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“Listen to the World”. Musical Themes in Children's Literature as a Space for Knowledge Integration

„Słuchać całego świata” – wątek muzyczny w literaturze dla dzieci jako przestrzeń integracji wiedzy

KEYWORDS ABSTRACT

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The authors of this article analyse contemporary children's books containing a musical theme. Selected books were examined to determine their educational potential in promoting children's ability to integrate associative knowledge of music. The following research questions were formulated: can the content and form of the studied works initiate the integration of children's knowledge? What types of literary editing approaches promote knowledge integration? The study demonstrated that the analysed books can inspire educators to promote identity-building and the development of self-awareness, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and socio-cultural identity in children. They can provide students with the necessary tools for discovering their identity and true potential, becoming independent thinkers, formulating and expressing personal beliefs, and – above all – integrating their knowledge.

SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

literatura dla
dzieci, integracja
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w literaturze,
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sztuk

W artykule poddane zostały analizie współczesne utwory literackie dla dzieci zawierające wątek muzyczny. Skoncentrowano się głównie na ukazaniu potencjału wybranych tekstów dla celów edukacyjnych dotyczących osiągnięcia przez dzieci integracji wiedzy asocjującej z muzyką. W związku z powyższym postawiono następujące pytania: Czy treść i forma badanych utworów może inicjować proces integracji wiedzy dziecięcej? Jakie sposoby opracowania tekstów sprzyjają integracji? Analiza dowiodła, że zaproponowane lektury spełniają wszelkie warunki, by stać się inspiracją do budowania tożsamości dziecka w obszarze indywidualnej świadomości, poczucia własnej wartości, sprawczości, a także tożsamości społeczno-kulturowej. Dla uczniów obcowanie z tego typu utworami może stanowić warsztat służący odkrywaniu siebie i własnego potencjału, praktykowaniu samodzielności myślenia, formowaniu oraz wyrażaniu indywidualnych przekonań, i wreszcie – budowaniu zintegrowanej wiedzy.

Introduction

This article analyses contemporary children's literature containing a musical theme. Books representing a variety of literary genres and different approaches to dealing with the musical theme were selected for the analysis. The books were examined to determine their educational potential in promoting children's ability to integrate associative knowledge of music. The following research questions were formulated: can the content and form of the studied works initiate the integration of children's knowledge? What types of literary editing approaches promote knowledge integration?

According to social, political, and scientific discourse, the Polish educational system requires change despite the fact that it has undergone numerous reforms in recent decades. Polish schools have been criticized for deforming education, failing to deliver educational outcomes, and being unable to adapt to the requirements of the modern world. They have also been accused of stifling intellectual initiative and inhibiting the intellectual development of students and teachers, which, according to Dorota Klus-Stańska (2008), can be attributed to the fact that knowledge is perceived as set of messages (in line with the behaviorist paradigm) rather than a process of reflection and active construction in the mind (in accordance with the interpretative-constructivist paradigm). An attempt was made in this study to identify children's books and literary editing approaches that foster independent thinking and encourage the integration of music themed knowledge in elementary school students.

In the authors' opinion, the integration of knowledge, in the most profound sense of the term, is a process that is closely linked with the hermeneutic worldview.

This observation guided the suggestion that the hermeneutic approach, interiorized by the teacher – an intermediary in the integration process – is transferred to the student, the most important participant in that process. This model of experiencing reality offers an opportunity to annihilate the “transmission-reproduction” approach that is firmly grounded in the Polish educational system, prevents students from achieving their full potential (Dudzikowa, 1994, p. 133), and is closely associated with the mechanism of symbolic violence (Kwieciński, 2000).

The Concept of Integration in Education

The concept of integration has permeated various symbolic contexts in humanistic thought. In the most general terms, integration is a process by which various pieces are merged to produce a harmonious whole. According to Iwona Kopaczewska (2008, p. 23), the formal process of integrating different pieces in education is rooted in the broad humanistic perspective or the dominant philosophical, psychological, and pedagogical theories.

Marianna Szpiter (2004) argued that “the philosophical aspect stems from the conviction that the whole is not a simple sum of elements, but that it possesses certain inherent qualities that are absent in the constituent parts” (p. 33). As a discipline that is rooted in the humanist tradition, pedagogy is strongly linked with philosophy, and it guides scientific thought towards a holistic view of human beings in the process of human development and education. Lidia Marszałek (2020, p. 32) observed that in contemporary humanist philosophy, an individual is perceived as an integrated physical, mental and spiritual whole. Although all dimensions of human existence are regarded as valuable, the spiritual dimension is perceived as the key element that integrates and constitutes the remaining aspects of human life.

