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DIAGNOSIS OF PREFERENCES AND SPECIAL TALENTS IN THE CHILD'S – OPINIONS OF SURVEYED TEACHERS

Abstract: The article presents considerations regarding the process of diagnosing child's preferences and musical talents possible to be implemented and necessary in general education. The material reported the multiplicity and complexity of the problem mainly in relation to the conduct of this type of diagnosis in the group of preschoolers and children attending lower grades of primary school. Some shortcomings and limitations of teachers-educators resulting from the preparation and skills in this respect were also indicated. The presented results may constitute an incentive for further explorations in the field of early identification of the child's potential.

Keywords: diagnosis, preferences and special talents, general music education, child, teacher

INTRODUCTION

A child born into the world is seen by his or her nearest and dearest as a unique, brilliant and exceptional being. It is commonly believed that every child carries an unlimited potential, therefore especially parents place great hopes in it. Any little human usually has talents in some area; what is important, is for the child to reveal them relatively early, in order for adults to help them develop. An area of child's activity revealed at the earliest is music, manifested in vocal or instrumental expression, music and motion, as well as music perception. Psychologists note that the earlier a given talent is discovered, the greater the chance that an individual, supported by his or her immediate environment, develops it successfully. In this paper, it proved very important to collect information regarding types of activities

taken by teachers and parents to identify musical predispositions and develop child's musical talents.

CHILD'S MUSICAL PREDISPOSITIONS AND APTITUDE – PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Music pedagogy uses such terms as: musical predispositions, music activity, musicality and musical aptitude. They have their references to psychological terms providing more detailed and precise definitions, thus making them applicable in education (Kisiel, 2012, p. 159).

The term “predisposition” is defined as a trait related to one's aptitude or abilities making the person particularly competent for doing something (Skorupka, Auderska, Lempicka, 1993, p. 628). In the case of musical predispositions, we point to characteristics likely to promote one's music activity, e.g. when a child has a nice voice, sings in tune, likes playing and experimenting on musical instruments, gladly skips around, sways or dances while listening to music, pays attention to presented music, tells about his or her favourite musical works etc. (Kataryńczuk-Mania, Kołodziejcki, Kisiel, 2018, p. 236). In their immediate environment, a young person revealing such predispositions is referred to as a “little musician”, “little artist” or “self-taught musician”. During family events, the child gladly presents his or her skills, it is pleased and contented when it is praised and rewarded with applause. Parents and grandparents organise private shows of their offspring, to the delight of the child and gathered guests.

Teachers-educators also use the term “music activity”, determining its level and type. Music activity is usually defined as unprompted willingness of students to perform a specific musical task (Okoń, 2004, p. 16), occurring when a child, regardless of the outcome of his or her activity, spontaneously sings, recites a text rhythmically, dances, moves to the music and while listening to music, plays musical instruments, actively listens to music or improvises. This specific type of animation is the most commonly used, developed and specifically-oriented disposition of pupils in pre-school and early childhood education. A child naturally pursues activity and growth of his or her abilities, regardless of whether it is aware of his or her predispositions. These tendencies are naturally intensified in the pre-school and early school period.

“Musicality” appears to be a more ambiguous term, although it determines an individual's ability to experience emotions and aesthetic sensations related to perceiving, creating and performing music. This trait is determined by sensory processing and emotional sensitivity of the body and aesthetic sensitivity to dif-

ferent musical phenomena. In its totality, it impacts the sense of timbre, harmony, rhythm, musical style, tempo or tonality. Also, musicality allows one to understand different musical forms, styles, contrast, balance, tensions etc. It also enables one to experience different musical moods, and over time, to judge or evaluate musical works (Chodkowski, 1995, p. 589). In a kindergarten and lower grades of primary school, musicality is developed by intentional and frequent exposure of pupils to artistic music, as well as by use of well-matched methodological and musical material. This is a long-term process requiring considerable patience.

Musical abilities refer to personal characteristics of a human being, as they determine acquisition of experience and skills in the field of creation, performance and perception of music (Shuter-Dyson, Gabriel, 1986, p. 45). These are relatively constant, genetically determined individual traits that impact the pace of learning and developing music agility and skills underlying the ability to listen and comprehend, perform and create musical works. Musical abilities are measured and assessed using music tests. Psychology acknowledges musical ability as a product of nature – which means it is innate, and as a product of culture – as to some extent, it depends of environmental factors (Eby, Smutny, 1998). Doubts arise when it comes to determining the balance between the innate and environmental factors in relation to its growth. Studies to date have shown that innate musical talent is induced by favourable musical experiences, especially those we have early in life (Lewandowska, 1978, p. 7).

