

Critical Thinking: A Missing Piece in School Music Education

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Abstract

Music, as a special form of non-verbal communication, has played –and still plays– a unique role in the development of mankind. It influences all aspects of humans: physical, cultural, intellectual, emotional, social, moral, and aesthetic. Music lessons provide students with opportunities to develop decision-making and critical thinking skills. Most authors tend to agree that critical thinking can be applied in resolving problems, estimating probabilities, and taking decisions in social everyday context. Critical thinkers can detect inconsistencies and common mistakes in reasoning, following the view that understanding is enriched by the perspectives of others. This article aims to bring the importance of critical thinking in music education into focus. The main purpose of the study is to give an overview on whether and how music education and curricula promote critical thinking skills, by focusing particularly on the case of the national music curriculum of Cyprus. The results of our research indicate that although the music curriculum assigns importance to the necessity of the development of critical thinking skills, it needs explicit changes as to support any successful implementation to improve students' ability. This study serves as an extension of previous research on the role of critical thinking in music curricula while it aspires to renew interest in many educational systems.

Keywords: Critical Thinking, Curriculum, Education, Music Education, Music Curriculum, Teacher

Introduction

Music, a universal human endeavor, has played –and still plays– a unique role in the development of mankind. As a special form of non-verbal communication, music has enormous impact on every aspect of life; thus, it is of great importance for every individual. It influences all aspects of humans: physical, cultural, intellectual, emotional, social, moral, and aesthetic. Along with foundational knowledge in music, music lessons provide students with opportunities to develop decision-making skills, communication and collaboration skills, and critical thinking skills. Music education offers a useful context for critical thinking development (Kokkidou, 2013), as music problems could have more than one solution. In addition, personal music expression is manifested in various ways while every outcome

(performance, composition, improvisation, arrangement etc.) is subject to evaluation. Critical thinking and music education can strengthen each other at school settings and, thus, have a symbiotic relationship with each other. In this paper we try to re-start a conversation, calling on researchers to further investigate ways to promote critical thinking skills in music curricula of primary and secondary general schools. The basic questions we attempt to address are: Why critical thinking in education and music education? Can critical thinking skills be cultivated and taught in music education? Do school music curricula –taking as research case the current national music curriculum of Cyprus– emphasize the development of critical thinking?

Critical Thinking: Literature Review

As we read in the Greek ancient bibliography, 2,500 years ago, Socrates used questions in his insightful teaching through inductive process of guided discovery. Instead of providing direct answers, he proposed a practice for constructing the questions and seek truth through criticism, and promoted critical discussion and metacognition (see Kokkidou, 2013). In educational terms, Socratic questioning is defined as a process of guided discovery, as a pedagogical tool for exploring alternative points of view and investigating big ideas, while it is found to provoke students' curiosity, which leads to developing a critical stance on various issues and actively seeking solutions (see Ingalls Vanada, 2016; Lee et al., 2014; MiYoung et al., 2014; Elder & Paul, 1998). According to Paul (1992), the specific pedagogy consists of six categories: (1) questions about the question; (2) questions of clarification; (3) questions that probe assumptions; (4) questions that probe reasons and evidence; (5) questions about viewpoints or perspectives; and (6) questions that probe implications and consequences (as cited in MiYoung et al., 2014, p. 289). Critical reflection is related to personal development, because it opens up space for new possibilities and helps us to make better decisions (Moon, 2008). Numerous scholars have discussed the definition and generalizability of critical thinking. There is a number of theorists and experts in critical thinking (philosophers, cognitive psychologists and education theorists) who have provided an overview of many of its aspects and have described them in a variety of ways. Many definitions about critical thinking display minor differences. Yet, there are definitions, which are more narrow and domain-specific, while others can be generalized. The term of critical thinking, has many different significations in national cultures and educational contexts. In other words, critical thinking appears to be context dependent (Facione, 1990; McPeck, 1981). Robert Ennis (1985) defines critical thinking as reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on "deciding what to believe or do" (p. 45). His definition of critical thinking can be applied on multiple thematic areas. In another basis, John McPeck (1981) underscores the importance of context in critical thinking. For him, critical thinking is contextual and cannot be generalized, because what may be considered sound reasoning in one field may not be valid in another. Consequently, critical thinking requires specific content knowledge of the subject or domain, and so is discipline-specific. McPeck defines it as "the propensity and skill to engage in an activity with reflective skepticism" (pp. 7-8). In 1988, the American Philosophical Association commissioned a national two-year Delphi research project, in order to develop a consensus definition of critical thinking according to the cognitive skills and the affective dispositions. According to the definition derived from this study, critical thinking is the process of judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference, giving reasoned consideration to evidence, contexts, conceptualizations, methods, and the criteria upon which that judgment is based (Facione, 1998; Facione, 1990).