Agnieszka Nowak-Łojewska (2008) analysed the concept of integration in the psychological context and concluded that it is largely dependent on the subject matter of research. Educators generally rely on the principles of behavioural, cognitive, and humanistic psychology to describe and explore developmental mechanisms in children.

According to behaviourist theory, human behaviours are shaped by external factors that are modelled by the social environment (Kozielecki, 2000). The behaviourist model of education has been transposed to and firmly established in the educational context, and it posits that appropriately selected educational tasks act as stimuli to generate the desired responses in students. In educational systems based on behaviourist theory, integration is a process of coalescing knowledge at the external level by focusing on lesson planning, the subjects covered by the curriculum, the goals and content of education, as well as various methods of teaching and organizing the teaching process.

This approach to knowledge integration is predominant in the official rhetoric and the arguments formulated by the educational authorities, and it carries the risk of obfuscating the reality of education (Klus-Stańska, 2005; Klus-Stańska & Nowicka, 2005).

In humanistic psychology, humans are perceived as unique, harmonious, and complete beings who want to live in harmony with their nature, and want to be authentic and independent. Human beings supersede the sum of their parts, where the “I” and the “organism” form a coherent whole that we refer to as an individual. The drive for personal development is the key characteristic of human nature that is influenced by internal factors (Kozielecki, 2000, pp. 241–242). Humanistic psychologists tend to focus more on human emotions, natural inclinations, psychosocial needs, and relationships with others, than on instrumental skills, knowledge, or problem-solving abilities. In the school context, humanistic-oriented activities emphasise the importance of interactions that can be described (in the simplest of terms) as educational rather than instructional (Klus-Stańska, 2005, pp. 30–32); therefore, in this approach, integration can be achieved “by shifting the focus to a child’s emotional and moral development, motivational aspects of learning, relationships with others, children’s rights, and building strong bonds with peers through cooperation” (p. 32).

The cognitive approach, represented by constructivist theories of learning, is the last of the analysed psychological approaches to defining and justifying the concept of integration in education. The proponents of cognitive theory argue that human beings are autonomous subjects who receive, store, interpret, create and transmit information through language, and attach certain value to that information (Kozielecki, 2000, p. 170). According to the constructivists, learning is an investigative process that involves independent and group problem solving, asking questions, proposing solutions and interpretations. It has been assumed that personal development is a process of active change in cognitive structures (Klus-Stańska, 2005, p. 35). Therefore, the cognitive apparatus is used to organise knowledge about the external world, and the students’ personal attributes, needs, interests, knowledge, and previous experiences have to be considered in educational practice (Nowak-Łojewska, 2008, p. 39). From this perspective, integration in education is a process of merging facts at the internal, intellectual level, which is why educators should reflect on a child’s thought processes and the meanings constructed in a child’s mind (Klus-Stańska & Nowicka, 2005, p. 196).

Integration of Knowledge and the Hermeneutic Approach

The concept of integration is immensely popular in contemporary pedagogical thought, in particular in areas that are directly linked with education. Integration

undoubtedly corresponds to the philological and philosophical tenets of hermeneutic discourse, but mainly in the context of cognitive behaviour rather than the scientific method. In hermeneutics, integration is perceived as an act of intention, namely a process where a piece of work is perceived in a way that triggers dialogue, communication, and exchange of ideas between "Me" and "You". This dialogue is accompanied by the inner conviction that an interiorized, individual and creative interpretation is an inherent part of human existence and an attempt at understanding literary works, cultural texts, and reality.

The significance of the hermeneutic approach in the educational process was also recognized by Katarzyna Krasoń. The cited author examined the hermeneutic approach by analysing the youngest readers' responses to children's literature, and her study corroborated Stanisław Bortnowski's observation that teachers tend to follow the heuristic tradition in which "the student obeys the questioning teacher and submits to his/her system of knowledge" (Krasoń, 2005, p. 13). This approach leads to isonomy, which was defined by Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak as "an act of liberating the individual from the responsibility to navigate his/her own life" (1994, p. 15). Meanwhile, the hermeneutic approach posits that in the process of perceiving a work of art, a child is assisted by an adult partner-mediator, learns the values portrayed in that work, and gradually adopts a hermeneutic attitude that is open to dialogue and exchange. From this perspective, "reading is the discovery of personal meaning", or even the discovery of oneself (Krasoń, 2005, p. 17). It should also be noted that the new type of literary reflection and contemporary motifs in analyses of children's books (in the field of literary studies and pedagogy) are strongly rooted in the scientific literature (for example: Waksmund, 2000; Papuzińska & Leszczyński, 2002; Baluch, 2005; Hejska-Kwaśniewicz, 2014; Leszczyński, 2015; Ungeheuer-Gołąb et al., 2015; Olek-Redlarska, 2016; Czabanowska-Wróbel & Kotkowska, 2017).

