

# **Pedagogical Principles**

## **Introduction**

As Early Childhood Music Education is a pedagogical domain, it is appropriate to consider pedagogical principles which are discussed in educational science and in pedagogical professional discourse. On the one hand, they could be essential for ethical reasons. Moral foundations of living together in society should also shape pedagogy. On the other hand, those principles could also be important for making learning possible and effectively facilitating it. In the recent past, learning research and scientific theory have continuously developed and opened up new perspectives on learning. Learning is no longer seen as something that could and should be completely controlled and organised from the outside. This understanding requires a new orientation for teaching. In the following, therefore, relevant guidelines will be examined.

## **High-Quality Learning Environments**

Learning depends crucially on the environments in which young children live. They should thus be of high quality in terms of opportunities and stimulation for learning (Bransford, Vye & Bateman 2002). The most important environments are certainly their home and their family. From this perspective, it is invaluable for music educators to work with children and their parents or caregivers at the same time. In this way, they can help the adult family members to create a musically inspiring environment and enjoy that themselves. Such an environment is characterised by a lot of singing, dancing, listening, by a wide range of songs and pieces, by sounding materials and instruments, and by space to move. But besides that, it is also of particular importance, which attitude parents have towards the sounds and movements of children and music in general. The more they appreciate that and the more they are interested themselves, the more the child can develop its musical curiosity, aptitudes and achievements. Finally, the concrete activities within the family are also vital elements of the learning environment.

It goes without saying that all this should also be valid for teaching. The classroom should have plenty of materials and instruments as well as space to dance, rest, play, and explore. And the teacher should also approach the children and their caregivers with affection and empathy and with a genuine interest in their development. The attitude of the teacher and the embedding of learning in concrete teaching situations are essential components of the learning environment. Its quality is therefore also influenced by the following perspectives and principles.

## **Situated and Embodied Learning**

Knowledge and skills are often regarded as abstract characteristics of a person. But on closer inspection they cannot be detached from the situations and contexts in which they are acquired (Brown, Collins & Duguid 1989). What students learn at school in particular lessons, far away from everyday life, may not be available in practical situations or might not be transferable to problems of personal life. In the field of music making, it can happen, that passages and movements that have been practiced isolated lots of times, may fail within pieces in rehearsals or concerts. The attitude of playing for the own pleasure or for an audience then differs from the experiences in the lessons.

The assumption, that people basically learn in certain situations for similar situations, calls traditional forms of teaching into question all the more the more remote they are from real life. From this perspective, learning situations should be meaningful in themselves as the cultural activities are, which are the aim of the lessons. It is not only knowledge and skills, that are learned, but also attitudes, norms, values, and social structures, that lead the people in the activities (Lave 2004). So, when the teacher sings, plays and dances with the group, she or he should do it with personal expression and for her or his pleasure, too. Then the specific attitude of making music, of expressing oneself through music can be experienced by the parents and the children.

This is also a bodily experience. Musical expression is transported by body movements like in gestures. Music is embodied in the truest sense of the word. So, when children learn to make music, it is an embodied learning, too. They learn to adopt expression into the body and its movements or to connect physical expression with music. Therefore, children should be given the opportunity to experience music physically. Sensory perception, free exploration and movement are important means of acquiring music in Early Childhood Music Education.

## **Nonlinear and Self-determined Learning**

Sometimes lesson plans look as if the learning itself could also be planned and as if there was a linear relationship between teaching and learning. When young children learn a new skill, they just try and act in different ways. Meanwhile, their body processes the different experiences and eventually finds adaptive solutions within the given context (Chow 2013). In the field of music, the imitation of pitches and rhythms and the acquisition of a song are examples for learning objectives, which might not be reached in a direct way. Maybe the child does not sing, or does not sing properly, for a long time, but at a certain point in time it makes the breakthrough.

In order to support nonlinear individual learning processes in a well-directed way, teachers can refrain from strict plans and practice so-called agile didactics (Arn 2016; Parsons & MacCallum 2019). In this case attention to the learners and to the interactions is essential for teachers in order to be able to react in an appropriate way. Although the teacher does not

know in advance what he or she will do, he or she brings his or her personal presence into each of the reactions. This presence is a strong pedagogical instrument. Its effects can not be foreseen, but in any case, they are profound.

