

The influence of choral music regarding the cognitive development of students

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Abstract: *The present paper wishes to present the benefits of the interest of students in what concerns choral music and also the means through which the music teachers support and diversify the choral activity in school and in the community. Teachers use basic skills in choral conducting and also pieces of knowledge in order to establish and coordinate a choral assembly. These are concepts which regard personal performance, musical style and also the psychology of children. The musical language is evidently, a progressive habituation, prevailing in it for a certain reason, pleasure and motivation.*

Concluding, it must be stated that the musical activity involves both physical and mental abilities. The students who take part in the musical act advance in both the field of the capacity of learning and they also improve their behaviour regarding different social issues. Students can also increase their self-discipline and they can concentrate, refining both their mental – perceptive area and also the spiritual one.

Key-words: *musical education; choral assembly; school; student; cognitive development.*

1. Introduction

Choral music is done with and out of passion with direct commitment, being created for those who really wish to sing, for those who have motivation and also for those who are eager to know music. Through participating in a choir we can discover a new way in which the child can spend its free time, being able to be part of an artistic phenomenon, walking on stage, but being protected by the thrill of the solo performance.

Here is the place where he can make friends, the place where he learns about patience and perseverance, the place where attention and memory are stimulated, the place where self-esteem increases, the place where competition spirit grows and also general knowledge develops.

At first sight it seems easy, but the result is due to a constant effort with the purpose of having endless artistic achievements materialized in festivities, concerts, competitions, where the level of training is evaluated and rewarded.

The student will be aware of the fact that he can successfully face competition circumstances, gaining, in this way, the ability to face future exams.

The child's self-esteem will rise in a considerable manner, seeing he is capable of doing things he considered to be difficult.

It can also be stated that focusing the child's attention, his working mind and storing information – in order to finish a task-are improved because the child needs to look at the parts that are more and more complex. The child also needs to pay attention to his own voice and also he has to follow the conductor's gestures and indications.

Those activities will make the child work more in order to gain success also in other fields.

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All this enterprise in what concerns choral activity followed me throughout my life, making me understand and also embrace this artistic phenomenon and regard it from the peculiarities of children's age.

The experience that I earned in the artistic activity, of interpreting choral music, and also in the didactic activity of teaching in School No.119 from Bucharest and in the didactic activity of research, as a university lecture at the University from Craiova, are the fruit of professional gaining, knowledge and skills that can provide for the coordination of the future choralists being in different stages of professional training.

The present paper carries with it the stamp of professional relationship with music. The study is, of course, the result of observation, researches, theoretical and practical investigations, of scientific analysis.

Without doubt when you like what you are doing, when nobody tells you to go to choir activities, when you succeed in creating an atmosphere of deep communication between you, as a conductor, choralists and the audience and you find the same pleasure for singing in front of your students, the time spent together means energy, joy, spiritual and emotional filling.

As, conductors, we feel contentment of succeeding together, of transmitting the essence of artistic interpretation and art doesn't have the notion of time and also it doesn't get tired.

2. The benefits of involving students in choral music

We notice a decay of contemporary culture under the assault entertaining consumers, a new civilization built on ourselves, transformations generated by contemporary technologies-the Internet, which can accomplish the change.

There are these temporal periods of time, of development and accommodation to daily life that we cannot neglect and to which we have to adapt.

Under the influence of the new information and communication technologies, of new psychological theories of learning and of new educational paradigms, the educational world is changing and teachers are called to face all these changes.

What has music become nowadays?

Music received new shapes under the influence of time and culture.

Music has become an activity with spectators, having a different audience, an audience that values the idea of musical concerts, with a polite reaction of polite obedience, through which becomes a deep cerebral experience and an audience that shows its emotions through its body, being almost impossible to divide the connection between movement and sound.

The time of concerts in their classical sense, the fixed choir which sings a repertory in front of an audience has long passed.

The conductor has to build with intelligence a guiding bridge, through which he has to succeed, to keep the young public's attention awoken.

Children and people, in general, need social connections in order to make the community work and music served throughout the history, to promote feelings of unity and synchrony of the group.

Playing games is the easiest thing that can help children learn social skills, to be efficient when interacting to others while if they listen or play music, students develop their concentration in an era dominated by smartphones and computers.

It's reassuring to see how some children, who on one side are concerned with reading the latest versions of computer games and assimilating very fast some types of behaviour are always surprizing can find it pleasant to be part of school clubs and choir.