The hermeneutic intention is even more desirable in the context of interconnectivity of the arts. The coexistence of various artistic disciplines exerts an even greater influence on the hermeneutic approach, which promotes open dialogue and strongly opposes the "transmission-reproduction" doctrine of formal education (Dudzikowa, 1994, p. 133) and acts of symbolic violence, where predefined meanings and interpretations are forced upon the students (Kwieciński, 2000, p. 267). This is because artistic disciplines are bound by a network of mutual connections and influences that impose even greater interpretative demands than a literary work itself. These complexities naturally oblige the reader to engage in a multi-layered cultural discourse.

In this study, the interconnectedness of the arts was examined on the example of two disciplines: literature and music. This problem has been and continues to be examined by researchers and practitioners (for example: Calogero, 2002; Gauthier, 2005; Miller, 2008; Eppink, 2009). However, the point at which these disciplines

intersect is a complex problem that cannot be reduced to the clash between literature and painting because “the radical differences between works of literature and music weigh heavily on all relationships between these disciplines” (Hejmej, 2002, p. 7). In the analysed contemporary Polish children’s literature, the musical theme is dominant, but it is addressed in various ways and is not always bound by a relationship with literature in the sense proposed by the Romantic literary theory and the contemporary proponents of the Romantic movement. The musical theme is undoubtedly most intriguing, and it is most aligned with the concept of integration in the context of hermeneutic experience. Nonetheless, all of the analysed children’s books make a reference to the musical theme and can, individually or collectively, promote integration, both on the external and internal level.

Musical Themes in Children’s Literature – Selection of Books

In the group of the analysed children’s books, Jarosław Mikołajewski’s *Krajobraz z burzą. Bajka o Pawle Mykietyńcu* (2019) [*Landscape with a Storm. A Story about Paweł Mykietyń*] appears to be most closely related to the interconnectedness of literary and musical arts. This work belongs to the *Gama i pasażerowie* [*Gamma and Passengers*] series of twelve books for children, where the main characters are famous Polish musicians of the 20th and 21st centuries. The author does not force the readers to adopt his point of view and offers multiple interpretative options, which is best summed up in the following passage: “Paweł’s music is what I hear and see in it. And when you listen to it, his music will be what you see and hear in it” (Mikołajewski, 2019, p. 21). Paweł’s music, a composition entitled *Epiphora*, is a metaphorical conglomeration of different meanings: the protagonist’s life path, his experiences, existential angst and tension, as well as the actual musical piece. Through the story, the author attempts to provide an intersemiotic translation of a musical work into a literary code, but he is deeply aware that a piece of music cannot be translated into literature, and similar observations had been previously made by researchers who analysed the relationship between literature and music (Hejmej, 2002). Mikołajewski describes this conflict in a highly comprehensible manner: “Music cannot be represented with the use of letters, but it can be imagined” (Mikołajewski, 2019, p. 8). The amalgamation of these artistic disciplines is clearly accentuated, and by immersing young readers in the musical world of *Epiphora*, the author encourages them to develop a personal and unique experience of the storm:

Listen to how the storm begins. How it roars and grows. As if an invisible bubble, hovering over the ground, suddenly burst at the seams because it was so full. But full

of what? Now, this is a challenge for you. A challenge for all of us. So just listen and let your imagination be free like a bird (Mikołajewski, 2019, p. 10).

Krzysztof Lipka's *Niespodziewana przemiana Marszałka Bimbusa. Co w duszy gra Jerzemu Maksymiukowi* (2019) [*The Unexpected Metamorphosis of Marshal Bimbus. What Music Moves Jerzy Maksymiuk's Soul?*] also addresses the relationship between artistic disciplines. Similarly to the previous book, Lipka deals with a problem that had been formulated by Calvin Brown, namely that literary language cannot be effectively used to describe music. However, Lipka addresses this problem in such a way that, when describing sounds, he does not make a reference to a piece of music, and the code embedded in the piano composition is verbalised with the use of a metaphor rooted in the sensuality of synesthesia, namely through colour, shape, and texture:

They were like living balls, fabulously colourful! Some bigger, some smaller, some sharp, some soft, some lighter and some heavier, gentle and vicious, menacing and smiling. There were reds and greens, and grays, and burgundies – violets and lilacs – and purples and scarlets – and oranges, and amaranths [...].

