



MUSICAL LANGUAGE AND ITS MULTIPLE SENSES: PROCESSES OF MUSICALIZATION AS A POSSIBILITY OF MUSICAL LITERACY

A LINGUAGEM MUSICAL E SEUS MÚLTIPLOS SENTIDOS: PROCESSOS DE MUSICALIZAÇÃO COMO POSSIBILIDADE DE LETRAMENTO MUSICAL

EL LENGUAJE MUSICAL Y SUS MÚLTIPLES SENTIDOS: PROCESOS DE MUSICALIZACIÓN COMO POSIBILIDAD DE LETRAMIENTO MUSICAL



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ABSTRACT: This theoretical essay aims to discuss the relations between the concept of Literacy and the process of musicalization, as a possibility to think about Musical Literacy. To this end, we start from the idea of music as a language intrinsically related to perception, that is, a language of the senses. Although perceptual experience is necessary in the process of constructing musical aspects, it is not enough to make sense of the real. It is necessary, therefore, the attribution of meaning by the subject. This thought is echoed in the Genetic Epistemology of Jean Piaget (1896-1980), especially in the way this theory conceives the construction of the real. The processes of making and understanding music are linked to the way of assigning meaning to the constructions involved in musical language. Thus, music learning through Musical Literacy should consider the totality of music in the context of its learning and not the fragmentation of its contents.

KEYWORDS: Musical Literacy. Music as language. Cognitive mechanisms. Genetic epistemology.

RESUMO: O presente ensaio teórico objetiva discutir as relações entre o conceito de Letramento e o processo de musicalização, como possibilidade para se pensar o Letramento Musical. Para tanto, parte-se da ideia da música como linguagem intrinsicamente relacionada à percepção, ou seja, uma linguagem dos sentidos. Embora a experiência perceptiva seja necessária no processo de construção dos aspectos musicais, ela não é suficiente para dar sentido ao real. Faz-se necessária, portanto, a atribuição de significado pelo sujeito. Esse pensamento encontra eco na Epistemologia Genética de Jean Piaget (1896-1980), em especial no modo como essa teoria concebe a construção do real. Os processos de fazer e compreender música vinculam-se ao modo de atribuir sentido às construções envolvidas na linguagem musical. Desse modo, as aprendizagens de música por meio do Letramento Musical devem considerar a totalidade da música em contexto de suas aprendizagens e não a fragmentação de seus conteúdos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Letramento musical. Música como linguagem. Mecanismos cognitivos. Epistemologia genética.

RESUMEN: Este ensayo teórico tiene como objetivo discutir las relaciones entre el concepto de Alfabetización y el proceso de musicalización, como una posibilidad para pensar la Alfabetización Musical. Para ello, partimos de la idea de la música como un lenguaje intrínsecamente relacionado con la percepción, es decir, un lenguaje de los sentidos. Aunque la experiencia perceptiva es necesaria en el proceso de construcción de aspectos musicales, no es suficiente para dar sentido a lo real. Es necesaria, por lo tanto, la atribución de significado por parte del sujeto. Este pensamiento se repite en la Epistemología Genética de Jean Piaget (1896-1980), especialmente en la forma en que esta teoría concibe la construcción de lo real. Los procesos de hacer y entender la música están ligados a la forma de asignar significado a las construcciones involucradas en el lenguaje musical. Por lo tanto, el aprendizaje musical a través de la alfabetización musical debe considerar la totalidad de la música en el contexto de su aprendizaje y no la fragmentación de sus contenidos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Letramiento musical. Música como lenguaje. Mecanismos cognitivos. Epistemología genética.

Introduction

Music is a language that "speaks" directly to the senses. For this reason, it is intrinsically related to perception. As Granja (2006) points out, not just any perception, but "an elaborate and complex perception, involving a huge range of cognitive resources" (p. 18, our translation). However, perceptive experience, although necessary, is not enough to give meaning to reality. The attribution of meaning by the subject is necessary. In its symbolic dimension, music can only be understood as a reality that refers to other realities and not in the *strict sense* of the idea of language that assumes a semiotic function with codes and decoding of a universal character (DELALANDE, 2019; SWANWICK, 2003).

