



Orff-Schulwerk *International*

Volume 2, Issue 2

ISSN 2791-4763 (Online)

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Published online: December 2023

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Convention 2023 Presentations

The Significance of Relationships in Inclusive Music and Dance Lessons

Erik Esterbauer

Relationships are the basis of human development and a central prerequisite for education. Research in this topic has become relevant in the last decades. The well-known analysis of meta-analyses *Visible Learning* by John Hattie has pointed out the significant role (among others) of relationships in education. Relationships proved to be an important factor (number 12 out of 150) with an impact on learning (Hattie, 2009, 2012).

The fundamental aspects of how a person shapes their relationships – and not just in interpersonal contexts, but also in the relationship to the world itself and its phenomena – are formed in the first months and years of life. The ability to actively influence the formation of relationships develops over time and has lifelong relevance.

Definitions

Referring to a definition by Gerald Hüther (2006, 2009), a German neurobiologist, the ability to relate is characterised by the following components:

- the relationship to oneself, between mind and body, thinking and feeling
- the relationship to other people, to their environment and their history
- the relationship to the world, to nature and one's own history.

Karin Schumacher, a renowned music therapist, has defined this in the following words:

‘The basis for the development of interpersonal relationship skills is the ability to coordinate, integrate and meaningfully process the various sensory impressions.’ (1994, p. 1).

Joachim Bauer (2014, pp. 193–195), a German psychiatrist and neuroscientist, defines the concept of relationship competence and describes it in terms of five components:

1. *Seeing and being seen.* Attention and interest of others increase one's self-worth and enable a sense of belonging.
2. *Shared attention towards a third 'object'.* The simplest form of attention is the interest in the focus of another person.
3. *Emotional resonance.* The ability to tune into the emotions of another person and to adjust one's behaviour accordingly.
4. *Joint action.* Joint action seems to be a factor with high relationship-building relevance.
5. *Mutual understanding of motives and intentions.* This only succeeds if the preceding components are already present. Recognizing motives, intentions and the like, enables other people to develop new potentials for a relationship.

According to these relationship models and the theory of the development of self-concept by Daniel Stern (2000), the following qualities of relationships can be defined:

The core quality of any relationship is the ability of perception and in a second line a general openness to whatever phenomena are emerging. Without perception there is no possibility to relate. A further quality is the ability to communicate, and another prominent feature of relationships is to regulate one's emotions. Next comes the experience of oneself and the experience of the other. Then the ability to communicate in the form of a dialogue develops.

Joint attention in education

Especially important in all pedagogical contexts is also the existence of joint attention, which is the ability to focus together on a third content (which can be a song, a musical development, a game, etc.). As a simple working definition, joint attention can be termed

the coordinated attention of two or more people to the same, intentionally focused object, event, or idea. (...) Joint attention does not appear until the persons involved know that they are focusing their attention on the same thing or object. From the outside, one can recognise the reassuring gaze from the child to the focused object and back to the caregiver and whether the persons involved share their attention together. (Salmon, 2020, p. 40)

Without the capacity for joint attention, success in many pedagogical contexts would be difficult to achieve. Adolescents and adults who cannot follow, initiate, or join with the changes of shared attention in social interactions may be impaired in their capacity for relatedness and relationships (Mundy & Newell, 2007).

If joint attention is underdeveloped or not present in a child, conventional pedagogical approaches are not successful. The child cannot participate or learn. Tasks such as playing music together, call and response singing, taking over rhythms or melodies, imitation, and thematic development can only be carried out on the basis of a developed joint attention. However, many teaching-learning processes are based on these interaction forms or presuppose them (Esterbauer, Salmon & Schumacher, 2018; Salmon, 2020).

These relationship skills are acquired in a typical course of development in the first years of life. In children whose development is impaired by various factors, however, relationship skills may be incomplete or, in extreme cases, not developed at all. A consideration and assessment of these skills is of great importance for inclusive teaching, as the possibilities for relationships form the basis of all learning.

Relationships in inclusive music and dance

Music and movement offer an ideal basis for a holistic approach in education through their ability to address cognitive, emotional, social, and creative areas of the human being. Inclusive education means that everybody should have the possibility to learn, play and study at their own pace, according to their own possibilities together with others (cf. Feuser, 2011).

The following aspects are of importance for pedagogical work:

- Each group is heterogeneous.
- There exists a variety of skills, interests, opportunities, etc. among the participants.

- The prerequisites that people bring into music and dance groups play an important role – whether these are general dispositions or recently emerged states of mind and emotions.
- In music and dance groups we will find a broad diversity in perception, processing, cognition, emotion, behaviour, motivation,
- and also in relationship skills.