The language of music, that is the arrangement of sounds comprising a musical statement, is full of meanings and symbols (Kisiel, 2015, pp. 9–17). Therefore, the meaning of music may be considered from three basic perspectives. Emotional meaning is the basic perspective reflecting one's feelings and presenting analogous forms typical of one's mental state; it is governed by intensity and time. Aesthetic meaning may be referred to as secondary, as it refers to such concepts as: work, artist, recipient, and the related form of music perception. Semantic meaning on the other hand, is linked to the idea of a sign, code, and it is an inimitable, unique and irreplaceable substance. In this context, the sign is essential for proper interpretation of the emotional content of music. The fundamental musical substance is sound and its characteristics, as well as components of a musical work. The sound structure encompasses perceptible emotional and aesthetic content. The use of sound and its characteristics in different ways, allows a child to discover the sources and possibilities of his or her own creation. A child receives music with the sense of hearing, and has considerable experience in this respect (Dyląg, 2002, p. 70). The code of a musical language is learned through emotional and creative transformation of sound structures. A young person treats this code as a means of communication with the external world and builds up his or her own collection of values carried by music.

Issues of substance, related to differentiation of music preferences, abilities and achievements, as well as methods of measuring those constructs, can also be found in papers by: Beata Bonna (2014), Paweł Trzos (2015) or Maciej Kołodziejcki (2009).

Educators' knowledge of terminology and their sensitivity to the need to diagnose pupils' musical predispositions and talents, translates into more efficient organisation and more precise implementation of educational tasks in pre-school and early childhood education.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND EXAMPLES OF AUTHOR'S OWN RESULTS

Results of diagnostic measurements presented in this section of the paper were based on the procedure involving an interview survey (Zwolińska, 2012, p. 104) applied to three research groups: parents, kindergarten and elementary teachers, as well music educators/eurythmics teachers working in kindergartens and primary schools. The aim of the study was to describe specific activities making up the process of diagnosing child's musical preferences and talents, that are feasible and necessary to be implemented in general education, as well as to indicate shortcomings and limitations in this respect resulting from qualifications and skills of teachers participating in the study. In the presented excerpt from a broader study on the impact of music on child development, attention was focused on the following question: what is the procedure for early diagnosis of child's musical predispositions and abilities? Below, are presented results of these explorations, in consideration of specific groups of respondents, appended with a relevant commentary and references to the literature.

Parents are the first to notice anything special in their child, they closely monitor their activity, observe the intensity of changes in their behaviour, sometimes they record the events revealing uniqueness of their little one. While conducting exploratory research, a group of 240 parents of preschoolers and children in early school age was asked a question: do and if so, how parents try to recognise musical predispositions of their children and what activities they initiate in relation to the observed qualities?¹. Of all study participants in this group, as many as 79.1% of respondents reported that they intuitively and naturally observed their children during any initiated games. Observed symptoms clearly pointing to musical predispositions made 26.3% of the parents from this group to enrol their children to extra music and eurythmics classes or singing and dancing classes,

¹ Diagnostic measurements conducted in a school year 2018/2019 on a group of 240 parents of preschoolers and children in early school age from selected cities of the Silesian Voivodship.