The understanding of music as a language is not a consensus in the musical field, as DeNora (1986) points out when presenting the formalist and expressionist conceptions. The first conception describes music as essentially abstract and expressionless. The second compares music to language, given that its compositional elements, to some degree, have extramusical references. Regardless of such conceptions, what is assumed in this essay, therefore, is the understanding of a musical language that takes place in the context of the multiplicity of realities.

The song(s), always in the plural, are loaded with subjectivities that portray a multiplicity of poetics that emerge in the production of meanings attributed to different discourses, as defended by Penna (2015). Taking Aristotle's *Poetics* (384 BC – 322 BC) as a starting point, Penna (2015) brings a broader conception of the expression "musical poetics", understanding it as different aesthetics that enable ways of making and thinking music. Thus, musical poetics are, as the author emphasizes, "different modes of musical creation, different ways of selecting sounds and organizing them, creating meanings through musical language" (PENNA, 2015, p. 86, our translation). In this sense, it is possible to state that music is not a "universal language". At least not with the intention of a common communication to all those involved with it. This is because the plurality of its aesthetic and social meanings must be considered, which makes it impossible for there to be only one meaning for this type of discourse (REIS; OLIVEIRA, 2017). Therefore, the musical language has to be understood in a particular way, differently from what happens with the verbal language. According to Penna (2015):

Being an artistic, culturally constructed language, music – precisely with its organizing principles – is a historical and social phenomenon. In this way, for example, European civilization, in its evolution, consolidated tonal music, based on the tempered system, delimiting among all sound possibilities, a certain range of sounds as "musical material" and establishing the rules for its manipulation [...]. Thus, the understanding of music, or even the sensitivity to it, is based on a culturally shared pattern for the organization of sounds in an artistic language, a pattern that, socially constructed, is socially learned (p. 30-31, our translation).

Moraes (2001) corroborates this idea by proposing that "music is a 'Language' that takes place in 'Space' and in 'Time', of 'Feeling'" (p. 25, our translation). In other words, music integrates both aesthetic and non-aesthetic aspects into its constitution. However, the complex cultural system that surrounds musical discourse allows, to a greater or lesser extent, these aspects to be socially shared in a specific context (REIS; OLIVEIRA, 2017). From this perspective, Reis and Oliveira (2017) state that "the close relationship with culture, within each social context, gives music an important space with symbolic characteristics, uses and functions that particularize it, according to the specificities of the context and the universe that surrounds it" (p. 1302, our translation). For this reason, when assuming music as a language, the multiplicity of implicit cultural and linguistic factors is considered, and, therefore, it becomes possible to establish intersections with the idea of Literacy and its learning ².

Music literacy

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Due to the nature of the theme and the interest of researchers in the area, the concept of literacy appears strictly linked to the universe of reading and writing verbal language. According to Soares (2004), the term emerged with the aim of understanding the social issues that govern the use of language, in different sociocultural contexts, simultaneously in the mid-1980s, and define two separate processes – even though they can walk together. That is, "Literacy is concerned with the (individual) acquisition process of reading and writing skills, whereas literacy encompasses the uses of reading and writing in social (collective) practices" (KALKI; SALES; MARTINS, 2020, p. 39, our translation). In the counterpoint between the literacy and literacy phenomena, Soares (2004) states that there is "a progressive, albeit cautious, extension of the concept of literacy towards the concept of literacy: from knowing

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²For what is aimed at in this essay, part of the theoretical discussion carried out in the thesis entitled "Musician in the classroom or teacher on stage? Meanings of Music Degree Students - Possible Encounters", defended by the author in 2020, in the Graduate Program in Education, at the State University of Londrina, Londrina, Paraná. The selection made prioritizes the discussion of the cognitive mechanisms implicit in the meanings of music, aiming to bring the understanding of musicalization processes closer to the concept of literacy.

how to read and write towards being able to use of reading and writing" (p. 7, our translation). The process that Soares (2004) calls "(dis)invention of literacy" proves to be important to the discussion we propose about musicalization processes, as musical learning goes beyond decoding the elements of musical reading and writing. That is, the focus is on the process of aspects that lead to the understanding of this language, through successive awareness (REIS; OLIVEIRA, 2013).

