

Music Education for Expressive Reading Skills

Maria Maddalena Erman

NaturalMenteMusica CIDM (Italy)
marilenaerman@fastwebnet.it

*"Il compito di un narratore è anzitutto quello di rappresentare.
Un libro che si apre è come un sipario che si alza:
i personaggi entrano in scena,
la rappresentazione comincia"
(Fausta Cialente [1])*

Abstract

Prosodic elements of spoken language are usual between words and sounds: in fact, the speech contains a large amount of musicality, as intonation, rhythm, intensity, and many other aspects of sound. Each language has its own musicality that contributes to the formation of meaning/sense in the communication process.

The author of this paper introduces a report on some educational experience realized with children in which the expressive reading and the "amplified communication" have been developed by using specific educational techniques of the musical language.

Through a methodology based on the learning by doing and learning by playing, proposals about prosodic reading have been elaborated, emphasizing the "musical game" de-contextualizing and creatively re-contextualizing texts. Starting from the awareness of accents and from the search and choice of words, through creative and expressive language games, the creation and variation of stories has been realized, also using the "modified voice", thanks to the integration of new technologies.

Finally, the results of these experiences have produced an audio-book, with numerous rhyming, lyrics, jokes, nonsense, rap, fairy tales and stories, read, performed and recorded directly from students.

These educational pathways, as well as developing a capacity for expressive reading, encouraged a positive emotional experience of recreation, and an opportunity to discover-learn-understand musical possibilities of the voice. The students developed interdisciplinary skills, being able to conquer fundamental abilities for the communication, happily gratified with the language, and in so doing immediately gaining the joy of "making music together".

1. Introduction

Music is a strongly and universally communicative language. Music, through its semiotic system [2], has the power to underline, strengthen or even contradict the literary-linguistic and scenic system.

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Each language has its own musicality that contributes to the formation of meaning/sense in the communication process.

In the renewed rapport between oral and written language structures [3], writing means communication rather than exercise, as well as reading intended as interpretation rather than pure recognition, thus underscoring the need to always keep a tight relationship between the structural command of the different codes (musical, linguistic, recitative) and the elaboration of the meanings aimed at an objective.

The complicity between verbal and writing brings to a close relation between text and context which allows students to develop their sensitivity to communicative scenarios, be aware of the linguistic codes flexibility and be able to adapt linguistic productions on the basis of links present in the surroundings.

2. Educational experiences



Music is fundamental to the dynamics of individual's personal life: it offers a firm basis for a general education and it is revealed as an activity capable of increasing self resources and contributing to the promotion of a better state of one's personality as a whole. The remarkable pedagogical value obtained must have its roots in the creative and in the interdisciplinary character of the process, which becomes itself a divergent exercise of the mind.

In the area of linguistic competence development, music education allowed the elaboration of an integrated methodology [4] between, creative writing, diction and expressive reading techniques education.

Duration:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50 hours
Target Groups:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 students - 8 years old
Aims:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To discover word features and structures • To encourage emotional re-creation through reading • To develop the aesthetic sense and the pleasure for reading • To encourage the expression of state of mind and emotions • To develop and to show the creative potential • To develop expressive reading abilities
Skills:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be able to read quickly, showing expressions, with awareness • Being able to communicate with an appropriate prosodic tone

The formative path has been elaborated by three labs, each lead by a specific expert [5], but all having a common tutor and measured through time thus favouring positive progression and connection, sharing mutual exchange opportunities. After the selection of the text to be read, the formative pathways starting from the awareness of accents and from the search and choice of words, through creative and expressive language games, the creation and variation of stories has been realized, also using the "modified voice", thanks to the integration of new technologies.

3. Reading as an interaction [6]

The "potential" reader, differentiated by abilities, interests and motivations, comes in contact with a multiplicity of different texts with which he interacts and projects himself into [7].

Reading implies an interaction that carries out on different stages: on the selective level with an empathic choice, whether it be rational or influenced; on a sensory level, as a contact with the papery object; at a cognitive level between the reader and the the text to read; on a metacognitive level, between the meaning and the possible sense to which it can return to with reference to the reader's/listener's abilities or experience; on a symbolic level between the personal representation and socio-cultural customs ; on the artistic level as to personal or generalized aesthetic criteria; on an imaginary level as an introspective process between observation and desire; on a relational level, between the reader and potential listeners [8].

