

Exploring the culture of Greek children's musical games in the school playground: An ethnographic study

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Abstract

This article reports findings from an ethnographic study investigating the culture of children's musical games played in school playgrounds. The research took place in nine primary schools in Greece and lasted for 6 months. Data collection methods included open observation of children aged 6 to 11 years, focused small-group observation, semi-structured interviews of 53 children (aged 8-11 years), and video recordings of the children's musical games. Analyses of the research data, in light of the relevant literature, revealed the physical and human geographies of musical games, gender preferences, transmission sources and processes, learning and teaching practices, improvisations and variations, and communication among participants. The article concludes with implications for music education research and practice.

Keywords

children's musical games, children's musical culture, ethnography, school playground, Greece

Introduction

Children express themselves musically in many different ways and these musical manifestations are part of their wider culture. Up until the middle of the 20th century, studies of music practices in societies focused mainly on adults, while children's practices were generally over-looked, or approached as folk material that revived old traditions and rituals (Gomme, 1894/2012; Opie & Opie, 1959). This view started to change significantly after Blacking's (1967) pioneering study of the Venda tribe in South Africa that acknowledged children's music practices as expressions of their own musical culture. This child-centered perspective in research practice was reinforced by a new sociology of childhood (cf. Matthews, 2007), which located children as active agents who shape and are shaped by the world in which they live (Prout & James, 1997). From this perspective, previously unexplored aspects of childhood emerged and children's voices were heard using ethnographic methods, such as observation, informal discussions, and interviews. Similar approaches were also adopted in studies on children's music culture(s) within the field of music education (Barrett, 2003; Campbell, 1998, 2002). The research focus today is more commonly on informal contexts where children develop musically through practices that they initiate (Green, 2008; Harwood & Marsh, 2012).

There has been growing interest in children's playground musical games as part of their music culture(s), which has established a distinctive area in music education research (Addo, 1995; Arleo, 2001; Harwood, 1993, 1998a, 1998b; K. Marsh, 1995, 1999, 2008). Musical games are seen as social interactions, which require synchronization, collaboration, and communication among players. They include singing

games, clapping games, chants, and rhymes, and thus their characteristics vary. They usually involve rhythm, melody, movement, and text, as well as kinaesthetic, rhythmical, or language challenges. Movement includes clapping, stamping, jumping, mimetic gestures and dance patterns. Text may tell a story or consist of nonsense syllables. Lyrics may be presented as an unpitched chant, or be sung to a defined melody. In recent research (Bishop & Burn, 2013; Harrop-Allin, 2010; K. Marsh, 2008), integral elements of musical games have been studied not in isolation, but in relation to performance context and participants. From this perspective, musical games are not investigated as texts or musical scores but as sociocultural practices.

Apart from the actual players, participants in musical games also include individuals who stand on the periphery of the activity as observers, commentators, and supporters, or who may become players (Harwood, 1998b). Learning happens as the practice develops between the “expert” members and the “apprentices” participating in a community of practice (cf. Lave & Wenger, 1991) in which participants do not just reproduce information, but develop their understanding of their own selves and environment (cf. Barrett, 2005). In this light, research focuses on the meaning of these musical interactions for children, and the possible implications for their cognitive, social, and cultural development. These are investigated through a number of themes, such as informal music-making, gender identity, transmission, technology/media influence, and creativity skills (Bishop, 2014; Countryman, 2014; Dzansi, 2004; Grugeon, 2001; Harwood, 1993, 1998b; J. Marsh, 2014; K. Marsh, 1995, 2001, 2008, 2011; Willett, 2011). Drawing on multimodality (Kress, 2000; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001), recent research has focused on musical games as multimodal interactions (Bishop & Burn, 2013; Harrop-Allin, 2010). These multiple ways of communication—such as body movements, sounds, facial expressions, gestures, touch, and gaze—have provided scholars with new ways of making sense of children’s musical performances as meaningful practices.

Method

This study presents findings from a research project investigating children’s musical games, which took place in Greek primary school playgrounds. A general overview of the playground time revealed a range of games and activities that children initiated, including sports, running, rope and skipping games, hopscotch, games inspired by TV programmes, musical games and dance performances, as well as sitting and chatting. However, the research focus was particularly on musical games as a sub-set of children’s play repertoire.

