policy and further defined this field with several objectives and measures. Since 2008, the MES and the MC have been organizing the Festival of Creativity and Innovation which provides opportunity for cultural institutions to present their work; numerous projects, which bring together school networks focusing on cultural and art education, have benefited from the financial support of the European Social Fund. First partnership networks are created in 2009. The year of 2008 sees the establishment of an Extended Subject Group for cultural and art education which defines national guidelines and operational programmes. The period between 2007 and 2013 brings about the implementation of an operational programme for the development of human resources, which specifically supports partnerships and cultural projects. The curricula for primary schools and grammar schools, which were revised in 2008, stress the importance of a global approach to education, connective and applied knowledge, lifelong learning and competence in cultural awareness and expression. In 2009, the MC and the MES organized a Cultural Bazaar, etc.

cultural and artistic activities, further education of practitioners in education and culture, a better supply of cultural topics introducing certificates of excellence, more examples of best practices, etc. (Culture and Arts in Education—A Challenge of the 21st Century, 2008; National Programme for Culture 2008-2011, 2008).

### **Research Objectives**

As one can observe, there is quite a gap between the declared principles of a knowledge society, which should to a greater extent than today include the advantages of education with arts and through arts, the triangle of research, education and innovation, and their implementation in practice. This is why our research, based on a case study, focuses on bridging the gap between the declared ideas and their practical implementation. We were interested in determining how musical communication through contemporary musical language can contribute to the development of a lifelong competence in cultural awareness and expression.

Following the objectives of our research, we posed the research questions as below:

- (1) Which motivational indicators can be recognized in musical communication through contemporary musical language?
- (2) How can musical communication through contemporary musical language contribute to the development of the key competence in cultural awareness and expression?

### **Research Method**

In conducting our research, we applied the descriptive method used in educational research.

The sample included pupils and students of music schools (a total of 46 pupils and students aged between 5 and 19), 14 mentors/teachers from music schools, 22 students from three faculties of the University of Ljubljana (Academy of Music—Department of Composition; Faculty of Arts—Department of Musicology; Faculty of Education—Department of Primary School Teaching), and 50 pupils from two classes of a primary school in Ljubljana (eight years of age), who participated in a project carried out in the form of a music workshop on contemporary music. The project was carried out from January to March, 2009, and was organised by the Ljubljana Festival under the leadership of composer, Uroš Rojko. The final presentation of the project took place in the Knights' Hall of the famous Križanke Summer Theatre, designed by Jože Plečnik, on March 12th-24th, 2009, during the Slovene Music Days. Participants of different ages, backgrounds and music qualifications were actively involved in the creative process of creating and performing contemporary pieces of music. During the three-month process, with the support of mentors and a composer, they independently analysed the sound of their instruments, studied contemporary methods of music notation, sought different possibilities for the interpretation of contemporary scores and learned about the parameters of contemporary musical language through individual and group improvisation. In this way, they liberated themselves from the obligatory methods of traditional music-making.

When collecting data, we used a semi-structured interview, which was carried out from April to June, 2009, with the participating composer, a representative of the Ljubljana Festival cultural institution, four music school pupils, three mentors from two music schools, and seven students from the three participating faculties and a parent of one of the participating pupils. The interviews, which lasted 30-60 minutes, were recorded by using audio equipment and transcribed for a subsequent analysis during which we used those parts of the text which were relevant in terms of achieving research objectives. The text was marked with a system of codes which were later combined into categories devised on the basis of criteria related to motivational indicators for

the development of lifelong competence in cultural awareness and expression, including factors of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, social and personal competences.

### **Results of the Research and Their Interpretation**

Following our research questions, we devised a semi-structured interview to obtain opinions from respondents, who were guided by the following open-ended questions:

- (1) Why have you decided to participate in the workshop on contemporary music project?
- (2) What have you experienced during the music workshop and what were, in your opinion, the advantages of such a work process?
- (3) Would you be willing to participate in the project again, and if so, why?