The first interaction made by the reader is indeed the selection of the text to be read [9], that is the choice of one of the possible readings. The selection of the text can come about as:

"emphatic selection", when it comes to texts appealing to the reader, thus provoking his curiosity;

"logical selection" based on rational motivations dictated by personal interests that the individual wants to fulfil. This is typically a reader's personal selection, his own choice, although guided by the socio-cultural context, political choices, mass-mediatic influences;

"set selection" when it comes to texts not directly chosen by the reader but presented by others to pursue specific objectives (for examples school texts)



The different types of selection takes on a main and fundamental role for the reading motivation development.

It is indeed essential to transmit a passion for reading, making shared choices, present texts different in styles, structures and topics, finding links between text content and reader's interests, being open to new literary horizons accepting and supporting other people's choices and interests, aiming at multiple reading opportunities thus encouraging different reading strategies.

The other levels of reader-text interaction are based on the codification of the written text which occurs either on the strictly linguistic level as an interpretation of the content as opposed to own abilities and skills and base information, or the semantic level strongly influenced by laws, cultural and social habits.

4. For an appropriate and good reading

An appropriate reading implies a close link between perceptive and cognitive parameters and among parameters pertaining structure and style of the text to be read.

To acquire this competence it is necessary to increase students' abilities to understand situation and contexts, to identify useful elements in order to better communicate.

The teacher has the task to promote an appropriate reading stimulating the student to analyze texts, leading him to get into the mechanisms and the fundamental points, and assisting him when deciphering the semantic links through a planned didactic program. The latter, sticking to progression and preparatory criteria relates to the school level, the rhythms and learning standards, and the cognitive styles.

The text thus becomes an opportunity within a cognitive process which, by contextualizing through ongoing cross-references at different levels, leads to extract a semantic meaning and merges into the expressive interpretation of the text itself as a reconstruction and re-contextualization of it.

Story-telling, reading out loud, interacting observations on the language functioning and effectiveness, the active exploration and the handling of linguistic elements are those functions on whose command the linguistic ability is based on.

5. For an expressive reading [10]

The interpretation is an interactive process between the reader and the text or the reader the text and the listener. The interpretation becomes essential in the oral communication of the text, conforming to laws pertaining to different vocal styles, as for example drama, news report and storytelling.

Reading out loud involves our senses thus triggering different and at times unexpected comprehension mechanisms.

The voice within the communicative process is the connection between the sender and the receiver, indeed conveying the written word that is the main message. However the voice, on top of the main message, communicates additional information:

Relationship integration, personality, rational, emotional attachment and physical balance, issues pertaining the respiratory and speech system. As a matter of fact, *la vive voix* [11], through the musical elements characterizing the expressiveness, conveys an additional meaning to the message, according to a communicative model based on double encoding/ decoding: the first message encoding carried out by the issuer in compliance with the linguistic code, integrates with a second encoding depending on the paralinguistic code; inversely, the receiver will have to elaborate an initial message encode referring to the paralinguistic code and a second one depending on the linguistic code [12].

The Expressive reading ability identifies and brings to life the voice of the text [13] through an amplified communication which gives structure, sound, colour, tone, and word consistency.

6. For an aesthetic reading [14]

The aesthetic modality conveys a higher emotional involvement to the reading experience thus emphasizing the elements of the text.

The aesthetic reading increases the interpretation possibilities: different interpretations can coexist and can be confronted through the narrative observation.

The tension and the liveliness caused by energetic factors (singing, articulation rhythm, rap, repetitive gestures, recited words), in the course of time can transform the casual experience of reading for pleasure in the pleasure for reading.

When reading for pleasure, the emotional tone defines the style, animating the phonic scheme of the written page with energy, and emotional charge.

The expressive qualities of the voice (tone, colour, accent, inflection, pause) are expressing signs highlighting words light and shade effects and bestowing intensity and depth.

