

Some Structural Components of Improvisation Process at a Secondary Music School

Introduction

Improvisation takes an important place in the practice of music making. Music schools of Latvia train professional musicians: instrumentalists, vocalists, music theoreticians and choir conductors. Prospective musicians have to be able to improvise, because this is what contemporary situation requires. The principal objective of education is the development of pupil's personality (Valbis, 2005). The society needs creative people with non-standard way of thinking (Blauzde, 2001). The German philosopher and educator, J. Herbart, pointed out that the task of education is to develop human's individuality and prepare him for the life in the society (Herbart, 1887). Latvian educator A. Dauge emphasized that school and family should arouse and develop creative energy (Dauge, 1925). Creative activity is defined as one of the strategic principles for a sustainable development of Latvia, because intellectual and creative potential transforms also into benefits of economy – into innovative and eco-effective economy (Strategy for a sustainable development of Latvia, 2009).

Both psychology and pedagogy consider creative activity the best way for the development and perfection of an all-round personality (Poikāne, 2004). Many psychologists and educators have also recognized the important role of music making for the development of human's intellectual and emotional abilities (Асафьев, 1965; Выготский, 1982; Gardner, 1993; Campbell, 1997; Overy, 2000; Морозова, 2002; Birzkops, 2008 and others). In J. Birzkops' opinion, 21st century will be the century of the development of abilities, and he is also the one who emphasizes the essential role of musical development for the development of personality (Birzkops, 2008). The author argues that creative activity is one of the best means for the development of intellect and underlines the great importance that musical improvisation has in the process of developing a creative personality. Other researchers, too, stress the great role of musical improvisation in this process:

- Improvisation helps to develop a free and creative personality (Башич, 1975);
- Improvisation enhances creative attitude and provides special opportunities for the manifestation of the talent of both a composer and a performer (Torgāns, 1983);
- Musicians who are able to improvise display initiative, and they have a well developed sense of style and good memory (Сапонов, 1982).

The place of improvisation in the artistic practice has been described in works by the above mentioned authors as well as in the works by E. D.Wagner (Wagner, 1869), A. Kreutz (Kreutz, 1952), R. Donington (Donington, 1963), M. Hood (Hood, 1964), V. Apel (Apel, 1967), S. Jeans (Jeans, 1967), M. Сур (Сур, 1971), I. Bril (Бриль, 1976), H. Muhe (Muhe, 1984), J. Tchugunov (Чугунов, 1988), S. Malcev (Мальцева, 1991), J. Spigin (Спигин, 2008).

In music pedagogy, too, the role of improvisation in the educational process has been pointed out. It has been mentioned by C. Orff (Orff, 1950- 54), E. Jacques Dalcroze (Jacques- Dalcroze, 1924), F. Jode (Jode, 1917- 1924), Z. Kodaly (Kodaly, 1937), D. Zarins (Zariņš, 1981), O. Blauzde (Blauzde, 2001), I. Direktorenko (Direktorenko, 2001), J. Birzkops (Birzkops, 2008), R. Petrauskis (Petrauskis, 2010).

Though there are definite achievements in the practical use of improvisation, mainly in musical activity, theoretical basics and methodological techniques of the acquisition of improvisation at secondary music schools remain still to be worked out.

This research is concerned with defining some structural components of improvisation process as well as with their interaction and impact on the process of improvisation.

Research aim: To determine the possible structural components of the didactic model for the acquisition of improvisation at secondary music schools.

Improvisation at intuitive and intellectual levels

To develop a didactic model for the acquisition of improvisation at secondary music schools it is necessary to determine the structural components of the model and their impact on the process of improvisation. For this purpose we consider it important to collect information about the

improvisation process and about possible structural components from those pupils of music secondary school who do improvisation.

Improvisation is possible both at the intuitive and at the intellectual level; however, there might be an intermediate variant too.

Intuition is defined as knowledge obtained without reasoning or learned skills, and which normally is based on the experience obtained by practical or mental activity (Карпенко, 1998). At improvising at intuitive level, knowledge and awareness about improvisation skills are not involved. Intuitive improvisation may be based on the experience gained by practical activity (skills of instrument playing or singing) or without it (spontaneous improvisation of small children).

Intellect is defined as a system characterized by a strategic problem solving or effective individual approach, by the activity of cognition and cognitive style (Карпенко, 1998). To improvise at the intellectual level means to use the respective skills and knowledge consciously. Intellectual improvisation is based on the complex of special knowledge, skills and abilities.