Ethnography was chosen as the most appropriate approach to investigate the culture of children’s musical games. This approach allowed for observation and interpretation of children’s behaviours and practices as meaningful practices in specific social and cultural contexts (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Although the focus was on children’s voices, it is acknowledged that the findings presented here are from the perspective of an adult outsider of an adult outsider who, at best, offers an “informed speculation” (Burn & Richards, 2013, p. 234).

The lead author of this article conducted fieldwork for 6 months in 2017 in nine primary schools in urban and rural settings across three geographical areas of Greece. All schools were unknown initially to the researcher who conducted approximately 10-day-

long visits at each school. In total, around 90 days of observation were undertaken. Data collection took place during the whole school day (8:15 am–1:15 pm), with the focus primarily around break time. There were three breaks, which lasted between 10 and 25 min. The student population of each school ranged from 40 to 300, aged 6 to 11 years (school years 1–6).

Initially, students were observed in their shared playtime in the playground for 2 to 3 days. They were also observed in corridors and classrooms outside lesson times. The aim was to locate those groups of children that played musical games, applying the method of “purposive sampling” (Cohen et al., 2007). At first, the researcher was discreet, keeping some distance from the players. However, there were cases when children approached the researcher asking her why she was there, to which she truthfully replied that she was interested in their musical games. Sometimes this led to further discussions with the children. Especially in the village schools, initial interactions with the children led them to form groups and play musical games for the researcher.

In the second phase, the focus was specifically on small groups of children who played musical games regularly. The researcher followed a participant observation method (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013), conversing and playing musical games with the children whenever they invited her to do so. At times, she would also share musical games with which they were unfamiliar. Children’s enthusiasm for their games was evident, and especially girls would look for the researcher during breaks to perform for her. They also tried to learn new musical games by asking others and researching on the internet. By following children’s habits during the breaks, the researcher gradually became part of the playground routine and, over time, children returned to their usual pastimes. Children often played their musical games among other games (e.g., football and running) and activities (e.g., chatting and eating). There were also times when they ignored the researcher. This type of interaction lasted for about 6 to 7 days in each setting and led to the development of a rapport with 10 to 20 individuals from each school of varied age and both sexes.

All participants signed ethical consent forms in which they were informed about the aims and content of the research, their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and the confidentiality of data. Written consent was also received from the headteachers of each school, the schools’ governing bodies, and from parents and carers. Approval for the study and the content of the ethical form had previously been gained by the Institute of Educational Policy at the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs in Greece.

In the third phase of the study, children who were knowledgeable about musical games and willing to share their practices participated voluntarily in video recordings of their games and semi-structured group interviews. These took place toward the end of the 10-day visit period. The school management usually allocated a room for this purpose, or, on a few occasions, the researcher conducted the interviews and the video recordings at a quiet place in the playground.

The total population in the third phase was 53 students, of which 52 were girls and 1 was a boy. Although many boys were observed playing musical games in the general playground context, they were disinclined to engage in the interviews and video recordings. Participant children’s ages in this phase ranged from 8 to 11 (school years 3–6) and the groups were formed by the children themselves, based on their friendships. Thus, the number of groups varied at each school. In total, 90 video-recording sessions

were conducted, each lasting from 15 s to 2.5 min. The interviews ranged from 20 min to an hour for each group.

The researcher kept a daily diary, creating a rich corpus of “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) of events and informal conversations with children. A large part of the diary consisted of descriptions of short bursts of musical games, such as counting-out games which children played often to decide the “it” in their chasing games or how to sit at their desks. It also recorded the names of the musical games and details such as the text, the movements, and whether it was a chant or a melody.

The interviews were recorded and then transcribed, and a thematic approach was used for the analysis of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The video recordings were analyzed drawing on multimodality theory (Kress, 2000; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). Elements were also drawn from the methodology suggested by Bezemer (2014) related to the tabling of data as well as from a multimodal analysis of children’s musical games by Bishop and Burn (2013). The modes that were taken into consideration in the analysis were (a) the visual mode (players’ and observers’ visual contact and gaze); (b) the kinesthetic mode (body posture, facial expressions, and gestures); (c) the haptic mode (distance between the players, personal space, and tension in touch); and (d) the aural mode (rhythm, melody or unpitched chant, and text of the game and participants’ oral speech).

