

# **LABOR et EDUCATIO**

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### **STUDIES**

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## **Music Education as an Important Part of the Educational Process of Children Aged 7–11**

### **Edukacja muzyczna jako istotny element procesu edukacyjnego dzieci w młodszym wieku szkolnym**

#### **Introduction**

Contemporary reality, in which less and less attention is devoted to the analysis of experiences, emotions, development of the emotional sphere, where technology often replaces interpersonal relationships and the concept of empathy goes into oblivion, forces schools to take on new tasks focused on caring for the sensitivity of young people. Among the many tasks of early childhood education, an important place is dedicated to those that are focused on students' emotional and social development. School often becomes the only place where young people learn to regulate their own emotions, express their feelings while considering the needs of others, and also build lasting, deeper relationships (Podstawa programowa, 2017). An invaluable tool in the process of shaping the sensitivity of young people may be the appropriate use of the

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potential hidden in art. It is music that moves us to tears, makes us smile, is able to recall deeply hidden memories, dreams, and moves sensitivity on all possible levels. Music soothes customs, integrates recipients from different social strata in a shared aesthetic experience; it allows breaking language barriers, connects amateur musicians from various professional circles, helps to utilize energy deposits in a way that benefits not only performers but also recipients. Unfortunately, in the Polish educational system, the phenomenon of marginalizing art education has become common. Limiting time for art and music, superficial implementation of artistic classes, insufficient methodical preparation of teachers – these are the factors that prevent students from meeting their needs connected with art. Young people are deeply involved in artistic activities outside of school (Sieńczewska, Sobierańska i Radwańska, 2015). Why, then, is the educational process not constructed in a way in which students can express their creativity in school situations?

For many years, there has been a discussion in didactic and musical literature about the problem of a barrier that has arisen between art of imperishable values and its recipients. What seems incomprehensible is the reality in which a society that has a wealth of cultural heritage in various dimensions and sizes at hand presents a lack or a very low level of perception of works of art, also including musical works (Wilk, 2004). The only way to disprove the belief about the unavailability of the world of art that has been in existence for years is to systematically bring it closer to the youngest part of society and to make efforts to make contact with art something natural for children.

The most important task and also the greatest challenge for modern schools is supporting the overall development of a human. The priority becomes to ensure the general and balanced development of personality for each individual. Education should not be limited to caring for the intellectual sphere, but it should support the development of such personality components as attitudes, beliefs, or the system of values with equal care (Muszyński, 1971).

Early childhood education is focused on satisfying the student's natural developmental needs. First of all, the activities that allow a child to discover their own possibilities and the sense of their operation are at the forefront, as well as gathering experience leading to discovering truth, goodness, and beauty. Organizing educational situations that enable experimenting, acquiring experiences, as well as cognitive, multisensory learning, supports the multi-directional activity of a child and stimulates their development in the emotional, social, cognitive and physical areas (Podstawa programowa, 2017).

## The developmental value of music education

Despite the fact that, at this level of education, the educational process is integrated, the scope of a student's activity is determined by the educational outcomes assigned to individual scientific disciplines. Among disciplines such as Polish, mathematics, social, science, art, technical, IT, language, physical education and ethics, musical education also has its place.

There are various ways of formulating the main aim of musical education in literature, but the slogan proposed by Maria Przychodzińska seems to combine the intentions of all authors.

According to the researcher, music education "is supposed to lead to the need and ability to interact with musical art, to understand its beauty, values and functions" (1989). The aim formulated in this way is of a timeless nature. The ability to participate in culture and to express observations and feelings through musical means of expression, among others, is one of the aims of education in the fields of cognitive and emotional development of students, which is included in the current core curriculum of general education for primary school (2017).

The full picture of activities related to the musical development of children at a younger school age is possible thanks to the analysis of stage purposes, which cover four areas:

- developing basic musical skills;
- developing elementary musical abilities:
- creative, reproductive, perceptual;
- vocal, instrumental, vocal – instrumental, and music and movement;
- transferring knowledge about music;
- developing interests and fondness, and deepening the motivation for music.

