



MUSIC LISTENING IN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS: REPRESENTATION OF MUSIC THROUGH LANGUAGE AND VISUAL ARTS BY FOURTH GRADE PRIMARY STUDENTS

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Abstract:

This study focuses on exploring fourth grade (9-year-old) primary students' (N=11) reflections on the opportunities they were given to externalise their emotions and thoughts induced by music by participating in music listening activities, in a general primary classroom context. The students worked in pairs; they first listened to four short musical excerpts, and they were then invited to represent them verbally, through writing, and visually, through painting. The participants recorded their ideas on worksheets. Data were collected over a 6-week period through participant observation/observational notes, a questionnaire with closed-ended questions, semi-structured interviews as well as on the basis of the students' produced work. Overall, the primary students were positive towards the activities expressed regarding the activities, as they had the opportunity to express themselves, to escape from the routine of everyday school life and the stress of classes, to enhance their imagination and creativity, to interact with their peers and to participate in something that they enjoyed and wished to be repeated in the future.

Keywords: music listening in primary classroom, language, visual arts, emotions, creativity

1. Introduction

Music listening that takes place in educational contexts differs from music listening in students' everyday lives and, especially at home (Woody, 2004). In the latter cases, they can choose the type of music they want to listen to and if they want to listen to music on their own or with others. On the other hand, the type of music to be played at school is

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most often chosen by the teacher (Kerchner, 2014a), and the students listen to music with their classmates whom they have not chosen themselves (Boal-Palheiros & Hargreaves, 2001).

In the context of music education, music listening is present in all musical activities, such as in *“composing, improvising, singing, playing an instrument, moving, participating as an audience member, critiquing, and reading some form of notation”* (Kerchner, 2009, p.183). Additionally, music listening in educational contexts aims at *“the facilitation and elaboration of students’ perceptual acuity, musical concept formation, and affective response”* (Kerchner, 2014a, p. 47), among other things.

During music listening in the classroom, teachers may encounter some difficulties which are related to the different ways students *“perceive, process, and respond to music”* (Kerchner, 2000, p. 32). Teachers may understand the way in which their students interpret the music they hear by asking them to represent it through language (Sims, 2005), movement and visual arts (Kratus, 2017) or to render the musical parameters through graphic notations (Verschaffel *et al.*, 2010) or listening maps (Blair, 2006; Gromko & Russell, 2002). In this way, music listening in the classroom can become multisensory and creative (Kerchner, 2014a, p. 51), thus giving *“new meanings that move a person beyond their currently held mental models and brain mappings”* (Kerchner, 2021, p. 110).

However, we should not forget that teachers only interpret students’ responses, which they choose to externalise and share in the classroom (Kerchner, 2014a). Additionally, in their verbal performance/description of music, students sometimes use their own vocabulary, which may not be what teachers expect based on their musical experiences (Kerchner, 2014b).

Music can induce specific emotions in the listeners (Juslin, 2016) and create mental images (Kratus, 2017). As far as music and the induction of emotions are concerned, it should be noted that *“the precision and relative universality with which music can transmit emotional meanings remains a rather unexplored issue”* (Proverbio & Russo, 2022, p. 55; cf. Juslin, 2019, for the arousal of musical emotions). However, we could argue that the characteristics of music and those of its listeners play a role in the arousal of musical emotions and that these two factors interact with each other (Kreutz *et al.*, 2008; cf., Juslin & Västfjäll, 2008, for the mechanisms through which music listening may induce emotions).

Taking into consideration the power of music to evoke emotions and images in its listeners as well as the possibility to represent music in different ways, in the present study, we designed and implemented music listening activities in a primary general classroom context. The students worked in pairs; they first listened to four short musical excerpts, and they were then invited to represent them verbally, through writing, and visually, through painting.

2. Research purpose and questions

The study focuses on exploring fourth grade (9-year-old) primary students' ($N=11$) reflections on the opportunities they were given to externalise their emotions and thoughts –induced by music– by participating in music listening activities, in a general primary classroom context. The following research questions were addressed:

RQ1: Was the students' cooperation enhanced during the activities?

RQ2: How did the students experience the activities related to the representation of music through language?

RQ3: How did the students experience the activities related to the representation of music through painting?

RQ4: Were the students interested in the active listening activities and how did they express their interest?