It is important to highlight that the multimodal analysis was feasible due to the video documentation, which “permits reviewing nonverbal behaviors, group dynamics, and other contextual variables that may be more difficult to capture in writing” (Nastasi, 2013, p. 327). However, setting a time and place to conduct the video recordings affected players’ spontaneity, and—until they became familiar with the research activity—participants often tried to be prepared for the performances. The researcher attempted to overcome this methodological challenge by video recording the children’s rehearsals before their main “performance,” during which players were observed to be more relaxed. Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that the video recordings did not depict the whole picture of the playground reality of children’s musical games but mostly detailed performances by knowledgeable participants.

Key Findings

The key findings are grounded in the data collected from observation, interviews, and video recordings, but they are also informed by themes that have been reported elsewhere in the relevant literature (cf. Bishop & Burn, 2013; Gaunt, 2012; Grugeon, 2001; Harrop-Allin, 2010; Harwood & Marsh, 2012; K. Marsh, 2008).

Physical and human geographies of musical games

Incidents of indoor musical play were more evident in the city schools with small playgrounds in relation to their large student populations and where ball games were banned during breaks. In contrast, students in village schools knew musical games but tended to play sports and team games as there was ample space outside and sports equipment provided.

Links between musical games and restrictions of time and space were also reported in

the interviews. Children from both rural and urban environments mentioned that they played before or after evening clubs, such as dance or language lessons, and while waiting to be picked up by their parents. There were also reports of musical games in confined spaces, such as on the school bus, changing rooms at the ballet school, restaurants, and even at desks when the teacher temporarily left the classroom to speak on the phone.

Children's practices regarding musical games were similar across the three geographical areas of Greece. Musical games tended to be short, lasting less than a minute, were played mainly in pairs, and required no equipment other than the players' own bodies. Movements included hand-clapping between two players facing each other, standing or seated, as well as stamping feet, clicking fingers, and swaying the body. Occasionally, children played in groups, in a circle or in rows. Games lasted from 30 s up to 2 min.

Examples of boys playing musical games or standing at the periphery were evident in the playground, but such incidents were fewer than those with girls. Moreover, boys were reluctant to share their experiences or thoughts about musical games, and only one boy volunteered to take part in the interviews and video recordings. During informal conversations with the children at a school, one boy said that "these games are for girls only; we play-fight." Girls also expressed their preference for playing musical games with children of the same sex, because, as one girl said, "the boys are savages." Only on occasion did the whole class play together. These interview data were confirmed during observations, as children of the same sex played mainly together in pairs and less often in mixed sex groups or pairs.

In general, children tended to play with their close friends. One girl was clear about her choice to play with her best friends, but not with a classmate, even though she sat next to her in lessons. Other girls suggested that only *their* group knew and played the musical games, while others did not. In big schools, these groups consisted of peers of the same class and age, while in smaller schools there was a mixture of ages. This observed practice mirrored the policy for the organization of formal education in Greece. In schools with a small student population, classes embraced different school years, forming groups of students of different ages. Regarding their play routine at home, the girls from both rural and urban environments reported a mixture of ages, as they would play with their older or younger siblings or cousins.

As noted earlier, interaction with the researcher raised children's interest in musical games, which, for some, became their main play activity during break time. The researcher's effect was more evident in village schools, where children revealed their knowledge of musical games and ability to perform only after interacting with the researcher.

Gendered preferences

The girls expressed their enthusiasm about games with stories, nonsense syllables, various body movements, and with or without a game-winner. This gendering of children's games was evident in the data, which indicated that the girls looked for novelty and challenge. These elements made the game interesting and created positive feelings for the participants. One girl reported: "I like my tongue being twisted . . . It makes me

happy.” Another girl stated that challenges made her feel frustrated but also that she liked to compete with her friends until someone had it “perfect.” In contrast, musical games that, according to the participants, lacked novelty and challenge were rejected and described as “boring” and “babyish.” These included mainly singing games or counting-out games, the so-called “traditional” ones, which were widely known, “even by the parents” as one girl stated.

In contrast, boys tended to play competitive musical games, using mainly their hands, with or without words in chants that would end with a game winner. The only boy who agreed to take part in the interviews and video recordings said that he enjoyed playing all kinds of musical games. The boys played mainly in pairs and formed their groups less often than the girls did. One of the most popular musical games with the boys was a variation of a counting-out game called “Simario,” in which they placed their hands in a handshake position and twisted them from left to right to the rhythm of the game. The game ended with one person bringing his hands down to strike the other person’s palms facing up.

