



## Sounds and Values in the Classroom

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### Abstract

*Music is one of the most important means of identity building of young people around the world. Every song has a meaning to the listener; every tune has a value. But although education through arts can be very powerful, music doesn't live up to the task, because both pupils and teachers admit that the use of music in the classroom is not that enjoyable and enriching. We hypothesize that the teachers are often responsible for this missed opportunity because.... trying to adapt to the informal world of their pupils, is the one choosing the music. Based on this working hypothesis 6 partners in 5 countries developed a new didactical approach in which a given value is discussed by music that is chosen by the pupils themselves. By bringing together these different meaningful discourses from every pupil with his or her chosen song, we wanted to achieve a more open mind towards different opinions on a given value and different musical tastes. This approach was implemented in 75 class groups with an n of 908 pupils in 5 countries. All class groups focused on the value of courage. By means of qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods, we investigated enjoyed it and if their attitude towards the musical styles and the given value of courage became more open-minded. Where the first part of the research helped us shape the approach, the second step gave us an insight in the short-term effect of the approach.*

*Therefore we used the widely spread STOMP-instrument on musical preferences in pre and post-test setting together with an own developed instrument on the value of courage. We did found short-term effects on pupils' attitudes towards musical styles and the value of courage in some of the target groups. But interestingly, the incidence of attitude changes was closely related to the pupils' initial musical preferences. Some musical preferences went together with more predetermined minds that were less open to change opinions towards musical styles or the value of courage.*

Music is one of the most important means of identity building of young people around the world. Every song has a meaning to the listener; every tune has a value. Recent sociological research has shown how people learn to understand each other and even become friends by music (Selfhout, M. et al 2008). Therefore, music should be an excellent tool for the communication of intercultural diversity and the discussion of value systems, which is an important goal of education in general.

But although education through arts can be very powerful (e.g. Bamford, A. 2006), music doesn't live up to the task. Of all artforms, music is even least enjoyed in schools in the UK (Harland et al 2000). Also Flemish teachers often use music for motivational reasons, but without satisfying results (De Bruyckere, P., 2008), with pupils being quite nuanced about the use (Roe, K. Et al 2001)

Therefore a new approach is needed where instead of asking the learners to tell what they think, feel or value in a song a teacher suggests, both parties must testify about their own culture and share music as a starting point for intercultural understanding. This is the aim of Silver, a Comenius project (European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme LLP), bringing together 6 partners from 5 European countries (Belgium, Estonia, Slovenia, Sweden & Turkey). The project investigated and piloted the use of music in the classroom, as a tool to promote the active discussion of values through the analysis of popular music, music that the pupils themselves have selected.

### Music as a meaningful discourse

In this project we use the communication model of encoding and decoding by Stuart Hall, which although originally describing television can be used to discuss all kinds of media, popular music included. The models shows media needs to transform an event to a story, by encoding it to the meaningful structures that are transmitted through a programme as a 'meaningful' discourse, and then

are decoded by an audience. Both the encoding and decoding are based on a framework of knowledge, relations of production and technical infrastructure. The a-synchronicity of encoding and decoding declares why a message can be understood differently than intended. But looking at the perception-side of the communication, we discover that decoding consists of 2 elements, a common part (based on shared experiences) and an individual part. That individual part is different for every pupil inside the classroom and of course also different for the teacher involved. (Hall, 1993)

That's why how much there is a shared part of common interpretations on the decoding site by the public, it's still very important to see each relationship with a source of information is unique. Steeman, bringing this model to the perception of music concludes: "Each receiver actively processes information and gives it a different interpretation. Information is experienced, not possessed. The value of this information depends on its meaningfulness for the receiver" (Steeman, 2002).

Drawing on this model, we put high emphasis on the individual preferences and interpretations of music in our new didactical approach.

By bringing together the different discourses of the pupils about their vision on how their song relates to a given value, we hope to achieve a more open mind towards both music and the value discussed.

### Does this approach meet our didactical goal?

In this project we examined whether the attitude towards the musical styles discussed and the value discussed becomes more open-minded by using the approach.

This research consisted of 2 distinct steps. In a first round a test was conducted in 3 different countries (Belgium, Slovenia and Turkey) where an open questionnaire was used to collect the different experiences of the teacher trainees. This helped us shape both the approach and helped us choose which value was most usable for the second step. Based on these different experiences, after debate, the team decided on using courage as a test-value. In this second phase of the research process we conduct quantitative research using the STOMP-scale (Short test on musical preferences) (Renfrow & Gosling, 2003) and a newly developed scale to measure the attitude towards courage. In this research we only examine the short-term influence. In November 2009 we conducted a pilot test to evaluate our testing material. We used both pre- and post-test on the pupils ( $n = 973$ ) and the teacher trainees (70) in March 2010.

