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The Resonaari Special Music Centre as the Developer of Special Music Education between 1995-2010

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to learn the background and objectives concerning the establishment of Resonaari Special Music Centre. The study was implemented by using qualitative research. The focus is on the interviews were used as a basis for deepening the topics described in the chronicle and discovering the founders' subjective views about the establishment of operations and their objectives. During the initial phase of the operations, the objective was to develop special music education and enable goal-oriented music education for special groups. The study results were also used to evaluate the role and influence of Resonaari as a developer of special music education.

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1. Theoretical background

The Resonaari Special Music Centre in Helsinki, Finland has a music school for people with special needs. The music school offers instrument and band lessons and has over 160 pupils. All of them have one or two music lessons per week. The Resonaari Special Music Centre has a music school for disabled people; it also does research and development work, produces material, organizes courses and complementary education and maintains a network for professionals, associations, polytechnics and universities in Finland and abroad. The intention of this study is to determine how well the objectives had

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been met and to evaluate the role of Resonaari as a developer of special music education, from both a theoretical and a practical point of you.

Music educators have understood that people have different learning styles: kinaesthetic, aural, and visual. General music educators also use a variety of learning styles in their teaching. The music movement is considered essential for teaching music through musical movement. Teachers also use visual aids, such as charts with iconic notation under the words, and they often model musical behaviours so that children can have the best aural examples.

The aim of this article is to research how music teachers at Resonaari have adapted and developed their instruction to meet the needs of all their students, especially those who have disabilities in learning normal notation. Instead of rushing to adapt lessons for students with disabilities, these music educators developed materials and methods that could be used as needed with all students who are willing to learn to read music in an easy way. These developers of music education looked for the alternate ways to notate music to help their students with learning disabilities.

Vikman (2001) studied which opportunities the Figure notes method has for different dimensions of piano teaching on the basic level. According to the results, the Figure notes method made possible individualized teaching and finding of individual meanings in music. On the intrapersonal level, Figure note playing gave better self-esteem and motivation through positive learning experiences. On the interpersonal level, the Figure notes method provided more opportunities for group playing. According to Vikman (2001), the Figure notes method provided new perspectives on the essential relationship between teacher and pupil. In the spatial area of piano playing, Figure note playing gave the readiness to perceive notation and musical forms. In the bodily-kinaesthetic area, Figure notes helped to develop motor coordination. Figure notes also helped in the adoption of forms and a theory of music which is logical, and which relates to a player's logical and mathematical skills. In the area of musicality, Figure notes made possible the realization of individual musicality for almost all players. For example, the special class students with their new concrete notation system could take part in goal-directed piano teaching and expressed themselves musically as well. In the linguistic dimension of piano playing the study showed that lyrics played an important role in adopting music. According to the study, Figure notes seemed to make learning easier and provided teaching with richer opportunities (Vikman, 2001).

According to Kaikkonen (2011), the concepts of difference or diverseness are rather complex to define; in light of the fact that every person is unique, diverseness can also refer to such factors as cultural background, age, abilities or the lack of them. The main point is to realize that people's special features not only create richness, but they also generate a number of challenges.

Special education is highly developed in the Finnish educational system. Special education is needed because the education principles that are appropriate for the majority of the pupils are not suitable for everyone. Diversity and special needs among the learners cannot be entirely accommodated. Besides general education, there is a need for differentiation, in other words, for special education (Ikonen, 1999).

Socio-cultural participation and learning in the activities of societies create the capabilities for different kinds of people to become active members of the surrounding society. According to Kaikkonen (2011), in some cases, the musical achievements provide an opportunity for some students to be full members of the society as musicians and artists. This is a clear indication that at some level, the equality of learning exists. In special music education, diversity is appreciated. When realizing the specific and long-term objectives of special music education, the invisible becomes visible and at the same time, both democracy and overall acceptance increases in the society (Lubet, 2010).

Music itself has a good effect on learners. Many researchers (Giles, 1991; Savan, 1996; Hallam & Price, 1998; North, Tarrant & Hargreaves, 2004) have proved that the introduction of background music into the classroom has had a good effect on the moods, emotions and behaviour of pupils and the calming effect of music has been found when used with hyperactive pupils.

