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Music education as extra-curricular activity in Portuguese primary schools

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Abstract

Although music has always been part of the Portuguese primary school curriculum, musical practice has been scarce, because classroom teachers have little training, and only few schools have music specialists. In 2006, the Ministry of Education directive for primary schools offers extra-curricular activities (English, Music and Sports) besides curricular areas (Portuguese, Mathematics, Sciences, Music, Sports, Arts). Its implementation, demanding a strong collaboration among all those involved, led to considerable changes in local schools and communities.

This study has investigated the implementation of the programme, and identified its main problems. We visited primary schools and interviewed promoters of 29 municipalities in different regions, about following questions: organization of music lessons (frequency, duration, resources), profile of music teachers (qualifications, age, experience), opinions about positive and negative aspects, and further suggestions.

The results showed different practices and similar problems across schools. The main difficulties were the shortage of qualified music teachers, inflexible timetables, and little collaboration between classroom and music teachers. In municipalities that already offered music in primary schools, the programme generated instability. The most positive aspect was the overall free provision for music in primary schools. Suggestions for improvement included teachers' training and better working conditions, and better overall organization.

Introduction

Music has had various functions across times and cultures. In modern societies, music plays a very important role in the lives of most children. However, the significance of musical activities out of school often contrasts with the low impact of school music upon children (Gammon, 1996; Ross, 1995). Research suggests that children develop different attitudes towards music in different contexts: music at home is more significant because it fulfils functions that are more valued by them. Thus, musical learning is more likely to flourish outside rather than within the school curriculum, and this divergence deserves greater attention from music educators (Boal-Palheiros and Hargreaves, 2001). Developmental, cultural and educational differences have also been found in children's involvement with music, namely in musical preferences, responses to music, and motivation for learning. Hargreaves and North's (2001) review examines the ways in which national musical traditions, education systems, and school curricula shape musical learning and development, showing the rich diversity of educational and cultural traditions around the world. The specific historical, political, and cultural contexts of each country, as well as aims and objectives of music education, affect the nature of musical learning and teaching.

Educational and musical goals have undergone great changes throughout the twentieth century, together with social, political, and technological changes. Historical views of music education illustrate this point (Pitts, 2000; Choi, 2007); the relative importance of different classroom musical activities (e.g. singing, listening or composing) reflects the social and cultural mood of the times (Pitts, 2000). In the first decades of the twentieth century, music educators (e.g. Dalcroze, Kodály, Orff, Willems) believed in the value of music for children's development and advocated a music education accessible to all children. In the second half of the century modern teaching approaches were developed, motivating children to experiment new sounds (e.g. Paynter, Murray Schafer). New philosophies of music education emphasized its intrinsic value, based on the uniqueness of musical experiences (Reimer, 1970; Swanwick, 1979). However, whereas this belief was common among secondary music teachers, non-specialists in primary education continued to advocate the benefits of music for children's cognitive and social development and for learning other school subjects (e.g. language, mathematics). They still firmly believe in the extrinsic, functional value of music education, which is shared by non-musicians, such as children, families, educators, and politicians, who use music for different purposes in their everyday lives.

Music in Portuguese primary schools

Primary education in Portugal has undergone several changes throughout the twentieth century, according to political, ideological and social changes (the first Republic in 1910, a dictatorship from 1926 onwards, until the democracy in 1974). Despite of changes, and throughout several reforms, music has always been part of the primary school curricula issued by the Ministries of Education, being successively referred to as 'Music and choral singing' (1911), 'Music' (1921), 'Choral singing'

(1928 and 1937), and 'Music education' (1960) (Boal-Palheiros, 1993). During the dictatorial regime that lasted for almost five decades, choral singing was deeply related to patriotism, with a nationalist ideology being transmitted through popular songs and the national anthem (Artiaga, 2001). In the years that followed the 1974 revolution, new curricula and programmes were designed: in primary education, 'Music, Movement and Drama' reflected fashionable ideas rooted in the international movement 'Education through the Arts', and teachers were trained to implement it (Gomes, 1976). During the 1980's major changes occurred both in general and in specialist music education, as well as in higher education, namely: the 1983 reform of music schools and conservatoires; the 1986 Law of the Education System, creating three cycles of basic and compulsory education from years 1 to 9; the 1989 curricula for basic education; and the creation of both first and master degrees in music and music teaching, in universities and polytechnic institutes (Boal-Palheiros, 1993).

