

# The Teachers' Attitude and Its Impact on (Musical) Learning

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**Abstract**—How does a teacher teach? How is she/he handling music educational contents? Which goals are pursued by teaching persons? Answers to these questions often include the aspect of the teacher's attitude. Why is it so important? Students always learn everything, not only factual musical knowledge or instrumental or vocal skills, but also connecting music with positive or negative emotions. They learn what kind of relevance music has for themselves. They learn to express internal states by music and, by the way, to control affects - or not. They learn how much joy it can bring to practice something (for example, an instrument) - or not. They will use "right or wrong" as terms for categorizing music - or not. The teacher's actions, interventions and words as well as her/his attitude and beliefs determine what and how children/students learn. This article discusses educational processes in early childhood and the role of music teachers, by using the example of dealing with "Orff-Schulwerk".

**Keywords**— *early childhood; music teacher; teachers' attitude; orff-Schulwerk*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to discuss educational processes in early childhood and the role of music teachers, by using the example of dealing with "Orff-Schulwerk".

I am not a scientist - I am a teacher. That's why I will not give a scientific lecture. Maybe it's just some thoughts based on my experiences. Let me start by telling you two anecdotes, that illustrate the subject of my lecture.

When I started teaching -about twenty years ago- I experienced the following situation:

Together with a couple of children I had just sung a song about snow a snowflake. After singing that song I gave the children a piece of white cotton wool - the "snowflakes". I said: "When it snows - every snowflake falls upwards." Most of the children nodded. I continued: "Let's try that - put your snowflake on the ground and wait!" Nothing happened - of course! Some parents sitting beside the windows laughed. One child, however, had her doubts. She was still thinking about what I had said. And then she got angry - very angry. "YOU ARE A LIAR!" she exclaimed.

The little girl trusted me - she wanted to believe what I said.

All kids trust adults. All kids want to believe in adults. They are watching us. They imitate us. They take on our behavioral patterns and beliefs. They study us - but they don't think about it. Teachers who are involved in early childhood education have a particularly great responsibility. For example: they have a duty to tell the truth, no lies. I did not do justice to this duty at the time. But: is there only one truth - especially in the arts?

The difficulties start with the act of perception. Everybody has got their own picture of reality - their own, individual truth. And that is what my second story is about.

Every week my students and me are teaching music in a kindergarten. One year ago it was my turn to teach. The theme of the music lesson was "Monkeys in the jungle". After the welcome-song children had to guess animal sounds, played from a CD. They guessed all the sounds right. But then I played this sound: screaming monkeys. And all children said: "Birds, birds!"

I knew - it was wrong, But I said: "Hmm - it could be, perhaps - birds... this is very interesting, it sounds like birds..." After the lesson students argued very passionately and persistently that I had not told the truth. "Why did you do it this way?", they asked.

I tried to explain my reaction, based on my attitude. My attitude in turn is a result of professional knowledge, values and beliefs.

In general I am interested in the thoughts of children. I like to react to their suggestions, ideas and associations. Beyond that it was very clear, why they interpreted the sound as a bird's scream: German children have no real experience of monkeys - they only know them from television, movies or the zoo. In contrast, they know many birds from their natural environment. So they listened to the sound, compared it with their memories and experiences - and the result was: "Birds, birds!" From my point of view their perception was not "wrong" - it was just another interpretation of the sound.

These two small scenes from teaching practice could be viewed from many different angles. However, I would like to confine myself to two aspects and to derive from them some requirements for good teaching.

## II. TEACHERS' ATTITUDE AND CHILDREN'S LEARNING DISPOSITIONS

Remember the first story? The little girl called me a liar. She was outraged because she -and also the other children- had trusted me. I didn't expect that and the strong reaction surprised me. I just wanted to make a little joke. But the children expected the young teacher to truthfully describe and explain a natural phenomenon.

But the young teacher didn't do so. He was a bit careless and inexperienced, he believed that children naturally learn by themselves - teachers only had to assist and support them a little bit. He had no idea of what a great impact he had.