3. Material and Methods

3.1 Participants

Eleven (11) grade four students five (5) boys and six (6) girls) participated in the survey, which was conducted in a primary school in Greece and lasted six (6) weeks. The activities were implemented during the Greek language lessons, and the whole class participated. Eight hours per week are allocated for Greek. The class spent 3 hours over the 6-week period for the completion of the project. The participating students, who were taught for the second consecutive year by the same teacher, were familiar with activities in which the arts were integrated into the teaching (i.e., music listening activities, development of written and oral language through singing as well as creative writing based on musical and literary stimuli). None of the students played a musical instrument or had received any other musical training at a conservatory. Consequently, their musical knowledge came from the music lessons at school.

3.2 Project design

The research team was comprised of two researchers-staff members who teach in a Department of Primary Education at a Greek University and specialise in Music Education and Greek as a foreign language, respectively, as well as a primary school teacher who holds a postgraduate degree in Arts in Education and has also studied piano and singing. Prior to the design of the activities by the first two researchers, the student's cognitive level and their previous experiences in similar activities were discussed by the team members. Music listening in the context of the class was directed, as the students were asked to produce specific activities while listening to the music excerpts. This did not limit their freedom; instead, it provided the framework to work (Sims, 2005).

We first asked students to verbally represent the emotions and images induced by four different musical excerpts they listened to. Once they recorded their views on

individual worksheets, they worked in pairsⁱⁱ and each pair wrote four short stories, one for each musical excerpt. They also provided a title for each story. Additionally, they had to use one of the musical excerpts as background music for their stories. Moreover, the students represented the music and the stories they invented visually, through painting; first they worked on their own and then in pairs. They were asked to work in pairs, as the aim was to promote “*co-operative learning*” which “*produces social and cognitive gains*” (Storch, 2001, p. 29). There were four (4) pairs of students and one (1) group with three (3) members in which a student who is diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome participated –it was considered necessary to support him towards the activities’ implementation.

In the activities which were implemented in class, a) “*to re-present means presenting music which already exists and adds dimensions or details which creates meaning to those involved*” (Eidsaa, 2021, p. 119), b) music representations through language and painting were “*indicative of students’ focus of attention and other mental processes employed during the music listening experience*” (Kerchner, 2014a, p. 48), c) we did not aim at the learning of the musical parameters (such as, for example, tempo, pitch, dynamics, rhythm, musical forms, etc.) but at the externalisation of the students’ thoughts and emotions as well as at the activation of their imagination and creativity, d) music was also used as a stimulus for the production of written language through the creation of short stories (cf., Nikolaou & Galani, 2024, for a similar activity) and e) the goal was also to strengthen the students’ attentive listening skills which are useful not only in their everyday communication (Kerchner, 2013) but also “*in general social interactions in the classroom and beyond*” (Smiraglia *et al.*, 2018, p. 2).

3.3 Detailed presentation of the activities

Music listening activities based on four musical excerpts were carried out in class for the purposes of our study. The students were invited to represent the excerpts in two ways:

- 1) Verbally:
 - a) each student wrote the emotions and the mental images induced by each musical excerpt (Activity A) and
 - b) each pair wrote a story, one for each musical excerpt (Activity B).
- 2) Visually:
 - c) each student represented the music and the story which was created by their group through individual paintings (Activity C) and
 - d) each pair represented the music and the story through group paintings (Activity D).

We would like to point out that the students were first invited to complete a preliminary activity which aimed to activate their listening attention and to prepare them for the main activities. For this task, the teacher asked each student to record any sounds

ⁱⁱ We will refer to the pairs and the group of students as “pairs” and to the worksheets/the paintings each pair/the group completed/created as “group worksheets/paintings” in the discussion that follows.

they heard in class and to read out what they had written. This was followed by a class discussion.

The four musical excerpts, the total duration of which was 2.33 minutes, were played in class in the following order (one straight after the other):

- a) 27 seconds of hip-hop music,
- b) 24 seconds of space sounds,
- c) 99 seconds of "Lion" from "The Carnival of the Animals" by Camille Saint-Saëns,
- d) 83 seconds of "The Blue Danube" by Johann Strauss.

It should be noted that the teacher did not give any information about the music genres, the composers or the titles of the excerpts to the students.

The excerpts were short, each one's character was different, and they were also played as a continuous mix –one straight after the other with no pauses in between– so that the students' attention and alertness were retained. Additionally, we believed that the different characters of the excerpts would aid the students to record the emotions and images that music evoked in them.

