



**SOME WAYS IN WHICH THE SCHOOL CLASSROOM
ENTERS INTO CHANGES MUSICAL MEANINGS**

Miskinova S. Z.

Teacher of Department “Musical Education”

Chirchik State Pedagogical University

ABSTRACT	KEYWORDS
<p>This article considers some ways in which the school classroom enters into, changes and complicates musical meanings, focusing particularly on the role of popular music and how it relates to classical music. I suggest that in bringing popular music into the curriculum, educators have largely ignored the informal learning practices of popular musicians. Popular music has therefore been present as curriculum content, but its presence has only recently begun to affect our teaching strategies. I examine how the adaptation of some informal popular music learning practices for classroom use can positively affect pupils’ musical meanings and experiences. This applies not only to the sphere of popular music, but also to classical music and, by implication, other musics as well. Finally, the notions of musical autonomy, personal autonomy and musical authenticity in relation to musical meaning and informal learning practices within the classroom are discussed.</p>	<p>autonomy, authenticity, classical music, informal learning, music classroom, musical meaning, popular music.</p>

Introduction

The school classroom is a notorious site for the entanglement of musical meanings, values and experiences. Perhaps this is particularly so in relation to pupils’ ‘own’ music – the popular field – as against what they often refer to as ‘old people’s music’ – the classical field. In this article, I will first examine how the classroom itself changes and complicates musical meanings in relation to both popular and classical music

Second, the notion of musical ‘autonomy’, the idea that music’s ‘true’ meaning and value rise above mundane social and political considerations, is rightly discarded nowadays (see, e.g., Clayton, Herbert, & Middleton, 2003; De Nora, 2000, 2003; Elliott, 1995; Goehr, 1992; Leppert & McClary, 1987; Martin, 1995; Middleton, 1990). Music is a part of everyday life, and must be understood as such. However, I will argue that there is a theoretical aspect of musical experience that is, momentarily, virtually free, or autonomous of, the meanings of everyday musical experience. This aspect, which crosses over musical divisions and affiliations, can be reached in the classroom, particularly through informal music learning practices. Current research suggests that through such practices, pupils can re-conceive not only popular, but also classical and, by extension, other musics as well.

Third, popular music has at times been included in schools to pander to pupils' tastes, in the hope that this will lead them on to something more 'worthwhile' (that is, classical music). Such an approach implicitly downgrades the value of popular music in and for itself (Green, 1988; Vulliamy, 1977a, 1977b). I will, however, suggest that such downgrading is not a necessary result of such approaches; popular music can be educationally valued, both for itself and in relation to its potential for leading pupils out into a wider sphere of musical appreciation.

Finally, I will suggest a link between musical autonomy and the personal autonomy of the learner. Through recognizing both musical and personal autonomy, we can perhaps also throw light on some issues concerning musical authenticity, especially the role of authenticity within music education. I will suggest some ways of recognizing autonomy and authenticity in the classroom, with the aim of easing the divide between popular and classical music that has continued to plague music education since the rise of the mass media.

I have written at length elsewhere on the subject of musical meaning, ranging in focus from musical ideology, musical value and issues of social class, to gender and the reproductive effects of music education (Green 1988, 1997; see also 1999, 2005b). Therefore here I will only briefly outline my theoretical position, which I will later apply for the purposes of the present article

Music has meaning insofar as people understand it to be music in the first place: otherwise we would not be able to distinguish music from any other collection of sound and silence. It is helpful to conceive of musical meaning as involving two aspects, which exist in a dialectical relationship. One aspect is what I refer to as 'inherent' meaning: the ways in which the materials that are inherent in music – sounds and silences – are patterned in relation to each other. This could be thought of as musical syntax, or inter- and intra-musical meaning. It is devoid of concepts or content in relation to the world 'outside' the music, but is a purely logical, or theoretical zone contained, or 'embodied' within the musical materials (Meyer, 1956). Whereas inherent musical meanings are made out of the materials of music, they arise from the human capacity to pattern sounds in relation to each other, which develops historically through both informal and formal exposure to music and musical activities.