Since 1989, in the first cycle (primary school, years 1 to 4) 'Musical Expression and education' was grouped with Physical Education, Drama, and Arts. Its guidelines (DEB, 1990), based on teaching strategies, lacked a consistent framework (Mota, 2001). The 1986 Law, recognizing the insufficient musical training of generalist primary school teachers, proposed that specialist music teachers could help and guide them, and indeed this topic has been extensively debated by educators (Mota, 2003). This innovation, however, did not become a common practice in public primary schools, but rather in some projects developed by private schools, local municipalities, or cultural associations. In the 2001 curriculum, 'Music' is part of Artistic Education, together with Drama and Arts (Ministério da Educação, 2001). The music guidelines are for the first time articulated along the three cycles of basic education. Being strongly influenced by trends of music education in English speaking countries (as was the 1990 programme for the second cycle), it reflects a broader perspective of children's musical development, by emphasising listening, performing, and composing as the main musical activities.

Thus, recent music education policies aim to promote children's musical, cognitive, emotional, and social development. However, despite valuable ideas stated in governments' documents, until the present musical practice has been scarce in most primary schools, not being regularly taught. Classroom teachers have very little instruction and confidence in their coverage of music, and they tend to use music to accompany other subjects and classroom activities (Bresler, 1993; Boal-Palheiros, 1993; Mills, 1991; Mota, 2001). The lack of teachers' music qualifications has also been a major problem in many other countries (e.g. Temmerman, 2006; Thomas, 1997). This may generate a low status of school music, which is recognized at various levels in societies, being perceived by children, families, and communities (Boal-Palheiros, 1993; Gammon, 1996). The recent emphasis upon basic numeracy and literacy skills reminds us of the 'reading, writing, and counting' objective that has prevailed for decades in Portuguese primary education. In the 1960s', children were not assessed in music, arts and physical education, which were regarded as extra-curricular activities (Boal-Palheiros, 1993).

Music in Portuguese primary schools as extra-curricular activity

In 2006, the Ministry of Education issued a new directive for public primary schools, offering a 'full-time school' free of charge: this aims at keeping children in schools for longer periods (seven, instead of five daily hours), thereby promoting their educational success and supporting their families (Ministério da Educação, 2006a). The Programme consists of 10 weekly hours of extra-curricular activities (English, Music, Sports) taught by specialist teachers, which children attend on a voluntary basis, after the 25 curricular hours. Guidelines were published for Music (Vasconcelos, 2006) and the other areas. The Ministry of Education finances the programme, being the funding calculated per pupil and per activity. The promoters (municipalities, general schools, parents', cultural or social associations) may apply to these funds. Either the promoters or their partners (local music or general schools, private entities or others) may be responsible for organizing the activities.

A Commission for Accompanying the Programme-CAP, created and directed by the Ministry of Education, includes representatives of the Education Regional Boards, Municipalities' Association, Parents' Association and teachers' associations of English, Physical Education and Music. The authors, as members of the Portuguese Association for Music Education board, have accompanied the implementation of the Programme, visiting primary schools all over the country and collaborating in a study, the results of which have been publicly reported by the Commission (CAP, 2007). The observation of music lessons, an analysis of data from questionnaires to promoters and music teachers, and numerous debates with colleagues generated a productive reflection (Boal-Palheiros and Encarnação, 2007), which led to further investigation.

The rapid implementation of the Programme throughout the country has had a powerful impact in the Portuguese society, reported by the media. The programme led to considerable changes in local schools and communities, suddenly demanding a strong collaboration among promoting institutions, schools, and generalist and specialist teachers, and a rapid adaptation of children and families. As Pitts argues, educational changes are generally slow, but may become 'aggressively rapid' when government directives 'force the pace' (Pitts, 2000:8). This has been the case, generating some resistance from schools and communities. Furthermore, there was no period for experimenting and evaluating the programme before implementing it. And there was no evaluation of the numerous local sport and art's projects that have been developed in the last two decades in primary schools by non-governmental institutions (e.g. parents', cultural and social associations, private schools, municipalities).

