

Theses of Ph.D. Dissertation

**The Operation and Social Environment of Primary
Art Schools:
A Type of School with the Potential to Create
Opportunities?**

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Aim of the study

In the international literature of the study of education (Bresler, Catterall, Chapleau, Iwanaga, Kinedinst, Miksza, Sherman), research into the interconnectedness of children's socioeconomic status, music education, and student performance has been an emphatic field. Such research confirms the presence of major differences between the school performance of students involved and those not involved in music activities, with better performance from those that study music. Furthermore, students of lower social status involved in music education have better academic performance than what is expected based on their social standing.

Research into the status of music learners has been carried out in Hungary, too, (Bácskai, Manchin, Sági, Vitányi, Barkóczi, Pléh, Gévayné), which similarly shows that students studying music fare better in tests of physical skills, productivity in the given subject, and sociometry.

The relevance of this research is that a significant transformation has taken place in the system of primary music institutions. On the one hand, the network of institutions has been enlarged considerably. In the 1950s there were about fifty institutions in the country where students could learn music; by the late 21st century, over 700 institutions presented the opportunity to learn music. The expansion of the institutional network is also connected to increasing demands from society. While in primary and secondary schools the teaching of music is seen as relegated to the background, the popularity of learning musical instruments has been on the increase, and the trend is currently continuing. On the other hand, social demands, the goals of educational policy, and economic factors facilitated the birth of a new type of institution: the primary art school (hereinafter referred to as "AMI"). Act No. LXXIX of 1993 is a milestone in art education, as it made the teaching of music and art an element of public education, which provided the institutions with a safer prospect for the future.

The range of courses offered by schools was broadened, with fine and applied art, theatre and puppetry, as well as dance alongside music (Decree No. 11/1994 of the Minister of Culture and Public Education). In addition, new courses were launched in music such as folk, jazz, and electroacoustic. All of this has made self-expression available for an ever broadening population of children in their own fields of interest.

The launch of these new fields of study has brought about a change both in the recruiting processes of schools and in the role of the music branch within the given institution. Thus one of the main goals of the dissertation is to explore the changes in structure and role of teaching music, as opposed to conventional music schools, which have taken place as a result of the introduction of this new type of institution, the primary art school. In order to do so, we have examined the development of all four branches of training (fine and applied art, theatre and puppetry, dance, and music) and their characteristics after the change of regime. The other goal is to disclose the motifs behind learning music, as regards students and parents. Thus we have reformulated the concept of various types of capital (Bourdieu 1999) from the aspect of learning music to answer the question: what is the social significance of learning music? Earlier studies associated learning music with the development of several skills and abilities, for instance, in the areas of productivity, health, wellbeing, and resilience. In this study we interpret learning music as an early investment in the child's cultural capital.

Another goal was to map the socioeconomic background of children who study music, their academic performance, their attributes which are different from those of their peers not involved in music studies. With the help of the applied research methods of social studies we examined the structures of family milieu, parents' musical biography, extracurricular activities, and cultural consumption in music learners and students not learning music. Finally we posed the question whether learning music has a function of elitism (Andor 2002) or of

compensating for disadvantages (as Vitányi et al 1972 asserted), or potentially both. Besides this we have found an explanation for the greater number of primary art schools in disadvantaged regions along the borders.

To achieve the above the following questions were posed:

1. How was the function of music education transformed by the early 21st century?
2. Can the social compensatory effect of learning music—and arts in general—be pinpointed?
3. Why is it that the number of primary art schools is the second highest in disadvantaged counties along the borders (Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Csongrád, Hajdú-Bihar) after the central region?
4. What is the socioeconomic background of children learning music?
5. What motivates children attending primary art schools to conduct music studies?

