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CLASSROOM RECORDER: PLAYFUL TEACHING FROM THE TEACHER'S AND PUPIL'S POINT OF VIEW

Abstract

This practice-based research took place in an Introductory Recorder class, and this paper examines the nature of playful teaching and learning. This pilot study took place with two groups during the Winter 2014/2015: with a group of 7-10 year old primary school students (pupils) (N=45) in a small village school nearby the capital Tallinn, Estonia, and with pre-graduated music teachers (MT) (N=13) from Tallinn University (TLU) after Introductory Classroom Recorder class. The instructor-teacher of the both groups was the same person. In addition two years later (in autumn 2016) the semi-structured focus group interview for the same respondents (now 4th graders, 10-11 year old students N=12) was provided. According to the results the notions about playful teaching of the pre-graduated music teachers (MT) and students did not overlap these were different, even contradicting. For the children all the activities seemed positively playful, even traditional methods like “learning piece from notation”. This study proves that the learning process itself is playful for the child as it includes the characteristics of playfulness like “curiosity” and “fun”. The music teachers overestimated the playfulness of creative activities, especially implementing of songs. Although the interview showed that the implementation and creation of own music seemed to be more playful and interesting activities for older students.

Key words: classroom recorder, playful teaching, pre-graduate music teachers, playfulness.

Introduction

Play, playfulness and creativity

Play is the most natural way of learning for the child. This view proposed by Friedrich Froebel has underpinned much pre- and primary school education since the 1840's. The educator's mission is to create playful learning/teaching situations in the classroom. Several theorists (Swanwick 1991; 1999; Vygotsky

2004; Päts 2010) have stressed that the most effective teaching takes place when teaching emanates from the child's development and personality.

According to some philosophers, playfulness is one of the indicators of art. Hallam, Cross and Thaut (2009: 404) stress that the concept of *play* is central to Gadamer's explanation of the ontology of art and aesthetic experience and is central in Huizinga's explanation of essential nature of Man (*Homo Ludens*).

On the other hand, playfulness is also closely linked to creativity (Barnett 2007; Graham, Sawyers et al 2009; Liebermann 1977) and plays a central role in healthy development and well-being. Playful, playfulness – these are activities full of fun, curiosity and high spirits, humorous – a festive merry feeling.

One of the earliest researchers of play and playfulness Liebermann (1977) speculates that playfulness becomes a part of an individual's personality and is an essential ingredient of creative thought. In this case all children should be creative in arts as playfulness is ontogenetic to the child and the teacher's task is to implement a game that coincides with the learning outcomes.

Drawing a parallel with computer games Whitton & Whitton stress that creating a game where the learning outcomes are closely related to gaming outcomes for a specific curriculum, will require a profound development expertise ("coding skills", visual design skills, game design skills) and will take time to develop (Whitton, N., Whitton, P. 2011: 14). In considering the requirements of practical activities comparisons to the playful teaching-game are similar – playful teaching should be visually designed (attractive), timely chronologised (game designed), and some tasks could be coded (hidden or candid teaching).

However, what might seem a playful approach for the teacher may not be perceived as playful by the child. Does the idea of playful teaching and learning from the teacher's and the child's points of view coincide/overlap? What kind of activities are the most playful for the child and for the teacher?

Playful learning

According to Lev Vygotsky (2004) learning emerges in the process of interaction and in a specific context with emotional, organisational, physical and cultural characteristics (Novak 1998). For learning, according to Vygotsky (2004), – the child should be in the zone of proximal development (ZPD), where she/he is able to learn independently, collaborating with experienced adults. This is seen as the main aspect of learning (Barrett 2005; Cook, J. L., Cook, C. 2005; Rogoff 2003).

Learning occurs by "doing" while interacting with classmates. In the school situation children normally are approximately in the similar *development zone* (ZPD). They are mostly in the action sphere of an experienced teacher, whose visually and timely designed (sometimes coded as a play) activity gives the possibility for autonomous learning and interaction between both adults and classmates.