Several scholars from the field of psychology tend to describe critical thinking in terms of behaviors or actions an individual can have or perform. For Diane Halpern (1998), critical thinking includes an evaluation component and is purposeful, reasoned, and goal-directed; it is the kind of thinking involved in solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihood, and making decisions; it needs “cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome” (p. 450). Matthew Lipman (2003), claims that critical thinking supports correct judgments, in order the learners to use it in social everyday life environments. He maintains that critical thinking is “skillful, responsible thinking that facilitates good judgment because it relies upon criteria; is self-correcting; and is sensitive to context” (p. 39) and he further adds that this kind of thinking helps us to solve problems and make decisions (pp. 58-61). The philosopher Richard Paul (1992), argues that the essential components of critical thinking include thinking abilities, affective traits, and intellectual standards. He defines critical thinking as a “disciplined, self-directed thinking that exemplifies the perfections of thinking appropriate to a particular mode or domain of thought” (p. 9). For Joe Lau (2011), thinking critically means “thinking precisely and systematically, and following the rules of logic and scientific reasoning, among other things” (p. 1) Deanna Kuhn (2016) discusses critical thinking as a dual (input-output) process and identifies inquiry and argument as key dimensions in a process-based account of critical thinking. Finally, for Joel Rudinow and Vincent Barry (2008), critical thinking is concerned first and foremost with decision-making; it is comprised by a set of conceptual tools associated with intellectual skills and strategies useful for making reasonable and thoughtful decisions about what to do or accept as something given. The authors demonstrate both the importance and the difficulty of thinking critically. Thus we understand that critical thinking can be perceived both as a process and as an outcome; it is conceived as ability or as the result of applying this ability. As an active purposeful process, it goes beyond descriptive and linear thinking.

Despite the controversy on a common definition for critical thinking, most authors tend to agree that it is a kind of thinking which can be applied in resolving problems, estimating probabilities, and taking decisions in social everyday context. It transcends subject matter divisions and varies according to the motivation underlying it. The critical thinker is distinguished first and foremost by vigilance and healthy scepticism; she/he is open-minded and flexible, is prudent in making judgments, reasonable in the selection of criteria, and honest in facing personal biases. She/he also has the skills of a good listener in order to formulate precise ideas and identify the relevance and importance of the ideas. They also can detect inconsistencies and common mistakes in reasoning, following the view that understanding is enriched by the perspectives of others. Thus the critical thinkers are not afraid to subject their positions to re-examination and they can evaluate the evidence for and against an hypothesis. Above all, she/he can reflect on and evaluate her/his own thinking skills, beliefs, and values, recognizing its strengths and weaknesses, in order to reconsider and reconstruct her/his viewpoint (Kuhn, 2016; Lau, 2011; Lipman, 2003; Paul & Elder, 2001; Facione, 1990).

Critical Thinking, Education, and Music Education

Why Critical Thinking in Education and Music Education?

Schooling as a powerful engine, cultivates attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, which can affect students' wellbeing and their development in all domains, with lasting effects on their lifetime accomplishments. The pupils seem to gain new experiences having new needs in the formal