In Activity A, the teacher gave the students individual worksheets to record their answers and informed them that they would listen to four different musical excerpts twice. They could, therefore, complete or modify their answers the second time the musical excerpts were played. He also made it clear that there were no right or wrong answers. We did not want the students to limit themselves to what they thought it was probably acceptable to the majority of the class; they rather had to let their imagination run free. In this activity, they had to listen to the music carefully in order to understand the character and the style of each musical excerpt. They also had to record the emotions and images the music evoked in them, according to the way each one of them perceived it. When the activity was completed, the students read out their responses to the class and a discussion followed. The teacher processed the students' completed worksheets and recorded their answers –any identical ones were taken as one token– and, based on their frequency (see Table 1 for the teacher's summary sheet, which summarises the students' responses about musical excerpt 1), he presented them to the class (on the interactive whiteboard) in a forthcoming lesson. The students referred to the reasons for which, according to their opinion, the music evokes the same or different emotions and images. They also discovered what their classmates heard and felt. In this way, they enhanced "*their own understanding of the music*" (Kratus, 2017, p. 48) and realised that there "*can be more than one answer to a question and more than one solution to a problem*" (Eisner, 2002, p. 196).

For Activity B, the individual worksheets completed in Activity A were handed back to each student to remind them of what they had written, while all the students' responses for each musical excerpt (the teacher's summary sheet) were also shown on the interactive whiteboard. The students listened to the musical excerpts once more. This time, they were asked to work in pairs and create four short stories, one for each musical excerpt. Their stories, for which they provided a title, were recorded on group worksheets. The teacher encouraged the students to imagine that they had to make a

short film and that each excerpt could serve as the film's background music. Once all the stories were written, they were narrated by each pair in class. Their fellow students commented on the titles and the content of each story, whether there were any common elements between the stories, what they liked and what they did not, etc. In Table 2, the work produced by pair A –on the basis of musical excerpt 1– is presented as an indicative example.

In Activity C and Activity D, the students had to represent the musical excerpts and the stories visually, through paintings; each student first worked on their own and then in pairs. In both activities, the students were given worksheets (blank papers) to record their individual and group paintings, which were then presented to and discussed with their classmates (see Table 2 for a representative example).

4. Data collection and analysis

The study's qualitative data were collected through:

- a) participant observations, as the teacher also had the role of the researcher (Zieman, 2012),
- b) the teacher's observational notes about the implemented activities,
- c) one questionnaire with closed-ended questions (Table 3),
- d) semi-structured interviews conducted by the teacher-researcher,
- e) the students' produced work (Tables 1 and 2).

Furthermore, interviews were a suitable tool for data collection, as they allow us to understand "*the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience*" (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). The interviews were semi-structured for two reasons: a) the interviewer has greater freedom "*in focusing the conversation on issues that he or she deems important in relation to the research project*" and b) the interviewees "*can make better use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues by allowing much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important*" (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 437).

Once the activities were completed, the research team examined the teacher's observational notes, the students' responses to the questionnaires and the work they produced. For the interpretation of the interviews, data content analysis was adopted. Initially for the "*determination of the analytical categories*" an "*intensive and repeated reading of the material*" (Schmidt, 2004, p. 254) was carried out by each one of the three researchers who noted down the themes that emerged and answered the research questions. The aim was to find both the common and the different points raised in the interviews and "*what new topics, which were not foreseen in the guide, actually turn up in the collected data*" (Schmidt, 2004, p. 254). The next step included an "*assembly of the analytical categories into a guide for coding*" (Schmidt, 2004, p. 255), where the eleven (11) interviews were "*assessed and classified, by means of classifying the material according to the analytics categories*" (Schmidt, 2004, p. 256) during the coding phase. Finally, the interviews produced qualitative data, which is discussed in the "Findings" section.

5. Findings

Several findings that were relevant to the purpose and the research questions of this study emerged after the analysis and interpretation of the data sources and are presented in the following themes:

- 1) Students' reflections towards team collaboration (working in pairs),
- 2) Students' reflections on the representation of music through language,
- 3) Students' reflections on the representation of music through painting,
- 4) Students' opinions on the reasons for which they were interested in the activities.

