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Developing Children's Artistic Thinking With Images In Music Lessons

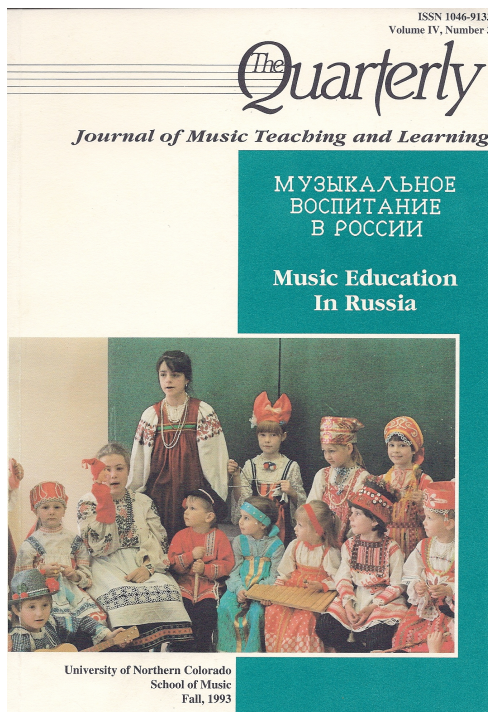
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It is with pleasure that we inaugurate the reprint of the entire seven volumes of The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning. The journal began in 1990 as The Quarterly. In 1992, with volume 3, the name changed to The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning and continued until 1997. The journal contained articles on issues that were timely when they appeared and are now important for their historical relevance. For many authors, it was their first major publication. Visions of Research in Music Education will publish facsimiles of each issue as it originally appeared. Each article will be a separate pdf file. Jason D. Vodicka has accepted my invitation to serve as guest editor for the reprint project and will compose a new editorial to introduce each volume. Chad Keilman is the production manager. I express deepest thanks to Richard Colwell for granting VRME permission to re-publish The Quarterly in online format. He has graciously prepared an introduction to the reprint series.

Developing Children's Artistic Thinking With Images In Music Lessons

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Music lessons in the general education schools of our country are compulsory for all students from the first through the eighth grade (ages 6 to 14). School children have one or two music lessons a week. Typically, the lessons consist of group musical activities such as singing or learning to play instruments. Also included are activities to encourage children's self-expression, such as thinking about music and reflecting music in movement. This system of general music education is based on Kabalevsky's concepts of music pedagogy.

The music lesson must be consistent with the principal goal of education: to promote the child's discovery of life and an understanding of his or her own position in the world. That is, the music lesson should mold the moral "kernel" of the student. In contrast to a narrow view of music behavior, we are more interested in the child as an individual personality searching for and acquiring the meaning of life, striving for beauty, good, and truth—all that elevates human beings.

Therefore, musical activity should not become an end in itself; instead, the content of art should become the child's content. "Spiritual work" must pervade the innermost

part of the child's thoughts and feelings. This is the only way for the teacher and the student to derive personal meaning from art studies; thus art becomes fertile soil for one's spiritual growth and for one's search for the best possible ways to develop self-expression.

The changes brought about by the new school music syllabus in Russia have challenged our foundations of music education. The following are brief statements of earlier theoretical principles used in music classrooms, with comparisons to Kabalevsky's main ideas:

- Music education has moved from an area of separate instruction to emphasizing education more broadly ("educating a human being, not a musician");
- Music, rather than only an instructional matter, has become a source and subject of spiritual intercourse;
- Music listening has been made broader and deeper so that students' music perception becomes the basis of all musical activities. The process of perception is more clearly understood as the spiritual mastering of works of art in relationship with spiritual values;
- The priority of students' accomplishing narrow, specific tasks connected with listening, sight-reading, and choral singing has been replaced with attention to the elements of personal development, cultivation of the interest in life through interest in music, and forming creative artistic thinking in music and about music with music images;
- Music teaching at school, once defined as developing students' knowledge, habits,

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and skills, is increasingly seen now as a lively and complex artistic process of joint teacher-and-pupil activities aimed at one's cognition of the world and oneself;

- Music educators who once chose classroom topics rather randomly and without considering the deeper nature of music now have access to a system of interrelated musical and aesthetic topics that are arranged by complexity and reflect the nature of music and the nature of the child;
- general didactic principles formerly applied to the artistic pedagogic process are now replaced by the principles of a specific pedagogy of art informed by the nature of music as a system of sound images and its association with life and the other arts.

Kabalevsky's concept of music education remains fresh in the pedagogy of the arts and in pedagogy in general. Elaborated in the 1970s, this concept emphasizes the preservation and cultivation of spiritual culture and the recognition of the importance of human values. The new teaching and learning processes stimulated by Kabalevsky's ideas are being used not only in the study of the arts but in other segments of social life as well.