The following passages contain answers provided by respondents according to the categories of motivational indicators for the development of a lifelong competence in cultural awareness and expression.

#### **Factors of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation**

In terms of motivation for learning and making music, which is considered by Rotar Pance (2006, p. 12) as “Everything that stimulates an individual to study music, determines the intensity and duration of such study and guides the individual towards achieving the set musical goals”, we discovered that intrinsic motivation indicators have prevailed. Respondents expressed their desire to explore and discover new concepts, face new challenges, test their capabilities, cooperate with a composer, satisfy their curiosity and interests in contemporary music and achieve other goals which represent the various components of intrinsic motivation (McLaughlin, 1993; Jurišević, 2006).

“Curiosity and the wish to learn something new... to gain new experience... to find out how contemporary music is made and which are its underlying principles... to obtain some new guidelines and methods for working with children and discover how to use them in a classroom”. (Students of the Faculty of Education)

“I was quite curious when I found out that a composer is going to compose a piece of music just for us and that it is going to be a contemporary piece... that we will work with a composer and will have the opportunity to present our own suggestions and proposals... that we will perform a piece of contemporary music and that it will be our own piece”. (Music school pupils)

Apart from components of intrinsic motivation, respondents also stated that they wished to perform and present the results of the music workshop to audiences, which shows that some components of extrinsic motivation were present, and that they were very much intertwined with intrinsic motivation factors (Harackiewicz, Barron, & Elliot, 1998; Lepper & Henderlong, 2000; Jurišević, 2006), and which is very common in music activities (Rotar, 2006). Results obtained by other researchers, such as Ryan and Deci (2000), show that the internalisation of extrinsic motivation factors increases the feelings of competence and autonomy in an individual, which are considered as important components of intrinsic motivation.

“As far as my daughter is concerned, the mere fact that she would participate in the creation of a piece of music which would be dedicated to her and other participants, was extremely motivating. The entire process of music-making as such was motivating. Their performances were also very special and represented additional motivation. The fact that she was able to show what they created has stimulated her greatly”. (Participant’s mother)

Respondents’ opinions demonstrate that factors related to personal attitude and intrinsic motivation are important in the process of musical communication. Motivation, views and values significantly guide individual’s engagement in music and consequently contribute to the development of a lifelong competence in cultural awareness and expression.

### **Social Competence Factors**

As regards the holistic approach theory, which considers motivation in the context of interacting influences between a learner and the social environment or the learning context (Turner, 2001; Järvelä & Niemivirta, 2001; Volet, 2001), we observed the importance of motivational reinforcements, including the factors of safe and stimulating learning environment, active and creative learning processes, different learning strategies and continuous feedback obtained through the exchange of views between the workshop participants. The use of feedback was, in terms of a constructivist approach, seen as a motivational reinforcement, since the participants received prompt and clear information regarding their work as well as advice and guidelines for their further engagement in musical activities. The formative function of feedback enabled the participants to gain more competence in music (Juriševič, 2006). In the framework of social learning, we could also discuss optimal learning situations and a stimulating learning environment (Brophy, 1999), which enabled the participants to experience the process of music communication as a value, thus encouraging their further personal and professional growth (Harkema & Schout, 2008). During the creative process, participants respectfully exchanged their views and opinions, embraced new ideas and alternative solutions and experienced a great deal of satisfaction with the learning process as such.