Playful learning may be targeted at cultivate an open, receptive and curious frame of mind (Rodriguez 2006). Therefore the actions of playing in recorder class – imitating sounds from environment, implementing sounds etc. enhance children's receptivity of the aspects of the immediate acoustical surroundings.

The Canadian researcher of interactive audio and video game sounds; Karen Collins – gives an interpretation of what sound means in the gameplay context. Focusing on sound and music, she stresses that these are parts of a “greater participatory culture that goes beyond the play situation itself” (Jørgensen 2013).

According to the theory of interactive sound based on neuropsychology and sound cognition research Collins shows how interactive sounds merge to actions. She stresses the embodied nature of sound, meaning that sound is always connected to a source, as brains have the tendency to merge sounds with physical or visual stimuli (Collins 2013).

Transferring this viewpoint to the recorder class play situation, specifically to the interaction between learner-teacher or learner-learner, the educator should know the importance of visual and physical aspects of the play and that the visual and auditory channels work as equals in supporting playful communication.

Therefore, the problem of playful learning/teaching can be investigated and analyzed from different points of view and results analyzed from different theoretical base.

Playful teaching and pedagogical aims in National Curriculum

From pedagogical point of view could be handled playful teaching methods or joyful atmosphere in teaching-learning situation but also achieving learning outcomes. Hereby are listed a few most important outcomes (some of these are overlapping themes):

1. knowledge, music reading skills and how to put these into practice
2. gaining technical skills of playing
3. learning social skills, working together, co-operation skills
4. gaining analytical skills for listening to music and to each other
5. promoting creativity

This study was focused mostly to the playful atmosphere and methods also considering the learning outcomes.

Another theoretical base for interpretation of the results is cognitive psychology and neurology (the situation of sound-play) what promise some avenues for player responses to sound. Also the personal traits of the teacher, such as: humorous, openness for example have an enormous impact on the playfulness in the classroom situation.

Aim, method, sample and procedure

This quantitative/qualitative practice-based research based in the recorder class. This paper examines the notions and nature of playful teaching. What I mean with playful teaching is a creation of playful learning situations. In this sense playful teaching means as well playful learning.

The aim was to find out if the notions of primary school children' about playful teaching/learning coincide with those of pre-graduated music teachers' (MT) notions about playfulness? All activities were planned to achieve the aforementioned learning outcomes.

This pilot study took place during the Winter 2014/15. The sample consisted of 7-10 year-old primary school students from Grades 1-4 (N=45, 21 boys, 24 girls) of a small village school near Tallinn, Estonia. In autumn 2016 additional semi-structured group interview was held for 10-11 years old 4th graders (N=12) in order to know their attitudes towards different activities now, after owning basic recorder skills.

Also pre-graduated music teachers (MT) (N=13, 9 females, 4 males) from Tallinn University were asked after Introductory Classroom Recorder class (recorder group-teaching methods course) to complete the same questionnaire with 25 options of classroom activities. The criterion for choosing these options was usage of the methods:

1. that were most used activities of the recorder teacher and
2. that were used with both two test-groups (in primary school recorder class and in the university course).

In this facility, half of the teachers (N=6, all females) had previous experience in teaching classroom recorder as music teachers. The MT were asked additionally to formulate three traditional ways of teaching (qualitative research).

Author of this article analyses the feedback of the two groups (children and pre-graduated music teachers) to the playfulness of the approaches, mainly organization of the activities.

The ages of the respondents ranged from 19-42 (M=27).

The data was analyzed by means of MS Excel descriptive statistics. Open questions were analyzed with coding and grouping the answers.

Instrument

The test consisted of 25 options of different teaching methods used by recorder-teacher. All these listed activities (options) were used by the same recorder-teacher in the classroom teaching in primary school and in the university course. The student-MT also completed additional questions on demographic variables (age, gender, teaching experience). Both groups: pupils and MT, were asked to rate on a 5-point scale (1= not playful, 5=most playful) the playfulness of the classroom

teaching activities (25 options) that they have experienced during the course of recorder learning.