Transmission sources and processes

Girls reportedly learned musical games from their peers, siblings, and cousins; from their parents or other family members; from teachers or carers in education and sport; and also in communal settings—school, scouting, dance clubs, and language learning schools. However, the transmission did not occur only within the local community but also on a wider scale when children mixed with families from other areas. Such reports offer a possible explanation as to why a common repertoire with slight differences was found across the different regions of Greece in this study.

The transmission was described by two 10-year-old girls as a chain process in which information spread from one person to another:

Niki: The games that I watch when older kids are playing, I then show them to my sister, and then my sister shows them to her classmates, and so on.

Nicole: The same way *we* learnt other musical games.

In their reports about learning musical games from adults, children referred to female teachers and educators (such as the music teacher, PE teacher, and scout leader) who used musical games in their teaching or educational programs. They also stated that female adults at home used mainly the so-called “traditional” musical games to help children with eating or sleeping routines.

Another source from which girls drew their material was the internet, mainly YouTube and the App “Musical.ly.” The “Cup Song” was very popular at the time of the research and was found to be part of the playground repertoire. Girls in one school had changed it to a hand-clapping game, without any song lyrics, for two players and for one person playing on the desk. Girls from another school reported that they had learnt it from their leader in a summer school and sang a few words from the original song in English or switched to non-sense English when they did not know the words. Data showed that only a couple of musical games came from YouTube, while many playground musical

performances derived from the “Musical.ly” App. These mainly English-language, technology-inspired musical games included short lip-sync videos with movement patterns, gestures, and singing or chanting in English, with players standing in a row singing and moving in synchrony. They resembled stage performances, which participants directed at an imaginary audience, as there was no bodily collaboration among them. Learning took place through practice, as girls stated that they “do Musical.ly” individually, or with their friends at home, watching and performing the videos. They reportedly shared these performances among them without using a mobile phone.

Data indicated that the technology-inspired musical games resembled the playground musical games in their integral elements (rhythm, movement, nonsense syllables), which appear to attract children. The digital material entered the playground and was transmitted orally as memes from one child to another, becoming part of the playground repertoire.

Learning and teaching practices

One of the most frequently reported methods of learning a musical game was a child observing very carefully and miming someone who would model it. In the following extract, a girl describes this process:

The secret is that you [must] look at the person who knows and shows you [the game]; you must have your mind there, on the game, and try to do what they’ve shown you . . . You might give yourself a headache . . . from concentrating . . . because . . . they might show you something very difficult. (Efstathia, 8 years old, Year 3)

Children also reported cases in which they wished to play a musical game that they vaguely remembered. On such occasions, the boundaries between knowledgeable children and apprentices were not clear, and they had to work collectively to complete the performance successfully. Often participants would enter into discussion before the performance started, reminding each other of the parts of the musical game and negotiating which version of the musical game to play, at what tempo, and what kind of movements they should include.

Analysis showed that children had personal ways of learning. Some children separated the words from the movements of the musical game, while others preferred to learn it as a whole. In other cases, girls replaced the words with syllables so that they could focus on the movements. Other learning practices included continuous practice, performing at a slower tempo to accommodate a player who did not know the game, and bodily intervention from knowledgeable participants who would place players’ hands in the right place and pattern. It was also common for players or observers to use verbal instructions during the performance along with modeling. Data showed that some participants were aware of the game structure which they then explained to others, as the following extract shows:

There’s a specific movement for a specific word, right? “Soko” is like this [shows], “lala” is like this [shows] and “ta” is like this [shows] . . . Do it, do it. (Eleni, 10 years old, Year 5)

While dealing with issues in the performance did not disturb the flow, verbal instructions and bodily intervention usually led to disruptions of the game. The progress of the performance was also influenced by participants' personalities. Those who showed determination, even in cases of improvisation, led the game and ensured its progress. In contrast, the hesitation was more likely to lead to the performance coming to a halt. Instances of friction were also evident when more than one player claimed the leadership of the game. In contrast, once players accepted their position in the hierarchy, it was more likely that the performance would continue without disruption.

Improvisations and variations

Across the schools observed, there were variations of the same game with the same title, melody, movements, and most of the text but for a few verses. In the case of the musical game called "Antoinetta," known in all the schools, seven different variations were found, some recorded within the same school. There were also variations of musical games with the same movements, but different text, and the same text, but different movements.

