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Local cultural heritage usage in music studies in south-eastern Estonian schools

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Abstract

This article focuses on the use of locality-related tradition in music lessons in the second stage of study (grades 4-6) in south-eastern Estonian schools. The objective of the research is to document the experiences of music teachers in using locality-related tradition in music lessons in the second stage of study in south-eastern Estonian schools. As the main research problem, the question was posed: how and to what extent do teachers use their locality-related traditions in music lessons at the second stage of study? The research questions developed to solve the problem aimed to find out how music teachers define the concept of locality-related tradition and whether and how they utilize locality-related tradition in music lessons.

To find an answer to the research question, a survey in questionnaire form was conducted among 55 music teachers. The results of the survey questions showed that teachers define the meaning of locality-related tradition in quite different ways and that they themselves consider their knowledge of locality-related tradition as average or better than average. The survey also found that the ideas of Zoltán Kodály, which have been used in music instruction for decades in Estonia, have laid a foundation where locality-related tradition and its different forms (such as songs, customs and games characteristic to a particular locality) are quite widely in use in music lessons. Music teachers were also of the opinion that use of locality-related tradition influences the identity, thinking and development of social experience among schoolchildren.

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1. Introduction

The particular teaching philosophy used depends largely on the teacher's own experiences, education, values and beliefs. Based on these attributes, teachers are able to set goals to be achieved in teaching the subject. This thesis proceeds from the philosophy of the Hungarian composer, ethnomusicologist and music teacher Zoltán Kodály,

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which holds that one's own national music should be the basis in providing music education. Kodaly sought to restore Hungarian folk music to a place of honor in music teaching at general educational institutions. Kodaly drew attention to teachers' readiness for conveying musical knowledge and skills. He believed that quality instruction was not possible based on textbooks alone, in the absence of previous knowledge. (Houlahan 2008)

The idea of using folk song for pedagogical purposes has been recognized all over the world, and over the decades it has also served as the basis for music syllabuses in Estonian general educational schools. The idea has been followed by well-known music educators in Estonia. Based on her own experience, one of Estonia's acclaimed music teachers and methodologists, Celia Roose (2003) emphasizes the importance of teaching children their native musical language. She finds that the power of traditional culture and the wisdom and truths it contains have helped Estonian culture and education survive.

This could be contrasted to globalization on the other hand, the influences of which are discernible in music education as well – besides so-called Western classical music, world music is a compulsory part of many music curricula; the current pupils are also denizens of the global music market and this is where they consume music on a daily basis. The cultural theoretician Robert Davis has pondered cultural identity, which is shaped through music instruction and vernacular music; he also notes that already in early childhood, a person's perception of music becomes "tuned" first and foremost to the specific music and language that surrounds that individual (Davis 2005).

Traditions and folklore are collected and preserved, but in order for tradition to remain vital, it has to remain in daily use. Passing on tradition is not just a matter of conveying knowledge and experience; it also involves passing on time-honored values through emulation. The reflection of values, moral and cultural identity passed from one era to the next via emulation is a cognitive process. In this manner, educative attitudes and beliefs have arisen, and are passed on from generation to the next. Some of them survive, but others fade, as they are no longer relevant in the present day. (Sassian & Liimets 2009)

1.1. Theoretical framework

1.1.1. The terms "pärimus" (tradition, lore, or intangible cultural heritage) and "paikkonna pärimus" (locality-related tradition).

Below, we examine how different authors have treated the term "pärimus" (tradition, lore) and use the treatments to construct the term "paikkonna pärimus" (locality-related tradition), a key concept in this thesis.

Estonian Literary Museum research fellow Mari-Ann Rimmel (2001) asserts that tradition amounts to oral memories of the recent past passed on from generation to generation and associated with specific places. Pentikäinen & Honko (1975) list the following hallmarks of lore:

- an oral means of transmission that relies on language as its mode of expression;
- takes the same shape in terms of form, style and content;
- is of anonymous origin;
- usually deals with the past.

