



# ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN THEORY & PRACTICE

*Literature and Music  
in Children's Education*

*Literatura i muzyka w edukacji dziecka*

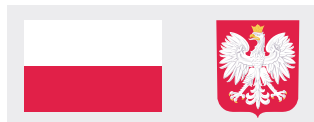
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# CONTENTS

## SPIS TREŚCI

---

- 5 THU NGO  
Introduction  
Wprowadzenie

### THEMATIC ARTICLES ARTYKUŁY TEMATYCZNE

- 11 JOANNA CHŁOSTA-ZIELONKA  
Therapeutic Function of Literary Accounts of the War  
in Ukraine Addressed to Children  
Terapeutyczna funkcja literackich relacji o wojnie w Ukrainie  
adresowanych do dzieci
- 29 ALICJA UNGEHEUER-GOŁĄB  
Literature as a Remedy for the (De)sensitization  
of the Contemporary Child. Attempt of Practical Approach  
Using the Theme of War  
Literatura jako remedium na (de)sensybilizację  
współczesnego dziecka. Próba praktycznego ujęcia  
z wykorzystaniem tematu wojny
- 45 MAŁGORZATA SŁAWIŃSKA  
ANETA ŚWIDER-PIÓRO  
“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

- 61 LORRAINE (LORRI) BEVERIDGE  
The Early Reading and Music Partnership  
Połączenie muzyki i nauki czytania
- 87 NICOLETTA ROSATI  
Nursery Rhyme, Rhythm and Narrative Thinking in Early Childhood Education  
Rymowanki, rytm i myślenie narracyjne w edukacji wczesnodziecięcej
- 101 MACIEJ KOŁODZIEJSKI  
Developing Students' Readiness for Musical Improvisation in the Context of Selected Assumptions of Edwin E. Gordon's Music Learning Theory  
Kształtowanie gotowości uczniów do improwizacji muzycznej w kontekście wybranych założeń teorii uczenia się muzyki Edwina E. Gordona
- 117 MAGDA UTRATA  
Stimulation of Auditory Perception in Children Using Maria Montessori's Developmental Materials  
Stymulowanie rozwoju percepcji słuchowej u dzieci z wykorzystaniem materiałów rozwojowych Marii Montessori
- 129 MARTYNA SZCZOTKA  
Pedagogy of Play in the Music Education of Third Grade Elementary School Students. Research Report  
Pedagogika zabawy w edukacji muzycznej uczniów klasy trzeciej szkoły podstawowej – raport z badań
- 147 EWA ANNA ZWOLIŃSKA  
PAWEŁ TRZOS  
Recognizing Modal Versions of Tonality by Students of Preschool and Early Childhood Education  
Rozpoznawanie modalnych wersji tonalności przez studentów edukacji przedszkolnej i wczesnoszkolnej

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## Introduction

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## Wprowadzenie

### Reading With the Ears and Dancing With Words: The Melodic Fusion of Literature, Music, and Literacy Learning in Early Childhood

From East to West and North to South, no countries in the world do not have lullabies or nursery rhymes. These are the infused forms of music and literature that the humans are exposed to right from birth or as embryos. The interplay between music and literature is a significant cultural phenomenon that has shaped human expression and communication across space and time. Both forms of expression offer rich avenues for emotional expression, storytelling, and cultural transmission. In educational settings, particularly in primary education, the integration of literature and music offers a powerful tool for cognitive and language development, cultural literacy, and emotional growth (Hallam, 2010). This introductory essay examines the relationship between literature in music and music in literature and discusses how these interactions contribute to language and literacy development and the broader educational experience of young children.

### Literature in Music

Literature in music refers to the practice of setting words – poetry, prose, or narrative texts – to music, creating an art form that merges linguistic and musical expression. This practice is evident in numerous genres, including nursery rhymes, children's

songs, operas, and musical theater, where literature is inseparable from music. In the context of young children's language development, literature in music has particular relevance. Lullabies, nursery rhymes and chants are some of the earliest exposures to language for children. These musical forms often feature repetitive patterns, rhythmic structures, and rhyming words that help children develop phonological awareness – one of the foundational skills necessary for reading and writing. For example, the repetition of sounds in a rhyme like “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” not only captures a child's attention but also reinforces their understanding of sound patterns, which is critical for later language acquisition (Goswami & Bryant, 2016).

Music enhances the emotional and mnemonic impact of the literary content, making it easier for children to internalize vocabulary, narrative structures, and linguistic patterns (Gardiner et al., 1996). Songs and rhymes also introduce children to a multitude of literary devices albeit in simple forms such as alliteration and onomatopoeia (e.g., in *Baa Baa Black Sheep*), metaphor (e.g., in *You are my sunshine*), simile (e.g., *Its fleece as white as snow* in *Mary had a little lamb*), repetition (e.g., in *Row, row, row your boat*) and imagery (e.g., in *Twinkle, twinkle little stars*). Through this exposure, children begin to grasp Abstract concepts, develop their vocabulary, and gain early literacy skills in an engaging and enjoyable way.

## Music in Literature

The most distinctive features of music are rhythm, melody and timbre. Modern concept of literature also includes multimodal digital forms such as films and music videos. In these forms, music, no doubt, plays a crucial role in story-telling (Ngo & Unsworth, n.d.). Literature in the form of poems and short stories are also extremely musical. You can almost dance with the words and walk short and steady steps (/ short rest; // long rest) with the beats (\*) as you read *The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson aloud:

*A \*mouse/ took a \*stroll/ through the \*deep/ \*dark/ \*wood//.*  
*A \*fox/ saw the \*mouse/ and the \*mouse/ \*looked/ \*good//.*

The up and down pitch contour (or intonation) of the reader's voice creates the melody of the line, particularly when the story reaches its climax. The climax in *The Very Cranky Bear* by Nick Bland would be read with Rise-Fall (R/F) melody and fast pace (no rest) to express dramatic moments; with tense, breathy and vibrato timbre to vocally represent the characters' fright; and with long rests (// // //) in the middle of a sentence or clause to create suspense.

*Zebra, Lion and Moose ran \*out and Bear was \*right (R) behind them// (F).  
They hid behind the \*bushes// // where they hoped // // he \*wouldn't// // \* find them//.*

The timbre in the reader's voice provides children with an additional auditory cue that helps them follow the narrative stages. Calm slow voice is usually used for the Orientation stage, easing the reader into the exposition of story. Dramatic voice as in the Cranky Bear example above provides hints of tension and rising actions. Happy and relaxed voice can signify the falling actions and resolution (Ngo et al., 2022). This musicality in literature and literature reading assists children in developing prosody, the rhythm and intonation of speech, which is the demonstration of children's Reading Comprehension and a key element of Reading Fluency.

The current journal issue, *Literature and music in children's education*, is among a very few international fora that brings scholars from East and West, North and South together for discussion of this very interesting matter in language, literature and literacy education in primary years. 'Reading with the ears and dancing with words' does not sound illogical at all. It is because we can hear music when reading literature and we can dance with words in music.

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**THEMATIC ARTICLES**

●  
**ARTYKUŁY TEMATYCZNE**

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## Therapeutic Function of Literary Accounts of the War in Ukraine Addressed to Children

Terapeutyczna funkcja literackich relacji o wojnie  
w Ukrainie adresowanych do dzieci

### KEYWORDS ABSTRACT

bibliotherapy,  
literature for  
children, research  
on children, war in  
Ukraine, fairy tale  
therapy

The aim of the article is to analyse children's books on war, written by Polish and Ukrainian authors, with special emphasis on the war in Ukraine. The starting point for the considerations is the methodology of *children's studies*, which is a scientific discipline that places childhood as the subject of in-depth research. The interpretation used current data on psychological problems related to the youngest refugees from Ukraine. Children's books by Polish authors published in the series *Adult Wars – Children's Stories* about the war in Ukraine were analysed, and their indisputable therapeutic functions were indicated. Reading them individually or collectively brings relief to the traumas experienced by Ukrainian children who find themselves in exile in a new, unknown country. At the same time, it teaches compassion and creates empathy for those in need among the youngest Poles. Then, the works from the indicated series were compared with those written at the same time, i.e. from February 2022, by Ukrainian authors. It turned out that they did not take into account the psychological needs of Ukrainian children, promoting primarily patriotic content and focusing on providing knowledge about the homeland in a state of danger. The summary includes a postulate regarding the need to adapt the content and form of the message related to war in children's literature to the audience of early school age, in such a way that its therapeutic function is fulfilled.

## SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

biblioterapia,  
literatura dla dzieci,  
studia dziecięce,  
wojna w Ukrainie,  
bajkoteria

Celem artykułu jest analiza książek o wojnie adresowanych do dzieci, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem wojny w Ukrainie, autorstwa pisarzy polskich i ukraińskich. Punktem wyjścia rozważań jest metodologia *children studies*, dyscypliny naukowej stawiającej okres dzieciństwa jako przedmiot wnikliwego badania. W interpretacji wykorzystano aktualne dane dotyczące problemów psychologicznych związanych z najmłodszymi uciekinierami z Ukrainy. Analizie poddano książeczki dla dzieci polskich autorów wydane w serii „Wojny Dorosłych – Historie Dzieci” opowiadające o wojnie w Ukrainie i wskazano na ich niepodważalne funkcje terapeutyczne. Indywidualna lub wspólna lektura tych książek niesie ukojenie doznanych traum przez dzieci ukraińskie, które znalazły się na uchodźstwie w nowym nieznanym kraju. Jednocześnie uczy współodczuwania i rodzi empatię dla potrzebujących wśród najmłodszych Polaków. Utwory ze wskazanej serii zostały zestawione z tymi, które w tym samym czasie, tj. od lutego 2022 roku, napisane zostały przez autorów ukraińskich. Okazało się, że nie uwzględniają one psychicznych potrzeb dzieci ukraińskich, propagując przede wszystkim treści patriotyczne i skupiając się na przekazaniu wiedzy o ojczyźnie w stanie zagrożenia. W podsumowaniu zawarty jest postulat dotyczący potrzeby dostosowania treści i formy przekazu związanego z wojną w literaturze dla dzieci do odbiorcy w wieku wczesnoszkolnym w taki sposób, by realizowała się jego funkcja terapeutyczna.

## Introduction

The war-related issues broaden the scope of research of *children's studies* (Szymborska, 2016, 2020), the discipline with its own subject of study, system and theory based on childhood. Therefore, posing questions like, for example, “Is war for children?” (Kotaba, 2015), becomes an important research task and a starting point for historical, educational, psychological and pedagogical observations.

Although war is not meant to be experienced by the youngest, the children, nevertheless, are its participants, witnesses and victims. The evidence of the presence of this problem in the public space is to be found in the publication entitled *Dzieci i doświadczenie wojny. Wiek XX i XXI [Children and the Experience of War. The 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries]* (Grzywacz & Okupnik 2020). The researchers, who are interested in the status of civilians during war, discuss traumatic experiences of children, that are often left unmentioned and overlooked. They also formulate theses related to the memory of war in contemporary times. Among the many topics, there is a suggestion to make children interested in war through visual forms, like exhibitions or museum displays. Joanna Ostrowska comments on this way of activating young audiences by describing the Museum of World War II in Gdańsk. Instead of traditional showcases,

the museum uses open spaces to visualize the living conditions during the occupation. Ostrowska writes: “Without any intrusive narrative of struggle, violence and cruelty, this exhibition shows how civilians, ordinary people – including the peers of those who visit the exhibition, experience it” (2020, p. 232).

A slightly different solution is offered at the Warsaw Rising Museum where children can spend the part of sightseeing meant for adults in the Little Insurgent Room where they can enjoy some entertainment:

The interior of the room resembles a common room or a kindergarten area in which the walls are decorated with simple, schematic, colourful, as if “childish”, drawings. Thanks to this, the Little Insurgent Room looks like a playroom with military accents. The attractions prepared for children are, among others, a field post office, where you can seal letters, and a field hospital, where you can take care of a wounded friend. There is also a corner with board games and jigsaw puzzles about the Warsaw Rising, and a replica of the insurgent puppet theatre in which puppet shows for the youngest are presented (Ostrowska, 2020, p. 233).

In such a way, children start to associate war with different forms of play. The Author adds: “The message of this room is clear: war is a game, it is a kind of game” (Ostrowska, 2020, p. 234).

The ideas presented above suggest that topics related to the time of war should be an essential element of knowledge passed on to a child. However, such knowledge ought to be adjusted to the mental condition of the young recipient. The topic should not be imposed intrusively, yet some solution should be found so as not to leave the child feeling anxious.

Is such a way of making children familiar with war experience appropriate? It certainly satisfies the most important need for a happy childhood and provides the fastest response to this need. The question of what children need to be happy is answered by the 2019 report of UNICEF Poland Association entitled *Children's Rights from the Perspective of Children, Parents and Teachers*. According to the report, top three activities that provide a sense of satisfaction are: 1) spending time with friends: 43%, 2) being loved by family: 40%, and 3) pursuing hobbies and interests: 37%. In turn, the three main reasons for being unhappy in the case of children are: 1) school, learning: 17%, 2) relationships with the loved ones: 16%, and 3) relationships with peers: 15% (Falkowska & Telusiewicz-Pacak, 2019). The list of reasons why children feel unhappy includes neither cataclysms and natural disasters, nor wars. The boundaries of the children's world do not comprise such events, so children do not incorporate them in the scope of their experiences.

This harmony of needs was changed by the outbreak of the war in Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The aim of this article is to point out that individual or joint reading

of books on the ongoing war in Ukraine serves an additional function. Such books not only are useful for the Polish young reader as they shape their personality, but they also bring relief to the traumas experienced by Ukrainian children who found themselves in exile, in a new unknown country, among the people who speak a similar, yet still foreign-sounding, language.

Before the war in Ukraine, it was World War II that had been the most exposed and exploited Polish topic related to combat. Due to this, the Second World War has been present on obligatory school reading lists since the end of hostilities in 1945. It can even be said that school curricula in the Polish People's Republic were dominated by this kind of issues.<sup>1</sup> There has also been a frequent discussion on how to use the most traumatic images of war, related to the experience of Auschwitz and the Holocaust, in school education, since these are also the images which appear in the readings discussed in Polish language or history classes (Trojański, 2008).

The period of the 1989 breakthrough verified the ways of creating reality and freed literature from the obligation to take up particular topics. This was naturally reflected in the explosion of motifs that had not existed before and which would concern broadly understood otherness, exclusion, existence on the margins of nations, minorities, genders, subcultures, etc.

## The Significance of the Series Called Adult Wars – Children's Stories

Despite focusing on happiness and cheerful topics, the 2017 *Early Childhood Education Curriculum for Grades 1–3 in Primary School* prepared by WSiP [the School

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1 In primary school, from the fourth grade onwards, the following books would be discussed: Halina Rudnicka's *The Boys from the Old Town* or Maria Zarębińska's *Children of Warsaw* – the books show the destructive impact of war; Janina Broniewska's *Krystek from Warsaw*, Janusz Przymanowski's *The Mystery of Hill 117* and Wiktor Zawada's *Cacti from Green Street* – these stories use the element of adventure and thus diminish the tragedy of war events. War narratives were also presented in the convention of fairy tales, for example, in Zofia Lorenz's *Little Heroes*, Wojciech Żukrowski's *Kidnapping in Tiutiurlistan*, and Irena Jurgielewiczowa's *A Boy Who Was Looking for a Home*. There were also stories in the form of coverages, like Arkady Fiedler's *Squadron 303* and Melchior Wańkowicz's *Westerplatte* – these texts were documentaries about heroes. The same is true of Aleksander Kamiński's *Stones for the Rampart* [The book was published in English in 1944 under the title of *Stones for the Rampart: The Story of Two Lads in the Polish Underground Movement*]; the film adaptation of the book has become a popular form of telling stories about heroic exploits. In secondary school, the texts used to refer to the wartime reality were the following: *Smoke over Birkenau* by Seweryna Szmaglewska (since 1947), *Medallions* by Zofia Nałkowska (since 1950), *Auschwitz stories* by Tadeusz Borowski (since 1972), poetic texts by Jerzy Ficowski (since 1982), Leopold Buczkowski's *Black Stream* and Janusz Korczak's *Diary* (since 1984), *Shielding the Flame* (translated into English in 1986) by Hanna Krall, and *A World Apart. A Memoir of the Gulag* (first translated into English in 1951) by Gustaw Herling-Grudziński (since 1991).

and Pedagogical Publishing House] included Joanna Papuzińska's autobiographical book *Asiunia*. It means that the book, the plot of which is set during World War II, was listed among the literary texts recommended for individual or joint reading in the early stages of primary education. The book belongs to the *Adult Wars – Children's Stories* series which has been published by Wydawnictwo Literatura [Literature Publishing House] under the auspices of the Warsaw Rising Museum. Asiunia is a character who resembles Anne Shirley from *Green Gables* and brave Pippi Langstrumpf from the world created by Astrid Lindgren. Asiunia may impress young readers with her cheerfulness and apparent naturalness in accepting adversities with her head held high. The title character says, for example:

Now it turned out that the war could not only come to the house, but even take it away. There is no home, there is no crib, no pillow or quilt. You have to sleep in someone else's house, where, instead of your mom, there is a strange lady and strange furniture, and you have to drink milk from someone else's cup instead of drinking it from the one you would always use. And, instead of your own pyjamas, they give you some awful, floor-length, stretched shirt to sleep in (Papuzińska, 2017, p. 9).

A little 5-year-old girl bravely accepts all the changes that take place around her: various people, about whom no one is allowed to talk, are hidden in the house; her parents and older brothers engage in dangerous activities that are seemingly overlooked. You have to call your dad, who is hiding away from home, by his first name in order to hide the kinship. When the closest person – your mom – disappears, and she disappears forever, you have to be a brave girl, you must not cry, but adapt to a few new dwelling places where you can neither reveal the pain you feel after your loss, nor your true identity.

While discussing the *Adult Wars – Children's Stories* series, Katarzyna Wądołny-Tatar draws our attention to its indisputable features:

Narratives about World War II for the youngest expose individual experiences of the protagonists according to the principle of peerage, they capture the situations of the child-figure in the constellation of the family, they take care of the emotional safety of the child-recipient, and, without shocking the reader with cruelty, they trigger deep compassion and empathy in the recipient (2017, p. 113).

Today, the series consists of several dozen books, aimed at audiences aged six to nine. The books touch on various themes related to World War II: the Invasion of Poland [known in Poland as the September Campaign], the occupation time, the heroism of the fighters, patriotism, the Holocaust (Extermination, the Shoah), the Warsaw Uprising, the Recovered Territories (among others, East Prussia), exile to Siberia, and the fighting in the West.

Among the authors of the books from the series, there are Michał Rusinek (*The Spell that Starts with "W"*), Paweł Beręsewicz (*Is War for Girls?*), Renata Piątkowska (*All My Mothers, Children Who Are Not There*), Dorota Combrzyńska-Nogala (*Jutka's Insomnia, Siberian Adventures of the Cloud*), Joanna Papuzińska-Beksiak (*Asiunia, My Lucky Dad, Spared Lines*), Katarzyna Ryrych, (*Mr. Apoteker, Little War*), Kazimierz Szymeczko (*The Dove of Non-Peace*) or Andrzej Perepeczko (*Jędrus. A Boy from Lviv*).

After reading these books, one gets an impression that the writers have found a way to make children want to learn about war. By this I mean the use of autobiographical memoirs or the inclusion of fragments of biographies of people who survived the turmoil of war as children. This time, these are children who tell their adventures to the youngest readers. At the beginning of each story, they present the world around them without fully understanding what is actually going on. On the one hand, the child-characters grow up faster due to the changes brought about by the war (the disappearance of loved ones, a quick relocation, the departure from their hometown, etc.). However, at the threshold of calamity, when they are yet unable to imagine it and know neither the extent nor the nature of the approaching changes, they resemble any child of any time.

