

# CREATIVE EXPLORATION OF MUSICAL DICTATION: IDEAS AND TECHNIQUES FOR ORGANISING AN INSPIRED ACTIVITY

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**Abstract:** Undoubtedly, the development of students' creative abilities depends to a large extent on the teacher's ability to create a suitable learning environment. The teacher helps students to structure and organize their knowledge. The effectiveness of pupils' creativity depends on the teacher's ability to organize their work intelligently and make the use of all teaching resources dependent on the objectives set. All the more so, as in today's socio-cultural context, children's attention is attracted and distracted by a variety of real and virtual environments that fascinate them and make them want to be part of multiple communities and engage in multiple experiences. As a result, educational leaders are in a position to better support these experiences in schools and make children's education more engaging. Among the many possibilities to consider, this article addresses creativity as a main factor in achieving an attractive, open and flexible educational process, as well as planning lessons in an interactive way, in line with children's expectations and current societal demands.

**Key words:** creativity, brainwriting, student-centred education, theory-solfeggio-dictation interactivity

## Introduction

Modern education focuses on the development of learners in many ways, seeing them not just as mere receivers of information but as creative and innovative individuals. Creativity is certainly an essential element of the learning process and promoting it through a student-centred educational approach is particularly important because it develops innovative and adaptable skills. Such an approach in theory-solfeggio-dictation classes is particularly beneficial because in this way students not only learn music from a theoretical perspective, but also how to apply it in a creative and original way.

## **Clarification of the fundamental concepts of the theory-solfeggio-dictation subject**

As far as the discipline of Theory-Solfeggio-Dictation is concerned, it can be divided into two main components (Nedelcuț, N, Rîpă, p.5):

- Music theory per se, which provides the theoretical basis necessary for the development of musical thinking and practical skills;
- Solfeggio and dictation, which are practical and applied branches aimed at developing musical hearing.

Musical dictation is an exercise in developing the ability to recognize and notate by ear previously and consciously learned musical elements. These elements include melodic, rhythmic, rhythmic-melodic, harmonic and polyphonic aspects. To be able to recognize these elements effectively, they need to be perceived through the senses, to be consciously learned and repeated several times until recognition skills become reliable. By teaching musical notation, pupils learn how to operate with musical sounds and to establish a relationship between musical sounds and the graphic signs that represent them. (Demian A, Nedelcuț N, 2021, p. 86)

There are several forms of musical dictation, depending on the main components that make it up:

- melodic dictation, which focuses on developing skills in recognizing melodic elements horizontally, i.e. noting only the pitch of the sounds by the corresponding graphic signs. The aim of this type of dictation is to develop reaction speed in notating a melody (Rîpă C, Nedelcuț N, 2002, p.7).

Rhythm representation is an essential component of rhythmic dictation and can be classified as a distinct activity. It involves the recognition of the duration of sounds, accents and measure. Followed by writing them down using the appropriate note values. The aim of this type of dictation is to develop and strengthen rhythmic skills and accuracy, as well as the correct writing of specific rhythmic formulas (Demian A, Nedelcuț N, 2021, p. 87).

Rhythmic-melodic dictation combines the two types of dictation and focuses on both pitch and note duration notation.

## **Involving creativity in education**

From an etymological point of view, the term "creativity" comes from the Latin "creare", which means to give birth, to conceive, to create (Sălăvăstru D, 2004, p. 98). In psychology, this term refers to the ability to produce new ideas, to the general disposition of the personality towards innovation, to a certain organization of psychological processes in the field of personality and the ability to open new

paths. Creativity refers to the ability or aptitude to create something original. The act of creation is a process of elaboration through invention or discovery, with the help of creative imagination, of new, original and valuable ideas or products, which can be applied in different fields of activity (Iaru A, Ion N, Kalman M, pdf).

Rightly considered one of the most fascinating human phenomena, creativity is today a research meeting point for many experts in different fields. The term was introduced in the literature by G.W Allport in 1937. Synonyms such as: fluid intelligence (RG Cattell), creatively oriented thinking (ER Hilgard), divergent thinking (JP Guilford), loosely structured problem solving (J. Bruner), creative imagination (Th. Ribot) and constructive imagination (AF Osborn) are still used today as specialist terms (Albu E, 2009, p. 127).

