

DIFFICULTIES IN THE MUSICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN AND POSSIBLE MODELS TO OVERCOME THEM

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Abstract: *Many authors have written about the importance of music in the education of preschool children and represented that importance of musical education in preschool institutions in different ways. In the book Metodika muzičkog vaspitanja predškolske dece Božidar D. Stefanović writes that all work in the education of preschool children is focused on esthetically, mentally, morally and physically preparing the child for life. The author stresses that esthetic education is unthinkable without musical activity in the work with preschool children. Experiencing music, whether through listening or performing, influences the development of a sense for beauty, and in that way they develop their artistic taste, and consequently their musical taste (Stefanovic, 1958, 19). This is why early musical experiences are important, here it is essential for the pedagogue and the parent to be capable and trained to encourage the child and develop a wish for further exploration of the “magical world” of music, through an adequate choice of music.*

Key words: *Experiencing music, aesthetic education, understanding and performing melody*

Musical development

The so called *musical babbling* is considered to be a period of vital importance for the musical development in early childhood. From three to six years children develop their musical ability at an astonishing rate, and

manifest their potential to study and understand primarily the musical characteristic of their culture (Andre, 2009 : 24).

During the primary musical development, children develop the mental perception for understanding music. E. Gordon explains this period by comparing it to cable television in which the pictures are available to all channels but a television (sample) is needed for them to be visually represented. The music potential is very sensitive at this age it is susceptible to both positive and negative influences. There is no doubt that every child is born with a certain potential, but equally important is the so called *active dialogue with music occurrences*, i.e. the adequate positive environment (family, preschool, surroundings) which will follow the needs of the child and adequately react to them. The music development of children is closely tied to the level of general development; therefore a certain level of maturity is needed for certain music achievements. Pedagogues talk about the so called *sensitivity periods*, about the optimal period for learning music (Andre, 2009: 25).

New research shows that music development starts as early as the prenatal period (before birth), i.e. that the fetus reacts to sound by accelerating the frequency of the heart from the sixth month of pregnancy (Верњи, Ајзенберг). The famous music pedagogue Suzuki, considered that *prenatal stimulation* is of immense importance. In that respect, he recommended to future mothers to sing to their children even before birth, to expose themselves to the children as much as possible. Latter research showed that children whose mothers followed these instructions reacted to music and expected musical stimuli sooner than other children (Šetler, 1985). As soon as five weeks the child reacts to vary loud sounds and sudden musical stimuli by moving the body and contracting. From the third month most children develop the so called *sound localization*, the child turns its head in the direction of the sound. After the fifth month ensues a sound stimuli differentiation period, and shortly after that the child reacts to music not only through movement but with sounds. Around the ninth month, when first words start occurring, the child starts to show heightened interest not only for the melody the text of the song that it hears. In the second half of the first year it will start to imitate rhythmic but also tone elements, the development of music memory.

When we talk about the types of musical development, it usually refers to the ways a child reacts to music in a certain period of general development. Therefore, we will pay attention to the development of musical perception, cognitive musical development, and affective musical development, development of vocal reaction and to the components of musical development.

Musical perception of pitch is key for the understanding and performing melody. Confusion regularly occurs around these concepts.

Children are frequently dazed when the grown up ask them to define the tone as high or low, since they are used to these concepts in a different context (visual). Three year olds, for example, chose a picture of an airplane in the sky as an example of a low sound (since it looked small, low), and a picture of an airplane on the ground as an example of a high tone (Andre, 2009). Confusion around the concepts *high – low* can also be noticed in adults who have not been formally exposed to music enough. However we can help children understand these concepts through a parallel auditory and visual presentation of low that is high tones. The same principle can be used for the concept of tone length. When it comes to the concepts of loud and soft sounds we can conclude that children distinguish them spontaneously at the earliest age. Regarding to melody, the child will first notice the melodic contour, movement, and only latter melodic elements, intervals etc.

As a rule, rhythm represents an element of music language which children can perceive quite well from the earliest childhood, and the reason for that probably lies in the human primordial connection with ancient magic rituals and their mystical we could say exoteric function. Rhythm, defined as a sequence of different durations which do not need to incorporate pitch, is sometimes recognized by children in the first year of life. Of course we are only talking about differentiating length, without metrics (children can distinguish between long – short, but usually not between the mentioned length and accents). Rhythm at this age, and latter, is connected to movement firstly spontaneous and latter directed (by the preschool teacher).

