

The practice of Portuguese traditional music in primary schools

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ABSTRACT

Social and technological changes have made the musics of the world available to most people. Educators agree on the value of traditional music (folk, popular, ethnic, world), in school music education. The guidelines of the music curriculum of basic education in Portugal include learning traditional music, knowing the musical patrimony and developing a national identity.

Our teaching experience suggests that children often reject traditional music in schools, despite existing rich musical traditions in everyday life. The present study has investigated the practice of Portuguese traditional music in primary schools in Portugal, by focusing on the activities carried out by 30 generalist teachers and their pupils, and on the teachers' views on children's attitudes towards traditional music.

The results of the questionnaire carried out with the teachers indicate that Portuguese traditional music is rarely practiced in primary schools and few teachers include it in their lessons. However, a positive result is that children are receptive to learning this musical style, and whenever they have opportunities to learn it, their general motivation for school music does increase.

Keywords

Music education; children; traditional music; primary school; music curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Among other factors, ethno musicological perspectives, and social and technological changes at the end of the twentieth century have contributed to musical pluralism (Cook, 1998). The musics of the world are available to most people (Nettl, 1998), which leads to an increasing awareness of different musical cultures. Music education has been influenced by the availability of music of other cultures (Pitts, 2000), and school curricula have enlarged their repertoire, including diverse styles, such as traditional music. Educators agree on the value of traditional music in school music education. International organizations, such as UNESCO, International Music Council (IMC), International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM) and

ISME help support and preserve 'musical traditions of all cultures' (Frega, 1998).

The Music Curriculum for primary education in Portugal aims to 'value artistic and cultural patrimony, at local, regional and national levels' (DEB, 2001). The Music Programme recommends that Portuguese traditional songs and dances are important for children's musical and social development (DEB, 1990). Castelo-Branco (1985) stated that music education should include an ethno musicological perspective and study Portuguese music in several contexts. Given the significance of the rich Portuguese traditional music in the lives of many people, one could expect that children and teachers would practice and enjoy it. However, in primary schools children's attitudes may be sometimes negative. For many years, singing traditional songs was indeed uninteresting and unpopular in schools. This has perhaps contributed to negative views of both pupils and teachers, who consequently do not tend to value this repertoire.

TRADITIONAL MUSIC

The concept of *traditional music* is a Western concept (Bohman, 2002). Throughout the 20th century, its origins and evolution have been studied by Western composers, ethnomusicologists, anthropologists and researchers. In the literature, traditional music has been designated *folk*, *popular*, *traditional*, *ethnic*, and more recently, also *world music* and *musics of the world* (Nettl, 1985; 1998). Although their meanings may have subtle differences, those various terms usually refer to music of oral tradition, practiced by communities all over the world. In this paper, we will use the term *traditional music*, which is adopted by the ICTM.

Folk music. The term *folklore* originated in the 19th century in Europe to designate the study of popular uses and traditions (Correia, 1984; Ramos, 2003). *Folk music* referred to music created in the pre-industrial era apart from the 'high' urban culture, and shared by the community in rural societies that had not yet been affected by the mass media. During the 20th century, folklore research throughout Europe reflected the awareness that folk culture might disappear because of urban lifestyles. In 1955, the International Folk Music Council defined folk music as 'the

product of a musical tradition which is kept by oral transmission' (Wachsmann, 1980).

Popular music. This term developed in the 19th century in the United States and Europe, indicating music that flourished with the growth of industrialization and was accessible to the populace (Lamb & Hamm, 1980). During the 20th century, *popular music* acquired a wider meaning, embracing different American and European trends. In Portugal, composer Lopes-Graça (1953), who gathered and arranged numerous songs, used the term as identical to *traditional*. He regarded *popular songs* (religious, work, love, dance) as lively and constantly changing. Later, *Portuguese popular music* designated music inspired by and rooted in traditional music, being further elaborated by composers (Correia, 1984).

Traditional music. This term is associated with anonymous music created by the people of rural regions in less industrialized countries, developed within working communities through oral transmission, and learned by ear, without needing notation or academic musical instruction (Nettl, 1985). Traditional songs are ancient, are performed and kept by communities, and tell about human activities, such as religious beliefs or the people's history (Díaz, 1997; Lambea, 1997). Ethnomusicologists advocate that they should be preserved in their primitive shape. In Portugal, traditional songs have been gathered since the early 20th century, in order to avoid their disappearance (Torres, 1998). However, they have undergone changes throughout time, due to incorporation of external influences, notation, or popularization, and musical cultures are nowadays regarded as changing (Nettl, 1992).