Here it is created the best place to make the specific activities for the choir through which the skills of students grow. The students obtain the experience in learning vocal singing, interpretation and listening choral plays with sacred or profane pattern, of some pages from choral creation, being at the same time a pleasant way to spend their time.

Singing, in general, and choir singing, particularly, represents the most efficient and handy way to do musical education.

The repertory the conductor chooses has to help the children gain musical knowledge on one hand and also on the other hand it has to gain knowledge from other fields and the choir's rehearsals must have an emotional content, they also have to be captivating, interesting and they also must have artistic value.

The conductor plays a complex role, the leader, the mentor, the educator, the psychologist, the passionate music also being part of this role.

The conductor works a lot from the musical, educational, psychological point of view, because the role of a mentor implies all those paths of professional and human training

Having the necessary knowledge of a musical educator and those of the pedagogical researches, the conducting will conceive the process of training taking into consideration a good knowledge of the student's aptitudes, of his virtues, indicating the strategy of working taking all of the above things into consideration.

The musical skills can be developed through different methods and techniques concerning working, which regard in a direct way the training of the educator.

We often have in schools wrong perceptions about the disability of some children to sing, this perception being disproved because the experience has shown that most of the children (except the pathological cases) can be educated from the musical point of view.

It can also be stated that music has pedagogical qualities within the support of harmonious physical development, of motor coordination, of aesthetic sense development, and also of emotional and mental evolution.

Musical education studied in schools has the role of promoting among, the new generations, material and spiritual values of our people, educating the interest in knowing things and acknowledging the authenticity of art, creativeness and innovation.

Musical education should begin during kindergarten as a game and should continue during school becoming in this way the base of its necessary continuation during all the other periods of the individual's age within the professional or the amateur aspect of music.

We are dealing, in many schools, with choosing musical training against musical education and we can see this in participating in school contests and also in small number of children in choirs.

Musical training, typically for the contemporary musical education, applies to the intellect, to the logic, most of the times, musical education being considered a red scientific subject.

The teacher uses the fact that he gives and assimilates the didactic information, registering methods proper to musical education, offering students theoretical information concerning music and not musical education.

Contemporary musical education reveals to us through the growth of personal concepts, it makes us search and also find new didactic ways and methods, in order to make the old ones better and also to be in accordance with the demands that come from the outside world.

It also makes us discover solutions in order to find a common way between the forming role, and the fundamental aesthetic value which expresses the truth, the good and the beautiful and which also applies to affectivity, emotion and feelings.

Musical art is first of all the art of sounds and knowing the practice characteristic of the art sounds, the new methods and didactic means must be chosen with great care so that the axiology spectre of musical art and also its character would not be „deteriorated”.

The intellectual listening of music that refers to the decoding of musical message represents the essential condition of passing from the sensuous boundary to the spiritual heart of music and also from sonority to sense.

Children are attracted by rhythm because it incites their body language and the tonality and the song stimulates their brain.

Lively music is suitable to the movement needs, it unlocks the body and it gives a positive tonus which creates a proper content for the creative and spontaneous activities, the group dynamics being alive, expressive and also cheerful.

Through music, children, students young people from different social classes succeed in finding bridges of communication, of knowledge, of building relationships of acceptance without any distinction between social and economic status, religion. In this way the choral activity stimulates the attending and the connection between young people in common activities.

From many different types of art, music is the one that is the closest to the human soul, reproducing the most intimate shades of emotions and feelings.

The artistic education, music can play an active and efficient role in educating and forming the human personality if people would grant it the necessary importance in fulfilling its formative role.

Unfortunately we are witnessing a formal education impact, regarding which there is a state of passiveness and students do not find themselves in it.

3. Cognitive development – physical and mental skills

The child, starting from his first years of life shows the first forms of educating his hearing and sensitivity.

During the period spent in kindergarten and school, we have the duty of continuing the generic development of speech through linguistic and paralinguistic creations, in which the vocal example of the educator, teacher is essential.

Children’s attractions for rhythm and sound happen very early.

In order to carry on with a musical activity, the young students need to develop and also to form skills like: voice, musical hearing, musical memory and the sense of rhythm. Let’s not forget that music means beauty, pleasure and it has to be made without effort in order to be successful in getting closer to children.

For the growing child, music is like a game, through which he is initiated in the mysteries of musical language by singing and exercising the forming of hearing, rhythm and tempo, activities that contribute to the development of memory, affection and constructive creativity.

Games work hand in hand with creativity with that ability of being less rigid and more flexible, being the means with the help of which children will integrate complex concepts in the development of more profound thinking.