The other aspect is what I call 'delineated' meaning. This refers to the extra-musical concepts or connotations that music carries, that is, its social, cultural, religious, political or other such associations. These may be conventionally agreed upon, such as the connotations of a national anthem for example; but they can also be unique to an individual, such as associating a particular song with a memorable moment. All music must carry some delineated meaning arising not only from its original context of production, but also from its contexts of distribution and reception. No music can ever be perceived as music in a social vacuum. Even music that is regarded as being autonomous nonetheless carries the notion of its own autonomy as one of its prime delineations

In all musical experience, both the inherent and the delineated aspects of musical meaning must occur, even though listeners may not be aware of them. For we could not notice any inherent musical meanings without simultaneously conceiving of a fundamental delineation: that what we are hearing is a recognized cultural object – a piece of music, an enactment or performance of some kind. Vice versa, we could not conceive of a piece of music unless we were already also ascribing some inherent meanings within it.

We may have positive or negative responses to either inherent or delineated meanings. Positive responses to inherent meanings are likely to occur when we have a high level of familiarity with, and understanding of, the musical syntax. Positive responses to delineations occur when the delineations

correspond, in our view, with issues that we feel good about. Musical ‘celebration’ is experienced when we are positively inclined both ways.

In contrast, negative experiences of inherent meanings arise when we are unfamiliar with the musical style, to the point that we do not understand what is going on, and thus find the musical syntax ‘boring’ (which is how many children say they feel about classical music). Negative responses to delineations occur when we feel that the music is not ours; for example, it belongs to social groups that we cannot identify with (children often say that ‘classical music is for ‘old people’, ‘posh people’ or ‘show-offs’). Musical ‘alienation’ occurs when we feel negative towards both inherent and delineated meanings.

Our responses to inherent and delineated meanings usually correspond, so that if we dislike the one we will probably dislike the other, and vice versa. However, although I have suggested that inherent and delineated meaning must always co-exist, we do not always feel the same way about each of them. A person may be negative towards one aspect of musical meaning, whilst being simultaneously positive towards the other, engendering what I call ‘ambiguity’. It is helpful to distinguish two types of ambiguity. In one type, the experience of inherent meaning is negative, whilst that of delineated meaning is positive. For example, a person might be unfamiliar with the inherent meanings of Mozart because he or she has never played or sung Mozart and listens only rarely to his music. Therefore, he or she is relatively unable to recognize syntactical detail, formal, harmonic or rhythmic change, and hears the music as frilly, dull or superficial. But, at the same time, he or she enjoys the delineations in terms of the operatic plots, the social event of going out to the opera with friends, and so on. In the other type of ambiguity, the experience of inherent meaning is positive, whilst that of delineated meaning is negative. We can think of Mozart opera-goers who are totally familiar with the inherent meanings because of their classical background, having performed Mozart for many years. But they are critical of the operatic plots and dislike going to the opera because they find it ‘stuffy’.

Not only may the quality of the response to one type of meaning contradict that of the other, but something else can occur – one of the most provocative aspects of music – that raises interesting issues for music education: that the response to one aspect of meaning can overpower, influence and even change the other. For example, the experience of delineation can override and influence that of inherent meaning. One late 19th-century Scandinavian music critic was in the habit of writing very positive reviews about a particular composer. Then he discovered that the composer was a woman. He still wrote positive reviews, but his language changed. Instead of saying ‘strident’, ‘virile’ or ‘powerful’, he began to use words like ‘delicate’ and ‘sensitive’. The gender of the composer had entered the delineations of the music for this particular listener. His contemporary assumptions about gender, musical practice and compositional creativity were challenged. This new delineation then affected the way that the critic heard the inherent meanings (Green, 1997). On the other hand – and this is the central question that I now want to address – can the experience of inherent meaning override and influence that of delineation? The notion appears at first to be a logical impossibility, for inherent meaning is devoid of content, and cannot occur on its own. It exists as a theoretical, logical aspect of musical experience, which can only occur if there is also a delineated content. However, I will argue that experience of inherent meaning can indeed change, and challenge, our musical responses and presuppositions concerning delineation. Further, in this theoretical aspect of music’s virtual autonomy from its social contexts, some of the most challenging questions and interesting possibilities arise, particularly for music education.