Two types of activities

Traditional methods („less playful activities“ on the opinion of the researcher) on the list were mixed with non-traditional/innovative („more playful“) approaches and games (in some cases the meaning of traditional and non-traditional overlapped). The options can be grouped (by the author of this article) as traditional and non traditional activities as listed below:

List of the traditional activities with explanations

- learning piece/song from notation – notation with rhythm on the stave
- reading note names from stave – reading note names in voice and synchronically fingering instrument on chin position;
- learning by ear – imitation method, when teacher plays the phrase and pupils repeat attacca the same phrase;
- learning piece from notation – notation on the board or on the screen in the classroom
- reading pulse before starting;
- listening to the accompaniment (follow piano phrasing) – synchronisation of playing with teachers accompaniment when she plays *ritenuto* or *tenuto* (like „catching a mouse“ play) or playing *piano/forte*;
- remembering the first note(s) of the phrase when playing a piece – at the beginning of learning a piece, after every phrase or musical sentence is played the teacher asks for the first note of phrase/sentence. Later, during the playing of piece teacher calls the first note of the next phrase;
- playing/learning from sequence of the notes (see figure 1) – learning a piece/song from stave on the board, teacher points to the notes on the sequence according to the order of the music

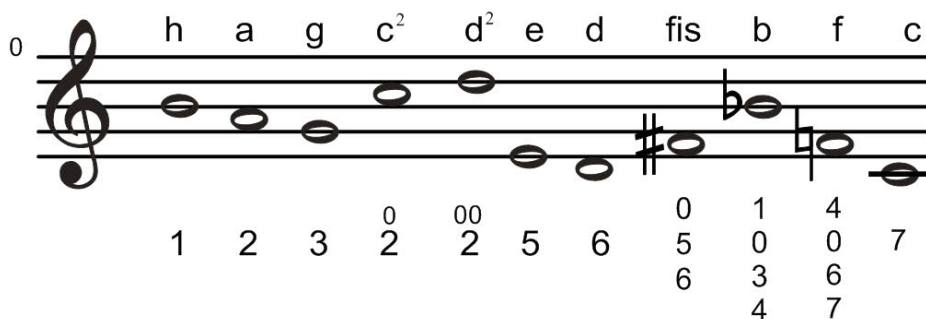


Figure 1. Sequence of notes according to the learning of fingering

List of the non-traditional activities with explanations

- finger-play song: transfer of fingering to the recorder in order to learn notes c^1, d^2
- simultaneous activities with recorder – playing together with singing or playing together with dancing; singing a song about “grabbling recorder” with closed eyes; soundless play with fingers instrument on chin and singing at the same time;
- metaphors/ funny-names for tasks – like: finger-exercise “eating parents’ nerves”; “summer and autumn wind”, to explain playing piano or forte; laughing A-H, a fingerplay for dexterousness in order to learn rapid covering of the finger holes, change of notes a^1-h^1 ;
- non-traditional, different ways of playing – closed eyes, instrument on chin, with moving;
- implementations – imitation of different sounds from surroundings, song about the autumn maple leaf; continuing the melody/note from previous note played by other student; creating own song/melody;
- visualisations – blowing a paper to illustrate forte/piano; “summer and autumn wind” as hard-soft blowing with right articulation „du“; imitating pulse with swaying; gesture of alternating teacher/class playing; playing soundlessly with fingers instrument on chin;
- non-traditional score – dash-notes, dingbats like:     – should be read and played with the pulse as „hand, hand, scissors, hand“ or clap the rhythm TA TA TI-TI TA ;
- cooperation – listening to classmates playing the piece; listening to the phrasing and accompaniment (incl. ritenutos); continuing the melody with own note, this is a round-game where every child has one note and she/he has to play this note in the order. He/she has to listen carefully to the previous child in order to play in time and to follow the pulse. The result of this play is a group composition called “our class hymns”.