“We exchanged our opinions on what we thought was done well, what could be eliminated or added, and quite often we all agreed with what was done well and what was not. We found continuous feedback provided by the composer very helpful... In the beginning, we feared that we might not be good enough to be part of the group, but when you received positive feedback and felt that you were part of making that piece of music, it just kept getting better... Even if you felt insecure at first, you were encouraged by positive feedback and found it quite easy to actively participate in the whole process”. (Students of the Faculty of Education)

When analysing important factors of social competence, we discovered that communication, which was established at different levels, has proven to be of great significance. We also noted that musical communication, which enabled learning in social processes, created the flow of information between all participants while simultaneously satisfying their emotional needs for security and acceptance, acknowledgement and recognition, was the predominant factor. Participants were able to express their views of the world in their own individual way through music. Music, as the fundamental language of communication, provided “a means by which people can share emotions, intentions and meanings even though their spoken languages may be mutually incomprehensible” (Hargreaves, Miell, & MacDonald, 2002, p. 1). Participants had the opportunity to listen to each other, communicate and cooperate, thus sharing their experience, opinions and values.

“We had to be aware of the entire space around us and each individual and their instrument. We could feel that we were communicating on the level of music... It was interesting to observe that our communication hardly consisted of words but was mainly based on the musical level”. (Students of the Faculty of Education)

Among other factors of social environment, respondents also recognised the advantages of cooperation between education and training institutes and cultural institutions or individual artists. They underlined the importance of the exchange and evaluation of professional views on education and arts, the applicability of knowledge and the education of audiences, etc.. They also stressed that adequate working conditions and financial support needed to be provided for. Following the results obtained by other researchers (Bamford, 2006), we also concluded that there is a need for a better connection between educational and cultural programmes, as well as for the transposition of the already agreed national and international strategies on cultural and art education into practice. Slovenian research results on cultural education (Cultural Education: The Accessibility of Culture and Links between Culture and Education—Seeking Conceptual Solutions, 2005; Cultural Education—Evaluation

Study, 2004) also emphasise that more attention should be dedicated to a high-quality cooperation between institutions and to further training of practitioners in the fields of education and culture, since the results demonstrated that the introduction of cultural topics to schools very much depends on the initiative and ingeniousness of individual teachers, that schools only passively accept cultural topics and that there is a one-way relationship between educational and cultural institutions, which is not founded on partnership.

“All cultural institutions should be aware of the fact that they educate audiences, that they are the ones unveiling the audiences’ journey to concerts. They have the possibility to conduct projects which schools are unable to do, also due to logistic reasons. This should be an integral part of their mission. But it seems there is a lack of awareness in Slovenia. Even when we look at activities conducted by the two competent ministries, we see that there is a lack of cooperation and the adequate financing of such projects”. (Representative of a cultural institution)

“I would ask the composer to organise a seminar for teachers, so that we can improve our musical literacy and learn certain elements which would enable us to act as moderators for this type of activities at the schools of music”. (Professor of accordion at a music school)

### **Personal Competence Factors**

Apart from the above-mentioned factors of social environment and skills, the participants also had the opportunity to establish their personal reasons for learning and develop their individual musical expression. Through music they were able to express their identity and communicate not only “who they wish to become” but also “who they are” (Hargreaves, et al., 2002). They used musical communication to express their personal identity, which is defined by Hargreaves et al. (2002) as “music in identities”.

“In a way, playing music is a reflection of your personality. Through music you communicate your way of life and thinking, even though there are no visible or obvious connections... Every piece of music has a message, there is something within it, a soul, maybe... I now know how to look deeper into myself... I became more open and learned to communicate with myself... I engaged myself into music with an ever greater confidence”. (Pupils of music schools and students of the Faculty of Education)

Each performer also enjoyed complete autonomy in searching for their individual musical expression or possible musical identities, which is defined by the aforementioned authors (Hargreaves et al., 2002) as “identities in music”.

