

Forum: Practical Perspectives

Individual transformation, social ascension and professional SUCCESS

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The purpose of this article is to identify how learning factors — social and pedagogical — cause an individual transformation. Research focus on young people from poor communities who completed courses on classical music offered by Brazilian nonprofit organizations. The studied group took part in social projects offered by different organizations. Through interviews with these youngsters, it was possible to identify their perceptions about building their own careers considering their background. The article examines the challenges experienced by these young people, and the existing contrast between their social and family with the environment — didactic and pedagogical — provided by the nonprofit organizations. The article suggests dedicating further attention to public policies in order to come up with alternatives that promote social inclusion and ascension for young people from poor communities.

Keywords: individual transformation; social policies; social inclusion; social projects; classical music.

Transformação individual, ascensão social e êxito profissional

Esse artigo teve por objetivo identificar como fatores de aprendizado — social e pedagógico — ocasionaram a transformação individual de jovens originalmente excluídos socialmente. O foco da pesquisa são os egressos de instituições sociais brasileiras de ensino de música clássica em comunidades carentes. Por meio de entrevistas, buscou-se a percepção de egressos, de como construíram suas carreiras a partir de uma origem social de carências e exclusão. Para tanto, foram analisados os primeiros desafios vivenciados, o contraste com o ambiente social e familiar da comunidade carente em relação às instituições sociais de música clássica, o ambiente educacional — didático e pedagógico — e o resultado final da transformação. O artigo sugere uma atenção maior a política pública, sobre novas alternativas para inclusão e ascensão social de jovens em comunidades carentes.

Palavras-chaves: transformação individual; política social; inclusão social; projetos sociais; música clássica.

Transformación individual, ascensión social y éxito profesional

Este artículo tuvo por objetivo identificar como los factores de aprendizaje — social y pedagógico — ocasionaron la transformación individual de los jóvenes originalmente excluidos socialmente. El foco de la investigación son los egresos de instituciones sociales brasileñas de enseñanza de la música clásica en las comunidades carentes. Por intermedio de entrevistas, se buscó una percepción de egresos, sobre cómo construirán sus carreras, a partir de un origen social de carencias y exclusión. Para tanto, fueron analizados los primeros desafíos vivenciados, lo contrasté con el entorno social y familiar de la comunidad carente en relación con las instituciones sociales de música clásica, el ambiente educativo — didáctico y pedagógico — y el resultado final de la transformación. El artículo sugiere una atención mayor a política pública, sobre nuevas alternativas para la inclusión y ascensión social de jóvenes en comunidades carentes.

Palabras clave: transformación individual; política social; inclusión social; proyectos sociales; música clásica.

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1. SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND INDIVIDUAL TRANSFORMATION

Poverty and social exclusion directly affect individual and collective development. Poverty stifles dreams and the process of attaining dreams, inhibiting people's aspirations (Ray, 2002). Poverty, thus, poses limits to the development of the individuals.

Individual development and social development are interdependent: one implies and depends on the other (Joy, 2011). Inequality results in wasted talents (Green, 2009); it undermines society, its institutions and social cohesion; it limits the impact of development on fighting poverty; and passes on poverty from one generation to another. Against this backdrop, among those most affected by situations of vulnerability are children and young people. Ensuring education, vocational training and social advancement of these young people is one of the major contemporary challenges, especially for developing countries.

Individual transformation means a conscious process of creating a new vision of oneself, connected to a personal will. The process of change begins when the individual is placed at the center of analysis and actions. The constant interactions between people going through transformation become, gradually, processes of collective changes (Motta, 1997).

The teaching of classical music in poor communities provides behavioral changes that include enhancement of self-confidence and self-esteem; greater willingness to obtain long-term benefits and reduced delusion with short-term benefits; a new motivation for learning; different perspectives on the concept and practice of discipline; and rebalancing the values of competition and cooperation (Motta and Schmitt, 2016). Today, in Brazil, there are hundreds of social projects and programs in poor communities teaching classical music. Therefore, thousands of children and young people have gone through direct and indirect learning processes. For young people from poor communities or from socially vulnerable realities, learning can generate possibilities of transformation and social ascension in just one generation.