In the growing diversity of social and linguistic factors that start to add to the discussion around this theme, one can see a variety of media and communication channels involved. According to Loureiro (2022),

[...] literacy pedagogy must also consider several design elements in the process of meaning, namely: linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural, spatial meaning, and also multimodal patterns of meaning that relate these five to each other (p. 77, our translation).

According to the same author, in this multiplicity of linguistic modalities, one can frame the musical language and, therefore, think about the possibility of Musical Literacy (LOUREIRO, 2022). As already discussed, in order to understand the Literacy concept, it is necessary to discuss its relationship with Literacy. Likewise, in order to understand what Loureiro (2022) calls Musical Literacy, it is necessary to discuss Musicalization. Therefore, this article starts with the idea of musicalization as a process of developing musical understanding. In other words, musicalization is the process through which one can "develop the necessary perception instruments so that the individual can be sensitive to music, apprehend it, receiving significant sound/musical material" (PENNA, 2015, p. 31, our translation).

The musical language and the many meanings attributed by the subjects

Music in its multiplicity of meanings, both those specific to language (emphasis on socially constructed aspects) and those of a subjective nature (emphasis on the subject's own expressions), assumes a form of discourse. As a discourse, music is full of different meanings and social functions. Thus, it can only be understood as a reality that refers to other realities, manifested through multiple poetics (PENNA, 2015).

This thought is echoed in Piaget's conception of the construction of reality, as it recognizes in the construction of knowledge what is external to it, as well as its previously consolidated experiences and meanings (PIAGET, 1996). Therefore, it is not possible to understand the meanings of the subjects if we do not take into account their formative context.

The subject's musical culture is manifested in the use of musical "accents", whose meanings can be apprehended and socially shared (SWANWICK, 2003). Through assimilation and accommodation, the subject uses the schemes he already has to build new knowledge. However, knowledge as a process can only make sense if it is inserted in a social context. Likewise, the levels of this knowledge also acquire meaning in this context (GARCIA, 2002).

The subject builds his relationships in social interaction having contact with the different surrounding languages, through which he elaborates the real and expresses his thought in the culture. In allusion to this issue, Caregnato (2012) points out that "music could take the place of one of those forms of communication, which transmit to the child an entire framework of knowledge constructed by culture" (p. 30). When dealing with the social dimension of knowledge, Piaget (1973, p. 416, our translation) points out that:

[...] society is the supreme unit, and the individual only arrives at his inventions or intellectual constructions to the extent that he is the seat of collective interactions, the level and value of which naturally depend on society as a whole. The great man who seems to launch new currents is just a point of intersection or synthesis of ideas elaborated by continuous cooperation. Even when he opposes the reigning opinion, he corresponds to the underlying need, which does not originate in him.

This allows us to understand that meanings are constructed in the subject's interaction with music. That is, the production of meaning is of the order of action and not something implicit in the music-object itself as a certain sound complex. The characteristics attributed to it constitute abstractions of the subject in front of this object. Such understanding "discourages us to seek a universal definition in which all future music should recognize itself" (CANDÉ, 2001, p. 11, our translation). The author also presents the following example:

The performer imitates an archetype, a memorized inner song. This does not always coincide with other archetypes: those that listeners bring to their memory and that will serve them to judge the interpretation (CANDÉ, 2001, p. 14, our translation).

This occurs precisely because of the diversity of interpretations attributed to music, through its subjective character. It is assumed, therefore, that the processes of meaning have their genesis in action and a process of transformation into internalized action leads to its understanding. That is, the construction of musical knowledge occurs with the attribution of meaning by the subject (BEYER, 1999).

In the Piagetian perspective, intelligence has access to the level of representation from the symbolic or semiotic function (DELVAL, 1998). That is, through the process of

interiorization of the action. Once the child is in possession of the symbolic function, he is able to differentiate the signifiers from the meanings, which then allows him to evoke objects or situations, constituting the beginning of the representation (WEILAND; VALENTE, 2007). In this process, figurative and operative aspects of thought play important roles.

The figurative aspect consists of representing and describing reality in a static way, even though it may be a dynamic situation. This aspect is what "allows research on the real to know its properties, but only notes and contemplates them" (BISPO, 2000, p. 40, our translation). Piaget (1973, p. 71, our translation) explains that

[...] the figurative aspect of representative thinking is everything that addresses configurations as such, as opposed to transformations. Guided by perception and supported by the mental image, the figurative aspect of representation plays a preponderant role (in the abusively preponderant sense and precisely depending on transformations) in preoperative thinking [...] the operative aspect of thinking is relative to transformations and is thus directed to everything that modifies the object, from action to operations.