At the same time, music is somehow struggling with the numbers of lessons in the national curriculum of basic education. More and more students with disabilities have more possibilities to participate in music education at school and receive instrument instruction. According to Kaikkonen (2011), curricula in many countries have begun to take more care of special learners, but there have also been many positive changes in attitudes on political and pedagogical levels. Music teachers have noticed the learning potential that people with special needs have; therefore, music teachers need more knowledge of learning styles and they need to learn more about special learners and how to organize and plan teaching, but most of all they need to learn more about pedagogy in Special Music Education (Kaikkonen, 2008).

2. Study design

The purpose of the study was to determine the background and objectives concerning the establishment of the Resonaari Special Music Centre (located in Helsinki, Finland). The research problem was also to examine how well the objectives had been met and to evaluate the role of Resonaari as a developer of special music education, from both a theoretical and practical point of view.

The study was implemented by using qualitative research. The research methods used were interviews and content analysis of the documents and archives of the Resonaari Music School. The data collected through interviews (Pollari, 2011) and archives was classified to find the culmination points of the historical line between 1995-2012. The results present the developmental line of Resonaari and special music education in Finland. The focus is on the interviews with the founders of Resonaari; they were used as a basis for deepening the developmental topics described in Table 1 and discovering the founders' subjective views about the establishment of operations and their professed objectives.

3. Results

Resonaari is the music center established in 1995 where the program Figure notes is being researched and developed. It also has a music school for special needs groups. It has over 180 pupils and is developed on a holistic music education model incorporating the rehabilitative objectives for special needs groups. In addition, Resonaari arranges training and provides music therapy using Figure notes program (Resonaari, 2012). The results consist of a chronicle, which describes the main activities of Resonaari between 1995 and 2010.

During the initial phase of the operations, the objective was to begin developing special music education and enable goal-oriented music education for special groups. Several challenges were faced in the beginning, the most significant was getting financing. The identified turning points included establishing Resonaari music school, expanding operations and extending them abroad. According to material obtained in the interviews: *"Then Kulosaari School was important for us to have a good place to work. . . . The year 2004 was a culmination point for us, because Resonaari was considered a music school and became part of the Finnish National Basic Education in the Arts."* Basic education in the arts differs from compulsory basic education. A local authority providing basic education in the arts receives statutory government transfers based on the number of inhabitants. Further, public and private education providers receive government grants based on the confirmed number of lesson hours given. The Finnish network of art education institutes thus funded comprises 89 music institutes and 41 schools in the other arts. Moreover, the increased appreciation of special groups, to which Resonaari contributed, was also considered a turning point.

The research and development work made in Resonaari Special Music Centre introduces new approaches for goal-oriented music and instrument teaching for people with special needs. Figure notes was developed by Kaarlo Uusitalo (1996/2011). The method was first used in music therapy and the main

aim was to develop easy notation for enjoying music immediately at the first lesson. The notation information is marked through colours and shapes.

The Figure notes R & D project was launched with financial support from the Slot Machine Association (RAY) at the Resonaari Special Music Centre in Helsinki in 1998 and is now ready for widespread application. It was initially designed for keyboard instruments only, but other instruments were soon introduced as well. Figure notes is an excellent tool for both normal instrument teaching and for special groups. It has been proved to have a positive effect in rehabilitation, and therefore one of the objectives for the near future is to develop it with a view more to rehabilitation and therapy. Teaching material and a number of research reports have been published in the course of the R&D project (Resonaari, 2012).

“Funding the projects has been most challenging for us especially at the beginning and we have struggled for it.” (Interview with the founders of Resonaari)

The aim was also to show the importance of versatile pedagogical thinking and the need to use different media in teaching. Special Music Education has become an individual part of Music Education. It means music educators need to learn the philosophical, pedagogical and sociological background and basics of Special Music Education.

According to the Kaikkonen and Uusitalo interviews, a teacher who wishes to teach instrument playing for people with special needs will face many practical and pedagogical challenges. A teacher needs theoretical knowledge, but also new approaches and applications for teaching. One new tool for instrument teaching for people with special needs is Figure notes developed in the Resonaari Special Music Centre. Today the use of Figure notes has expanded widely in Finland but also internationally in many countries (including Italy, Estonia, Japan, Ireland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Latvia and the United Kingdom), and not only in Special Music Education, but also in Music Therapy and mainstream Music Education (Resonaari, 2012).

Kaikkonen points out that people with special needs have a right to receive goal-oriented instrument and music teaching in a way equal to that received by mainstream pupils. For both developers, Uusitalo and Kaikkonen, of special music education and Resonaari, work was needed to create theoretical and pedagogical background for Special Music Education. This is an on-going challenge for education programs, for teacher training, for development and research work, but also for music teaching in practice.

