

Teaching and Learning Practices of Popular Music in a secondary level school in Brasilia – Brazil

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Abstract

The implementation of music education in Brazilian schools (Law 11.769/2008) has raised many discussions on different political and social spheres. This article has the objective to share an experience in music education project in a secondary level school in Brasilia (Brazil) that has applying Lucy Green (2008) study regarding the pedagogical learning practices of popular musicians. The empirical and qualitative research has been focused on two strands of the teaching and learning project. The first is directed to the music teacher's education that aims to provide an opportunity for undergraduate students to experience and reflect on the pedagogical principles of informal learning (popular musicians). The second strand, directed to the learning music process of the youngsters, with the goal of developing a motivating methodology that is integrated with the adolescents' life. The principles guiding the work is based on: their personal choices (musical pleasure, identification and familiarity); aurality (recorded music and attentive listening as a learning tool); self-learning and peer-learning (through discussion, observation, hearing and copying); assimilation of knowledge and skills in personal, often haphazard ways (according to musical preferences, starting with 'real world' pieces of music); integration of listening, performing, improvising and composing, with an emphasis on creativity. As an exploratory study, we have been collected data since 2009, through interviews and questionnaires applied to the youngsters, and observation made by graduating students through videos, audios and reports. The most significant result from the teaching practice of the student-teachers was the initial impact resulted by the work on the proposed project (informal learning of popular musicians), its innovative

nature in comparison to what they had experienced so far. The results regarding the youngsters have point out in three main aspects: the opportunity to play an instrument, or sing in a band; to make music with a collaborative way; and the development of autonomy (they make the decision of what and how to play, listen to and compose music). The project also furthers differentiated musical experiences that allow for the social education of the youngster within the school walls as the learning process happens through interaction, mutual respect and attentive listening to someone else's music. Even if the project was only developed at one school located in one city in Brazil we hope to contribute with relevant data and reflection regarding the possible implementation of a music pedagogy that is valued by young people and adequate for a country like Brazil.

keywords: Popular Music, secondary level students, undergraduates, learning practices

Introduction

The implementation of music education in Brazilian schools (Law 11.769/2008) has updated the need to debate and (re)think *what*, *why* and *how* to teach and learn music in schools. It is therefore, of paramount importance to develop research that integrates the different aspects of music making, considering that the curricular structures of primary, secondary and higher music education are currently undergoing a process of reform and reorganization. The labour market and professional music education are other important subjects of the current debate in Brazil. Research has shown that the availability of professional activities for music students has changed significantly (Grossi, 2003; Louro, 2003; Oliveira, 2003; Requião, 2002; Souza, 2003). Requião (2002), for example, advocates that a contemporary musician must, apart from playing his/her instrument, know how to operate a sound console, teach classes, produce didactic material as well as perform in various contexts such as play in a symphonic orchestra,

and participate as a performing guest in a popular music show.

In a global perspective, a premise among researchers is that study of informal learning practices and their inclusion in formal education is that a large part of the learning process takes place outside of the classroom and through informal cultural practices and within the popular music (MP) world. (Folkestad, 2006, p. 136)

The existence of popular music in the classroom takes different forms and exists on different levels, and many educators acknowledge its value for the music learning process. Many have, however, sounded the alarm: it is a mistake to use the same teaching principles for differentiated styles, genres and contexts of production, dissemination and reception. Each type of music has its own intrinsic character, contextual nuance, instrumental form of playing, specific delineated musical and cultural values. The research undertaken by Green (2008) is of great importance in this realm, and is widely cited among authors that study the learning practices of the popular musicians and their integration with the educational formal practices. The author's proposed pedagogy is based on a research of informal learning practices among popular musicians (Green, 2001) and their implications for music education in schools of England (Green, 2008). She points to the fact that informal practices differ from formal education in terms of their learning and teaching strategies; those practices are characterized by: personal choices (musical pleasure, identification and familiarity); aurality (recorded music as a learning tool); self-learning and peer-learning (through discussion, observation, hearing and copying); assimilation of knowledge and skills in personal, often haphazard ways (according to musical preferences, starting with whole 'realworld' pieces of music); integration of listening, performing, improvising and composing, with an emphasis on creativity (Green, 2006, p.106).

The project

The Research Group for the Teaching and Learning of Popular Music (G-PEAMPO) of the Music Department of the University of Brasilia (UnB) has been developing the project “Informal Learning Practices in the classroom of secondary school” since 2008 (the pilot project). It counted with the participation of students between 14 and 17 years of age. The main objective has been the application of Green's ideas, concepts and music-pedagogical principles on a Brazilian secondary school context, as well as to assess the results in relation to the teacher's education and the learning process of pupils.

