

**TYPES AND FUNCTIONS OF TESTING THE SUBJECT OF MUSIC
CULTURE IN SECONDARY EDUCATION**

Introducing the problem

Our pedagogical experience in secondary schools has led us to conclude that most of the students start with minimal initial knowledge, no interest towards the subject of music culture and an insufficiently developed liking for artistic music. They are neither active, nor disciplined, and their attention and concentration is short-spanned, especially during the first lessons.

In such situations, the music teacher must find a way to interest and motivate the students. Apart from inventing new forms and methods of working in class, the teacher must *continuously* examine the students' achievements, to grade them and train them to be able to study individually. Such examination both motivates and affects the *permanence of knowledge* – one of the universal didactic principles, as well as one of the most frequent problems of education.

A secondary school teacher usually faces the dilemma of which instrument to use in order to measure students' knowledge, knowing that the students' motivation depends on its accuracy. Having a minimal number of classes (only one class per week in the first year), a large amount of material to cover (studying history of music) and large classes (around 30 students), *testing* is usually the basic method of examining students' knowledge at all educational levels.

Some researchers believe that "... testing knowledge is unsatisfactory for examining the achievements of the so-called educational subjects such as music and art..." (Poposki 1996:107). It is precisely this statement that lead us to research the problematics of testing the subject of music culture in the secondary schools. Hence our aim to increase students' interest and motivation, as well as help them gain permanent knowledge of the subject matter.

Preparing tests on the basis of types of knowledge

Before planning and making the tests we defined the concept of “knowledge” in music education, defining three of its types:

- a) Knowledge of *concepts* and *facts* from the educational material (based on memory, logical thinking, intellectual approach), and
- b) knowledge of the *music matter*, music phenomena (based on music experience, music memory, active perception...).

These types of knowledge are inseparable with the successful learning of the subject matter. Thus, our examination concerns both types, while the general determination of the students’ achievements is based on their synthesis.

From the four paper-and-pencil tests we carried out in the 2003/4 school year with the students of 12 classes (273-280 students) at the National Secondary School “N.H. Orde Chopela” (agriculture and nutrition vocation) and the DSEMU “Riste Risteski-Richko” in Prilep, the first, second and fourth test are instruments of measuring knowledge of concepts and facts from the subject matter (*tests of knowledge*), whereas the third test (*test of recognizing music*) measured the student knowledge of the subject matter itself, music phenomena acquired through listening to music in class.

The first test of knowledge (December) measures students’ knowledge in the field of music history (from ancient times to Baroque) and is of a linear type with the combination of closed and open questions (circle, fill in, answer). In order to avoid cheating, this test was made for four groups, with the same number and complexity of questions. The primary task of the test was to separate the students in levels (unsatisfactory and satisfactory – first level, good and very good – second level, excellent – third level), in order for us to adjust our future methods to the students’ abilities and knowledge. Grading was not our primary purpose, but it was the students’ motivation for in-class and individual activities.

The second and fourth test (March, first week of June) measures the students’ knowledge of the entire studied material. *Permanence* of knowledge was achieved through the systematic review of the knowledge in music history. It is interesting to observe that the students’ showed more knowledge of the older material (from the first semester) than from the last three lessons. From the answers of ten students who completed the survey included at the end of the fourth test, 75% of the students stated that they knew the older lessons better than the new ones. We also came to the same obvious conclusion. Naturally, additional and full analyses of all the test could

provide us with more specific results. We should stress that we used reduced studying – especially with the weak students (after turning the lesson into a “more general version” through printed questions, graphs and oral preparation, we turned the students’ attention to the most important parts of study). It was impossible to review the entire studied material in an alternative way.

As opposed to the first test, the second and fourth test are in *levels* (first, second and third). Each level consists of two groups of equally difficult questions. Depending on the previous test grade, each student answered the questions from the acquired level, but had the opportunity of moving to a higher or lower level. Through the entire second semester each student wishing to move to a higher level was allowed to take the test. Thus, a large number of students overcame the feeling of fear and psychological stress from tests. The motivation, attention and activity with most students evidently increased. They begun to freely ask questions in class, whereas many of them regularly took notes from the compositions listened to in class (they even asked for some of them to be repeated).

The details about test levels

The first level test is linear and contains 75% of closed questions (recognition of facts) and 25% of open questions (knowing the facts). These tests enabled the weak students to get a pass grade, and the good students (who received a lower grade on the previous test) to move higher to the second level, in case of getting enough points for the grade 3.

The second level test is linear. Open questions requiring more knowledge of facts predominate. There are less closed questions that require more complex knowledge, and not recognition of facts like in the first level. This test enables the students to pass to the third level, as well as to “fall” to the lower level.

The third level test is associative and vertical. Students are not only required to know facts, but to comprehend, generalize, and use them. In this test, the students’ task is to classify the “mixed” information correctly – in a vertical and horizontal line, and to logically connect the associations (in case the student does not comprehend the test, s/he is given the second level test, which can also lead to the highest grade).

Democratic test. For the students with weaker abilities, as well as those that had missed many of the lessons because of their own inertia or absence from class, we

created a new type of test mostly composed of open questions. The student is given the possibility of posing 6 questions by choice (as a substitute for the ones s/he can't answer). Because of this chance we decided to call the test *democratic*.

Music listening test

This type of test plays an important role in determining the students' knowledge of music listened to in the course of the entire school year. It is a closed question test because of the total of 62 compositions, the student is to recognize 12. The test is taken in groups in order to avoid cheating. An interesting fact is that most of the "first level" students did very well on the listening test (even better than some students from the higher levels). For instance, the **DSEMU** students from the I1 class had a grade point average of 3.79 on the second test of knowledge, whereas their average grade in listening declined to 3.65. The 27 students in class I6 (predominating weak students) could not even achieve the average grade – 2.00 (1.69) in their theoretical knowledge, but they achieved better results in listening to music (4.04) than the previously mentioned class. We state with great pleasure that the students are generally extremely interested in this type of testing. Additional classes were regularly full, and at the end of the school year, after the grading, the students inquired about where to buy "such" music and recorded it for individual use.

After all the tests ended, we concluded that it is better to use a *combined* test in the future which also includes *theoretical questions and recognizing music tasks*.

Functions of testing

From the above-mentioned facts, we may conclude that music culture subject tests have the following *functions*:

- motivating (they motivate the students to study)
- stimulating (interest for the subject increases after study and deeper inquiry into the problems of the subject)
- *diagnostic* (the real level of students' knowledge is seen, especially through the use of level tests)
- *analytical* (the teacher is able to analyze the results and plan work further)
- *grading* (an opportunity for objective grading is created)

These functions are universal for testing, as a way to examine students' knowledge in any school subject. We thus believe that the use of tests in the subject of music culture

is completely correct and necessary, but requires comprehension of the specific material, and above all, of the two categories of the notion of “knowledge”.