educational context. Thus they need to know how to navigate diverse cultural values and significations; they have to develop abilities in order to understand, analyze, and interpret the world around them, and to address new unfamiliar situations, challenges and problems for which there is no master guidebook (Larson, 2011; Larson et al., 2011; Biesta, 2006). Under this prism, many educational researchers and theorists highlight the importance of cultivating students' critical thinking in developing higher cognitive functions and forming learning behaviors, as well as in preparing themselves to be responsible citizens, able to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Critical thinking and metacognition can be considered as key components of effective learning. The movement for the development of critical thinking in education has been growing worldwide since the 80s and through curriculum design and new teaching methods, the educational policymakers changed the curriculum construction (see Ellis et al., 2014). Researchers and educators began to express their interest on what enhances critical thinking skills: how these skills could be developed and promoted in everyday life and in education environments (i.e., appropriate instruction processes) (Kuhn, 2016; Topoğlu, 2014). Critical thinking is not a theoretical concept but one that strongly relies on necessities of everyday life having practical implications. One of the main purposes of education is to turn students into independent thinkers helping them to act responsibly, making thoughtful judgments. Furthermore, it should prepare them for future situations so that they are able to negotiate problems of tomorrow, which cannot be seen or predicted in the present. This is really a challenging mission, yet a crucial one. Over a century ago, John Dewey (1910/1997) proposed the term "reflective thinking", suggesting that learning, for it to be truly educative in value, must involve reflective thinking, and articulated that "the most important factor in the training of good mental habits consists in acquiring the attitude of suspended conclusions, and in mastering the various methods of searching for new materials to corroborate or to refute the first suggestions that occur" (p. 13). In his perspective, the main purposes of education is learning how to think, challenging and testing beliefs, and bringing meaning to experience. His writings served to provide the basis for subsequent authors who investigated and described the impact of critical thinking in learning. Paulo Freire (1973), pointed out that the target for a society of equity, solidarity, and justice requires active citizens. The route to this is education. Traditional education, according to Freire, does not provide the experiences needed to form critical consciousness, because it constrains autonomy, criticality, and democratic relationships, it is disconnected from life and is centered on words emptied of the reality they are meant to represent lacking concrete activity. Freire (1970) also claims that the students must be critical co-investigators along with their teacher. This way, students are able to develop a critical perception of their own existence in the world; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in transformation. The problem-posing educators constantly re-form their reflections. They provide their students with chances for questioning and, consequently, for autonomy. Both students and teachers reflect on themselves and the world without dichotomizing this reflection from action: when life "consists of action and reflection, it is praxis; it is transformation of the world" (Freire, 1970, p. 106). Thomas Regelski (2005) writes that critical theory could lead to a new point of view for understanding the status of music education as a social project. In the critical pedagogy agenda, schools should be aiming at creating responsible citizens for an egalitarian society; they should empower students to resist and free themselves from the ideologies of the dominant culture. Thus, music education should be emancipated from the mere transmission of the Western musical heritage, focusing on the transformative potential of music as a key sociocultural practice (Regelski, 2010). From this

perspective, music teachers who adopt the principles of critical pedagogy are likely to develop the habit of critical consciousness. Moreover, they go beyond conventional content by focusing on issues related to fairness and social justice (e.g., critical consideration about gender and racial stereotypes, sensitivity towards the environment in which we live). The arts, as Freedman and Stuhr (2004) put it, are believed to teach children to “think critically, act constructively in an informed manner, and collaborate in the conscious formation of personal and communal identities” (p. 824). They are well suited to the construction of meanings and promotion of higher-order thinking skills (Johnson, 2003). Learning in and through the arts can present varied and complex means for the acquisition of life skills such as creative thinking, decision making, goal setting, critical thinking and social-emotional skills (Ingalls Vanada, 2016; Bowen et al., 2014; Nilson et al., 2013; Temmerman, 2006). Elliot Eisner (1998), who advocated the importance of arts education, focused on improving educational practice across the curriculum by applying critical methods in teaching the arts.

It is well accepted that good thinking involves critical thinking and creativity (Nilson et al., 2013; Lau, 2011). Paul and Elder (2006), argue that both creative and critical thinking are aspects of good purposeful thinking, which requires individuals to create intellectual output and to be capable of criticizing and reflecting on the quality of these products. For Ken Robinson (2009), an equally important part of every creative process is to act critically on your own ideas. Being creative is not just about blowing out new ideas, but it is about critical judgment as well. Finally, according to Delane Ingalls Vanada (2016), the ultimate goal of education is to nurture creative, flexible yet critical, lifelong learners. Her research provides evidence about students’ overall quality of thinking which should be best measured and observed against critical, creative, and practical skills and dispositions. In the field of music education, critical thinking and its instruction can take many forms. Music can be perceived as an art form of representation and as a symbol system, which is to be encoded, decoded, and evaluated. In this vein, music teaching-learning should emphasize, among others, conceptual understanding, awareness and exploration of music processes and experiences (Custodero, 2002; Small, 1987). Pogonowski (2002), stresses the importance of reflecting upon information in music education, and explains “critical thinking occurs when experiences allow us to formulate impressions based on the cognitive and emotional issues present within them” (p. 29). Elliott (2008), who has provided detailed explanations for curricular revisions, maintains that music teaching can promote and enhance students’ critical thinking skills, developing what he calls “critically reflective music makers and listeners” (p. 52). According to him, if we want students to become independent, critical, and creative musical thinkers, we must provide them with opportunities to practice exploring, generating, constructing, and selecting musical problems and solutions themselves. Green (2014), turns our attention to the ways in which students can develop critical listening and appreciation skills. Finally, Jorgensen (2008), endorses the idea of the dialogical approach (participating in reflective dialogue) in music teaching-learning, which requires attentive listening and highlights the importance of taking other people’s views into account. Given the importance ascribed to critical thinking, it is somehow surprising that few studies have linked critical thinking to music teaching-learning (Nápoles et al., 2013; Colwell, 2011). Moreover, existing studies to date show that music teachers spend very limited time engaged with critical thinking skills (see Nápoles et al., 2013). Jessica Nápoles and her colleagues (2013), examined two teacher-training approaches for critical thinking instruction. Their results indicate that when pre-service music educators receive instruction in critical thinking skills, then they can transfer

