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## A New Approach In Music Education Improving Creativity: Soundpainting

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### Abstract

Common characteristics of Orff, Kodaly and Dalcrose music education approaches are not only that they are the education methods improving the creativity but it is also that they gain aimed behaviours in dramatization, improve musical skills and ensure adaption into social environment thanks to music, acquire mental skills such as motivation, attention and self-confidence. Soundpainting is the universal live composing language created for musicians, dancers, actors, poets and visual artists working in their improvised environment. Soundpainting, a performance art based on improvisation, has started to be used in education in recent years. Just like other music education methods, education of Soundpainting is quite an important music education approach in terms of development in the creativity of individuals, their musical and mental skills. With this study, it has been tried to emphasize the Soundpainting's common points with other music education approaches by providing information about Soundpainting. Within this study, it is aimed at contributing to music education and teaching as a new approach. This research is one of the very few studies, which carried out in the fields of Soundpainting. Therefore, it is important in terms of its contribution to the both education and Soundpainting fields. This research is descriptive research and data were obtained by literature review. At the end of the research, it was emerged that Soundpainting has common ground with the other music education approaches and it could be used in music education.

**Key words:** creativity, music education, music education approaches, soundpainting.

### Introduction

In the living conditions gradually gaining momentum and changing, the conception of 'creativity', which has an extremely important place in order individuals to be able to look from different perspectives, to provide solutions to the problems and to be successful both in their social and professional lives , is explained by Aslan (2001) as follows: "Recent perceptions of creativity consists of these components: the creative process, the creative product, the creative person, the creative situation. Emerging as an original product or not as yet a product and based on ability, creativity is a cognitive skill which contains a problem-solving process special to its own and with which a person uses intelligence elements originally and productively (Akt. Küpana, 2013: 25).

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Creativity is a skill needed in the field of education besides practical life as the education of creativity is quite important in the growth of individuals who seek different solutions to problems, and these problems, who are able to think critically and put forward creative ideas in their field.

Torrance describes four reasons why creativity is important in education. First, through creativity children can express their own ideas and emotions, which improves mental health. Second, children become fully functioning persons as they develop all of their mental abilities, including the ability to learn and think creatively. Third, although teachers are concerned, creative learning is time-consuming. Fourth, the children are more likely to succeed in their vocations when they develop the creative ability to solve problems that they would face in their daily lives (Akt. Auh, 1995: 1-2).

According to Alder, the characteristics of creative thinking are as follows:

- Fluency of Thinking. The person is able to think freely and effortlessly. It comprises word fluency, associational fluency, expressional fluency and ideational fluency.
- Flexibility of Thinking. The person can easily abandon old ways of thinking and adopt new ones.
- Originality. The person comes up with ideas that are statistically unusual. The person forms associations between elements that are remote from each other in time or space or remote from each other logically.
- Ability to see or sensitivity to problems. This is associated with 'putting your finger on the problem' and 'getting straight to the crux of the matter'.
- Responses are judged to be clever. This is a subjective evaluation, but there is usually significant agreement between judges in experiments.
- Redefinition- gives up old interpretations of familiar objects and uses them in new ways.
- Elaboration- can fill in details given a general scheme.
- Tolerance of ambiguity – willingness to accept some uncertainty in conclusions, not using rigid categories.
- Interest in convergent thinking – thinking towards one right answer and ability to focus on detail when necessary.
- Interest in divergent thinking – open-ended thinking, where there is not a single right answer. This feature is universally associated with creative thinking and forms a large part of the psychometric instruments.
- Willing to be different and to defy convention. It is in the sense of a leader in ideas.
- High self-discipline. This is another example of the conscious thinking involved in the total creative process, in contrast to the often-cited unconscious aspects.
- High standards of excellence. Self-measurement is also linked to self- or intrinsic motivation. Self-standards will increase as bigger challenges are pursued.
- Willingness to take risks. The form of risk can be seen as the risk of failing in difficult tasks with unknown outcomes or also as the risks in going against popular opinion and 'received wisdom' (Akt. Küpana, 2013: 27).

There are various areas in which creativity is revealed and developed and one of these areas is music education.

Music education, which has an active role in personality development and socialization of individuals, contributes particularly to emotional and cognitive development of children. “Music education supports the development of academic and personal skills like critical thinking, problem-solving and learning how to work in cooperation for these purposes. Cognizance oriented skills such as how to use the symbols and analysing, synthesizing and evaluating data indistinctively support the child’s skills in this direction in music education (Őendurur ve Barıř, 2002: 167).