The fact, that learning processes cannot be predicted, is particularly true, when children are given the opportunity to learn in a self-determined way. This can be said when children have the freedom to choose their own learning activities, learning goals and learning pace. Teachers then just offer resources for the learning processes (Blascke 2012). In Early Childhood Music Education, materials and activities can be supplied in a way that allows the children to follow individual needs and approaches. These approaches can then be appropriate for the respective stage of development and the personality of the child, so that individual formation processes can evolve in a beneficial way.

## **Participation and Learner Centeredness**

Participation is undoubtedly an important requirement not only for pedagogical work, but for society as a whole. For example, it is also an important demand of the “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” of the United Nations (United Nations General Assembly 2007). One can distinguish different aspects of participation: First, it should be possible for every child and every parent or caregiver to take part in Early Childhood Music Education lessons. No one should be excluded from this, for example because of financial obstacles or special physical needs.

The second aspect goes beyond the mere presence of children and adults. In this understanding to take part rather means to have a responsible role to play in making the lessons successful. In fact, the attitude and the activities of the parents are crucial in determining, how children can engage with and benefit from what is happening. Therefore, they should be allowed to modify and adapt the suggestions in view of their children. However, every child and every child’s behavior should also play a decisive role in shaping the lessons together with the group. No one should be left out and unnoticed. Nevertheless, one could speak of a Guided Participation here because the children and the parents take part in and observe the activities alongside an experienced teacher. Through this and through the cultural and social values underlying the activities, the participants' actions are given direction. In the process of a Participatory Appropriation they acquire skills and develop personally (Rogoff 1995).

The third aspect goes even further. Participation in this context means the active co-determination of the design of the lessons. These are then not planned and carried out *for* the children and their caregivers but shaped *with* them. It is obvious, that flexibility and agility on the part of the teacher are just as necessary as a consistent taking seriously of the children and the adult participants in the sense of interpersonal contact at equal level.

This principle corresponds to a learner-centered approach, as appropriate for creating a supportive learning environment (Bransford, Vye & Bateman 2002). The focus is then on the participants themselves, their interests, needs, preconditions and individual potentials. In concrete practice, this can mean abandoning the logic of the curriculum and working with the children and parents to find personal approaches or to facilitate these.

## **Appreciation of Diversity and Anti-Bias Approach**

Diversity among humans means to be different from each other. From this perspective there is always diversity when people come together. However, the concept of diversity is referred in particular to cultural backgrounds and gender, respectively it is often associated with the triad of race, class and gender (Knapp 2005). But it can also be used for different attitudes, beliefs and values. All these differences can be seen both as a problem and an opportunity (Ferris, Frink & Galang 1993).

In the first case, emphasis is placed on the challenges of adapting to the diversity of people. For example, teachers sometimes find it difficult to teach pupils with different preconditions at the same time. Here, one danger is, that they focus on the majority of pupils and do not adequately address the others. If things go badly, minorities can even be marginalized by ignoring their potential and needs. The reasons for this may also lie in biases towards certain groups or one of the genders. As teachers tend to unintentionally transfer their own prejudices to the children they teach, it is important to recognize and examine one's own prejudices and biases. Accordingly, the so-called Anti-Bias Approach is concerned with overcoming stereotypes and disadvantages and empowering every child, so that she or he can develop a strong self-confidence and self-esteem (Derman-Sparks & A.B.C. Task Force 2001).

Instead of seeing diversity as a burden, it can on the contrary be appreciated and welcomed. According to the "Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions" of the UNESCO "cultural diversity is a defining characteristic of humanity" creating "a rich and varied world, which increases the range of choices and nurtures human capacities and values" (General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2005, p. 1). The pluralism of perspectives is of crucial importance for the progress of democratic societies. Similarly, a variety of backgrounds and views also enriches the teaching of the arts. Early Childhood Music Education can begin with the stylistically rich experiences that parents, but also even children, frequently bring with them, and can thus introduce them to music in its full variety. Musical traditions from countries, where participants come from, should be integrated into the lessons, thus realizing appreciation. Furthermore, learning strategies of various cultures such as aural learning, imitation and improvisation (Campbell 2003, p. 27) seem to be extremely suitable for Early Childhood Music Education. Music education in particular can possibly contribute to social cohesion and sensitivity in interacting with others (Young 2018, p. 131) as well as to powering cultural understanding and "bridging cultures and communities" (Campbell 2018).

## Literature

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