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7. MUSICAL EDUCATION IN THE FAMILY. CHALLENGES AND FULFILLMENTS IN THE PARENT-TEACHER ROLE

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Abstract: *The role of parent is in itself one that provides both challenges and fulfilments. Moreover, it necessarily assumes the exercise of the pedagogical function. The main challenge is the delimitation between the position of a teacher and that of a parent, implicitly that of a student and that of a child. At the same time, the fulfillment that covers both the didactic process and the result, is the ultimate reward and also the motivation for starting another project. The present case study covers a period of approximately two years, involving the teacher-parent (mother) aged approximately 30 years and the student-child (girl) aged 5-7 years. The three completed or ongoing projects aim, on the one hand, at learning the basics of piano and ukulele performance and, on the other hand, at the vocal performance of a pop piece in a festival-competition.*
Key words: *parent-teacher, family, didactic process, piano, ukulele*

1. Introduction

As much as the context allows, the realization of musical activities within the family should not be neglected, and the advantages are multiple. Whether we do unplanned singing, karaoke nights, sing-and-playing or actual music lessons, practicing music provides important advantages to family cohesion, harmonious development of children and even strengthening self-esteem. Of course, the parent – preferably the one who has musical inclinations – is the one who makes possible musical activities in the family. Thus, the mother or father, as the case may be, can extend their usual pedagogical presence to that of a music teacher. Being part of the category of didactic processes, the teaching-learning activity comes with both challenges and achievements.

We propose for analysis a set of educational approaches carried out over a period of approximately three years – and, to a certain extent, ongoing – and which consider instrumental and vocal performance. The daughter-student is 5-7 years old during the process. Around the age of 5, we started the recurring activity of alternative teaching of some instrumental (piano and ukulele) and vocal notions. It should be noted that the student's talent is a decisive factor in the stages of evolution: through the artistic instinct, a child with musical inclinations has already passed several stages of development and understanding, so that the initiation for which the teacher is responsible takes place at a higher level than in the case where a child has fewer or no musical qualities. Going back to the object of interest, we will make a description of the teaching-learning process, in order to finally identify the main challenges and achievements that occur both in the process itself and in the stage of delivering the result.

2. Aspects related to actual learning

In teaching the piano or ukulele, the five-year-old girl was presented with

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elementary notions of music theory in an extremely simple and clear form that did not go beyond her capacity of understanding. The cognitive-behavioral profile of the age must be taken into account, in order to adjust both the duration of the class and the degree of abstraction of the concepts presented during the lesson. If around the age of 4 the child begins to develop his imagination, beginning with the age of 5 he becomes aware of the will to reach certain future goals. The parent-teacher knows his child better than he knows other students and must be able to tell when he is nearing the end of his attention span. In fact, some education specialists insist on this aspect: "Always stop before he wants to stop"[20].

In this way, the child is not only left with curiosity, which is a perpetual motivation to learn, but also the willingness to expose himself to the next class, being convinced that he will not be asked for more patience than he is willing to offer. The same authors quoted above say: "Your child's attention is remarkable – always make sure you are worthy of it with short, lively, highly organized and enthusiastic sessions."[21] Why is it so important to adjust the difficulty of the process? Because not understanding some concepts leads to a interest decreasing in them, both in the short term and, unfortunately, in the long term. At the other extreme, a child who understands what is being taught is not only fulfilled, but also eager to continue the learning process.

In support of obtaining an optimal result comes the ability of the teacher to involve the child actively in teaching the lesson. In the pedagogical method we have adopted, the answers are generally induced and not given to the child. By the teacher launching the challenge to discover the answers, the child not only receives a stimulus to strengthen his self-esteem, but is also fascinated by what he is learning.

Both piano and ukulele are very approachable instruments, even for children. If a lot is known about the piano, the ukulele is an exotic, lesser-known instrument that deserves a little mention: it has four nylon-made strings with a warm, matte sound. It is very suitable for accompaniment and can be a good option for both adults and children. Of the four alternatives, differentiated mainly by size and sound register, I usually opted for the concert ukulele, respectively the second in size. The elements that make this instrument easy to approach are mainly the material from which the strings are made, being gentle on the fingers, but also the fingerboard with keys, which ensures the accuracy of the musical notes.

The first stage of the study consists in getting familiar with the instrument and with the musical score, designed by a difficulty degree adapted to the age of the student. In the child's piano exploration phase, the parent-teacher can harness the child's enthusiasm and curiosity to create an affinity for the subject of study. In almost all fields, the element of novelty is an attraction for children, and in this case it can also be an efficient tool to make the student want to go further because he wants to.

Things are somewhat different with vocal singing. At such young ages, the term *canto* is a demanding one as the interpretation is rather guided by the natural possibilities of the child's voice. The main concerns are the accuracy of intonation

[20] Bernard Lievegoed (2011), Fazele de dezvoltare a copiluluii, Ed. Univers enciclopedic junior, Triade, București, p. 101
[21] Ibidem

and memorizing lyrics. As for the first aspect, the musical inclinations of the student are mandatory, and the approach differs according to the difficulty of the score. On the other hand, the challenge of memorizing the lyrics is facilitated by the melody, because, as we all know, the lyrics are learned more easily if they are associated with a melody. Psychologist Andrei Cosmovici points out the essential role of motivation, affectivity and will in the learning process. In this regard, I have observed in students of certain ages different types of motivations, some personal, others involving the public space. In both cases, it is mandatory to have a final result, a context in which the artist can be seen and listened.