If these relationship skills are of the utmost importance for the work as teachers of elemental music and dance, it would be of great benefit to capture the status of relational abilities. Especially inclusive learning contexts in heterogeneous groups depend on the identification of the diverse abilities of children and their possibilities to relate. The observation and assessment of the quality of relationship can improve the fundamental effectiveness of artistic-pedagogical music and dance interventions. From the work of Karin Schumacher with children with disabilities and especially autism we can conclude that: Inclusive learning contexts in heterogeneous groups succeed when the different abilities and needs of the children and their ability to relate are correctly assessed and the teachers correspond individually to the children (Schumacher et al., 2019).

The focus of interest in researching the phenomena of relationship skills can be summarised in the following questions:

- Does the teacher recognize the relationship qualities of the participants in the current moment and react appropriately?
- Is the offer, the task, the intervention the right one for the needs and abilities of the child/participant?

To answer these questions an analysis of the quality of relationship and of various other aspects such as intentions, mood, lesson planning, etc. should be integrated in order to focus not only on the child but also on the teacher's activities. With the help of an analysing tool such as the *Assessment of the Quality of Relationship* (AQR) these aspects could be focused on. The AQR Tool (Schumacher et al., 2019) was originally developed for the field of music therapy, and was now adapted for the use in pedagogical areas, especially for inclusive music education (Esterbauer, 2019, 2022).

The AQR-P Tool

The original therapeutic AQR Tool functions as an observation and assessment method that focuses on interpersonal relationships. It was developed in cooperation between music therapist Karin Schumacher and developmental psychologist Claudine Calvet, beginning in the 1990s, for music therapy with children suffering from a profound developmental disorder, especially autism (Schumacher et al., 2011). The original AQR Tool has been adapted in the last years by the author of this article for music and dance education with focus on inclusive contexts (Esterbauer, 2022).

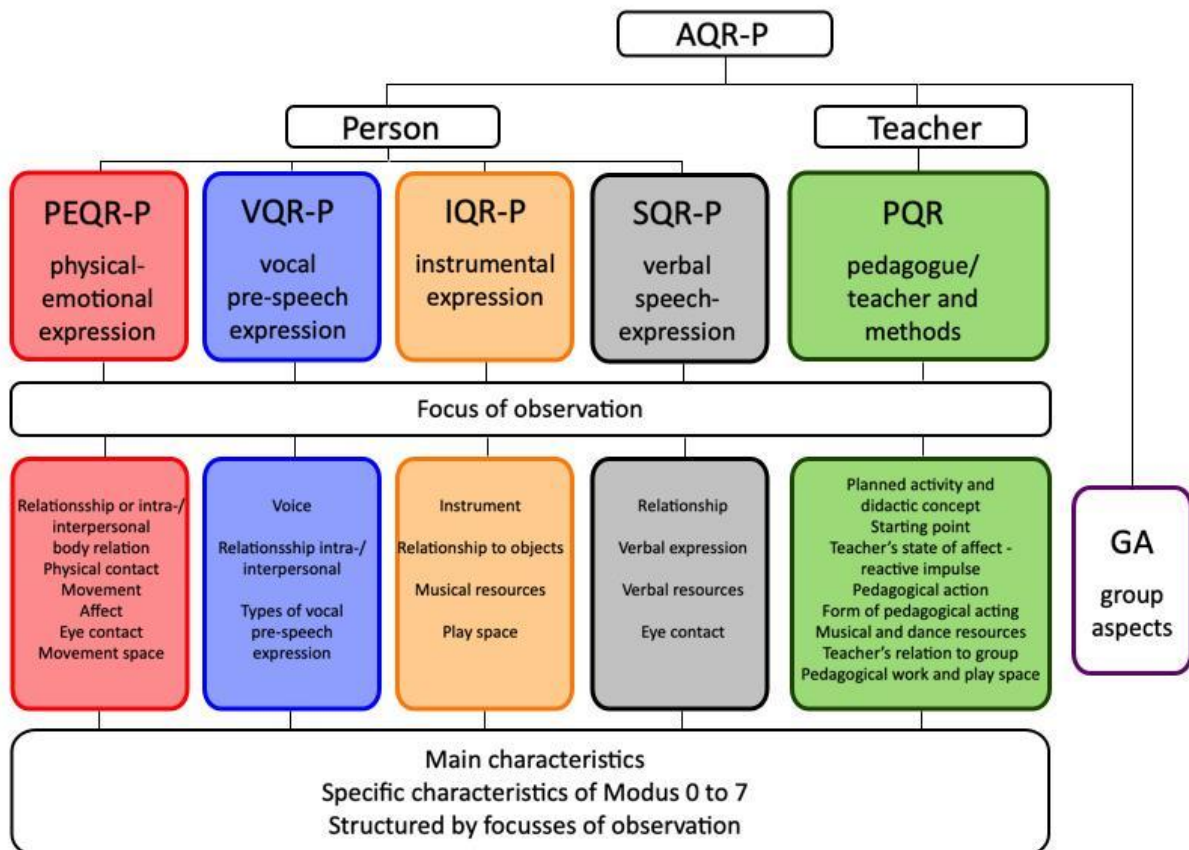
This new AQR-P Tool (Assessment of the Quality of Relationship in Pedagogical Contexts) enables music educators to assess the current condition of the individual participants and

their ability to relate, and thus provides important indications for the methodical, didactic, and musical approach and reflections of the teacher.⁵