5.1 Students' reflections towards team collaboration (working in pairs)

According to the teacher's observational notes, the students collaborated well in all pair activities. In a few cases only some sort of dissatisfaction was expressed, which was soon resolved. This attitude is confirmed by the students' responses to the questionnaires as well as during the interviews. According to the students' answers in question 1 of the questionnaire ("How would you describe your collaboration with your team?"), it seems that almost all of them (90%) had either an "Exceptional (20%)" or a "Very good (70%)" collaboration with their classmate when they were writing the short story, whereas only 10% described it as "Moderate". The collaboration between the members of the pairs was equally good in Activity D; all the students (100%) had an "Exceptional" (60%) and a "Very good" (40%) collaboration with their partner.

This view is further supported by their responses to question 2 of the questionnaire, which was related to their contribution in the pair activities; 80% of the students stated that their personal involvement in the writing of the story was significant (60% "A great deal", 20% "A lot"), while only 20% considered it insufficient (10% "A moderate amount", 10% "A little"). All the students (100%) stated that their personal contribution to the painting activity was equally important (40% "A great deal", 60% "A lot").

The good collaboration between the students in the pair activities is also highlighted in their personal interviews, when they were asked to describe their cooperation with their partner. For Activity B, their good collaboration was due to several reasons. One of them was related to the fact that they felt equal with their partner in their collaboration, and each member put forward their ideas, which were first discussed and then combined. The following comments are indicative:

"I felt equal with my partner in the collaboration, that is, one of us was writing it down, and then, if we didn't like it, we would erase it and rewrite it." (Participant 1).

"We both had ideas, and so we put them together, and I believe we did a good job." (Participant 2).

"When one of us wanted to talk, she would say so." (Participant 11).

This kind of collaboration also helped them to avoid any tensions and, even if these existed, the partners were in a position to resolve them since they shared roles and had the opportunity to collaborate with good friends.

"We had some disagreements, we came up with good stories, I think, you'll also be the judge of that. Well, let's say maybe sometimes we argued because we disagreed and said, "no, I believe this one fits", "no, the other one fits" but we got along in the end, and it turned out to be a good job." (Participant 4).

"We generally didn't have any fights. We divided the roles, one will do this, the other will do that. So, we didn't have any disagreements. I mean, we might have had some disagreements, but then we combined them (= things), and the piece we had to write would come out." (Participant 1).

"I and V. participated to the same extent and I feel happy. He is a good friend, and he knows it." (Participant 9).

Similarly, the students felt that Activity D in itself promoted good collaboration, as they assigned roles, they discussed any ideas they had, each student mentioned their own ideas, and then they would decide which ones to choose, they accepted each other's ideas when someone else's was better than their own and they participated equally in the process. Indicatively, we quote:

"We got along well, during the creation of the group painting we were saying: I'll do this, what do you want to do? There were no issues at all." (Participant 10).

"I participated in the group painting, I mean, D. was telling me "Do you want to do this?" and I was saying "Do you want us to do that?". Sometimes we were even comparing our ideas, and one of us might have had a better one. This was not something negative for me." (Participant 9).

However, there were also some negative comments about the pairs' collaboration in the activities. Two of the participants commented on their collaboration in Activity B, as follows:

"It was a bit difficult because V. wanted to do everything quickly, and I didn't want to. I felt that she didn't listen to my ideas." (Participant 8).

"In the creation of some of the stories, I felt like I wanted to do things that I couldn't do." (Participant 3).

Moreover, it should be noted that the quality of the collaboration also influenced the way in which the students characterised –as easy or difficult– the activities carried out. Indicatively, we quote:

“The participation in the creation of the paintings seemed easier to me because we collaborated better.” (Participant 4).

“I found the group story harder. As I also told you before, M. and I didn’t agree on everything, and he wanted to write his own (things).” (Participant 2).

At this point, it is worth referring to the collaboration of Participant 5 –who was diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome– with his team members. Participant 6 mentioned that, despite the fact that she identified some problems in relation to the implementation of Activity B, they eventually found a formula for their collaboration.

“I worked better with A. (Participant 7) than with M. (Participant 5) because sometimes M. did his own things and we couldn’t work together... M. didn’t write much because he makes a lot of spelling (mistakes) and we didn’t want to keep erasing them all the time, so he only gave ideas.”

However, there were no problems in the collaboration with Participant 5 during the implementation of Activity D. That was also due to the nature of the activity. Participants 6 and 7 mentioned in their interviews:

“I think we all participated in the group painting, so I didn’t have a problem. It was such a beautiful process.” (Participant 6)

“I participated, I was coming up with ideas and based on what each one of us had painted, we were then combining them. With my group, I collaborated with both (members) the same, a little more with I. (Participant 6) because M. (Participant 5) was talking to V. about some games they were playing.” (Participant 7).