skills learnt in this instruction in choral rehearsals. Students who have developed critical thinking skills can think more broadly and deeply upon various music topics; they adopt a critical stance towards the works they create, study, and respond to (investigating, for instance, the cultural context of Western and non-Western music works) and are able to examine their own works of music as well as those of others thoughtfully and knowledgeably (Kaschub & Smith, 2009). They can generate and evaluate musical knowledge (deconstruction, differentiation, inference), they are able to examine alternative ideas concerning musical phenomena, can detect possibilities and consider alternative solutions to music problems, and can evaluate new information and ideas (i.e. detect bias and not merely accept obvious and given statements). Moreover, they can demonstrate understanding of the music making processes (performance, composition, and arrangement), namely metacognitive skills, and can feel more confident articulating, sharing, testing, and justifying their own perceptions of the music environment. Critical thinking is demonstrated when students show willingness to describe, revise, and refine their critical analyses in both informal and formal contexts.

Could the Critical Thinking Skills be Cultivated and Taught in Music Education?

Today, it is well documented that teachers can encourage students to apply critical thinking skills across a range of disciplines and contexts (Topoğlu, 2014; Thompson, 2011; Moon, 2008; Lipman, 2003; Halpern, 1998; Ennis, 1997). Many scholars and researchers support the importance and the necessity of teaching critical thinking skills in classrooms. According to Paul (1992), critical thinking is not just one aim of education among others, but *the* ultimate aim (p. 303-304). In the Delphi report it is highlighted that critical thinking cognitive skills should be taught in creative learning environments (Facione, 1990). Thompson (2011) concludes that there are various ways to teach critical thinking and to embed it across the curriculum. Teaching for critical thinking skills necessitates a philosophical shift from output to process, from practice to problem-based learning, and from subject isolation to subject integration. In the field of music education, there is a widespread agreement that critical thinking skills should be taught (see Kaschub & Smith, 2009).

However, do all music lessons actually develop students' critical thinking skills?

Are there any specific methods and strategies music teachers can use to facilitate students' critical thinking development?

For Janice Dressel (1988), both music lessons and rehearsals offer many occasions for the students to think critically about certain issues. Christopher Small (1987) proposes specific best practices, such as a) *defining the musical problem*, b) *gathering knowledge for decision making*, c) *recognizing underlying assumptions*, and d) *detecting inconsistencies in assumptions* (as cited in Topoğlu, 2014, p. 2255). For Timothy Brophy (2000), critical thinkers in music follow three ways of music expression: (1) *reflection (the examination of previous musical experience in relation to present experience)*, (2) *metacognition (thinking about one's own thinking, learning, and music development)*, and (3) *procedural application (thinking in performance, updating and altering musical performance to suit the immediate musical conditions or context)*.

Wanda May also (1998), claims that critical thinking is teachable, because it requires metacognitive skills. She also notes that activities, such as the playing of instruments through

imitation, the reading of scores, and the memorization of songs do not promote critical abilities. For her, the development of critical skills moves students beyond rather vacuous responses such as “I just like/don’t like it” (p. 83). An interesting question May (1998) poses is this: do students need a large store of content or expertise before they can think critically? Her answer has as follows:

What is needed are numerous experiences and encounters with music in order for students to be able to develop conceptual understanding of content or skills in critical thinking. It seems fair to say that developing thinking skills must be directed towards some content or object of inquiry. If we wait for “mastery” of content, we may be waiting a long time to introduce critical thinking skills and activities (p. 73).