When girls were asked about the variations of musical games, their answers showed that it was not always clear to them why this happened. For instance, two girls from Year 5 both claimed that they were the creators of the same variation. In another case, two girls from Year 6 thought that their classmate was responsible for showing them different versions, but they implied that this was a normal process.

Children adapted the material drawn from the internet to serve their needs. Originally, the games from "Musical.ly" were performed by one person. However, children made the necessary changes so that a greater number of players was accommodated while keeping its other elements (movements and text). The same process was followed with the "Cup Song," as children maintained the same rhythm but turned it into a hand-clapping game so that they could play together without any equipment.

Musical games with insulting words and gestures toward the coplayer or the opposite gender were also changed, depending on participants' personalities and the context. For example, some players decided to omit or replace these insulting elements when they knew that they would offend their co-players, or be punished by their teachers:

I don't do this: "take that [insulting gesture 'mountza'], stupid," as *she* does. I do this [hug] and I say "you're my best friend." (Emel, 10 years old, Year 5),

No, no, [not to the boys] because, if they tell the headteacher, we'll be in trouble. (Evelina, 8 years old, Year 3)

Only some of these compositions were established as part of children's repertoire, as opposed to variations performed on the spot, which were forgotten soon after the performance. For instance, girls in one school stated that they invented chants similar to the original to accompany the French skipping game that they played. However, in the case of a hand-clapping game accompanied by a chant with food and drinks that rhymed, children played for as long as they could think of relevant words, and thus no performance was identical. This kind of improvisation seemed to serve the players at the time of the performance and it did not spread any further.

Communication among participants

Participants communicated using the music, text, and movements of the musical games. However, communication also took place through less obvious ways, such as through gaze, bodily movement and contact, facial expressions, speech, and movements that were not part of the game and by the relative distance between participants. These elements became apparent through a multimodal analysis of the video-recorded musical games.

Different modes of communication—visual, kinesthetic, haptic, and aural—were noted in relation to the flow and progress of the musical game. Data revealed that the body would communicate messages when standing, preparing for the next movement, or dancing to the rhythm. In some cases, participants would adopt their co-players' body movements, swaying to the rhythm, or smiling back at their partners in the game. In other cases, a knowledgeable player prepared the co-player for the next—challenging—movement by fixing her gaze on a specific part of the body. In addition, participants smiled, showing that they enjoyed the game, or pursed their lips indicating that they acknowledged the mistakes during the performance. Also, approval or disapproval for an observer was communicated through facial expressions, or through changing the proxemics by closing the circle to exclude a person from the performance.

Multimodal analysis provided insight into participants' relationships and feelings, such as enjoyment or discomfort for a member, or over the performance generally. Good relationships were manifested through the willingness to accept a sense of hierarchy, friendly gaze, smiling, making smooth and calm movements, and generally by keeping a stable tempo. However, competition became apparent through frequent flow disruptions, tension in touch, in gaze, in facial expressions, in volume, and through bodily intervention.

Discussion

The study focused on the context of the Greek playground, aiming to shed light on the under-researched area of children's musical games as meaningful practices. The data analyses indicate that musical games are part of children's musical cultures in the researched Greek primary-school playgrounds, as illustrated by research in Europe and Africa, as well as in the United States and Australia (Campbell, 1998; Harrop-Allin, 2010; Harwood, 1998b; K. Marsh, 2008).

In the current study, children shared a common repertoire, with slight variations within and across the three geographical areas of Greece. Regarding the meter, most of the musical games followed 2/4 and 4/4 time signatures. None of the games were in 5/8 or 7/8 time signatures, which are characteristic of traditional Greek music. A few games also involved a traditional insulting Greek gesture ("mountza"), in which players extended and spread all fingers of the hand, presenting the palm toward the face of the other player, usually coupled with words such as "here" or "take these." Most of the musical games were in Greek or nonsense Greek. A couple of games, which were found in schools in Athens, the Greek capital, made references to districts in the city, as well as to renowned Greek figures, such as actors and an ex-prime minister. In one school only, a participant

of Muslim origin played a game that included a mixture of nonsense and a few Turkish words. In the cases of musical games from technological sources (i.e., the “Cup Song” from “YouTube” and musical performances from “Musical.ly”), children switched from Greek to English (or nonsense English). However, the musical games repertoire in the researched Greek playgrounds did not appear to be significantly influenced by the media, as TV or advertising jingles were not noted. Also, a few musical Greek games (“Antoinetta,” “Simario,” and “A sailor goes to go-go-go”) were similar to games reported in other studies (“Sar macka dora,” “Son macaron,” and “A sailor went to the sea,” in K. Marsh, 2008 and Bishop & Burn, 2013).