Nevertheless, Participant 5 (who was diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome) was happy with his participation in both group activities, as also confirmed by the teacher’s reflections; he described the student’s participation as touching and highlighted the joy the student showed in all activities. Participant 5 stated that he was satisfied with his collaboration with his team’s members, because he worked well with his group and felt that he was a protagonist as he was the main character in both the story and the paintings. Participant 5 responded:

“I would describe the collaboration with my team nice and fun, because we had a good time and we learned a lot of things... The whole story was written about me, because I was the main

character... In my collaboration with the other two girls, I felt equal... My participation in the group painting was important... I was the main character in the painting as well and I gave some ideas to the girls."

5.2 Students' reflections on the representation of music through language

According to the teacher's observational notes from the very first instance that the teacher described to the students what had to be done in the first and the second activities as far as the representation of music through language is concerned, the students showed special interest in and paid attention not only to their participation in the activity but also in the way they responded to his instructions. It appeared that they had generally no difficulty in thinking and recording their ideas and the fact that there was no right or wrong answer was particularly helpful. As Participant 8 stated: "I like this exercise, as I can write down my ideas without having to worry about finding the right answer." In addition, the cooperation of the students when they were writing the group activity was also very good to a great extent; there were no significant complaints about the behaviour of the team members.

The good atmosphere during the representation of music through language is further confirmed by the students' responses. In question 3 of the questionnaire (Table 3), the majority of the students (70% "A little", 30% "Not at all") stated that they had no difficulty in finding and recording –on individual worksheets– the appropriate words that conveyed the emotions and images the musical excerpts induced in them. This is also reflected in the students' produced work as recorded on the worksheets. In a few cases only, it was observed that the students wrote words that did not correspond to emotions. For example, for excerpt 2, they wrote "mystery" and "adventure", for excerpt 3 "wedding ceremony" and "sense of luxury", while for excerpt 4 "fun", "freedom", "drama". Moreover, it should be noted that, upon examination of the summary sheet which was created by the teacher and contained the answers of all the students (Table 1), we may find several similarities; for excerpt 1, seven students said that it caused them excitement and joy, while two students mentioned that it caused them tension, energy and heroic feelings. For the same excerpt but in terms of the images it evoked, two students answered a holiday, two a movie and three a superhero.

Moreover, similarities are observed in the titles the students gave to their group stories; for instance, for excerpt 2, groups 1 and 4 gave the title "The Haunted House", while group 3 "The Scary House". This can be explained by the fact that the musical excerpts created similar images and emotions for the students in many cases, in addition to the fact that the students used both their own individual worksheets and the teacher's summary sheet (Table 1) during the writing up of the stories. The students' and the teacher's worksheets served as a springboard for the students to get ideas or as a framework for the organisation of their imagination and creativity. The following comments based on the students' interviews are indicative of the way they organised their ideas in the writing of the stories.

"We looked at both of them, both at the individual worksheets and the summary sheet. That is, first, we looked at what we had both written on our individual worksheets, and then we looked at those of the other children, and we were combining them." (Participant 3).

"First, we got images and emotions from the individual worksheets, we came up with some ideas and we started writing. One was writing one story, the other was writing the other one but we were also saying ideas together." (Participant 8).

Finally, in terms of the process followed by the students in the writing of the stories, it seemed that they sometimes exchanged their ideas verbally, whereas other times, they wrote them down and then transferred them to the worksheets they were given.

"We were saying them orally. We took turns writing them. Someone wrote two stories, someone wrote one." (Participant 2).

"Sometimes we were keeping notes, sometimes we were writing them down right away." (Participant 4).

5.3 Students' reflections on the representation of music through painting

The students seemed to enjoy activities C and D, in which painting was also included even more. As the goal was to represent both the stories they had written and the music that accompanied them through individual and group drawings, the students started working on these with exceptional enthusiasm. On the basis of the work they produced, it appeared that they managed to combine their individual ideas in their group paintings. These activities were implemented in a happy and creative atmosphere, and there were no complaints at all.