Children often mix different terms such as *high, loud and fast* with the terms *low, soft and slow*. Mixing of these terms can also be noticed in latter development when it changes into unnatural merging of the terms. Therefore children or even adults with insufficient music experience will perform slow musical content softly, and fast content loudly. From the earliest age we have to work on distinguishing these terms or in other words correctly understanding them. For the correct perception of these terms adequate examples are of essential importance since children often form their own *code* and *key* for understanding, hence insisting on these terms if they are not followed by concrete examples is condemning them to failure due to the abstract nature of these terms.

When we talk about musical ability we have to know that this entails a whole array of abilities and that their identification and development in children presuppose an adequate level of competency of the teachers. Therefore it is essential to know some basic terms which are closely connected to the identification and development of music abilities.

Musical sensitivity (sensitivity) is a genetic predisposition which is manifested in the child's ability to feel and show pleasure and interest towards a certain musical opus. We can say that it entails the perception and understanding idea of the musical work, musical phrase or just the topic. Of

course this predisposition can be developed through active engagement in music.

Musical perception represents a *logical continuation* of musical sensitivity and it is present if the sensitivity is already present, especially through active engagement in music from the earliest age. Musical perception represents the ability to perceive the musical opus not only as a whole but as a sum of different elements of the musical language (melody, rhythm, harmony).

Musical performance represents the ability to reproduce musical performances and images. That simultaneously presents experiencing music through a personal prism and understanding, the formation of a personal framework for experiencing musical harmony.

Musical memory is manifested through the ability to repeat acquired audio wholes. It is developed through systematic musical activity fragments of whole musical works of art.

Musical imagination represents a psychological process through which new musical pictures are formed, starting from the existing and learned pictures. Their development is possible through specific activities.

Musical thought or *musical way of thinking* incorporates the existence of musical pictures, performances, musical memory and sensibility. It is developed through an active engagement in music but also through developing the *inner hearing* that is the ability to completely experience musical content without the need for its active interpretation. A listener who manages to acquire such a way of thinking, will approach the musical work in a completely different way, and his/her perception of the musical language elements (melody, rhythm, metrics or harmony) will in many ways vary from the approach of an ordinary listener. This musical phenomenon is frequently connected to the term *musicality* which incorporates three important elements, and they are: intelligence, sensitivity and creativity.

Difficulties in musical development

When we talk about difficulties, they are most frequently manifested in an insufficiently developed ear for music (imprecise pitch or rhythmic intonation) as well as in musical memory. The aforementioned difficulties are frequently interpreted as signs of the lack of musicality which is a misjudgment. It is common for confusion to occur when differentiating difficulties in musical development, and so for example insufficiently developed musical memory is interpreted as insufficient ability to intonate precise pitch.

Many studies confirm that every person is musical to a certain extent and that cases of someone being completely unmusical are very rare. Experts, however, speak about *slow hearing*, a term which adequately describes what

was once considered unmusicality. What actually occurs are problems in the global psychophysical development of the child and which are manifested in music, insufficiently developed ability to notice tone relations, etc. (Andre, 2009:35).

If we view the term musicality (as it should be viewed) as a complex system of appropriate responses to musical stimuli and not through a simplified version as differentiating of tone pitch and lasting in children, we can agree that nonmusical children do not exist. Reality has shown the writer of this work that a lack of adequate musical education, musical vocal or instrumental practice, can so thoroughly bury the existence of musical ability that it is very difficult to identify, and this is the most common reason for wrongly labeling children as unmusical.

Of course, there is nothing easier than to label a child as unmusical, not care about the fact that its voice might still be underdeveloped, that because of insufficient musical stimulation in the environment in which it lived, it doesn't have a developed musical memory. Of course, for a successful outcome a lot of dedication is needed from the parents and preschool teacher. Recently inclusion has been in the center of attention as a model for overcoming different levels of development in certain children. On the other hand, musical education, in its professional form, is based on the individualized approach, since currently there doesn't exist a more efficient model for achieving the performance. When we talk about overcoming elementary difficulties in musical development in children, in the framework of the public system of education, we could say that the golden middle would be the best, that is implementing a certain level of individualistic approach towards children with special needs, which most certainly may not include separating them from the group because collective performance would have a stimulating effect. The same model should be implemented in the case of an insufficiently developed musical memory to in time gain self-confidence and to develop the ability to precisely reproduce musical fragments.