Being creative implies being original and expressive, imaginative, generative, inventive or innovative. Novelty is evaluated according to the degree of originality, which represents the distance between the new product and what is already known and used in the field (Ețco C, Fornea I, Davidescu E, Tintiuc T, Daniliuc N, Cărăruș M, 2007, p.179).

According to Elena Lupșă and Victor Bratu (Lupșă E, Bratu V, 2005, p. 76), creativity is the finality of the organization of different personality factors and not just a psychological trait in itself. "Creativity is the ability to imagine answers to problems, to elaborate original and novel solutions" (Limbos E, taken Onutz S, 2009, p. 66). It is a generally human trait, even if over time it has been thought that this concept belongs only to a certain category of people. Fortunately, it is found in latent, virtual form in every individual. "If we did not accept this point of view, we would not be able to intervene in the stimulation, education and training of creativity" (Zlate M, p. 280).

### **Methods for stimulating scholastic creativity**

One of the permanent tasks of education, whatever its level, should be, and is, at least in theory, the development and structuring of the creative forces that exist in every human being.

Creativity can manifest itself in different ways and with varying intensity throughout an individual's life. For example, at the age of 6-7, creative children may find ingenious solutions to problems, invent new games or have a passion for art. Research suggests that intense displays of creativity emerge in the early years of school and increase until around age 9, then stagnate for two to three years. Creativity peaks around age 16, then increases slightly until age 17. A possible explanation for the stagnation and the consequent decline in creativity after the age of nine is that students begin to focus more on school performance and teacher evaluation (Almășan A; Solonca D, Iacobescu R, 2017, p.15).

According to Sanda Onutz (Onutz S, 2009, p.69), in order to stimulate the development of students' creativity, it is necessary to take into account certain principles that, over time, have proved to be indispensable:

- The attitude of the teacher must be positive towards creativity. Recognise the creativity in pupils' products;

- The atmosphere during the teaching process should be permissive, allowing pupils to express themselves freely (within the limits of common sense);

- The assessment objectives should be shifted from informative to formative and the stress of the assessment should be eliminated;

- Avoiding material rewards and school competition, which also leads to a reward;

- Offer a wide circle of choices in work tasks and avoid strict rules and constraints.

- In order to have creative pupils, the teacher himself must be creative in his pedagogical approach. He must be persuasive, open-minded and promote freedom of thought and creativity. Or, as Jean Lupu puts it: "For the classroom to light up dozens of lights in the eyes of the children, at least one spark has to come forth from the teacher's desk". (Lupu J, 1988, p.74)

In the context of the aforementioned ideas, the concept of interactive-creative learning has emerged, following the desire for the instructional-educational process to keep pace with the changes occurring in social life and human activity in general. The promotion of creativity should occur throughout the lesson, fostering a creative style of thinking and acting. Teachers can act as role models and encourage their pupils to develop their own creative ideas and solutions through interactive and stimulating methods and techniques. An environment that is conducive to the development of pupils' creativity is also important, as is the organisation of activities that challenge and inspire them to think differently and express their own ideas.

### **Interactive methods and techniques. Student-centred teaching-learning**

A student-centred educational method puts the student at the centre of the learning process. It is an active strategy that involves the development of a positive learning experience in real time, based on equality, trust and mutual respect, in which the teacher assumes the role of facilitator of the learning process. In such a relationship, students are encouraged to express their opinions and ideas. While the organisational structure of the school has, in a relative sense, of course, shaped the profile of future teachers, pupils certainly know what the image of the "ideal teacher" is not. Studies in this field have largely identified "the authoritarian teacher, centred

on the content of the subject he or she teaches, overwhelmed by normativity and obligation" (Șoitu L, Cherciu R, 2006, p.58-59).

Therefore, it is necessary to replace this style and promote strategies that ensure "students' knowledge, motivation, involvement and personal development" (Șoitu L, Cherciu R, 2006, p.58-59). According to the same authors (p. 61), an ideal teacher would be the one who: holds the position of a partner in the teaching process, approaches teaching from an applicative and interdisciplinary angle, masters assertive communication, finds multiple solutions to problems.

Student-centred learning, as mentioned by K. Rogers (Solovei R, 2012), first considers the needs of the students, then those of the other participants in education: teachers, subject matter or the educational institution.