Creativity education is needed in music education in order the individuals who work in the field of both music production and education to be creative. Karkın expresses his views on the necessity of musical creativity as follows: “In polyp honing of a melody or in the formation of an original polyphonic melody, the students’ having also creative thinking along with harmony, counterpoint and composition knowledge may get this work closer to the concept of musical beauty which has no end in music. Alongside the knowledge and skills that students have acquired in the groups of musical instruments at school, game-dance-music, chamber music and through teamwork that the students carry out altogether, it is also possible to note that students conduct various practices with creative ideas, and, as a result of such practises, they produce quite good and extraordinary work.

In music performance and education, the most suitable environment that will build up and improve individuals’ creative identity is the improvised environment. According to Uan (2005), on the basis of people’s musical actions, the act of composing music lays out. In the process of creating music, it could be mentioned about two elements emphasizing the creativity; which are, composing and improvisation. Composing is the process of forming a whole by processing and bringing the sounds together repeatedly and/or successively with a certain aim and method according to a certain sense of beauty. Improvisation, by the way, is vocalizing or forming by vocalizing music or musical composition ‘in the moment’ whose flow has not been determined in detail in advance. (Akt,Küpana 2013: 29) In the medium of improvisation, students are expected to perform a composition in accordance with their regards and ideas. However, at which level and how the composition will be have been shaped by a training between the student and the trainer in time.

According to Bilen, music classes, which have important place in growing up creative individuals, should be presented with the modern music education approaches which have proved their effectiveness with the experiments today (Akt. Gürgen, 2006: 59).

Music classes, which have an important role in the development of creative individuals, are carried with modern music education approaches which are accepted and success of which are currently proven. Modern music education approaches are a learning process where students are active, learn by doing and experiencing; composed of activities and games revealing the creative potential. These education approaches break some taboos and help individuals to discover creative skills they hide inside for some reasons. Individuals get more confident as they create and thus, make healthier and more balanced contact with the outer world (Gürgen, 2006: 59).

The instructor should also go through a creative process in order to apply modern music education methods and approaches truly. There is use in mentioning about some of the most common music education methods, which have been used in today’s music education:



Orff-Schulwerk: This method, which takes his name from German composer, Carl Orff (1895-1982), aims at improving the creativity and sense of rhythm in child. “Orff-Schulwerk is a music teaching approach including many games and activities together, which are in the child’s world of play and children enjoy playing, and teaching children the elements of music by discovering by means of these activities” (Sökezoğlu, 2010: 166).

According to Jungmair, Orff teaching which has been accepted in many parts of the world, holds creative people on the focus of all artistic and pedagogical pursuits. Orff’s elemental music and movement education covers all sense and perception organs of humans and activates them (Jungmair, 2002: 4-5).

*The Kodaly method:* Zoltan Kodaly (1882- 1967), Hungarian composer, is the person who gave his name to the method. This method combines music and dance and ensures students to participate in lessons actively. According to Çevik, children love to play games and dance is also game for them. Mostly songs are dramatized. In this method, the repertoire is selected by traditional folk songs and teaching order is carefully followed. Children learn music by singing and music conception by clapping. This method is mostly used for children 2-3 years of age. Human voice is an important instrument (Çevik, 2007: 96).

*Dalcrose method* takes his name from Swedish composer and harmony teacher, Emile Jacques Dalcrose (1865-1950). The aim of this education is to improve child’s musical hearing ability, the sense of rhythm and creativity through games and rhythmic gymnastics. According to Çevik, in this method, the action is fundamental and the most important aim of this method is to give children opportunity to reveal their own mobility by themselves. The harmony between mind and body is shown by improvisation and body movements. Child’s musical creativity and sense of rhythm are developed through rhythmic gymnastics (Çevik, 2009: 86).

Tufan states that the education provided by Dalcrose method strengthens the child’s sense of trust and this education is suitable for children of all ages (Tufan, 1997: 336).

Some of the common features of music teaching methods improving creativity mentioned above are; child’s learning by doing, taking part in groups, being independent from the note and accordingly improvising. Another application area with common characteristics is soundpainting as performing arts which still continues its development and has been used in education recently.

