

THE ROLE OF HUMAN RELATIONS IN A TEACHING SITUATION

MARIANN ABRAHAM

Piano Department, Bela Bartok Conservatory, Budapest-Hungary
mariann.abraham@lisztacademy.hu www.konzi.hu

ABSTRACT

I experienced first-hand that professional knowledge itself is not sufficient to build up a deep relationship to music in the student: the quality of human relations between the teacher and student is equally important.

I will elaborate on this by addressing three issues which, while universally known, may offer some new aspects, useful conclusions proven in practice. The environment, our immediate surroundings and the entire world underwent huge changes in the past decades. What positive and negative changes of character do these cause in today's youth, how are their interests, attitudes and mentality influenced? Are there any tangible differences between youth studying music and those who are only passive consumers of it? Are our teachers prepared to handle the intellectual and emotional problems accumulating in our age? Since the answer is unambiguously negative we must urgently change the ways how teachers themselves are educated. This conclusion is supported by the discouraging results of *PISA Studies* in several European countries. The basic tenet of the new approach is competence pedagogy, emphasizing that in addition to professional and psychological knowledge the teacher must be well-informed in many other areas. Also, the most important educational goal is not memorizing specific material but to unfold the special talents present in each student. Here I would like to refer to some recent results of a new discipline called *neuro-didactic*.

I will also discuss briefly the status of music education in Hungary using the latest (2008) statistical data and describing both the structural reforms and content changes

INTRODUCTION

The economy based on services and change of information requires people to have higher level knowledge than that provided by schools at present.

In Hungary, where the training for instrumental music teaching has primarily been focussed on academic and instrumental know-how, the emphasis is being moved to the more intensive development of the ability to create many-sided human relations.

For many decades the music education beginning with primary music teaching has been carried out according to strict system of institutional frames.

At the same time, while this frame of the educational process with its well-built-up levels is very important on its own, the substantial content is created by teaching activity. This activity can easily be rewarding or valueless. I would like to make a contribution to this topic following three main directions. These are the forthcoming: **the teaching situation – the teacher – the student**

THE TEACHING SITUATION

"Learning can be successful only in active mental state"

This sentence having key-importance for me was pronounced by neurobiologist academic Prof.Dr. Endre Grastyán at a National Conference for Education in 1983, where I heard it for the first time. The title of his lecture was The Optimalization of Learning in the Mirror of Neurophysiological Knowledge¹.

Years passing I came across new and again new relating material which enriched my knowledge in the topic. I was able to find out, among others that the development of the brain is in strong interaction with the information acquired from the surroundings, and the microstructure of the brain is altered as result of learning.

The former conception emphasizing the determining influence of emotions to the perception and memory is confirmed by present scientific light related the role of emotions within the processes taking place in the brain².

The recognition of these facts led me to unseen experience, because on entirely scientific and objective basis they proved the facts described in an article published much earlier by me. The article was written on the occasion of celebration of our eighty-year-old colleague who dealt with teaching exceptionally gifted young musicians. The article included interviews with her 12-14-year-old students. During the preparation of this article two staggering facts astonished me: first, how infallibly the young children feel what is happening to them and what makes them step forward; and second, with what unmistakable awareness the teaching process works out in case of a genius artist-teacher when he or she is bringing up talented musicians.

Please let me quote a short passage of the celebrating discussion I made with four young students of hers³.

The interview was made exactly thirty years ago, in 1979.

"Why do you feel nice during the lesson with Mrs. Clara?"

"Because the atmosphere is good. I think, if someone begins to play the piano seriously, you must cheer him/her up first. Then everything comes uncalled. Then we are able to play so happily and it becomes so easy to do all Mrs. Clara asks! She always strikes the right note" (girl).

"It doesn't of course mean that she melts with joy. It means she hasn't got a general system, but as many ways as students (boy).

"It means she can reach the technics through good spirit. The difficult things become so simple through her musical advice. She always has the two things make one piece completing one another. And then we find everything so simple! (girl).

"Does she sometimes blame you if you happen to go to a lesson unprepared?"

"Of course, but she never orders you. Orders otherwise always produce dislike. And she may send you out of the lesson only if you feel yourself it is useful to you" (boy).

"I've observed that she usually blames those whom she expects to do more. She can find out from the playing what the child has done at home. And as pedagogue she arranges the atmosphere of the lesson (!) in such way, as to make you practice well" (boy).

"And what happens if you don't learn the piece by heart for the first lesson?"

"She never wants you to play the piece by heart at the first lesson, only expects it as soon as possible, urges you. After the third or fourth lesson though, if you want to put the score, she simply closes it. This may take you by surprise and you have to concentrate hard. The truth is that on such occasions we usually have already learned the piece, but don't dare play it by heart. It's a good method, because doing so she also develops the self-confidence of the student" (boy).