And they shimmered, and glimmered, changed shades, and shone and dimmed (Lipka, 2019, p. 30).

As the narrative evolves, sounds – as the dominant compositional device – are intensified, and, at the climax of the story, they reveal to the protagonist that, although music cannot be precisely verbalised, one can discover the entire world in music and that "everything can be translated into musical sounds". This revelation is essential for the protagonist's inner transformation (from Bimbus the football player to Jurek the Musician).

The splashing, humming, and bubbling of water, [...] the clatter of plates and the scraping of a fork, the swishing of a bow and... Yes, that's right! [...] even the joyous bouncing of a ball [...].

He didn't lose it! He didn't lose the ball! He waved the baton and conjured up all the sounds he carried in his memory, in his soul, in his heart. And the ball, too (Lipka, 2019, p. 36).

The protagonist's passion for piano and orchestral music is a theme that surfaces in many contemporary works of literature for the youngest readers. Krystyna Zabawa notes that "passion is a key word in contemporary children's books describing characters who undertake some kind of artistic activity" (Zabawa, 2016, p. 96). A similar scenario can be found in Anna Czerwińska-Rydel's two-part morality novel about Matylda, a young and talented violinist: *Tajemnica Matyldy* [*Matylda's Secret*] (2007) and *Marzenie Matyldy* [*Matylda's Dream*] (2011). The heroine is passionate about

music, and she discovers the beauty of music seemingly by accident when she meets a charismatic violin teacher. Matylda instantly recognises the beneficial influence of music, and she listens to it “with delight” and “as if enchanted”. Already after the first lesson, Matylda is overwhelmed with musical inspiration, and she feels that music makes “everything at home different than always. Somehow more cheerful, more interesting” (Czerwińska-Rydel, 2007, p. 16). At that point, Matylda realises that she can always soothe bad emotions with music. Matylda’s passion for music is not only a source of personal joy, but it also brings joy to others and proves to be a “cure for loneliness” that brings harmony to her life and unites Matylda’s broken family.

Music is the dominant compositional device, and it even becomes the protagonist in Justyna Bednarek’s *W to mi graj. Bajki muzyczne* (2016) [*Play This for Me. Musical Fairy Tales*]. The fairy tales are characterised by fast-paced action, unforced humour, lightness of narrative, and extraordinary freedom in abolishing the boundaries between reality and fantasy. Through the juxtaposition of the latter two antinomies and the creative power of music, the author paints children’s “world in reverse” which features a magical playing pot with captivating power, personified sounds, the Ghost of Old Times resurrected by the power of music, a rebellious ear, an unconventional music school, and the school’s students, gifted with imagination and musical talent. Their adventures naturally capture the attention of young readers, including those who have not yet been culturally initiated into the world of musical inspiration.

Wszystko gra [*Everything Plays Out Just Fine*] by Anna Czerwińska-Rydel and Marta Ignerska (2011) is another piece of children’s literature that deserves close attention. The book is a literary and illustrative masterpiece, where, as the title suggests, all components “play out just fine”, both in terms of semantics and form. In this unusual story, the authors were able to create a harmonious world; a world that is solemn, but deprived of pathos, and they introduce the reader to the unique ambience of orchestral music and its creators shortly before a concert begins. The authors were successful in rendering musical sounds through rhythm, changes in tempo, pauses, tonality, and by intensifying or toning down emotions. This was accomplished through the use of verbal and graphic clusters, their ascetic qualities, with complete restraint and discreet aesthetics. This unusual literary work is quintessential in that it directly promotes integration, thus building a successful partnership between the young reader and the teacher-mediator.