PORTUGUESE TRADITIONAL MUSIC

Musical traditions of Portugal are highly diverse, reflecting its contrasting geographical regions and rich cultural history (Castelo-Branco, 1994; Lopes-Graça, 1953). Some traditions are still part of everyday life and some result from a conscious process of preservation. *Philharmonic bands* (ensembles of brass, woodwind and percussion instruments of mainly amateur musicians, which are often a family tradition) perform in religious fests in villages (Ferreira, Mota & Seabra, 2006), playing a relevant role in the communities and in music education (Vasconcelos, 2004). Numerous *folk groups* of instrumentalists, vocalists and dancers perform throughout the country, in a revivalist tradition that began in the 1920's (Castelo-Branco, 1987; Nunes, 2003). During several decades (1926-1974), the dictatorial regime used folk music to promote an image of the country, to itself and the outside world, as 'a predominantly rural community happily immersed in its traditions'. Folk music was negatively associated with entertainment and touristic goods, having a lower status than other musics, and there was even considerable hostility towards *folklore* among musicologists (Castelo-Branco & Branco, 2003). However, since the 1980's folk groups are widespread in Portugal. Recognizing the value

of traditions, musicologists Lopes-Graça and Giacometti documented and revealed an 'ancient' and 'authentic' musical patrimony (Castelo-Branco, 1987:19). In the late 1970's some urban groups gathered traditional songs in rural areas and performed it as they found it, whereas others introduced some changes. These songs were then played by the media, which contributed to 'popularize' them and make them more accessible to the public (Correia & Neves, 1988).

DIFFERENT MUSICAL STYLES IN SCHOOLS

Researchers investigated the inclusion of non-classical musical styles in the curriculum of generalist schools. A positive result was pupils' receptiveness to new practices and their growing motivation towards school music. Investigating the effect of popular music in Australian music education, Dunbar-Hall and Wemyss (2000) concluded that primary school teachers had positive results when using popular music in the classroom, perhaps because they included familiar music to children and facilitated practical work. The introduction of popular music in the Australian programmes contributed to new ways of thinking music education and developing alternative teaching methods.

Green (2002) claimed that although Pop music in the classroom greatly motivates pupils for music education, it has remained inferior in schools. For example, in American and in Scottish schools, teachers' difficulties in accepting Pop and Rock in music education relate to the less value they attribute to these styles and to the lack of specific teaching training and musical resources (Hebert & Campbell, 2000). American teachers, who were against Rock music in the classroom, became quite receptive to its inclusion in the curriculum. They were willing to meet pupils' interests, because this was positive to their motivation and musical learning (Hebert & Campbell, 2000). Scottish teachers, who used classical music in their lessons, also adapted to the demands of the new curriculum, including new musical styles and resources. They later understood that curriculum changes had brought good results: by including Rock music they increased the number of pupils who decided to study music at school (Byrne & Sheridan, 2000).

Dionyssiou (2000) investigated both the effect of Greek traditional music in pupils and how it has been taught in Greek schools. The results showed that when practiced in formal institutions, such as schools, traditional music was significantly altered, becoming more formal and uniform throughout the country. Senanes (1998) described a successful continuous education programme in Argentina, focusing on folk music in the classroom. Folk music integrates the curriculum of generalist schools, but it does not integrate the initial training of teachers in conservatoires, which emphasises classical music. Teachers needed thus to teach music that they had never learned and this was successfully achieved through specific courses.

TRADITIONAL MUSIC IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Our teaching experience suggests that both teachers and pupils do not value Portuguese traditional music in primary schools. Thus, it becomes relevant to understand if and why this is so. The present study investigated the practice of Portuguese traditional music in primary schools, by looking at teachers' approach to this musical style in the classroom, and children's attitudes towards it. We asked following questions:

- 1) Do generalist teachers include Portuguese traditional music in the classroom? Why?/ Why not?
- 2) What are teachers' views on children's attitudes towards this music in school?

Method

Participants

Participants were 30 generalist teachers in primary schools, who volunteered to take part in the study. The second author has collected the data in the village of Rabo de Peixe, a rural and fishermen's village in the archipelago of the Azores, due to her professional commitments and her subsequent interest in the region. People's lifestyle in this village is similar to that of other inland rural areas of the continent: rather poor, with a high level of immigration, and with ancient musical and religious traditions, such as folk groups and philharmonic bands. Traditional music is associated with work activities in the community (Bettencourt, 1984).