This explains the ability to discover and describe particular and observable properties existing in objects. By this logic, Ramozzi-Chiarottino (2002, p. 79, our translation) comments:

There are three types of figurative knowledge: perception, which works exclusively in the presence of the object and through a sensory field; imitation, in the broadest sense (gestural, phonic imitation, graphic imitation, or drawing, etc.), functioning in the presence or absence of the object, but through manifest motor manifestation, and the mental image, which only works in the absence of the object and through means of internalized reproduction.

With the function of serving as an indispensable auxiliary to the operative aspects, imitating, representing and anticipating some aspects of reality, figurative knowledge is based on empirical abstraction. The operative aspect, in turn, is constituted by cognitive functions and is not directly linked to the images in the sense that they are not where its genesis is propitiated. Unlike the figurative aspects that have their genesis in the object itself, the operative aspects originate internally, as products of assimilation and the subject's logical need. Thus, it is characterized by the deduction or modification of the object, figuratively represented, in order to achieve transformation (BISPO, 2000). In this sense, discussing the operation, Ramozzi-Chiarottino (2002, p. 103, our translation) argues:

It is an action made reversible. This reversibility is nothing more than the expression of a permanent balance reached between a generalized accommodation and a non-deforming assimilation: reversibility is, in fact, the possibility of finding a previous state of data, not contradictory with the

current state (assimilation), and a state as real or realizable as this current state (accommodation). It is this mobile and reversible balance that ensures the conservation of concepts and judgments and that regulates both the correspondences of operations between individuals (social exchange of thought) and the conceptual system prior to each one.

This form of knowledge has its origins marked by schemes of action and operations and is characterized by the predominance of assimilation, since, supposing an incorporation of external elements to the subject's structures, a static character is annulled and movement is admitted, that is that is, the characteristics of transformation are imposed on structures, due to the subject's logical need. In this case, the symbolic or semiotic capacity of music is understood, among which the relations between the mental image and the musical gesture will be highlighted. According to Bispo (2000, p. 38, our translation), the mental image

refers to an interiorized imitation in the absence of the model, that is, it allows the evocation of objects not currently perceived [...] of doing or possessing something in its perceptive absence.

The fact that the mental image has imitation as its source and is linked to the constitution of the symbolic function makes it occupy an essential function for acts of knowledge and have a symbolic role. Therefore, the image is related to the figurative aspect, being, from the subject's point of view, copies of the real, but from the object's point of view, only approximate correspondences of reality (BISPO, 2000). Mental images are therefore a form of imitation that is not externalized. That is, they are not simply "marks" left by the path of sensitive experience. In other words, as an interiorized imitation, it is not a simple copy of reality, but represents an effort to assimilate and elaborate reality (DELVAL, 1998). For this reason, mental images, having sensorimotor imitation as their genesis, are located at the accommodation pole of adaptation and, therefore, play a preponderant role in the evolution of reasoning. This meets the metaphorical resources of the discourse to refer to music and the high degree of correlation between music and expressive movement.

The songs, in their different poetics, find in the *gesture* their possibility of revealing and expressing themselves. Zagonel (1992), when referring to the etymology of the word gesture, finds several definitions, among which the following stand out: from the Latin *gestus*, to bring upon oneself, to take upon oneself, to voluntarily charge with; *gesta*, synonymous with acta, actions. The musical gesture is present in the musician as a composer or performer. In the first, he goes from gesture to composition, while in the second, he goes from composition to gesture. In the words of Zagonel (1992, p. 17, our translation):

The composer, when conceiving a musical idea, builds the image of the sound movement and can foresee the instrumental gesture necessary for its realization. The interpreter, from reading the score, imagines the desired sound movement, and associates the necessary physical gesture to the emission of this sound.