Prof Mrs. Clara Mathe (85)

"I know you have very good relation with Mrs. Clara. But the love alone doesn't yet creates excellent musicians."

"It's simply the question of her being not only excellent pedagogue but great musician as well" (boy).

"If she pulls a piece in pieces through analyzing, she knows in advance how she is going to put it together. It's easy to make mincemeat of a piece of music, but you can join it together again only with the help of a good teacher" (boy).

"Do you think there is a trick in it?"

"The only thing is, that she doesn't only set the homework, but suffers through the whole work with the student. She sometimes plods away with us step by step all the way. She makes us think through all she asks, and she is really interested that the pieces would clog together. I believe it really matters for her to make a 12-year-old or even younger child to be excellent. She has already produced so many outstanding young musicians!" (boy).

"Do you know how does she do it?"

"I think if someone would really find out this recipe, it would be a second Mrs. Clara. But she discloses only crumbs of her knowledge. Anyway, she never allows for the sake of whatever techniques to lose the basic good feeling for the piece while practising" (girl).

So, what is the basic condition for creating successful teaching situation? According to a statement confirmed by both science and practice the most important moment is to bring the student into an active mental state which guarantees the receptivity towards the topic. In the present social and environmental circumstances this requires from a candidate-teacher such high level professional and psychological awareness like never before, unless the candidate is in possession of incomparable empathy. If the students would have a kind of mental discipline and attention, and they would show basic respect towards the teacher the conditions would be more favourable. However, the practice shows that the principles of education at present do not give enough importance to this moment, so the teacher is not assigned automatically the superior position, which would be the initial terms for such behaviour.

THE TEACHER

The solution of numerous problems emerging in education in our days can be expected only through changes and innovations in the teacher-training.

That is why it is not enough to educate professionals and give theoretical knowledge. The education must emerge from the aspects that give narrow knowledge of subjects to more global, general levels. The methodological and didactical material handed on in an appropriate way so far has become outdated. The higher education is in a state of continuous fallback. The cooperation of different professions in passing over a wide variety of knowledge is indispensable in our days. The success of teaching and learning, as mentioned before, greatly depends on the forming and alterations of the environment and conditions, and the alterations of methodology and didactics plays an important role.

A would-be teacher's education must be necessarily based on wide psychological knowledge. It also seems indispensable to get them acquainted with the development of technology, the expectations of labour market, the new research achievements of neuro-physiology which are related to pedagogical practice.

They need to be learned in other subjects, acquire other skills as well while being excellent professionals in one field. One has to have readiness in program editing or be a good moderator, etc., etc⁴. All in all the candidate-teachers must be prepared and educated to have many accomplishments corresponding to the new conditions and circumstances.

At the same time a very important task of teacher's training is to provide not only the most modern pedagogic methods and ways for those who take up the activity of educating the future

generations, but also to arm them with such psychological and communication skills which may guarantee the success of passing over knowledge. What's more they have to be prepared to face fails and fiascos in case they aren't able to find, - with the help of empathy, - the right key to the youths of our time. The real challenge for teachers is to keep in movement the student on his own level. If the student doesn't like the teacher, it creates a negative emotional condition, under which the establishment of good human contacts and the development of abilities can be carried out far harder.

It is a great luck for teachers nowadays that the neuro-physiological research can provide information spreading wide range of knowledge on all levels. The pedagogy aimed on the development of abilities is the basic task and unveiling the successful methods used is an essential task. In acquiring more knowledge in this field is helped by the new scientific discipline of neuro-didactic. The term neurodidactic refers to the connection between the two branches of science: the neuro-physiology and education

Each subject can be made understood only through empathy towards the student and focussing on positive experience. During my teacher's practical activity I have experienced the truth of this idea and I consider it conceptual. At present we know that the dry conveyance of facts is hardly grasped, and information got this way can be stored with more difficulty, than it was believed earlier. It was a great experience for me to perceive some data concerning this subject. For example:⁵

- The brain doesn't need rules and principles, because it has effective samples and models of work. Neither does exist a need to express verbally all inner contents.
To quote again the practice- based observation of the ingenious colleague I have spoken about before: *"You mustn't intervene into something that goes on well all by itself."* (Prof. Mrs. Máthé).

Why do we need to *"put aside"* a piece for some time? We know it gets mature this way. What the science says to us?