Procedure

Teachers responded to a written questionnaire, consisting of following questions: professional qualification (academic degree, teaching experience, musical education); musical practice in the classroom (pedagogical and musical resources; frequency of musical repertoire and activities); practice of Portuguese traditional music in the classroom (frequency, musical versions, and resources); pupils' attitudes towards Portuguese traditional music (familiarity with it, motivation for learning, and interest for traditional music of their region). In order to refine the initial questions, a pilot study was carried out with six teachers, the data of which were excluded from the analysis.

Results and discussion

Although the sample in this study is rather small, not allowing for generalizations, some tendencies could be observed. As there were no significant differences in teaching training and years of experience among the participants, the sample will be analysed as a group.

Table 1. Questionnaire for the teachers

Professional qualification
1. Academic degree
2. Teaching experience (number of years)
3. In your initial teacher training, did you have musical education?
4. Do you think this musical education was sufficient to teach music in primary schools?
Musical practice in the classroom
5. Do you teach music in the classroom? Why/Why not?
6. Do you know the Music Programme and/or the National Curriculum Guidelines for Music?
7. Do you follow these or other documents (e.g. school music books) to guide your teaching practice?
8. Which musical resources are available in your school? - Music room; - Audio/ video/ Tv/computer; - Music instruments: popular/ Orff/ percussion/ piano/ guitar; - Books; - CD/ DVD; - Others
9. How often do you teach following contents and repertoire in your lessons? - Children's songs; - Children's rhymes; - Traditional songs; - Traditional dances; - Songs in other styles; - Classical music; - Music notation; - Musical elements
10. How often do you teach following musical activities? - Performance (singing, playing, dancing); - Listening; - Composing/ creating
Practice of Portuguese traditional music
11. How often do you teach Portuguese traditional music in your lessons?
12. How often do you think Portuguese traditional music is taught in primary schools? Why?
13. Which versions of Portuguese traditional music do you normally use? - Original versions; - Arrangements by folk groups; - Adaptations for children
14. Which resources do you use? - School books; - Technical books; - CD/DVD /Video; - Internet; - Others
15. Were your pupils familiar with this musical style?
16. How do pupils respond to Portuguese traditional music in the classroom?
17. Could you refer to children's interest for Azorean traditional music within Portuguese traditional music?

Professional qualification (1-4)

Academic degree, musical training, teaching experience

All 30 teachers (28 female and 2 male) possessed a professional teaching qualification for primary education. Most of them were relatively young and their teaching experience varied from one to fifteen years. All teachers had music education during their initial training. However, 24 of them thought that this was insufficient to prepare them to teach music to children. This has indeed been a major reason why music is little practiced in primary

schools (Boal-Palheiros & Encarnação, 2008; Figueiredo, 2006).

Musical practice in the classroom (5-10)

Frequency and reasons for teaching music

Some participants (7 out of 30) responded that they teach music 'often', most of them (18) 'sometimes', and a few (5) 'never' do it. The latter justify their response, once again, with their little musical instruction and lack of time, because they value more other subjects. Participants teach music because it is compulsory or because they believe music helps children's development or facilitates teaching other curricular subjects, which is a common reason to include music in primary schools (Mota, 2001).

Pedagogical and musical resources

The following questions were responded by 25 teachers. Although all teachers stated knowing either the Music Programme (DEB, 1990) or the Music Curriculum Guidelines (DEB, 2001), only 9 of them reported following those guidelines. The others did not use any document, which seems to indicate again the less importance given to Music. Similarly, many participants (15) are not familiar with school music books for children, and the others mentioned only three books that they have known during their teacher training.

As far as musical resources are concerned, primary schools did not have music rooms. Audio equipment was available in all cases, followed by TV/ video (13 responses out of 25) and CD/ DVD (10). About one third of the participants (9) mentioned Orff and small percussion instruments, and only a few (3) referred to Portuguese popular instruments. No other instruments were available, and sometimes teachers and pupils built their own. This situation is similar to that reported in previous studies (e.g. Boal-Palheiros & Encarnação, 2008). Most participants claimed that the existing resources were not sufficient for a good musical practice. However, some resources were not even used by them, mainly because they did not know how to use them.