Aleksandra Sikora sees the success of the *Adult Wars – Children's Stories* series in the way the stories are narrated. Typically, there is a child protagonist who quite frequently turns out to be the narrator, and the language of the characters is very vivid and lively as, according to some of the authors, it is to reflect the child's speech. Yet, in Sikora's opinion, the weakness of war stories lies in the protagonist's lack of awareness of the events taking place – the child does not always understand what is happening (Sikora, 2014, 25–44). However, it should be noted that, in order to protect a child from the trauma of war, one should not explain to a child the mechanisms of evil, which it is incapable of understanding. Two examples can illustrate this point. The first is Roberto Benigni's famous film *Life is Beautiful* (1997), in which Guido, imprisoned in a concentration camp together with his son, constantly tells the boy that the cruel reality is only a form of fun for adults. The second is a book by Agata Tuszyńska and Iwona Chmielewska entitled *Mom Always Comes Back* (2020). It contains an authentic story of Zosia Zajczyk whose mother kept her, when she was a little girl, in a basement, thus isolating her from the atrocities of war. Thanks to that the girl did not experience war traumas.

## Books for Children on the War in Ukraine

In recent years, within the already mentioned series: *Adult Wars – Children's Stories*, three books reporting on the events of the ongoing war in Ukraine have been



published. These books also function as a way of making children familiar with a situation which, for them, is new and entirely unrecognisable. Two of the books: *Now Here Is Our Home* and *The Power of Amelka*, were written by Barbara Gawryluk, while the third one: *How Mr. Giraffe Was Fleeing from War*, was written by Rafał Witek.

Picture 1. The Covers of the Books for Children on the War in Ukraine Issued in the Series “Wojny Dorosłych – Historie Dzieci” [“Adult Wars – Children’s Stories”]: Barbara Gawryluk, *Moc Amelki* [*The Power of Amelka*] (2022a); Barbara Gawryluk, *Teraz tu jest nasz dom* [*Now Here is Our Home*] (2022b); Rafał Witek, *Jak Pan Żyrafa uciekał przed wojną* [*How Mr. Giraffe Was Fleeing from War*] (2023)



The war in Ukraine has become some kind of a new, generational experience, covering all age groups, including the youngest. The course of war is particularly dramatic for children in Ukraine. They became direct witnesses and participants of this circumstance. According to the UNICEF data as of March 31, 2022, “Two million children from Ukraine have crossed borders with neighbouring countries in search of safety. In addition, 2.5 million of them have been internally displaced. A total of 60% of Ukrainian children had to leave their homes” (UNICEF, 2022b). They were not only victims of the armed attack (the deaths of 117 children were reported in March 2022), but also the victims of rape and eyewitnesses of the violence and bestiality of the invaders. Moreover, at some point, a problem of wartime orphanhood appeared. According to UNICEF:

Between 24 February and 17 March, more than 500 unaccompanied children, who crossed the border of Ukraine and ended up in Romania, were identified. The actual number of unaccompanied children who have fled Ukraine to neighbouring countries is probably much higher. These children are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation (UNICEF, 2022a).

These examples of data already outline main problems accompanying the cataclysm of war that involves millions of people, and nearly half of them are children. According to the Border Guard data provided on the “Ukrainian in Poland” website, from February 24, 2022 to May 21, 2023, 12 million refugees from Ukraine, mainly women and children, crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border (Turaieva, 2023). In turn, the Lalafo platform<sup>2</sup>, which was created to help Ukrainian refugees in Poland get the most basic things to live, reports that about a half of the Ukrainians who have come to Poland because of the war are of working age. More than 96% are women in the age range of 30–50; 16% are under this age; and 10% are older. Of the respondents to the Lalafo survey, almost 90% have children, one or two in most cases.

Representatives of social sciences and humanities almost immediately made statements that pointed to the issues implied by the events of the war. As Elwira Kryńska wrote:

War is not only about destroyed cities and destroyed infrastructure. It is also about destroyed human lives, which means that the effects of the Russian aggression against Ukraine also have a psychological dimension. Long-term suffering experienced by the Ukrainian population, including children, is detrimental to health and life, and causes trauma which often leads to profound changes in human functioning. Such an injury may result in persistent difficulties in returning to previous functioning; difficulties that sometimes form a set of symptoms called post-traumatic stress disorder (2022, p. 63).

The aforementioned author, in one of the first diagnoses on this subject formed under a telling title, i.e. *We Don't Want to Die – Children Say*, points out that

[...] the stress response includes symptoms typical of anxiety, such as: difficulty in breathing in, incomplete breathing, stinging sensation, aches and pains, a feeling of increased heartbeat, abdominal pain, dizziness, diarrhoea. There may also be symptoms which are specific to an acute reaction to stress, such as fainting, a sense of unreality, fear of losing control, “going crazy”, a sense of numbness. The latter, especially in children, can lead to withdrawal from the expected social interaction (a condition that, in its extreme form, can be seen as immobility and lack of contact of the person with the environment), disorientation, anger, despair, etc. A common consequence of an acute

2 The Lalafo.pl service is a charity initiative aimed at helping Ukrainian refugees in Poland get the most necessary things to live. Unlike other advertising websites, the Polish Lalafo website offers goods for free. A team of volunteers collects, sorts, photographs, and describes things, then places them on a specially designed virtual platform. The website, created as an electronic free market, allows people in need to search for and select the goods they need, regardless of their location in Poland. To make it easier, the offers provided on the website are divided into some categories: personal belongings; the child's world; home and garden; sports and hobbies. In these categories, you can find clothes, shoes, groceries, goods for children, furniture, household items, electronics, and even products for pets (Turaieva, 2022).

stress reaction are memory gaps which manifest themselves in forgetting specific events or their fragments (despite the lack of brain injuries), tormenting, recurrent memories, avoidance of conversations and everything that may be associated with the injury. Hence, people who have experienced acute stress disorder require professional medical and psychological help; they need time, because the trauma of being a war victim can last for years (Kryńska, 2022, p. 63).

It should certainly be added that, at the time of the crisis, free psychological support has been provided by a number of organizations<sup>3</sup>. However, although psychological help is available, the people who should receive it do not always realise they need it.

## Bibliotherapeutic Function of Children's Books About the War in Ukraine

Maria Molicka, the author of many publications on the influence of literature on the development of a young person, points out that it is the immaturity of the phylogenetically programmed nervous system which causes that “at a certain time, anxiety appears in a child, just like the raising of a head or sitting down [occurs] in infancy” (2002, p. 10). The anxiety can be soothed by bibliotherapy, that is the use of fiction for therapeutic purposes:

[...] in situations of experiencing stress, after traumatic events or in mood or personality disorders. [...] In the deliberations on the role of literature, it is the therapeutic function of literature that is mainly emphasized, although its importance in the creation of “I” is not forgotten, and neither is its influence on the psychological development of a child (Molicka, 2011, p. 132).

The impact of “word therapy” has been repeatedly praised by researchers and academics who would point to indisputable benefits stemming from the therapy via fables, poetry or a dramatic text that can be heard in the theatre. The earliest works related to the said topic are the ones of American researcher Caroline Shrodes (1949).

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3 These are: the Red Cross Helping Hand platform; the ZUSTRICZ Foundation in Kraków; the Terappo online platform which belongs to the Health and Psychotherapy Centre; the Polish Migration Forum Foundation, the eKropka Foundation; the Foundation for the Development of Ukraine; the Children's Helpline of the Ombudsman for Children; Psychological help from the Foundation for Social and Economic Development; Psychological assistance from the BeeHuman organization; the Polish Migration Forum; the Polish Psychoanalytical Society; the “Faces of Depression” Foundation; the Psychological Help Centre in Wrocław; Psychotherapy Centre “Bridges Instead of Walls” in Gdańsk; Foundation for Psychological Assistance and Social Education “RAZEM”; Psychological Centre “Kompas” in Radom; Centre for Psychotherapy “HELP”; Centre for Women's Rights; ART Foundation; the “Nagle Sami” Foundation (Sharapova, 2023).

When it comes to Poland, the principles of bibliotherapy were formulated by Irena Borecka (1991) and Maria Molicka (Molicka, 1997, 2002, 2011). As for the latest publication in this field, comprehensive insight into bibliotherapy is provided by *Podstawy współczesnej biblioterapii [Principles of Contemporary Bibliotherapy]*, a handbook published in 2017 (Czernianin et al., 2017). But new compendia of knowledge on this subject are constantly being created. They include detailed descriptions of bibliotherapy as well as practical ways of using the knowledge about it. Alongside such publications, various campaigns are being initiated to popularize reading and to emphasize its undeniable value. There are various forms through which bibliotherapy can be carried out. The youngest ones benefit from fairy-tale therapy and fable therapy. Fairy-tale therapy, aiming at eliminating children's fears, makes use of three types of fairy tales, i.e. therapeutic, psychoeducational and psychotherapeutic ones. In order to achieve the most beneficial effects of fairy-tale therapy, specially created stories are applied to face a specific situation that caused anxiety, phobia or trauma. The Polish book market offers children both translations of foreign-language fairy tales (Brett, 2003, 2005) and fairy tales by Polish authors who are often educators and therapists (Ortner, 1995, 1996; Molicka, 1999, 2003; Szaga, 2014). When it comes to fable therapy, it makes use of elaborate plots and utilizes the already existing works, especially the ones by Hans Christian Andersen. In fable therapy, the young recipient, while listening to a complex story, subconsciously becomes familiar with a problem that is similar to their own one, identifies with it, undergoes catharsis and then, he/she is ready to overcome their own problem.

However, in the process of therapy, it is possible to use ready-made models of literary texts belonging to various genres of children's literature, because, as Anna Bautsz-Sontag writes:

The use of literature to design activities supporting the development of children and the youth seems to be the right direction for pedagogical and therapeutic activities. Both children and adolescents grow up with books. Fairy tales, fables, short stories and novels, as well as poetry, accompany children in their journey towards adulthood (2013, p. 11).

The researcher has developed a collection of workshops based on well-known texts of children's literature. The workshops show the therapeutic procedures step-by-step (Bautsz-Sontag, 2015). The use of literature in the development of a child's knowledge about the world, in shaping their sensitivity and aesthetic development, is also discussed by Alicja Ungeheuer-Gołąb (1999, 2007, 2009, 2011).

Literature addressed to children can, therefore, become a psychological support for the children affected by various traumatic experiences related to war. Such a function is fulfilled by the aforementioned series *Adult Wars – Children's Stories*, and the

three books that belong to it. The books can be used in school practice to soothe fears caused by the cataclysm of the modern war in Ukraine. Barbara Gawryluk, the author of the two of them, i.e. *Now Here Is Our Home* and *The Power of Amelka*, is a writer, a journalist and a winner of numerous awards, and her publications are bibliotherapeutic in nature<sup>4</sup>:

The world depicted in the books by Gawryluk is situated in the present day reality, in spaces that are well known to a young person: a house, a school, a park, a beach. The plot concerns universal issues important to a young person, such as: friendship, falling in love for the first time, family relationships (divorce of parents), death of a loved one, moving home, etc. Her books provide support to young readers, help them cope with difficult situations, and act as a catalyst for the change in attitudes or behaviour (Kotaba, 2021, p. 5).

In these works, Gawryluk tries to alleviate, above all, the deep fears of Ukrainian children, that were born of the war. One of the most tangible fears is the unexpected disaster itself and the resulting loss of home, of the loved ones, of a place previously considered safe. The following stage is the problem of assimilation in a new place which is foreign linguistically, culturally and religiously. Being marked with the stigma of the Other, the Stranger, and the difficulty of convincing the new environment to oneself is the next phase, the end of which will probably never come. However, even when you manage to get used to the new environment, you still feel nostalgic about the home, family, friends, school, as well as the idealized daily life that used to be the norm.

The book *Here Is Our Home* was created in 2014, after Russia's first invasion of Donetsk in Ukraine. It tells the story of a family that managed to escape the war. The main problem for the family is to adapt to a new situation and to find the "home" mentioned in the title. The adaptation to new circumstances has become an extremely difficult experience for the children. Polish peers do not immediately accept the siblings in their group. This situation is the hardest for the youngest child who is eventually helped by his older brother in reconciliation with his peers. Despite their young age, the children experience loneliness which results from the absence of their compatriots and extended family. What they also left behind in Ukraine were their friends, their favourite pastime activities and forms of play. They lack contact with their mother tongue and the freedom of acting. In Polish schools they feel as if

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4 The book *In the Green Valley* was nominated for the Kornel Makuszyński Literary Award, and in 2012 another book *Dżok. The Legend of the Dog's Fidelity* received a distinction from the Jury of the Polish Section of IBBY as well as the title of the Most Important Book of the tenth anniversary of the "All of Poland Reads to Children" social campaign organized by the ABCXXI Foundation. Moreover, in 2010, *Zuzanka From the Pistachio House* won the Kornel Makuszyński Literary Award.

they were under observation and marked with the stigma of otherness. They slowly learn to live in difficult conditions, to overcome the difficulties related to everyday life. They also gradually learn Polish and establish new contacts, familiarize themselves with an unknown culture and the customs different from their own. However, they still retain the memory of what they have lost. The story has a happy ending, giving hope for the formation of proper peer relationships.

The second story, *The Power of Amelka*, is based on true events that became known all over the world. The title Amelka, a little girl with a beautiful voice, captivated millions of social media viewers around the world by singing a well-known song from the Disney film *Frozen* entitled “Let it go” in the Kyiv underground, which was used as a shelter during the Russian air raids. Together with her grandmother, Amelka was sent to Poland where she took part in a concert supporting the people of Ukraine. Her touching performance helped Amelka adapt to the unfamiliar environment, as everyone was incredibly kind to her. However, this situation neither eliminated her sense of danger due to the dramatic events taking place in her homeland nor diminished her ongoing longing for her loved ones and the fear for their safety. The circumstances were changed by the grandmother’s illness as it forced the arrival of Amelka’s beloved mother. The story of a little girl, known all over the world, is an example of childhood heroism, not giving in to adversity, but facing it. Amelka has become a paragon of endurance in a foreign, albeit friendly, land, and a symbol of faith that one must keep as long as the war rages in one’s homeland.

The third story, *How Mr. Giraffe Was Fleeing from War* by Rafał Witek, was written as part of the Polish development cooperation program implemented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland in 2018, and was first published in the form of a *kamishibai* storytelling theatre available under a Creative Commons license. The author did not think that the story would become so relevant a few years later. Mr. Giraffe mentioned in the title of the book is Tatiana’s mascot with whom she had to part while fleeing from Ukraine. The girl’s fate is a typical example of the ordeal of refugees who take up an uncertain nomadic life in order to possibly avoid the inevitable death. The story shows the successive stages of making the decision to leave the homeland, as well as being condemned to isolation in a foreign place because of otherness. The book ends with the girl’s pondering about the future:

She looks forward to tomorrow. She wonders what tomorrow will be like in a foreign country. Will there be any people in this tomorrow? Will they turn out to be nice? Will there be girls her age; friends? And will there be a house similar to her old one, the one that was destroyed even though Dad and Mr. Giraffe were guarding it? Will she ever have her own room again? Will ...? Will ...? Will ...? (Witek, 2023, p. 37)



All the three books evoke empathy for the participants of these events, contemporary refugees, and enhance understanding for their situation. Empathy can be aroused by finding affinities and similarities between the experiences of young readers and the characters presented in the books. That is why the authors concentrate on presenting those emotions of the children from Ukraine which are known to all children, including those who have not experienced war. The authors talk in detail about unsettling situations which are connected with being knocked out of a safe space, thus showing the fear of an unknown place, darkness, of being away from parents; about looking for safe places: corners, cellars, shelters; seeking friends, colleagues, peers with whom you can play in order to forget what was bad and be happy.

## Other Examples of Children's Books About Modern Ukraine

In 2022, three publications related to the changes in the territory of Ukraine were created by Ukrainian authors. These were Olena Kharchenko and Michael Sampson's *Little Book about Great Ukraine* [English title: *The Story of Ukraine. An Anthem of Glory and Freedom*], Olena Mikhailova-Rodina and Lyudmila Nikorycz's *Ukraine*, and *Owva! Ukraine for the Inquisitive* by Zhanna Slovovskaya.

Picture 2. The Covers of Books by Ukrainian Authors. The Books Were Written After the Outbreak of the War in Ukraine: Olena Charczenko, Michael Sampson, *Mała książka o wielkiej Ukrainie. Z tekstem hymnu narodowego*/Розповідь про Україну. Гімн слави та свободи [Rozповід' pro Ukraïnu. Gimnslavitasvobodi], (2022); Olena Michajłowa-Rodina, Ludmiła Nikorycz, *Ukraina* (2022); Żanna Słoniowska, *Owwa! Ukraina dla dociekliwych* (2022)



Their authors do not look for original literary ways to present the new situation of their youngest compatriots. Despite the outbreak of the conflict, the first two publications do not take up the subject of war. Rather, they serve as a form of patriotic

agitation. *Little Book about Great Ukraine*, a bilingual publication, originally issued in English and Ukrainian, presents basic information about Ukraine to preschool children. The greater part of the book is devoted to the national anthem. Each verse of the anthem is accompanied by some commentary and explanation. The book does not contain any information about the war in Ukraine, neither the one from 2014 nor the one from 2022. In a similar manner, the subject of war does not exist in another book for slightly older children, that is for six-year-olds. In the Introduction we can read that “This book shows Ukraine as we had known it until recently. A lot has changed since the Russian invasion and the reality is different now. However, we hope that, in the future, it will be again the way it is presented on these pages”.

On the other hand, Zhanna Słoniewska’s book is addressed to an older, but still young, reader. The publication is in a form of a guidebook and provides detailed information about Ukraine as well as about the unleashed war conflict. The book explains many issues related to living in the new, Polish, reality. Subsequent chapters deal with the following: the problem of communication in a foreign land (“Do you howorysz ukrajińskoju?”), the golden Scythian pectoral (“The Universe on the Neck”), religious diversity and multiculturalism (“Golden Domes”, “The Tzaddik of Podole is singing and dancing”), the description of the figure of the opera singer Solomiya Krushelnytskaya. In addition, there are issues that are neither easy nor obvious to children, such as the Chernobyl power plant accident (“Chernobyl”) or the Holodomor (“Chernozem and the Great Famine”), but also the perseverance of Ukrainians (“Revolution of Dignity”).

## Conclusions

Summing up the deliberations on books addressed to the youngest readers on the subject of war, it should be stated that the way the events are arranged, the creation of characters, the presentation of places and symbolic objects, as well as adapting all these elements to the early school recipient, are the most important in spreading the knowledge about war. The plot of these stories should not serve educational purposes when it comes to presenting factual knowledge about the ongoing war as well as about the country in which it is taking place, as was the case with the publications of Ukrainian authors. On the one hand, the obligation to fulfil a patriotic duty by talking about the homeland when its sovereignty is threatened is quite understandable. On the other hand, young recipients do not expect schematic narratives about their homeland, but stories which reflect their own experiences and their own fate. In this way, children’s literature can fulfil its most important functions of today, that is ludic, therapeutic and entertaining ones.



Examples of stories about the effects of the war in Ukraine from the series issued by Wydawnictwo Literatura also touch upon the subject of contemporary refugees. As Anna Józefowicz rightly suggests, books about such experiences make young readers sensitive to the tragedy of refugees. In her study: *What can you learn from children's literature that presents a childhood marked by the refugee experience?*, Józefowicz sums up her considerations as follows:

The experience of being a refugee, being a stranger, shown in the book from the point of view of a child who does not see his or her otherness, who constantly wonders what it is about him/her that bothers people – can be an introduction to a dialogue about stereotypes, about our often unfounded fears (2019, p. 122).