Possible models of overcoming difficulties in musical development

– dedication to proper breathing and voice posture

Proper breathing in the function of a musical performance

Breathing technique in the function of a musical performance is the same as in usual breathing only during singing we inhale deeper and take in more air. During singing the exhale is more important, it should be controlled and much slower (Stefanović, 1958). Before every vocal instrumentation we need to focus on breathing exercises (inhaling and exhaling exercises), voice setting exercises – voice posture, as well as exercises for the right pronunciation of words and diction. During the preliminary setting of proper breathing, the best example is breathing through an open mouth while lying

on the back. In an adequately prepared room (aired room, chairs placed in a semicircle, harmonizing the room according to the activity which will be used etc.) a preschool teacher can tell a certain story, for example a bear who went to a cave to spend the winter there. The children will lay on the floor with open mouths and slowly inhale and exhale imitating a bear which is sleeping. In this way their body will be in the right position in which all of the organs which are needed for proper breathing will be activated. After this exercise the children can while still imitating a bear inhale deeply through the nose and slowly exhale through the mouth. Since all children enjoy lying on the floor, this position of lying will form a calm and relaxed exercise among children. After that next is waking up of the bear which is followed by yawning, deep inhales of ear, and also stretching of the body (since the whole act represents the resonator in singing, we need to wake it up). Of course relevant to the theme, this activity could be realized in late autumn or after the winter holidays, e.g. if the topic of the activity is learning a song about a bear.

Children have come across this breathing exercise many times at birthdays. While blowing out the candles on birthday cakes the children breathe in deeply after which they blow it out (they blow out the air quickly). Also, during everyday lunch while blowing on the soup, children practice breathing exercises (the air is slowly being exhaled). While practicing these activities in a preschool, the children should be instructed to pucker their lips, inhale deeply through the nose, keep the air for a little bit and equally and with control exhale in order to cool the soup. An interesting example where more consonants are used is imitating the locomotive. Children form a line and imitate the movements of a locomotive. After that the preschool teacher can ask the children if the locomotive starts at the same speed and keeps the same speed during the whole ride, or if it changes the speed during the ride. The children then with the same syllables imitate the movements of the locomotive from the station, then its acceleration and after that its arrival at the station where it slows down.

Exercises for voice posture

Many authors recommend that the first exercises for voice posture be same tone games. It is desirable that the preschool teacher makes up a game or a story through which can imitate a phenomenon on the same tone. For example barking of a dog- aw, aw; duck- quack, quack; sparrow- chirp, chirp; car honking – honk, honk; bells – jingle, jingle etc. For the beginning we use intonation on the tone e1 because that is the natural pitch of a child's voice. Singing in the same tone is used to direct the children's attention to one tone. It is useful to use different rhythmic during the performance, in order to develop a feeling for rhythm and to direct the children's attention and escape monotony. Simultaneously the preschool teacher can notice which

child possesses the ability to reproduce the same tone and the ability to fluently repeat the same rhythm.

Games for voice posture on the same tone through onomatopoeia:

а) б) в)

Ав, ав, ав, ав. Га, га, га, га, га. Цин, цин, цин, цин, цин, цин.

After the children had mastered the exercise through onomatopoeia, the preschool teacher can continue with small games. For example, the preschool teacher calls the children one by one, and they respond in the same intonation. The preschool teacher should as frequently as he/she can address the children through song, in order to encourage them to do the same. For example the preschool teacher asks the children a question through singing and asks them to give him/her an answer through singing. Games can still be in the same tone e1, but it is desirable to change the intonation in time, moving the tone a half a tone upwards (e.g. f1, fis1, g1, gis1, to a1).

After the games in the same tone, exercises on the descending minor third interval are used, which have already been mentioned (imitating the cuckoo, cuckoo). It is recommended that in the games in the descending minor third, in younger groups intonation: g1-e1 be used, after some time followed by as1 – f1 and in the end a1 – fis1. Games on the interval of descending minor third can begin with a calling game, one child has to hide, and the other has to find it while calling him/her, after which the hidden child answers (during the game the children exchange roles, or all children can be the “finders”).

Games on the interval of descending minor third in the form of calling:

Перво дете: Друго дете:

Где си Ма - ри - ја? Ту сам Ни - ко - ла.

However, while calling each other by name it can happen that children come to a name which cannot be sung from the tone g1, because the speaking accent changed, e.g. in the names Aneta, Mirela, Teodora, and similar. That is why the preschool teacher will be the first to start singing with a lower tone and then the children (if the children call each other).

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