It is understood that the passivity of pupils in the classroom produced by the traditional method of teaching based on explanations can only produce learning effects to a small extent. For meaningful learning, it is not enough for the student to simply listen to what the teacher says or explains, no matter how deep and clear his or her thoughts may be. Research shows that the reason for this is actually the way the brain works, or that it is not simply a receiver of information: the brain processes information. (Solovei R, 2012).

"The brain works like a computer (or rather, the computer was modelled on the way the brain works!):

- In order for a computer to start working we have to press the "power" button. When learning is "passive", our brain's "power" button is not activated!

- A computer needs the right software to interpret the input. Furthermore, our brain needs to "link" what is being taught to what it already knows and its own way of operating. When learning is "passive", the brain does not make these connections.

- A computer does not retain processed information unless we press the "save" button. Our brain has to test the information or explain it to someone else in order to store it. When learning is "passive", the brain does not "save" what has been presented!" (Sarivan L, Gavrilă R, Stoicescu D, 2009, p.9)

Therefore, when teachers burden their students with their own thoughts, no matter how structured and deep they may be, learning is disrupted by this piece of information that has already been systematized by the teacher. Certainly, a lesson taught in an engaging manner manages to make an immediate impression on the brain, even if pupils generally cannot retain much information in the long term. The teacher cannot replace the individual thinking of each student and cannot guess the activity going on in the students' minds. It is the students who have to organise their information in an orderly and meaningful way. In other words, for the full success of

the instructional-educational approach, students must be given the opportunity for discussion, investigation and action. (Sarivan L, Gavrilă R, Stoicescu D, 2009, p. 9).

There is no doubt that learners have to pass knowledge through their own understanding, because nobody can do it for them. At the same time, personal understanding is fostered by interacting with others, who in turn also learn. In other words, if students construct their own knowledge, it does not mean that they do it alone, in isolation. Let us not forget that man is essentially a social being. Promoting active learning also requires learning partnerships. In fact, interactive learning, for that is what it is all about, offers the opportunity to operate, to transfer the concepts learned in different environments (Sarivan L, Gavrilă R, Stoicescu D, 2009, p. 10).

### **Explanation of the methods and experiments used in the case study**

**Brainwriting** is a brainstorming technique that is carried out in writing, with the aim of stimulating students' group creativity by asking them to come up with as many solutions or ideas as possible on a given topic. It provides equal opportunities for all group members to participate and enables them to think without being blocked or influenced by a pre-existing consensus on whether to accept a particular idea before considering all possible ideas. It is used for the same purpose as brainstorming, plus it allows for a deeper exploration of ideas than launching them orally, encourages participation from everyone, even the shiest, and gives them the opportunity to focus individually and examine the problem in detail. It gives all group members an equal opportunity to participate and helps them to generate ideas without being blocked by any preconceived opinion or pre-existing consensus on a particular idea. (<http://practica-teoria.excelsior.org/metode-de-activare-a-creativitatii/>).

At the *Sigismund Toduță* Art High School in Deva, lessons in music theory, solfeggio and dictation included a case study for a group of 24 students aged 8-13.

The aim of the study was to develop the ability of rhythmic improvisation, representation and transcription of a short musical text (rhythmic-melodic, rhythmic) in a creative approach, through individual and group involvement, thus providing an interactive and engaging learning experience.

In order to organise the writing of musical dictation, we proceeded as follows, starting from the way of organizing a brainwriting session, adapted to the specifics of the theory-solfeggio-dictation discipline (Breben S, p. 289-291):

1) Division of students into small groups of 3 members. Due to the fact that in theory-solfeggio-dictation work is already done in groups, divided at class level with students between 5-12 members, no more than two or three groups with 3 or 4 members can be formed, depending on the number of children. The experiment in 2nd grade was carried out with 9 students (divided into 3 groups of 3 students, rhythmic improvisation based on rhythmic values and formulas given by the teacher),

in 3rd grade with 6 students (divided into two groups of 3 students, melodic dictation) and in 6th grade with 9 students (three groups of 3 students, rhythmic-melodic dictation).

2) Presentation of the theme, procedure and work activities. In **6th grade**, the subject for the experiment was the rhythmic-melodic dictation (six bars). This was generally carried out according to the standard procedure (pitch and measure were established, and the dictation was in two-bar fragments, each fragment being dictated four times), but was adapted accordingly, depending on the speed of the students' reactions.