Music, because of its sensuous characteristics helps, according to the level of understanding of each age, training the mind of the child for a set of complex social and cognitive activities. The teacher invents, in this way, exercises so that the child uses his thinking, but by an emotional approach, making the brain work so that it can face the demands required by the speech and also by the social interaction.

The mechanic imitation, without a base of intellectual knowingness and without emotional vibration it does not have formative and educational bond.

It has to be started that the social and mental development of children, is very important so that the children will be safe from failure, from the pressure of other children and also from the influence of mass media.

Music, as it is today, already known by the majority of researchers who studies its effects, it has healing powers.

It is a sublime art, with wonderful impacts on the artistic outline but also on the different changes that it can produce on the human being.

Many studies suggest that the students who have music lessons achieve higher goals. There are scientific proofs, behind this consideration, because the researches show that the study of music can induce positive changes in the brain.

This fact can explain the reason why education, which includes a large part of music, supports the performance in other fields like mathematics and foreign languages.

Even though music makes the school results better or not, it can be good in many other ways. Some say that the feeling of affiliation determined by community aspect of music, can offer the children the proper emotional background so that they progress.

It also offers priceless transferable skills, that can be used through they career and also in the professional development of the human being. Besides the obvious team work abilities and the tenacity, making music means solving problems and it draws the attention to details and analysis, all those things being essential in the future professional life of students.

Building a choir does not depend only on the conductor but also on the responsible involvement of each child, involvement that we will see in everyday life. There are many different positive feelings and also the feeling of unity to the others, which makes the desire of implication of students in other projects, bigger. This way, students embrace and also try new attitudes, habits and actions without fear of risk.

Every member of the choir becomes its own creator, discovering the importance of receiving and also offering support, which makes each child accept himself, trust himself and others.

Singing in a choir has wonderful effects on the development and the strengthening of the abilities of socialization, communication and talking to others, on the capacity of adapting yourself and of listening to the person next to you in order to create a balanced product in which everyone can express itself.

The practice of choral music allows the student to get used to rules which give him the opportunity to progress in the professional area. By listening to what the conductor says, the student learns what strictness is, he also learns the feeling of patience which will allow him to rehearse for long periods of time without losing his heart or forgetting about his long term goal.

The students will build their abilities of reading and communicating through an artificial language, the music symbols, like mathematics, to face large amounts of details in a meaningful way, having in the same time a good understanding of superior level objectives.

Due to the fact that the student memorizes a number of plays during the period of studying and works on a repetitive task for a long time, his ability to store information grows and also the student gains exceptional abilities of multitasking.

During rehearsals, even though the indications change very fast, the students are capable to concentrate on the new tasks without waiting. The ability of solving problems in a creative, unconventional way generates better and solid results.

There are many studies that prove the fact that classical music has a positive influence on intelligence, and the information come from measuring the intelligence quotient before and after listening. This proves that music has the gift of activating both parts of the brain.

Music has a holistic influence on the human body, through the psycho-somatic action; music induces changes in the metabolism, circulation, blood volume, heart beat and blood pressure.

The feelings gained this way have a strong influence on the autonomous nervous system, coordinating the activity of the myocardium, the smooth muscles and the endocrine glands.

It has been established that classical music is an extraordinary instrument of therapy in treating many psychic and also somatic affection. The idea of therapy through music comes right after World War II as a consequence of the large number of soldiers that returned from the battle field with head injuries and cerebral trauma.

Then in the 1970s, the therapy through music started to grow all over the world as an effective way to treat some mental diseases or Parkinson syndrome.

The experts in neurosciences have proven that the works of Mozart and also these of baroque music composers like Bach, Haendel, Telemann or Vivaldi, influence in a positive way the psychic actions like attention, memory and the capacity of learning. In academic researches, the baroque music is associated to the phenomenon called „supra-memory”, the boost of the capacity of storage of a subject influenced by external factors, in this particular situation music.

The experiments on large groups of people have been done starting from Wagner or Beethoven’s works, capable of giving improvements in the learning output.

In Romania the psychologist Liliana Neagu confirms the fact that people who use music as a background have results that are 40% better in memory tests.

The Bulgarian psychologist, Gheorghe Lozanov who had special abilities in learning foreign languages, as a result of his researches generated a method through which he offers reasons that by using music the memory improves. The explanation of this phenomenon was provided by the fact that the using of baroque music, the best in stimulating the memory, the effects of facilitating the storage of different words, notions, ideas, because of its action as a vocal wave.