Towards the Integration of Knowledge – Educational Motifs

Books with a musical theme that are read by children and with children help integrate their knowledge of music. For these literary works to promote integration, their

content and editing should be taken into consideration in studies that explore music from the perspective of various scientific disciplines. Books that contain an element of novelty, promote a scientific approach and problem-solving, and encourage exploration, are more likely to contribute to knowledge integration (Klus-Stańska & Nowicka, 2005). As regards the element of novelty, teachers should be ambitious when selecting reading material and they should abandon topics (and literary works) that children are familiar with, especially if these topics are presented in a highly conventional manner. A scientific approach implies that the recommended content should not be infantile, trivial, or grandiose. Teachers should develop literary sensibility and should not avoid "difficult" content that is wrought with intriguing problems, challenging questions, or fresh perspectives on familiar topics. In turn, problem-solving implies that reading materials should involve cognitive conflict, should elicit astonishment, surprise, and intellectual inquiry. Literary works can provoke cognitive conflict both through their form (which is new, unprecedented, and can be discovered by young readers) and content, by presenting problems that are more intellectually demanding. Finally, to encourage exploration, learning materials must be analysable. This requirement is closely related to problem-solving, and it implies that the problems addressed by children's literature should encourage readers to formulate hypotheses, conduct independent experiments, and engage in creative activity. All of the above requirements are linked and should be fully met to promote knowledge integration.

In the authors' opinion, the analysed books can act as a medium through which children construct their knowledge of music, in the broadest sense of the term. *Krajobraz z burzą* poses a question about the essence and meaning of music, and while the author attempts to answer this question, he emphasises that music is a subjective concept and clearly encourages the readers to seek their own answer. Mikołajewski uses a metaphor, a literary device that is often regarded as too challenging for young readers because it prevents them from exploring the text, but according to Monika Wiśniewska-Kin (2016),

This is [...] not an impassable barrier, on the contrary: the recognition that such difficulties exist usually enables readers to overcome their limitations, and through continued practice, children become more flexible in their thinking, more open to vagueness, ambiguity, and discovery (p. 66).

Mykietyń's masterful depiction of the storm is an excellent example of how listeners' impressions of music can be conveyed by words. A similar attempt was made by Bednarek, by introducing children into the content (thought, concept) of selected musical works. These include Ludwig van Beethoven's Symphony No. 5, also known as the Fate Symphony, which is played by Ludwik Bazylko (the main character in the eighth fairy tale) on musical bottles filled with water. The author writes:

At first, you could hear fate knocking on the door. It sounded like the knocking of the postman delivering the bills or something even less pleasant. You can hear that the man is rebelling against the fate that has befallen him; he is angry, he waves his hands, he protests. But fate can be stronger, and the man is jerked around like a balloon in a storm (Bednarek, 2016, p. 96).

In a fairy tale dedicated to Camille Saint-Saëns' *Aquarium*, Bednarek writes: "When you close your eyes and listen to this piece, you will see a school of tiny fish, neon green or blue, swimming out of the dark abyss. Or maybe you will see something completely different..." (2016, p. 114).

The author of the books about Matylda also reflects on emotional responses to music and individual differences in interpretation, depending on one's present mood and personal experiences. As Matylda listens to her long-lost father playing the piano, she

[...] recognised all recent events in his music [...] – the sound of a moving train [...], the sad melody of saying goodbye to her mother on the platform, the soft sounds of swirling snowflakes, the loud barking of the dog, and the joyful chords of a greeting (Czerwińska-Rydel, 2011, p. 49).

The idea that educators should respect students' right to develop a personal and intimate relationship with music, and encourage them to recognise the ambiguity of musical works by allowing them to listen and interpret for themselves, is an educationally valuable concept that can be found in all of the analysed books. A child is not obliged to decode meanings that make a reference to the artist's experiences; he or she can give completely new meanings to the work based on his/her sensitivity, knowledge, experience, or preferences (Cyrek & Dziwak, 2017, p. 115). Educators can promote self-understanding and self-identification in the surrounding world by enabling children to interpret the suggested cultural texts independently at the intellectual, sensory, and emotional level.

In *Wszystko gra*, Anna Czerwińska-Rydel and Marta Ignerska offer a tactile description of the sounds produced by musical instruments: the double bass "makes the audience feel the ground under their feet"; the singing of the flute "reaches to the sky"; the trombone "laughs and tells jokes"; and "the bassoon hails from dark cellars and underground caves full of bats". These humorous comparisons introduce children into the timbre of the sounds generated by different instruments that can imitate and trigger human emotions. By learning to interpret these sounds, children discover the role of each instrument in a musical piece. However, this cannot be achieved without listening to music – musical works that lead to emotional engagement should be carefully selected not only to enable the readers to identify and name the instruments,

but also to interpret music individually, express opinions about music (especially if it differs from popular genres), define musical concepts, and establish dialogue with a literary text.