The practicing MT could assess the activities also from the teaching point of view.

Students completed questions in the classroom. MT completed the questionnaire-online.

The semi-structured interview consists of questions: what were the most playful teaching situations for you during your recorder studies; why these were playful; what makes them playful? The questions were first answered in writing and later orally discussed during a music lesson. Recorded discussion and written answers were qualitatively analysed.

Results and discussions

Children and teachers about playful learning-teaching

The notions about playfulness from the MTs and the students were different. As shown in figure 2, mean-level comparisons revealed that there were no overlapping ratings in any evaluation section/option between groups, although some indicators did not have a statistically significant difference (figure 2: listening piano accompaniment/phrasing; gesture of alternative teacher/class playing; building melody; learning by ear; imitating pulse with swaying).

For the children all the activities seemed positively playful, even the traditional method “learning piece from notation”. The main difference between ratings of options was small and all listed activities showed positive estimation. That is why we can speculate that for the children any kind of learning is playful when it consists of basic elements of playfulness like curiosity, fun, positive feelings, freedom etc. (Rodriguez 2006). This could also explain the relatively lower ratings to “playing from dash-notes and dingbats” which is a method at the very beginning and which seemed to be losing actuality/attractiveness after the elementary skills of learning notes from the stave were owned by the children.

The student’s notions about playfulness were mainly connected with auditive aspects of learning. Listening as a multidimensional activity consisting of cooperation both with classmates and teacher, needs attention, memory, coordination, exactness and other facilities. However, it does not mean that the other aspects are less important. This could also be influenced by intrinsic motivation of the pupils (Malone, Lepper 1987). Hereby the viewpoint of aforementioned K. Collins’ (2013) should be stressed that the sound is always embodied and “visual and auditory channels work as equals in supporting playful communication”.

Figure 2 shows that the 25 ratings could be classified into five broader groups of characteristics: what makes learning playful for children and what they enjoyed more.

1. Listening the group (listening accompaniment, learning by ear, continuing melody with own note); listening in music activities is inseparable from cooperation and interaction.
2. cooperation with fellow-pupils (working in pairs, continuing melody with own note);
3. changeable simultaneous activities with instrument (playing with singing or dancing, “finger-plays”);
4. implementing different sounds with the instrument;
5. visualization of learning (playing from dingbats/dash-notes, “summer and autumn wind”, blowing a paper to illustrate f/p, reading pulse, playing from sequence, play with fingers in chin position).