Lore and intangible cultural heritage can arise on the condition that there is both a bequeather and a recipient – the whole process must take place via people. (et. al.). To preserve and pass on tradition, it is important to participate in the process continuously (Rüütel 2002).

The term "intangible cultural heritage" is summarized by UNESCO: "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills – including the instruments, objects artifacts and cultural spaces associated with them – that communities, groups and individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage is transmitted from generation to generation and is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity." (UNESCO 2003)

One of the subcategories of intangible cultural heritage is "place lore," which ties in with this thesis. M.-A. Rimmel defines place lore as place-(name)-centered folklore, usually represented as prose text, including legends connected to the place and beliefs related to places, descriptions of customs, historical tradition, and memories etc. In the opinion of Valper (2010), place lore is connected to a definite place with which the folklore is associated. The place may be a natural feature of different size, a manmade object or larger territory or settlement unit.

To sum up, the term “pärimus” is quite ambivalent, but relying on the theoretical approach mentioned above, it is possible to define the key term of this paper, “locality-related tradition,” and a definition follows.

The term “locality-related tradition” this means a tradition, custom, belief, information etc passed on from generation to generation as oral folk art, a tradition that can be treated as intangible cultural heritage. Existing oral tradition gains something new, drawing influences from its environment, nature and history. In the course of the process, cultural diversity and creativity is advanced and the community’s sense of identity and continuity is furthered. (UNESCO 2003) Thus, based on the theoreticians, it is possible to say that locality-related tradition encompasses both historical tradition as well as modern-day folklore, which can be re-created and in which new local traditions can be found.

1.1.2. The Estonian school system and the second stage of study

The Estonian school system specifies minimum compulsory schooling up to the end of the 9th grade or up to the age of 17. Basic education is divided into three age levels: the first stage of study (grades 1-3); the second stage of study (grades 4-6) and the third stage of study (grades 7-9). Compulsory schooling begins at the age of 7 in Estonia, and the pupils in the second stage of study are thus 10-12 years of age. (Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act 2015). Based on the theories of educational scientists J. Piaget (1970) and E. Erikson (1968), a key transition takes place in the cognitive development in the second stage of study from childhood to recognition of their individual identity. In the course of the development in the processes of cognition, perception of the world becomes more abstract. The child experiences an increase in self-awareness and ability to lead and control (Kikas 2010) and through positive or negative self-concepts to influence performance strategy, academic results and motivation (Mägi 2010).

The capacity for abstract thinking develops, which certainly affords the opportunity to understand the symbolism within oral tradition. Above all, this means figurative or metaphorical use of language (Gábor 1994) and allows linguistic nuances to be better understood.

According to the Estonian national curriculum, the components of music education in a general educational school are singing, instrument performance, musical movement, composition, listening to music, music history, musical literacy and field trips. Music shapes and contributes to the development of the following skill components in children – singing, instrument performance, composition and listening to music. The components of music instruction and the skill components are interlaced in a close relationship with multiple meanings and are shaped through musical activities. (National basic school curriculum 2014)

1.1.3. The south-eastern Estonian region

The south-eastern Estonian region is spread out over three counties known for their rich cultural heritage, which still remains vital today. Two of these counties have state-established institutes for the local culture (Võru and Põlva counties), whose main objective is to keep alive and popularize the local traditional culture and local language varieties. (Võru Institute 2015). Kodály, too (1994), highlighted the original and unique native musical language of Hungarians. Parallels can be drawn in this regard to the three south-eastern Estonian counties – each one of them retains its original musical and/or dialectal native language in active use. Thus the use, often in combination, of both verbal and musical tradition influences the child’s self-expression and cognitive ability and by participating in the tradition, they sense their identity as a member of the particular locality.

2. Research questions

The objective of the research was to document the experiences of music teachers in using locality-related tradition in music lessons in the second stage of study in south-eastern Estonian schools. To do this, the following research questions were set out:

- What do music teachers see as locality-related tradition?
- How is locality-related tradition implemented in music lessons at the second stage of study?