The first experience of the project, as a pilot study, was undertaken by the G-PEAMPO during the second semester of 2008 at the Paulo Freire Secondary Education Centre. It counted with the participation of about 80 youngsters between 14 and 17 years of age, distributed in four classrooms. It also counted with the participation of 16 undergraduates from the Music Teacher Education Course, their tutor, one coordinator of the school and members of the G-PEAMPO. From 2009 onwards the Project has been developed bi-annually by West Sector Secondary Education Centre - CEMSO, another secondary level school; since then it has counted with the participation of 150 adolescents and trained 30 undergraduates. Both schools are run by the public sector within the Brasilia education network. The current project is not part of the curriculum of CEMSO; it is an extra-curricular activity offered to the students among the three years of the secondary education. The adolescents' participants know beforehand that they will play music in a band, choose the music and the instrument that they

want to play/sing.

The project has been focused on two strands of the teaching and learning project. The first is directed to the music teacher's education working with secondary level students that aims to provide an opportunity for undergraduates to experience and reflect on the pedagogical principles of informal learning (popular musicians) and their possible applicability in schools. The second strand, directed to the learning music process of the youngsters, with the goal of developing a motivating methodology that is integrated with the adolescents' life. The research is directed to the learning process of the youngsters of the three years of secondary education.

The research

The research here seeks to reflect on: students' skills, achievements and knowledge acquired and developed during their participation in the project; how they form their bands, share and communicate ideas; how they experience and understand their own learning process; which practical aspects are deemed as relevant by them; how they 'copy the music by ear', compose, improvise; what aspects they elect as important for the instrument playing; how they evaluate the project, the role of the students-teachers. It is important to highlight that a few music bands already existed in schools where the project was implemented, but the large majority of participating youngsters had no previous experience either in singing or playing an instrument.

The majority joined the project without having undergone any kind of experience in formal music education even if half have claimed to have some kind of informal musical experience like playing an instrument or being part of a church choir. The Group (G-PEAMPO) assumes

the concept of formal music education as the existence of a teacher who leads the teaching process, creates situations that lead to learning (which include, or not, informal learning processes), plans and directs the lesson in order to achieve previously established objectives; there is a *pedagogical framing* according to Folkestad's concepts (2006).

The research's objective is to reflect on the application of popular musician learning principles for the music education of secondary level students, according to the proposal presented by Green (2008). The methodology follows the basic concepts of qualitative research, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), as it is committed to describe, interpret and explore the musical experience of the participants in terms knowledge and skills developed through their experiences in popular music. It follows, in particular, the directives for qualitative research related to the study of "values, beliefs, habits, attitudes, participation, opinions" (Paulilo, 1999, p.135). Quantitative data was also collected before and during each edition of the project; it aimed at collecting descriptive information related to the participating youngsters (number of enrolments, age, sex, grade, previous musical experience, musical preference, etc).

The methodological design of the research was structured in order to allow for the collection of data directly from the music-teachers descriptive and reflexive reports, field notes, and participative observation. Interviews were used both as a method and as a strategy, as well as a tool for data collection, according to the methods used by the studies undertaken by Green (2011), Almeida (2009) and Galizia (2007). We therefore opted for the research of interviews, which used semi-structured individual and collective interviews as a tool, and a questionnaire aimed at the identification of the youngster's musical experiences both before and after the project, their preferences as well as their evaluation of their work.

Results

The musical learning and pedagogy of the student-teachers

The most significant result comes from the undergraduates who have been receiving the initial impact resulted by their work on the project and its innovative nature regarding motivation, interaction, peer learning, and musicality in the realm of secondary level students:

"I was at first chocked because the methodology is way out of the traditional...it was stressful; I felt...what am I doing here? But bit by bit we are started to understand some of the things that are happening" (Group A of the pilot project, 2008)

Student-teachers often stated that they did not have any deeper knowledge of the repertoire chosen by the adolescents. For each new edition of the project pupils brought new songs, styles and musical groups of varied origins and contexts such as rock (pop, metal, punk) gospel, country, and so on.

Another important aspect in the project is related to the performance experience of the student-teachers. On the one hand, we have musicians that have undergone a classic education and possess therefore skills that do not match the skills needed for the project, such as to play an instrument by ear, without the need of scores or music sheets.

On the other hand, we have popular musicians with extensive non-academic experience and

who play some instruments such as electric bass, acoustic and electric guitar, or drums and percussive instruments; furthermore, we had students who had experience with music technology, knowing how to use editing programs, audio mastering and even basic knowledge such as how to assemble a drum set, amplify the group/band instruments, tape rehearsals, use a sound equalizer and, last but not least, they possess a broad popular music repertoire. Finally we have student-musicians that have undergone a mixed education (classic and popular experiences).