Salley (2012), proposes a teaching tool called ‘spectrum reasoning’ that enhances critical thinking skills in the music theory classroom by encouraging debate, inviting reflection, and instilling respect for lifelong learning. Salley, based on the axiom that music theory instruction does allow opportunities for higher-level thinking, concludes with some suggestions on how ‘spectrum reasoning’ might be used in other areas. Johnson (2003; 2006) claims that critical thinking skills develop musical understanding, which means *analyzing, synthesizing, comparing and contrasting, developing criteria for judgment, sequencing, making connections, recognizing patterns, and evaluating musical information through active listening, reasoning, and reflection based upon affective responses and prior musical experiences* (Johnson 2006, p. 1164). May Kokkidou (2013), also proposes teaching strategies, such as students to examine musical environments, experimenting with sound sources in order to draw conclusions, comparing and contrasting different eras or pieces of music, using criteria so as to evaluate their own performance. Teachers have a vital role in the creation of the appropriate environment in which students can think critically. Pogonowski (1989) emphasizes the role of teacher as a catalyst for learning. For her, music teachers set the stage for experiential learning and intellectual challenge in the classroom and are responsible for designing music lessons that allow students to listen to and study works of music while considering them from various perspectives, and to discover meanings beyond those that have been elucidated by others. In order to foster critical thinking skills, the music teacher can provide students with the minimal knowledge demanded so that they have the possibility to proceed beyond the first contact, approach and identification. Moreover, she/he would avoid asking students to simply memorize facts and music terms; expecting music problems to be speedily resolved; and responding to students’ viewpoints in an authoritative manner. If students, for instance, are obliged to spend most of the time learning and identifying intervals, harmonic processes, musical forms, and so on, there is no time left for deepening their knowledge of music and to develop high-reasoning strategies required to debate convincingly and arguably about music. Given the collaborative teaching-learning procedures adopted in school, it is obvious that critical thinking can be enhanced through fruitful discussions and argumentation. Thus, teachers have to adopt open approaches to teaching-learning procedures; pose open-ended questions; encourage learners to take a critical viewpoint toward every aspect of music phenomenon and practice; and create conditions in which students can think critically about everything they learn and do in a music course (see Hietanena et al., 2016; Kaschub & Smith, 2009). They can also promote the *Think Aloud* strategy and make their own thinking visible to students through verbalization: acting as models, they can verbalize what they are doing (the steps or procedures of a strategy as it is

being deployed), why they are doing it, and ways for overcoming obstacles (Ellis et al., 2014). Clearly, stimulating students to continually probe the subject matter is not an easy task. Unfortunately, researchers find that the majority of music educators teach music without attaching much importance to reflection, metacognitive skills, critical examination of facts and relations (Allsup & Westerlund, 2012; May, 1988).

There is a general consensus that critical thinking skills can be taught and reinforced in music classroom. Critical thinking is teachable, however developing and maintaining critical thinking skills takes time and guided practice (continuous training). Achieving depth of critical thinking requires more holistic and organic procedures (Moon 2007). Students can be taught to question and critically examine facts and beliefs in order to reach concrete conclusions, to be engaged in dialogical argumentation, and to consider and examine others' and their own opinions, perspectives, and values (Kuhn, 2016; Thompson, 2011; Jorgensen, 2008; Moon, 2007; Johnson, 2006; Halpern, 1998). Critical thinking can be a useful tool in music education because developing independent thinkers and autonomous learners is one of its central goals. We can assert, paraphrasing Ken Robinson (2009), that critical thinking is not a specific activity; it is not about assigning specific time in our daily program; it is about the way we *do* things. We can be critical in anything –in Maths, science, history, philosophy– as much as we can in music. Critical thinking can be facilitated within any sort of activity.