Children's literature related to the war in Ukraine can become an important element in shaping attitudes towards other people, as it enriches the young reader with the ability to build relationships based on friendship and camaraderie. It shows what coexistence in Europe is all about. It teaches tolerance for different cultures and broadly understood otherness. It awakens the sense of empathy and compassion, willingness to help and to be kind towards other people. It illustrates what it means to do good deeds. It introduces serious topics, reflections on the threats posed to man by all kinds of cataclysms: from natural disasters such as floods, to wars resulting from the foreign policy of countries.

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## Literature as a Remedy for the (De)sensitization of the Contemporary Child. Attempt of Practical Approach Using the Theme of War

Literatura jako remedium na (de)sensybilizację współczesnego dziecka. Próba praktycznego ujęcia z wykorzystaniem tematu wojny

### KEYWORDS    ABSTRACT

children's literature,  
sensitivity, working  
with a literary text,  
taboo subjects (war),  
early childhood  
education

The text is theoretical in its nature and deals with the subject of the influence of literature on the child in early school age in terms of affecting the sensitivity of the recipient. The author considers the phenomenon of (de)sensitization as a process that would help the modern child to accept taboo phenomena on the example of the subject of war. The article refers to the theory of the Highly Sensitive Child and the “bitter-sweet” impact of art, recalling the works of Elaine Aron and Susan Cain. It was emphasized that the child's hypersensitivity to certain images or sounds is related not only to natural stages of development, but also, or perhaps mainly, to individual predispositions to sensitivity to stimuli. The considerations included in the article also refer to war-themed texts for children published in Poland. The researcher provides a list of reading materials that may be interesting for contemporary child readers, but are not part of the school canon. The text is supplemented by a practical example of working with Liliana Bardijewska's work entitled *Karim's Cat and Pictures* with the use of a board game as a form of work with text at the level of grades I–III of primary school.

## SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

literatura dziecięca,  
wrażliwość,  
praca z tekstem  
literackim, temat  
tabu (wojna),  
edukacja  
wczesnoszkolna

Tekst ma charakter teoretyczny i podejmuje temat oddziaływania literatury na dziecko w wieku wczesnoszkolnym w aspekcie wpływu na wrażliwość odbiorcy. Autorka rozważa zjawisko (de)sensibilizacji jako procesu, który pomagałby współczesnemu dziecku w przyjęciu zjawisk tabu na przykładzie tematu wojny. W artykule odniesiono się do teorii wysoko wrażliwego dziecka oraz „słodko-gorzkiego” oddziaływania sztuki, przywołując prace Elaine Aron i Susan Cain. Zaakcentowano, że nadwrażliwość dziecka na niektóre obrazy czy dźwięki jest związana nie tylko z naturalnymi fazami rozwoju, ale także, a może w głównym stopniu, z indywidualnymi predyspozycjami wrażliwości na bodźce. Rozważania nawiązują ponadto do wydanych w Polsce utworów dla dzieci o tematyce wojennej. Badaczka podaje listę lektur, które mogą być interesujące dla współczesnych dziecięcych czytelników, a nie wchodzą w obszar szkolnego kanonu. Tekst uzupełniony jest o praktyczny przykład pracy z utworem Liliany Bardijewskiej pt. *Kot Karima i obrazki* z zastosowaniem gry planszowej jako formy pracy z lekturą na poziomie klas I–III szkoły podstawowej.

## Introduction

In this article I continue to discuss various aspects of children's literature and the way they form the sensitivity of the reader. Just like creativity educators, I assume that signs of culture and art become important in this process, as long as the child is in contact with them (Gołaszewska, 1997).

Research by Stella Chess and Alexander Thomas shows that within sensitivity, four categories can be distinguished that are linked to temperament types. In addition to types such as sensory processing sensitivity, social anxiety and sensitivity to changes, the researchers mention emotional sensitivity. The latter is characterised by being easily moved, having little resilience to stress, experiencing strong emotions, and being prone to anxiety (as cited in Poland 2000, pp. 15–23).

Although temperament traits are largely innate, it seems that particular sensitivity manifested by verbal and behavioural reactions, in addition to genetic factors, is to some extent acquired by children as a result of environmental influences. According to Janet Poland, temperament can be changed because “it tends to be an inclination towards certain behaviours” (Poland, 2000, p. 40), and the solution to hypersensitivity is not avoiding tasks that cause discomfort, but rather facing them in a safe atmosphere. The research states that “systematic desensitization is used when trying to reduce the anxiety or nervousness which is a reaction to a particular object or situation”. In the title of the article, I used the term “desensitization”, which comes from

the English word “sensitive”. In the PWN Dictionary of Polish, one of the meanings of the related term is “desensitizing a body”, or “making a living being stop feeling pain” (PWN, n.d.). From this I derive the idea that reading literature with a specific theme, the accompanying conversation about the meaning of the literary work, and active methods of working with the text can influence the level of sensitivity associated with a specific subject. In order to get rid of difficult feelings, the child should learn about the issue slowly, in the company of someone close. Literature is helpful in this process (Molicka, 2012). Therefore, desensitization is understood here as the result of reading that leads to a reduction of unpleasant feelings of anxiety or nervousness that are associated with a specific object or situation.

## Taboo Subjects in the Process of (De)sensitization

What may expose the listener or observer to sensations stronger than the norm are taboo subjects within a given culture (Sochańska & Czechowska, 2012). These include illness, death, disability, body, sexuality, divorce, disgust, etc. It is worth noting that attitudes towards them are determined by belonging to a particular culture, as what may be prohibited in one cultural area does not evoke such reactions in another.

Monika Szubrycht (2022) identifies important elements influencing the shape of a child’s world, such as family and school environment, sexuality, attitudes to the media, punishments and rewards, past traumas. The taboo subjects noted in works of children’s literature include many of these phenomena, as does the reality in which the child grows up. Living in society, therefore, requires the provision of security for children, which is one of the basic human needs and should be met in an environment of adult caregivers during childhood (Maslow, 2006, pp. 115–119). Reading, including reading with an adult, is one component that satisfies the need. It is worth noting that shared reading also meets the needs for belonging and love, which are essential for the child’s proper development.

In medicine, one of the ways of desensitizing a patient is putting them in contact with an allergen contained in a substance other than the original one, i.e. in the medicine. It seems a similar effect concerns emotions. The calm, safe exposure of the child to literature containing content that may seem anxiety-producing in real life should lead to an alleviation of the hypersensitive reaction. This kind of effect of literature has been used since ancient times and has been termed bibliotherapy in modern times. Literature makes it possible to verbalise feelings; to slow down the anxiety-generating process caused by the anxiety-producing factor. According to Magdalena Wiatrowska, from the point of view of psychology, “verbalising, i.e. naming what a person feels, allows the brain to make contact with the cerebral cortex, i.e. the part of the brain

that is responsible for logical thinking” (as cited in Szubrycht, 2022, p. 15). A child’s hypersensitivity to certain images or sounds is not only related to natural developmental phases, but also, and perhaps mainly, to individual predispositions to sensory sensitivity. W. T. Boyce’s (2019) theory, confirmed by research, speaks of two types of sensitivity, which the researcher described using the terms “orchid child” and “dandelion child”. The psychologist points to the very important role of neurodiversity and the family environment in the development of the hypersensitive (orchid) child. Boyce’s and Elaine Aron’s theories have rekindled the interest of educators in the issue of the diverse sensitivity of children. Some have undertaken research and the creation of parenting approaches specific to highly sensitive children (abbreviated WWD in Polish) (Juil, 2011; Cohen, 2020; Aron, 2021; Sołtys-Para, 2023).

Polish therapists point out the good sides of high sensitivity and advise how to deal with it. They consider literature, such as therapeutic fairy tales written for emotional support, as one of the sources of support (Brett, 2006; Sand, 2016; Stażka-Gawrysiak, 2022). Psychologists advise taming negative feelings of anxiety by slowly introducing the child to a fear-generating object, such as water, darkness, or an image of something the child is afraid of. Urszula Sołtys-Para cites the opinion of Lawrence J. Cohen who writes that “children who are afraid of novelty become more vulnerable to anxiety when parents ‘protect them’ by allowing them to avoid the sources of any anxiety, rather than helping them develop coping strategies” (as cited in Sołtys-Para, 2023). Susan Cain’s book *Bittersweet*, on the other hand, was based on the inner individual need to feel sad. The author writes of “melancholic tendencies [...] to wallow in longing, grief, sadness” (Cain, 2022, p. 21). This particular, bittersweet ruminating, as Cain puts it, occurs already in childhood and is always linked to art. Reading literature can be a helpful strategy, as it allows one to relieve unpleasant moments while remaining in the shoes of a literary character. Difficult experiences can be discussed with the child through a literary mediator. The substitute experience of anxiety frees the recipient from the real anxiety. Educational activities leading to a balance in the area of sensitivity to difficult situations would therefore be advisable. This would be a kind of desensitization that would make it possible to gain confidence in one’s own power through skilful handling of one’s own sensitivity, anxiety and the resulting stress.

Taboo subjects arouse fear mainly in adults. They are the ones who, by overreacting emotionally or avoiding them, show this reaction pattern to children. In a situation of hypersensitive reactions, a communication barrier is created, expressed by the phrase: “We don’t talk about it”. And yet, the taboo subject is usually an important area. It triggers questions from children: What is it? Where does it come from? What is it used for? Why does it exist? When adults do not answer the questions, a tension of cognitive dissonance arises, because the child does not get an answer without knowing why. Literature and art are a good pretext to start a conversation on such a topic.



In supportive interaction, educators focus on positive reinforcement. They are concerned with preparing children for life in the modern world, which is geared to a constant readiness to struggle. It becomes important to pursue a goal at all costs, while this should be accompanied by a joyful attitude towards a good future. Parents teach their children to be assertive and, at the same time, optimistic in case of difficulties. Societies are absorbed with consumption, the need to possess objects, or the race against time, as if everyone has some sporting goal to attain. However, it seems that not everyone can or wants to be a champion. According to Cain, it is behind the bittersweet melancholy that the right ‘momentum’ lies (Cain, 2022, p. 25). The feeling of boundless sadness and sorrow evoked by art opens up a path towards the land of freedom. Perhaps there would be nothing special about this, were it not for the fact that the protagonists of significant children’s works are precisely orphaned children whose fate evokes feelings of discomfort: *Anne of Green Gables*, *King Matt I*, *Pippi Langstrumpf*, the characters in *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, or *Harry Potter*. The longing for familial warmth, a sense of security and love is closely linked to the construction of this type of literary character which is already exalted by virtue of being an orphan. When we add the understanding of orphanhood as a state of holy grace, we are just one step away from the transcendent feelings associated with the reception of art. Its different types: music, painting, film, literature, can lead to an understanding of the meaning of being human – a rational and spiritual being who is, at the same time, empathic. Children’s literature is able to touch upon the emotions of its audience and, like literature for adults, has an effect on its readers. Many adults say that when they were reading as children, they experienced special feelings that no other experience could replace. This is why I focus on children’s works, looking for taboo areas that, on the one hand, involve sensitization, and, on the other hand, reduce it. When reading literature that contains anxiety-provoking themes, a process of taming them takes place. Although they may initially evoke fear, anxiety, repulsion or sadness as a result of learning about a story from beginning to end, the reader gains an experience that is different from their initial feelings. It is not only the “sensitive” subject matter that is important here, e.g. war, death, suffering, but precisely getting to know the entire story, which, when presented as a literary work, also has an important message in its form. The artistic shape of the text is important here.

The reader’s confrontation with suffering, with a feeling that arises in them and remains their emotion, is an unavoidable experience in the process of reception of taboo-focused literature. In order for this process to take place properly, an immersion in the work that appeals to the sensitivity that the child already possesses is essential. Learning about war themes in educational experience leads to recognising the facts, taking them apart, identifying the components. A school-based, curriculum-based analysis of literature is unlikely to include inner emotional responses. It is because such

analysis provides ready-made answers – the puzzle has been solved; the reader knows everything. In my opinion, what happens then is a caricature of desensitization, because it is this bittersweet context that is important in the encounter with this type of content, which offers a combination of pain and relief, fear and courage, despair and joy. Such reception leads to noticing the beauty of life when “one becomes sensitized to this particular combination of sweetness and bitterness” (Cain, 2022, p. 33). As Keltner’s research shows, the ‘compassion instinct’, meaning ‘feeling together’, which leads to pro-social behaviour and relationship-building, is fundamental to a person’s emotional life (Cain, 2022, pp. 46–47). Thus, if a literary work arouses sympathy in the reader because of the fate of a character, instinctive reactions of sympathy are likely to emerge. A war perspective always leads to episodes that evoke fear or sadness. Thus, it turns out that a literary text, by combining aspects of aesthetic beauty and character suffering, evokes that bittersweet emotional context that is relevant to the world of human sensitivity, creativity and social cooperation (Cain, 2022, p. 50).

On the other hand, however, there is a tendency on the part of parents to avoid difficult topics in the works they choose for their children. Curricula invariably report that works for children should have an optimistic tone. In the current curriculum for the primary grades, there are three readings with uplifting plots touching on difficult topics: Joanna Papuzińska’s *Asiunia* (war), Roman Pisarski’s *O psie, który jeździł koleją* [*The Dog which Was Travelling by Train*] (the death of an animal), Barbara Kosmowska’s *Dziewczynka z parku* [*Girl from the Park*] (mourning after the death of a father). In each of them, the authors tell the story in a different way and distribute the ‘emotional’ accents differently. It is difficult to judge whether this is a sufficient number of works through which one may talk about what affects human sensitivity. It certainly seems that the themes of ecology, about which we talk a lot nowadays; illness, which is, after all, part of everyday life of many children; and family conflicts, in which children are very often involved as witnesses or victims, all appear too rarely. In addition to these problems, topics that speak of the difficulties of a child’s world – such as the loss of a beloved pet, the loss of a favourite toy, the death and illness of loved ones – would provide a pretext for conversation, reflection, or sometimes therapy.

If one were to assume that learning about grief and accompanying suffering leads to empathy, builds a bond with the other person/animal/object, strengthens cooperation and develops creativity, then one could put forward the thesis that curriculum-based literary education contains too few items of this kind. Thus, lessons do not provide opportunities to talk to children about all difficult and really important topics.

Therefore, if, in the process of educating children, we were able to help the students translate sadness/grief into creative activities, the effect of the work would not only provide didactic, but also therapeutic, cognitive and autotelic values. This could

be achieved on the condition of turning to the bittersweet emotions and meanings of a given text.

## The Taboo Content of a Text in Teaching Practice – Using a Board Game

The simplest and most frequently posed questions when working with a text at school are: What does the protagonist/character look like?; What does he/she do?; Where does he/she live?; Where and when is the action set?; etc. These are, of course, important questions dictated by the structuralist approach to a literary text, but given that structuralism is already a rather conservative current, it would be appropriate to turn to more up-to-date methods of analysis and interpretation, indicated by the works of Dorota Kluz-Stańska (2003), Danuta Dobrowolska (2015) and Danuta Czelakowska (2020). For example, incorporating contexts resulting from the subjectivisation of reception into the discussion of the text would significantly enhance the quality of the didactic process. It is worth enriching the previously mentioned questions with new ones, such as: What did the protagonist/character feel?; What do you think about his/her feelings?; Do you know them from your experience?; What do you feel when you think about the events described in the text? Focusing on the emotions of literary characters and audiences helps you to enter deeply into the situation depicted in the work. Moreover, it seems more meaningful than checking whether the student has memorized the appearances and quantities. Conscious identification of the nature of feelings helps one to approach difficult issues in a balanced way.

Figure 1. *Example of Questions for a Literary Work*

Questions related to the construction of the piece:	What does the protagonist/character look like?	What does he/she do?	Where does he/she live?	Where and when is the action set?
Questions related to reader reception:	What did the protagonist/character feel?	What do you think about his/her feelings?	What do you feel when you think about the events described in the text?	Do you know them from your experience?

The language we use to talk to children about difficult issues is also extremely important. The psychologist Dominika Słowikowska suggests “using literature or art tasks” (Gołota, 2022, p. 124). A hypersensitive, overly fearful or timid approach to difficult (taboo) subjects will then change; will be weakened by learning about and taming the problem. The desensitization I have in mind leads to a harmonious balanced reaction of the body to matters that may originally have been an over-stimulating signal.

The example of the war motif mentioned here may seem incomprehensible and quite distant to a modern child, even though he or she hears about it from the media or adult conversations. In contrast, the representation of war in the form of a literary work (story) serves to familiarise the child with the issues of war; to evoke sympathy and emotional togetherness with the characters in the work through bittersweet experiences. The literary message is aimed at the moral sensibility of the young viewer, which is already formed in the preschool period (Piaget, 1967). It is characterised by sensitivity to other people’s harm and a desire to help (Stachowicz-Zawiszewska, 2016). Works depicting the wartime fate of children and their families, on the one hand, influence the formation of children’s moral sphere as environmental factors, and, on the other hand, allow us to better understand their experiences. Talking to a child about events and feelings reveals his or her understanding of them and provides an overview of the ethical stance of the young reader.

For the educational activity, I chose a work published in 2016 entitled *Kot Karima i obrazki* [*Karim’s Cat and Pictures*] with illustrations by Anna Sędziwa, in which Liliana Bardijewska addressed the problem of the war in Syria. In an interesting story, the author introduces readers to the fate of the cat Biss and the Syrian boy Karim, who have to leave their own home together with their family. The author used the character of the cat to create a part of the narrative about the cat’s life, and, in this way, he achieved the effect of mixing happy and sad events. Watching people’s lives from the cat’s perspective abounds in many funny situations that may appeal to young readers, even though Biss, like humans, experiences wartime hardships. The family’s journey includes many poignant events, some of which Karim captures in his pictures. Their themes determine the composition of the piece, which begins ‘bitterly’: “The house that does not exist”, and ends ‘sweet’: “The house that exists”. This scheme is emphasised by the book’s front cover in which the illustrator has shown the characters’ journey in the form of a labyrinth leading from the burning building to the house in the orchard.

Figure 2. *The Composition of the Plot*

The theme of bittersweet emotions pervades the content of the entire work and is underlined by two types of narrative: one telling the story of the cat and the other of the family’s struggle to cope with their wartime wandering<sup>1</sup>. When Karim, the cat, the mother, and the grandmother arrive in Poland after a long journey, they are greeted by their Polish hosts. This moment evokes a particular bittersweet feeling:

They travel, they travel, they arrive. The town, the market, the river. A house across the river. Their house! A room, another room, a kitchen, a garden. In the garden – a rose, a pear tree, and an oak. And a stork’s nest on a dry pine tree. In the windows – curtains. In the kitchen cupboards – plates and glasses. On the first floor – the neighbours. A real home! Mum cuddles Karim, Karim cuddles Biss, Grandma closes the door.

Shuffling, knocking – several women.

- I brought dinner – says one to Mum.
- And some cooking pots – says another to grandma.
- And books. Tomorrow I’ll take you to school, says a girl in red slippers. They walk away. The door closes.
- They have really been waiting for us – says Mum.
- Upstairs – the clatter of red hard-soled slippers. And an angry male voice:
- Stay away from those vagabonds!
- Not everyone has been waiting – murmurs Biss.
- You can’t pick grapes from thorns – murmurs Grandma.

Mum hugs Karim, Karim hugs Biss, Grandma wraps herself in hope. Thorn bushes also bear fruit, it’s nothing that they are sour like lemons... (Bardijewska, 2016, pp. 84–85).