The tertiary students that identify themselves with the project and are able to provide a significant contribution are those with broad musical experience, participation in various musical activities, and that play more than one instrument, compose and make arrangements, learn with other musicians, play or have played in a band and, in particular, have achieved a refined listening sensibility and maturity.

We have, therefore, concluded that one of the main results of the research, as far as the education of music teachers is concerned, is the importance of previous musical experience acquired outside the formal institutions, even if this does not imply that they do not need any instrumental education in order to participate in the project.

We, therefore, deduce that the role of the musician/teacher in the project is much broader than simply 'teach how to play'. These professionals dive into the universe of the individual youngsters and use this to re-elaborate their own functions, their own roles as teachers.

The project according to the youngsters: what they appreciate mostly

The importance of the project for the youngsters is based on different factors. Firstly, it allows them the first opportunity to play an instrument, or sing in a group – this is the most widely cited. Secondly, the project also furthers differentiated musical experiences that allow the social education of the youngsters within school walls, as the learning process happens through interaction, mutual respect and attentive listening to someone else's music.

In their evaluation of the project, the secondary level students have pointed to four positive aspects: 1) it is great to form bands/groups (they mention meeting new friends, playing together, rehearse and perform); 2) to learn how to play a music instrument alone and with guidance (they mention the non-traditional learning model, to play music without the need of notes, to learn a lot in a short time); 3) the participation of student-teachers (they mention group interaction, including interaction with teachers and their strong interest to teaching); 4) the pleasure of playing the music they like, that they have chosen themselves ("I enjoyed playing the music that I like" / "Meet people that like the same type of music I like!" / " To create a band and not only learn how to play an instrument").

Factors related to motivation are often mentioned. For example, not to give up in the beginning is considered a big victory; they highlight the initial difficulty to 'start' playing, to join the parts, but also that they are able to surpass them with the help of friends and of the teachers. We have also noticed that the youngsters see the project's teaching team as a cohesive group which helps them develop many abilities, such as: making the adjustments of the band; playing in a group; train techniques and the learning of music theory (notes, chords, harmony) and finally, they help them trust themselves, to surpass their mistakes, to overcome their shyness and to show

what they are capable of.

Difficulties

The most common problems during the seven editions (including the pilot) of the project have a direct relation to the project's infrastructure: lack of instruments and music players, lack of space in the classroom for the amount of students, their instruments and their 'sound'. Classes at public schools in Brazil are adjacent to each other and have no acoustic isolation which interferes with the listening process and with the quality of the musical experience. There isn't a specific music classroom.

Final considerations

The compulsory music teaching in the Basic Education in Brazilian schools has injected new vitality to the debate regarding possible methodologies and highlights the need to address questions such as: what, why and how to teach and learn music in Brazilian schools. Green's (2008) study on the principles of informal is one of the possible pedagogies that could be applied for the teaching of music in Brazil, and in our experience, one of that which has real connection with adolescents' lives – driven by motivation, pleasure, involvement, autonomy, socialization, and music learning.

The teacher education programs raise additional questions of paramount importance for the implementation of music classes at all basic education schools in the country. Initial data point to the lack of music teachers for the implementation of music education in the whole Brazilian

educational network. However, the law does not require a degree in music which implies that professionals with a degree in other subjects can play the role of music teacher. The main question is: how to empower them to deal with learning strategies based on the principles of informality? Aspects regarding the role of the teacher and the formal teaching of music in Brazil require innovative measure. The project's results have pointed to a change of attitude by students towards the role of the music teacher. Initially, many students expected to attend traditional classes that followed the instructor-apprentice model - the teacher teaches and the student learns; what the students experienced was a differentiated methodology where the teachers have, among other things, to interact with youth music and way of being, as well as, to work for help them to reach their own learning objectives.

Even if the project was only developed at one school located in one city in Brazil we hope to contribute with relevant information and data for the possible implementation of a music pedagogy that is valued by young people and adequate for a country like Brazil. Contrary to what happens in the United Kingdom, the inclusion of music education in Brazil is a controversial issue as it is still regarded as an extra-curricular activity and/or as entertainment.

Some educators also see the inclusion of music in the school curriculum as a destabilizing factor, both in a curricular context and due to the fact that it will create 'noise' in the school environment. It is necessary to reflect on a musical pedagogy that is valued by the young and well adapted to a Brazilian context.

The project, similarly to the learning process of popular musicians, offers students the opportunity to learn in a recreational manner, without demands and in a social situation

involving friends and more experienced individuals (Lacorte, 2006). According to Arroyo (2005) it is redundant to state that young people have a strong connection with music but we may not conclude that all have the same opportunity to create music, to play an instrument and to be part of a band. To offer these opportunities is the real objective of the Project.

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