- The representation in the brain needs time, so we must leave enough time for the students to collect, assume and elaborate their experiences.
- A lot of possibilities must be offered to provide all the necessary information for the brain to learn and to set the most effective operational stimuli for neurons.
Again I must bring a quotation: *"If I feel necessary I may dance a peacock dance to make the student understand what the music requires."*
- It isn't the subject, but the relations and connections between different elements of the subject that create and shape the meaning.
- The learning process can be the most successful if it is accompanied by positive feelings, if the learning situation pleases the student, creates happiness. Now I quote the twelve-year- old student: *"If someone begins to play the piano seriously, you must cheer him/her up first."*
- The motivation must be formed by successful learning. Whatever the teacher is motivating the student for, it has to become his /her own inner motivation through adoption.

It is most important that the young teachers be aware of all these coherencies and relations.

The older generation of active teachers should also take part in professional trainings to get acquainted with these achievements, in order to be able to keep pace. Whatever good the intentions are in planning and mapping the tasks if we can't face the challenges of momentary conditions. The competence pedagogy is a new term which is due to describe and define the personality of a successfully working teacher.

At present we can determine with sober professional judgement that an educational reform is needed and more space must be given to alternative pedagogic methods.⁵

If the most important pursuit in the schools ought to be the task of finding and setting up all the opportunities and possibilities for the development of a child's own abilities, then in the situation of music teaching, especially in instrumental tutorial this is thousand times valid.

I consider a great problem nowadays that the teachers generally don't seek the way and don't endeavour to understand and share the multiplying problems of their students as to be able to help them in humane way to solve these problems. A teacher, besides having high level knowledge in methodology must have sober mind, and good heart. He or she has to know that his task includes to form a person and, according to me, the more talented a student the more beautiful and challenging the task.

THE STUDENT

The conditions of modern life accelerate the development of the personality and this is true for intellectual development as well. The emotional advancement however doesn't follow this pace. The emotional life of a person is effectible and formidable. The area of emotions and emotional intelligence in our brain is continually in change. The most important task of bringing up children especially the youths aiming to become musicians is to form in them a receptiveness and sensitivity to emotional intelligence. This is a complicated skill. We can bring into effect and execute what we recognize spiritually. The performer can play whatever and however he can hear with his interior hearing.

The people who don't take part in any musical education can perceive only the superficial part of music on the level of sound and this fact is used when all kinds of primitive music making is given space. This way the people cannot reach the level of understanding classical music, only to a stage where the simple means of mostly high volume sound affect their nervous system and shakes them up.

The view of providing value-based education still holds on. The market however pushed into our life with its overwhelming amount of digital products providing the CD-producers continuously with undemanding cheap and valueless pop music, which, we can say, acquired autarchy in the circle of musically uneducated youngsters⁶. The music consumption is influenced by the offer of public media. Great masses of young people are attracted by and take in the music which is good for them, pleasant and easy to comprehend. The society ought to give an option to young generations making them know another choice so that they could see and feel what other things are around them. We should involve the masses of the young generations into a wider range musical culture.

How to educate the young generation which is surrounded by daily renewing choice of novelties? What's new is always attractive, interesting: the fact of being new inspires it must also be better. The inexperienced people are always easy to influence. In present life thousands of novelties appear every day, their number is so big that it makes impossible to filter the valuable ones. Around one product of high value there are hundreds of low-grade poor things. The value needs proof and time to be certified, it can't be taken seriously until then. All people should be able to recognize in fact what horrible amount the low-profile products appear around those counted precious ones. It would be rightful if the novelties were accepted with appropriate sceptical approach. The real value is strong enough to find its way ahead in spite of all.

We also have to take into consideration the fact that the negative side-effects of something new are not in the least known at the time of its appearing. These turn out and become known only long years later. For example nobody suspected some years ago what physiologically harmful effects the use of headsets may bring to those youngsters who have them on their ears all day long battering at high volume. This is a general phenomenon, known for everyone. These days the frenetically thundering rock, metal and light music has the goal to reach visceral, physiological effects, it intentionally uses frequencies that penetrates into body and flesh. The atmosphere of this music is dazing and narcotizing, the unuttered aim of this effect is to erase the person from the surrounding him reality, to make him live for the moment without thinking about following minute or day⁷.

I consider a great trouble that at present a great deal of average young people is able to understand and interpret any kind of text only on the level of slogans, ads or campaign texts. It would be interesting for example to organize a one year course for young people during which 200-300 advertisement texts or slogans are taken to be analyzed to see and understand step by step how, with what means they try to influence you, how they are financed, what interests they represent, how they misdirect the bumpkins, how they may ruin one's life and how they mislead people, away from real life. The aim nowadays is to build up a false world with the power of money which covers everything else.

