

IMPROVISATION IN MUSIC ACTIVITIES IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

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A life without purpose, a path without destination, an untuned violin... that's how life would sound like without any improvisation.

Abstract: *This project was done at the Orthodox Highschool Roman Ciorogariu from Oradea with the 4th grade (year 2016-2017). This class is made of 28 pupils, 10 girls and 18 boys (unbalanced number in gender). It came into being as a strong desire to observe the impact of improvisation in music activities in the primary school, on the pupil within this criteria level. The main observation concerning this criteria of pupils (during a lesson of music improvisation of a professor done on this class) was that they are receptive on everything that is new, which demands creativity and imagination. More than that we wanted to investigate if, by bringing up a music improvisation program, children would reach the highest level of improvisation (see Levels of improvisation) in relation to their age level and their musical experience. The passion of the professor and of the primary school teacher, the atmosphere full of warmth and harmony of the class, made me curious and determined me to do this research. I believe it was necessary because it presents another angle of education. Improvisation in musical activities allows self-knowledge, it demands the interaction of human beings to reach the same objective, develops confidence and assertiveness, and develops essential communication abilities.*

Key words: *improvisation, music, activities, primary school, pupil*

Theoretical foundation

Learning improvisation is a continuous process from the beginner till the expert. Kratus described a model of seven consecutive levels for the development of improvisation abilities (Kratus, apud Bauer, 2014):

Level 1. *Exploring*. This could be considered a pre-improvisation level in which the student tries different sounds without a certain structure. Exploring is similar to children's babbling. Since hearing is a necessary ability for the middle and advanced improvisation, the teacher can help the pupils in developing this while he gives enough time and necessary instruments to ease the improvisation as an exploration part.

Level 2. *Improvisation oriented towards the process*. At this level comes genuine improvisation. Pupils have a certain control over the process, coordinating movements through sound patterns created intentionally, patterns that often repeat. Pupils see improvisation as a process (to do) rather than a creation of a musical product at this stage, and their improvisations lack entirely music components that offers coherence for a listener. At this stage the teacher can point out the patterns of improvisation of the pupils and how they can be associated. The teachers can also help the pupils to develop their ability of listening and offer them opportunities to improvise with the help of these, and then absorb the improvisation of others.

Level 3. *Improvisation oriented towards the product*. The pupil knows better the musical structure-tone, meter, rhythm, changes in the harmony and phrases-and begins to use them in improvisation, which gives the listener to take out a great musical meaning of it. During this stage the teacher can broad the children's understanding concerning the structure of the music elements and can help them to develop their musical "ear" and sensibility in harmony variation, tempo and meter.

Level 4. *Fluid improvisation*. The pupil manifest more control and automatism on technical aspects of interpretation (being able to sing without the necessity of being conscious of it) with great fluidity in sounds, meter and tempo. At this stage the teacher should highlight the right technique for the children to do and offers exercises for technical development and will facilitate opportunity of improvisation, among which the best ones will be put in authentic musical contexts and will facilitate opportunities of improvisation that uses a variety of tempos, meters, tones and harmony of chords succession.

Level 5. *Structured improvisation*. The pupil uses musical structures more extended in improvisation and techniques as a development of melody conception, tension and liberation, and connections between musical conception in an improvisation. Improvisations became consistently coherent for the listener, as a clear beginning, a mean and an end. During this study the teachers can propose strategies for the children to use in developing an

improvisation. Pupils can also gain a lot through analysing techniques that others use in improvisation.

Level 6. *Stylistic improvisation*. Pupil is capable to improvise fluently in a particular style, using proper melodic, harmonic and rhythmic procedures. At this level teachers can help children to achieve a repertoire that includes melodies, rhythms, harmonies and pitch specific to the style. Learning these standards, continuing to analyse professional interpretation and having opportunities to interpret with the professionals, concerning the style, it will be a benefit.

Level 7. *Personal improvisation*. The last achievement for a musician is to develop a unique improvised style, that can be acknowledged. The teachers can encourage his pupils to become fluent in a broad range of styles which could become, along the way, a mixture in an innovative stylistic approach.

Methodology

The assumption upon which this experimental demarche was structured is the following:

We assume that the musical improvisation program implementation leads to the improvement of the improvisation level in fourth grade pupils.

