

Organizing controlled music listening in the 8th grade elementary school classes

The current syllabus and curriculum for the subject of music education in 8th grade¹ includes some of the following tasks:

- to become familiarized with important works from the history of music
- to expand music knowledge and to learn to recognize music forms
- to develop interest in listening to music performances, spiritual, church music, film and drama music, contemporary music, etc.

The successful accomplishment of this task depends on the active listening to music in class – which is the basic learning activity in 8th grade. The goal of this activity is to *perceive and comprehend the entire music piece* (including large forms such as sonatas and symphonies), as opposed to fragmented listening for the in-class illustration of music theory. Listening to music is a complex and active psychological process which expands the emotional and intellectual development of the students. On the other hand, it requires knowledge, working habits and skills. Hence the essential problems of the organization and realization of quality music education in the 8th grade. We divided these problems in the following groups:

- **organizational** (the number of weekly music classes is far too small for this activity)
- **status of the subject** (music education is usually treated as a subject “of a less important degree”)
- **students’ tastes and opinions** (the students’ lack of interest towards artistic music, the strong influence of the media and society)

These problems directly affect:

- **students’ attitude towards the subject** (low motivation, attention, discipline)
- **student’s working activities and habits** (lack of ability to listen to classical music and actively listen to an entire music piece)

This situation significantly increases the difficulty of realizing the goals of the syllable and curriculum, as well as the educational process in general. Therefore, in

¹ Pedagogical Institute of Macedonia, 1998

organizing the class, the teacher was to use different teaching methods in order to increase students' interest and motivation and activate controlled attention. Naturally, we were interested if the students were able to remember and recognize the material analyzed in class. We thus decided to conduct several controlled listening activities of music pieces that had been heard previously.

The subject of research was the students' level of perception and recognition of specific components of the music piece, related to required previous knowledge, memory and perception.

The instrument of research was a test leaflet containing five parts:

table 1: test leaflet sample

title

author

music period (1 listening); music genre (2, 3, 4 listening)

music ensemble:

a) instrumental

b) vocal

c) vocal-instrumental

tempo:

slow moderate fast

The 1st group of questions (title, author, music period, music genre) should be most difficult to answer since it involves a complete recognition of the music piece, i.e. establishing a relation between intellectual understanding and accumulated music knowledge (especially in terms of the music genre).

The 2nd group of questions (music ensemble and tempo) should be easier to recognize, since these components are primary external characteristics perceived from the music phenomenon. Their recognition can be achieved with minimal music knowledge and experience.

The choice of music was made according to the 8th grade music education syllabus (*music period* – Baroque, Classicism, Romanticism, etc. *Form*- 3-part, rondo, sonata, etc. *Genre*- suite, sonata, concerto, opera, ballet, film and theatre music, etc.

Compositions: W.A.Mozart – Turkish March

S. Gajdov – Listen, listen
 J.S. Bach - Badinerie (Suite in h minor)
 M. Ravel – Bolero
 L.van Beethoven – Symphony no.5, 2 movement
 B. Smetana – Vltava
 W.A. Mozart - Kyrie Eleison (Requiem)
 G. Verdi - Va Pensiero (Nabucco)
 G. Verdi – Triumphant March (Aida)
 P.I. Tchaikovsky – Flower Waltz (Nutcracker Suite)
 Anastasija – “Before the Rain”
 E. Grieg – The Hall of the Mountain King (Peer Gynt)

table 2 – choice of music pieces

The *purpose* of this listening activity was to establish the components more easily recognized by the students (i.e. perceived) in the process of listening to music. Apart from this primary purpose, we noted the following secondary goals:

for the students:

- to increase motivation and attention in class
- to create self-examination

for the teacher:

- to check whether the students manage to remember specific pieces of music

The listening activity took place at the end of the second semester of the 2003/4 school year in two 8th grade classes in the Elementary School “Krstev Misirkov” – Gevgelija (the students’ ages range from 13-14, their interests and opinions vary, as well as their levels of independence and self-criticism).

table 3.1 1 class – date, students

table 3.2 2 class date , students

The listening took place during the regular music education classes, during the first part of the lesson.