Most music educators would agree that encouraging young children to experience as many styles and pieces of music as possible would be legitimate and, indeed, highly desirable. As children grow up, and especially for those who go on to study music in Higher Education, we would certainly want to encourage some critical distance so that celebration could give way to a more balanced judgement, allowing considered responses and evaluation of different musics in relation to a variety of criteria. But achieving such criticality is more likely to occur if pupils' ears have already been opened, through positive experiences of a variety of musics in relation to both inherent and delineated meanings; that is, through what I have referred to as musical celebration.

Most music educators would probably also agree that the response of pupils to music in the classroom is sadly unenthusiastic. The most successful and inspiring music teachers tend to be among the first to suggest that music education does not reach all pupils. Many pupils have 'ambiguous' experiences, or worse, 'alienated' experiences resulting from negativity towards the inherent and the delineated meanings of much classroom music. The reasons are not straightforward. First, let us consider delineation in the classroom. In the post-Second World War period, it was unthinkable that popular music, jazz or any other vernacular form, apart from Western folk music, could be brought into a classroom in the UK, North America, Australia or many other countries in which a Western style of music education prevailed. This was partly because the delineations of such music were, and continue to be, associated with issues such as teenage rebellion, sexuality, drugs, and so on. Pupils were educated in Western classical music and folk music, mainly through singing and listening. Thus, they were required to study music with whose delineations they largely had no point of identification.

Second, let us consider inherent meaning in the classroom. Pupils tend to be unfamiliar with the inherent meanings of classical and folk musics. Whilst folk music in some countries (usually those that have been colonized) has a stronger presence in family and social life across the generations, folk music in many other countries, especially ex-colonial powers such as the UK or Japan, has more negative delineations in the social and political climate. For many children, as well as teachers, it has taken on the mantle of museum culture (e.g. Endo, 2004; Green 2002b). Overall, listening to classical and/or folk music is simply not a part of the cultural practices of most school children. Without repeated listening, stylistic familiarity cannot develop, and without some stylistic familiarity, positive experience of inherent meaning is unlikely to occur.

In general, pupils in the post-Second-World War period were likely to be in a negative relationship to both the delineated and the inherent meanings of music in the classroom, and thus, alienated. As a response, educators began introducing music that pupils could be expected to welcome. Popular music and jazz, along with what is unfortunately now known as 'world music', were accepted into the curriculum very slowly from the end of the 1960s until their formal inclusion within a number of countries towards the end of the century.¹ Today there is a great variety of such music in many curricula.

One could therefore suppose that pupils should no longer be particularly negative towards the delineations or the inherent meanings of music in the classroom. However, musical meanings are slippery modes of communication. One cautionary point is that popular music remains a broad category. For children of school age, not only does 'popular music' change every few weeks, but there is evidence that some pupils conceal their 'real' musical tastes when at school in favour of appearing to be a part of the mass-mediated music of the Top 40. This may be particularly so in the case of children from minority cultures.² It is therefore reasonable to suggest that mass music provides a

‘safe’, if not always authentic, cultural space which pupils can inhabit, and behind which they can conceal private cultural identities. But the situation is more complex still. Let us consider delineation. As I have suggested earlier (also Green 2005a, 2005c), social context already forms a part of music’s delineations. Therefore, as soon as any music is brought into a new context of reception, its delineations are apt to change. Indeed, when popular music is introduced into the classroom, its very presence often means that it ceases to be considered as ‘pop music’ by the pupils. Pupils have often told me that their curriculum contains only ‘classical music’; whilst their teacher and the department’s Scheme of Work make it perfectly clear that the curriculum contains a variety of popular, jazz, traditional and world musics. Most teachers would be likely to agree that, as far as pupils are concerned, the Beatles belong to the classical realm. Even teachers who include up-to-date popular music cannot reasonably change their curriculum materials at a speed that reflects pupils’ changing allegiances. So music that carries positive delineations for pupils inside the classroom is hard to come by, and even harder to sustain as part of a curriculum.