Musical abilities occur in most people, but to different degrees. These are certain innate advances that require work on their development (Januszewska-Warych, 2006). The development of musical abilities and musicality occurs mainly in the preschool and early school period. It is known that the highest efficiency in the area of motor accompaniment when performing music is achieved by first grade students and children from an older kindergarten group; the development of the sense of rhythm undergoes rapid growth up to age eight; and intonation singing (characterized by the ability to accurately

reproduce the melodic - rhythmic structure of a piece) develops in the period from nine to 10 years of age. Sensitivity to consonance and harmonization of melody develops at the end of the early school period (Wilk, 2014). At this time, musical abilities are defined as developing, and later they are already stabilized. A low level of musical abilities in children often results from a combination of two factors: the lack of musical influence in the family environment during early childhood and the poor quality of music education at the preschool and early school stage. Unfortunately, the musical potential of students is often irretrievably lost as a result of inadequate didactic activities. In the Polish education system, the musical education of children at the younger school age is entrusted to teachers of early school education. This does not consider the fact that conducting such activities requires special talents and skills that cannot be shaped only during the course of study. Beata Bonna has conducted research on the diagnosis of the musical abilities of third grade students whose music classes at the first stage of education were conducted by a specialist in integrated education, and those who were taught music by musicians. The analysis of the results provided extremely interesting data. In the first group, almost one third of the students achieved results indicating a low or very low level of ability. The largest group (over 40%) were students whose abilities were shaped on an average level. A high or very high level of ability was presented by around 27% of investigated students. In contrast, in the group taught by the music teacher, as many as 92% of the students achieved a high or very high level of ability. A small group (only 8%) was made up of children who achieved a score showing an average or low level of musical ability. Interestingly, there was not a single person in this group whose level of the tested abilities could be described as very low (Bonna, 2009).

Musical abilities cover four categories:

- musical hearing:
- altitude hearing, or the ability to differentiate musical sounds in the height range;
- hue hearing based on the ability to differentiate musical sounds in the hue range;
- harmonic hearing, meaning the ability to distinguish individual sounds in consonance;
- musical memory, defined as the ability to remember specific elements and musical structures, as well as recognizing and reproducing them;

- a sense of rhythm, meaning the ability to perceive and reproduce rhythmic structures;
- musical taste concerning both the distinction and the appreciation of artistic values in music (Lewandowska, 1978).

A condition for the perception of the artistic values of music is also musicality, understood as the ability to experience music emotionally. Although it does not belong to any of the presented categories, it is important in the process of musical education (Przychodzińska-Kaciczak, 1989).

Using appropriate methods of hearing training by the teacher, considering the many types of musical activities, as well as the various means of musical perception has a special value in developing not only the special abilities of students but also their musical interests.

Another category of activities concerns the development of elementary musical skills, which – in contrast to talents – are the result of learning and depend on the child's effort (Januszewska-Warych, 2006). Musical abilities can be divided into creative, reproductive and perceptual ones.

The musical creation of children at the first stage of education is expressed in the form of improvisation. Despite the passage of time, music education still uses the method of universal musicalisation developed in the 19th century by Carl Orff, based, among others, on creating music (Wilk, Waligóra, Cebulak, 2017). *As much as possible creative activity, freedom and joy in a child's dealing with music, as close as possible to the child's psyche, their musical needs – this is an accurate description of this method of universal musicalisation* (Przychodzińska-Kaciczak, 1979).

There are two types of improvisation:

- 1) free;
- 2) directed – with imposing melodic, rhythmic, and formal discipline.

Vocal improvisation initially makes a child uncomfortable and is difficult for them. It is inhibited by shyness towards peers and teachers. With time, however, when it develops, it becomes students' favourite form of musical activity. Instrumental improvisation brings joy from its first attempts. The possibility of using a musical instrument is something new and attractive for a child. Moreover, free improvisation, not limited by orders or patterns, provides a true opportunity to broaden the imagination and enjoy own spontaneous

works. Directed improvisation can be accomplished by arranging melodies to a previously rhythmized poem or set rhythm, arranging a successor to a given predecessor, supplementing musical compositions using contrast, or creating expressions in a specific form. Ostinato, reprise form, roundabout, canon, and variations are also used in early childhood education. The level of difficulty of the forms, as well as the rhythmic and melodic themes must be varied and adapted to the instrumental capabilities of students (Przychodzińska-Kaciczak, 1979). Opportunities for children's creativity develop abilities of original and individual expression, develop independence, broaden knowledge, deepen sensitivity, and, as a result, lead to the development of personality.