Each one in their own way will be the bearer of a gesture, be it abstract or concrete, making music possible. Zagonel (1992) points out two aspects of the aforementioned musical gesture, namely: 1) Physical gesture: the mental image, the image of the physical body gesture in the individual's thinking. Mental representation of a given movement, element that is part of the conception of instrumental technique, therefore of direct relation with the corporal aspect; 2) Sound movement (sound moving in time): this is the path of sound itself as an idea (thought) or in real form (sound). In understanding the gesture as a sound movement or, better said, as a sound displaced in time and space.

In this sense, the musical gesture as an interiorized action (operation) works as a potentiator of meaning, as evidenced by Delalande (2019). The author elaborates a typology of the gesture that demonstrates different aspects of producing it, from the motor action to the mental representation:

- 1) Effective: gestures necessary for the mechanical production of sound (rubbing, blowing, pressing a key, etc.);
- 2) Companions: gestures that engage the whole body. The performer combines movements that are strictly essential with others that are apparently less necessary (chest gestures, shoulder gestures, mimes and the breathing of a pianist, etc.);
- 3) Figurative: has a metaphorical character. These are the association of perceptive elements to figurative gestures, such as, for example, the idea of the "swing" of a melody.

The figurative aspect of the gesture, that is, the *mental gesture*, supports the representative character of the musical content that one wishes to transmit in the different ways of relating to music: composition, interpretation and as a listener. The mental gesture, as stated by Zagonel (1992), is "always present in the musician, as a composer or performer" (p. 17, our translation). In the case of the composer, this process occurs through the construction of the sound movement image, and may even anticipate the necessary gestures for instrumental performance. In the case of the interpreter, the process begins with the image of the desired sound movement, associated with the physical movement necessary for its realization. As

Zagonel (1992) points out, if the "composer goes from gesture to composition, the performer does the opposite, that is, he goes from composition, from score to gesture" (p. 17-18, our translation).

For Swanwick (2014), the final characteristic of the subjective, original and qualitative aspects of musical production is not at the level of creation of new sound materials nor in the creation of expressive gestures, but "in the unique relationships elicited by musical speculation – the transformation of the sound and gesture in musical structure" (SWANWICK, 2014, p. 51, our translation). In this understanding, the musical structure does not deal with a fixed construction, but with the effectiveness with which an expressive gesture is heard to relate to another. This applies both to a jazz improvisation and to the movement of a symphonic work, for example. Swanwick (2014) emphasizes the quality of musical productions, in order to prioritize the speculative element involved in manipulating the musical structure. In a later moment of the same work, the author complements his thoughts about the musical structure:

It is precisely this deep structure of music that motivated my own search for a critical and developmental model; an analysis of what the musical experience really is, of what happens when people relate to music. The effective teacher is sensitive to students' needs and to the nature and structure of the subject (SWANWICK, 2014, p. 167, our translation).

For the British educator, the speculative element of a musical production needs to satisfy, to some extent, the criteria of structural interest. That is, guaranteed aspects such as coherence, element of surprise, characterized by climate, atmosphere and gesture. For the author, a completely predictable musical work fails to satisfy these criteria, since, according to him, "it is psychologically weak and will lose our attention in the first few minutes" (SWANWICK, 2014, p. 167, our translation).

The cognitive mechanisms involved in the construction of knowledge are not absent from the interactions established by the subject. Nor are they independent of their own constructions. The imbalance, proper to the action of knowing, transposes the concreteness of the object in question, thus becoming what the subject means (PIAGET; GARCIA, 1987; BEYER, 1999). In other words, the processes of making and understanding music are linked to the way of attributing meaning to the constructions involved in the musical language. Thus, music learning through *Musical Literacy* should consider the totality of music in the context of its learning and not the fragmentation of its contents. In other words, it is not about learning it in a fragmented, disconnected way, but as a whole that belongs to a given sociocultural context.

Final remarks

When thinking about the pedagogical implications involved in the processes of Musical Literacy, we seek a school music education that enables conditions of constitutive awareness in the being and being of the musical experience. Under this logic, it aims to contribute to the expansion of the concept of musicalization and the understanding of the cognitive mechanisms involved in the production of meanings in the construction of musical knowledge.

In short, the reflections raised here, in line with the theoretical references that address literacy, musicalization and musical development, aim to promote the thought of music teaching that is not imposing, but committed to the integral formation of the human being through doing and understand music. Although much has been built in studies on school music education, there is still a long way to go so that one day Musical Literacy is accessible to all students in Brazil.

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