Soundpainting is multidisciplinary, simultaneously universal live composing sign language. Soundpainting is created by Walter Thompson, a composer from New York, for the musicians, dancers, actors, poets and visual artists working in the medium of structured improvisation. At present, Soundpainting language comprises more than 1500<sup>1</sup> gestures (Thompson, 2006:2).

Today (in 2015), language is composed of 1500 signs, determined by the Soundpainter according to the material type required in the performance. Forming of the composition is conducted via parameters composed of each sign movement set.

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<sup>1</sup>The researcher translated the last edition of the book into Turkish. In his Soundpainting book to be published soon, it is mentioned that the language has more than 1500 signs.

The syntax of soundpainting divides into six categories; which are identifiers, content, modifiers, go gestures, modes and palettes. These are the gestures showing who will do what and when they will do. Along with these, there are a set of special gestures and palettes which can be prepared in advance.

Soundpainter (composer) who usually stands in front of the group, using hand and body movements, refers to the specific or/and aleatoric materials to be performed by the group. Soundpainter develops the performer's response, forms and shapes them according to the content of the composition, then determines another set of signs and phrases, and the piece continues on its process of composition.

Language of Soundpainting is one of the rare environments and education systems where the performers, who would like to Soundpaint, are free in their fields and can improvise. Performer's level of information and skill does not matter in this case and the performer gets the chance to improve his ability of improvising.

Language of Soundpainting is an important field of creation not only for performers but also for the Soundpainter. Both auditory and visual materials, which would come out as a result of the movements signed by the Soundpainter to the community, are the pieces composed at that moment. Soundpainting composition is developed and shaped depending on the level of knowledge and creativity of the Soundpainter. When considered from the perspective of both Soundpainter and the performers, Soundpainting is quite a field of creativity and helps the individual to develop himself in this field.

Today, studies on Soundpainting have gained importance in Europe, especially in France, Sweden, Finland, Norway and Germany, and in United States, in New York.

In New York, Soundpainting festival is held supported by the US government, while in Europe the workshops and trainings are organized under the name of "Think Tank". In Turkey, studies on Soundpainting are so limited. This course has been officially given by the researchers in Ondokuz Mayıs University's Educational Science and Fine Arts Institute at Master's and Doctoral programs since 2013. Also in Samsun, there is a Soundpainting community founded and run by the researcher. This community gives concerts throughout the year. Soundpainting is a sign language and everyone can do Soundpainting who learns the gestures and signs in this language. Soundpainting language has signs ranging from a simple sound production to very complex structures. Those who have just started learning the language also can set basic compositions with the most simple movements and can make their own compositions. The improvement of the composition and high quality of the performance varies according to the competences of performers at their instruments and the language proficiency of Soundpainter.

Soundpainting for students means that they can communicate with their instruments freely. Usually there are rules in an instrument training that must be strictly obeyed starting from the first times of the education until reaching the level at which students can express themselves, and at the same time these rules restrict them while developing the students in a sense of technical and leaves them unable to do anything when there is no note in front of them. At this point, during Soundpainting, students have opportunity to act freely on knowing their instruments, overcoming their fears and developing musical ideas.

While the gestures and concepts in adult individual's Soundpainting education are delivered directly, in children's education this situation differs. Children's education of Soundpainting is performed with the basic gestures among 1st level Soundpainting gestures (41 gestures). While these gestures are signed, children are expected to respond at the same time. For example, Soundpainter wants vocals to sing a long tone and performer can voice any vocalist such as aaa, muu, zii etc. Responding at the same time requires students to be more cautious and concentrated on the gestures. In gestures such as 'Improvisation or 'Relate to' which provide freedom to performers, children are expected to use their own creativity and respond to gestures. Children, who may act hesitant in the first place, may develop their ideas in time.

In children's soundpainting education, games are also very important. While teaching soundpainting language to children, gestures and concepts are displayed with dramatization. The meaning of the gestures is thought through the games.

In soundpainting education, soundpainter's training is also very important as well as students and performers. Soundpainter must work on the physical quality and control the gestures before working with his/her group. This will allow him/her to be a clearer soundpainter.

The important thing during soundpainting is to establish a good communication with the group. Along with this communication, the desired movements can be understood and applied by everyone. For this aim, soundpainter/composer should be exceptionally clearer and determine which sentence structures he/she will show the group in advance (Coşkuner, 2013: 573).

"The method, or process, that you are teaching has to be simple enough to communicate easily to the group as a whole, and for all of them to be able to do it. But it also has to be demanding enough of concentration to satisfy those who are more developed musicians" (Bailey, 2001: 163). Bailey's general description for classroom improvisation is also true for Soundpainting.