From the perspective of a child, every adult who has built a kind of relationship with him or her is an important adult [1]. These adults are orientation-guides and role models. Teachers are such people, they are important for children. This great importance results only from their actions, reactions and interactions. But a large proportion of what a teacher does is determined by their individual values and beliefs. To be effective, these inner attitudes need not be conscious to the teacher. They are effective anyway: expressed in nuances of the look, the facial expressions, gestures and the movement - and these are involuntary and barely controllable.

Children perceive these fine nuances. They imitate, internalize and interpret. Especially little children rely on adults and adopt their behaviors, attitudes and beliefs. If a teacher believes in the performance of a child, the child will recognize this through the teacher's facial expressions and gestures. It will feel empowered and act accordingly.

From their interactions with adults and from dealing with their environment children develop learning dispositions. These are complex behavioral patterns, which predetermine learning processes far into future. These learning dispositions are characterized by keywords such as readiness, interest, identification, communication skills, responsibility, empathy and perseverance [2].

Crucial for later success in learning is how children respond to learning-occasions and in learning situations. Are they curious? Interested? Scared? Perseverant? Are they able to overcome difficulties? Teachers can help children develop specific learning dispositions [3]. This can be achieved, for example, through:

- sensitive and emotionally consistent feedback
- conveying security, fearless and friendly atmosphere
- creation of challenging situations but also:
- successful experiences.

It can be assumed that a positive development of these dispositions in early childhood has a more lasting effect than the focus on practicing specific skills.

So my first requirement is:

Teachers are important - they have to know their real impact and the consequences of their actions. Teachers of course should act consciously and responsibly. But beyond that

they should also be aware of their beliefs and check whether their inner attitudes are conducive to the long-term and sustainable learning success of the students.

Remember my second story?

University students argued that I had not told the truth about the monkey sound.

I did not say everything I knew. I accepted the different assessment of the children as a possible solution to the aural task. My decision was based on the knowledge that each phenomenon is perceived contextually and differently by every individual.

Education and educational institutions often refer to an imaginary norm, an average student. But children are individuals, and these individuals must be listened to. Children learn in different ways, use their sensory modalities differently, have grown up in different environments, bring different experiences and preferences.

The diversity of the students does not have to be a burden either - it can be a gift, especially in music lessons. But only if teachers react appropriately to the different learning requirements of the students.

Let me come now to my second requirement:

Teachers need to tailor content, methods, and procedures to the heterogeneous group of students [4]. That means: They have to provide diverse points of view and perspectives, they have to support individual ways of learning and they have - particularly in the arts- to challenge the children to find a variety of possible solutions.

But what does that mean in concrete terms in Elemental Music Pedagogy?

Let me explain this with the example of how people deal with the "Orff-Schulwerk" [5].

The history of the Orff-Schulwerk is a history of crucial misunderstandings.

Even after the first publications in the 1930s and then in the 50s, many readers misinterpreted the booklets, written by Gunild Keetman, Hans Bergese and Carl Orff [6].

From today's perspective, it is hard to believe that the authors published only notes, but not a detailed didactic commentary. After all, it was a completely new teaching concept!

As a result, most teachers read only these notes, played the ostinato patterns and pieces - and the children had to practice these pieces, often even by notes. They didn't change their way of teaching music - they only changed the instruments and materials. I suspect they could not do better. They themselves were influenced by the old German school system including the outdated values and beliefs. That system didn't promote such qualities as creativity or the ability to solve problems in an individual way. No value was placed on educating children to become self-confident and independent-minded people. The teachers themselves had been trained in obedience and

fulfillment of duty. They passed on this inner attitude - with immediate effects on their teaching.

That went far past Orff's basic ideas. I think that his approach is based on an amazingly contemporary understanding of Music-Pedagogy.

From my point of view three guiding principles played an important role in the development of the "Orff-Schulwerk":

### III. MUSIC PEDAGOGY AND ORFF-SCHULWERK

#### A. *New Perspectives on One's Own Music Practice Abbreviations and Acronyms*

Orff was in search of a supposed "origin of music" [6]. He expected to find clues of this in ancient times and non-European cultures. From this perspective, he wanted to renew his music but also music education.