2. JOINING THE SOCIAL PROJECT

The main public of the project is young people living in a context of disregard and social rejection, where the prevailing idea is that social inequality is something 'normal'. The youngsters understand their social origin as something determined from birth, and not easily changeable throughout life. Like their families, they see no possibilities beyond their communities, feel no incentive to make progress or have little illusion that something could be different. Their references of life and relationships continue over the years restricted to the limits of their communities. Consequently, the educational and professional parameters are "those of parents and close relatives".

For youngsters in this condition, the support of parents and guardians — crucial for the development of the individual — is often limited to little orientation that shows an attitude of passivity, apathy and conformity. At most, they carry only the hope that life can be better, but dreams tend to be shaped by the social context.

The reality of daily life shows that young people usually join the projects only to keep distance, albeit partially, from the critical environment that surrounds them. They seek an activity to "keep

themselves busy” or to “spend time” away from undesirable external influences. Indirectly, the activity seen as leisure will interfere with the process of transformation.

The youngsters enrolled in these social projects describe their origin as a context characterized by low concern with education. In their families, there is little conversation about what is learned in school and little knowledge about the opportunities that come with education. Employment and income have greater value, and education, when considered, is less focused on providing a career and more on the idea of leading to a good first job.

Announcing the desire to join a “music school” (as this kind of social project is often called) is an idea of little acceptance in the family. For some parents, using free time to go to ‘another school’ — the music school — reinforces family fears about distancing oneself from employment, the possibilities for future stability, or increasing the risk of future unemployment. Moreover, by viewing music as “entertainment”, or the culture of orchestral music as something distant, the family consider this idea as one of little use.

In fact, because the entry into the labor market is priority, many young people feel pressure to leave regular school and look for a paid job. Adolescence, above all, is a critical moment to make a decision between investing time in education, and supplementing family income. Often young people themselves feel obliged to cooperate to support the family, as they consider that this is their main mission.

The message of the environment is one of ‘limitation of opportunities’. This makes many young people accept the idea that they are unprepared or unfit for learning. In regular school, they already feel part of an unfair competition because they are less prepared and less able to respond in comparison to young people coming from other contexts. They know that in order to achieve something they must strive and dedicate themselves more than the average student of the most privileged areas. In addition, they fear the stereotypes of discrimination against poverty and feel socially unprotected. Many people with potential and without access to information or opportunity fail to explore their abilities, because they do not feel it is a fair contest, considering the poor training they have had. In addition, many do not even try, because they just ignore the possibilities. Finally, families prefer to support career choices that they believe are closer to their reach, involving less risk and greater financial security, thinking in the short term.

Through family life and messages received from their parents, young people perceive themselves to be in a community full of insurmountable barriers, represented by social prejudices and obstacles. They are aware of the lack of attention from public authorities, whose actions reproduce poverty and exclusion rather than favor conditions for social mobility. They see colleagues as easy targets for short-term benefits (including through illegal measures), and all this is close to the reality they experience in everyday life.

Even the students enrolled in regular schools see themselves as hopeless, because they feel the schools are reproducers of the social conditions they experience. In fact, they see the reality that the higher the social class, the greater the chances of staying in that class or advancing to a higher one. In addition, education is perceived as a means to reduce barriers, but it is not the solution, itself, to eliminate the influence and effects of the class of origin (Ribeiro, 2014). Improving the educational level of the population may be a necessary condition, but it is probably not enough (Medeiros and Galvão, 2016). Other solutions must be found to change this reality.

3. THE SOCIAL SPACE OF THE PROJECTS: FIRST CHALLENGES

The space offered by the nonprofit organizations through the social project is crucial to attract new students, because it represents a welcoming environment, allows social interaction, and offers learning opportunities and other benefits. The initial lack of knowledge about classical music among families, brings up not only fear of it just being entertainment, but also the idea of it being useless in terms of getting a job. However, the perception of comparative advantage leads young people to choose to join the project to learn classical music. For those coming from a social situation of great exclusion, there are several advantages, which are perceived even from the minimum benefits. While for some, the learning of music may be the initial focus, for others the simple offer of daily meals at the organization providing the music lesson is motivation to stay – even though at an early age, they already perceive that they are helping themselves and their families.

The lack of resources is a major constraint on the permanence of young people in the projects, especially when it involves transportation costs. Many projects offer benefits to facilitate disadvantaged students to stay in their activities. There are frequent reports of successful ex-students, who in the past worked in underemployment either as general service helpers or selling goods at traffic signals.

