Competence-oriented music lessons to improve teaching

What does the learning culture of music lessons in Switzerland look like? New research at the University of Zurich aims to investigate how lessons could be improved

Little is known about tasks as competence-based learning opportunities in music lessons. Tasks are widely discussed in public under the aspect of audits and tests, due to the introduction of educational standards and competencies. In connection with the competence-oriented teaching, especially learning tasks began to capture the attention of empirical teaching research and the improvement of teaching. Learning tasks are seen as the carrier of learning opportunities and processes. As a result of important international comparative large scale studies like PISA and TIMSS, the discussion about relevant criteria of good tasks, as well as the analysis and construction of domain-specific learning tasks increased in recent years. But these newer publications focused on learning tasks and the subject of a didactic research with a musical-didactic perspective is still missing.

Functions of learning tasks
Tasks have a ubiquitous presence in class and play a central role in the engagement of the students with the learning subject matter, learning objectives and cross-subject learning objectives. Depending on different phases of the lessons, they fulfil diverse didactic functions and appear as tasks for elaboration as well as for exercise, application or test. The design of learning tasks has a significant impact on the quality and complexity of learning process by

influencing the choice of the learning paths and strategies, on the motivation of the students, as well as on the depth of the resulting understanding and the acquired kind of knowledge. In summary, learning tasks have an effect on what and how something can be learnt. Their effectiveness depends essentially on the quality of the task design.

Competence orientation and social-constructivist approach to learning and teaching
Deep understanding as a basis for the use of knowledge and skills is an outcome expectation of the competence-oriented teaching and learning. Since TIMSS empirical teaching research shows that deep understanding of the subject matter results when characteristics of teaching quality like classroom management, supportive learning environment and cognitive activation are connected with an orientation for the depths structure of domain-specific concepts. This includes concept-specific elements of understanding, the quality of domain-specific representations and structural clarity of conceptual structures (Reusser & Pauli 2013). From a social constructivist viewpoint learning and teaching is characterised by the orientation toward domain-specific relevant knowledge and meaningful representations, as well as domain-specific ways to acquire knowledge and domain-specific ways to think and act. Therefore the development of compe-

tencies is made differently in diverse domains. For example, the concept of speed includes not the same learning and understanding in physics as in music. In summary, learning tasks have to represent the relevant core ideas, concepts and connections of a specific domain if they are aimed to foster students' deep conceptual understanding. Also, subject-didactic research on learning tasks requires as mandatory an analysis of the learning subject matter and the domain-specific core ideas.

Music education research in German- speaking countries
Music didactic in Switzerland is developed in practice and traditionally not seen as a scientific discipline. Music education research only gradually emerged since the formation of the Universities of Teacher Education and Universities of the Arts of the last decade. There are currently very few existing empirical studies in music education. Little is known about the common music teaching practice, the quality of music teaching in public schools, as well as the ideas of teachers about good practice of music teaching. The fact that about 20% of music lessons in primary schools are performed by teachers who are not qualified for music teaching (Huber & Camp 2013) is striking.

Also in further German- speaking countries with a widespread music education research, there is a lack of

empirically validated local theories on musical education and musical learning processes or a discussion about relevant criteria of the application, the function and the quality of learning tasks in music teaching (Lehmann-Wermser 2008). It exists in a diversity of didactic concepts, but still no consensus about an aesthetic and expressive musical understanding or about domain-specific core ideas and their underlying representations which have to be acquired in music lessons.

The necessity of a musical-didactic research on learning tasks
The development of suitable teaching designs, learning tasks and learning material is seen as a main duty of teachers. This is due to the shift from a learning input to a learning outcome perspective in educational governance, as well as the implementation of a new competence-based curriculum over the next few years. Also, musical-didactic research must generate basic empirical knowledge and new evidence-based didactical approaches about how teachers can plan and implement their music lessons in public schools according to a competence-based curriculum.

A planned research project wants to make a contribution in order to close this research gap. The primary objective of this video-based study is to investigate what the learning culture is looking like in music lessons at primary schools in Switzerland, but also to get first indications about how music teaching could be improved by the use of an educational reconstruction, a framework for the design and evaluation of theory-based content specific interventions. By qualitative content analysis of learning tasks, learning material and planning documents, by stimulated recall interviews with teachers and metaphor analysis of students' loud thinking during task solving, we hope to find answers to the following questions: Which tasks create teachers as competence-based learning opportunities in their music lessons? Which ideas of relevant knowledge, elements of understanding, meaningful representations and students' points of view, lead teachers in creating learning tasks and supporting the learning process of students? Which pre-understanding and thinking patterns lead students in solving learning tasks?

The generated data and answers of this first step should result in a follow up intervention study and the creation of teaching-learning settings for music education based on theoretical and empirical ideas of competence orientated good practice.

References

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