Frequency and type of musical activities and repertoire

Participants were also asked how often they teach the contents and repertoire suggested in the Music Programme for primary schools (DEB, 1990). As expected, the contents most often taught by all teachers were children's songs and rhymes, which are familiar to them and are also practiced by generalists in kindergartens. Portuguese traditional songs and dances were 'sometimes' approached by half of the teachers. Musical elements (e.g. pulse, dynamics), and notation were less often or never taught by the participants, which is not surprising, given their little training in those topics.

The question about musical activities is based on Swanwick's (1979) model for school music education, in which Composition, Audition and Performance are the main activities. Singing was the most often taught activity by all participants, listening to music was the second and

dancing was the third. These results agree with the responses to the previous question, and with the importance given to singing in the Music Programme (DEB, 1990). Playing instruments was taught by half of the participants only, which may relate to the lack of school equipment and the little instrumental instruction of generalist teachers. Composing was the least taught activity, 'never' being approached by 22 participants. This is not surprising, as it agrees with previous studies carried out with music specialists in Portuguese middle schools (Lessa, 1994; Boal-Palheiros, 1998).

Practice of Portuguese traditional music (11-17)

Frequency of teaching; content; resources

Although all 25 participants believe that Portuguese traditional music is important for children's development, only 7 of them 'sometimes' teach this repertoire. This response partly contradicts the previous statement of more than half of the participants, who reported including traditional songs and dances. But it does agree with the results of other studies carried out with generalists, in primary schools (Cunha, 2006) and specialists, in middle schools (Lessa, 1994). Most participants admitted that Portuguese traditional music is hardly practiced in the classroom, justifying this with lack of time and insufficient preparation. However, this repertoire has been increasingly practiced in primary schools, because of the growing number of school folk dance groups.

Only the 7 participants who reported teaching Portuguese traditional music completed the last section of the questionnaire. They taught traditional songs and dances, namely an Azorean dance, very appreciated locally. They used different versions of Portuguese traditional songs: mostly, adaptations for children, followed by arrangements by folk groups, and 'original' versions (gathered by ethnomusicologists). Among the available resources, they used audio-visual ones, mainly CD, DVD and video films, and sometimes, Internet. None of them used school or other music books, which agrees with their previous responses, indicating that teachers do not generally use written resources in primary music education.

Pupils' attitudes towards Portuguese traditional music

All teachers reported that their pupils were familiar with this music before they taught it, especially Azorean music, which they learned in non-school contexts. Rabo de Peixe has a strong tradition of folk groups, and some girls and boys learn local traditional songs and dances. Out of the 7 teachers, 6 believe that pupils prefer traditional music of their own region (Azores) to that of other regions.

All teachers considered that children's attitudes were positive towards Portuguese traditional music in the classroom: pupils initially showed 'some' or 'much' interest, and after the lessons they maintained or increased their interest. Although these results reflect the views of 7 teachers only, they contradict the idea that children respond negatively towards this repertoire. In fact, research has

indicated that pupils increased their motivation when they performed, more than when they composed or listened to music (Winter, 2004).

CONCLUSION

Generalist teachers in this study stated their insufficient preparation as a main reason for not teaching Portuguese traditional music in primary schools. Ethnomusicologists argue that teachers should learn to understand all musics of a culture – art, folk, popular (Nettl, 1992). Although they can not know all musical styles (Lundquist & Seago, 1998), they could improve teaching by attending to courses of continuous education in specific areas (Figueiredo, 2004).

This research was carried out in Rabo de Peixe, a particular context with strong ancient musical traditions, with which some children are involved, while others prefer hip-hop. An issue of cultural identity emerged in this study, as children seem to be influenced by both North American and local cultures. Although this cultural issue was not our main question, it certainly deserves further research and analysis. According to the teachers, pupils' attitudes towards Portuguese traditional music are rather positive. If children are receptive to learn it, this may have relevant implications for primary school music education. Traditional songs possess musical and cultural values (Torres, 1998). They can help children develop musical and vocal skills, acquire their mother tongue, and appreciate local and national patrimony. Performing traditional dances further helps improve motor coordination and develop social skills. Thus, in order to motivate children for Portuguese traditional music, teachers could implement practical activities – singing, playing, dancing. They could also demystify children's sometimes erroneous concept of 'traditional', by presenting interesting musical examples. Pupils, in turn, would likely increase their willingness to learn traditional music and eventually change or improve their views on this musical style.

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