- What types of locality-related tradition are used in music lessons at the second stage of study?

3. Research methods

The method for data collection was the questionnaire, which included both open and closed-ended questions. The questionnaire was e-mailed to respondents. After the responses were received, the process of analysis began: the responses were distributed into four categories on the basis of the research questions.

- Background data.
- Views of locality-related tradition.
- Use of locality-related tradition in music lessons at the second stage of study.
- Use of locality-related tradition by category.

The data collected by questionnaire then underwent qualitative content analysis, in the course of which the content and contextual meaning of the text was examined. In the course of analysis, text parts with a similar meaning were categorized, topics relevant to the research were found from among the categories, and the results were compared with the ones identified in the theoretical part of the thesis. (Ryan & Bernard 2003, 85)

1.2. Description of sample

The locality investigated has a total of 51 general educational schools that employ a total of 55 music teachers teaching at the second stage of study at the time of the survey. A total of 55 questionnaires were sent out, and 29 were received back. Twenty-eight of the respondents were women, and one was male. By age, the greatest share of teachers (22) was in the age group 46-55 and over 56. This shows that SE Estonia, which can be seen as the periphery of Estonia due to its distance from the capital, has a serious lack of young educated music teachers, as the age structure shows that most of the teachers are nearing retirement age and the share of younger teachers is quite low.

Nearly all of the respondents had higher education. From the standpoint of this paper, it should be borne in mind that many active teachers were trained in a previous era when the existence of tradition-related subjects in the teacher-training curriculum may not have been universal. Although not all teachers were able to study such subjects during their training years, various institutions have offered many opportunities in the form of in-service training and courses, and teachers have made fairly active use of these opportunities.

4. Findings

On the basis of the respondents' answers, the authors tried to find a definition for the key term in this article, "locality-related tradition". The responses were as follows: lore related to the past that is passed on in the oral or written tradition from generation to generation in a locality (can also be the place of residence), which is a natural part of life and is connected to a person intrinsically no matter what locality they may be living in at the current time.

Although theoretical research set out past and future as dimensions of lore the responses showed that the respondents approached the term more from the historical principle. None of the respondents mentioned the media or virtual archives – which are common these days as a way of learning about the tradition of a locality – as a means of transmitting lore. They also viewed locality-related tradition mainly as historical and old lore, not the modern folk culture that has arisen in recent years. But they did make repeated mention of the community aspect of tradition, which corresponds to the concept of social group advanced by Lauri Honko (1999). In this sense, tradition is connected to a person intrinsically no matter what locality they may be living in at the current time.

In general, teachers rated their own knowledge of their locality-related tradition as average. By categories as well, they mainly assigned "average" ratings to their own knowledge. They said they had a good knowledge of songs and folk music/instrumental performance. The assessment "I have little familiarity with..." was given to the "stories" (also the only category where six respondents deemed their knowledge non-existent) and the "place lore" fields. Based on the theoretical part of the thesis, one reason for this may be the following: the idea adopted by

Estonian music educator Riho Päts (2010), based on the example of Kodaly, to use the native language in musical education survey has over the decades led to a foundation where the use of songs, customs and games and other traditional elements of a given locality plays an important role among teachers. The fact that music teachers have a better knowledge of traditional music than general traditional culture can be attributed to their training and everyday practice.

The use of locality-related tradition in music lessons at the second stage of study is considered “somewhat important” among the respondents. This is consistent with the current curriculum, which recommends that folk song (including runo verse song) skills, Estonian folk dance (can also be viewed as locality-related) be developed and local cultural traditions be prioritized in music lesson (National basic school curriculum, 2014). On the basis of the responses to the survey, it was found that use of the relevant materials in music lessons will expose students to knowledge of local tradition, culture, including world culture, and a sensibility for their roots, values and motivations.