Another problem is that the demands today are focussed on surface success, external result, social recognition and financial profit. The young persons are being directed towards easily and rapidly reachable success, result and response, the less intensity and absorption is required the better: neither the effort made nor the real intellectual trustworthiness is essentially important. The idea of the fact that things focussed only on quick success are usually quickly destructed doesn't even occur. The claim in our days is basically operates on finding immediate solution. The previous planning, spiritual preparation, awareness and patience for of time-consuming solutions, ability for advance mapping, layout and digest are unusual and odd. What's more, we can say such phenomena may appear untrue to life. If a teacher doesn't have an immediate quick and pointy answer to an arising question he can easily be cut out.

Composer Leo Weiner⁸ was a legendary chamber music professor at Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest in the beginning of the twentieth century. He was the perfect counter-example of this. His former students and well known musicians like Sir George Solti, Antal Doráti, János Starker, György Sebők, György Kurtág and less famous others described in a number of memorial interviews his method of sitting at the piano and trying to find for the piece the most suitable and most expressive sound which would correspond to the essence of the music. This was the approach from which - according to statements - the student would learn the most⁹.

Our reactions are tightly connected to the level of comprehending and interpreting. Most of young people remain on the level of surface. This statment is proved by the results of the tests of PISA¹⁰ Survey. The results show that the reading comprehension of students is on very low level. They are unable to perceive, think over and reproduce the content of the read text. The shallowness in great deal is induced by uncounted tools at hand. We see on every step that the tools and devices "think" and operated instead of us. The possibilities of the market are misused by commerce and business bombarding the young generation. The horrible amount of sophisticated toys erases the possibility for development of creativity, fantasy and imagination of young children. Decades ago the toys were far more primitive: but their simplicity assured that the child had to imagine additional meanings, pictures, appearances, which actively developed their creative thinking.

At the same time the technical appliances certainly have great advantage in the hands of people with competent critical sense. In case somebody has developed an ability to select, to go deep into the essence of matters and work hard elaborating the essentials it is a great gain, that with the help of Internet any information can be obtained easily and quickly, without looking up in books for hours.

The problem is that the young generation is brought up using all kinds of information without developing the ability to filter, select sort out the way the older generation is doing it. The bigger amount of information we have to encounter the more important to be able to select. The multitude of different pieces of information can be extremely useful, but if there is no patience and selection, you can conclude the issue with one click without trying to concentrate your attention and sort out things with discipline. Such kind of work may not even occur

Often appears the question whether we really live in a social environment not committed to values. Whatever is the general answer to this question, I'm answering to this with another question: Is it possible to teach classical music without concentrating on principles of high values? The classical music is about values. A piece of serious music cannot be performed and considered to be interpreted if it is only rattled out loudly and quickly. The task of music education has always been to transmit and hand over high values and we hope it will always be so. Teaching classical music cannot have basis and aims other than this.

What is the inner plot and subject of the world of experiences of youngsters now? The emotions grow on the basis of experience. A person is rarely able to perceive something as spiritual experience. It may happen because this action needs a kind of inner readiness and quiet. Prof. György Sebők told once at a mastercourses of his that sometimes you have to feel as crucified in order to be able to perceive the message of a Bach fugue. Getting information doesn't create a way to take in. It is a way to collect ideas. The imagination and conception are indispensably important in the work of an artist. The emotional range of masterpieces of music is endlessly rich. The first step is to get fully and subconsciously impressed by it and try to perceive it getting previously deserted from all. Then we can gradually find all the technical tools for the right interpretation through professional analysis step by step. Then *these* must be tackled and stabilized through.

„Music-making must always contain one unknown element – element of creation to a greater or lesser extent. It cannot be entirely encompassed in the manner of school of science – applied science“, said Yehudi Menuhin¹¹.

Who is dealing with music or teaching music has already experienced the cragged path of obtaining the means of expression. I know it's extremely risky to draw a parallel between the desire for catharsis of perception in art and the subconscious need of those who find escape in using narcotics. It would be a greatest mission if the young people gifted in art would be able to hand over the intensity of their experience in art to those who try to find excitement and catharsis in other ways. The music transmitted in media of mass communication pervades the everyday life of the young people. Their role in music education should be re-estimated and considered in a deeper way¹².

SOME WORDS ABOUT MUSIC EDUCATION IN HUNGARY

In our country there is a huge distance between the mass culture and the culture we would like and try to convey. There are still basic principles which follow the value-centred ideas of Kodály.