usually organised by culture and education centres operating nearby their place of residence. Their decision was inspired by the need to provide their child with organised leisure-time activities or to satisfy their child's interest in music, and provide for continued development of the observed music-oriented pursuits. Most often, respondents conducting such activities were parents who in their youth were themselves members of different kinds of music ensembles or dance groups, and they also confirmed their considerable interest in music and dancing, additionally revealing their unfulfilled dreams about pursuing an artistic career. For the remaining part of the respondents (73.7%) in this group, results of their observations have not inspired them to provide their children with music-oriented education. However, when their offspring pursued dancing or singing activities, they were filled with great joy, and some, in certain situations, were embarrassed. Of the entire group of 240 participants, a mere 20.8% of the sample reported that apart from brief observation, they managed to verify musical predispositions of their children on their own. Most often, their attention was focused on correctness of the song, nursery rhyme or movements performed by minors. Few, and these were usually musically educated parents, applied activities using simple forms of verification, being components of tests or auditions commonly used in music education, checking the level of musical abilities. Among these, children were asked to perform tasks consisting in repeating melodies played on a musical instrument with their voice, repeating rhythmical patterns, determining the number of harmony components, whereas as regards motion, reproducing marching, running or hopping sequences. Responding parents usually conducted their diagnostic measurements with a view to continue their child's education in a music-oriented establishment. Very often the parents admitted that in view of the promising assessment results, they would start to prepare their children to play a musical instrument (piano, keyboard, diatonic bells, thin whistle), or not waiting for a spontaneous action of their offspring, they themselves initiated playing to music or while listening to music. They also declared, that they intentionally attended some extra music classes with their children already in early childhood (e.g. *Muzyczna akademia malucha*, *Filharmonia dla najmłodszych*, child talent shows, eurhythmics classes, etc.) and revealed their interest in different, usually online publications (e.g. *Muzykalne dziecko*, *Muzyka stymulująca inteligencję dziecka*, *Mozart dla umysłu dziecka*² etc.), that were all focused on importance of music activity for the all-round human development. While analysing the results of the entire sample (240 respondents), considerable interest of parents in the impact of music on their children and their

² Online resources search: <http://muzykalnedziecko.pl>, <https://www.mjakmama24.pl/niemowle/rozwoj-niemowlaka/jak-muzyka-dla-dzieci.html>, <https://mamadu.pl/116561,efekt-mozarta,Mozart-dla-umyslu-dziecka-muzyka-relaksacyjna.pl> [access: 12.03.2019].

interest in different forms of music activity was reported. Decreasing intensity of this phenomenon together with child's age was also observed, as well as different expectations in relation to girls and boys. What is intriguing, in a group of parents having two or more children, younger child undertook musical activity more frequently. As indicated by the respondents, younger siblings were inspired by activities pursued by older siblings, whose music activity on the other hand resulted from education activities pursued in a kindergarten or at school. Analysis of the results allowed to conclude that respondents (primarily mothers) would gather various musical works, collect CDs, create audio folders which according to their declarations were played back to their children with the use of the latest media. Few parents represented a traditional approach in this respect, that is they were themselves singing, chanting children songs, playing a musical instrument for the child at home (guitar, piano, keyboard, accordion, violin, flute), they were taking their children to music concerts.

Possibilities of early diagnosis of child's musical abilities outlined in the presented analysis from the parents' point of view have revealed certain negligence and departures resulting from limited knowledge and diagnostic skills, general social and cultural situation we have observed in the era of media dominance and development of consumerist attitude, prepared to receive and not act creatively in different areas and forms of music activity. To remedy the situation and enhance parents' sensitivity to development of musicality of their children, any attempts to create favourable conditions in child's immediate environment and develop parents' interest in popular science publications would undoubtedly be of help. A child growing up in a family whose members like singing, siblings play music, and everyone listens to different kinds of music, stands a high chance of developing their musical abilities.

One of the tasks of a kindergarten and elementary teacher is making a pedagogical diagnosis aimed at identifying events, situations and problems encountered in their pedagogical work, such as e.g. educational difficulties, disadvantages or field-specific abilities. In many cases, the purpose of such examination is to obtain information essential to pursue remedial actions that will allow to design supporting activities. Reflective and inquiring teachers-tutors will manage to find and apply proper diagnostic instruments allowing them to objectively evaluate musical predispositions of their pupils and recognise the level of their musical abilities. During the second stage of the study, survey data was collected allowing to obtain supplementary information related to assumptions of the studied problem: how kindergarten and elementary teachers diagnose musical predispositions and abilities of their pupils/students and what is its purpose? Information was obtained from a group of 150 surveyed educators who confirmed they had conducted such