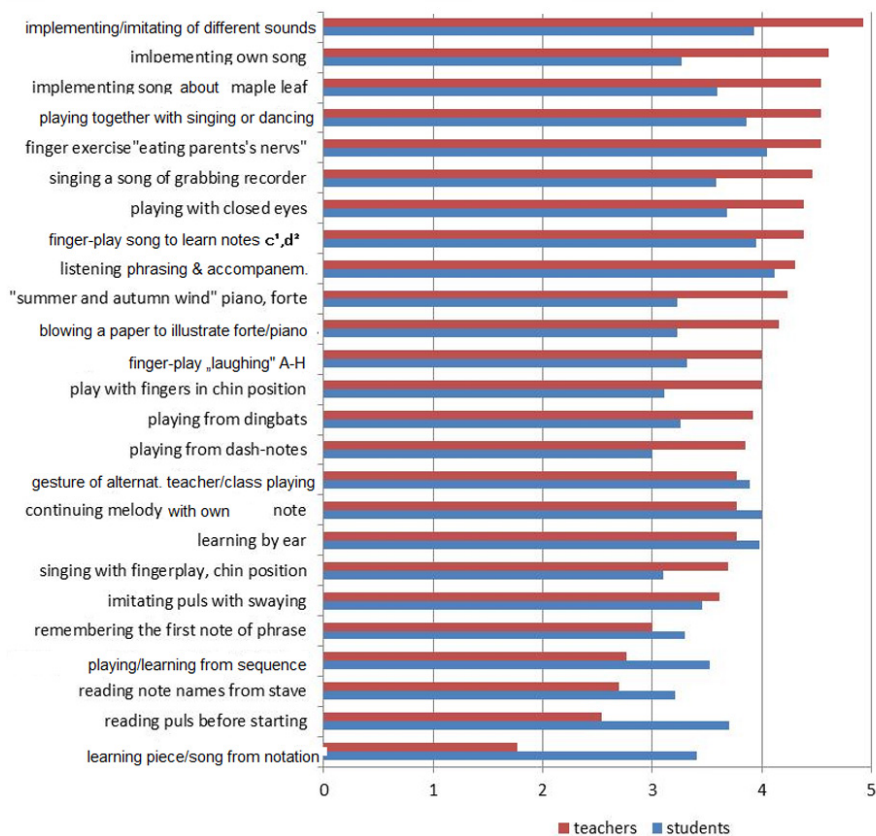


Figure 2. Teachers' and children' notions about playful teaching activities (rating on the scale 1-5)

Different from Vygotsky's viewpoint this study showed that communication with classmates during learning process was seen more playful than communication with experienced adult. Consequently the practical suggestion for the teachers is: learning tasks through communication (within the age group) are more playful for the pupils even in the action sphere of experienced teacher.

Children's relatively low estimation compare with MTs' to the activity "playing with fingers in chin position" could be the result of the fact that the teacher in the school has exploited this method too often.

Another activity finger-exercise "eating parents nerves" what was on the top of the rating from both groups could be seen according to Whitton, Whitton (2011; Ang et al 2011) requirements to the playful teaching-game as a good example of coded task (hidden or candid teaching).

Analyze of MT's notions faced me with the problem of finding a common denominator for the grouping the results of both groups. It seems impossible to

find out what the common notions about playful learning/teaching are. Aforementioned children's five rating-groups did not suit to the teachers' notions. Then I realized that the MT's ratings were given to the activities considering also learning outcomes, children ratings were given to the playful nature of activities. Hence, previous experience of learning some instruments and owning pedagogical instructions had influenced the answers of the MTs towards pedagogical objectives and pedagogical outcomes.

Stereotypes concerning the playfulness of the activities and teaching models

The MTs' ratings show clear stereotyped division to the traditional and non-traditional activities however character of some activities partly overlapped (see explanation above).

The MTs' notions about traditional-academic methods in recorder teaching were additionally examined asking them to specify three traditional teaching methods in recorder. There was also a place for comments. The answers overlapped with results in Figure 1. Learning music reading, 2. learning music from notation, 3. reading note names from stave 4. learning rhythm names and reading rhythm from stave – were most cited activities. Such a result is typical to the traditional model/way of teaching:

knowledge → notation → skills → creation/improvisation

Figure 2 shows that the teacher's notions about playfulness were first and foremost connected with creativity and creative activities (see first three options). In the current situation in Estonia where the concepts of "creativity", "to be creative" and "composing" are highlighted in the subject Music in the State Curriculum, such a result could be a modern trend and less the result of incompetence of respondents as most of them had an experience in teaching.

In the second place there were the changeable simultaneous activities with recorder playing and visualizations. These are mostly options classified as non-traditional teaching-ways.

Less valued as playful were traditional-academic teaching-activities (see last five options).

From the MTs point of view (keywords are creativity and freedom) playful model of classroom recorder learning/teaching could be as follows:

improvisation/ implementation → skills & knowledge owned through play → notation

The student model of learning could be as follows:

skills owned through play → improvisation/ implementation → knowledge

This study shows also that playful teaching means freedom (pupils independency in playing and in solving tasks) and less intervention from the teachers' side to the learning process. The semi-structured interview proved this outcome most clearly. Following examples are collateral evidence for this: „I could create myself what I want, without teachers help“ (R8); „The class own song implementation was most interesting, we should do this more“ (R4)

The limitation of this pilot study is a small number of the respondents that does not allow to make a wider generalisation but to give some guidelines for playful classroom recorder teaching.