The greatest change in the system of Hungarian education was brought by the National Curriculum introduced in 1993. In this Curriculum instead of separate subjects different areas of education appear that include different disciplines. In the field of art education different branches like music, fine arts, dance and applied arts appear in one category. In 2001 the newly introduced Frame Curriculum changed again the education. The hours of singing teaching in primary schools were again reduced and the number of schools with music specification decreased to one third of their previous number. The Frame Curriculum regulates the contents of the education on the level of law. Its aim is to get away from one-sided and dry conveyance in teaching a subjects and make students able to use their knowledge in various ways. The emphasis was put on the readiness and the development of abilities. According to my knowledge these tendencies are getting emphasis all over Europe.

This form of education need further revision and continuous reorganization of updated tasks. The question is how to preserve the traditions and in what way traditions allow different changes.

CONCLUSION

The main novelty of the paper is that it presents the connection between the scientific results explained in theory of psychology and the facts of pedagogical practice. These facts experienced during years of music teaching that were published in form of interviews with pupils on an article. The pupils surprisingly touched upon essentials. The amazingly apt answers of theirs brightly confirm in practice all the new achievements of neuro-psychology, which are related to pedagogical practice.

I assign great importance to these findings, because this way the practice proves the verity of the theory. At the same time it emphasises the unavoidable need for closer cooperation of theoretical and practical sides.

Within my paper I referred to publications of scientific statements, like: *"Learning can be successful only in active state of nerve system"*. I introduced the optimal teaching situation with the help of my earlier published article titled *"Whatever is beyond methodology"*. I compared several most important statements of a new scientific trend, the *"neurodidactics"* with the practice showed.

I wanted to prove the importance of complex knowledge of these facts in the pedagogical work as well as the necessity of reforms in teachers training. I tried to show why and in what way the teacher must change his relation to his most responsible work.

I showed the changing situations and environmental changes in the life of the young generation with all the problems and anomalies and presented the possible ways of treating these.

I found important to refer to the thoughts of some outstanding artists like Weiner, Kurtág, Sebők, Menuhin and Goethe, which help to find the right direction.

I introduced the present changes in the Hungarian educational system through several data .

We don't have many causes for being optimistic, but it's up to us how can make things work out positively, whether we have a clear programme corresponding to the expectations of our age and the claims of the society. The polarization of different views and their contradictory characters are obvious.

Let us make the way to higher quality fearless! To reach this aim though, the intellectual clarification of problems is necessary. The challenge for a teacher is to help the development of the abilities of the student in the best possible way. Goethe said: *"...the genius is diligence"*¹³. The amount of truth contained in this saying is the same now as it was 200 years ago.

In the seventies of last century a great Hungarian composer and professor at Academy of Music Lajos Bárdos said: *"Provided a teacher likes his subject and loves his students the induction between the student and subject is created soon or late."*¹⁴

ENDNOTES

¹ Grastyán, E. (1983/6). Győr, The Optimalization of Learning, (National Conference on Music Education). In: Parlando, 1984/6-7.

² Gruhn, W.: Neuro-didactics. New Scientific Trend in Education. ISME Conf., Tenerife 2004/07, In: Parlando, 2004/6.

³ Abraham, M. (1980). Whatever is beyond methodology. Article about Prof. Mrs. Clara Máthé (1900-1985) In: Parlando No.12.

⁴ The Kodály Pedagogy and the Situation of Music Education in Present Hungary, Conference on Education (2007/12) Szeged, In: Parlando, 2008/2.

⁵ Laczó, Z. (2002) Psychology, Music-Pedagogy and Society. In: Sound and Soul. ed. Hungarian Music Council

⁶ North, A. & Hargreaves, D. : (2008) The Social and Applied Psychology of Music, Oxford University Press

⁷ Patrik N. Juslin, John A. Sloboda: (2001) Music and Emotion, Oxford University Press

⁸ Weiner, L. (1885-1960) Composer and professor of chamber music

⁹ Berlász, M. (1985). Memories about Leo Weiner, ed. Atheneum

¹⁰ PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) <http://www.pisa.oecd.org>.

¹¹ Abraham, M. (1991) A Teacher in Two Worlds, Margit Varro (p. 223)

¹² XXIII. ISME (1998/7) Musics of the World's Cultures, World Conference, Pretoria, In: Parlando 2002/2.

¹³ Eckermann: (1836) Gespräche mit Goethe. vol. I., Weimar

¹⁴ Bárdos, L. (1899-1986). Composer, conductor, musicologist

Acknowledgments

The author expresses appreciation to Prof. Dr. Gábor Dávid (BNL, US), Prof.Dr. Gábor Eckhardt (Budapest, Hungary), Prof. Dr. Ferenc Kerek (Szeged, Hungary), Prof. Zoltán Laczó (Budapest, Hungary) for high-value and inspiring information.