

CONTEXTS OF MUSIC EDUCATION: PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN'S OPPORTUNITIES AND MOTIVATIONS IN MUSIC

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RESUMO: This paper examines primary school children's self-perceptions of their participation and learning in the broad range of opportunities that are available to them within music education at Portuguese institutional and cultural levels. The main findings were gathered from two studies carried out in two phases (year 1 and 2): the *Pupil Questionnaire study* and the *Pupil Interview study*. In this paper, we will explore four issues: children's musical activities, both in school and outside school; the influence of children's participation in extracurricular musical activities at school on their self-assessments of their musical development; changes occurring in children's musical activities as a function of their participation in extracurricular musical activities, and their attitudes and beliefs about music.

Findings has shown that musical participation in the different contexts of music education seems to be an activity participated in only by a minority of those involved in this research. One of the alarming finding across the sample, relates to the children's level of musical participation in most school activities as they tended to decrease in frequency in year two. Most children's did not participated in many other musical activities at school or outside school before participating in the established extracurricular activities. In fact, those seem to provide children with wider opportunities to participate in music, generating musical development and learning, as well as positively influencing children's self-assessment of their 'own musical development', attitudes and beliefs about music. Most children began enjoying their school more and evidence supported the fact that taking part in those musical activities positively affected these children's identification with school music lessons as they moved from grade 3 to grade 4.

Introduction

Developing musical identities have origins in biological predispositions towards musicality, and then are shaped by other people, groups, situations, and social institutions that they encounter as they develop in a particular culture (Hargreaves and North, 2003, North and Hargreaves, 2008). Factors such as home environment (Borthwick and Davidson, 2002, MacPherson and Davidson, 2006) parental support and involvement (Eccles and Harold, 1996: 5), school environment (Lamont, 2002), and the influence of the presence of different conceptual and methodological viewpoints in teacher's practices (MacDonald, Hargreaves and Miell, 2002, Jorgensen, 2008) may influence the development of musical identities.

Research also suggests that music, memory, and self-identity are deeply associated. Gracyk (2004: 8) comments on music's "emblematic capacity" in relation to

memory and self-identity asserting that a sense of self-identity truly starts through one's memories. Musical memory connects with our sense of self, since musical taste and experience are closely linked to personality and emotion (eg. Sloboda and Juslin, 2001; North and Hargreaves, 1997; Ritossa and Rickard, 2004; Dibben, 2004). Music can also transform and shape our minds (Machover, 2004), and may be among the most personal and meaningful of all the activities humans possess (Folkestad, 2002), and for that reason, 'can be used increasingly as a means by which we formulate and express our individual identities' (MacDonald, Hargreaves and Miell, 2002, 2009).

Sharing the belief of Hargreaves, Marshall and North (2003) that the ultimate outcome of music education is the development of individual self-identity, a research that examines primary school children's self-perceptions of their participation and learning in the broad range of opportunities that are available to them within music education at Portuguese institutional and cultural levels was carried out (Milhano, 2011a).

The 'globe' model of opportunities in music education developed as part of the work of the Music development Task Group of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (2002) was an essential reference in this research (see eg. Hargreaves, Marshall and North, 2003). We categorized the broad range of opportunities that are available to pupils within music education in the social and cultural contexts of music education at Portuguese institutional and cultural levels (Milhano, 2011b). We highlighted that the changes in the contexts of music-making and music listening provided by the establishment of extracurricular music activities at schools, may be critical in determining the course of those children's musical development and learning. The main argument was that, by altering children's individual musical behaviours,

routines and experiences, their attitudes, beliefs and self-perceptions could also be changed, possibly influencing their musical identities.

Within this area of research, this paper reports on findings from a larger study looking at the effects of the participation in the extracurricular musical activities in the development of children's musical identities (Milhano, 2011 a). It examined the changes taking place in their musical activities, both in school and outside school; the influence of participation in extracurricular musical activities on pupils' self-assessments of their own musical development, as well as on their attitudes and beliefs about music in terms of the activities they themselves choose.

Methods

Considering that middle childhood is suggested as the period during which children's musical identities emerge (Burnard, 2002, Harter, 1999), and it may, for many, be a decisive moment in their lives in shaping not only their attitudes, choices and identities towards a life of musical involvement, but also a decisive moment in 'creating' their own selves (Burr, 1995: 28), and in the way they represent themselves to others, the participants of this research were primary school children aged between 8 and 11 years old. We utilized a cross-sequential design that enabled to make longitudinal, cross-sectional and cohort comparisons in order to investigate the effects of the participation in musical activities on children's musical identities.