### ***Purpose of Study***

The aims of this research are to explain the Soundpainting language emerged as a stage art based on improvisation at the beginning of 1970s and used gradually in music education for the last 10 years and to show its availability in education as a music education approach.

### ***The Importance of Research***

This study has importance to introduce the Soundpainting sign language, getting recently recognized in the world and introduced to our country especially only by the researcher, and to talk about a new music education approach.

In addition, there is no sufficient source in academic field as it is still very new. This study is therefore important for creating resources related to Soundpainting.

## **Method**

### ***Model of the Research***

This is a descriptive study and gathered data are acquired via literature review. “Descriptive researches aim at explaining the interaction between situations, considering the relations between current incidents and previous incidents and conditions” (Kaptan, 1989: 47).

### ***Related Publications***

In his master’s thesis, “The effects of Soundpainting Applications on Students’ Self-confidence” (2016), Bilgin has given Soundpainting education to 7th grade students for 20 weeks and looked for the effects of this education on the self-confidences of these students. This research was an experimental study. At the end of the research, it has been found out that self-confidences increased under the six subscales of Piers Harris Self- Concept Scale.

In his article, “Conservatory Students’ Self Assessments on Soundpainting Practices” (2016), ořkuner provided trainings to the conservatory students. In this study, it is intended to determine the attitudes of conservatory students towards the Soundpainting education. For this purpose, Soundpainting self-evaluation form were prepared for students who voluntarily participated in the training and their opinions were taken. At the end of the research, it was emerged that Soundpainting training has positive effects on conservatory students’ self-reliance and motivation. Although their awareness on improvising has increased and they have made it partly, they also said that they could not be creative enough and could not associate the Soundpainting with other courses.

## **Results And Discussion**

With the music education methods, which are mentioned above, used for a long time and proved itself, Soundpainting displays similarity in many aspects. Music education methods such as Orff, Kodaly, Dalcroze aims at revealing and developing creativity in individuals. Soundpainting like these approaches also reveals and develops individuals’ creativity. A child or student in the position of a performer sometimes performs signed gestures within determined limits and sometimes without any limitation. S/he can always perform gestures differently and develop them.

Development of creativity skill is possible not only for performers but also for the Soundpainter. A Soundpainter can try various combinations as much as the gestures s/he knows like how a cook can do a wide range of food with a number of materials he has. 42 gestures in the 1st level of Soundpainting language have 342 combinations. Within these opportunities, Soundpainter can always do better and develop himself/herself as a composer.

Another common point between other music education methods and Soundpainting is that the gestures of this language can be taught via games. Thanks to games, children’s attention remains at the top level and behaviors aimed to be acquired are delivered via games.



Soundpainting philosophy is based on the concept that ‘there is no error’. So, even if a Soundpainter gives a wrong response to a signed gesture, this response now becomes a new material for soundpainter to be used.

It is not possible for performers to repair their mistake and to stop and start again. This is not required. This situation enables performers to respond the gestures without fear and with no concern of making mistakes. Thus, it has possible impact on self-confidence of performers; that is to say, children.

One of the most important aspects while learning the Soundpainting language is to get used to the Soundpainting philosophy. This philosophy advocates that ‘there is no such a thing as error’. If a performer makes mistakes and performs a wrong content, he/she should continue on performing and should not try to change it according to the correct content. It may seem easy to do, but it is quite difficult because we act as if we have been programmed about errors since our childhood. There are many artists from past and today seeing the error as an opportunity not a mistake. When the performers get used to the Soundpainting philosophy that error is an opportunity, new worlds of creativity will open for you as soundpainter and them.

Performance of Soundpainting is conducted with the response of displayed signs. Performers turn a gesture or symbol into sound and respond. They can make connection between gestures. Soundpainter sometimes knows what the result will be at the end of his gestures, sometimes does not. Performers, with unexpected end and surprise gestures, can think open-ended as there is no single true result. Or when the gestures are limited, they can determine the details. They may give different and unexpected responses to the surprising gestures like Point to Point and Scanning. These features of Soundpainting multi-disciplinary universal sign language coincides with the characteristics of creative thinking mentioned above.

In the light of all these common points, it is thought that Soundpainting sign language, just like other music teaching methods, develops children’s creativity and can be used in other music teaching methods.

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