Methodology

To analyze the relationship between the AMI network and its social context we have used data from the Office of Education and the Central Statistics Agency. The basis of analyzing the empirical research was provided by an individually designed and recorded database: “Learning Music in Hungary 2017.” Data collection was carried out between June 2016 and January 2017. During the survey we used the quantitative method, in the form of a self-completed, paper-based questionnaire. The questions in the questionnaire were based on the research questions. The first three groups of questions strove to determine the social status of music learners (basic demographical variables, economic capital, cultural capital). The second batch of three topics had to do with learning (performance, plans of further studies, and motivation to learn music). The final batch of questions needed responses only from children studying music, as it

included questions expressly about learning music. Demographical variables included gender, class, familial structure, the number of siblings, and the type of community. To determine the economic capital of the family we explored the parents' status in the labor market, their occupation, objective and relative financial standing. To determine cultural capital we analyzed the parents' highest qualification, musical biography, habits of singing and playing music together in the family, the size of their home library, the children's habits of spending their free time, their extracurricular activities, and the allotted time. To determine academic performance we explored the end-of-term and end-of-year average grades, the grades by subject, and the use of ICT devices. In the area of planned further studies, the type of secondary school and learning for the music profession were mapped. Data on learning music included questions regarding the number of years of learning music, the reasons for starting, the people involved, the instrument, the occasions and the time allotted, the practice, concerts and competitions.

The area of empirical study was Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg, and Hajdú-Bihar Counties. The choice was justified by the fact that taking into account the geographical nationwide distribution of primary art schools, the concentration of institutions is the highest in the three border counties, irrespective of the central region. When selecting the primary art schools we strove to have comparable data, thus we decided upon the primary art schools located in county seats in the case of all of the three counties, which are institutions with long histories and specializing in the teaching of music. Choosing this type of institution was also supported by the fact that different attitudes and motivations are required on the part of both children and parents to have music lessons in a school which the students attend to complete compulsory education or a school which the students need to attend besides the former, which consumes extra time and energy and requires dedication.

The target group of the research is composed of children of the age of 13-15. We selected this age group since based on the age composition of music learners it was probable that they learned music of their own free will and they had accumulated enough experience during the years to provide creditable answers. The questionnaires for the group of music learners were completed by all students of the selected primary music schools in the given age group (N= 5207 students; n=269 students). To choose the members of the control group we decided upon institutions that came in third (were in the middle fifth) regarding the results of the National Assessment of Basic Competences, as in the case of sampling it was important not to choose students from “elite schools” or “disadvantaged institutions,” but the eight-graders of schools of average standard (OKM: N= 83442 students; n=282 students). Regarding the control group we took care to target only students that do not learn music. When processing the data we used an SPSS program, and as for methods we compiled two- and three-dimensional cross-tabulation and carried out variance analysis, cluster analysis, and logistic regression. To compose groups for objective financial standing we performed cluster analysis on the basis of the families’ non-perishable material goods. Social background was analyzed as per the following variants: gender, number of siblings, the father’s highest qualification, the mother’s highest qualification, objective financial standing, relative financial standing.

To create the groups of habits of cultural consumption I performed cluster analysis. In the questionnaire we investigated own cultural habits as well as of those of the circle of friends. As a result of the analysis three categories were found: “stay-ins,” “those interested in culture,” and “consumers of high culture.” When determining social milieu the variants of cultural consumption, religion, singing and music at home, the parents’ highest qualification, the number of siblings, and objective financial standing were taken into account. The impact of

social background and the milieus on music studies was analyzed by chi-squared test, logistic regression, and cluster analysis.

Based on the research questions I formulated the following five hypotheses:

H1: *Learning music was initially interpreted as elitist training, but I presuppose that in the early 21st century the teaching of music became available for new social strata, which interpreted it as a way to compensate for their social and economical disadvantages and as a method of upward mobility.*

H2: *I presuppose that learning music can compensate for social disadvantages, which is observable, among others, in better academic performance, a greater motivation for learning, choosing a higher standard of school type, a more efficient way of managing social and individual crises.*

H3: *I presuppose that the impacts of art education in primary art schools can be felt on a regional level, too.*

H4: *I presuppose that students learning music are the offspring of families with higher cultural capital and mostly with a musical biography, who regard extracurricular activities as an investment.*

H5: *I presuppose that the children undertake the tasks and burdens involved in learning music to gain personal attention, a feeling of success, and community experience besides the will to learn the instrument.*

Major findings

The second part of the dissertation presents a systematic summary of the development of the system of institutions of music education. The conclusion of the analysis is the division of the above history into eras by touching upon the discernible fault lines and pinpointing the central importance of social demands, as well as exploring the intricate art education system of the 21st century.