The aims of the ministerial directive have been widely debated by music educators and non-governmental institutions (e.g. the National Council for Education). Some controversial issues can be identified: 1) the 'full-time school' main aim is to adapt schools' timetables to parents' working

schedules. It emphasises the social value of extra-curricular activities, more than their educational value, whereas education should remain school's main purpose; 2) another aim is to promote children's educational success. Assuming that children learn more if they spend more time at school may be especially adequate for economically and socially less favoured families. However, research has also shown the richness of informal musical activities for children's learning; 3) the activities have been named 'enrichment activities', complementing curricular areas that are less practiced. In fact, they are perceived as something between curricular and out of school activities that children usually attend after school.

This ambiguity of the directive has generated some problems. For example, if musical activities intend only to keep children busy, animators are adequate and no music teachers are needed. But being named 'Music education' and taught by specialists, they are likely to make 'Music' in the curriculum rather meaningless. In fact, another Ministry's new directive for primary education defines minimum weekly hours for each curricular area: Portuguese, 8, Mathematics, 7, Sciences, 5 and Artistic Education and others, 5, thus, about one hour for Music (Ministério da Educação, 2006b). Although Music is still a curricular area, it has often been taught by non-specialists: these are mainly concerned with the 'serious' areas (Boal-Palheiros, 1993). Thus, the emphasis on the 'core' curriculum and simultaneously on Music as extra-curricular activity may lead to either of two situations: its integration in the curriculum, taught by specialists (as was foreseen in the 1986 Law) or, more likely, its gradual disappearance from the primary school curriculum, remaining extra-curricular (as was practiced decades ago).

The implementation of Music as extra-curricular activity: an exploratory study

Besides the structural problems of the Programme outlined above, we have identified other problems that stem from its implementation: the lack of 1) the shortage of human resources, i.e. qualified music teachers; 2) the lack of physical resources, i.e. music instruments; 3) the lack of organization, namely of flexible timetables. Whereas the second and the third problems could be solved within a short period, teachers' training is a long-term enterprise. No music education can be effective without well-prepared teachers, and this becomes therefore the main issue. Thus, our exploratory study has investigated the implementation of the Programme, in order to identify its main problems.

Method

Participants

Portugal is administratively divided into municipalities. The promoters of 29 municipalities (10 per cent of its total number) from different sizes and regions in the continent have volunteered to participate. Because of their political and educational autonomy, the regions of Madeira and Azores are not part of the Programme and were therefore not included in the study.

Procedure

A structured interview with closed and open-ended questions was adopted. In order to refine the initial questions, a pilot study was carried out, the data of which were excluded from the analysis. The promoters were interviewed at their municipality, and indeed they were pleased to report their problems and their own suggestions. This interaction generated extra data, which allowed for a better understanding of specific issues. The interview consisted of following questions: 1) promoter and partner institutions; 2) provision for music education; 3) organization of music lessons (frequency and duration; physical, pedagogical and financial resources); 4) profile of music teachers (qualifications, age, and teaching experience); 5) opinions about both positive and negative aspects, and further suggestions.

Analysis

A quantitative analysis of the closed questions was carried out, as well as a categorization of the responses to the open questions. The response categories were revised, and all responses were subsequently coded and assigned to each category. There were between 3 and 5 categories for each response.

Results and discussion

The results showed very different practices and similar problems across municipalities and primary schools throughout the country. The majority of the promoters (90% of the sample) were municipalities. Most partners for music education (53.1%) were local music schools, followed by general schools (18.7%) and others (28.2%). Although the percentage of primary schools offering music is very high (80.2% of its total number), that of children attending music is much lower (56.8%), because either music was not offered to the whole school or some children chose not to attend to music, as extra-curricular activities are not compulsory. In what the organization is concerned, the weekly frequency of each 45 minutes lesson was mainly twice (60.0%) or three times (33.3%). As expected, physical resources for music were almost inexistent, according to a scarce musical practice. None of the primary schools had a music room and most lessons (96.7%) took place in the classroom. However, some schools possessed pedagogical resources, such as audio equipment (32.5%) and music instruments (17.5%). Some had already acquired instruments (32.5%) and books, CD and DVD (26.2%) with the funding received from the Ministry.

