



Ulrike Schwarz, Germany

Cymbals Stand for Power

Jazz Education and Democracy

A Jazz Pilots Project in Elementary School Fostering Musical and Civic Learning

Background

The German *Jazz Pilots* have been exploring the possibility of bringing jazz education and civic education together for several years. The German Jazz Union and the Federal Agency for Civic Education joined forces for just that purpose. Ulrike Schwarz incorporated insights of this cooperation into her teaching at Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts (HfMDK). She developed and implemented a class for improvisational and specific teaching skills in future music teachers. The project includes university students working with 4th grade children at their school – bringing together improvisation and democracy.



Fig.1: HfMDK students, Ulrike Schwarz, boy with cymbal, children: Discussing ways of integrating cymbals as potentially loud and dominating instruments

Approach

First, HfMDK university students are introduced to free and jazz improvisation on a basic level. During the following term, they join Ulrike Schwarz to improvise with elementary school children in four consecutive weekly workshops. The children become involved in the process of finding their own rules for improvisation. Next, the current elementary school teacher addresses political topics such as representative structure and legislative processes of the German state. Finally, HfMDK students and Ulrike Schwarz return for two follow-up workshops to bring music and politics together for the children.

HfMDK class

- Improvisation
- Teaching skills

HfMDK students / U.S. / 4th grade children

- 4 Workshops on improvisation
- Research



Fig.2: Children negotiating rules for improvisation



Fig.3: Children playing without any rule: a very soft piece including cymbals



Fig.4: Focus group discussing their own improvised music

Improvisation

1st term
spring 2023

2nd term
fall 2023/24

January 2024

HfMDK students / U.S. / children

- 2 Follow-up workshops
- Improvisation & Democracy

Democracy

HfMDK class

- Civic education

Children

- Learn about German democracy



Fig.5: How children brought improvisation and democracy together: Through the experience of power, powerlessness and self-empowerment and through the process of negotiating rules. It was important to talk about these findings explicitly in order to link them to democratic processes. The terms on the signs have been translated into English.

Results

- Being the loudest instrument available, cymbals provide their players with power.
- Power can be abused or can be used responsibly for the good of all.
- Power tends to be distributed unequally.
- The experience of powerlessness can be frustrating and might lead to resignation.
- Making oneself heard can be empowering.
- Negotiating rules is a core task of democratic societies.

Research

- “... and then it was louder and more beautiful” – How Children Describe and Evaluate (Their) Improvised Music
- Research was conducted as part of the presented project.
- Focus group - interviews with children (4th grade, N = 17) after workshops with improvised music
 - Structured content analysis (Mayring, 2022) to detect themes
 - Interpretation regarding models of improvisation and criteria for improvised music applied in universities of music

Discussion

- Does jazz education bear the potential to empower future generations to become fully responsible members of a democratic society?
- If so, what does it take for children to use their improvisation experience for active, informed and self-determined participation in democratic processes within society?

Research Desiderata

- Civic learning results of children involved in a Jazz Pilots project of this kind should be investigated further.



Fig.6: Children improvising according to their own rule “no rules”



Link to recording

References

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