The second category of skills includes reproductive vocal activities, such as singing songs and reading notes with voice, and instrumental activities, such as the reproduction of heard melodies on an instrument, making melodies from a notation, playing the rhythm of a recording, repeating a rhythm, etc. Training of instrumental skills at the first stage of education takes place using a variety of instruments, such as recorders, bells, and percussion instruments with undefined pitch (drums, tambourine, gong, triangle, castanets, harpsichords, etc.). Both vocal and instrumental reproductive exercises support the broadening of the students' repertoire. Moreover, appropriate teacher activities, enabling students to fully understand and experience their musical pieces, have a positive impact on the emotional development of children. The impact of musical exercises on the cognitive performance of preschool children became the subject of research conducted by Dr. Frances Raucher, a psychologist working at the University of Wisconsin, USA. The results of observations presented in 1997 showed that learning to play piano has a long-term effect on the development of visual and spatial functions in children. It has been found that the learning and reproduction of music modifies neural pathways associated with spatial perception, which are crucial for higher brain functions (Kozłowska-Lewna, 2012).

The last category of skills refers to the broadly understood perception of music, which is most often associated with any reception manifestations concerning the hearing of individual elements of a musical piece and the whole composed of these elements, as well as tracking any changes that occur in it and the ability to absorb its expression. Perceptual skills are of a great importance in the process of learning music. They concern the perception and understanding of many complex aspects of music, through which they

prepare children to participate in a culture of high artistic value. These skills will allow them to value musical works and consciously choose a repertoire in the future. Listening to musical pieces influences the shaping of the emotional sphere in children. In the course of her research, Wiesława Sacher proved that daily listening to appropriately selected music pieces from the Baroque period, changed weekly, conducted as part of integrated education, brought positive changes in shaping the emotionality of students. The studies used the EAS-C questionnaires of Arnold H. Buss and Robert Plomin in the Polish adaptation of Włodzimierz Oniszczenka, using three separate sheets: for the mother, father and teacher; and Mieczysław Choynowski's KSI test. Systematic listening to artistic music meant that children solved their class conflicts more easily and had no difficulty in focusing attention (Kozłowska-Lewna, 2012). Exercises supporting the development of perceptual skills in younger children include, among others, differentiating sounds, recognizing consonances and individual sounds, determining the direction of the melodic line (perception of the melody contour), determining the tonal center, the formal structure of the melody, perception of tonality, and perceiving the time by capturing the distribution of accented units (Bonna, 2015). Listening to music at early stages of development should be combined with activities such as movement, vocal, instrumental, as well as many types of expressions – verbal, art or theatrical (Wilk, Waligóra, Cebulak, 2017).

The transfer of knowledge about music is a special type of activity, in which the level of teacher's preparation – their knowledge in a given field – is decisive. Only free and conscious use of information on a given topic will allow for the proper selection of content carried out during classes, as well as the adjustment of the level of difficulty to the perceptual abilities of the students. At the first stage of education, students learn the basics of the history of music, literature and musical form, instrument science, performance measures and – to a lesser extent – the rules of music. The teacher assumes the role of a guide to the magical world of music. The use of the element of surprise, discovery, arousing students' curiosity about exploring the secrets of the world of sounds – these are actions that support the development of passion for music.

Training of sensitivity and so-called "positive motivations for music" is a prerequisite for the development of musical interests and the beginning of a way to understand artistic values in music (Przychodzińska-Kaciczak 1989). These values have twofold functions. Most of all, they are a condition of reaching the

world of musical culture, but they also have their own sense of upbringing. They enrich the sphere of specific aesthetic feelings, which broaden the general sensitivity of feelings. The willingness of children to take up active musical activities can bring tangible benefits to their intellectual development. Musical education is an effective way to improve conceptual and holistic and creative thinking (Gardner, 1984). Extensive research conducted by, among others, M. F. Gardiner of Brown University in the USA proved that children between the ages of five and seven who were poorly prepared for school education caught up with their peers in learning to read and in math after seven months of music lessons (Kozłowska-Lewna, 2012). Musical education in Poland is carried out on two independent levels: in general education, focused on the development of a universal musical culture and amateur movement, and in a specialized system of music education, which deals with the preparation of professional musicians. From a global perspective, the Polish system of professional music education is perceived as one of the most effective. Unfortunately, its dynamic development led to a regression of universal music education, carried out in general schools. In Northern European countries, such as Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Finland, it is not just professional music practice that is attached, but the creation of broad opportunities for amateur music and a wide range of music teaching in public schools, also targeting the youngest children. Such activities have aimed at educating a society presenting a high degree of interest in classical music, and the development of amateur vocal and instrumental ensembles. In Poland, disproportions in the level of musical knowledge and skills presented by professional musicians and average members of society are much greater than in other countries. Germany is an example of a country which does not consider the integrated approach to teaching arts subjects. Music and art classes are conducted separately while being a compulsory part of the curriculum. Furthermore, the teaching and running of artistic subjects are entrusted there, as in Denmark and Latvia, only to specialists. Thanks to this, Germans are known to be a large group of people actively practicing music, and band playing has become their national hobby and the goal of musical education (Kaczmarek, 2014). In many European countries, the importance of music in overall human development is recognized and used. Musical education has a special place in the system of general education, among others, in schools in Hungary. For many years, this country was a model for specialists in the field of music pedagogy in general