The ex-students also reported that they welcomed the opportunity to join the project, as an opportunity for better quality of life and entertainment: they developed an interest in music after attending the project. Later on, they envisioned ways of changing their own lives. This new attitude of the youngsters influences the family. That is why it is noted that the first and most impacting benefit of the project is the transformation of the family's vision that goes from discredit to unconditional support. Such support is a motivating drive for staying in the project.

Overcoming this resistance from the family is a big challenge, because it means reacting to conformity and resignation with living conditions and disbelief in change. The participation of the families is achieved, especially, by processes of communication and showing results — in the short and in the long term — and by providing possibilities of new life perspectives. Logic supports the idea that in addition to family resources, the characteristics of educational systems can positively influence students' chances of progression, regardless of their origins (Ribeiro, 2011).

Family meetings with teachers and managers of the nonprofit organizations responsible for the projects act as a demonstration of reception, resulting in support for permanence. On the other hand, in these communities there is little belief in the possibilities for regular school to do any extra activity to gain support or recognition from parents. Thus, activities offered outside regular school, which welcome and host children, fulfill some expectation of a better future and show some results, obtain support and proximity of parents.

The expansion of the characteristics of 'social care' as well as the training in classical music becomes an additional attraction to overcome the difficulties experienced. Examples are the provision of social assistance, access to psychologists and doctors, as well as computing and language classes. Practically all interviewees recognize the social space provided by the nonprofit organization running the project as something unusual and surprising. A warm and supportive environment that contrasts with underprivileged youngsters' previous life experiences, especially in the experiences in regular schools. In general, there is no insecurity related to permanence because of the object of teaching, because music was seen as something natural and an identification of talent. The main challenges are related to family structural issues – such as family income. Negative and pessimistic references to life are quickly transformed into positive and promising perceptions.

4. MUSICAL AND SOCIAL LEARNING

In the social projects studied in this research, musical training is always collective. From the beginning, students study and practice together. The orchestra emerges as a natural consequence for the continuation of individual transformation. Orchestral training offers a greater dimension of social learning. Working together is a way to create opportunities for all.

The orchestral training reproduces, in part, a structure of the society itself. It presents, however, fundamental differences in terms of interdependence, cooperation and common purposes, thus becoming relevant for social learning. Structures with cooperative objectives stand out because they are highly motivating when groups are unknown, since they provide access to rare and valuable knowledge within a setting (Kistruck et al., 2016). In a society, people can perform different tasks without necessarily seeking connections and without having a desire for cooperation. In the community space, people share a common cultural context, but not necessarily a common purpose.

In the space of the orchestra, young people are led to see the world in a cooperative and interdependent way, set to build something common. They are interconnected by a clear interdependence of skills, competencies and purposes, aided by a powerful emotional bond that is music itself. Interconnection is the basis of performance and fundamental to individual and collective improvement. Belonging to the group is important for the psychosocial development of individuals, and recognition and approval from the others is fundamental for the sense of belonging (Dantas, 2010).

The union of the group allows people to be close in a way that would not happen through socioeconomic factors – either because of differences in family income or because of the origins within the same community. By valuing the sense of collectivity, orchestral training favors the development of social skills such as seeking balance between peers, respecting others, recognizing leadership and the existence of a hierarchy in the group. Each young person discovers the positive in the others: they recognize how their own talent helps their colleagues and how the competence of others help them to perform.

The process of seeking excellence in the orchestra causes internal change, making them seek quality in other areas of life and for continuous improvement. Among these abilities it is worth emphasizing: the harmonization of distinct tasks, aiming to achieve a specific result (coordination); transmission of feelings, emotions and meanings in an effective way (communication); avoid digressions and seek to attune to the other (self-control); maintain rigorously in the parameters of the collectivity (discipline); natural and positively influence the work of others (leadership); and contribute to the common purpose (teamwork). The vision of common purpose, in the midst of difference, institutes the vision of community and cooperation.

At the same time, the conviviality and activities of the orchestra such as presentations, trips and festivals give rise to different situations from those that would be commonly offered in the communities and strongly influence the development of the student.

Public presentations influence the change of behaviors and values, which are definitive for individual transformation. When a child coming from poverty presents themselves in a great orchestra in another country, they feel the art of universal communication that surpasses all the possibilities dreamt when they were in their disadvantaged community. Public performance provides the feeling that all people are capable of passionately developing and learning what they want to.