3) After dictating the first fragment (measures 1-2) once, the children filled in their personal sheet with the notes and rhythmic formulas corresponding to the first fragment. They then passed the sheet to the peer on the left and received the sheet from the peer on the right. After the second musical edition of the first fragment had been dictated, each child completed and tried to improve the content of the sheet received. Afterwards, they handed the sheet to the peer on the left and took over the sheet from the peer on the right. The procedure was repeated for the third and fourth musical edition of the first fragment, during which time the sheets went back to the child from whom the procedure originally started. The same procedure was applied for the next two fragments (measures 3-4 and 5-6).

4) After completing the dictation session of the six measures, each team was given the task of collaborating on writing two more measures to complete the musical dictation in a creative way.

5) At the end, all sheets were collected, each paper was examined and corrected where necessary. Both positive and negative aspects of this activity were discussed.

It is necessary for the teacher to supervise the activity and take the following aspects into consideration: a) the explanations must be well understood, otherwise the teacher should intervene with instructions; b) the sheets must be exchanged in the order established, thus respecting the rule of the method; c) no talking during the writing of the dictation; d) each student waits his or her turn and is allowed to finish what he or she has started, before the next one can write; e) for the better development of the dictation, instructions can be given regarding the rhythm of the melody, the rhythmic formulas heard in each fragment, the note with which each new fragment begins; f) students should improve the content of the assignment; g) note the involvement of each child on a sheet; h) for a clearer assessment of the involvement of each student, at the beginning of the activity it can be specified to choose a single colour to write with (it is recommended to use erasable pens), different from the colour chosen by the other members of the group. This makes it easier to assess each member of the group.

In the **third grade**, the experiment was carried out with a group of six children, divided into two teams, the subject of the activity being melodic dictation. The presentation of the activities and the conduct of the action included: the

transmission of the key, the note with which the dictation begins and the information that the melodic listening exercise is divided into 3 segments (with 4 musical editions corresponding to each fragment), delimited by the bar. Students made the first exchange of sheets after the completion of the first fragment, the second exchange after the completion of the second fragment and the third exchange after the dictation of three segments. In contrast to the 6th grade activity, students did not interfere in any way with each other's writing of the episodes. After all students had completed writing the melodic dictation, they were asked to adapt their own rhythm to the melodic notes of the dictation.

Perhaps the most successful creative variation was the activity carried out in the **2nd grade**, which involved 9 children, divided into 3 groups of 3 students. The theme was rhythmic improvisation based on given rhythmic values and formulas. The identification of tasks and resources involved:

- communicating the formulas and note values on the basis of which the rhythmic improvisation exercise was composed; determining the measure as well as the total number of measures belonging to the rhythmic exercise;
- the time allotted to each fragment (there were three fragments of two bars in total) was 4 minutes;
- after completing the first fragment, the students handed the exercise sheet to the colleague on the left and received the one from the colleague on the right. They continued in the same manner until the completion of the rhythmic improvisation;
- writing the rhythmic exercise on post-it notes, which were then collected and organised on the board, resulting in a giant improvisation exercise.

### **Conclusions:**

Through the creative and interactive exploration of the dictation activity, the effectiveness of this method was demonstrated through the following aspects:

- it developed listening culture in a complex and creative way, which sparked the interest and sympathy of the students;
- the new way of working and organising the educational process allowed a deeper understanding of the notion of "musical dictation".
- it promoted effective collaboration between teacher and students, thus developing communication and teamwork skills;
- practising musical knowledge and skills in a different way than usual, stimulated students' interest and improved their positive attitude towards musical dictation;
- it enhanced children's cognitive ability and listening comprehension;



- it provided an interactive and creative learning experience by actively involving students in the learning process and promoting collaboration and communication within the group;

- it provided students with a new perspective on the practical meaning of the term dictation;

The aim of this case study was to increase students' interest and creativity during theory-solfeggio-dictation classes, especially the musical dictation part, as well as to combine dictation learning methods with students' delight. The aim was to balance instruction and rules with the development of imagination, creativity and the enjoyment of creating one's own piece of music (even small ones) at the same time.

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