As part of the active method of working with the reading, I have suggested the creation of a board game to be implemented in groups. The inclusion of the board game in the children’s activity is justified because of the important role of games in human life. This applies to adults and children alike, although games with an educational dimension, with a storyline ‘for children’, were initially not considered a material

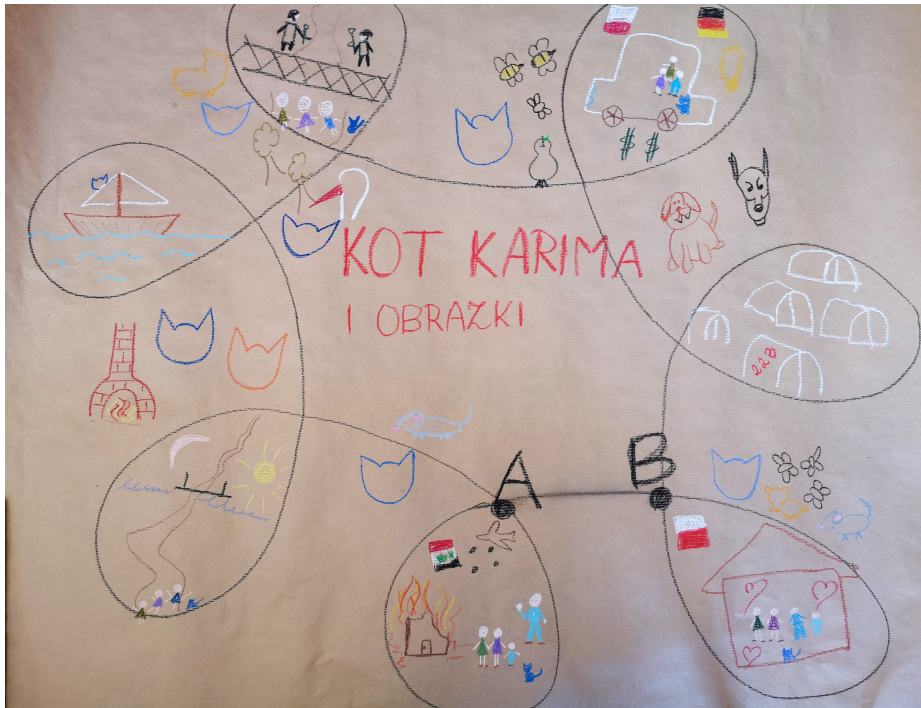
<sup>1</sup> This is also marked by the visual side of the book, which uses the bold font to describe the fate of people.

worthy of scientific description (Huizinga, 1967; Cieslikowski, 1985; Caillois, 1997; Kopoczek, 2013; Strzelecki, 2020).

Board games have long been used in early childhood education. Edyta Gruszczyk-Kolczyńska has written about their important role, pointing out the advantages of ready-made games and the art of constructing them (Gruszczyk-Kolczyńska et al., 1996). The researcher focuses mainly on teaching mathematics, but rightly emphasises that games are well suited to the development of intellectual skills and the shaping of children's emotional resilience (Korolczuk & Zambrowska, 2014, pp. 18–19). The need to cope with a task strengthens the emotional sensitivity of game participants, and the pursuit of a goal gives them satisfaction. While Gruszczyk-Kolczyńska writes about fostering talents through game participation, Monika Węglorz-Masłowska (2021) emphasises strengthening the cognitive abilities of students with mild intellectual disabilities. As Jacek Francikowski writes, “games are also educationally valuable because of the authenticity of the experiences they offer, activating students, inducing a sense of agency in them, shaping their social and other soft skills, and activating deeper levels of information processing” (Francikowski, 2018, p. 34).

The course of the class involved dividing the team into four groups of several students. They had previously read the content of the work, and their task was to find the most important moments in the characters' lives in the story's plot and arrange them in the chronological order. After each group had read out their prepared 'plans,' the students were tasked with presenting the plot of the work in the form of a line on which the most important events were to be marked schematically. Each group worked on a sheet of grey paper using crayons.

Figure 3. Example of a Plot Diagram



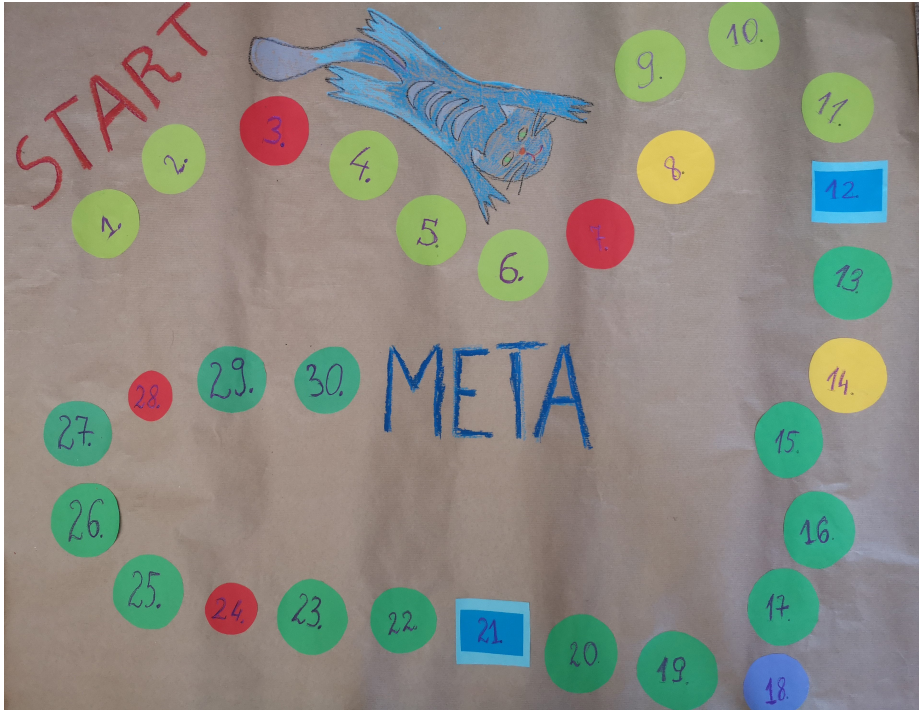
The next stage was to create a board game based on the plot of Bardijewska's work.

The pupils identified positive and negative events; then they assigned specific behaviours to the participants. Guided by a pre-prepared 'plan' and a picture of the plot, each group drew their own game according to the instructions they had developed.

As a result of this work, the class team prepared four board games with instructions. In the next step, the participants played their games by throwing dice and aimed at a goal (just like the characters in the work did). In the following activities, the students could play the games prepared in other groups.



Figure 4. *An Example of a Board Game*



The aim of working with the text in this way was to involve all the children in learning about the content and responding to it in ethical terms. Among the didactic objectives achieved are:

- developing the ability to distinguish elements of the plot in the reading,
- making the audience aware that the plot of a work is linear and has the shape of a movement pattern (Ungeheuer-Gołąb, 2009) – it begins at place A and ends at B;
- shaping the processes of analysis and synthesis as a result of selecting and evaluating the events occurring in the work;
- becoming familiar with the modern way of narrating in a children's prose piece with two modes of narration;
- improving logical thinking by constructing instructions for a game based on the plot of the work;
- shaping the ability to determine the meaning of the piece by preparing artwork, instructions and a game board, and by participating in the game.

Working in groups provided the opportunity for students to interact and come to a joint conclusion. This activity allowed all the students to be fully involved. It made



them realise that their action related to the literary text resulted in a specific product, which is important for further learning and play.

The repertoire of ready-made board games is quite wide, most of them having varied themes, but they are unlikely to relate to specific children's literary works, especially those with taboo themes (Januszewski, 2017). The use of such a method allows, on the one hand, to expose children to a difficult topic, and on the other hand, it occupies their attention, teaches them concentration and a creative approach. The necessity to create a game plan requires the student to consciously consider the ethical dimension of the plot events, to evaluate the actions of characters, and to acquire an emotional attitude to the story.

## Closing Remarks

In the offer of Polish books for early school-age children, one can find important titles that deal with war themes. These works have a high literary and artistic value, are often enriched with artistic illustrations, and some of them even have the form of picture books. The works collected here cover a wide variety of issues related to the war and would require a separate discussion. I cite them here only as examples of titles to which it is worth drawing the attention of the readers. These include:

- *Czy wojna jest dla dziewczyn?* [*Is War for Girls?*], Paweł Beręsewicz, illustrated by Olga Reszelska.
- *Kot Karima i obrazki* [*Karim's Cat and Pictures*], Liliana Bardijewska, illustrated by Anna Sędziwy.
- *Mała wojna* [*Little War*], Katarzyna Ryry, illustrated by Joanna Rusinek.
- *Moje cudowne dzieciństwo w Aleppo* [*My Miraculous Childhood in Aleppo*], Grzegorz Gortat, illustrated by Marianna Sztyma.
- *Mój tata szczęściarz* [*My Lucky Dad*], Joanna Papuzińska, illustrated by Maciej Szymanowicz.
- *Otto. Autobiografia pluszowego Misia* [*Otto. The Autobiography of a Teddy Bear*], Tomi Ungerer.
- *Pamiętnik Blumki* [*Blumka's Diary*], Iwona Chmielewska.
- *Pan Apoteker* [*Mr Apoteker*], Katarzyna Rydy, illustrated by Katarzyna Ryrych.
- *Podróż* [*The Journey*], Francesca Sanna.
- *Syberyjskie przygody chmurki* [*The Siberian Adventures of a Little Cloud*], Dorota Combrzyńska-Nogala, illustrated by Maciej Szymanowicz.
- *Teraz tu jest nasz dom* [*Now Here Is Our Home*], Barbara Gawryluk, illustrated by Maciej Szymanowicz.

- *Wojna* [War], José Jorge Letria, illustrated by André Letria, translated by Katarzyna Okrasko.
- *Wróg* [The Enemy], Davide Cali, illustrated by Serge Bloch.
- *Wszystkie moje mamy* [All My Mums], Renata Piątkowska, illustrated by Maciej Szymanowicz.
- *Zaklęcie na „w”* [A „W” Spell], Michał Rusinek, illustrated by Joanna Rusinek.

The publications listed above are an interesting reading list on the subject of war, for which there is no time during school lessons. Each of the stories presented in them is a reason to talk about struggling with wartime life, about how human fate can change under the influence of complete strangers, but not only, as they are also stories which, thanks to their content and artistic form, evoke important feelings necessary for shaping empathy and cooperation skills in children. All these works were written not only to tell children about the war. I believe that their overarching purpose is to promote and maintain peace. Introducing young readers to the human fate during the war and the suffering associated with it becomes a remedy to a lack of sensitivity, but also a cure for the hypersensitive person who does not take the right stance due to excessive fear. When educating and teaching children, it is necessary to constantly bear in mind the need for empathy, which is gained by understanding and mastering one's own hypersensitive reactions derived from fear, grief, disgust, thanks to the bitersweet experiences resulting from contact with art.

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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

children's literature,  
integration of  
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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  
wiedzy, podejście  
hermeneutyczne,  
muzyka  
w literaturze,  
korespondencja  
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 Mykietylinie* (2019) [*Landscape with a Storm. A Story about Paweł Mykietylin*] 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 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> 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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## The Early Reading and Music Partnership

### Połączenie muzyki i nauki czytania

#### KEYWORDS ABSTRACT

early reading  
and music,  
literacy, teaching,  
partnership, teaching  
early reading

There is broad agreement, in relation to the high gravitas of 'the big six' in teaching early reading, the pillars of effective reading instruction (Moats, 1999; NRP, 2000; Konza, 2014). Notwithstanding, there exists a body of evidence that indicates the arts, in particular music, enhance and motivate other learning, helping young children to become readers. This suggests the explicit teaching of early reading and music together can yield powerful learning for students, the conflation of which improves and accelerates both reading and music mastery. This research investigates whether participation in music instruction has beneficial effects on young children's learning and acquisition of early reading skills; specifically, if a link exists between early reading and music acquisition. There are three parts to this research: a) literature review; b) email surveys/ semi structured interviews; c) classroom observations.

Results suggest that music serves as a natural bridge to literacy, strengthening auditory processing, and scaffolding learning phonemes and graphemes. Music aids memory because the beat, melody and harmony carry semantic content, clarifying meaning. Children learn with less effort and remember information more easily when rhyme and rhythm are present. Nursery rhymes, poems and action songs engage children through playing with language, suggesting that a transdisciplinary pedagogical approach is a potential solution to challenges currently faced in education in relation to disengagement from traditional schooling and declining reading levels. An early reading and music partnership is an approach to learning that may benefit young learners along the road to becoming readers.

## SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

nauka czytania  
i muzyki,  
umiejętność  
czytania i pisania,  
nauczanie,  
połączona nauka,  
początkowe etapy  
nauki czytania

Panuje powszechna zgoda co do znaczenia tzw. wielkiej szóstki na pierwszych etapach nauki czytania, gdyż to właśnie jej komponenty stanowią filar skutecznej nauki tej umiejętności (Moats, 1999; NRP, 2000; Konza, 2014). Niemniej jednak istnieje też szereg dowodów na to, że sztuka, a zwłaszcza muzyka, wspomaga i motywuje ucznia w nabywaniu innych umiejętności, w tym czytania. Fakt ten sugeruje, że nauka czytania połączona z nauką muzyki może umożliwić dziecku osiągnięcie doskonałych wyników zarówno w zakresie umiejętności czytania, jak i opanowania zasad muzyki. W niniejszym artykule badamy, czy uczestnictwo w lekcjach muzyki wywiera korzystny wpływ na naukę u dzieci i na ich wyniki w początkowych etapach nauki czytania, a konkretnie – czy istnieje związek pomiędzy wczesną nauką czytania a nabywaniem umiejętności muzycznych. Badania te podzielone są na trzy części: a) analiza literatury przedmiotu; b) analiza mailowych ankiet/wywiadów częściowo ustrukturyzowanych; c) obserwacja dzieci w klasie.

Wyniki naszych badań sugerują, że muzyka w sposób naturalny wspomaga naukę czytania, przetwarzania słuchowego oraz fonemów i grafemów. Muzyka ma także dobry wpływ na pamięć, gdyż rytm, melodia i harmonia niosą treści semantyczne, a zarazem pomagają wyjaśnić znaczenie. Dzieci uczą się łatwiej i szybciej zapamiętują informacje, gdy nauce towarzyszy rym i rytm. Rymowanki, wierszyki i śpiewanie piosenek z wykorzystaniem ruchu angażują dzieci i zachęcają je do zabawy językiem, co sugeruje, że interdyscyplinarne podejście pedagogiczne to potencjalna odpowiedź na obecne wyzwania edukacji, takie jak nieskuteczność tradycyjnych metod nauczania i spadający poziom umiejętności czytania u dzieci. Powiązanie nauki czytania z nauką muzyki to podejście, które może przynieść dzieciom znaczne korzyści w nabywaniu umiejętności czytelniczych.

## Introduction

Music is a core anthropological experience, reflecting cognitive abilities, and fundamental to human evolution (Schulkin & Raglan, 2014; Bridges, 1994). However, it is progressively undervalued in education. Music and the arts are being relegated an increasingly lower rung of importance at school, due to a current focus on literacy and numeracy in a widespread “back to basics” education climate (Hill-Clark & Robinson, 2004; Rich et al., 2013).

In Australia, teachers concentrate on preparing students for national assessment testing, the National Assessment Program literacy and numeracy (NAPLAN), undertaken by all Australian children in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. NAPLAN provides comparable

data in literacy and numeracy over time, and nationally (ACARA, n.d.). Whether intended or not, schools (and teachers) are held accountable for their NAPLAN results (Frawley & McLean-Davis, 2005; Luke, 2010; McGaw et al., 2020). An emphasis on literacy, numeracy and national test rankings and results has resulted in other subjects being relegated a lower priority in schools.

Notwithstanding, sources indicate that a “back to basics” focus in education has made a negligible difference to students’ overall reading scores, as evidenced by NAPLAN and other standardised tests (Thompson, 2013; McGaw et al., 2020; Dwyer & Collins, 2022). This leaves educators questioning how teaching literacy can be nuanced to improve results, at the same time fully utilising what the research outlines as best practice in teaching reading (Hunter et al., 2024).

This research investigates whether a link exists between music and early reading acquisition, and what this link may look like in classrooms for schools, teachers, and students to best benefit from music and early reading partnership.

## Overview of Literature

Reading is widely regarded as the most fundamental academic skill, the bedrock of academic success. A highly regarded meta-analysis of reading research, report of the National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) reviewed the reading research literature and its implications for effective reading instruction. It identifies the essential components of teaching reading, colloquially referred to as the *fab five*. Konza (2014) added oral language to the *fab five*, making it the *big six*. These six evidence-based pillars of effective reading instruction comprise phonemic awareness, phonics, oral reading fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and oral language. The NRP report outlines the most effective ways to teach reading (NRP, 2000, p. 34), as do significant follow-up studies, including an Australian study: *Teaching Reading: Report and Recommendations* (Australian Government, 2005) and a British study: *The Independent Review of The Teaching of Early Reading* (Rose, 2006). Collectively, these studies underpin widespread contemporary literacy policy and practice.

The *big six* pillars of early reading instruction are seen as the essential skills of learning to read (NRP, 2000; Konza, 2014; Cox et al., 2019). However, other subjects at school also contribute to young learners becoming successful readers. When reading, readers seek to make meaning from text. The knowledge base we need to activate background knowledge, make connections, and make sense of reading, is accrued through life experiences (Wexler, 2020). Music naturally connects to the acquisition of the ‘big six’. The explicit teaching of early reading and music together yields powerful learning for students, which accelerates both reading and music mastery

(Hill-Clarke & Robinson, 2004; D'Agrosa, 2008; Bonacini et al., 2019). Teaching early reading and music together draws on principles and conditions that encourage *convergent cognition* (Rich et al., 2013), a term used to describe one subject increasing the other's effectiveness, when taught consecutively.

Teaching reading is a big part of the subject of English, including literacy, particularly in the early years. Literacy is not a subject in its own right but is fundamental to all learning areas (NSW Government, 2023). English and literacy interconnect, but English is much more than literacy. Literacy is a set of skills required for all subjects, while English is a broad subject in its own right. Other subjects at school also lay strong foundations for young learners to become successful readers. A wide body of evidence suggests that the arts, in particular music, enhance and motivate other learning, providing, and activating valuable background knowledge that naturally connects to the acquisition of formal reading skills, such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency and comprehension. The explicit teaching of early reading and music together can yield powerful learning for students, the conflation of which improves and accelerates both reading and music mastery (Hill-Clarke & Robinson, 2004; D'Agrosa, 2008; Bonacini et al., 2019).

Music precedes language development in the brain. From music, students move to song, then speech, then to alphabetic knowledge and reading. Students need to be able to keep a beat to learn to read (Kolb, 1996; Bonacini et al., 2019; Collins, 2020). Rhythm helps them to organise events into conventional and logical patterns, a main element that create the sequence of sound and silences in music, and in speech. When learning to read, rhythm helps students select and identify phonemes, syllables, words and phrases from an ongoing speech stream. Having good rhythmic skills is important for music learning and for language development, communication and oral reading fluency (Fisher et al., 2001; Holmberg, 2010; Kraus & Chandrasekaran, 2010).