examinations to a lesser or larger extent ³. In general, the respondents used observation focused on children during specific teaching situations, where a teacher was carrying out a task set out in the core curriculum ⁴ and in a selected course curriculum for different forms of music activity. 55.3% of respondents reported they had been using their own, personally developed or in-house systems of evaluating artistic achievements which in their opinion also allowed to assess the level of student's music activity; they were primarily elementary teachers. 25.3% of kindergarten teachers reported on the implementation of innovative programmes supporting development of children's talents in their establishments, i.e. "Nie zgubić talentów", "Zdolny przedszkolak", "Dziecko zdolne w przedszkolu" etc. Among indicators in specific areas of development allowing to recognise child's musical talent, the following criteria were reported: the child likes to participate in music classes, it is fascinated by the world of sounds, it likes singing, reproduces rhythmical patterns correctly, responds to musical accent, conceives original melodies, is able to associate different phenomena with music, likes dancing and experimenting with movement, is willing to play percussion instruments, is able to determine tempo, dynamics (loudness) and pitch, is happy to participate in concerts (Kucharska, Pawłowska-Niedbała, Sikora-Banasik, 2017, p. 106). A talented child is one who combines three qualities: he or she is gifted with special abilities, e.g. musical abilities, is strongly motivated (e.g. wishes to do something in life, is curious about the world, he or she is a seeker), and can think creatively (Bates, Munday, 2005). Some respondents reported on indicators which in their opinion were likely to support development of child's abilities. These included: provision of an interesting singing material, audio material and good quality musical instruments stimulating one's imagination, leaving time for reflection, encouragement to record their ideas, allowing to look at certain things their way ("as a child"), rewarding any manifestations of individuality and willingness to ask questions, accepting any musical statements made, encouraging to explore and solve problems. In their explorations, kindergarten teachers participating in the study very often referred to Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences as the source of inspiration and recommendations regarding evaluation of intelligence, including music intelligence of their pupils (Poleszak, Porzak, Kata, Kopik, 2014, p. 19).

³ Diagnostic measurements conducted in a school year 2018/2019 on a group of 150 kindergarten and elementary teachers from selected educational establishments across the Silesian Voivodship.

⁴ Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 14th February 2017 on the core curriculum for preschool education and the core curriculum for general education in primary schools, Journal of Laws 2017, item 356, p. 6.

Music educators (including eurhythmics teachers) participating in the study gave more informed replies related to measuring musical aptitude in preschoolers⁵. In this group, respondents had knowledge of a number of diagnosing techniques, including the HJ Test – i.e. abbreviated name of Gdański System Badania Zdolności Muzycznych [Gdańsk System for Music Aptitude Measurement] developed by Jan Horbulewicz and Zbigniew Janczewski (1990, p. 8) and Edwin E. Gordon's Intermediate Measures of Music Audiation (Kamińska, Kotarska, 2000, p. 11). Test material was used by music educators to measure musical aptitude of 6-year-old children completing their pre-school instruction, to suggest children and their parents that their children should start education in a music school. Simplified diagnostic forms developed on the basis of the a/m tools were also used in matching musical content with forms of music activity, and performance of a more demanding artistic programme with possible verification during kindergarten. In this place, it would be advisable for educators working with three- and four-year-olds to use an effective tool for measuring music aptitude named *Zabawa muzyczna AUDIE*. The instrument described by E. Zwolińska (2004, p. 241) facilitates understanding and analysis of musical abilities of younger preschoolers, ensures stimulation of child's musical development, provides essential information about child's individual music needs, it can also be used to track pupil's audiation (ability to imagine music in one's head).

Similar results were obtained in the analysis of responses by elementary teachers (44.7% of the respondents). Most likely, this results from the fact that kindergarten and elementary teachers have for already quite a while received instruction in only one teacher training major (field of study). Obtained data shows that a popular method of learning how to determine musical skills and interests of pupils in primary schools has been observation (Skorny, 1975, p. 43) of the processes and outcomes, as well as skills of an individual. Usually this took the form of student introspection, which allowed a teacher to identify child's attitude to music and to the presence of music in his or her life and education. Application of this technique was aimed at collecting observations concerning child's attitude to specific music tasks set by a teacher, music activities including group singing, finding out child's responses to the elements of music, i.e. rhythm, melody, harmony, dynamics or changes in the mood of music listened to, and noting down child's responses and behaviour during organized creative tasks. Educators participating in the study pointed to significance of the used diagnostic technique feasible in determining the level of musical aptitude of individual pupils, if only to customize the teaching

⁵ Diagnostic measurement in the form of an interview was conducted on a group of 25 music educators (eurhythmics teachers) from selected kindergartens in the Silesian Voivodship.

and learning process, but also to pick out children to enrol to extracurricular music projects, to take part in competitions, prepare artistic events and development of supporting activities for students with poor educational attainment syndrome (Dyrda, 1999, p. 24). Teachers participating in the study failed to confirm the use of commonly known and used diagnostic instruments to assess the level of musical aptitude.