The simultaneous presentation of carefully selected musical and literary works is also an effective method of making children familiar with the elements of intangible cultural heritage and national values and, in some cases, also global values, which promotes the development of social and cultural identity in young audiences.

In turn, *Niespodziewana przemiana Marszałka Bimbusa* provides the readers with an opportunity to explore music through words and artistic means of expression. As previously noted, the book merges literature with music and visual arts. Justyna Bednarek speaks through Eugene, the protagonist of the tenth fairy tale: "Just like with crayons, you can draw with sounds; various composers sometimes use the same color to paint different, yet similar things" (2016, p. 115).

Educational materials that explore this theme invite students to "paint music". Children can begin with the compositions presented in the book to confront the visualised mental picture with the images that are evocatively described by the authors – not in search of conformity, but rather in search of an original interpretation.

In the analysed books, the postulate that knowledge should be integrated in the students' minds is fulfilled through exploration, namely by encouraging children to experiment with sound and make music. In children, the need for this type of activity can be triggered through the use of onomatopoeic words, and numerous researchers have noted that onomatopoeias play a special role in children's literature (for example: Niesporek-Szamburska, 2011; Nosek, 2017). Numerous descriptions of musical instruments and the sounds they produce, including single, chaotic sounds, as well as sounds in carefully arranged compositions, encourage children to discover the nature of sound and the ways in which various sounds can be produced not only with the use of musical instruments, but also with everyday objects. The examined books inspire children to produce various sounds with musical instruments, depending on the playing technique (for example, in Krzysztof Lipka's book, sounds *whirring, rumble, rattle, buzz, and sing*), to identify objects and instruments that imitate the sounds of nature, to discover objects that imitate the sounds of musical instruments, and to search for ways in which the mood of a musical piece can be effectively conveyed. By making music, children gain a better understanding of the concepts discussed in the analysed books, such as music, harmony, composer, conductor, creator, and audience. In addition, free improvisation enables a child to express himself or herself, and this form of expression promotes the projection of a child's identity (Cyrek & Dziwak, 2017). According to Alphons Silbermann (1963), "music is chiefly a social phenomenon: social because it is a human product, and because it is a form of communication between composer, interpreter and listener" (p. 38). The children's

books selected for this study directly focus on the role of music in human life, and their content provokes reflection on music as a means of communication, identity-building, integration, a utilitarian and ludic resource (cf. Jabłońska, 2018). In all books, the narrative is set in musical schools that are attended by the musically gifted protagonists. Music schools are depicted as valuable and necessary institutions that promote the development of musical skills and passions, direct artistic careers, and organise concerts and competitions for students. There is no shortage of criticism of music education in Poland (although it is more often encountered in journalism than in academic writing), which is accused of being conservative and authoritarian and of suppressing individuality in young musicians. Although these themes are not present in the analysed books, one of the fairy tales in *W to mi graj* tells an interesting story about Mrs Genowefa and her efforts to start a music school. Mrs Genowefa, an elderly woman, involves Kasia, a girl who had accidentally visited her apartment, in the process of recruiting the school's principal. Those interested in the job must first meet Kasia, a future student of the school, because, as Mrs. Genowefa tells one of the candidates, "the principal will work for her, not for me. That's why it's the girl you should convince" (Bednarek, 2016, p. 33).

The idea that students can participate in the recruitment of the school principal could foster a debate on whether children should be engaged in the decision-making process in schools. The authors of the analysed books thus argue that not only the experiences of music school students, but also the insights of regular school students could be invaluable, and that teachers should be ready to accept constructive criticism and consider the students' postulates to create a child-friendly school environment.

Summary and Conclusions

Contemporary Polish children's literature creates multiple opportunities for cultural participation by adopting a hermeneutic approach, recognising the interconnectivity of artistic disciplines, and confronting the readers with interpretive challenges. The examined books can inspire educators to promote identity-building and the development of self-awareness, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and socio-cultural identity in children. In these books, music and musical exposure can help children navigate the path to personal growth and maturity, and mark the starting point of a new chapter in their lives. These books can provide students with the necessary tools for discovering their identity and true potential, becoming independent thinkers, formulating and expressing personal beliefs, and – above all – integrating the learned knowledge.

The choice of the optimum reading material is a key task for the adult mediator (including the teacher). The adult mediator should be willing to go off the beaten

path and take risks in the process of interpreting cultural works. These efforts are inseparable from an interdisciplinary approach to the discussed problem and flexible learning formats.

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