When students can identify sounds aurally, the next sequential step is identifying the sound symbolically, which could either be as a musical note or a letter of the alphabet. Kraus and Chandrasekaran (2010) describe a phonological loop, a sound to symbol system in which the brain hears a sound and instructs the child how to make the particular sound. The child makes the sound, listens to the sound, reflects, makes changes and repeats the process in a cycle, connecting a sound to a symbol. In reading, a child hears a sound, speaks it, identifies the sounds and symbols in a word, then reads it (Kraus & Chandrasekaran, 2010; Collins, 2020). Being able to aurally distinguish sounds is a foundational building block both in learning to read and learning music. Collins (2020) describes how children need to be able to aurally identify the beginning, medial and end sounds in words; like high/low, loud/soft, fast/slow, and long/short sounds in music. Phonics instruction reinforces connections between spoken sounds



and written letters. Both language and music use parallel reading instructional strategies such as phonemic awareness, sight identification, orthographic awareness, and fluency.

The inclusion of music in early teaching of reading has many cognitive, educational, and social benefits that can scaffold students along the path to becoming successful readers. Cognitive benefits include improved inhibitory control and executive brain function, which assist students to concentrate, stay focused and manage their emotions (Levitin, 2006; Jones, 2010; da Silva et al., 2022). Executive functions and other *soft skills*, such as interpersonal and behavioural skills, are acknowledged as increasingly important in today's workforce (Hansen et al., 2014) for effective communication and collaboration, teamwork, creativity and problem solving.

Identified educational benefits of integrating music in early reading teaching include improved rhythmic abilities, sound to symbol correspondence, phonemic awareness and reading prosody (Wennerstrom, 2001; Collins, 2020; Godde et al., 2020). Socially, music has the propensity to calm and engage reluctant learners, facilitate cooperative group learning, and ensure that students feel comfortable and confident in the classroom (Curtis, 2007; Saefudin, 2019; Debreceeny, 2021).

Being able to aurally distinguish between sounds is a foundational building block both in learning to read and learning music. Collins (2020) describes how children need to be able to aurally identify the beginning, medial and end sounds in words. Phonics instruction reinforces connections between spoken sounds and written letters. Both language and music use parallel reading instructional strategies such as phonemic awareness, sight identification, orthographic awareness, and fluency. In summary, music has a role to play in developing students' language skills. Teaching early reading and music consecutively is a wise partnership as teaching the two together can create powerful learning experiences for students (Debreceeny, 2021; Pascoe et al., 2005).

## Research Project

This research project encompasses three main areas:

- 1) an overview of literature outlining the link between early reading and music;
- 2) a survey of interested teachers, seeking their views of how music is used to support literacy and English acquisition in the early reading classroom. The teacher survey seeks to garner teachers' background knowledge, experience and views on whether a link exists between literacy learning and music in the early reading classroom;
- 3) classroom observations in three case study schools to determine how these schools incorporate music into the curriculum and whether links are visible between music and early reading instruction.

The research investigates whether the integration of music in early reading classrooms contributes to improvements in students' reading abilities, as suggested by findings in the available literature and in teacher surveys.

## Research Significance

The current back-to-basics emphasis focusing on literacy and numeracy in education, has resulted in less time being allocated to teaching other subjects. Along with higher accountability attributable to high stakes testing like NAPLAN, the amount of time dedicated to teaching art and music in schools was reduced. Perhaps the trans-disciplinary pedagogical approach – like an early reading and music partnership – will be a possible solution to contemporary educational challenges related to declining reading standards and student disengagement. Evidence suggests that learning music strengthens brain connectivity, benefitting every part of the school curriculum, particularly the *big six* pillars of effective reading instruction (Frischen et al., 2019; da Silva et al., 2022; Debreceeny, 2021). This study builds on prior research investigating the music and early reading partnership, with the aim of moving knowledge forward in relation to how teaching music and early reading together can strengthen both areas of learning.

## Survey Research Questions

The main research question relates to whether the inclusion of music improves early reading and literacy acquisition:

In what ways, if any, does the integration of music in the early reading classroom contribute to improvements in students' reading abilities?

Semi-structured interview questions were emailed to 30 teachers interested in teaching music and early reading, with an invitation to participate in the research. The teachers were selected through a purposive sampling technique. The technique (snowball sampling) involved volunteer teachers recommending their colleagues who use music in their early reading classes. In this way, information tendered by interviewees provided deep, relevant information that addresses the research question being studied (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003, p. 279). From the 30 teachers contacted, 12 responses were received, culminating in a 40% overall response rate.

The interview questions, inspired by Curtis (2007), comprised:

- How do you engage students in literacy in the Kinder/Foundation to Year 2 (K/F-2) classroom?

- What instructional methods/ strategies/ techniques do you find most effective in teaching literacy?
- How do you know this (evidence)?
- How do you integrate music into the early reading classroom?
- Do you have any system support in connecting music and early reading in the classroom? If so, please elaborate.
- How do you think K-2 children perceive a music and literacy connection in the classroom?
- How do you view the connection between learning music and learning to read?
- What are your favourite musical activities in the K/F-2 reading classroom?
- Can you see links to literacy learning in the activities that you identified? Please elaborate.

Email responses were transcribed and entered in NVivo 12 plus, which is data analysis software. Texts and other materials were coded, synthesised, and analysed to identify main themes and make links between data sources. When coding the responses to the semi structured interview questions, categorisation and thematic analysis with reflective and inductive processes was undertaken. Parent codes were developed for each question and child nodes were formed according to responses of the participants. Similar child nodes were synthesised into themes. For example, an excerpt of responses to the question: *How do you view the connection between learning music and learning to read?* can be seen below. Participants' responses were initially placed in a parent node, then synthesised into several child nodes, then theme [in brackets following]. See below:

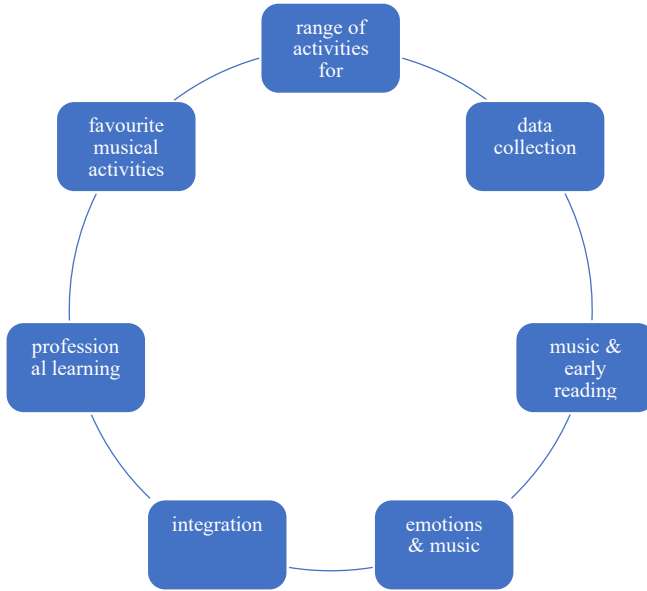
Table 1. *Excerpt/Example NVivo Codebook: The Early Reading and Music Partnership*

<p>&lt;Files\\interviews\\Interview ..... Infants&gt; – § 2 references coded [4.34% Coverage]</p> <p>Reference 1 – 1.52% Coverage</p> <p>Phonemic awareness, make it fun, cultural link [<i>range of activities for engagement, music and early reading links</i>].</p> <p>Reference 2 – 2.82% Coverage</p> <p>We don't think children think much about the link. They see it as mutually supportive [<i>integration</i>].</p> <p>&lt;Files\\interviews\\Interview ..... 21-2-21&gt; – § 6 references coded [21.95% Coverage]</p> <p>Reference 1 – 1.26% Coverage</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I always engaged students through a short discussion in K and 1 [<i>integration, range of activities for engagement</i>]</li> </ol> <p>Reference 2 – 2.86% Coverage</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. if there was a song which went with the theme or sound effects the children could make to enhance the experience they would be introduced first [<i>music and early reading links, emotions and music</i>]</li> </ol> <p>Reference 3 – 5.37% Coverage</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. As a natural enjoyable connection and one which adds more interest and overlay of skills such as listening, memory, concentration, rhyme, and expression that are common to both literacy and music [<i>range of enjoyable reading activities, music and early reading links</i>]</li> </ol>
--

The results were reviewed in collaboration with a colleague, discussed and modified according to guidelines contained in Richards and Morse (2013, p. 223), ensuring coding reliability.

The key themes, derived from the analysis of email responses, can be seen in figure 1 below:

Figure 1. *The Identified Key Themes*



## Identified Key Themes

### The Importance of Engaging Musical Activities in Early Reading

Respondents highlighted the importance of fun, joyful musical activities to support the acquisition of literacy and early reading skills in the early years at school.

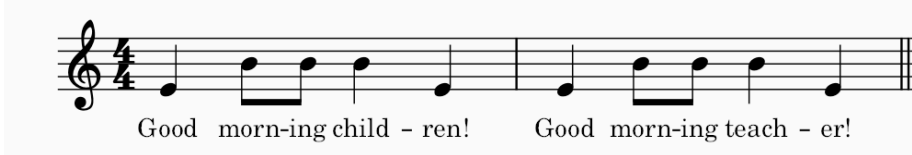
I engage students by breaking learning into manageable chunks, making things fun, looking for ways to introduce new content joyfully, and build on what students already know. We are in the learning and entertainment business. Rhythm and rhyme makes it fun. (Marion)

Music is a powerful motivator to engage students in learning to read (Curtis, 2007; Debreceeny, 2015; Del Rey, 2017). Variety and fun are key when using music to engage students in the early reading classroom.

Listening, singing, and responding in musical conversations using call and response, focus on the early reading skills of phonemic awareness, auditory discrimination, and oral language development. At the same time, students are learning basic musical concepts of rhythm (the patterns of sounds and silences that make the beat);

tempo (the speed at which the music is played); and melody (the tune of a piece of music), encouraging good listening and musical appreciation. See below:

Figure 2. *Example Musical Greeting*



Non-verbal cues are useful attention grabbers to introduce familiar musical lesson breaks and revise initial phonemes in words. For example, for teaching *Koala Brown*, an action song, the teacher holds up a koala toy, cueing students to form into pairs and face their partners, preparing them for a particular pending musical lesson break. Puppets, dress-ups, musical instruments, masks and toys are all useful props for scaffolding children in both acting out and internalising stories and songs, improving recall and comprehension (Oczkus, 2009).

Participation in a wide range of musical activities encourages students to practise early reading skills through active participation in enjoyable music and language arts activities.

## Assessment and Data Collection

Musical activities can be useful tools to collect information about student learning, to inform teaching, and to move students' skills and knowledge forward on the road to reading.

Class phonics checklists, used as a monitoring tool during morning circle, when alphabet songs are often used to reinforce student GPCs, are a time-efficient means of checking and monitoring students' growing GPC knowledge.

I always use a musical circle game, to greet each other in the morning. This allows me to observe and monitor many aspects of a child's continued reading development. Through observation, I collect a range of data and work out how to best engage each child. I identify ... vocabulary usage, clarity of oral language, listening skills and the ability to follow instructions, all necessary early reading skills. (Maria)

With follow up tasks, I can identify the children who need more personal one-on-one instruction and more intense focus on different strategies to help them with their oral language and early reading skills. (Maureen)

Breaking words into smaller units, as well as identifying and creating oral rhymes demonstrate students' growing phonological awareness, all measurable during class musical activities. For example, *The Rhyme Song*, a piggyback song, sung to the tune of *The William Tell Overture* (Rossini, 1829), invites individual students to provide words that rhyme with song lyrics in an enjoyable game format. For example:

What words rhyme what words rhyme with *bed, red, ted*?  
What words rhyme what words rhyme with *bed, red, ted*?  
What words rhyme what words rhyme with *bed, red, ted*?  
*Fed* rhymes with *bed, red, ted*.

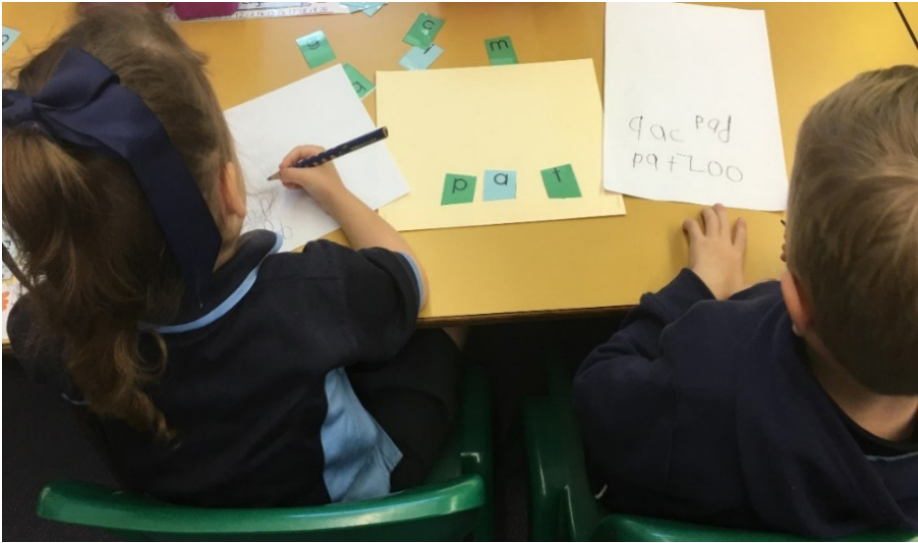
Through selecting individual students to respond to the questions in the song above, the activity provides assessment data on their phonological awareness, particularly knowledge of rhyme identification and production. Participating in songs that focus on rhyme and word play increases students' understanding of how phonemes can be manipulated to make new words, as students' ability to accurately decode words is a reliable predictor of future reading achievement (Hunter et al., 2024; Debreceeny, 2021; Moats, 1999).

## Music and Early Reading Links

Activities connecting early reading and music enhance both reading and music learning. Music complements reading instruction because, as in music, reading has rhythm and melody (D'Agrosa, 2008; Fisher, 2001).

Musical games and songs are a natural enjoyable connection to early reading. They add interest when introducing skills and content, such as listening, memory, concentration, rhyme, and expression that are common to both literacy and music. (Maria)

Singing phonemes to simple rhythm patterns as they are writing, helps students to blend phonemes to make words, reinforcing the talking, singing, reading and writing link.

Figure 3. *Blending Phonemes to Make Words*

In Figure 3 above, students use a range of manipulative objects (letter tiles, bottle tops, magnetic letters) to make new words, recording them on mini whiteboards; oftentimes using a musical scaffold to help them to orally blend, read, then write new words. For example:

Figure 4. *Musical Scaffold for Phoneme Blending*

Teachers use musical games and rhymes to introduce new content, building on what students already know. Props (like simple toys) help students to recall and recite initial phonemes and digraphs, with accompanying musical rhymes.

Teachers reported that students with backgrounds where English is an additional language or dialect (EAL/D); feel valued when their home language in the form of songs, chants, and rhymes, is utilised in the classroom. In doing so, teachers are drawing on the potential of *translanguaging*, using students' entire repertoire of language resources to maximise learning (Beveridge et al., 2021, p. 23).

Students feel valued when their home language is taught at school, through songs and chants, building cultural knowledge, understanding and respect in all students. (Sonia)



The video (*Baby Shark Vid.*, n.d.) draws on Vietnamese and English language to reinforce *s, sh*, in a simple musical action rhyme, provided by a Vietnamese community member, building important links between home and school knowledge.

Figure 5. *Baby Shark Action Rhyme (Vietnamese/English)*



Source: *Baby Shark Vid.*, n.d. ([https://www.youtube.com/shorts/EyFqd\\_3-vU4](https://www.youtube.com/shorts/EyFqd_3-vU4))

Multicultural texts, songs and chants play an important role in music and literacy learning as they acknowledge what students already know, help students to understand their own and others' culture, and build intercultural understanding, knowledge, and cultural pride.

### Emotions and Music

Music surrounds students with the language of emotions and opens communicative spaces for students to talk about their feelings. Music can facilitate oral language acquisition, a pillar of effective reading instruction (Konza, 2014), through talking about how music makes them feel. Similar to discussions about quality literature in class, music facilitates oral language development through students sharing what makes them happy (or sad; or the myriad of emotions in between...), including their own likes and dislikes.

Music plays a role in conveying emotion – exposure to music at a young age can help children to identify and connect with ideas on an emotional level – this impacts communication and interpersonal skills. (Tamara)

In the survey, teachers shared musical games and songs that contribute to a positive class climate in which students are engaged and feel safe and valued. Cumulative songs like: *We're going on a bear hunt* (Rosen & Oxenbury, 1984), *That's what I like*, and *How do you feel today?* (Beveridge, 2023, pp. 13, 18) scaffold students in discussing their feelings in a safe, caring space. Students may sing or speak their responses, reinforcing the difference between singing and speaking voices, all the while focusing on oral language development.

The well-known children's song: *If you're happy and you know it*, attributed to Joe Raposo (1971), encourages students to explore and articulate their feelings, drawing on actions and vocabulary to express how they feel. They can embroider their contributions with Orff instruments and perform joyfully together, contributing to wellbeing through the creation of a rich classroom musical tapestry.

## Integration

Teachers reported that they plan musical activities that support existing literacy programs. In this way, music is integrated into early reading instruction, "but it is never forced" (Marion).

High frequency words are taught alongside phonics, alongside quality texts. We introduce parallel music and literacy, focusing on rhythm, rhyme, and semantics. When integrated, it is part of the literacy program and supports existing learning. (Marion)

During writing [joint construction], we compose stories and put them to song. Reading begins with oral language; a 'sea of talk' (Dwyer, 1989). (Shirley)

Singing is talking and chanting. It underlies reading. All those little rhymes and tunes that are used to teach spelling, handwriting and grammar; or even just the alphabet, make literacy learning fun and easy to remember. (Helen)

Skills common to both music and early reading include phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, visual word identification, orthographic awareness, and fluency (Del Rey, 2017; Butzlaff, 2000; Darrow et al., 2008). The integration of musical activities in early reading lessons provide seamless opportunities for students to practise emerging early reading and literacy skills.

## Professional Learning

Three teachers recounted they had received professional instruction in music, although none specifically in relation to how music can be used to support early reading acquisition. The first mention was new curriculum implementation, and in the second, a group of teachers from the same school reported that they attended

professional learning in their own time, provided by a national professional teaching association. Gavin shared that his school uses the expertise of musical staff members to provide professional learning across the school.

When the Creative Arts syllabus was released (2006) we did some professional learning on the new syllabus. Teaching music and reading together was not mentioned. (Maria)  
We attended in services in our own time, like Primary English Teachers (PETAA) courses, when offered. We had visits from literacy consultants. There was lots of professional learning on teaching reading. I cannot recall any on early reading and music. (Maureen)

I can only remember one in-service where the focus was on music, and that was a long time ago. Specific staff members with musical expertise were chosen due to their talents e.g. piano playing and band, and they wrote songs for us that we often used in the early reading classroom, with good results. (Gavin)

No primary teachers surveyed participated in professional learning in relation to teaching music in early reading, and only one teacher reported that they attended professional learning in music.

An Australian review of music education in schools (Pascoe et al., 2005) identified that many Australian students miss out on effective music education because of a lack of equity of access; lack of teacher expertise and professional confidence, lack of quality of provision, and the poor status of music in many schools.