In this paper, we present the main findings gathered from studies A and B that were carried out in two phases (year 1 and 2): pupil questionnaire study and the pupil interview study. In study A, the total number of questionnaires received was 406 from children in the first cycle of education: 43.6% from pupils in grade 3 and 56.2% from

pupils in grade 4. All respondents were pupils participating in extracurricular music activities at school: 53% were male participants, and 46% were females.

In study B, two small group interviews with pupils from grade 3 and 4 were conducted in order to explore the rich and descriptive meanings that children find in assessing the wider influences of taking part in extracurricular music on their musical activities in and out of school, as well as their attitudes towards and self-perceptions in music (Milhano, 2011b).

We will present the findings according to four issues: children's musical activities, both in school and outside school; the influence of children's participation in extracurricular musical activities at school on their self-assessments of their musical development; changes occurring in children's musical activities as a function of their participation in extracurricular musical activities, and their attitudes and beliefs about music.

Findings and discussion

The main findings of the research (Milhano, 2011a) suggested that the influence of children's musical backgrounds on their musical activities could be seen in pupils from both grades through the association of the musical instruments they reported owning at home, the instruments played by their friends and peers, their musical listening preferences, and the instruments learned outside school or the ones preferred by pupils, which were the guitar, the drums, and the piano. Evidence relating to the parenting styles and lack of musical practices, suggested that children's musical backgrounds influenced their current musical activities, in many cases, by restricting their opportunities in music education.

Opportunities to participate in music outside school through playing, singing and

dancing activities in the community seem not to be available to many pupils. However, the results draw attention to some local social and cultural influences on providing a small percentage of pupils with some opportunities to participate in elective, voluntary, and self-selected musical activities outside school.

One of the strongest indicators of changes occurring in children's musical activities as a function of their participation in extracurricular musical activities relates to music at school. The pupils' level of musical participation in most of the school activities tended to decrease in frequency in year two. Findings suggested that, when it existed, the most common musical activity pupils undertook as part of their statutory music education at school was singing.

Findings suggest that extracurricular musical activities provide opportunities for children to learn and develop competences that are neglected by schools'. The establishment of extracurricular activities in first cycle education schools provided children with wider opportunities to participate in music, and generated both musical development and learning as well as positively influencing pupils' self-assessments of their 'own musical development', attitudes and beliefs about music.

Evidence also suggested that most pupils did not participate in many other musical activities at school or outside school before participating in the elective extracurricular musical activities. Therefore, these activities appear to have been, for most pupils, the only musical activities in which they had the opportunity to participate in.

In addition, finding from this research suggested that most pupils began enjoying their school more with the introduction of the extracurricular musical activities. Findings supported the fact that taking part in these musical activities at school

positively affected the children's identification with school music lessons as they moved from grade 3 to grade 4.

The main reasons pupils decide to participate in the extracurricular activities relates to the fun and amusement they reported having, as well as to the idea of becoming a musician. However, as underlined in the findings of this research, further measures are needed to satisfy and delight further pupils' requests for more instrumental practice during music classes. It would be important providing them with more opportunities that could support and nurture their reported desire for music-making, and possibly sustaining and fostering further their idea of becoming musicians as they considered it important for their life.

Conclusions

The present research (Milhano, 2011 a) has shown that musical participation in the different contexts of music education seems to be an activity participated only by a minority of those involved in this research. These contexts include pupils' participation in musical activities both at school as a compulsory subject, and outside school as an elective subject in the formal and informal dimensions. Their participation in the extracurricular activities at school were for most pupils constituted the only opportunities they had to participate in music learning and seems generating very positive attitudes and a focus for the value of music in these pupils' lives; producing a desire to learn, and to take part more widely in several music practices. Therefore, findings of this research have suggested that the urgency for change in music education should be focused more on practices than on attitudes, that is, on the need to provide pupils' with more opportunities to access to musical experiences than on the need to increase their perceptions towards music and its importance to their lives.

It seems to be increasingly important not to neglect the importance of nurturing pupils' opportunities to actively take part in each one of the potential and desirable contexts of music participation, especially music at school as a compulsory subject that should be available to all. As we have seen, these elective activities were, for most pupils, the only musical experiences and activities in which they had the opportunity to participate. The quality of the musical experiences provided in those, should be carefully addressed as we have demonstrated through his research, the experience of participating in the electives extracurricular musical activities was, for the large majority of pupils, the main determinant of their musical identity. Therefore, it seems crucial that the system should move in parallel towards other different curricular structures so that music education would not be, as it seems to be, associated with something that came out of the curriculum. The curriculum should continue to include music, with formative autonomy, but not only in theory and in educational policy, but as a reality in the integrated education of all pupils (Milhano, 2011 a, b).

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