The students' positive attitude towards the activities in which music was represented through painting is also confirmed by their responses to the questionnaires. In question 4 ("In the activity in which the music was represented through paintings, which activity did you find the most difficult?") of the questionnaire (See Appendix, Table 3), the quantitative data results indicated that the students considered the representation of music through the group paintings (70%) more difficult than through the individual ones (30%). On the other hand, their responses to question 5 ("In the activity in which the music was represented through paintings, which activity did you find the most interesting?") revealed that they liked both activities equally well (50% liked the group painting activity and 50% the individual painting activity). Overall, the students considered both painting activities an enjoyable process because they felt they were creating and exchanging views in a good collaborative atmosphere, as shown in the following interview extracts:

"I didn't think that the group painting was a difficult process because we usually have a very good collaboration with D." (Participant 1).

"I had good participation in the painting. Together with Chr. we had ideas, and one was drawing, and then the other was painting it." (Participant 9).

5.4 Students' opinions on the reasons for which they were interested in the activities

In the interviews, the majority of the students stated that they would definitely like to do this kind of activities again, as they found them interesting for various reasons:

- a) They had the opportunity to escape from the daily stress of the other lessons;

"All these were very creative. I liked them all very much, and I can say that they made me escape a bit from the stress of the lesson. I mean, I was saying that I will do something pleasant, I will go to school and listen to music, I will paint. And I liked it a lot." (Participant 11).

- b) The activities were something they had never done before, and they stimulated their imagination and creativity.

"With these activities, we developed our imagination. Anyway, this is what we do every day with you." (Participant 9).

- c) They were painting and listening to music at the same time, which was something they liked, but they could not explain exactly why.

"I really liked that we were listening to different types of music and then we were drawing. I don't know, but I really liked it." (Participant 3).

- d) They had the opportunity to paint more than they usually do in the school context.

"I would like to do something like that again with painting and the way we combined them, because we don't spend as much time on painting as we do on the other subjects." (Participant 7).

It is worth mentioning that Participant 5, the student with Asperger's Syndrome, stated that his attentive listening was strengthened.

"For me, it was a fun and nice activity and it was also like a kind of practice to learn to listen more carefully. It helped me to listen to the different things we do in class more attentively."

6. Limitations

The main limitation of the study is related to the small number of its participants. It could be suggested, nonetheless, that the common characteristics of the students –i.e., their age and cognitive level– highlight significant traits upon which more generalised conclusions could be drawn. The fact that the students were all in the same class –taught by the same teacher– may also be considered a limitation which restricts generalisations.

7. Discussion-Conclusions

This study focuses on exploring fourth grade primary students' (9-year-old students) ($N=11$) reflections regarding the implementation of four music listening activities in a primary general classroom context during which the students represented music verbally and visually. The students participated in an effective/positive way in the music listening process. Moreover, they collaborated in a constructive way, as they exchanged ideas –which were discussed prior to their implementation– and they shared roles. The activities were carried out in a pleasant atmosphere where the team spirit prevailed, any tensions were avoided, and, as a result, their collaboration created good feelings, with a few exceptions only.

Regarding the representation of music through language, the students mentioned that they had no difficulty in finding the appropriate words to describe the emotions and images that music induced in them. However, in some cases, it was observed that the words they used did not really correspond to emotions but rather to moods, situations or images. Furthermore, in terms of the process that the students followed in the writing of the stories, it appeared that the majority of them used both their personal ideas and the ideas of the whole class –as recorded in the teacher's summary sheet and displayed on the interactive whiteboard. These worksheets acted as a guide, which helped the students organise their ideas, and not as a constraint on them.

Additionally, the students found the representation of music through painting (both on an individual and a group level) particularly enjoyable; they felt creative and participated in a process that was extremely pleasant for them. In general, the students said that they had the opportunity to escape from the routine of everyday life and the stress of classes, to interact with their peers and to participate in something they would definitely want to be repeated in the future. At the same time, they expressed their gratitude to their teacher for giving them the opportunity to get involved in activities which enhanced their imagination and creativity.

The opinion of the student diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome was of particular interest, as he stated that he was completely satisfied with his participation in the activities and felt that his ability to listen attentively was enhanced. This was also confirmed by the teacher's reflections; a significant increase was noticed in the student's participation and attention –when compared to those in other activities in class– something that enhanced the student's self-image and confidence.