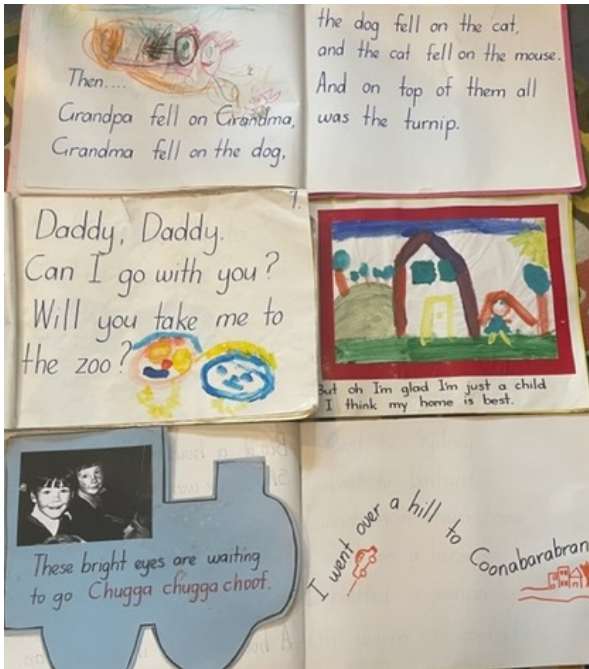
Teachers need more professional learning in the form of curriculum support materials, advisory services, networks, mentoring and professional development; as the quality of teaching is related to teacher skills and pedagogic content knowledge (Gore et al., 2021). “Professional learning can improve the quality of teaching and... high quality teaching improves student learning” (Hunter et al., 2024, p. 62)

### Favourite Musical Activities

Favourite musical activities identified by survey respondents include chants, action songs and games that reinforce existing classroom learning.

Singing at school... I always love the *Ants on the Apple* song for kids, and it is a great way to teach and drill grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs). I also love songs that reinforce current phonics learning and actions are a big part of that too! Beginning the day with a *good morning song* is a joyful way of settling students and getting the class ready to focus on literacy learning. (Melissa)

We all love creating class big books. They are firm favourites. I see them [students] singing along to the rhyme and rhythm of the text, adding actions as they excitedly read the texts that we composed and illustrated together. (Helen)

Figure 6. *Class Big Books Provided by Helen*

Writing simple percussion scores and creating (and performing) soundscapes helps students make sense of challenging vocabulary in literary and informative texts, building fluency.

Figure 7. *Text Cover, B. Bancroft, Coming Home to Country (2020)*

For example, in the text: *Coming Home to Country* (Bancroft, 2020), challenging vocabulary is explained by adding related sound effects. “A rolling storm drops a majestic downpour” (p. 15) comes alive by adding rain sticks and thunder tubes, vibraslaps and cabasas, aiding meaning-making, linked to the comprehension pillar of effective reading instruction. See below:

Figure 8. *Thunder Tube, Rain Sticks, Vibraslap, Cabasa*



Students enjoy sharing poetry together, as it helps them to listen, interact with texts and speak clearly and prosodically. Poetry accompanied by music provides students with opportunities to use their voices to communicate ideas and feelings.

Singing and active learning stimulates cognitive capacities, attention, concentration, memory and learning (Iwasaku et al., 2013; Debreceeny, 2021; Keating, 2020). Timeless nursery rhymes like *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*, *Old McDonald Had a Farm*, and *Baa Baa Black Sheep* enrich literacy learning through developing language, musical concepts and prosocial behaviours. Students add instruments, make choices and judgements about rhyme and rhythm, and reorganise sounds through “conscious creativity” (Bridges, 1994, p. 102). In addition to addressing the *big six* of early reading, learning to sing, read, write, play and perform rhymes like these teaches various aspects of musicality. These basic musical concepts include dynamics (loud and soft), tempo (fast and slow), pitch (high or low) and timbre (the tonal quality [or tone colour] of sounds).

Music and young children are a natural combination, as they love to move and their attention is easily grabbed through music, whether it’s games, songs, dance, movement, or making the music themselves through body percussion or using percussion instruments. (Tamara)

Favourite musical activities in the early reading classroom specified in survey responses ranged from “developing sound and letter correspondences through music”; “learning new GPCs and repeated practice of favourite class texts set to music”; to “performance of musical activities based on favourite books at school concerts”.

Overall, favourite musical activities provided in survey responses focused on “building rhyme, rhythm, facilitating engagement and creating positive classroom climates conducive to learning”.

## Classroom Observations

The methodology underpinning the classroom observations was multiple case study. A qualitative multiple case study was chosen to investigate music teaching in the early reading classroom from multiple perspectives, to provide information-rich cases that contributed to in-depth study of the phenomenon. Selection criteria for schools’ participation in classroom observations include:

- Willingness of schools to participate in the research;
- Music is a focus in early years classrooms;
- Selected schools demonstrate a variety of models of music implementation.

Three case study schools were chosen for classroom observations. I sought variability in the schools by selecting a large rural school, a medium-sized school in a city, and a primary school in a small town. No specialist music teachers are provided in primary schools in the education system in which the research was undertaken, and any related expense connected with teaching music in early years classrooms is covered from general school funds.

The school leaders in all three schools shared the opinion that art and music help young learners achieve success. All the case-study schools are government primary schools and although they all implement music in the early years, they do so in various ways. The school names I am using in this article are pseudonyms to comply with ethics requirements and to protect the privacy of participating schools.

## Schools

The first case study is Kinsley Public School, situated in a village, 77 km from a big city. 431 students attend this school. 87% of those students are in the bottom two quarters for socio educational advantage (Australia-wide). 26% of the students identify as Indigenous<sup>1</sup> and 6% have a language background other than English (LBOTE). NAPLAN reading results indicate the school results fall in the band below all Australian students (Year 3) (ACARA, n.d.).

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1 Indigenous students are those who identify as being of Australian Aboriginal descent or First Nations Australians. The Australian government invests in strategies to close the gap of educational disadvantage between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students through targeted measures to improve the education of First Nations students (Australian Government, n.d.).

Next, Finkley Public School is an inner-city school in a capital city. 280 students attend Finkley Public School. 77% are situated in the top two quarters for socio-economical advantage Australia-wide. No students (0%) identify as Indigenous and 83% have a LBOTE. At Finkley, NAPLAN reading results indicate the school results fall in the band above all Australian students (Year 3) (ACARA, n.d.).

The third case study, Carnley Public School, is a small school in a regional city. 134 students attend Carnley Public School. 56% of the students are situated in the middle two quarters for socio-economical advantage (Australia-wide). 24% of students identify as Indigenous and 6% have a language background other than English. At Carnley, NAPLAN reading results indicate the school’s average percentage result is similar to all Australian students (Year 3) (ACARA, n.d.).

The comparison table of the three schools below summarises the differences in student enrolments, socioeconomic advantage, compilation of student populations and national reading results, which is the evidence of variability of case selection.

Table 2. Comparison Table of Case Study Schools

School name	Students	Socioeconomic advantage %	Indigenous students %	LBOTE %	NAPLAN reading result Year 3 %
Kinsley Public School	431	87% students bottom 2 quarters	26%	6%	Band below all Australian students
Finkley Public School	280	77% students top 2 quarters	0%	83%	Band above all Australian students
Carnley Public School	134	56% students middle 2 quarters	24%	6%	Band close to all Australian students

Source: ACARA, n.d.

### Kingsley Public School

Kingsley Public School purchased an on-line music program for early years classrooms, delivered weekly by a teacher with an interest in music, who delivers the web-based program. The online program provides sequential music lessons for teachers and students which are supplemented by the music teacher who addresses emerging student needs.



Figure 9. *Online Music Program*



The weekly music lesson *was* a team-teaching time in which the dedicated music teacher and class teachers worked together to implement the program. Class teachers reported this worked well as they were able to integrate what they learned during the music lessons into their everyday classroom practice. However, a system change resulted in class teachers being provided with an additional hour release from face-to-face teaching each week, and the team-teaching music timeslot disappeared. Although their students still access the online music program, class teachers are no longer able to easily integrate the new learning into existing programs.

The school may consider how to reorganise and reinstate the team-teaching music timeslot in some way, so that class teachers can again share the music learning, putting them in a better position improve the skill and embed the music learning into their daily English teaching. Integrating music into existing English and literacy activities deepens learning of those pillars of effective reading that we know make a difference to students learning to read. In integrating the two, we are providing students with the best, evidence-based early reading teaching we can deliver.

## Finkley Public School

Finkley Public School is fortunate to have a specialist music teacher who works across a secondary and a primary school, based on an agreement between the principals. The specialist teacher visits Foundation and Year 1 classrooms weekly and models the implementation of sequential musical activities in-class, for class teachers, building on what the students already know. Activities focus on developing students' listening skills, rhyme, rhythm, movement and singing. At the same time, students are practising their oral language and supporting their literacy development.



Figure 10. *Specialist Teacher Modelling Musical Action Rhyme In-Class*



Through a professional learning lens, the specialist teacher shares their expertise with staff, supporting class teachers in growing their musical knowledge and skills. In this teacher professional learning model, the specialist music teacher is potentially a champion of change, passing on their specialist expertise to classroom teachers with whom she works, building their skills, knowledge, and professional confidence. The next challenge from a sustainability standpoint is for the specialist teacher to actively mentor the class teacher whilst the class teacher takes the lead, through modelling, rehearsal, enactment, and reflection. Rather than simply observing, the class teacher could work alongside the specialist teacher to maximise impact. Both teachers would gain new knowledge and skills through teasing out common ideas and “weaving authentic teaching tapestries, where content knowledge and understanding are drawn from one subject discipline and used to enrich and apply to others – connecting the curriculum dots” (Gould Lundy, 2015, p. 8).

Collaborative practice provides the best chance of learning being sustained when the specialist teacher moves on to another class (Beveridge, 2014). D’Agrosa (2008) outlines the unlimited possibilities for specialist music and class teachers working together through collaborative practice. Finkley Public School is well-situated to create important meaning-making and multiple literacy experiences through the authentic integration of the music and English curricula.

## Carnley Public School

Carnley Public school has no specialist music expertise or access to online music programs. However, there is a teacher in staff who has been teaching Foundation students for a long time and music is present in their pedagogical practice.

The teacher uses music as a vehicle to drill GPCs, build alphabetical knowledge, settle students to work and facilitate writing – in fact, for every facet of literacy learning, as well as in classroom activities more broadly. The teacher’s metaphorical teaching toolbox is brimming with musical activities which support classroom learning. They seamlessly infuse music into their literacy instruction. Selected activities support curriculum content currently being taught, and music complements and deepens the instruction rather than detracts from it (Fisher, 2001).

A challenge for the school may be succession planning and sharing the teacher’s expertise across the school, to ensure their legacy of considerable musical knowledge and skills remains in the school, should the teacher decide to move somewhere else in the future. In this way, the teacher could “showcase best practice”, “sharing school-based specialist expertise” (Hunter et al., 2024, p. 65) on how they integrate music in teaching reading.

Figure 11. *Good Morning Greeting Focusing on Oral Language Development*



## Conclusion

The survey responses and classroom observations both indicate there are natural connections and considerable overlaps between teaching reading and teaching music. Music has a role to play in developing students' language skills and phonemic awareness. This research supports the reciprocity of learning music and learning to read.

The impact of music training on reading skills seems clear. Phonological awareness is an important early reading precursor, word decoding is associated with auditory skills and comprehension is a mix of basic decoding and higher-level cognitive processes like memory and attention. All of these skills are important in both music learning and early reading.

Through music, students' auditory, kinaesthetic, and emotional systems work together. Music aids memory because the beat, melody and harmony carry semantic content, supporting meaning-making and building comprehension. Children learn with less effort and remember information more easily when rhyme and rhythm are present. "Noticing" rhyme and rhythm across a range of texts provides phonological information that increases vocabulary and fluency in enjoyable ways.

All students deserve the many advantages that the early reading and music partnership affords, as music engages young learners and builds enthusiasm and eagerness to read. Students are mesmerised by the rhyme, rhythm and melody of music, song, rhymes and chants, supporting them in their reading journey.

Students benefit when they learn music and reading together. Notwithstanding, there is an identified need for more research to further clarify how music education enhances early reading acquisition and under what circumstances these benefits may be fully used in the early reading classroom.

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## Nursery Rhyme, Rhythm and Narrative Thinking in Early Childhood Education

Rymowanki, rytm i myślenie narracyjne w edukacji  
wczesnodziecięcej

### KEYWORDS

rhythm, music,  
storytelling,  
narrative thinking,  
silent books, early  
childhood

### ABSTRACT

The contribution focuses on the effectiveness of nursery rhymes, music, and storytelling in early childhood education. Various research studies carried out over the past twenty years have demonstrated the way in which the use of rhythm, music, and storytelling can facilitate the development of a child's overall personality. This study examines the impact of incorporating silent books into early childhood education to enhance a child's language skills, social interaction, and cognitive development. Over the course of one month, teachers assessed the progress of young children in various domains, including vocabulary acquisition, narrative fluency, and peer interaction. The results highlight the importance of providing diverse opportunities for play with stories, images, and music in supporting holistic development in young children. By integrating these rich experiences into early education practices, educators can effectively nurture linguistic, social, and emotional competencies, laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning and growth.

## SŁOWA KLUCZE    ABSTRAKT

rytm, muzyka,  
opowiadanie  
historyjek, myślenie  
narracyjne, ciche  
książki, wczesne  
dzieciństwo

Niniejszy artykuł skupia się na skuteczności rymowanek, muzyki i opowiadań w edukacji wczesnodziecięcej. Badania prowadzone w ciągu ostatnich dwudziestu lat wykazały, że wykorzystanie rytmu, muzyki i historyjek może usprawnić ogólny rozwój dziecka. Badanie opisane w niniejszym tekście ukazuje wpływ stosowania tzw. cichych książek w edukacji wczesnodziecięcej w celu poprawy umiejętności językowych dziecka, a także jego interakcji społecznych i rozwoju poznawczego. W ciągu miesiąca nauczyciele oceniali postępy małych dzieci w różnych dziedzinach, w tym w przyswajaniu słownictwa, płynności narracji i interakcji z rówieśnikami. Wyniki tych obserwacji podkreślają znaczenie możliwości zabawy z opowieściami, obrazami i muzyką we wspieraniu holistycznego rozwoju małych dzieci. Włączając takie zajęcia do praktyki nauczania małych dzieci, nauczyciele mogą skutecznie wspierać kompetencje językowe, społeczne i emocjonalne swych podopiecznych, tworząc dla nich solidne podstawy do nauki i rozwoju trwającego przez całe życie.

## Introduction

The attention given to a child's learning and the ways in which he/she acquires knowledge in the early years has grown significantly since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. This interest has been fueled by various factors, including the development of childhood sciences, the evolution of psychological and pedagogical theories, and social changes that have led to a greater awareness of the importance of the early years in a child's development.

One of the key aspects of this focus has been the understanding of expressive forms and their role in the child's personality development and cognitive abilities. This has led to an increase in targeted investigations and research aimed at understanding how children explore the world, communicate, and express themselves. Artistic forms such as nursery rhymes, rhythms, songs, and storytelling have gained particular attention, offering children creative ways to express themselves and contributing to their holistic development. However, along with this growing interest, there has been a growing trend to idealize childhood, often linked to the decline of positivist thinking and a yearning for a more genuine and spontaneous understanding of what it means to be a child. These romanticized views have resulted in adults projecting their own needs and desires onto children, thereby shaping the way children's experiences and expressions are interpreted. This projection can obscure the true nature of childhood, leading to misunderstandings and misrepresentations of children's authentic selves.



Among the expressive forms that have received particular attention are artistic content such as nursery rhymes, rhythms, songs, and storytelling. These forms not only offer children a creative way to express themselves but can also play an important formative role in shaping the entire personality of children from 0 to 6 years of age. These activities can help the child to develop linguistic, cognitive, emotional, and social skills, as well as stimulate his/her imagination and creativity.

Furthermore, the use of artistic expression as an educational tool can promote more meaningful and engaging learning, encouraging children to actively participate in the exploration of the world around them. In this sense, nursery rhymes, rhythms, songs, and storytelling are not just forms of entertainment but also powerful tools for fostering a child's overall development and promoting his/her emotional and cognitive well-being.

## Imagination and Creativity in Early Childhood and the Development of the Learning Process

Children enjoy listening to stories, nursery rhymes and chants at home or in the nursery and pre-primary school classroom. The use of storytelling and of music in nursery rhymes and chants facilitates the process of vocabulary building and language acquisition. Music and rhythm facilitate the ability to use language and support the development of expression and communication (Imberty, 2019). Stories stimulate a child's imagination while rhymes and chants activate his/her musicality.

When a child listens to a story, he/she is transported to an imaginary world where he/she can invent places in which characters of all kinds exist. Listening to a story such as "Little Red Riding Hood", for instance, can take hold of a child's imagination whereby the characters of the little girl, the mother, the grandmother, and the wolf become real in the child's mind. Many children are frightened by the mental image of the big, bad wolf interacting with the little girl and, more importantly, with the grandmother, a beloved figure for most children. This feeling of discomfort becomes apparent in the child's facial expressions and body language, at first relaxed then tense, as the story unfolds and reaches a dramatic climax.

According to Piaget (1964/2012), this type of reaction can occur only after the child has had a tangible experience of a child-mother-grandmother relationship along with an interactive experience with other children. Moreover, the child must be able to recognize the main elements of the story, such as the color red and the figure of the wolf or of an animal similar to a wolf.

In early childhood, there needs to be some connection to reality so that the child can create mental images and understand different kinds of situations. According to

Bachelard (1938/1995), the imagination, or the translation into images of wishes and “movements of the soul” for affectivity at the subconscious level, is a scope that precedes rationality. The imagination is expressed through three modalities in different spheres: that of day-dreaming, which interprets subjectivity perceived by the senses, that of poetry, which creates fantastic universes, and that of science, which has a similar analogizing function, producing subjective and pre-scientific awareness. Bachelard pursues a strong interest in art and literature, which forms the basis of several of his writings (Bachelard, 1960/1973, 1970/1987). While acknowledging the opposition between science and art, the French philosopher claims that the independence of any activity of the imagination is the basis for artistic production preceding the affirmation of rationality.

To develop the imagination, one can begin with educational activities connected to the arts. These may include songs, music for listening and movement, making up nursery rhymes, and engaging in handicrafts using modelling clay and modelling dough, to name just a few. Art, imagination, and rational thought are specific phenomena which share equal value. The imagination is a creative faculty which goes beyond the mere reproduction of perception. It produces a form of knowledge that transforms the object itself. The imagination does not need to adapt to reality, as it creates imaginary worlds made up of things not found in reality but may be superior to reality itself.

According to Melanie Klein, the type of knowledge produced by the imagination differs from that of rational thought, but these two forms of knowledge remain distinct traits in humans. Man/woman is constantly comparing himself/herself with reality, and at the same time, he/she continues to be a dreamer who creates unreal worlds. “Man is simultaneously a rationalist-creator and a dreamer-non-creator” (Klein, 1921/1986, p. 27).

According to Bruner, the two processes of imagination and rationality are closely connected. He makes a distinction between two types of thought: the paradigmatic (logical-scientific) and the narrative. Both types provide a special method of ordering experiences and constructing reality. These two ways of thinking, while being complementary, are distinct. Any attempt to attribute one to the other or to consider one over the other will inevitably lead us to overlook the richness and variety of thought (Bruner, 1986/2001, p 15). Each of these two ways of thinking possesses its own operating principles and its own validity criteria (Bruner, 1986/2001, p 15). The first type of cognitive function is typical of the narrative, whereas the second is typical of argumentation. While argumentation “convinces us of one’s truth” and “is subject to verification”, narratives convince us of one’s “verisimilitude” and do not establish the truth. Paradigmatic thought draws upon classification and conceptualization, and seeks the general causes of events. Narrative thought is able to contextualize without

a time frame those events common to all humanity. On the contrary, paradigmatic thought tends to transcend detail to reach an ever-higher level of abstraction (Bruner, 1986/2001, p. 8).

An important point in Bruner's dissertation is that both narrative and argumentation require the contribution of an intensely creative way of thinking, intended as the ability to construct worlds.