Secondary music school pupils who have studied „Improvisation” at Daugavpils music school were selected for conducting this research. They improvise at the intellectual level rather than at intuitive one because they do it consciously by using special knowledge, skills and abilities. We think that these pupils are able to provide us with more objective and complete information about their feelings while improvising.

Methodology of the research and substantiation of its choice

During the research empirical material was collected and analyzed: information about the structural components of the improvisation process from people who are involved in it – pupils of the secondary music school. Partially structured interview method was applied to collect the needed information.

The interview method was applied in order to obtain new reliable facts, correlations, more detailed answers to questions we were interested in, more detailed information about the research problem and either confirm or reject the research hypothesis. This method enables to assess the situation by asking additional and precise questions and reduce the risk of being misunderstood

(Špona, Čehlova, 2004; Geske, Grīnfelds, 2006). At partially structured interviews we can expect free and informal answers, and they do not encourage the respondents to give ready-made answers (Geske, Grīnfelds, 2006). Such interviews contribute to a better understanding of the sense of the respondent's behaviour and describe various realities (Seidman, 1998). The advantage of such kind of interview is the fact that it produces previously structured information and it is easier to analyze such kind of information (Kristapsone, 2008).

After conducting and recording the interview, the obtained information is processed by applying the content analysis method to reveal the sense of the content and draw conclusions (Geske, Grīnfelds, 2006). In this way new problems and issues can be identified. The division of the text into fragments increases the reliability and internal validity of the analysis (Kropļijs, Raščevska 2004).

The reliability of the research is manifested in such parametres as:

- General results and conclusions of interviews are stable and similar;
- At repeating the research it is possible to obtain similar results;
- The descriptive data of the research – respondents' interviews and their content analysis – ensure highly favourable external validity.

The objectives of the interview:

- To elucidate pupils' attitude to improvisation;
- To determine the place of improvisation (in the opinion of those under the research) in society's life;
- To identify some possible structural components of the didactic model for the acquisition of improvisation.

The basic questions are formulated before the interview. The possibility that new and more precise questions might appear during the interview was also recognized. Each respondent was asked similar basic questions so that the answers could be compared and general conclusions drawn as precisely as possible.

Interview questions to a secondary music school pupils:

1. Is it necessary for a musician to be able to improvise? Offer arguments in support of your opinion.

2. What abilities are needed to be able to improvise?
3. What did you personally gain from improvisation classes?

Research Basis

Five students of Daugavpils secondary music school (four girls and one boy) who have acquired the course on „Improvisation” participated in the research. They are students of the same academic group who have had equivalent theoretical and practical training at their musical classes. This approach contributes to revealing differences in the development of students’ independent professional activity experience which is based on individual peculiarities of personality. Four of the students learn at the choir department and one of them at the string instrument department. The number of respondents is small: the number of secondary music school students who have had a course on „Improvisation” is commonly not great, because it is an elective subject which is taught not at all schools and not studied by all students of secondary music schools. Consequently, the qualitative research methodology is the most adequate for this research. The advantages of the qualitative approach are transparency and interaction with the participants involved in the research (Miles, Huberman, 1994; Kroplijs, Raščevska, 2004).

The participants were selected according to the following criteria:

- Similar age: the age gap smaller than two years, the age of the pupils 18 -19 years.
- Education programme : all are 3rd – year students of Daugavpils secondary music school; four of them follow „Choir conducting” programme, one of them – the programme of „String instruments”.
- Similar situation: all students have learnt „Improvisation” for a year at Daugavpils secondary music school. All of them have attended the same number of lessons. All pupils have the same preliminary knowledge – they all attended Children’s music school.
- Similar motivation: the course on improvisation is an elective course at Daugavpils secondary music school. All the participants have selected this course themselves.
- The researcher himself worked with all students for a year.

During the research students’ opinions concerning the necessary structural components of the improvisation process were analyzed because it is essential to find out the opinions of the participants, the way they „explain the world”, their assessment of events and their subjective

viewpoint (Gudjons, 2007).

The research process and results

The interview was carried out at the end of the course (during the final lesson) in June, 2010. All the participants were personally informed about the research and readily took part in it. The interview was conducted during a usual lesson and in the usual classroom. Interviews were held individually, each participant came at his appointed time and was not informed about the answers of other participants. Each respondent was informed about the interview beforehand. Their anonymity was guaranteed; they were promised that:

- a) the interview would be stopped if they feel uncomfortable;
- b) the undesirable questions would be removed from the recordings;
- c) at their request the final copy of the report would be given to them.

