

Concerning the teaching of singing in Estonian-language handbooks for teachers in the context of Prussian pedagogy in 1873

Tiiu Ernits

This paper deals with the arrival of Prussian pedagogy in the Estonian area. The research is based on the analysis of four teacher handbooks, primarily with reference to the role of music education in them. The aims of the paper are, first, to investigate the handbooks written for teachers in the German language and their Estonian adaptations, published between 1860 and 1870; secondly, to find connections between these books and the methods of music instruction contained in them.

The first subsection of the work consists of a brief overview of Western European and Prussian pedagogy, of the situation of music education and of the spread of Prussian pedagogy in the Estonian ethnic area. Subsequently the backgrounds to the handbooks are considered and their contents are introduced. In the following sections the significant principles of the subject/discipline of "teaching singing" are comparatively introduced. The last subsection deals with species of songs: sacred/spiritual, popular and patriotic songs.

In 1873 two authors – Woldemar Adolf Hansen (1823-1881), who worked as a pastor and an inspector of schools in Paistu (South Estonia), and Wilhelm Normann (1812-1906), a sacristan and a teacher in Simuna (North Estonia) – published two handbooks for teachers in the Estonian language about education, namely "Kooli-teadus" and "Õppetus koli-pidamisest ning laste kasvatamisest" respectively. The handbooks deal with the methodical and didactic principles of the subject of "teaching singing". Both handbooks were based on the "Schulkunde für evangelische Volksschullehrer" by Karl Wilhelm Bormann (1802-1882). As well as the book just cited, W. Normann also used the work "Unterrichtskunde für evangelische Volksschullehrer" by Bormann. Both were published in 1869.

The research indicates that the authors of the Estonian adaptations transmitted the principles of education fairly exactly from the original German handbooks. In the Estonian handbooks there are no references to Prussian regulations and arrangements; neither can we find any checklist of obligatory songs. The authors of the Estonian handbooks have not translated the longer discourses and disquisitions, but practical advice about didactic questions are transmitted carefully.

Comparing the handbooks, coincidental principles of teaching singing, in which the Word is stressed as a relatively important circumstance (faultless and expressive acquisition of lyrics), become evident. Foremost is the pursuit of beautiful singing, singing from the souls of Christians flowing from the devout heart. There is less emphasis on the teaching of musical notation, especially in the German-language handbooks. The educational values of singing and its connection with other disciplines are stressed. All authors give special attention to hymns. The singing of spiritual songs for edification and the importance of singing as members of a congregation were stressed.

A glimpse into the Estonian and German handbooks of the 1860s and 1870s reveals that the Estonian handbooks relied particularly upon handbooks of German pedagogy. They followed the grounding theory of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and the didactic rules elaborated by Friedrich Adolf Diesterweg. An actual movement in teaching from the easiest to the more complicated, from familiar to unfamiliar, from the nearest to the more distant were the basic didactic-methodical principles in teaching.

The Estonian translations of didactic recommendations by W. Normann for singing with a clear intonation, elementary exercises and keeping the beat while singing were valuable for a music teacher at that time.

The Estonian adaptations of famous Prussian authors were in advance of the rules regulating school life (Andresen 2002: 245; Koolipidamise ... 1878). By these rules compulsory school education and fixed unified curricula were imposed. Prussian education was based on Christianity and the essential keyword was obedience understood as cardinal virtue.

The ideas, didactic concepts and methods in the handbooks are also considered essential nowadays. For example, the authors endeavoured to synthesize so-called subject "Schulkunde" by adding such disciplines as pedagogy, methodology, didactics, psychology, anthropology etc. in the curricula of teacher training schools for integrated teaching. The continuous need for self-improvement and lifelong learning were stressed. Education was focused on the development of the human being as a whole and on stimulating thinking. Practicality was stressed.

The research indicates that requirements for the knowledge of musical notation in Livonia and Estonia exceeded the requirements used at that time in Germany. In Livonia and Estonia 4-voiced singing was pursued as an ideal. German teachers focused on the acquisition of a common song repertoire, in order that children should be able to participate successfully in choral singing.

The perspectives closely related to education and explicit didactic advice transmitted in the handbooks analysed enlarged the world-view of local teachers and contributed to the establishment of a solid basis for music education.