In baroque music we can find vocal waves which have frequencies that are part of the proper activation of brain activity and also different amplitudes vibrations. It can be stated that during listening and producing this type of music suscitating the neurons a cyclic rhythm of activity in a frequency of 8 to 12 cycles per second, this frequency being met only with masterminds according to the researches of professor.

All those experiences have the gift of making the capacity of storage better.

Talking about the influence that music can have on the human body, and of course on children, professor Ioan-Bradu Iamandescu, primary care physician, allergist and psychologist, the author of a treaty in „Receptive music therapy” the first to do the studies of music therapy in Romania, in the department of Medical Psychology and Psychosomatic in the University of Medicine „Carol Davila” Bucharest, has proven the fact that any type of music is efficient, being a so-called favourite music (for some of us the novelette, for others rock or folk music) but it has proven that the plays from the classical repertory and the romantic one stimulates the brain best.

The brain scan showed that Mozart’s music stimulates 90-100% of the cerebral cortex. Most of the times the symphonic and chamber music stimulates the brain almost go per cent unlike tango which stimulates 50 per cent of the brain.

All these information although they are purely theoretical, are very important to us, in order to have a starting point when we choose the music we encourage to be listened and produced by the children, young students and teenager.

In the „Apolo music” project, developed by the specialist from the Institute of Education in London University, in which 4500 students, aged 7-10 years old, we initiated and involved in classical music.

The psychologist, Sussan Hallam states that all those students had great benefits in the capacity of learning area.

Against all expectations, the children are not reluctant to this type of music, they appreciate it.

By listening to this type of music, the students succeeded in concentrating and also gained self-discipline, improving in all the studied subjects and not only in musical studying.

An interesting therapy and with strong results, an active method of using music for expressing feelings and self-knowledge is the method of active therapy developed by Wolfgang and Katharina Beasinger.

The Singende Krankenhauser method being very useful in unlocking the emotions and the energies in us, in expressing feelings that were locked somewhere deep down our souls. Music can cure, it can reveal strong emotions, it can unlock healing energies that are very important and also very strong.

In the same time, music can create happiness it can influence various aspects of life of the human being, so that people can experience happiness, harmony and fulfillment.

It is the method which was initiated in Germany, the active method of therapy through music which means singing in groups. Therefore, this aspect is very important, meaning singing in a group, expressing profound emotions and feelings of the people involved, having remarkable effects.

This fact was observed and highlighted through measurements and specific test and also through an experiment in September 2015.

Thirty-five children and teenagers, aged five to twenty, were part of a project- „the singing project” in the „Dr. Gh. Preda Psychiatry Hospital” in Sibiu, the first singing hospital in Easter Europe, where the patients forget about their illness with the help of music.

The vocal skills were not important and this was not the main aspect but the important things were the encouragement, the support in expressing feelings with the help of music.

What is more, this fact is done by the subject in the group, which creates a proper environment to communicate, to getting involved in the group’s activities and then in all the future activities of the participant within the method.

It has been noticed, after the sessions of active therapy through music developed by Bossinger, a growth of trust of children and teenagers in themselves and also in others.

They have become more sociable, friendly to one another, more tolerant and involved eager to listen and help others, relaxed, saying that they had a well-being feeling, a positive attitude and also a state of joy and happiness.

4. Conclusions

The studies done regarding the effects of classical music show that, it has a major role in sharpening the observation spirit, with wonderful consequences on the mental activity.

There are a lot of benefits that result from this phenomenon like the reducing of some attention and communication deficiencies, the growth of the concentration power, the encouragement of meditation states, the euphoric feelings, stimulating inspiration and also lowering the stress and anxiety level.

The present research gave me the opportunity to show the positive effects music has, especially the creation of music on the emotional balancing of children.

The advice is to promote and encourage this interactive – participative manner to do music, stimulating students to take part in choirs in order to have a harmonious development of emotions and also the other aspects of their lives.

The positive effects can be traced in all the participants, proving first of all the role music can have in emotional expression and also the balance in children and teenagers involved.

Choir singing proves to be good in strengthening friendship between children, in the creation of a trustworthy atmosphere and in stimulating individual and group expression and in the same time it teaches the children to be patient and considerate to others not just himself.

Choir singing allows positive emotional manifestation of those children who had difficulties of integration, at first and they also had a low trust in themselves, this aspect being easy to establish by the growth of involvement in vocal activities and experiences.

What is certain is the fact that music has for sure a valuable contribution in the development of mental-perceptive area and also the spiritual one.

The fact that many physicists, doctors, important thinkers have proven passion for music must not be neglected, being an interesting connection which facilitates the evolution of the human being.

5. References

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