How are these ideals revealed in actual practice in school-music programs throughout the former Soviet Union? One example is a music syllabus for 6-year-old students. Its aim is to give the children rich experiences in color, sound, words, and movement by creating conditions for children to perceive music in a natural way, through images of the musical art, and this curriculum lays the foundation for perceiving image content of music in the upper grades. The syllabus is significant because the repertory of the music lessons includes genuine folk music as the natural expression of art, sacred or church music as an important branch of Russian culture, and ancient and contemporary music by Soviet and foreign composers is included. Games, dramatizations, and improvisations abound in the lessons. Some special methods, derived from pedagogues such as Orff, Kodaly, Jaques-Dalcroze, Vanhove, and Suzuki are used too.

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Developing students' artistic thinking with images in music is accomplished by using a system of questions and assignments that help the teacher bring the content of music, music images, to the students. The dialogue form encourages students to express their interpretations of musical compositions. A question may be raised comparing musical compositions or comparing musical works with works in other art forms. The question should draw the child's attention not to separate means of expressiveness (loudly, softly,

slowly, quickly) but to the child's own inner world of feelings, thoughts, reactions, and impressions that music evokes in the heart. Here are examples of possible questions:

- Do you remember the way this music impressed you at our last session?
- What do you think to be more important in this song—music or lyrics?
- What is more important in a human being—the mind or the heart?
- What did you feel when you were listening to this piece of music?
- Where could this music be played in your life, and with whom would you like to listen to it?
- What do you think were the composers' emotions when the music was composed? What feelings did the composer wish to convey to us?
- What events of your life could be linked with this music?

It is important that teachers not only ask questions of children, but that they hear children's original and unique answers, for there is nothing richer in content than children's utterances. Although children's answers may be contradictory or incomplete sometimes, they are marked with individuality, with a personal attitude. This is what should be heard and appreciated by teachers.

Another teaching technique used to organize musical activity is a "polyphonic process." All the students in the classroom could react to the same music image simultaneously, each one proceeding from an indi-

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vidual vision and emotional response to the sound of the music. Music evokes a moving response in children, which some can express with rhythmic movements of hands or body. Another child might express understanding of music images with drawings emphasizing color or line. The third one begins to accompany the music by improvising on an instrument. Yet another child “does nothing” and simply listens to music most attentively. Actually, this might be the most serious creative activity of all.

The wise teacher's task is not to give an appraisal of who is “better” and who is “worse,” but to display the ability to preserve the diversity of creative manifestations and to encourage such diversity. The desired result of the music lesson is not for each child to feel, hear, or perform music identically. We aim at encouraging multiple pictures of music perception in which each student has an individual and inimitable “voice” that adds something unique and original to the experience of music.


These strategies aim to cultivate students' artistic thinking with images, their aptitude toward aesthetic contemplation and observation, and their ability to view phenomena and processes of the surrounding world in individual ways. All this helps students to feel their own spiritual lives more deeply.

Another important stage is the elaboration of a new didactic that can be called the artistic didactic. It differs from the didactic used in teaching natural and exact sciences because it is based on the regularities of the arts. The new didactic has been influenced by B. Asafiev's theory of intonation in music; the original pedagogical legacy of a group of outstanding music educators that included Neuhaus, Igumnov, Fienberg, Oistrach, and Yampolsky; by K. Stanislavsky's theory of educating and training actors; and by the new concept of teaching arts in school as created by Kabalevsky and B. Nemensky, a prominent Soviet painter. The elaboration of an integrated artistic didactic theory appears

to be a task of the future. At present, Russian music educators can formulate basic principles that determine the goals, tasks, content, and methods of the pedagogical process in arts instruction.

Our view of artistic didactics is based on the belief that the study of all the arts incorporate uniform standards and methods of teaching. We are primarily interested not so much in the differences among literature, music, fine arts, dance, and so on as in their deep affinity with the whole spiritual culture. The art of music, despite its unique specificity, cannot therefore be fruitfully mastered without knowledge of other arts, because it is through the unity of the arts that one recognizes the corresponding integrity and unity of the world, with its diversity of sounds, colors, and movements, and thus comprehends the concept of universal character and regularities of artistic expression and development.

Integrity of approach, association of ideas proceeding from music images and intonation, and improvising music—these are the pedagogical ideas that can shape the process of giving students access to music. Music education based on these principles favors the development of the student's basic capability to think in artistic images. This is particularly important for very young students, who are generally predisposed to learn about the world through various images.

The best way to understand any phenomenon or process is to follow its logical, natural development. Thus a music education curriculum that fosters students' musical and spiritual development while relying on teaching methods that stem from the very nature of music is very promising. 



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