The experimental intersession focuses on three goals. These reflect the improvisation level that fourth grade pupils can reach during those five months of program implementation, the benefits that the improvisation has upon the learning process and the way in which the improvisation is contributory to working together as a cooperative group. They are:

O1. To identify the improvisation level of the fourth grade pupils and the evolution of these pupils during the activities;

O2. To emphasize the benefits that improvisation has upon the learning process;

O3. To emphasize the way in which improvisation is contributory to cooperative group working.

We have reached these goals through this program by using the following research methods: the initial interview addressed to the pupils, the observation chart, the opinion survey, the final interview addressed to the pupils and the interview addressed to the teacher.

After administrating the preliminary observations we started implementing the intervention program: a series of eight lessons lead by the researcher. This program emphasizes the concept of musical improvisation used in certain integrated activities for pupils in elementary school (Purton, 1999). The efficient exploitation of the eight activities was due to making the

musical instruments from recyclable materials, which we used with great success in the group working (Bertles, et al., n. y.).

In the first activity we integrated the musical improvisation with the practical abilities (Campbell and Scott-Kassner, 2014). The children made various instruments which they used during this study in completing their tasks (*Como elaborar diez instrumentos*, 2014).

In the second activity poetry was integrated with musical improvisation (Comett, 2010). They had to render musically in logical fragments the poem *Acceleratul (The Fast Train)*.

For integrating the musical improvisation in math we used the musical instruments and different geometrical shapes. In the third activity every shape was represented by an instrument sound within different types of groups: architects, composers and athletes (Popa, 2010).

The fourth activity helps integrating musical improvisation in civics (Limb, 2010). For this, children made a musical entitled *The Feelings* in which they described a school day. At the end of the activity they had to render the feelings they experienced during this class in a *Musical Journal* (Bedore, 2004). For each feeling they had to think and find either an instrumental sound or a vocal sound (*A Turkish Couple Arguing*, 2014).

In activity number five we have integrated musical improvisation with arts (Muntean, 2013). The pupils had to do a drawing with lines and at the end of the activity the whole group had to symbolize it using musical instruments, vocals, body percussion or even motion.

In the sixth activity we have integrated the musical improvisation with narration (Laurian, 2010). Children represented *The Bear's Tale* using the musical instruments that they made and in the end, for reinforcing the notions of half note and quarter note they had learned before, they had to dance, having a he-bear and a she-bear for the half note in each group, as well as cubs for the quarter note.

For the activity number seven, musical improvisation was integrated in geography. Kids had to role-play the meteorologist and present the *Forecast* so that the audience understood how the weather would be in order to be able to adapt to the weather conditions (*How to impress a woman*, 2010).

In activity number eight, musical improvisation was integrated in spelling and pupils had to render musically a text improvising a specific sound for every punctuation mark (Borge and Martin, 2009).

Results

From pupils' perspective 58% consider that they have achieved level 7 of improvisation. See Fig. 1 *Improvisation levels - pupils' view*

In activity number eight the notes percentage was as follows: 100% pupils past level one of improvisation, 93% pupils past level two, 54% past level three and 18% reached level four. See Fig. 2 *Implementation levels – researcher’s view*