“We were given selected actions which we had to place in the context. You were forced to think about when you would do that and how it would fit into the context that took place around you. You could also do something completely different, but you had to know why, because nobody would tell you when and how to do that”. (Student of musicology)

The complex interaction of cognitive, emotional and social responses to music enabled the participants to develop the feeling of their personal and musical identity. At the same time, they were able to deepen their interest and a positive attitude towards contemporary music and raised their awareness regarding the parameters of a contemporary musical language, which is still lacking in Slovenia. This was also confirmed by the results of the research (Analysis of the Situation in the Field of Music Education, 2001), which show that consumers in Slovenia expressed low interest in classical music, as well as international research results (Tarrant, Hargreaves, & North, 2001) which found low levels of interest in classical music among the youth. As a consequence, the supply and demand for contemporary classical music is, of course, even more modest.

“When you work on yourself and your feelings, you become more and more open towards contemporary music... The main point is that you need to understand this language, and when you do, you start liking it... Contemporary music is not about whether you like it or not, but about opening yourself to it... When you go back to music school, you find yourself completely horrified, because again you are forced to follow the tempo and the like, while during that project, you had the freedom to be different. I think we should spend more time playing this type of music in the music school, too.... It would be useful for professional musicians, not that many of them joined us, to move away from traditional music-making”. (Pupils from music schools and faculty students)

## Conclusion

The research on communication through contemporary musical language demonstrated a number of motivational indicators which have, at the level of personal and social factors, indirectly influenced the development of competence in cultural awareness and expression.

The participants:

(1) were aware of the importance of the process of musical communication as such and not only of its results;

(2) developed self-confidence and accepted creative challenges;

(3) exchanged views, ideas, feelings and experience through team work;

(4) broadened their horizons and gained new skills and knowledge through the transfer of artistic and pedagogical practices (“A teacher may be extremely good, but we all have our weaknesses and limits, we all have certain views which are neither unique nor necessarily accurate. If you have the opportunity to work with someone from the outside, it enables you to become more open and encourages you to question your views on pedagogic and music on a daily basis”<sup>3</sup>);

(5) participated in a group which supported the engagement of individuals and provided them with a safe environment;

(6) developed tolerance and respect for different opinions and ideas;

(7) communicated through the contemporary musical language with great interest;

(8) were autonomous in seeking their own musical expression and musical interpretation of their personality and identity;

(9) developed mutual trust and understanding through cooperation between educational and cultural institutions and the participating artist.

In the process of musical communication through contemporary musical language, the aforementioned advantages functioned as motivational reinforcements on the development of competence in cultural awareness and expression.

Our research also points out numerous opportunities and challenges for future solutions necessary to improve the implementation of learning and teaching with and through arts into practice. We would particularly wish to emphasise the need for:

(1) establishing high-quality partnerships between educational and cultural institutions and artists, which should benefit from adequate systemic support;

(2) providing education for teachers and practitioners in the field of culture on creative work, and providing education for artists on pedagogic work;

(3) intensifying the inclusion of contemporary music and other fields of art into educational programmes at the levels of general and music education.

“If there is one thing that those working in education and those working in the arts share, it is a conviction that what they do has the power to transform individuals and societies for the better” (Chamers, 2006, p. 56).

---

<sup>3</sup> Statement of professor at a music school.