Possible differences in children’s musical games in city and village school playgrounds were investigated by Dzansi (2004) in schools in Ghana, reporting that musical games were equally alive in both environments. In the current study, it was noted that the musical games were more evident in urban areas. Moreover, the repertoire of musical games seemed to be matched to the restrictions in space, time, and play equipment.

Children demonstrated creative skills as they invented ways to extend their musical play in space and time. They achieved this by performing musical games “anywhere and anytime” (Roud, 2010, p. 296), such as while waiting in lines before entering school, or even at their desks. Children’s play in times and places that were not necessarily designed for play showed their desire and ability to change their surrounding environment to suit their needs and interests, achieving a degree of control and autonomy (cf. Cole et al., 1978). K. Marsh (2008) has similarly noted that musical games can thrive during waiting times and in places without any equipment but be difficult to locate in a playground where there is play equipment.

A particularity of this study was the different levels of boys’ participation. Some relevant research on musical games has focused only on girls (Grugeon, 2001; Harwood, 1998a), while some have highlighted the involvement of both sexes (Countryman, 2014; K. Marsh, 2008). In the present study, boys were observed sometimes to engage actively in musical games; however, they avoided being identified with them in the interviews and video-recordings phase. Musical games were seen as feminine, and this was possibly reinforced by the fact that only female adults were reported to teach or play musical games with children at school, at home, or in other settings. Other studies have similarly reported on boys considering girls as “the primary agents and performers of such games” (Gaunt, 2012, p. 104) and, for this reason, keeping their practice private (cf. Campbell, 1991). The data suggest that “playing girls” games would be a risky action for boys’ gender identity and their role as the “savages” of the playground. Some girls in this study reinforced a gender division, as they stated that they did not want to include boys in their performances.

Gender also shaped children’s preferences for musical games. Girls’ repertoire was wide, while boys tended to play short and competitive games in pairs. These findings shed some light on the types of musical games to which each sex is likely to be attracted, and add to the data reported in Knapp and Knapp’s (1976) research on the same topic. They are also in line with research on gendered preferences in general play (cf. Armitage, 2001; Dzansi, 2002).

The transmission of musical games reflected children’s socialization networks with peers, adults, and technology. However, the analysis showed that there were differences

in the content of the material transmitted; adults used “traditional” musical games to serve a function or an educational aim, while girls tended to reject these on the grounds that they were old, easy, and thus “babyish.” Instead, they were attracted by novel musical games in which the combination of movement and text challenged their skills and knowledge. These characteristics were also found in the material that children drew from the internet. There have been similar reports from research in a London school playground, where children classified “traditional” singing games, originally documented by the Opies, as “babyish,” but were still part of a wide repertoire “sitting alongside pop songs” (Willett, 2011, p. 341). In the present study, children who had access to digital material functioned as “mediators” (p. 342), teaching their peers. As the musical performances drawn from the internet enter the playground, the borders between “online and offline environments are becoming more and more blurred” (J. Marsh, 2014, p. 109).

Improvising with the integral elements of musical games led to different variations of the same musical game. Bishop (2014) stressed that these new compositions are distinctive musical games in the playground, although they might look similar. Composition-in-performance, originally conceptualized in Lord’s (1987) oral-formulaic theory, has served as an analytical tool for scholars studying children’s compositional skills in the playground (Bishop & Burn, 2013; Harrop-Allin, 2014; K. Marsh, 1995, 1999, 2008). Its emphasis is on the participatory culture of musical games in which players and observers co-construct the performance as an ongoing process, rather than as a product. The different variations of both oral and technology- inspired musical games that were found in the current study indicate that children are not passive consumers but able to adapt the material to their own purposes.