Just like an actor reading a script, the pleasantness is generated by listening to the words musicality, whose echo continues to vibrate inside even when the external voice is silent. A voice setting the stage for the text, which *shows through the hearing* intertwined accents, sounds, calculated silence.

7. Methodology

Through a methodology based on the learning by doing and learning by playing, individual discovery, and cooperative learning, proposals about prosodic reading have been elaborated, emphasizing the "musical game" de-contextualizing and creatively re-contextualizing texts. The activities developed through music assume the role of learning conditions and teaching strategies, generating these educational experiences as a creative process. The basic goal of this creative process with a music approach is to place emphasis on creative thinking and to motivate learning through activity.

The didactic and educational proposals especially the one involving a direct contact with books and paper, have motivated the child's personal rapport with books of different topics and with the newspaper. The motivational support that the child obtains through the collaborative work certainly represents an important incentive for the personal strategies growth. In addition knowledge concepts and the process leading to its acquisition are definitely strengthened.

Although the time and space to set aside for reading have been created and planned in light of a promoted expectation which has conveyed a special remark to the experience, and the solemnity of a ritual, it was essential to go along with personal time to dedicate to reading. Starting by focusing on the student, motivating to aesthetic reading, within an authentic and significant context carved out unusual spaces (gym, music workshop, artistic-expressive workshops, outdoor, library) and through creative and loose methods, (individual reading, couple, group, quiet or reading out, with different rhythm, particular tones, sound effects produced with paper or music instruments). The introduction of new reading methods turned out to be very stimulating through the text pitch levels and prosodic exploration, and through the support of external elements: special settings, light effects, shades and images, onomatopoeia and musical sounds, rhythm articulation, gesture-sound, simple vocal and instrumental melodies which have helped make the reading experience magic.

Through an engaged and shared creation of a welcoming and organized physical space (with the use of floor mats, painted curtains, pillows, microphones, speakers or cd players), it was possible to create a mental space for reading and listening [15].

The listening and production activities have gained great benefits having been developed simultaneously either in the classroom education or in the interactive workshop: the workshop activities conjugating



knowledge with know-how, stimulating the active participation and group interaction, allow students to build together, to compare their knowledge, and to share case studies.

The game takes on a strategic role to reach either linguistic or educational objectives within a complex vision of the language, which must not be considered just a set of rules, but also a communication, socialization, and personal growth instrument. The language components become pieces that can be fit in different ways in an ongoing game made of rule combinations and fun.

8. Reading strategies

Exercise for good and relaxed posture to enhance the sound produced.

Exercise through vocal variation: volume, pitch, rate, duration, tone.

Volume changes

Pitch: high and low sentence, gradual change of the voice pitch; up at the end for a question mark; the pitch of your voice should go up at the end of a question; straight up for an exclamation mark.

Adjusting rate: reading the punctuation using effective pauses.

Duration: fast and slow sentence; start out at a good clip but taper off speed just slightly as you near the end.

Modified tone: nasal, firm, whispery, somber, etc.

Articulation: pronounces individual words, enunciating words clearly.

Intonation: relatively whit analysing the agreement/disagreement of the meaning/sense.

Inflection: emphasizing key words and sounds.

9. Advantages

The educational synergy revealed to be motivating and incentivizing for the cooperative learning. The proposed materials and educational activities, introduced as playing games, generated curiosity and fun, thus promoting the natural and positive inclination to challenge and playing activities. The construction and re-construction creative strategies have stimulated the individual and the group creativeness, their abilities, their cognitive and metacognitive competences, fostering the creation of an emphatic emotional-relationship environment. Positive advantages have been found relating to: gradualism, experience authenticity, multi-sensory experience, pragmatism, motility, semiotics.

10. Conclusion

These educational pathways, as well as developing a capacity for expressive reading, encouraged a positive emotional experience of re-creation, an opportunity to discover-learn-understand musical possibilities of the voice. The pupils developed interdisciplinary skills, being able to conquer fundamental abilities for the communication, happily gratified with the language, and in so doing immediately gaining the joy of "making music together".

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