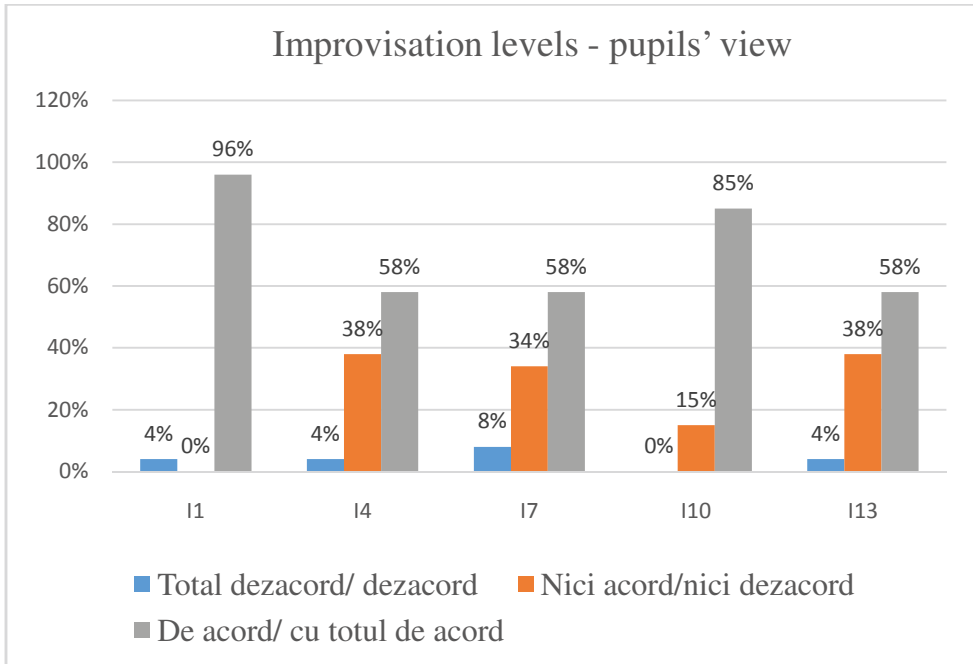


Fig. 1 *Improvisation levels - pupils' view*

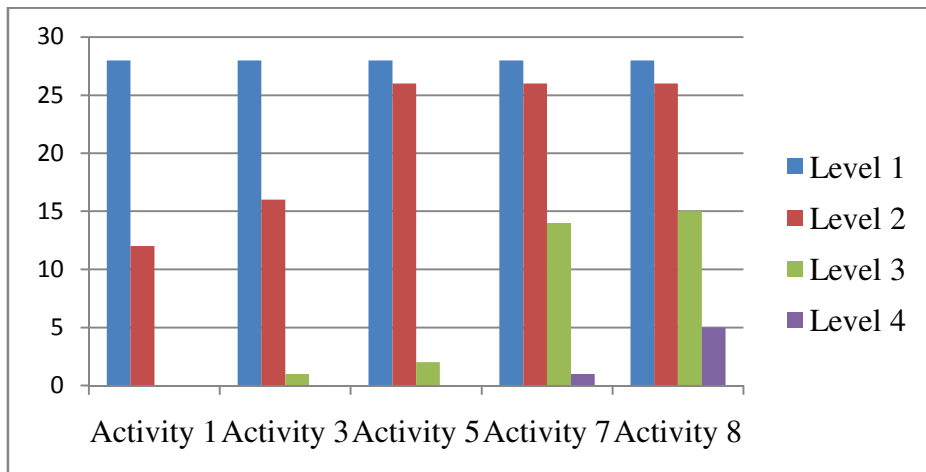


Fig. 2 *Implementation levels – researcher*

Discussions

According to the data analysis resulted from the interview addressed to the teacher, she has the same opinion with the researcher. The majority of the pupils are at levels 3 or 4 of improvisation, while children evaluate themselves at level 7 of improvisation. This gap is due to the difference between the children's mindset and the adults. It is easily noted that children are at this age think that everything is possible and with a little bit of effort you can realize everything you wish for. Nevertheless, adults are not so flexible and their mindset involves more effort in adapting to new, unpredictable situations.

Conclusions

Considering that classrooms are not equipped with musical instruments, in my opinion, this research program was a great benefit for pupils stimulating their appetite for music as well as for real musical instruments. I affirm this because, even after the initial interview addressed to the pupils, one girl that made a guitar out of recyclable materials affirmed that she was so impressed of this instrument that the next instrument she would like to have is a real guitar. Another child during this initial interview said that he loves the worlds' composers very much and he would like to know how to play a real instrument, for instance the violin, because the instrument he made doesn't stand up to his expectations, he would like it to make more sounds and be a real instrument. Not after a long time, during the program, I heard from him as well as from his teacher that he started learning to play a real instrument, the piano. Another child started being tutored for canto singing and at the final interview he sang his first composition. One girl that was very impressed with the making of the musical instruments from recyclable materials told me at the interview that she enjoyed the activity so much that for her brother's birthday party she wants to make more instruments in order for her and her friends to play them in a mini concert.

After the first class where improvisation was implemented with these pupils, at the end of the activity, a child took the teacher's chair and amazed us by starting to create a rhythm with it. The other children joined his rhythm with their musical instruments made out of recyclable materials and thus we witnessed a real concert.

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