Rationale and Aim of the Study

The curriculum is the cornerstone for any educational system. Curriculum design and implementation reside at the core of the mission of education, Pinar (2003), claims. Much curriculum research serves school reforms (p. 28). A challenging task for curriculum theorists is to identify the constraints in the curriculum, the values and ideologies promoted, and their implications for students' learning (Biesta, 2006). The most vigorous and significant controversies in the field of music education are related to curriculum design and implementation. Nowadays, a considerable debate is happening in education on how critical thinking should be taught and encouraged in schools. As the curriculum determines what the students need to know and what they should be able to achieve, it is crucial to investigate whether and how a music curriculum gives emphasis to critical thinking skills acquisition in school settings. In a previous research, (Kokkidou, 2006; 2013), the first author of the present paper, gathered data from in-depth study of the official music curricula for primary education in seven European countries/regions: Austria, Germany /Berlin, Greece, Spain /Catalonia, Sweden, Bulgaria, and Russia. According to the results of her study the references related to critical thinking in these curricula were extremely limited. More specifically, critical thinking was mentioned in the five out of seven curricula in a brief way and with respect to the examination and evaluation of music (functional role, musical environment) and music works (listening, performance), and students' general attitude toward music. The Bulgarian and the Russian Federation's curricula did not make any reference to critical thinking. The present research serves as an extension to the 2006 study about the role of critical thinking in music curricula, while hoping to renew the interest in this topic by using a new set of conceptual lenses. Taking the current national music curriculum of Cyprus (in force since 2010) as research case we formulated our basic research questions as follows: Does the Cypriot curriculum highlight elements related to the role of critical thinking in music lessons? Do the recommended methods emphasize the ability of students to think critically? Does the Cypriot

curriculum provide teachers with ways to implement techniques that promote critical thinking?

Does the Cypriot Music Curriculum Emphasize the Development of Critical Thinking?

By selecting the knowledge and skills that are considered to be worth teaching and learning, any curriculum both reflects and shapes everything that is considered beneficial for the child, and consequently for society, since the child is a future citizen. From this perspective, everything that is included in a curriculum constitutes an object of investigation and reflection. This is also the case with music curricula.

In order to identify whether the Cypriot music curriculum gives emphasis to critical thinking, we investigated the elements of the curriculum (general aims, specific objectives, teaching methodology and so on), horizontally and vertically, with respect to the development of critical thinking skills. In the official music curriculum of Cyprus¹ critical thinking ability is mentioned both as an educational goal and as a methodology. In the case of goals there are three direct references related to critical thinking, referring to a critical stance toward the musical environment and to works of music. In the introductory unit (“Curriculum structure”), it is stated that the music curriculum aims “to contribute to the development of critical thinking and the ability of students for problem solving [...] and the acquisition of metacognitive skills” (p. 323). In the “Musical Activities” section, it is affirmed that music listening must “focus on the development of student’s critical thinking by creating opportunities to comment on music works, both their own and others’, and suggest possible ways to differentiate them” (p. 331). In the section entitled “Attitudes-Behaviors”, it is stated that students are to “consider and deal with the (positive or negative) effects of music on the environment and everyday life, and to evaluate the music they listen to and everything that is promoted through music (music and propaganda, the consumption of music, music and politics, etc.)” (p. 345), “to obtain criteria for the quality of music they play and to be able to accept criticism and to criticize themselves and others with politeness and decency” (p. 346), and “to acquire a positive and critical viewpoint regarding music professionals and the music industry” (p. 348). Finally, in the methodology section, entitled “Critical Thinking Skills, it is indicated that critical thinking supports students as they take a critical stance toward music and rejects the idea of students as rote memorizers. More specifically, it is stated that “observation, identification, retrieval, analysis, comparison, classification, categorization, ordering, hypothesis, conclusion, clarification, decision making, explanation, dialectical debates, imagination, documentation, data correlations, explanations, justifications, practicing of divergent and convergent thinking, creativity and inventiveness, all the above are some of the critical thinking skills that could be integrated in the music course, through a wide variety of strategies, having as an ultimate goal the improvement of the quality of students’ thinking” (pp. 351-352).

Critical thinking seems to be a catch-all phrase in the present curriculum. The importance of critical thinking is stressed many times yet the content of the curriculum is not consistent with these statements. The curriculum does not adequately cover the teaching-learning of critical thinking and logical reasoning skills, it does not specify the delineation of the relevant aspects,

¹ Retrieved from the official page of Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs: http://www.schools.ac.cy/klimakio/Themata/mousiki/analytiko_programma.html