Many times, as emphasized by the respondents, elementary teachers obtained information from parents or peers of a given pupil that a talented pupil attends his or her class. A considerable number of primary school teachers failed to perform specialist measurements of musical aptitude of their pupils. At times, it was taken into account during general assessment of child's abilities or wrongly identified as evaluated learning outcomes in the field of music education. It was also reported that only few respondents in this group got familiar with Edwin E. Gordon's Intermediate Measures of Music Audiation while receiving instruction at a university, most often during writing of their theses or during classes within a given course. However, in their daily educational work, they failed to use the encountered test instrument, and their diagnosing experience only involves taking general aptitude measurements (Gardner, 2002).

Music classes at the elementary level in primary schools are also conducted by music teachers⁶ who increase the number of their obligatory working hours by teaching Music as a separate subject isolated from the integrated education curriculum for grade III or for the entire instruction level (in grades I–III). These teachers (conducting approximately 35% of music classes, the remaining number being held by elementary teachers) approach the measurement of student's musical aptitude with greater awareness. While measuring the aptitude, only few have used standardised tests. All others confined themselves to the use of non-standardised measuring instruments, usually of their own design. They were mainly focused on music auditions, where a pupil was asked to clap out (repeat) a rhythm, sing a song or determine sound pitch. On this basis, they declared their support and assistance to selected individuals, by developing customized curricula for them. And here arises a doubt whether this kind of diagnosis still comprises evaluation of music aptitude or is it already the measurement. What follows from the analysis of the obtained material, is that many music teachers had a negative attitude towards the tests due to their ignorance, but they were also worried that they would not be able to use them in practice. According to the respondents, inability to make a reliable diagnosis of musical aptitude also resulted from limited time allocated

⁶ Diagnostic measurement in the form of an interview was conducted on a group of 15 music teachers from selected kindergartens in the Silesian Voivodship.

in their establishments for direct contact with pupils and music. Numerous and detailed recommendations in the curriculum, reduced number of lessons and modest working conditions put considerable pressure on teachers, who avoided similar situations which they referred to as awkward. What is more, the need to develop customized curricula for specially gifted children failed to motivate teachers to diagnosing and evaluating musical aptitude of their pupils. Those who declared the need to conduct reliable tests and acknowledged their usability, very rarely made an effort to diagnose the precise level of musical aptitude of their pupils, using standardised measuring instruments.

CONCLUSION

The fact of conducting a diagnostic procedure by teachers provides evidence of their maturity as educators characterised by professional approach, reflectivity and criticism. In the case of music teachers, outcomes obtained as a result of such diagnosis provide grounds for searching for optimization of the means of instruction in the organized and implemented teaching and learning process. To accurately measure pupils' and students' musical aptitude, it is advisable to use a battery of standardised tests, and responsibly link the collected data to knowledge obtained during interviews with their parents and observation of child's music-oriented behaviour displayed in a group of kindergarten kids or peers at a primary school. The material obtained during the diagnosing procedure, revealing pupil's musical abilities and partial achievements, should be described to understand and properly interpret the obtained data, in consideration of the benefits of the personal development of a given individual.

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DIAGNOZA PREFERENCJI I UZDOLNIEŃ SPECJALNYCH DZIECKA
– OPINIE BADANYCH NAUCZYCIELI

Streszczenie: W artykule zaprezentowano rozważania dotyczące czynności diagnozowania preferencji i uzdolnień muzycznych dziecka możliwych do realizacji i koniecznych w powszechnej edukacji. W materiale odnotowano wielość i złożoność problemu głównie w odniesieniu do prowadzenia tego typu rozpoznania w grupie dzieci przedszkolnych i uczniów klas młodszych szkoły podstawowej. Wskazano również pewne niedostatki i ograniczenia nauczycieli-wychowawców wynikające z przygotowania i umiejętności w tym względzie. Przedstawione rezultaty mogą stanowić asumpt do dalszych eksploracji badawczych w zakresie wczesnego identyfikowania potencjału muzycznego dziecka.

Słowa kluczowe: diagnoza, preferencje i uzdolnienia specjalne, powszechna edukacja muzyczna, dziecko, nauczyciel