Conclusion

The results showed that there were no overlapping ratings to the playful activities in recorder class between children and MT although some indicators did not have a statistically significant difference (could be estimated as concurrent). According to the results the notions about playfulness from the MT and the students' side were different, even contradicting. This is because the teachers emanate from learning outcomes and earlier experiences in music learning/teaching, children as “tabula rasa” emanate from playful nature of activities. In consequence, notions about playful learning do not identify with playful teaching.

For the students all the activities seemed positively playful, even traditional methods like “learning piece from notation”, “reading note names from stave”. Playful learning for the children is foremost activities linked to active listening – listening to others in order to go on with melody, learning by ear, listening accompaniment. Listening is not a preferable or common activity for the 7-12 year old active and frisky pupils and is far from playfulness. For that reason it can be guessed that there could be another unknown mechanism between sound embodiment and instrument play. In the light of new neuropsychological and cognition studies the phenomenon of sound-listening need more investigation in the future in order to know how visual and auditory channels work together in supporting playful communication.

This study proves that the learning process itself was playful for the child as it included the main characteristics of the concept “playfulness” like “curiosity”, “fun”, “coding”(hidden learning) etc.

This study shows decidedly that the MT overestimated the playfulness of creative activities, especially implementing of songs. Freedom to create, what seems to the MT most a playful activity, is not playful for the student. This controversial result can be interpreted as follows – even though implementation and creation are playful, these activities need some effort and skills from the child they are not familiar with or they have not experienced yet.

Children enjoy building sounds from their own world and representing something familiar is a wonderful experience for young children. The knowledge can be drawn from what the child has experienced.

This study will clearly demonstrate that playful teaching requires a lot of preparatory work from the teacher implementing the changeable synchronised activities with instrument, fingerplays in order to apply hidden or candid teaching, include activities that allow the child the freedom to independently solve the learning task – all this generates teaching in the form of play.

The playful activities emphasise the importance of human interaction and subjective well-being.

For future research this area of study would be an important course as attuned play and playful learning-teaching are potential benefits to well-being.

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Блок флауте у учионици: учење кроз игру наставника и ученика

Сажетак

Блок флаута представља једну од могућности инструменталних активности у музичком образовању у Естонији. Ово практично истраживање испитује искуство и појам учења кроз игру, а спроведено је на уводним часовима блок флауте у току зиме 2014/2015 године. У пилот студији укључене се две групе ученика: прва група састављена је од ученика мале сеоске основне школе у близини Талина (Естонија) узраста 7 до 10 година ($N=45$); другу групу чинили су будући наставници музике ($N=13$) са Универзитета у Талину, након одслушаних часова блок флауте. Наставник-инструктор за обе групе била је иста особа. Две године касније (у јесен 2016. године) фокус групу чинили су сада ученици четвртог разреда узраста 10-11 година ($N=12$). На основу резултата установљено је да не постоји подударње ставова о учењу кроз игру наставника и ученика, чак напротив, добијени су контрадикторни резултати између ове две групе. Ученици су све активности одредили као забавне и играчке, па чак и оне традиционалне методе као што су "учење композиције из музичког записа". Ово истраживање доказује да је процес учења, сам за себе, игра за дете, јер укључује разиграност, радозналост и забаву. С друге стране, будући наставници музике подценили су значај разиграности у току креативних активности, посебно када је реч о увођењу песама у наставу. Међутим, резултати показују да је стварање сопствене музике много забавнија активност за старије ученике.

Кључне речи: музичко образовање, блок флауте, учење кроз игру, разиграност.