and it does not set out an explicit account of how music courses could do so in applicable ways. The goals of the curriculum are not aligned with its content. The nature of the vast majority of music activities are practice-based and minor importance is attached to critical thinking through music activities. Despite the plethora of proposed strategies the designers do not pay attention to teaching-learning strategies, which help students understand what and how they learn. Moreover, there are omissions, lapses, and misconceptions in the methodology section. For example, “explanation” is mentioned paradoxically twice, there is no reference to metacognition and opportunities to pose questions, and “imagination” is supposed to be free and not critically-oriented. It is obvious that the curriculum designers support the integration of critical thinking into music as a school subject, yet they do not outline critical thinking skills in detail, while they appear to ignore the fact that teachers need much more than prompts and generalities. Additionally, they do not take into serious consideration that today students’ music experiences are formed, to a high degree, from the music promoted by the media. Finally, there is too much specified content that has to be covered, which does not allow time for an in-depth study of a number of topics and issues. Certainly, the debate is not about content versus skills. Knowledge and skills are not unconnected but rather interwoven. They are both essential and equally important. Yet, there are priorities. Contemporary music curricula require something more than paying lip service to content knowledge. All in all, critical thinking skills are reported in the Cypriot music curriculum as essential for the study of music, but they remain an abstract outline and some vague propositions. The designers emphasize the importance of critical thinking skills but they do not take into account the fact that music teachers are not prepared to incorporate those skills into teaching-learning procedures. Indeed, some teachers are not convinced of the value of encouraging their students to think critically and do not recognize the importance of reflection on various music topics. Moreover, many teachers face difficulties when trying to adopt such approaches and need to be better informed and trained about the instructional strategies and relevant material they can use in order to translate theory into classroom experiences (Nápoles, et al., 2013; Colwell, 2011; Dressel, 1988; May, 1989). Without specific support it is more likely that they will continue to use conventional teaching methods, which are based on the notion that students are passive recipients of knowledge. Thus, music curricula ought to provide teachers with a theoretical basis for the development of students’ critical thinking skills and as well as with practical suggestions for doing so.

Another issue that should be explored is that of time. To develop critical thinking skills in music classrooms, students need time to express their ideas and reflect on their solutions. Time is an essential factor, which affects the ways ideas are shared, constructed, and evaluated. According to Colwell (2011, p. 146), thinking skills are not easily employed in a practice-based curriculum. For critical thinking to occur, students need challenging material and time to thoroughly engage with the material. Moreover, as critical thinking requires active participation from all students, music curricula ought to provide time for activities, which can bring students together in Socratic-type interaction; can motivate students to understand and analyze music practices in various contexts; awaken their interest in various music topics; and reflect on their music ideas. Further, many current researchers suggest that one of the most powerful methods of promoting critical thinking is verbal “Socratic” interaction, including dialogue between students and teachers (see Lee et al., 2014). The dialogic approach can enhance students’ abilities to seek different perspectives on music as a phenomenon and to study the ways to strengthen music learning and understanding

(Hietanena et al., 2016). The results of our research indicate that although the Cypriot music curriculum assigns importance to the necessity of the development of critical thinking skills – indicating a positive turn regarding the value of critical thinking – it needs explicit and appropriate changes so as to support any successful implementation of initiatives to improve students' ability to think critically.

Conclusion

Today, world is a rapidly changing one as major changes are happening locally and globally: catastrophic climate change, financial crises, socio-political changes, multicultural societies, and rapid development of technology in all areas. The world that students will enter is far more complex than the one previous generations had to encounter. It is increasingly heterogeneous, fluid, and disorderly, with enormous diversity of cultures, codes, and meaning systems (Larson, 2011; Larson et al., 2011). All these aspects raise important questions about what kind of school experiences are likely to develop students' critical thinking skills. Thinking critically is now more important than ever before. As mentioned above, a substantial body of literature reports and identifies the important role that schools can play in providing students with opportunities to develop critical thinking skills. However, this is not an easy task. Even college students often fail to develop higher-order thinking skills and reach deeper conceptions of critical thinking (Moon, 2007). In order to help students to develop such skills, use critical thinking purposefully, and be able to transfer these skills to other areas of their everyday lives, teachers need to provide them with appropriate experiences and chances for exploring music issues and make judgments, through strategies which support interactive, open, and dynamic teaching-learning procedures. Student learning should include critical inquiry into the music cultures in order for the students to grasp the meaning of music works and evaluate their own works, which they perform, create, and arrange. The ability of thinking critically is not innate, therefore it can be cultivated, encouraged and developed over time. Teaching students to think critically should be one of the major goals of school, especially in this era of information. This kind of thinking ought not to be left to chance (Lenja & Brame, 2015). We must renew the discussion about the aims of music education and the way these relate to creating the kind of society that we hope to live in (Allsup & Westerlund, 2012). Consequently, music curricula need to be redesigned to reflect the importance of learning to think critically. In our troubled times, critical thinking can make the difference in music education because it enables students to deal effectively with musical, social, and every-day problems; it can keep music educational practices alive and meaningful in a world of unpredictability and change.