For example, he was fascinated by the ancient Greek term "musiké", which described the unity of song, instrumental play, dance and poetry. He also was inspired by non-European cultures. He maintained close contacts with music ethnologists and experimented with an original African xylophone as early as in the 1920s.

Changing perspective, checking one's own routines, recognizing and relativizing one's own preferences - I think that's a really modern attitude. And this attitude led him to an interdisciplinary approach - which is typical for "Orff-Schulwerk"

#### B. *Music in Connection with...*

The combination of music and movement is a cultural and especially a music-historical constant. At the beginning of the 20th century, many artists and reformist educators rediscovered this connection. In collaboration with Dorothee Günther - a gymnastics and dance teacher - Orff developed a unique way of referring to dance and movement.

Of course it also makes sense to connect music with speech. We know so many examples from opera to folksong and rap. Likewise, in music education there are whole systems of rhythm syllables - and, in the Orff-Schulwerk too: Again and again, the authors pick out rhythmic speech and singing as a central theme. From here it is not far to music theater - an elemental interplay of music, language, movement and scene [5].

#### C. *Improvisation...*

Orff's favorite way of teaching music is improvisation. A true understanding of music can only be acquired by dealing with it independently. Keetman and many of the later co-authors developed didactic models for the concrete implementation of this idea [7].

In summary, I would say: The "Orff-Schulwerk" makes its readers an offer.

It shows them many different musical building blocks. And it challenges them: Make something of your own and think beyond the boundaries of your discipline!

But what could a modern realization of this concept look like?

First, we need to question the original - looking at it from our new, up-to-date perspective. That means, in most cases, we should get rid of the original. We have to use contemporary themes and musical materials, which are today's children interested in.

For example, a new cat song:

The cat gang has struck once again,  
Third time in three days, what a shame  
You know they hang around here in the night  
Policemen have no chance, they have no light----

The milk was robbed from the store by them,  
Security guard ate eggs and ham,  
He knows they hang around here in the night  
Policemen have no chance, they have no light----

Whoever updates concepts and responds to situations in class, does so with a specific pedagogical attitude. They are interested in the needs and preferences of the students and will arrange the lessons accordingly.

Part of this attitude is to take the children in, pick up on their ideas and, if necessary, change the concept of the lesson. Sometimes it is more important to pursue supposedly inappropriate ideas than to achieve the intended result. Sometimes you cannot measure success. Sometimes success only comes later: for example, when children -after weeks of silence- suddenly find the courage to improvise their first solo.

Let me explain in a very concrete way. Imagine the following situation:

I have planned a music lesson with the theme "cats in the night".

The children should get to know the minor blues scale using the example of the cat song. Another goal is to make possible small improvisations by using the pentatonic blues scale.

I start the lesson with a game in movement: We all sneak through the night - we see nothing, it is a bit scary - with every little noise we startle and freeze. When the sound is over - we move forward. Three children make the noise - with a bell, rattle and drum. In this game you can already recognize some guiding principles of the "Orff-Schulwerk":

"Music in connection" with movement and theater.

Also "improvisation" - the three children are currently deciding who plays and pauses for an instrument when and for how long.

But now something unexpected happens: some kids call "bewitching hour!" Others answer "Hooh!" They sing fantastic "Hooh!"-glissandi. The theme "ghosts" immediately thrills the children. ... Cats .... are long forgotten.

What is to be done here?

I'm the teacher - I have to set priorities.

But my decision will be partly determined by my attitude.

If I am convinced that it is good for the children to participate with their own ideas, I have to give them a positive feedback now. I have to give room to their ideas and change my plan. Only in this way will I encourage them to actively participate in learning processes in the future as well. You could say that in such a lesson the children learn that their opinion has meaning for adults. They also learn that they can make a difference in life itself.

So my inner attitude leads me like a guide. After that, I direct my actions. And this action will influence the learning behavior, the learning dispositions of the children - maybe for a long time! And maybe something has changed compared with my attitude 20 years ago. So that no child must revolt over a lie.

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