

## Primary Pupil's Perceptions of their Participation in a Performative Music Project – Crianças ao Palco

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### Abstract

*The present study is based on a socio-cultural perspective of music education, in which the contexts of musical participation and learning that are provided to the children can assume an important role in the formulation of their perceptions, in the opinions and attitudes that they build and rebuild on music and on themselves. It focuses on understanding the musical and socio-cultural contribution of the project named Crianças ao Palco, a music project available since 2010 in the Leiria region, in Portugal, for primary schools. This project aims to develop and improve pupil's artistic, cognitive and social skills through a voice selection process in order to participate in a final musical performance [1]. As suggested by Milhano [2] in a study developed with pupils from the same region, musical participation in the different contexts of primary music education seems to be an activity participated in only by a minority. They include children participation in musical activities both at school as a compulsory subject, and outside school as an elective subject in formal and informal dimensions. Suggestion was made upon the importance of nurturing pupil's opportunities to actively take part in each one of the potential and desirable contexts of music education, especially music at primary school [3]. The present study aimed to understand the meanings assigned by pupils to the experience of participating in the project, characterizing their contexts of musical participation, before and after the experience. Results were drawn on a questionnaire survey, made available online to pupils participating in the final shows between the years 2010 and 2017, and on structured interviews made with parents and primary school teachers. Results suggests that, for many pupils, the project allowed their first contacts with professional musicians, and later, encouraged their search for opportunities for a greater musical involvement as the pursuit of further studies in music education. The positive experiences and musical, social and emotional memories gathered by pupils generated new musical perspectives in their lives and ways of participation and involvement.*

**Keywords:** Music participation; music performance, professional musicians, school music.

### 1. Introduction

*While the emphasis may change between authors and across decades, the cumulative message is familiar: when taught well and sufficiently supported, music offers all children the chance for expression, insight and development, and so has lasting effects on their engagement with the world [4].* The article focuses on investigating the lived experience of children in a project named *Crianças ao Palco*, available for primary schools since 2010 in the Leiria region, Portugal. What's the importance of nurturing pupil's opportunities to actively take part in music education? What are the meanings assigned by pupils to the experience of participating in a music project that allowed their first contacts with professional musicians? How those musical experiences encouraged pupil's search for opportunities for a greater musical involvement? The present study is based on a socio-cultural perspective of music education. It begins by addressing the importance of nurturing pupil's opportunities to participate in the different contexts of music and learning. It considers, in particular, the balance between school and outside school opportunities and the link between them in the formulation of their perceptions, opinions and attitudes that they build and rebuild on music and on themselves, and in their musical identity formation.

### 1.2 Understanding the importance of nurturing pupil's musical experiences

Research have suggested that opportunities and motivations to participate in musical activities are recognised factors on musical development [5]. It seems strong the claim that the influence of the quality of the musical interactions, situation and learning experiences provided to pupils' have in the ways they value and use music, in their self-perceptions, beliefs, motivations and opinions about



music, as well as in their levels of engagement in a variety of musical activities. This may be of particular importance when emphasising the transitory and socially constructed nature of the sense of self, acknowledging that, the development of a commitment to musical participation over the lifespan, recognises a 'series of continuous changes' [6]. Therefore, the conscious management of those changes and the quality of the opportunities of the musical participation provided to pupils' from some age ranges, may be significant in shaping not only their attitudes, choices and identities towards a lifespan musical involvement but also in 'creating' their own selves [7], and in representing themselves to others.

We acknowledge that music education is concerned with providing all pupils with access to musical opportunities. Previous results has shown the need to provide pupils with more opportunities for access to musical experiences and as being increasingly important not to neglect the importance of nurturing pupils' occasions to actively take part in each one of the potential and desirable contexts of music participation [2]. Those results have also drew the attention to some local social and cultural influences on providing a small percentage of pupils with some opportunities to participate in elective, voluntary, and self-selected musical activities outside school. However, those opportunities to participate in music outside school, in the community, seemed not to be available, then, to many children [2].