The challenges of individual development and transformation are constant, and the feeling of being on the stage and seeing the audience's recognition motivates young people to continue to achieve new results. Anxiety is inherent in the process, since it consists in 'unlearning the old' and 'learning the new' (Coutu, 2002). The presence of people who encourage the process of transformation — whether in the role of teacher, maestro or mentor — becomes a differential in influencing the permanence in the project and behavioral change.

In these social projects, there are several restrictions challenging the promotion of change, restrictions that can be social or material, affecting the teachers and/or the work teams. A flexible and dynamic pedagogical approach is required that is adapted to the teaching conditions and supported by strategies that overcome the difficulties imposed by the social environment in which students live (Smetak, 2015).

Transformative learning involves the creation of more dynamic relationships between teachers and students, as well as building a set of knowledge that enables individual growth by building teams, facilitating learning and developing attitudes (Slavich and Zimbardo, 2012). Identification takes on a distinctive role as leaders influence the process of shaping the self-image of the others, while positive relationships increase the proximity (Ashforth, Schinoff and Rogers, 2016). Leadership for transformation works within existing culture, helping people develop their morale and motivation to move forward in life (Burns, 1978).

The continuation in the learning of classical music and the participation in the social projects involve factors that go beyond the reality predominantly experienced in the communities. Teaching and its acceptance involve unusual elements in poor communities, more complex aesthetics and long term learning.

The 'unusual' in poor communities. For poor communities, learning classical music is something that brings up concerns regarding its usefulness. This is because classical music is distinct from the music that prevails in everyday life in these communities — such as *pagode*, *samba* and *funk carioca* — and it is unknown to the majority of the population. Moreover, because it is commonly associated with cultural elitism, it is not seen as something inherent in the social environment of these communities. Cultural consumption is connected to the accumulation of cultural capital, resulting from socialization processes linked to social position and class habit (Lima and Ortellado, 2013).

However, classical music has an immense power of individual transformation, and attracts the interest of young people. Learning makes the student more inclined to accept and experience new realities and knowledge, instigating curiosity.

The most complex aesthetics. Classical music has an aesthetic complexity that encompasses various levels of mental processes and technical skills, depending on variations in the way it is composed. It requires greater dedication and better understanding of peer work and compliance with the leadership guidelines.

Long-term learning. In classical music, a differential factor is how much time is used in the learning process. Because it takes longer, young people spend more time in the nonprofit organizations, and thus develop the perspective of institutional cooperation and loyalty as an important factor in life. They recognize more easily the importance of colleagues and of the organization.

5. CONCLUSION AND FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research points to the individual transformation as the product of two interdependent social environments: that of the nonprofit organization that runs the music project and that of the orchestra.

The environment of the orchestra is inserted in the first one, but the process of socialization in the orchestra is conducted in a particular way, deserving distinction. In both environments, it is observed that the individual transformation is incremental, by the continuous incorporation of new values. This transformation stems from the awareness of the dissonance between the lived and the expected, and leads to the reconfiguration of values and behavioral changes (Joy, 2002).

The social mobility granted to many young people by social projects is evidence of an effective resocialization beyond the possibilities offered by the community itself and by the regular schools. Respondents declared a profound reconfiguration of values and attitudes towards life.

In a radical contrast with the social and family environment in a poor community, the organizations that offer projects on classical music promote a new socialization, instilling values, worldviews and social practices previously unthought and not transmitted by the experience of life in poor communities. In addition, the educational environment — didactic and pedagogical — is also different from that experienced by students in regular schools: it offers skills, abilities and practices unavailable in regular schools.

Young people report the whole saga of a construction of new conquests from a beginning of life centered on exclusion and hopelessness. They reveal not only the similarities with peers who have achieved equal status, but also highlight singularities, such as some unique barriers in their life history. The respondents improved their social status because they faced challenges and worked hard to achieve good results. The teaching organization only provided the foundations (through music training) at a crucial moment of human development: it presented a new culture or a new set of values and social practices. From a very young age, going through the process of musical learning and socialization represents a phase, among many others to be experienced throughout life. In this history, it is possible to synthesize some characteristics of this success, i.e., of how the youngsters got to the moment they felt they were beyond the conditions of social exclusion.