The third chapter investigates the social significance of learning music by finding a new interpretive framework. Following the presentation of the role of

cultural and social capital as regards learning music, the focus shifts to children's motivation to learn music. In the fifth, empirical chapter, we undertook to compare the characteristics of children learning music and those not involved in music education and to find the cardinal points that mark the similarities and differences between the two groups.

The novelty of the dissertation is the analysis of today's system of art education as well as an approach to art education from the aspect of theories of capital. The description of the history of professional changes stemming from the creation of the new type of institution, the primary art school, is similarly innovative. In our research we strove to test the following hypotheses.

1. *While learning music was initially interpreted as elitist training, and only children from socially advanced families had an opportunity to partake in it, I presuppose that in the early 21st century the teaching of music became available for new social strata, which interpreted it as a way to compensate for their social and economical disadvantages and as a method of upward mobility.*

In our research we found that learning music is tied to a unique way of thinking, which prefers traditional values. The parents of music learners have a higher proportion of graduates, which confirms the dedication of intellectual families to pass on their culture. At the same time, families with no graduates and with lower cultural capital also appeared in the case of music learners. Therefore, music education became more open socially in primary art schools and children with lower socioeconomic status could participate.

2. *The second hypothesis presupposes that learning music can compensate for social disadvantages, which is observable, among others, in better academic performance, a greater motivation for learning, choosing a higher standard of school type, a more efficient way of managing social and individual crises.*

To test the hypothesis on the compensatory effect of learning music we strove to see whether better academic performance was apparent in the case of children of parents with lower qualifications, too, or whether the academic performance of

music learners was better only due to the higher qualifications of the parents. In the case of parents without a degree, there are also significant differences experienced between music learners and non-music learners. There are no music learners that have an average of grades lower than 3, and only 10% performed below 4. In contrast, in the control group 9% are below an average of 3 and almost half of the children are below 4. In the case of all-5 students there is a significant difference ($p=0.000$) between the two groups, with proportions of 12.5% and 31.4% in the control group and the music learners, respectively. Controlling the children's academic performance with the parents' qualifications it was found that even the children of parents of lower qualifications have an average higher by a full grade in the group of music learners. Therefore, there is a non-quantified, but probable, conclusion that learning music provides an opportunity to upward mobility in the long run, with which social disadvantages can be overcome.

Looking at the findings from the aspect of subjects it was found that music learners perform better in all subjects, regardless of their parents' school performance. The greatest differences between the two groups were shown in the results of science subjects (approx. 1 grade) and the smallest in skills subjects (lower than half a grade).

In the empirical investigation the aspirations of children to conduct further studies were controlled with parents' qualifications to see whether it was learning music or the higher qualifications of parents that influenced the preference for elite training. The results show that in the control group there was a high number of applications to vocational grammar schools (approx. half), as well as four-year grammar schools (approx. a third). Among music learners the children of parents with lower qualifications also had plans of further studies in institutions of higher prestige. 76% of students chose various grammar schools, and over half of those applied to elite schools. So children of both graduates and non-graduates, who learn music, preferred elite schools. The preference for

vocational secondary schools is insignificant (0.25%), and applications to vocational grammar schools are almost totally accounted for by plans to study in the vocation. Thus the compensatory effect of learning music is traceable in plans of further studies in higher-prestige schools, too. This provides an opportunity for students to reach a higher status in the future.

The hypothesis that learning music can provide children from lower-status families with an opportunity of mobility can also be confirmed. Therefore, primary art schools have both elitist and compensatory functions, with different emphases depending on the given region.

3. The third hypothesis *presupposes that the impacts of art education in primary art schools can be felt on a regional level, too, therefore, it has a role of compensating for disadvantages nationally in communities and regions with social and economical indices below the national average, thus in these areas the demand for this form of training is higher than the national average.*

To satisfactorily test the third hypothesis, further research is needed by analyzing not only county seats but all settlement types. What can be confirmed by statistical data is the demographical explanation that the number of children is the highest in the aforementioned counties (with the exception of Csongrád), and the second highest after the central region. This accounts for the higher demand, as the opportunity to learn art must be provided for more children. The preliminary research and the answers in the questionnaires have shown that primary art schools indeed have a prominent role in the cultural life of settlements. They have a dominant role in smaller communities, as there are fewer cultural institutions there. In towns, especially in the county seats, where the research was conducted, their role is smaller. This is because of the greater number of institutions, on the one hand, and the presence of more types of cultural institutions, on the other. Their significance is not reduced, though, as the students, bands, and choirs of primary art schools often appear in exhibition opening and school ceremonies and celebrations of national holidays. As

primary art schools have different importance for each settlement type, further studies will be required to explore the role they play in the development of settlements and regions and to confirm their function of compensating for disadvantages, which will necessitate overall analysis for each settlement type.