The AQR-P Tool consists of five scales. Four of them are used for the phenomena observed in the child's behaviour:

- I. physical-emotional phenomena
- II. vocal pre-speech qualities
- III. instrumental activities
- IV. and verbal speech activities.

The fifth scale is to be used for the teacher to assess the level of their interventions and to determine whether the tasks for the child are appropriate or if the teacher needs to modify their approach.



The structure of the AQR-P Tool (English version according to Esterbauer, 2022, p.277)

The core idea for identifying the quality of relationship lies in the focus of observation in each scale, that is described in detail for the respective observation points as they are given here. In each scale every observed activity can be assigned to one of eight qualities of relationship – the so-called *modi*, which have been developed out of the theoretical framework mentioned above.

⁵ The German version of the AQR-P Tool will be published in late 2023 or early 2024. An English edition is planned for 2024/25.

The qualities start with lack of contact or the total rejection of the contact, leads to the observance of self-awareness, and has its most developed form in the experience of inter-affectivity – a real joint experience on the emotional level. In educational contexts there is additionally *Modus 7* which can be described as the independent execution of tasks or activities.

Modus	Person	Teacher
Modus 0	Lack of Contact / Contact Refusal	Creating Atmosphere / Enveloping
Modus 1	Sensory Contact / Contact-Reaction	Connecting Perceptions
Modus 2	Contact for Affective Regulation	Affect attunement / Allowing Oneself to be Functionalized
Modus 3	Contact to Oneself / Self Awareness	Sense of Oneself/ Making Aware
Modus 4	Contact to anOther / Intersubjectivity	Intersubjectivity / Being Included as a Person
Modus 5	Relationship to Another / Interactivity	Dialogue in Music and Dance / Answering and Asking
Modus 6	Joint Experience / Interaffectivity	Play Space – Playing / Having Fun / Imagination
Modus 7	Performing Tasks Independently	Setting Tasks for Independent Action

The 8 Modi of the AQR-P Tool

Working with the AQR-P Tool

The AQR-P Tool consists of lists of observable characteristics, which describe the different qualities of relationship (*Modi*). When working with the AQR-P, usually an entire music and dance lesson is recorded on video. Then relevant scenes are selected out of the recorded material which can be special moments of relating, moments of presence, or scenes with changes of relationship qualities, as well as segments with problems arising in a lesson. These relevant scenes, which are normally between a half minute and three minutes long, are then assessed with the lists of characteristics – by the teacher or another person. The core feature in that process lies in the existence of the matching or non-matching relationship qualities of the participant and the teacher. If the teacher can react adequately to the modus of the participant, a positive development of the situation can be expected (similar to outcomes in music therapy, see Mössler et al., 2017). With the results of the analysis the teacher can do further planning of the next music and dance lessons and integrate the new information about the different forms of relating. The AQR-P Tool thus supports the music teacher in the evaluation of the child's current level of relating ability in order to match his/her needs and possibilities in learning contexts.⁶

Benefits of the AQR-P Tool in music and dance education

By application of the AQR-P Tool the teacher can benefit from a range of positive aspects for practical (and also theoretical) work. Especially for elemental music and dance education with groups of mixed ability persons the tool can provide important information about live aspects of teaching actions and the respective reactions of the participants:

⁶ For a reliable application of the AQR-P Tool, training is strongly recommended.

- Diagnostics – determination of the ability to relate
- Assessment of different skill levels
- Recognition of over- or under-challenge
- Providing adequate content and methods for different individual needs
- Adaption of the content for individual learning and experience
- Self-reflection of the teacher on different levels (content, methods, emotional, social factors ...)
- Regulating group dynamics
- Planning of future units, lessons, methods
- Documentation of process and progress
- Research.

With the integration of the AQR-P Tool in the teacher's working routine, inclusive education can be facilitated and will provide a more adequate and individually adapted instruction and selection of tasks for the participants. By the self-reflective possibilities of the tool on various levels such as content, didactics, emotions, social behaviour, perception, and the interpretation of participants' behaviour, the teacher should be enabled to offer lessons and activities that correspond to their respective possibilities and abilities.

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