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Music technology and music education: A practice-based case study on dub reggae

Content analysis of written interviews (continued)

The reasons for dub's educational value were widespread and comprised the everyday relevance, an exceptional ambient character, tonal aspects, the influence on electronic music and an interest in its cultural background. Fifty per cent (N = 17) stated that dub reggae is sensible for music education because of its modern appeal. Other students (N = 6) highlighted the musical diversity of dub reggae.

Many students reported about the lesson that they had begun to listen to dub reggae more-spectaculately, and that they would have gained extended perceptual representations, leading to a better comprehension of sound characteristics. An interesting new extension of the results was the effect of a staged virtual room designed by audio effects were also described. Sixty-three per cent (N = 12) approved of having gained an extended awareness of produced sound. Six of them ascribed to it the newly acquired knowledge about music production like the use of effects, mixing and room placement. "Our brain has extended my understanding of sound. Now I know how the overall sound is composed of different parts. When I listen to a song now, I listen to it more carefully" (Sh, f, 27). Other students stressed the daily relevance of their acquired knowledge: "In your everyday life you get confronted with technologically produced sound all the time. I learned how these are created and what cultural significance they obtains" (Sh, f, 20). From the twelve students five stated to pay more attention to popular music's tonal qualities in the future due to both their newly advanced perceptual skills and greater awareness of production details. These competences would have come along with the more intensive listening experiences. Regarding the music technology, 89 per cent (N = 17) wished to work with DAWs frequently to record original material and to improve their (re)mixing skills. Dealing with mixing tasks led to recognizing that it is an effort to produce electronic music and that it demands musical skills just as playing an instrument does, only in a different manner.

Discussion

Listening skills and awareness of produced sound

The findings indicate that the production tasks have facilitated an increased awareness and understanding of produced sound. The initial analyses of the dub example demonstrate that the students were capable of identifying details of sound like an emphasis on bass, a flow of sounds and their sonic standardisation. Introducing conventional production effects (reverb, delay, flanger, chorus) and the sound box model (Moore 2001) combined with analyses and active production tasks added to the students' understanding of sound. The results comply with both Brown's definitions of music technology and the dub style as well as introducing students to DAWs through dub reggae is a worthwhile approach as the findings indicate. Notwithstanding its specific aesthetics, the students are rather free to explore and to improve with effects, volume levels and pan settings without being confined by strictly defined stylistic regulations (Savage 2005). Since the dub remix has no need for formal aspects, it supports the focus on dynamics and flow of sounds, which in turn is expedient for facilitating an extended understanding of sound as a creative means. Another positive aspect of teaching dub reggae is its suitability to convey an informed understanding of production techniques without much explanation. Knowledge about the style has been gained equally by noticing similarities between dub reggae and modern genres, by experiencing remixing practices and by slipping into the roles of Jamaican dub reggae producers.

Motivation, acquaintance knowledge and heterogeneity

During all phases of the lesson, most students were remarkably motivated. Working with music production technology proved to be attractive and so the dub reggae style was highly interesting to them. Combining listening tasks, analysis and production raised their willingness to engage with the original dub reggae culture and its appropriation in Europe. Even theoretical work met their interest, which was exceptional. Another goal of the lesson design was to facilitate a participatory culture (Tobias 2013b) that included every student regardless of formal training (Galli & Breeze 2007). The outcome suggests that this aim was reached as the tasks were carried out at different levels.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the high potential of music technology for the music education, not merely reduced to a method but as a content in its own right. Music technology is suitable for imparting manifold educational goals, namely, for introducing students to detailed listening skills, differentiating between music styles, understanding and imitating musical ideas, and gaining insight into less familiar musical cultures. The one starting point for working with technologically produced sound in the classroom will always be the awareness of musical qualities, their tonal variety and quality. Yet, for the purposes applied within musical lessons, it must be supported by theoretical knowledge and, above all, by combining theory, listening skills and previous personal experiences through practical exercises.

References