Through music listening activities, teachers –among other things– can bring students in contact with new musical genres (i.e., music from non-western cultures or other genres, etc.) with which they are unacquainted (Fung & Gromko, 2001) and which they would not have the opportunity to listen to in their family or the wider environment. However, this sets some requirements on the teachers' side: a) their respective knowledge of the music genres that they wish to introduce and of the appropriate activities with which they will link them in class and b) the way by which they will organise music listening activities in class; as far as this point is concerned, how students listen to music in out-of-school settings also needs to be taken into account (Woody, 2004).

Moreover, general primary teachers have the opportunity to teach other subjects (for instance, the development of language skills (Nikolaou *et al.*, 2024) in an interdisciplinary context (Baker, 2013; Eisner, 1999) and in a more enjoyable way, through activities in which music or the arts in general are integrated.ⁱⁱⁱ In such cases, they can further strengthen students' imagination and creativity, as *“art education offers alternative and more creative didactic approaches, which are more child-centered, as well as didactic strategies, which do not only include assignments and tests that are graded”* (Nikolaou, 2023a, p. 399). Therefore, in this context, the relations between students and teachers, as well as the ways in which students perceive the school in general, are strengthened.

Through music listening activities in which students express themselves by creating and producing group work, they can strengthen their social-emotional skills; i.e., the satisfaction of personal expression, the ability to listen to the opinion of others during the completion of tasks that are carried out, the development of bonds through collaboration with their peers, gaining trust, the cultivation of empathy and critical thinking as well the development of the ability to manage conflicts (Jacobi, 2012).

Additionally, music listening activities in which students are asked to express the emotions that music induces in them can help them express and externalise their feelings and inner thoughts. Within this context *“music could be used to achieve the aims of emotional education within the framework of music education”* (Raptis, 2023, p. 310). However, an important parameter for students to express themselves freely is the creation of an appropriate classroom atmosphere *“where the teacher acts as a facilitator and animator”* (Nikolaou 2023b, p. 476).

Overall, the present survey may serve as a pilot study which could be further extended and developed; indicatively, additional data (i.e., different classrooms/teachers) could be collected to verify the results or an analysis of the students' visual representations by image experts could provide useful insights for the value or the quality of the project.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

ⁱⁱⁱ See i.e., Fleming et al. (2015) for topics related to the arts in education and Soulis et al. (2023) for a general discussion of several educational issues from a contemporary perspective.

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Appendix

Table 1: The teacher's summary sheet for Activity A (musical excerpt 1)

Emotions	Images
suspense, curiosity/my dramatic instinct/excitement, joy (x7)/tension, energy, heroic/emotions (x2)/fun/action/relaxation	Movie music with guns in the picture/I'm at a concert, dancing, piano, holidays (x2)/Broken speaker/A superhero (x3)/Superman/A cool guy/I'm on a secret mission/Children at a party/A child playing drums/Summer landscape with lots of music/Movie (x2)/Breakdance/Subway Surfers (video game)

Table 2: Pair A worksheet for Activities B, C, D (musical excerpt 1)




<p>Story title: <i>The concert</i></p> <p>Today I jumped out of bed because I remembered that I had to go to a concert with my friends. I dressed up, brushed my teeth, put on my shoes, took a taxi and I left. As soon as I arrived, I found my friends and we enjoyed the concert in which Beethoven was singing. I can say that I had an amazing time. The food was also very good.</p>		
<p>Visual representation: <i>The concert</i></p>		
<p>Individual painting by Smokey 007</p> 	<p>Individual painting by Foxy</p> 	<p>Group painting by Group 1</p> 

Table 3: Questionnaire

1. How would you describe your collaboration with your team				
a. as far as writing the story based on the four musical excerpts is concerned?				
Exceptional	Very good	Moderate	Slightly good	Not good at all
b. as far as the representation of the music with a painting is concerned?				
Exceptional	Very good	Moderate	Slightly good	Not good at all
2. In your opinion, to what extent did you contribute to:				
a. the writing of the story that you created with your classmate?				
A great deal	A lot	A moderate amount	A little	Not at all
b. the painting that you created with your classmate?				
A great deal	A lot	A moderate amount	A little	Not at all
3. In your opinion, to what extent finding and recording (on individual worksheets) the right words to convey the emotions and images that music induced in you were difficult?				
A great deal	A lot	A moderate amount	A little	Not at all
4. In the activity in which the music was represented through paintings, which activity did you find the most difficult?				
The personal painting		The group painting		

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5. In the activity in which the music was represented through paintings, which activity did you find the most interesting?	
The personal painting	The group painting

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