According to Bruner, creativity is a form of productive thought characterized by combinatorial activity and an organization of information from a new perspective. (Bruner, 1964/1968, p. 45). This productive thought consists of "not making useless combinations but rather making useful ones. Invention is discernment and choice" (Bruner, 1964/1968, p. 46). Listening to stories and acting them out through movement and interpretation encourages a child's creativity. Nursery school children, for example, can play the characters in the story, an activity that offers them an opportunity to imagine a reality different from their own and which is closer to their wishes and needs for self-assertion. On the other hand, listening to stories represents the main vehicle with which, stimulated by his curiosity, the child can experience the world of things and events. The intertwining of these elements reveals the child's inclination to engage, through playful activity, in two different types of thought. The first of these is aimed at the construction of imaginary worlds, while the second is directed at the knowledge of reality.

We need to ask whether or not and in what way we can stimulate a child's natural impulse for imagination, develop his/her attitude for play, and build his/her knowledge through educational initiatives. The goal is to foster the imaginative thinking process which forms the basis of both narrative and rational thought. A point of reference for this concept can be found in the educative experiences of Susan Isaacs, head of Malting House, a school which she founded in the 1920's. This experience was especially significant with Isaacs setting up a learning environment well-suited to developing the child's intelligence and imagination. Isaacs' vision sprung from an in-depth knowledge of the inner world of children and from her own unique way of viewing the world, along with her application of Dewey's idea of "learning by doing".

According to the British pedagogist, a child's natural resources do not develop independently but rather must be cultivated by providing a favorable environment and by adopting a specific attitude on the part of the adult who offers support, fostering, and encouragement. It is not a question of providing the child with knowledge by way of the direct transmission of ideas, but of fostering activities based on the child's natural interests and inclinations expressed during freely chosen play. These are the seeds of discovery and cognitive depth, which through step-by-step encouragement and without influencing the child, can lead to significant learning, attitudes, and competences.

According to Isaacs, there are essentially two motivations behind a child's behaviors: "on one hand, the enjoyment of stories and pretend play, singing, dancing, and all forms of self-assertion", and on the other hand, "the child's pleasure [...] in discovering and their direct and active interest in the things and events of the physical and human world" (Isaacs, 1930/1961, p. 24). The first motivation finds satisfaction in "creative imagination and its expression in literature and manual work, in music, theatre, and rhythmic movement" (ibid) and has its roots in the rich fantasy life of children; the second originates from the epistemophilic impulse and manifests itself "in forms of diligent investigation and a taste for the actual process of discovery, which are at least anticipations of true scientific spirit" (Isaacs, 1930/1961, p. 25). At the Malting House, the importance of imagination was recognized both in the form of imaginative play and in that of aesthetic expression and enjoyment: "Play is [...] the starting point not only for cognitive development but also for the creative intent which, when fully developed, distinguishes the artist, the novelist, the poet" (Isaacs, 1930/1961, pp. 133–134). However, the role of the adult is central: imagination must be nurtured to lead to expressive forms of value and significant aesthetic enjoyment, just as curiosity must be supported to become a source of observation and scientific investigation. But such promotion must occur "from within".

## Playing With Rhymes and Music

The suggestion to have children play with their voices, searching for rhymes and stimulating the creation of nursery rhymes, constitutes an educational activity for children in nursery and kindergarten. The educator or teacher can "throw" a word (e.g., cake) and invite the children to repeat it several times, clapping their hands, scanning the syllables, pronouncing it aloud, then increasingly softly until silence. The children can then repeat the same word starting from silence, which the educator emphasizes by counting the numbers to cover the length of the pause (e.g., one, two, three), then start pronouncing the word first whispered and then gradually louder until shouting the word itself. The rhythmic scanning of the word can be accompanied by body movements such as turning around, bending down, reaching upward, depending on what the children "feel" while pronouncing, whispering, shouting the chosen word. This rhythmic game is an important exercise for auditory sensibility, for the development of creativity, and for executive functions. From rhythm, one can move on to melody and then "sing" the word. The word can become the stimulus to find other words that rhyme with that specific word, for example: cake, bake, lake, make, take. Children are invited to repeat a word but to pronounce it with different intensity and tone, in increasing or decreasing rhythm. This simple example of

rhythmic-timbral-melodic structuring creates particular emotions that evoke deep resonances. Rhythm, like music, the body, and musical instruments, can be “mediating objects” that release some of the tensions that daily life can accumulate even in children. Music is a rewarding non-verbal language. It offers multiple opportunities to stimulate encounter and cooperation among children: singing together, producing rhythms together, building simple instruments together (e.g., maracas made by putting rice in a plastic bottle; a tambourine made with paper plates, pierced at the edge and in whose holes the metal caps of bottles are inserted). These instruments can accompany the teacher using a piano or a guitar to guide the singing. You can pronounce and then sing the rhyming words previously searched. You can use rhyming words to compose short phrases with the children and build a nursery rhyme even without meaning like “nonsense”:

I take a cake  
going to the lake.  
I lost the cake and  
called Jake:  
“Make a cake  
And come to the lake”.  
“I’ll bake the cake  
– said Jake –  
And run to the lake  
To eat the cake  
With...

The nursery rhyme, sung or recited, while making a circle, can become a game in which the name of one child at a time is pronounced and the child that was called moves to the centre of the circle. All the children repeat the nursery rhyme and the child in the centre of the circle pronounces the name of another child who takes his place and the chant continues.

Music arises from history, lived experience, and relationships with others and with the environment. Composers, instrumentalists, and storytellers have honed the ability to give shape and expression through the language of music (Visioli, 2011, p. 18) to personal experiences or universal values in different spaces and times (Visioli, 2011, p. 18). Music has effects on the entire person. Changes in heart and respiratory rates have been recorded while listening to music of various kinds. Listening to music also influences blood pressure, digestion, and the muscular system. In the recording of an electroencephalogram, the transition from the lowest to the highest musical tone determines a desynchronization of alpha waves. Music also acts on the level of sensory stimulation and, due to its dynamic capabilities, reaches the unconscious.

The child can be considered a *homo musicus* (Visioli, 2011) who shows his musicality at every moment and on every occasion. If this natural tendency towards rhythm and music were always to be cultivated, the child would develop creativity and divergent thinking.

In music education, the child is involved in a process of sound sensitization in which he/she can invent musical nursery rhymes or compose sounds, melodies, and songs together with his/her peers. In doing so, the child draws from autobiographical storytelling and expresses emotions and experiences also through body miming and acting out simple dramas.

Rhythm enhances movement, making the body more sensitive and attentive to others, thus opening the way to dialogue (Regni, 1997). Rhythm and music activate attention and concentration, promote processes of analysis and synthesis, and facilitate the acquisition of fluid speech and correct pronunciation of accents and syllables (Cangià, 2011). They also stimulate the understanding of the text through a focus on keywords, mime, and gesturing.

Music often serves as a sonic backdrop for a story. By listening to music, children are encouraged to recount their own experiences through drawing, which is the primary narrative form of expression for young children.

## Narrative Thinking and Storytelling

Narrative thinking refers to the cognitive process through which individuals organize and make sense of their experiences by constructing narratives or stories. It involves the ability to recognize, interpret, and create narratives, serving as frameworks for understanding the world around us and for communicating our thoughts and emotions.

Narrative thinking is fundamental to human cognition and plays a crucial role in the development of memory, identity, problem-solving skills, and social interaction. Through narratives, children construct meaning, establish connections between events, and become aware of their feelings. In addition, narrative thinking plays a central role in communication and social interaction. Overall, narrative thinking is a fundamental aspect of human cognition that shapes how we perceive and make sense of the world. By constructing narratives, we organize our experiences, communicate our thoughts and emotions, and create meaning in our lives.

One of the main tools to facilitate a child's development of narrative thinking at an early age is storytelling. From early childhood, children learn to structure their experiences into stories. Through storytelling, children share their experiences, beliefs, and values with others, fostering empathy, understanding, and connection. As they grow

older, they become more adept at constructing complex narratives that reflect their evolving understanding of themselves and of their environment.

Storytelling for young children is a rich and dynamic practice involving the oral narration of tales, fables, myths, and other stories tailored to engage and captivate a child's curiosity. Children are stimulated by storytelling to develop imagination, creativity, and critical thinking skills. Listening to stories helps children to develop language skills, including the use of vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. Storytelling exposes children to a rich and diverse range of words and phrases, enhancing their linguistic competence and comprehension abilities.

Stories provide children with opportunities to explore and express their emotions in a safe and supportive environment. Characters in stories often face challenges, overcome obstacles, and experience a range of emotions, allowing children to empathize with them and develop their emotional intelligence.

When children engage in storytelling activities together, they learn to take turns, listen to others, and collaborate to create narratives, fostering positive social interaction and relationships.

Through stories, children learn about their own cultural heritage as well as the cultures of others. Folktales from different regions and ethnicities provide insights into diverse cultural traditions, values, and beliefs, promoting intercultural awareness and appreciation. Many of the most beloved fairy tales convey moral values and teach universal principles.

Furthermore, storytelling for children is a source of entertainment and enjoyment. Whether read aloud by a caregiver, teacher, or storyteller, or explored independently through audio recordings, or digital media, stories captivate a child's imagination and provide hours of delight and amusement. Storytelling plays a crucial role in a child's development, offering a rich and rewarding experience that stimulates his mind and his feelings, and facilitates socialization.

Analysing the most famous fairy tales from around the world highlights how these stories convey universal values of good triumphing over evil, the importance of friendship, family bonds, courage, honesty, etc. Characters often form strong alliances and support networks that help them overcome obstacles and achieve their goals. These relationships emphasize the importance of loyalty, compassion, and solidarity in navigating life's challenges. Fairy tales like "Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, and Sleeping Beauty" have been passed down through generations and across cultures, transcending geographical and temporal boundaries.

## Storywriting: An Experience in Pre-Primary Schools

A qualitative study was conducted across ten preschools in the city and province of Teramo, Italy, to explore the impact of diverse linguistic and artistic practices on the holistic development of preschool children. The study aimed to assess the effectiveness of using narration, drawing, music, and singing in fostering cognitive, emotional, and social growth among young learners. The study involved thirty teachers and approximately 300 children.

### Methodology

The educational intervention was inspired by Munari's concept of "books not-to-be read" (Munari, 1984/2011). These silent books comprised pages with various colors, geometric shapes, and illustrations forming a narrative without written words. Munari used to experiment with materials to make the book a tactile experience even before it became a reading experience, with the ultimate goal of introducing young children to the allure of the book as an object to touch, manipulate, and smell. This line of his artistic experiments includes the illegible books (*Illegible Book*, 1984) or the pre-books (*The Pre-books*, 1980), objects that have only the shape of a book but are mostly made without written words, using only different materials to assemble the pages (cardboard, tissue paper, wood, fabric, etc.). These objects suitable even for the very young children.

Munari's books not-to be-read- allowed the teachers to tell the story while the children listened and looked at the images that the teachers showed them from the silent book. Subsequently, the children could pick up the books and invent their own stories while looking at the drawn images. The teachers employed a series of qualitative tools to facilitate and evaluate the intervention:

1. **Storytelling with Silent Books:** Teachers narrated stories while children observed the images in the silent books. This method allowed children to engage with the visual content and create their own narratives based on the illustrations.
2. **Music Integration:** Children selected background music to accompany their storytelling. For five-year-olds, teachers segmented sentences into syllables, encouraging rhythmic clapping and singing of the narrated content. Then they tried to turn the short sentences of the oral narration into sung words.
3. **Observational Assessments:** Teachers maintained logbooks to document each child's progress. Observations reported in the logbooks focused on the different language skills, sentence structuring, vocabulary enrichment, story comprehension, and peer interactions. These items correspond to the checklist



specifically constructed to test children's spontaneous storytelling using silent books and their ability in rhythmic clapping and singing.  
The checklist statements were the following:

### Language Skills

- Oral Expression: Child expresses thoughts and ideas clearly during storytelling.
- Listening Skills: Child demonstrates active listening and comprehension during peer storytelling sessions.
- Grammar and Syntax: Child constructs grammatically correct sentences during spontaneous storytelling (according to the different children's ages)

### Sentence Structuring

- Sentence Complexity: Child uses simple sentences with subjects and predicate.
- Sequencing: Child organizes sentences in a logical and coherent sequence to form a narrative.

### Vocabulary Enrichment

- New Vocabulary Usage: Child incorporates newly learned words into their storytelling.
- Contextual Vocabulary: Child uses words appropriately based on the context of the story.

### Story Comprehension

- Main Idea Identification: Child accurately explains the main idea of a story.
- Detail Retention: Child recalls and mentions specific details from the story during retelling.
- Character Understanding: Child describes characters' motivations and actions accurately (only for five-years-old children).

### Peer Interactions

- Collaboration: Child works well with peers during group storytelling activities.
- Feedback Reception: Child listens to and incorporates feedback from peers into their storytelling.

### Spontaneous Storytelling Using Silent Books

- Creativity: Child demonstrates creativity in interpreting and narrating silent books.
- Narrative Development: Child develops a coherent and engaging narrative based on the images in silent books.

### Rhythmic Clapping and Singing

- Rhythm Accuracy: Child maintains a consistent rhythm during clapping activities.
- Coordination: Child coordinates clapping with singing accurately.
- Musical Expression: Child expresses musicality and engages enthusiastically in singing activities.
- These checklist statements can help systematically evaluate the children's progress and abilities in the specified areas.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The teachers were asked to assess language skills and comprehension of the stories before using the silent books, and after a month's time, the children used these books with the teacher and independently. The teachers recorded in a logbook each child's ability to structure simple sentences, his/her vocabulary enrichment, his/her comprehension of the story told through images by the teacher, and his/her interaction with other children in sharing the play with the silent book.

The qualitative data included:

- Language Skills: Evaluation of children's ability to construct simple sentences and enrich their vocabulary through storytelling and interaction with silent books.

The investigated categories were "sentence construction" and "vocabulary enrichment".

- Narrative Fluency: Assessment of children's fluency in independent storytelling and comprehension of illustrated stories.

The investigated categories were independent storytelling and comprehension of silent stories.

- Social Interaction: Observations of peer interactions, including shared book reading, collaborative storytelling, and group singing activities.

The Categories about the above data were peer interaction, shared silent book reading, collaborative storytelling and active participation in singing activities.

## Findings

The qualitative analysis revealed significant improvements across the domains of vocabulary acquisition, narrative skills, social interaction and cognitive and emotional development. After a month of systematic use of storytelling through the silent books, the teachers observed an increase in the children's knowledge of vocabulary related to the stories, greater fluency in independent storytelling while looking at the silent book images, increased interaction among older children in sharing books, narrating stories, and listening to pairs reading the images, spontaneous search for stories to listen to by looking at the images, and singing along with background music.

After several sessions with silent books, for examples, children started using more descriptive words during storytelling. For instance, instead of saying "big dog", four year-old children said "enormous dog" or "fluffy dog". These children also described a character from a silent book as "feeling sad because he lost his toy" and used action words like "searching" and "finding", indicating an understanding of emotional vocabulary and actions.

Five-year-old children began to use words like "exploring" and "adventurous", "solitary" when narrating a story from a silent book depicting a journey through a forest. The same children who previously described a picture simply as "house" started using more detailed phrases like "a small, house with a red roof and a garden full of flowers".

Three-years-old children initially using single words to describe images, progressed to forming simple sentences like "The cat is jumping" or "The boy is happy", showing improved sentence construction and vocabulary use. Children increased their ability of narrative storytelling. Here are a few examples of children's narratives collected during the study: a four-years-old child looking at the Munari's book about shapes said: "The blue triangle is a mountain, and the red circle is the sun The yellow square is a house where a family lives. They are happy". Looking at the same book, a five-years-old child said: "The green and purple shapes are a magical forest. The animals are hiding, and the music makes them come out to dance".

This experience, albeit limited in duration, confirms the importance of providing young children with multiple opportunities for play with stories, images, and music to support their cognitive, emotional, and relational development, as well as their linguistic, aesthetic, and problem-solving skills.

## Conclusion

This qualitative study highlights the importance of integrating diverse linguistic and artistic practices in early childhood education. The findings from this brief yet

insightful study underscore the significant role of exposing young children to diverse experiences involving storytelling, imagery, and music. Furthermore, the use of silent books, music, and storytelling fosters comprehensive development, supports cognitive, emotional, and social growth. The findings underscore the value of providing rich, multifaceted experiences to nurture linguistic, aesthetic, and problem-solving skills, laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning. By providing children with ample opportunities for imaginative play and exploration using language and music.

These results highlight the importance of incorporating rich and multifaceted experiences into early childhood education to support holistic development across cognitive, emotional, and relational domains. By providing children with ample opportunities for imaginative play and exploration using language and music, educators can foster not only linguistic and problem-solving skills but also aesthetic appreciation and emotional intelligence, laying a strong foundation for lifelong learning and growth.

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## Developing Students' Readiness for Musical Improvisation in the Context of Selected Assumptions of Edwin E. Gordon's Music Learning Theory

Kształtowanie gotowości uczniów do improwizacji muzycznej w kontekście wybranych założeń teorii uczenia się muzyki Edwina E. Gordona

### KEYWORDS

music education, improvisation, audiation, music learning theory, tonal and rhythm patterns, musical skills

### ABSTRACT

The article is an attempt to highlight selected assumptions of Edwin E. Gordon's music learning theory in the context of developing readiness for music improvisation at school and outside school. Improvisation is, in this case, understood as one of the instruments of interpersonal communication, which can be developed through musical dialogue using tonal and rhythm patterns. The article is also a subjective presentation of the values inherent in the theory of music learning in the context of developing the above-mentioned readiness for music improvisation in students of different ages. Developing readiness for musical improvisation involves assimilating tonal and rhythm patterns into the students' musical vocabulary so that they can participate in musical dialogue with others. This happens thanks to students' active experience of music in an individual and social context. In developing readiness for musical improvisation, the student begins by actively listening, repeating and assimilating musical motifs, which, in music, are the starting point for complex mental operations related to musical audiation, which, to a musician, is what thinking is to language. The effect of applying the concept of improvisation suggested in the theory of music learning will be to increase

the creative, expressive and improvisational activity of students in the process of music education and to develop the tonal, rhythm and melodic vocabulary necessary to independently undertake creative and improvisational activity with full awareness, taking into account the processes of musical audiation.

## SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

edukacja muzyczna,  
improvizacja,  
audiacja, teoria  
uczenia się muzyki,  
motywy tonalne  
i rytmiczne,  
zdolności muzyczne

Artykuł jest próbą zasygnalizowania wybranych założeń teorii uczenia się muzyki Edwina E. Gordona w kontekście rozwijania gotowości do improwizowania muzyki w warunkach szkolnych i pozaszkolnych, rozumianej jako jeden z instrumentów międzyludzkiej komunikacji, którą można rozwijać poprzez dialog muzyczny z użyciem motywów tonalnych i rytmicznych. Artykuł jest także subiektywną odsłoną wartości płynących w teorii uczenia się muzyki w kontekście rozwijania gotowości do improwizacji muzycznej uczniów w różnym wieku. Rozwijanie gotowości do improwizacji muzycznej polega na asymilacji motywów tonalnych i rytmicznych do słownika muzycznego uczniów po to, aby mogli wchodzić w dialog muzyczny z innymi. Dzieje się tak dzięki aktywnemu doświadczaniu muzyki przez uczniów w kontekście jednostkowym i społecznym. W rozwijaniu gotowości do improwizacji muzycznej uczeń wychodzi od aktywnego słuchania, powtarzania i asymilowania motywów muzycznych stanowiących punkt wyjścia do złożonych operacji myślowych związanych z audiacją muzyczną, która jest dla muzyki, tym czym myślenie dla języka. Efektem zastosowania koncepcji improwizacji zaproponowanej w teorii uczenia się muzyki będzie w procesie edukacji muzycznej zwiększenie aktywności twórczo-ekspresyjno-improwizacyjnych uczniów oraz rozwijanie słownictwa tonalnego, rytmicznego i melodycznego, niezbędnego do samodzielnego podejmowania aktywności twórczej i improwizacyjnej z pełną świadomością, biorąc pod uwagę procesy audiacji muzycznej.