## References

- Analysis of the situation in the field of music education*. (2001). [PDF document]. Retrieved March 25, 2010, from [http://www.mk.gov.si/fileadmin/mk.gov.si/pageuploads/Ministrstvo/Zakonodaja/Analiza\\_stanja/03.pdf](http://www.mk.gov.si/fileadmin/mk.gov.si/pageuploads/Ministrstvo/Zakonodaja/Analiza_stanja/03.pdf)
- Bamford, A. (2006). *The wow factor: Global research compendium on the impact of the arts in education*. Berlin, Waxmann: Verlag.
- Brophy, J. (1999). Toward a model of the value aspects of motivation in education: Developing appreciation for particular learning domains and activities. *Educational Psychologist*, 34, 75-85.
- Chamers, P. (Ed.). (2006). *The best of both worlds: Developing successful partnerships between schools and the arts*. London: Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.
- Cultural education: The accessibility of culture and links between culture and education-seeking conceptual solutions*. (2005). [PDF document]. Retrieved March 25, 2010, from [http://www.mk.gov.si/fileadmin/mk.gov.si/pageuploads/Ministrstvo/raziskave-analize/umetnost/Kulturna\\_vzgoja\\_\\_november\\_2005.pdf](http://www.mk.gov.si/fileadmin/mk.gov.si/pageuploads/Ministrstvo/raziskave-analize/umetnost/Kulturna_vzgoja__november_2005.pdf)
- Cultural education-evaluation study*. (2004). [PDF document]. Retrieved April 2, 2010, from [http://www.mk.gov.si/fileadmin/mk.gov.si/pageuploads/Ministrstvo/raziskave-analize/umetnost/Kulturna\\_vzgoja\\_-\\_evalvacijska\\_studija.pdf](http://www.mk.gov.si/fileadmin/mk.gov.si/pageuploads/Ministrstvo/raziskave-analize/umetnost/Kulturna_vzgoja_-_evalvacijska_studija.pdf)
- Educational Research Institute. (2008). *Culture and arts in education—A challenge of the 21st century*. Ljubljana: Educational Research Institute.
- Harackiewicz, J. M., Barron, K. E., & Elliot, A. J. (1998). Rethinking achievements goals: When are they adaptive for college students and why? *Education Psychologist*, 33, 1-21.
- Hargreaves, D. J., Miell, D., & MacDonald, R. A. R. (2002). What are musical identities, and why are they important?. In R. A. R. MacDonald, D. J. Hargreaves, & D. Miell (Eds.), *Musical identities* (pp. 1-20). Oxford: University press.
- Harkema, S. J. M., & Schout, H. (2008). Incorporating student-centered learning in innovation and entrepreneurship education. *European Journal of Education*, 43, 513-527.
- Järvelä, S., & Niemivirta, M. (2001). Motivation in context: Challenges and possibilities in studying the role of motivation in new pedagogical cultures. In S. Volet, & S. Jarvel (Eds.), *Motivation in learning context: Theoretical advances methodological implications* (pp. 105-129). Amsterdam, Pergamon.
- Jurišević, M. (2006). *Learning motivation and the differences between pupils*. Ljubljana: Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana.
- Lepper, M. R., & Henderlong, J. (2000). Turning play into work and work into play: 25 years of research on intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. In C. Sansone, & J. M. Harackiewicz (Eds.), *Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation: The research for optimal motivation and performance* (pp. 257-307). San Diego: Academic Press.
- Ministry of Culture. (2008). *National Programme for Culture 2008-2011*. Ljubljana: Ministry of Culture.
- McLaughlin, J. (1993). Gaining and losing voice: A longitudinal study of students' continuing impulse to learn across elementary and middle school contexts. *Research in Middle Level Education*, 17, 1-25.
- OECD. (2002). *Definition and selection of key competences, DeSeCo*. [Strategy paper]. Retrieved March 25, 2010, from <https://www.pisa.oecd.org/dataoecd/47/61/35070367.pdf>
- Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning. (2006). *Official Journal of the European Union*, 394(10).
- Rotar Pance, B. (2006). *Motivation—A key to music*. Educa: Nova Gorica.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25, 54-67.
- Tarrant, M., Hargreaves, D. J., & North, A. C. (2001). Social categorization, self-esteem, and the estimated musical preference of male adolescents. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 141, 565-581.
- Turner, J. (2001). Using context to enrich and challenge our understanding of motivational theory. In S. Volet, & S. Jarvel (Eds.), *Motivation in learning context: Theoretical advances methodological implications* (pp. 58-52). Amsterdam: Pergamon.
- Volet, S. (2001). Understanding learning and motivation in context: A multi-dimensional and multi-level cognitive-situative perspective. In S. Volet, & S. Jarvel (Eds.), *Motivation in learning context: Theoretical advances methodological implications* (pp. 58-52). Amsterdam: Pergamon.