The Contribution of Critical Thinking to Music Teaching-Learning: A Revised Perspective

There is widespread acceptance of the idea that critical thinking should be an important dimension of music education since one of its goals is the meaningful engagement with music and the development of independent musicianship. From the synthesis of the relevant literature, there is also evidence that critical thinking is teachable. Yet the results of our study, alongside those of the previous research (Kokkidou, 2006; 2013) indicate that music curricula do not meet this challenge. Therefore, we can reasonably conclude that critical thinking is a fundamental, yet a missing piece in school music curricula. In the light of these findings, we advocate the need for a more pragmatic, precise, and functional discourse of curriculum development with respect to the issue of critical thinking. Critical thinking is not only about analyzing and evaluating music. It has to do with the development of criteria for making

critical judgments in every domain, with giving and receiving constructive and critical feedback regarding musical performances, compositions, and improvisations. Critically literate students adopt a critical stance to music works and practices (e.g., recognizing underlying messages in songs) and are able to produce their own interpretation for their own and others' musical works. In addition, they realize that the ways of interpreting music information are much more important than information itself. The more the students learn to think critically, the more they develop their abilities to think consciously and make thoughtful decisions about their music future. In our contemporary media-dominated society, music is a central component in the profitability of the entertainment industry. Most people, rather than listen to music, "consume" it at an enormous rate (Walker, 2005). In relation to this, as the Internet has changed everything, more opportunities should be provided for students to engage in critical discussion of multimodal texts (music videos, television programs, movies, web pages, advertising, audio-visual art works). In this basis, the ultimate goal is for students to develop awareness of various aspects of music communication and the musical world they live in. It is therefore crucial to help our students to filter and assess the information they receive from the environment and handle its complexity. They must learn to stand up against imposed tendencies in music; argue in favor of their own preferences; read the code in the lyrics of modern songs so as to learn to face up to various social issues; understand the role of the dominant music culture in a society; be able to resist the tendency towards mass-standardization imposed by the multi-national recording companies; and make better decisions on what music they choose to listen to, as well as to perform and create. They need to be able to put together an assembly of the criteria for the analysis of musical ideas; re-examine their perceptions, their values and their ideas for music in the light of new data; go more deeply into questions of the functional role and influence of music in human life; and gain insights into how their values about music integrate and conflict with other values related to their moral, social, cultural, political, and spiritual experiences and convictions. But how can we teach our students to think critically? For critical thinking to become an integral part of music teaching-learning procedures, we propose certain practices, grounded in the theories and perspectives of Freire, Paul, Regelski, Elliott, and Jorgensen, such as: in-class workshops where students could reflect on the way they construct their musical identity and become able to make critical judgments about music-social and music-political issues (e.g., about today's thousands of local musical cultures which are under enormous pressure, musical cries for social justice, music activism); a dialogical approach to learning which de-emphasizes the one-way communication procedures in music courses (e.g., open-ended questions that lead students to take and defend their points of view, reasoned arguments, thoughtful discussion of ideas and convictions); teaching-learning scenarios, based on real-life situations and problems, which integrate information from different and perhaps non-typical sources and encourage students acting as researchers; well-organized activities and provoking questions to foster students analysis and evaluation of the impact of music in society and in their lives; learning environments where all teach and all learn; music curricula which include a greater variety of world musics so as to help students to develop multiple musical perspectives and to consider the values and perspectives of individuals and groups from other music cultures.

Above all, the proposed practices need music teachers who avoid lecturing and 'rule-following' procedures within strict frames, and promote reflective discussions (Hietanena et al., 2016; Regelski, 2010). Such teachers can provide students with music problems rather

than answers and solutions; reject static traditions, norms, determinate formulae and unthinking routines (in Regelski's words); and anchor critical pedagogy to their instruction and to their students' lived experiences, while conceiving their mission in broad terms. Beyond all these things, it is also important to bear in mind that teachers have to be able to reflect on their own teaching methods and re-examine their own beliefs on what it means and takes to be an effective and creative teacher. Consequently, policymakers must give attention to teachers' systematic training programs, as every promising educational reform presupposes well-educated and well-equipped teachers. All in all, a critical-thinking-based music curriculum is not a utopian goal. Why? Because critical thinking strategies could be linked with every field of music teaching-learning. Teachers can teach in ways that help students to become critical thinkers. Students need to know how to think critically and act responsibly (Allsup & Westerlund, 2012; Jorgensen, 2008; Biesta, 2006). If they become able to think about their thinking they can make sense of their musical lives and identities.

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