According to the interviews, the developers of Resonaari emphasize that teaching instrument playing for people with special needs is a challenge in many ways. First, a teacher needs to find the best way to teach each pupil; second, a teacher must have the knowledge of different approaches and applications in order to teach instrument playing. Third, a teacher must have a sensibility for good interaction with a pupil. The founders emphasize that 2005 was a turning point in the developmental history of Resonaari, after a performance at Savoy, an exclusive and historically significant musical theatre in Helsinki: *“. . . it was a certain culmination point when Resonaari celebrated its tenth anniversary and our music school was about five to six years old, and we lifted the musical potential of these different learners in the Savoy to the level of professional musicians . . . it was a real “bomb,” for everyone to realize that disabled learners could play and create a wonderful evening’s show . . . it was a real success.”*

Several challenges were faced at the beginning; the most significant was getting funding. The identified turning points included establishing the Resonaari music school, expanding operations and extending them abroad. Moreover, the increased appreciation of special groups, to which Resonaari contributed, was also considered a turning point. The future of the operations was seen in a positive light, and the operations were expected to expand further and become more international.

3.1. International Figure notes club

According to interviews with Kaikkonen and Uusitalo, the international interest in Figure notes spread naturally without any marketing. The international network of people and organizations became aware of the method and interest in using the Figure notes method has been established among people operating in the fields of caring, education, music and other cultural fields. The founders mention that the fact that it has been possible to share feedback and new ideas with people from very different backgrounds has been of considerable significance in developing Figure notes. They describe their attitude and braveness in developing the method: *“This is like a wild flower that flowers in every direction... , the whole world is open to us everywhere.”*

For professionals (music educators, therapists, teachers), Resonaari has established a Figure notes Club. The idea is to bring together anyone using Figure notes in his/her work. The Figure notes Club arranges courses and workshops, gives information and note-making services and organizes the network internationally. Currently, International Figure notes have members from Scotland, Italy, Estonia, Japan, Latvia, and Ireland (Resonaari, 2012).

Table 1. Culmination points in development of Resonaari and Special Music Education

<i>1995- Innovation</i>	<i>1997-98 – Establishment</i>	<i>2002- School</i>	<i>2004- Official status</i>	<i>2005- Concerts</i>	<i>2009-12- Expansion</i>
Beginning of Resonaari with a scholarship for dissertation on alcoholics rehabilitation	Establishment of Resonaari Special Music Centre 1998-2001	2002 Kulosaari school is the new place for Resonaari first	Resonaari Music School became part of the Finnish National Basic Education in the Arts	2005 First Concert in the Savoy theatre: Partnership with professional musicians, Media publicity increased	Expansion and development work in new areas: Senior work, basic education, providing national and international education on special music education, research co-operation etc.
Kaarlo Uusitalo designed Figurenotes 1996 and started to further develop the method with Markku Kaikkonen with the support of Petri Lehikoinen	developmental project of the Figurenote method and material, (funding from RAY) development of special music education started 2001 First dissertation published about Figurenote method Composing with Figurenotes project 2000-02	meeting of Figurenote club	Kulosaari school became the place for Resonaari Figurenotes project 2001-2005 More and more international Figurenote Clubs	International interest and contacts started to spread out Music learning as a tool in cultural social work project 2006-08 Figurenotes –key to rehabilitation project 2006-08	All play-project 2009-11 Music for all-project 2009-11 Central Baltic INTERREG IV A Program

4. Conclusions

The founders of Resonaari have created an international network for Figure notes and Special Music Education. They have created a special music educational field that is also used for basic educational and inclusive educational needs. The future of the operation is seen in a positive light, and the operations were expected to expand further and become more international and to touch more different music learner groups in the society such as seniors. The study results were also used to evaluate the role

and influence of Resonaari as the developer of special music education, a concept that has been developing and has now become a staple in the field of music education.

Kaikkonen (2008) emphasizes that teaching music to people with special needs must hold the same high standards as mainstream music education. The quality of the teaching and individual methods is the focus. Teachers need to respect disabled people as learners equal with all other pupils and students they teach (Kaikkonen, 2008). The main aim of Resonaari is to create more equal and intercultural learning experiences. Special music education is a special form of creative design learning where democracy, understanding, respect and equality are present in the culture and society.

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