When testing the first hypothesis we referred to the function of the opportunities deriving from learning music to strengthen social status, on the basis of which the populations of border counties primarily sense that music (and in general art) education has a compensatory effect. Owing to skills development, music learners can more easily find jobs and better jobs at that. Their value systems improve, which can be traced in their cultural choices (habits of cultural consumption).

4. In the fourth hypothesis *we presuppose that students learning music are the offspring of families with higher cultural capital and mostly with a musical biography, who regard extracurricular activities as an investment, thus assisting their upward mobility or preserving their status in the social hierarchy.*

The research findings have confirmed hypothesis four. We analyzed the children's habits of cultural consumption by cluster analysis, as a result of which three groups were found: "stay-ins," "those interested in culture," and "consumers of high culture." In all three of the communities examined the "consumers of high culture" were in significantly higher proportions among music learners, with a proportion of 47-80%, depending on the town, while in the case of the control group the values were between 1-10%. In the case of the "stay-in" type it was vice versa: 6-21% for music learners and 47-75% for non-music learners. During the logistic regression test it was found that cultural consumption habits had the greatest impact on whether the child would learn music or not, which increased the chances tenfold. It appears, therefore, that habits of cultural consumption have a central role in starting and finishing music studies.

When comparing objective financial standing and habits of cultural consumption we found that there is no clear-cut interdependence between financial standing and cultural interest and participation. There is a difference between the two groups when analyzing objective and relative financial situations, favoring students that learn music, but the deviation is not significant. In addition, the group of music learners presented greater extremities of the positive and the negative kind alike.

5. The fifth hypothesis *presupposed that the children undertake the tasks and burdens involved in learning music to gain personal attention, a feeling of success, and community experience besides the will to learn the instrument.*

Our analyses confirmed the presumption. In primary art schools playing music together, whether chamber music, orchestral, or choral, establishes a special link among the members. The joint work and goals may assist the tying of serious bonds, which are not only relevant within the school. The feeling of belonging to a community provides the members with support and a sense of safety, thus it acts as a safety net. In addition, the improvement of several personality traits is facilitated by community life, e.g. accepting the community's values and norms, dedication to and responsibility for matters of the community, mutual support and cooperation. The central role of community experiences and social bonds is confirmed by the findings on why learning music is attractive. Besides the experience of playing an instrument, 20% of the children marked the category "experiences, friendly company, band" as second most important.

In summary we can say that of the findings the most prominent are the exploration of the changes in the structure and role of primary art schools, the analysis of the system of art education, as well as the approach of art education from the aspect of theories of capital. Furthermore, we have presented the areas, abilities, skills, phenomena, and dimensions that are affected by learning music, all classified systematically. Methodological novelties include clusters of objective familial financial standing, groups of cultural consumption habits, and

familial milieu clusters aligned with capital types. New findings in the empirical part include the analysis of learners' motifs behind learning music, mapping the attributes of music learners, and the analysis of their socioeconomic background. The description of student productivity in and beyond the school also yielded new findings.

As a further direction of research we wish to further enrich the research by settlement types, so that a more detailed picture of the significance of roles of learning music as compensating for disadvantages and developing the community may be presented. Therefore, in the subsequent studies we plan to broaden the scope of the investigation and explore hitherto unseen dimensions.

The findings of the dissertation can be utilized by both laymen and professionals. For experts they provide an insight into the socioeconomic background of music learners, through which they can better understand the problems and difficulties they have to deal with, thus contributing to reducing the number of dropouts.

The dissertation provides an overview of the system of art education in the 21st century, disclosing the opportunities for self-expression available to young people interested in arts. Through a detailed analysis of the realm of "users" we strove to present the double function of art schools and their roles in preserving social status and generating change.

We hope that backed by the objective facts and research findings both teachers and parents as well as the actors of educational policy can have a clear view of the opportunities involved in learning music.

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