These were three target groups in the first round of local testing:

1. Pupils aged 10-15 in Turkey ( $n = 295$ )

The target group pupils come from two different schools: the private primary school of the university and two state high schools which pupils of a mixed social economic status, between ages 14-17 attend. The pupils in private primary school are taught in groups of 12-15 and the pupils in high schools are taught in classes of 30. Besides, groups of the teacher trainees needed to stay in the classroom for each session which lasted for 45 minutes. All teacher trainees start and end their lessons at the same time, so they observed this rule.

Gender 122 boys, 173 girls, average age 13,41 with an std deviation of 1,66, they could speak an average of 1,75 languages.

2. Pupils aged 14-18 in Flanders, Belgium ( $n = 129$ )

The target group is pupils in vocational training, what is called BSO. These pupils come generally from families with a lower socio-economic status and can possibly have difficulties with abstract thinking. Important to know is that they often have issues at school because they have had a lot of bad experiences during their educational life so far. This is because of the 'waterfall'-system the idea of which is that you can always lower your standards almost to the bottom. In BSO there are students aged between 14-18, but this can be older. This group was very interesting for our project for several reasons. They were generally very sociable and open in expressing their opinions and feelings. BSO-schools tend to be more advanced in educational approaches. Furthermore, these pupils with the lesser abstract thinking and lower SES were intriguing for the project.

Gender 41 boys, 88 girls, average age 18,02 with an std deviation of 1,05, they could speak an average of 3,06 languages.

3. Pupils aged 15 to 25 in Slovenia ( $n = 148$ )

The target group consisted of both high school students and school dropouts who were participants of Project Learning for Young Adults. Some of their characteristics were they had unreal expectations for work and employment, low motivation for education, they were socially



excluded lacking functional and social skills and they came from poor socio-economic background having many family problems. They had basic oral and written knowledge of English obtained by following TV programs and using the internet.

Based on this first round in year one of the project, we decided on a fixed version of the approach for the student mobility and decided to select the value for the project to 'courage'. Knowing this we developed an instrument to measure different possible views on courage (this was done in Slovenia). We combined this instrument with Stomp, an existing instrument on musical taste. Both instruments were then piloted during the second round of local testing in Estonia.

4. Local testing of pupils aged 11-13 in Tartu (n = 174)

The local testing in Tartu was conducted in two language groups with the total of 32 pupils and 2 English teachers. The target population in the student mobility comprised pupils aged 11-13 and it belonged to the second school stage based on the Estonian educational system. They obtained their first social skills and knowledge of multicultural context and some command of a foreign language with the mixed socio-economic status. For the mobility this group was interesting because there were several pupils visiting a special music class or taking private music lessons.

Gender 85 boys, 89 girls, average age 14,63 with an std deviation of 1,04, they could speak an average of 2,67 languages.

5. Target group Sweden: (n = 155)

The children's age ranked from 6 to 16 years old and all are being thought in an independent school in Älvboda Friskola, situated 20 kilometres south of Gävle. Independent means that the school is not ruled by the municipality. The target population are pupils from 10 to 16 years old and they have been into social as well as English classes composed of 20 students.

Gender 77 boys, 78 girls, average age 13,90 with an std deviation of 1,62, they could speak an average of 2,37 languages.

We developed 4 new variables counting all the extreme negative results (aka a 1) that every pupil scored on the musical preferences pre and post and on the opinions on the given value pre and post. 2 extra variables were created by distracting the amount of negative scores of the posttest from the pretest.

A positive value for the music evolution variable would mean that the pupils have become more open minded on musical preferences, a negative value would mean the opposite. Also a positive value for the value evolution variable would mean that the pupils have become more open minded on opinions on the value, a negative value would mean the opposite.

A zero would mean in both cases that they didn't change their mind.

The quantitative data shows that with the SILVER approach we can indeed have a short-term impact on pupils in terms of open-mindedness to both musical preferences and opinions about the value of courage.

	Mean Music	Mean Value
Belgium	-,25	-,70
Estonia	,41	,11
Slovenia	,90	,43
Turkey	,10	,66
Sweden	,02	,37

In Slovenia we found that the major effect of the approach involved open-mindedness to music, Turkey showed the greatest effect on values. Sweden and Turkey showed minimal effect on music, while in Estonia the project had a minor effect on values.

If we look at the effects on the five countries together we see the following patterns:

- a positive relation between music evolution and value evolution (,01) – the more open-minded one becomes to musical types, the more open-minded one is towards the value;
- a negative relation between age and value evolution (,05) – the younger a pupil is, the greater the effect of the approach on achieving increased open-mindedness towards the value;
- partner country and value evolution (0,01); this means that there are differences in the results between countries and in the effect of the approach on the evolution of values;



- a negative relation between the number of languages and both music and value evolution (,01) – the more languages a pupil knows, the lower the chance of their becoming more open-minded towards musical styles or towards values because of the approach.

The negative effect (being less open minded) that showed up in Belgium probably has a distinct origin. We discovered that pupils with more elite musical preferences (a liking for musical styles such as jazz, classical and blues) are less likely to become open minded through our approach, and this musical profile is significantly dominant in the test group from Belgium (De Bruyckere et al, 2010).

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