

RECONSTRUCTING HISTORICAL LESSONS: TEACHING MUSIC IN THE 1920S AND 1930S

Andreas Lehmann-Wermser

Heinrich Nordhoff High School, Wolfsburg, Germany

Background

The time after World War I was marked in Germany by a rapid development of music education as new theories, materials and policies were distributed. While publications have been discussed broadly, almost no research has been done on everyday music teaching in higher education.

Aims

Therefore an attempt was made to gain an understanding of the conditions, methods and results of music education as they were perceived by the students participating, i.e. the relationship between the state of theory in music education and its actual practice.

Method

17 narrative interviews were conducted with 14 persons aging from 72 to 90. A corpus of 120.000 words was analyzed on the basis of the Grounded Theory. Categories were identified to describe classroom activities as well as the perception of educational processes.

Results

Teaching music in higher education schools turned out to be rather conservative in topics and methods making little use of the achievements of “progressive” contemporary music education. However, low professional standards could not be made responsible for this as it has been supposed by general histories of music education in Germany. On the contrary, music teachers appeared in the corpus as well-trained and competent persons. The lessons were successful in terms of an introduction and long-lasting participation in bourgeois musical life. Part of that success can be explained by the conformity of contents and values of school and family culture.

Conclusions

In-depth interviews appear as a useful method of reconstructing historical music teaching as well as basic processes of music socialisation. For the historical period in question success or failure of teaching music cannot be understood by merely looking at classroom processes, but only in the context of the introduction of the students into musical culture as a whole.