At the age of 4 and a half, the soloist girl participated in the *Children in Celebration* Vocal and Instrumental Music Competition, organized by the Children's Palace, Iași. Of course, we started the actual preparation more than a month earlier, in order to facilitate optimal learning, the assumption of the melody and the lyrics and, thus, obtaining a favorable context for overcoming emotions at the competition. Thus, the first appearance on stage was a successful one, after which the performer won the First Prize. Apart from the prize itself, the teacher-student team, respectively mother-daughter, won cohesion, trust, validation, courage and, cumulatively, esteem self.

A second event in which the little girl participated, this time aged 5 years and 4 months, was the International Pop Music Festival for Children and Youth *Voices of Angels*, 3rd Edition, Suceava, August 2020. Of course, for this contest we chose a song of increased difficulty, both in terms of lyrics, melody and rhythm. Here, too, the teacher-student team took advantage of the opportunity to better bond the relationship, to get to know each other and get closer. Also, the child, having already experienced the scene, easily got over the particular emotions. In this competition, beyond the priceless experience, the finality with propulsive effect was the First Prize in the Beginner Section.

The third contest in which the 5-year-old and 8-month-old student daughter participated was the first edition of the Winter Music Stars International Contest, held online in December 2020 and for which the degree of difficulty was also increased. Being given the fact that the competition took place in the midst of a pandemic, it had a beneficial role by maintaining the motivation to work and partial distraction from the tense general health and social context. The third prize obtained brought more fulfillment.

3. Challenges and achievements

However, as in any other field, here too the journey is defined by moments of success and, equally, by challenges and difficulties. In this regard, one of the challenges we encountered is, paradoxically, related to the child's musical abilities. A student who has a very well developed melodic and rhythmic sense often finds it difficult to get over the moment when – for purely technical reasons – he does not manage to perform perfectly yet. The young student, in this case the five-year-old girl, is disturbed by the uneven rhythm achieved or the sometimes wrong notes, but doesn’t have the ability to understand that in the learning process these types of lameness are normal, even useful. This inability of the child to perceive the natural flow of learning is a drain on resources for both teacher and student. From this point

of view, it is much easier for a less gifted student to follow the steps proposed by the teacher without worrying. On the other hand, what balances things out is the feeling of fulfillment that occurs when the result is obtained. The obstacles have been overcome, the stages have been completed and the product is not taking long to appear. This is an appropriate moment when the mother-teacher can highlight to her student-daughter the benefit of following natural steps and unsuccessful experiences.

Speaking of a parent-teacher and a child-student, the most obvious of the challenges is related to the division of roles. Thus, it is necessary for the mother to partially detach herself from the role of mother, in order to be able to identify more with that of teacher. From this angle, distractions are easier to ignore, avoid, or remove. To the same extent, the child must perceive his mother as his teacher, in this way the probability of defocusing from the didactic act is reduced. Of course, neither extreme is beneficial; in the end, the mother and the child are and will be in a special, unique relationship, but it is important to outline some limits to help make the teaching-learning process more efficient.

Closely related to the idea of delimitation, another challenge we identified is that of time. Spending a great deal of time in the same space, mother and child routinely engage in various activities together. However, when it comes to piano lessons (it can equally be ukulele lessons or singing lessons), things need to be clearly defined as much as possible. The teacher-parent knowing the child's ability to concentrate sets a certain time that he considers appropriate, during which he does his best to avoid any other concerns from any side. It is good for the parent to make sure before the lesson starts that all the child's physiological needs are met and the lesson can be carried out in optimal conditions. Taking into account the child's age, the parent-teacher adjusts his behavior, the teaching techniques, the demands and expectations of the child's performance. For example, for the five-year-old, a 15-minute session may be more than enough.

Another challenge is related to the child's desire to sing immediately or as soon as possible certain pieces of music from his memory. Most of the time, the desired songs are suitable for a somewhat higher technical level, and their approach at this time would involve jumping over the normal stages of learning – those that ensure the correct acquisition of theoretical notions and practical skills. In such cases, the teacher must be firm, help the student understand the importance of passing the stages and manage to provide the student with the most enjoyable learning experience appropriate to the current stage. In this situation, the parent-teacher has the opportunity to live pleasant experiences with the child, in a process full of creativity.

Last but not least, the challenge of any parent of our century is that of time management and prioritization. If the current job is the one that takes up a good part of the parents' daily physical time, well, all that remains is that the spare time with family be made more efficient, and the activities concentrated, so that the children's harmonious development and the warm family climate would not be affected. On this line, the distribution of tasks between family members is required. Thus, with some discipline efforts, the music session can be carried out with the necessary recurrence.

4. Conclusions

The field of traditional pedagogy is not independent from that of the family. Considering the related aspects, the family is, in fact, another kind of school. The question is: do parents accept this reality or not? If we look at things this way, the inherent challenges will be welcomed as part of the perpetual learning process, and the accomplishments – greater or lesser – will serve as fuel. On the other hand, an individual's time is a relative resource, meaning that it derives its value from how it is used. Ultimately, being a parent-teacher is both a privilege and a responsibility.

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