

Reflections on Music Education

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Resumen

En las páginas siguientes expreso el papel de la educación musical y los propósitos y acciones que los educadores musicales debemos poseer y desarrollar. También expongo la visión que necesitamos para crear y transformar en nuestra sociedad el papel de la educación musical, como una enseñanza esencial dentro de una nueva conciencia educativa, principalmente en nuestro país.

Asimismo, se aborda la concepción de algunos científicos y genios del pasado, sobre la importancia de la práctica de la música en sus vidas cotidianas. Las historias, por ejemplo, de Pitágoras, el Rey David, Leonardo da Vinci o Albert Einstein, entre otros, nos dicen que solían tocar un instrumento musical, ya que esta actividad les daba un equilibrio en su cerebro e intelecto y, posiblemente, la música provocó en ellos una inspiración y elevación para sus inventos y creaciones. Emile J. Dalcroze (1865-1950), importante músico y educador musical suizo, expresó una vez que “[...] no existe arte que no haya inspirado a tantos teóricos ingeniosos [...]” (Mark, 2008: 65).

Finalmente, se enfatiza en la misión del educador musical, la cual también consiste en contribuir a generar conciencia, tanto en las autoridades educativas como en la población en general, respecto a la necesidad de ofrecer una buena educación musical a todos los niños y jóvenes.

Introduction

In the beginning of the 21st Century, we still have indifferences or irregularities in music education in Western Culture. Millions of talented children in public schools must wait to study music with private teachers to develop their artistic potential; many of them don't have economic possibilities to have regular music classes or aren't able to buy a music instrument. But also, our society has not enough music educators; there is not probably a professional program in many countries to prepare people to teach the art of music.

Where is the problem? Do governments not have enough budget to support a basic music program in schools? Or the society doesn't have visionaries or at least educated school directors to give the same importance to music than others subjects? Where is the origin of the problem? Perhaps for many people music education doesn't exist, music is not part of education; music is only a simple little recreation.

What governors may possibly need is to return to the thought and spirit of ancient civilizations whose considered *the teaching of art as indispensable, sublime, and necessary for the society*. In ancient times, I think that music was cultivated for high purposes, spiritual or religious, and intellectual and formative for each person.

The Importance of Music Education

Ancient Greeks knew the importance of music education for the young people; they promoted and cultivated music as an indispensable activity; education was meant to develop healthy and wise human beings. In my opinion, they promoted a basic education program including music for a complete intellectual and human integrity. The Boston School Committee in 1837 stated that “[...] vocal Music seems to have a natural place in every system of instruction which aspires, as should every system, *to develop man's whole nature*” (Mark, 2008, p. 89). In today's society, we must continue with the purpose for educating first of all, the human aspect and self-knowledge, to try to have healthy students and healthy people in general.

To achieve a good education, music teachers must be conducted by educated, cultivated, and responsible school directors and governors. These people need to have complete academic preparation, but also sensibility and attraction for the arts, and an open spirit to feel the magnificence of an artistic expression.

Economical aspects is another factor affecting the interest of people in music; but, why music and art programs are always primarily affected by the economic situation? Music doesn't require exactly large amounts of budget, neither sophisticated equipment. This art basically requires time, space and creativity from the music teacher, as the Suzuki music method does, for example. The edu-

cator should have the liberty to create his music class with his own tools and those provided by the school. The principal or school director should be involved and support the project of the music teacher. There should be a good interaction between these two actors (i.e. school director and music teacher) to create well-structured music programs.

Frequently, it is known that people in a society minimize the job of a music teacher. For those people, students should be prepared just to make money or to create important enterprises. They might only expect that young people get good jobs, properties, and good positions. For these people, the musician is not important, only matters the social status he or she can get.

Today, we are witnesses to a lack of values in our contemporary society. A number of people may not care about human aspects or think about feeding the spirit; perhaps they are only looking for “priorities” such as possessions and a good self-image.

The importance of music education may transcend beyond of having just material results; *it is needed that society believe in the internal strength and complete development that the young student may achieve when he is cultivated in music.* When students are able to discover their sensibility for a musical expression, they might begin to see and to be part of the creation of a better society. Plato remarked in his ideal of society: “[...] they become more civilized, more balanced, and better adjusted in themselves and so more capable in whatever they say or do, for rhythm and harmonious adjustment are essential to the whole of human life [...]” (Mark, 1996: 56). They become sensitive and cultivated persons who may experience a process of consciousness and awakening for human and intellectual progress more than materialistic. Music reveals freedom and relaxation... we could go through life more easily (Cerrillo, 2015: 14).