The students had been told that their answers would in no way influence the final assessment of their knowledge in the subject already given to them. Every interview lasted for 6-7 minutes and there was enough time to obtain all the necessary data.

Interview recordings were made by using SONY dictophone, and the students were informed about it. Unfortunately, the quality of recordings was not good enough and therefore it was not always easy to understand and make the recorded interview transcriptions.

The participants of the interview are coded as follows: A1, A2, A3, A4, A5. In order the language problems would not become an obstacle to express their opinions, the interview was conducted in the native tongue of every participant. Participants A1, A2, A3 and A4 were in good spirits and answered the questions without thinking long, therefore the interview could be conducted in a good tempo. Participant A5 was relatively reserved and formulated his opinions with great difficulties, the answers were confused, incoherent and even contradictory. Respondent A5 alternatively used both the Russian (native) and the Latvian language. Despite a relative failure in the interview held with respondent A5, the interview in general provided a lot of interesting information that may be useful in further research.

After the transcription of interviews the obtained material was summarized and clarified in contact analysis, because the speech of the young people was full of reiterations, faltering, redundancy of words, corrections, reformulating, slang and other specific features which needed transformation into a standard speech.

The contact analysis of interviews produced such results:

Respondent A1 considers that improvisation is very important for the musicians; his arguments in support of this opinion are: not always there is sheet music at hand, in the circle of friends it is better to play something from pop music rather than from academic music, and ability to improvise is an advantage and provides the opportunity to be distinguished. Respondent A1 also points out that inability to implement the idea and psychological complexes are factors that pose obstacles to improvisation. However the respondent also stresses that after studying the course the situation has changed: he can improvise, does not pay much attention to errors but continues playing, knowledge in music has become broader, positive changes can be observed in his playing the piano, and the score (this implies that there is progress in other subjects as well). The following components of improvisation are important for Respondent A1: knowledge, skills and abilities, imagination, psychological freedom.

Respondent A2 considers that musicians need improvisation very much and they must be able to play music in different situations. His arguments in favour of this assumption are the fact that improvisation gives the opportunity to be free in self-expression. Respondent A2 marks that by acquiring improvisation he has received theoretical confirmation for his empiric knowledge, has obtained new knowledge and now is able to improvise. The following components of improvisation are important for Respondent A2: skills and abilities, technique, imagination, emotionality, self-confidence, creativity. The student thinks that musical education is not vital for a musician and considers that one of the necessary components of improvisation is abilities (...only those who are able should improvise). However our pedagogical experience rejects this assertion.

Respondent A3 emphasizes that it is essential for the musicians to play the piano well and this is also necessary for him personally. Respondent A3 considers that improvisation is necessary for musicians. He substantiates this by saying that improvisation contributes to the development of a musician, adds to his knowledge, broadens the technical arsenal of piano playing and improves piano playing skills. Respondent A3 thinks that improvisation is musician's self-affirmation and musicians should be able to improvise also in informal situations. The following components of improvisation are considered as important: knowledge, skills, abilities, technique, psychological freedom and also inspiration.

Respondent A4 wants to improvise. Respondent A4 considers that professional musicians need improvisation. He asserts that improvisation contributes to professional activity. He mentions

the following components of improvisation as being important for him: knowledge, skills, abilities, technique, psychological confidence and freedom.

Respondent A5 thinks that improvisation is necessary for the musicians. He supports his opinion by saying that improvisation is necessary for professional activity and it is a good means of self-manifestation. Respondent A5 states that while improvising he feels uncertain and experiences fear. Respondent A5 found the following components of improvisation important: knowledge, skills, abilities, psychological freedom.

Conclusions

1. The interpretation of interviews proves the important role that improvisation plays in the professional activity of prospective musicians. All respondents stress the necessity to learn improvisation for both professional activity and for every-day activities. The interpretation of interviews elucidates and proves the role of the components of improvisation for the improvisation acquisition process.
2. By applying analytical induction to the interpretation of interviews the research has identified the following possible structural components for the acquisition of improvisation:
 - knowledge,
 - skills,
 - abilities,
 - technique of instrument playing,
 - Psychological confidence,
 - inspiration,
 - emotionality,
 - creativity.

This research shows the direction which further research might take.

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