Before the project started, several teachers were concerned about issues of musical authenticity in the classroom, particularly in relation to the pupils’ ‘own’ culture of popular music. The lack of authentic popular music instruments would, teachers feared, be problematic. They also felt that the technical difficulty of replicating professionally produced music would be off-putting. Pupils would consider their own products inferior and, therefore, inauthentic. But there was no suggestion that pupils were as concerned about the authenticity of their musical products as adults expected them to be. I wonder whether the problem of authenticity in the classroom is an adult construction, caused by too much focus on the product, and, as Christopher Small (1980) argued so long ago, not enough on the process of music-making.

Perhaps we should aim, not for the authenticity of the musical product, but for the authenticity of the musical learning practice; in other words, not for ‘musical authenticity’ but more for ‘music-learning authenticity’. In the case of popular music, this would involve changing pedagogy so as to approach popular music’s inherent meanings in ways that are more authentic to how the music is actually created. But there has always been a problem of authenticity in the classroom with relation to classical music too. Indeed, no ordinary class of mixed-ability children is likely to be able to play any kind of music in a way that is musically authentic. Again, the learning practices of classical musicians have also been removed, over time, from their original contexts. They too, used to be much more informal, deeply located within musician-family or apprenticeship networks, whereby young learners acquired their skills and knowledge by immersion in an adult community of practice. Perhaps we have gone too far in removing these practices into an ‘inauthentic’ realm of formal educational principles and procedures.

Finally, I want to connect the two concepts, of ‘musical autonomy’, and ‘music-learning authenticity’, to the concept of the ‘personal autonomy’ of the learner. This is because some attention to informal learning practices within music education could offer pupils a level of autonomy from their teachers, that would increase their capacity to carry on their learning independently. Thus, this would encourage further participation in both formal and informal music-making beyond the school. Furthermore, as our findings suggest, practical involvement with musical inherent meanings through aural copying naturally leads to an enhancement in the ability to listen to music. Once ears have been opened, they can hear more. When they hear more, they appreciate and understand more. As I argued earlier, the greater the familiarity, the more positive the experience of music’s inherent meanings, and there is no

better way to gain familiarity than by playing or singing music oneself. Pupils can thus be celebrated by music in the classroom, through positive experiences of both inherent and delineated meanings, accessed via an authentic engagement in relation to musicians' real-world aural practices, and to how children and young people learn music outside formal realms. Beginning with pupils' own, self-selected music, and using learning practices that come relatively naturally to them, pupils can be lead out: educated.

Conclusion

In summary, if we employ informal music learning practices in the classroom, at least some of the time, it may help us to enhance the authenticity of the learning experience, allowing learners to 'get inside' the inherent meanings of music, freed for a moment from specific, and therefore limiting, delineations. Learners can imbue music with their own, alternative, delineations. Music's apparently immutable, fixed and 'true' delineations – about the nature of the music itself, the people who made the music, the people who listen to it, their social, political or religious values, beliefs and actions – are challenged. Precisely by acknowledging music's theoretical aspect of virtual autonomy from social contexts, we can appreciate how readily music becomes filled with social content and significance. By allowing learners the personal autonomy to explore authentically that aspect of musical autonomy, we could open their ears to the possibility of imbuing music with a much wider variety of delineations than children and young people usually realize are available. In so doing we could also make available a new wealth of responses not only to music, but to the social, cultural, political and ideological meanings that music carries.

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