Course of listening

After distributing the test leaflets among the students, the teacher calls for their attention. Then s/he explains the process of work: “you shall hear each composition once for 2 minutes, and you are to fill in the blanks according to the task”. S/he also reminds them that the compositions were listened to during the previous classes. If there are any questions, they are answered and the listening activity follows. The entire activity took place in this manner, only with a different number of compositions.

table 4.1 listening activity 1 –

Turkish March – W.A Mozart

Bolero – M. Ravel

Badinerie (Suite in h minor) – J.S Bach

L. van Beethoven – 5th symphony 2nd movement

table 4.2

B. Smetana – Vltava

5th symphony 1st movement - L. van Beethoven

W.A. Mozart - Kyrie Eleison (Requiem)

G. Verdi - Va Pensiero (Nabucco)

table 4.3

G. Verdi – Triumphant March (Aida)

P.I. Tchaikovsky – Flower Waltz (Nutcracker Suite)

E. Grieg – The Hall of the Mountain King (Peer Gynt)

Anastasija – “Before the Rain”

table 4.3

W.A.Mozart – Turkish March

M. Ravel – Bolero

W.A. Mozart - Kyrie Eleison (Requiem)

G. Verdi – Triumphant March (Aida)

P.I. Tchaikovsky – Flower Waltz (Nutcracker Suite)

B. Smetana – Vltava

E. Grieg – The Hall of the Mountain King (Peer Gynt)

G. Verdi - Va Pensiero (Nabucco)

S. Gajdov – Listen, listen

Anastasija – “Before the Rain”

table 4.4

The first three listening activities included the newest compositions analyzed in class. The fourth listening activity was a type of exam in listening to music which included a larger number of compositions studied through the course of the entire semester and covered once in the previous listening activity.

Results from the listening activities

When processing the correct answers, we came to the following results summarized in relation to each component:

table 5. 1 class listening activity 1

components	title	author	period	ensemble	tempo
...					

According to the results of each listening activity, the components **music ensemble and tempo** had highest number of correct answers. Naturally, the difference between the two class is evident: the second class exhibited much better results, including the recognition and recollection of the titles of the pieces (this class is generally better in terms of overall success, but also in terms of the attention and interest towards the subject of music education). In this class, the components **music ensemble and tempo** noted a larger amount of correct answers in the 1st and 3^d listening (we saw that the answers regarding tempo contain mistakes in defining fast or moderate and slow and moderate tempo, which can be explained through the individual experience of different tempi). The “Turkish March” saw the largest number of correct answers in all parameters, whereas the compositions “Hall of the Mountain King”, “Before the Rain”, “Listen, listen” and “Badiniere” had the lowest number of correct answers.

Conclusion

From these results we can conclude the following:

1. During the process of listening to music, the easiest way of making contact with the music piece for the students is through its external characteristics (music ensemble, tempo), which requires minimal education.
2. Our assumptions about the ability to perceive both component groups of the music piece have been proven. The unsatisfactory results of the students in recognizing the 1st group of components (title, author, period, genre) clearly identify the low level of student music experience and knowledge, as well as the low level of activity and attention in class.
3. This research illustrated the real level of the student's music knowledge of studied works.
4. It is evident that with the existing number of classes in music education in 8th grade, studying large-scale pieces of music is a difficult task. It is even more difficult to create a lasting knowledge for such works.

These results will affect the further realization of the educational process and:

- the choice of specific educational methods
- the increase of the ??? aims in the organization of the classes
- grading and creating questionnaires
- organizing additional classes for the students interested in music (we assume that this form is one of the most efficient because of the larger amount of time needed to re-listen to music and to establish the knowledge of a specific piece of music).