musical education. This is where the music education system of Zoltan Kodály was born, the elements of which are currently being implemented in other countries – also in Poland. From an early age, Hungarian children sing national and folk songs during music lessons, thanks to which they have chance not only to improve their vocal skills but, above all, to learn about the culture of their country and deepen their sensitivity. Students of schools with an extended dimension of music education achieve very good results not only in the field of musical skills but also in other subjects (Wilk, 2003).

## Conclusions

Education and upbringing with the use of music are indicated as the source of comprehensive development of the student. At one of the most important stages in the formation of the human personality – the younger school age – musical education cannot be perceived as a curiosity or a form of relaxation during classes. During this period, first musical preferences are formed, and musical talents are revealed which, if unnoticed, can be wasted. Contact with music significantly influences the development of a child's cognitive processes, perception skills, imagination, thinking, memory, concentration, and many other areas. Music is one of the most natural ways to stimulate the intellect and inspire children to take on their own creative activities. Understood in this way, the musical education process includes a series of tasks that not only stimulate a child's overall mental development but, above all, lead to shape their personality, develop motivation, emotionality and creativity and direct socially desirable attitudes (Sacher, 2012).

**Abstract:** Education of children at 7–11 age is characterized as multifaceted. It covers both the intellectual development of the individual and the sphere of their personality, as well. The article discusses the subject of music education as a field that supports overall human development, shapes their sensitivity, stimulates the development of social competences, and prepares for active participation in culture. The objects of consideration were the aims of music education. Their detailed analysis allows to determine the importance of this marginalized field in the educational process. The

text presents not only the benefits of stimulating the musical development of children but also the risks posed by omitting it in school situations. The specificity of didactic activities related to the musical activity of children at the first level of education is also presented.

**Keywords:** musical education, early childhood education, child development, participation in culture, musical activity

**Streszczenie:** Edukacja dzieci w młodszym wieku szkolnym ma charakter wielopłaszczyznowy – obejmuje zarówno działania wspierające rozwój intelektualny jednostki, jak również oddziaływania na sferę jej osobowości. W artykule podjęto temat edukacji muzycznej jako dziedziny, która wspiera holistyczny rozwój człowieka, kształtuje jego wrażliwość, stymuluje rozwój kompetencji społecznych, a także przygotowuje do aktywnego uczestnictwa w kulturze. Przedmiotem rozważań uczyniono cele edukacji muzycznej. Ich szczegółowa analiza pozwala określić znaczenie tej marginalizowanej dotąd dziedziny w procesie edukacyjnym. W tekście przedstawiono nie tylko korzyści wynikające ze stymulowania rozwoju muzycznego dzieci, ale także zagrożenia, jakie niesie ze sobą pomijanie tej sfery w edukacji formalnej. Przybliżono także specyfikę działań dydaktycznych odnoszących się do aktywności muzycznej dzieci na pierwszym etapie edukacyjnym.

**Słowa kluczowe:** edukacja muzyczna, edukacja wczesnoszkolna, rozwój dziecka, uczestnictwo w kulturze, aktywność muzyczna

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Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 14 lutego 2017 r. w sprawie podstawy programowej wychowania przedszkolnego oraz podstawy programowej kształcenia ogólnego dla szkoły podstawowej, w tym dla uczniów z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną w stopniu umiarkowanym lub znacznym, kształcenia ogólnego dla branżowej szkoły I stopnia, kształcenia ogólnego dla szkoły specjalnej przysposabiającej do pracy oraz kształcenia ogólnego dla szkoły policealnej, które opublikowane zostało w Dzienniku Ustaw z dnia 24 lutego 2017 r. Poz. 356.

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