We consider that the understanding of the importance of nurturing pupil's musical experiences is closely linked to the study of existing synergies between school music, the home, and the various cultural environments. The connections established between the musical activities experienced at school, both in formal and informal settings, and in those developed outside school as an elective subject in formal and informal dimensions are complex, but increasingly significant to pupils' musical development, motivations and learning. Accordingly, it seems crucial that the educational system considers, in parallel, other different curricular structures, recognising its implications for the formal educational contexts of music learning and teaching, so that music education is not, as it sometimes seems to be, associated with something that came out of the curriculum [2, 3].

## 2. Methods of data collection and analysis

This study focuses on understanding the musical and socio-cultural contribution of the project named *Crianças ao Palco*, a music project available since 2010 in the Leiria region, in Portugal, for primary schools. It aims to develop and improve primary pupil's artistic, cognitive and social skills through a voice selection process in order to participate in a final musical performance [1]. With eight years, the project has been developed by professional musicians with primary schools, through the support of the respective municipalities (Ansião, Leiria, Pombal e Porto Mós).

In order to understand the meanings assigned by pupils to the experience of participating in the project, results were drawn on a questionnaire survey, made available online to 108 pupils from the 153 participating in the final shows between the years 2010 and 2017, and on 8 structured interviews made with parents and primary school teachers. The questionnaire was sent to several specialists to gain their opinions and thereby to increase its readability, practicability and its internal validity. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistical technics and content analyses. A method of structured interviews was used to collect data from parents and primary school teachers. After recorded, data from transcriptions were analysed according to the previously defined categories. Ethical procedures were followed with results drew on participants informed consentient.

## 3. Findings and discussion

Regarding the contexts and opportunities for children's musical participation, results showed that about half did not previously had a close connection to music. For most, their participation in the musical project brought changes by fostering their musical involvement in the different contexts of music learning and practice. Results showed a very positive appreciation from their parents, particularly concerning their children's involvement in the whole process. Parents highlighted that it offered their children with the possibility of familiarizing and introducing them to an artistic experience that positively influenced their attitudes and behaviors towards music and school, their career choices and their involvement in the musical activities available in their communities [1].

The interpersonal ties developed between the various stakeholders were an important category of analysis. Results suggested that the project has fostered new friendships among children and musicians, which, in some cases, originated new musical projects.

The meanings attributed by children to the experience of participating in the project are suggested by several expressed ideas: the recognition of the quality of their performances by local communities; the opportunity for an effective musical participation with professional musicians; the strengthening of their

musical learning; their awareness of other possibilities for musical participation and involvement; and, in the way they felt it improved their view of their schools. Pupils' expressed a sense of proud about their musical performances, valued the development of the process itself and not only the results and, discovered individual talents. As less valued by children were the difficulties expressed in acting for an audience and, if case, the fact of not having won.

Results from the interviews to primary teachers suggests a very positive appreciation of the musical project, highlighting that it provided pupils' with adequate opportunities and contexts for musical, personal and social development and learning, enhancing their sense of belonging at school. The cheerleader stands out in the relationship between the project and the school as it strengthened the involvement between school, community, and professional musicians. One teacher expressed that it would be interesting if the project were included in a broader approach of music education in primary schools. Teachers also mentioned the motivation on the way their pupils began valuing more music learning and how it influenced some pupil's vocational paths [1].

#### 4. Conclusions

Results suggest that *Crianças ao Palco* music project has been an opportunity for musical participation and learning that generated in children, in schools and in the communities, very positive attitudes of the role of music in their lives. Children expressed a greater desire to learn and to become more involved in musical practices. Thus, it is possible to suggest that this project provided a social, cultural and artistic experience relevant to its participants as well as to their respective communities [1]. It had significance for the establishment of new contexts for music learning, able to nurture children's motivations and desire to a further musical and social involvement with schools, communities and the artistic-musical milieu.

For many pupils, the project allowed their first contacts with professional musicians, and encouraged their search for opportunities for a greater musical involvement. As previous studies shown, it seems that music practice and involvement during primary school generate very positive attitudes and a focus for the value of music in pupils' lives, producing a desire to learn, and to take part more widely in several music practices [3]. The project has allowed experiences for musical participation and involvement, reinforcing links of sociability by providing pupils with opportunities for an active participation in cultural life, from an early age and by valorizing its own artistic resources [1].

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