As a positive aspect of use of locality-related tradition, the respondents listed acquisition of social experience that takes place in a specific cultural context and formative environment. For example, they identified the following reasons for using locality-related tradition in music lessons: sparking interest in one’s immediate home surroundings (...) introducing developments around us, both from the past and present, and guidance with regard to noticing it.

Music teachers were also of the opinion that knowledge of locality-related tradition gives schoolchildren the opportunity to self-identify culturally and socially. *They are our roots that we should know, pass on and preserve (...) knowing tradition helps people be better rooted to their home place, instils a yearning to always come back (...) we know who we are, what we value and pass on.* As tradition is passed on predominantly through language, knowing the customs, folk music and songs in one’s home place on a better than average level, allows the dialect or language variety used in the locality to enrich a child’s thinking through various folklore, and also develops the ability to express thoughts.

On the basis of the opinions provided by the teacher, two sets of rankings were compiled, as the responses indicated that use of locality-related tradition had, in the opinion of the respondents, both a positive and negative effect on the schoolchildren. Students’ positive attitudes start with the attitudes fostered with regard to tradition by their peers in school, parents or other role models. The emotional content of the activity also comes up: *there is a joyful recognition (...) when teaching a runo song, there should be a good story told, words should be explained, and the whole thing tied in with humour. Merely singing the song is not of much interest.* The role model set by the teacher, and his/her interest, knowledge and experience are also interrelated and important. *If a teacher teaches in a compelling manner, this will not be lost on the children and they will not have anything against it. (...) Inciting interest in a locality’s culture gives students knowledge of the locality’s songs, dances and instrumental music and broadens their horizons. . Active curiosity is fostered by enjoyable activities related to lore and tradition. For example, children really like playing singing games.*

Negative attitudes in schoolchildren originate from lack of interest. It was found that if locality-related tradition is not introduced early, from the first stage of study, it will not interest pupils in the second stage of study. Lack of interest is related to development of negative attitudes. As to how actively children are engaged with the subject, this depends on the teacher’s model and how the subject is integrated with a specific locality: *it isn’t important for students whether it is a local tradition or a tradition from a more distant region.*

Of the various forms of traditional culture, singing (i.e. folk song) was used the most often (26 respondents) in music lessons, followed by listening to music (24 respondents) and musical movement (19 respondents). More specifically, commemoration of local holidays and observance of customs was mentioned the most often, e.g. *folk calendar dates, I choose my own repertoire, I don’t particularly use textbooks for folk songs and singing games and traditional singing.*

5. Conclusions

The results of the research showed that teachers define the meaning of locality-related tradition in quite different ways. The respondents based their answers on their inner convictions and personal views, in which various categories of traditional culture played an important role. Generalizing the responses received and tabulating all of the opinions provided by the teachers, we arrived at a description similar to the definition set out in the theoretical

part. Although the theoretical section set out past and future as dimensions of tradition and lore, the responses showed that the respondents approached the term more from the historical principle.

Teachers themselves rate their knowledge the local culture above average. This sort of more positive assessment may be due to the fact that the idea adopted by Estonian music educator Riho Päts (2010), based on the example of Kodaly, to use the native language in musical education survey has over the decades led to a foundation where the use of songs, customs and games and other traditional elements of a given locality plays an important role among teachers. The good knowledge of locality-related tradition allows it to be incorporated in multifaceted fashion into music lessons at the second stage of study. Most teachers identified a wide selection of folkloric examples regarding their use. They also concurred that use of locality-related tradition affects the identity, thinking and development of social experience among schoolchildren. The developmental particularities of the second stage of study were explained based on Piaget and Erikson's theories on stages of development and the work of other researcher.

Teachers stated that various genres of traditional culture are used in different parts of lessons (singing, instrument performance, musical movement, composition, listening to music, music history, musical literacy and field trips). Thus the teachers who participated in the survey tend to be rather well aware of their own locality-related tradition. They use the locality-related tradition in parts of the music lessons based on the curriculum but also as occasioned by opportunity and experiences.

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