The lack of human resources was indeed the main problem, for a number of reasons: 1) there may be a real shortage of qualified music teachers, a situation that also occurred in music education in the second cycle, about two decades ago (Boal-Palheiros, 1993); 2) the implementation of the programme started too shortly after its publication, and the promoters hardly had enough time for selecting the candidates; 3) the attribution of funding being dependent on the provision of all three extra-curricular activities, the promoters desperately tried to find teachers, in order to receive the full

amount. This was not difficult, regarding the considerable number of unemployed teachers; 4) the salary of the teachers is generally rather low and most jobs are unstable and temporary (from October until June), which is not attractive to well-qualified teachers; 5) the timetables for extra-curricular activities are inflexible, most of them taking place after the curricular ones (between 15.30 and 17.30). Most teachers get part-time jobs of about 10 weekly hours and therefore many more teachers are needed.

The Ministry recommended that the selection of music teachers should consider their qualifications, but it also allowed teachers with very little musical training (a wrongly named 'relevant' curriculum). Table 1 shows that a number of teachers possessed professional qualifications in music education (32.2% of the total number), some had musical, but no pedagogical qualifications (12.4%), and others had not completed a music degree (17.6%). The majority of teachers (37.8%) possessed a 'relevant' curriculum only, which turned out to be rather irrelevant for teaching music. This heterogeneous group included music students of teacher education courses and amateur musicians (63.4% of the teachers in this group), non-specialist primary school and kindergarten teachers (24.8%), and others (11.8%): these had teaching degrees in other areas (Visual Arts or English), or they had studied music informally (e.g. singing in choirs or attending to guitar lessons).

Table 1. Profile of the music teachers

Qualifications	N	(%)
Professional qualification in music education	130	(32.2)
Professional music course (school year 12)	50	(12.4)
Secondary music course (school year 8)	71	(17.6)
With few music qualifications	153	(37.8)
	N	(%)
Music student, amateur musician	97	(63.4)
Primary school / Kindergarten teacher	38	(24.8)
Other qualifications	18	(11.8)
Total	404	
Age	N	(%)
Under 20 years	18	(5.2)
21-30 years	230	(66.1)
31-40 years	68	(19.6)
41-50 years	28	(8.0)
Above 51 years	4	(1.1)
Subtotal	348	
Previous teaching experience	N	(%)
In the first cycle of basic education	104	(39.4)
In the 2 nd and third cycles of basic education	77	(29.2)
In specialist music schools	83	(31.4)
Subtotal	264	

Table 1 also shows that the majority of music teachers are rather young, in their twenties (66.1% out of 348) and in their thirties (19.6%), thus, many getting their first job. Most of their previous professional experience (39.4% out of 264) had taken place as generalists in primary schools, although many of them had also taught as music specialists in music schools (31.4%) and in general schools (29.2%).

In order to minimize the lack of qualified music teachers, some promoters used their financial resources for offering short training courses (15 to 25 hours) to their staff, most of them free of charge. The only case of a 105 hours course was the initiative of a partner music school that had already offered music in primary schools for almost two decades, long before this programme was implemented. The director was very pleased with the positive results of this course in their teachers' practice, which obviously reinforces the need for a consistent, long-term training for music teachers.

Conclusion

The last interview questions asked the promoters' opinions about both positive and negative aspects of the implementation of music, and further suggestions. The main difficulty was indeed the shortage of qualified teachers, and the inflexible timetables of extra-curricular activities. They also reported the lack of adequate rooms for music and insufficient financial resources. Other negative aspects were pedagogical ones, such as a low receptivity of classroom teachers to music lessons, which sometimes turned into hostility towards the new music teachers; little articulation between classroom and music teachers, and between curricular and extra-curricular activities; and the optional character of music lessons, which hindered children's musical progress. In some municipalities that already had a tradition of music in primary schools, the new programme has generated some instability.

The positive aspects were more general. The promoters emphasised children's musical and cultural development, and the generalization of free music education to all primary school children. They also considered occupying children and supporting their families as positive aims. Further suggestions for the improvement of the music programme included: stronger coordination between promoters and partner schools, and between classroom and specialist teachers; more resources and flexible schools' timetables; improving the training of music teachers, as well as their working conditions; and developing music in the curriculum.

The future will show if music in primary schools remains a curricular or extra-curricular activity. Despite the problems caused by the structure and the rapid implementation of the directive, the greater autonomy recently attributed to local schools and communities has generated positive effects: the greater responsibility of those involved in the programme favours their adaptation to the new reality and their ability to improve it. Furthermore, the new work opportunities opened by the

programme will hopefully increase music teachers' education and develop the quality of musical practice in primary schools.

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