In fact, the narratives repeat many factors highlighted by professionally successful people. Leadership theories, for example, always seek to show specific factors that have led to decisive changes in people's lives that led them to professional success, such as reinventing one's own life and renewing social work practices (Bennis, 1996). The youngsters that managed to improve their social status have somehow reinvented their own lives: they know themselves well, before knowing the world and their work practices. They are aware of their abilities and skills, as well as their weaknesses, and know how to take advantage of their positive conditions.

By testing their own possibilities, young people discover new paths and a unique way of facing and adapting to reality: they inspire others to pursue a new future. Through musical practice, they develop a new human competence and skill — useful for all social relationships. Naturally, these young people reach a level unimagined before entering the musical project; they faced immense and unique difficulties, but practiced the values of individual transformation as initiative, vision, determination, self-confidence, and integrity. In addition, young people have contributed, through sociability, empathy and a sense of social duty, to social change in their own communities of origin.

Because of their spirit of *initiative*, they allied the desire to progress to the courage to take a step forward. As they embarked on a new journey, these young people became less passive and accommodated, investing their time in overcoming problematic situations and opening spaces for new conquests. They dared to glimpse a new future and sought to interfere in their environment to

practice the unusual. They assumed the possibilities of their own success with conviction. Thus, they see the future less as a product of fatalities and chance and more as the self-direction of their actions.

Due to the new *vision*, they came to know an alternative future and its construction as something rational and imaginative. The imagination embodies dreams, and constructive rational action guarantees realism and reasonableness in predictions about the future.

The *determination* or willpower to get results, led them to face the tasks required to achieve their own vision of the future, with persistence, dedication and self-effort. Determination facilitated persistence, dedication and self-effort in order to get results. Along the way, these young people faced difficulties and the risk of failure, but nothing was a good enough reason to give up. The new practice of life, took them to see their needs and adversity not as permanent barriers, but as temporary phases to overcome. With resilience and dedication, they turned around and headed toward a new destination.

Because of *self-confidence* and conviction of their own skills and abilities, these young people were able to concentrate on their tasks and were able to keep up the enthusiasm even though living a hard life. They have effectively overcome adversity rather than being subjugated to it.

The *integrity* they have shown is evidenced by the fact that ethics and morality are values present in their lives. Young people learned ethics in social projects as a way to face life and, therefore, establish relationships of trust with their colleagues. Ethics and morals inspire their actions and achievements as much as their skills and abilities.

In addition to these values of individual transformation, it was possible to observe in the interviewees a strong *sense of 'social'*, such as the desire or the sensation of giving back to other people and to society the change that they could experience. Pride makes them feel a lasting connection with the community, belonging to a particular group makes one responsible (Sandel, 2011). The young people also revealed *empathy* of putting themselves in other people's shoes and understanding the importance of communicating about the reality lived. This communication would serve the purpose of getting other people to recognize the potential of the youngsters living in poor neighborhoods. In their narratives, young people recognize that there are many talented people in their communities, but no opportunities to develop them. The ex-students of social projects recognize themselves in the children who are now joining the 'music school' and, thus, realize the change in their own attitudes and behaviors.

There is also improvement to the *sense of sociability* or sensitivity to the needs of others and a genuine interest in maintaining pleasant social relationships. Respecting others for what they are and for what they do. Collaborating for new ways of understanding and new forms of relationships. The social projects allow the construction of contacts and networks of information to help find jobs in order to obtain the financial means and make it possible to overcome the various barriers found along the way. Network information also helps families and other people in the community to overcome the obstacles of everyday life.

When empowering young people from poor communities, opportunities for more than one generation are created, directly and indirectly. By developing their potential and talent in the most diverse areas, these young people become positive references to other people and generations of their communities. Others may feel motivated to follow the same path or even go beyond.

In rebuilding their own story, young people offer a change of reality to their family. The community projects allow the valorization of the image of the territory and the self-confidence of children and young people of that space, historically underprivileged. The success and social and individual prog-

ress achieved by any student tends to be shared by their community of origin, which is represented in the conquest as a contributor of the results.

For public policy, especially for leaders and professionals in social and educational fields, the results achieved by these young people suggests a need for greater attention to this type of project. Understanding the main factors of individual transformation, it is possible, through several aggregations, to elaborate new policies for the social advancement of underprivileged youth as well as facilitate the channeling of private donations to the hundreds of projects already existing in Brazil. By illuminating the perception of life's potentials, social projects that teach classical music serve as an important means of personal and social development. Regardless of the professional choice — music or something else — young people can advance in society in the most diverse careers.

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