On the other hand, when children get involved in music, most of their parents get involved too. The new world that children discover in music touches in some manner some of their parents. In my personal case, I have met parents who are grateful to me because they discovered the world of music through the enthusiasm and happiness their children show. Since then, all the family goes to listen to a symphonic orchestra concert or some recitals, or even, to see a theater play. Moreover, classical music is since then part of their family collection.

The Future of Music Education

Essentially, music education programs will be in the hands of academic authorities and school directors; they must awake to the necessity of giving more attention to art in general in schools. They don’t need to ask for results immediately, but to give them time and support for the continuity of the project. They will see that students that learn music at school show a notable academic achievement, and these students maintain a responsible image and control of their lives and goals. They are and will be productive and role models for society.

In the future years, or decades, I believe that our society may return to the basic principles of education that ancient civilizations such as the Greeks had; it is important to understand that youngsters could be better educated in music in simple and practical ways. Authorities should be trusted that preparing music teachers and creating well-structured music programs may not require large budgets.

In order for music to gain importance in society and education, it may need the collaboration of authorities, teachers, and parents. Teachers and authorities need to understand that music should be as important as any other school subject such as sports for the education of learners. On the other hand, parents at home need to get involved in music activities with their children. In this understanding, we may have the comprehension and support of an important part of the society working together and giving importance to music education and its positive effects on the personality of young students.

The Role of the Music Educator

One of the main purposes educators should pursue for their young learners is to create and build a human being. In order to do this, the music educator should start by giving attention to the human aspects of their personalities, their characters and behaviors. When I meet a student for the first time, I like to discuss with him; to know his habits, ideals, goals, and also ask him for the members of his family; but overall, to motivate him for the new learning he is going to experience with music.

The educator should know that every minute that he will spend together with their students will be

very important because, according with his progress and efficiency, the learning process could be very pleasant and effective. This implies that the music educator should be close and be a good friend with the students.

The teacher should share with students some moments of relaxation, and have spontaneous activities to strengthen self-confidence. Music needs discipline, but it is not strict; music is joy. It is important to know the different student's moods and emotions; we, as educators, must always be there to support the dreams and goals of students. They have new experiences every day and we must advise them in every step they give, and also, for some important decision they will need to make.

In general, the mission of a music educator should be to transform consciousness and thoughts of school authorities and society into a comprehensive vision of the importance and necessity of music education for youngsters. The educator should show the natural talent and attraction children could have for music. He should be a leader creating music, concert programs and artistic projects continuously to get all music students involved. Music educator has to be active developing his creativity every day, his potential, but overall, showing his work to society, and giving serious and convincing results. He should leave proof of his devoted and passionate work, and an exemplar and professional attitude.

Conclusion

It can be speculated that there is not enough music educators at this time. A music teacher needs to be a professional, and therefore, he must receive an academic preparation. Nevertheless many music teachers, especially in Latin America, may not be able to find an institution to have such preparation. In my personal experience, I am convinced that a personal music project can be as effective as having a music education program. A music teacher who may have developed his artistic talent could create a curricular music program for the school he might be working at. Strategies should be created to engage school directors to support and believe in such projects.

The demand for music education is increasing everyday in our society, but the budget is always low, and also, authorities seem to show little interest in music education. I believe that when there is an interesting and ambitious music project created by a music teacher,

then, visionary people appear to support it. At the same time, by showing results, the teacher attracts more and more new supporters. By doing this, we are creating and cultivating a musical environment in school, and after some years of continuity and perseverance, a music project may have an impact in society. Such types of music projects would produce new music students every year, and many of them, seeing and discovering their pleasure and capacities for music, would probably embrace music as their profession in the future.

Mark (2008) states that music has been considered for many philosophers, politicians, educators, and clergymen as important and essential for children's education. On the other hand, I like the words and I agree with the editor of the *New England Journal of Education*, A. E. Winship, who affirms that "Music is the most exact science, the most nearly fathomless philosophy, the most exhaustless psychology, the most brilliant art" (Mark, 2008: 115). As a music educator, I have seen the growth of new generations who are involved in learning music, how this art has transformed them into good and healthy students, and they become cultivated and role models for society.

I believe in the transformation of consciousness of school authorities to support music school programs; I believe in the purpose of society to become more educated and cultivated; but overall, I believe in the talent and creativity of music teachers to produce and work for *elevating the quality and presence of music education*.

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