Another key aspect of musical games in the playground was the learning and teaching practices that children developed. These practices included modeling, observing, miming, verbal instructions, and bodily intervention. Two particular aspects of learning were observed in this study: implicit learning, with children participating as a group in a common activity, and explicit learning, with peers teaching each other. This reflects similar research findings on learning in informal contexts (Green, 2008; Harwood & Marsh, 2012). In line with findings from relevant studies (see Introduction), data from this study showed that learning took place in a holistic way in the performance context. Participants had ownership of the musical games, as they decided which material to perform, how to perform it, and for what purpose.

Friendship groups were found to be crucial in the culture of children’s musical games. They were the basis for the main groups in which transmission took place and where participants developed their personal ways of learning. The girls especially used musical games to affirm their close relationships and a sense of belonging to a special group. It was more likely for friends to complete musical games, as they collaborated and dealt with issues that came up during performances. As K. Marsh (2008) explained previously, “the context of a friendship group . . . provides the psychological safety within which children can accommodate both aesthetic and socio-cultural differences” (p. 311). When children who were not very close to each other met in a practice which they were not used to sharing previously, there was imbalance and it was more likely for the performance to be disrupted, or to stop. Countryman (2014) noted that, in such cases, participants lack “social competence or what Corsaro (2005) calls a ‘collective agency’” (p. 238) that would allow them to continue the game.

Information about the relationships between the participants in musical games became available through the detailed analysis of their multimodal communication. Participants used their body, face, and gaze, as well as sounds and proxemics, to send messages to their counter- parts and express feelings. The children also explored social issues in their musical interactions, such as hierarchy, conflict, competition, and collaboration, and negotiated social aspects of the performative roles that they undertook during the game, for example, observers/performers, teachers/learners, experts/apprentices, leaders/followers. These findings relate to similar research results on the social meanings and cultural functions of the modes that the children use in their musical games in specific contexts (Bishop & Burn, 2013; Harrop-Allin, 2010).

Implications for research, policy and practice

The study of the participant Greek children's culture of playground musical games, in light of the relevant literature, revealed the physical and human geographies of their musical games, gendered preferences, transmission sources and processes, learning and teaching practices, improvisations and variations, and means of communication. Relevant research in music education is increasingly emphasizing the importance for music educators to be inspired in their teaching methods by children's out-of-school practices (Green, 2008; K. Marsh, 2008).

Close observation of the musical games that children play gives us an insight into what they enjoy in music in specific contexts. It is important for music educators to observe and listen carefully to their students' voices in the playground and to seek to incorporate their preferences and interests in the classroom. The aim is not to assimilate the playground culture to the class- room culture as such (K. Marsh, 2008) but rather *to provide* opportunities for children to share their musical games, extend their knowledge and skills, and develop their critical thinking. Embracing students' musical experiences and validating them as an integral element of the classroom culture can be a solid base for a culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2002).

Investigating how children carry out their musical performances also provides knowledge about who they are. Their musical, personal, and social identities are reflected on the processes that children employ to acquire and transmit music (Campbell, 2007). Key aspects of their selves are made evident when children experiment with and transform the musical material as well as when they negotiate their roles in their socio-musical interactions. Bishop and Burn (2013) stressed that embodied, physical play poses vital social questions, such as "What do I like?" "What does it say about me?" "Who is my friend?" "What do we want to be?" and "What am I good at?" Music educators can use musical games to explore the roles that best fit each student's personality and way of learning, as well as to learn more about children's social inter- actions and negotiation of new roles.

Information about children's musical and social identity can be accessible to music educators through a multimodal reading of their practices as well as through offering opportunities for multimodal expression in the classroom. Music educators should

provide their students with multisensory experiences to enhance their cognitive and socioemotional growth (Campbell & Wiggins, 2012).

Research shows that classroom practices often clash with playground practices. Children in the playground are actively engaged in listening and music-making and experience holistic music learning. In contrast, there have been reports of biases toward passive listening in the classroom, and learning taking place in a more disconnected way (Campbell & Wiggins, 2012). Music educators also need to become aware of the gendered practices in the playground and address these in the classroom with inclusive practices for both sexes.

The findings of this study revealed various aspects of the culture of musical games played by Greek children. However, the participants were of a specific age range and mostly girls. The preferences, beliefs, and practices of younger children and of both sexes were not investigated in depth. Similar research involving a wider population with diverse ages and an equal number of boys and girls would be useful for music educators to gain a better understanding of the richness of students' musical culture(s).

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