## Introductory Remarks and General Terminology

The article is an attempt to signal selected assumptions of Edwin E. Gordon's music learning theory in the context of developing the readiness to improvise music among **pupils of the first stage of education** at school and in other places. Musical improvisation is understood as one of the tools of interpersonal communication (Gordon, 1999b; Kołodziejski, 2022), which can be developed through musical dialogue using tonal and rhythm patterns. In the context of Dewey's pragmatic egalitarianism

(see Krasny, 2020, pp. 149–169)<sup>1</sup> and the so-called universality of education emphasised by Wojciech Jankowski (2010), there is a consistent misunderstanding of the thesis that music is for everyone and not just for the gifted (see more: Majzner, 2017). Hence, the subject of this article, following in the footsteps of the conceptualisation of the research subject of music pedagogy (see Gnitecki, 2008, pp. 16–17), is the issue of developing musical improvisation readiness in younger schoolchildren, understood as an appropriate way of teaching and learning music<sup>2</sup>, consisting in providing pupils with the appropriate musical content present in tonal and rhythm patterns, which are the building blocks for improvisation, which is present in the conceptual assumptions of Edwin E. Gordon's music learning theory (Gordon 1999a, 1999b, 2016; cf. Gutek, 2003; Schön, 1992; Pérez-Ibáñez, 2018). The cognitive, emotional and social attributes of musical improvisation play a dynamic role in the development of the child (as a learning and cognitive being), especially in the context of fostering musical creativity. The background to the discussion is provided by elements of music learning theory, a holistic concept of human musical development, which includes a description and explanation of phenomena related to the broadly understood processes of music learning, its conditions and stages. Optimisation of these processes, according to Maciej Kołodziejski and Barbara Pazur (2020), requires “a systematic evolution of the school culture – from the so-called transmissive (theoretical, offering solutions, verbalist) to deliberative-inclusive and dialogical-interactive, with the dominance of social learning and experiencing a broad spectrum of musical phenomena” (p. 196), including the development of musical improvisation readiness and improvisation itself. Developing readiness for improvisation, in short, involves providing the child with and developing the tonal, rhythmic and melodic vocabulary necessary to undertake creative and improvisational activity with full awareness, which, in my opinion, locates E. E. Gordon's contemporary theory in a mixed model of music education philosophy – namely, a praxial-aesthetic one, rooted in empirical ideas (see McCarthy & Goble, 2002, p. 19). This means that, on the one hand, the theoretical-philosophical layer of music learning theory is dominated by two distinct approaches (Kołodziejski & Pazur, 2022, p. 27): the first, Bennett Reimer's (1991, 2022) aesthetic vision of music education, and the second, David J. Elliot (1995) and Marissa Silverman's praxial education. In the aesthetic approach, listening to music is the starting point for understanding music, but it is expression (singing, playing instruments, movement with music and

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1 The 'praxial', in other words practical (action-oriented or active) approach, derives from the philosophical system known as pragmatism, which emerged in the 20th century in the United States through the intellectual work of the aforementioned John Dewey.

2 Through active action in the context of the individual and social experience of music in accordance with the progressivist concept of education.

creating with improvising music) that becomes the determinant for the active development of children's musical intelligence (Gordon 1999b; see also Gardner, 2002).

Music learning theory explains how we learn when we learn music (Gordon, 1997, 1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2008, 2012, 2016), providing a comprehensive account of **developing audiation**, a term, according to E. E. Gordon (1997, 1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2008, 2012, 2016) that best describes the **ability to think musically in terms of understanding**. The main feature of Gordon's theory is its **universality**, as it applies from early childhood to late adulthood. The primary aim of the theory is to **develop pupils' tonal and rhythmic audiation**. Through audiation, pupils can **understand the meaning of the music they listen to, perform, improvise and compose** (Gordon, 1997, 1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2008, 2012, 2016). The music learning theory – empirically designed, named, researched, developed and disseminated in many countries (e.g. in Portugal, Italy), has, for decades, been located on the periphery of formal music education in the world – as reported already in the 1990s by Harold F. Abeles, Charles R. Hoffer, Robert H. Klotman (1994), while, at the same time, it is the only **comprehensive theoretical account**, supported by psychological research, that fully takes into account the development of musical skills from early childhood to maturity. That is why, it is referred to by some scholars (see Alfred, 2021, p. 156) as a **paradigm** that continues to evolve, through ever newer research and practical experiences of teachers (Shuler, 2021, p. 56; Grashel, 1991; Hanson, 2019). There is also empirical scientific evidence in Poland in the form of data obtained by (*quasi*-)experimental means that supports the effectiveness of this music learning theory (Bonna, 2005, 2016; Trzos, 2009, 2018; Kołodziejcki, 2011; Przybylska-Zielińska, 2023). Music learning theory is entirely devoted to **child development, musical responsiveness and understanding of music**, which is its primary goal (Gordon, 2008, pp. 65–66; Shuler, 2021, p. 45). Central to this is **musical aptitude** (tonal, rhythmic, harmonic, etc.), which is “a measure of a student's potential to learn music” (Gordon, 2001, p. 4) and musical achievement is “a measure of what a student has already achieved in music” (Gordon, 2001, p. 4). The concept of musical aptitude presented by Edwin E. Gordon is **egalitarian in nature**, as every human being possesses some level of musical skills and is therefore **musical to some extent** (see Kierzkowski, 2010, p. 16), and can **learn to listen to and perform music with some success** (Gordon, 2001), with musicality being treated as a phenomenon that is a conjunction of nature, culture and identity (Toropova et al., 2016). Although children are born with a certain level of musical skills, this level changes with the quality of the musical environment. This process continues until the age of nine. After about nine years, children's levels of musical aptitude stabilise (*stabilised musical aptitude*) and will not change for the rest of their lives (Gordon, 1997, 1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2016; Miner, 2007), indicating the **processual nature of musical aptitude development** and the possibility



of **fluctuating** levels of ability during the first nine years of a person's life. Edwin E. Gordon (1997, 2016) emphasises the need to provide children with high-quality informal music direction and formal music education at the developmental stage of musical aptitude because, according to his theory, it can improve and, therefore, have a direct impact on musical achievement levels (Gordon, 1997, 1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2016). According to Wendy Valerio (n.d.), through audiation, which "is to music what thought is to language" (Gordon, 1999b), we discover that learning music is a never-ending, ever-deepening process of musical expression and enjoyment.

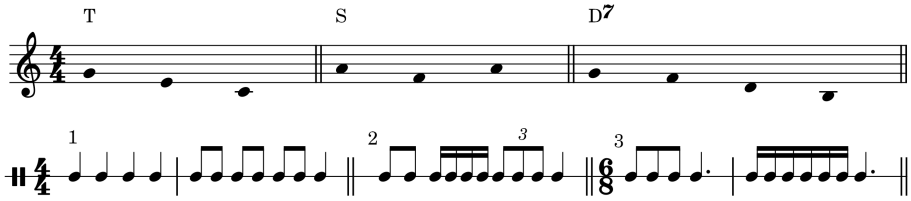
In Edwin E. Gordon's theory, the focus is on the individual and the social group at the same time, and the roles they play, i. e. music listener and music performer. The listener in music learning theory is subjected to so-called musical enculturation, which plays a significant role in the development of conscious musical thinking, i.e. musical audiation<sup>3</sup>, first initial audiation through informal musical direction and then proper audiation through educational influences, and provides the foundation for a readiness to undertake improvisation. According to John Sloboda (1999),

[...] when listening to music, one discovers that one element is more important than the other, or that one element is strongly related to some element, while its relationship to another element is weaker. Concepts such as tonality, metre and rhythm, which musicians use, exist in our mind and we use them to make sense of music. The possibility of communication exists because various processes involved in the composition, performance and perception of music relate to the same representations (p. 41).

The music performer reaches for audiation (see Liperote, 2006, pp. 46–52) as a kind of intellectual-perceptual-imaginative background in order to fully create and improvise music. The praxial (practical) approach refers to experiencing music through practising it, as this is what significantly influences the dynamisation of the child's musical development leading to the acceleration of basic musical skills (tonal and rhythm), the enrichment of the musical vocabulary of tonal and rhythm patterns. Below there are examples of such tonal and rhythm patterns as a component of music<sup>4</sup>.

3 Audiation is not the primary concept here, but it plays a relevant role in understanding the processes of acquiring readiness for musical improvisation. Audiation is, using an analogy with the terminological findings of N. Chomsky (quoted in Sloboda, 2002), the unconscious knowledge of music, or, directly, as defined by Edwin E. Gordon (1999b), "audiation is to music what thought is to language".

4 In the case of tonal patterns, the first is a tonic pattern (T), consisting of g-e-c notes, the second is a subdominant motif (S), consisting of a-f-a notes, and the third is a dominant with a minor seventh (D7), consisting of g-f-d-h notes. As for the rhythm patterns, the first is a pattern in binary metre ( $\frac{4}{4}$ ) of two bars consisting of quarter notes and eighth notes, and the second is also in binary metre ( $\frac{4}{4}$ ) of one bar consisting of quarter notes, eighth notes, sixteenth notes and an irregular group of eighth-note triplets. For the first two, quarter notes will be the pulse (macrobeat). In the third pattern, we have triple meter ( $\frac{6}{8}$ ) and

Figure 1. *Examples of Tonal and Rhythm Patterns*

The acquisition of tonal and rhythm patterns leads to an intensification of the processes of activating and deepening audiation due to the fact that the highest form of procedural audiation, i.e. the practical understanding and performance of music, is, according to Edwin E. Gordon (1991, 1999a, 1999b, pp. 385–407), creating and improvising music (see also Azzara, 1993, 1999; Kołodziejcki, 2022, p. 279), especially vocally, rhythmically and melodically<sup>5</sup> – the traditions of singing known from the theory and practice of Polish education are then combined with a creative (and improvisational) component. According to Michele Biasutti (2017), improvisation is always a multidimensional, creative activity when there is a conjunction of musical and intellectual skills, present in sensory and perceptual encoding, storage and recall from memory, motor control and quality monitoring. Thus, when improvising, we use metacognitive strategies (Hart, 2014). The educational environment should take into account the diversity of musical practices and materialise the opportunity for students to develop musical creativity through improvisational activities as rational (based, after all, on empirical evidence, see Gordon, 1999b; Bonna, 2016; Trzos, 2018) daily tasks or challenges that emphasise multiple developmental benefits and shape pupils' emotional well-being (Navarro Ramón & Chacón-López, 2021). The foundation for developing pupils' improvisational skills is their basic musical aptitude – tonal, rhythmic and harmonic (Gordon, 1999b). To what extent is musical ability innate and to what extent is it environmentally conditioned? This problem, at first sight, belongs to the domains of academic discussion. However, when we analyse the significance of this duality more closely, we conclude that, regardless of the counter-arguments, there is a huge responsibility on teachers to develop these musical skills – in the perspective of musical direction (Gordon, 1997) and informed, focused and valuable music education<sup>6</sup>

it consists of eighths, sixteenths and dotted quarter notes. For the final pattern, two dotted quarter notes will be the pulse (macrobeat).

5 Why vocal improvisation? This is because the voice is the closest and most important musical instrument for humans (Gordon 1999b; Burczyk, 2016).

6 At the same time, I would like to emphasize the phenomenon of Fordism, causing concern in the scientific community, in the promotion of Edwin E. Gordon's ideas in Poland, which is characterised by a mass, often unreflective and based only on methodical behavioural activities, commercial 'production' of various types of classes/training courses/workshops in music imitating a genuine approach to the

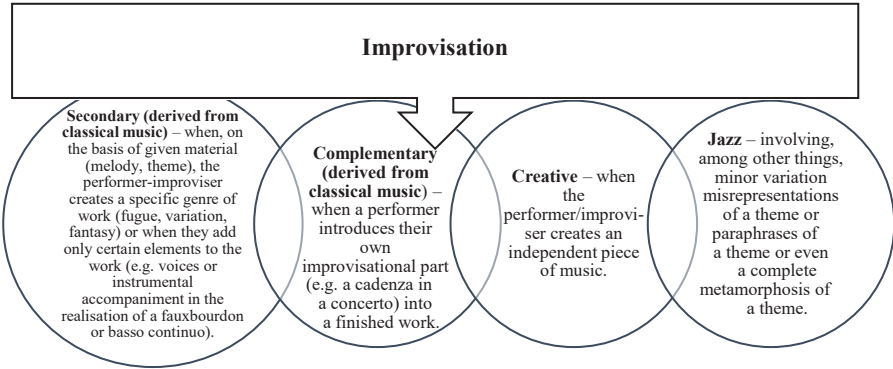
. As Rosamund Shuter (1969, p. 90) significantly reports, following in the footsteps of Ralph Smith, this problem concerns the difference between “aristocratic” and “democratic” approaches in music education (Shuter, 1969, p. 90). Thus, a differentiated musical experience **based on providing opportunities to actively build a vocabulary of tonal and rhythm patterns** (as advocated in John Dewey’s progressivist approach) is the essence of rationalised music education, rather than merely acquiring and storing declarative knowledge (*I know that...*) through mental memory operations. The experience involves a real personal interaction with and through music by means of assimilated musical patterns, which are the building blocks for creating and improvising music.

## On the Need to Develop Students' Readiness for Musical Improvisation

Improvising on a theme is a well-known practice in music (Ferand, 1940, pp. 115–125). However, it is much less common in academic writing to reverse this process – that is, to deal with improvisation as a topic or object of consideration or discussion. Generally speaking, improvisation is an artistic activity in which “the creative act coincides with the performance of a simultaneously created work” (Chodkowski, 2001, p. 378). In musical creation, I distinguish (after Chodkowski, 2001, p. 378) at least **three** historically determined **types** of improvisation, depending on the role of the performer-composer-improviser, as shown in the diagram below.

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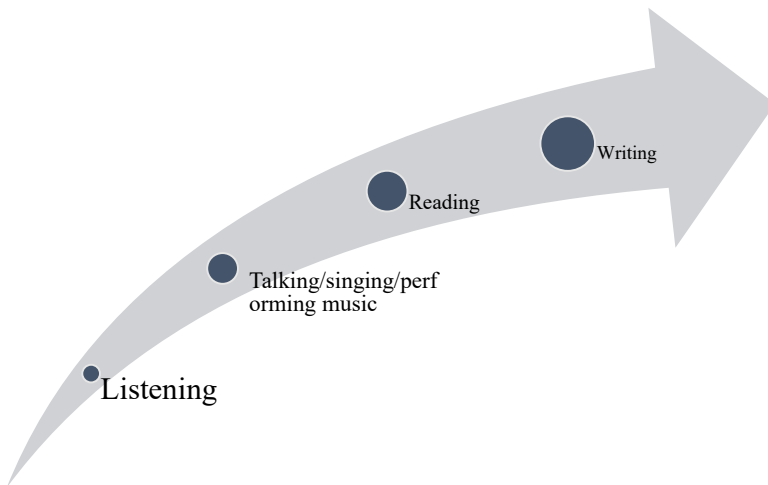
development of musical (preliminary and proper) audiation. The effectiveness of music learning theory in optimising musical achievements in the perspective of a taxonomy of cognitive goals has not been sufficiently and definitively established (Shuler, 2021, p. 45; Colwell & Abrahams, 2021; Woodford, 1996, pp. 83–95; Çenberci & Tufan, 2023).

Figure 2 . *Types of Improvisation in Historical Perspective*

Source: Selective self-analysis based on (Chodkowski, 2001, p. 378).

Improvisation does not only concern art music (classical), as the practice is also found in folk music, the music of oriental peoples, or in the above-mentioned jazz. Regarding jazz as an inspiration in the development of the concept of musical improvisation, the music learning theory of Edwin E. Gordon plays an important role here. Improvisation is treated (after Beckstead, 2013) as a specific cognitive activity, in the context of the uniqueness of this, so often ignored (especially in Polish educational reality), area of music learning. Edwin E. Gordon (1989, 1999b) suggests that improvisation cannot be taught, but that pupils' readiness to fulfil their musical potential towards improvisation must be developed (Gordon, 1989, 1998, 1999b). The most important of the four vocabularies of musical skill acquisition is listening, as it is the foundation on which the other three (performing, reading and writing music) are built.<sup>7</sup> Before vocabulary emerges, children listen to their mother tongue for almost a year. Ideally, as writes Kathy A. Liperote (2006, pp. 46–47), the transition to reading words comes more naturally for children with a rich listening and speaking vocabulary. Knowledge of content and context allows them not only to pronounce the words they read, but also to understand their meaning. Just as listening to language prepares children for speaking, listening and speaking prepares them for reading and writing. The four vocabularies form a chain whose proficiency at the earlier levels enables the student to enter the next level stress-free, of which listening is the most important and writing the most difficult. This is illustrated in the chart below.

<sup>7</sup> When asked if he could read notes, the great jazz musician Louis Armstrong replied: "Yes, but not to the point of compromising my performance" (quoted after Woody, 2012).

Figure 3. *Four Basic Musical Skills in Order of Development*

Source: the author's own study.

According to John Sloboda (2002) “music is composed of great amount of small pieces tied together, and the perception of music is just in combining a number of acts of perception connected to those fragments” (p. 182). Each teacher can help pupils in the process of developing their musical skills by developing their vocabulary first in order to obtain the required number of tonal and rhythm patterns (understood by Sloboda as “small pieces”) connected to listening to music and talking/performing music. Pupils should participate in tasks that develop their vocabulary connected to performing music through learning music without notation, through chanting of sounds, signing, melodious moving, improvising, and creating music. Properly guided exercises with the use of musical materials in the form of chants, rhythm clapping or songs that gradually develop listening skills, allow pupils to focus on music content such as tonality (e.g. major, minor harmonic, dorian, etc.), metre (binary, tertiary, combined), music style, and harmonic progression. Understanding those concepts is a preliminary condition for developing the ability to comprehensively read notes, perform music at a steady pace or improvise expressively (Gordon, 1999b; Liperote, 2006). A suggestion to develop musicality through improvisation based on musical dialogue was published by Christopher D. Azzara and Richard F. Grunow (2006) with the use of the melodies from the book titled *Developing Musicianship through Improvisation. Book 1 – Vocal Edition*. It assumes building musical vocabulary that contains tonal patterns, melodic phrases, rhythmic patterns and phrases which, through assimilation, may be used in (classic, jazz or folk) music. Exercises in the

book will allow to also read and write music in the future. Irrespective of previous music experience or education, learners may perform melodies and learn harmony by ear, i.e. develop the skills that are the basis for improvisation (Azzara & Grunow, 2006). The quality and scope of previous music environment influence general musical skills of a person. They are also the most important factors defining the scope to which one may become musically creative to the degree their inborn potential allows (Gordon, 1999b). The readiness to improvise music should be, therefore, developed, as by expanding the vocabulary of tonal and rhythm patterns, pupils get ready for musical reasoning. In this context, improvisation is a particularly satisfactory form of musical expression and an indispensable element of comprehensive music studies. Improvisation means demonstrating an understanding of music in a similar way that paraphrasing is a measure of language comprehension. In order to teach improvisation, appropriate order should be followed, at best one step at a time (more on this subject in: Kołodziejcki & Pazur 2020).

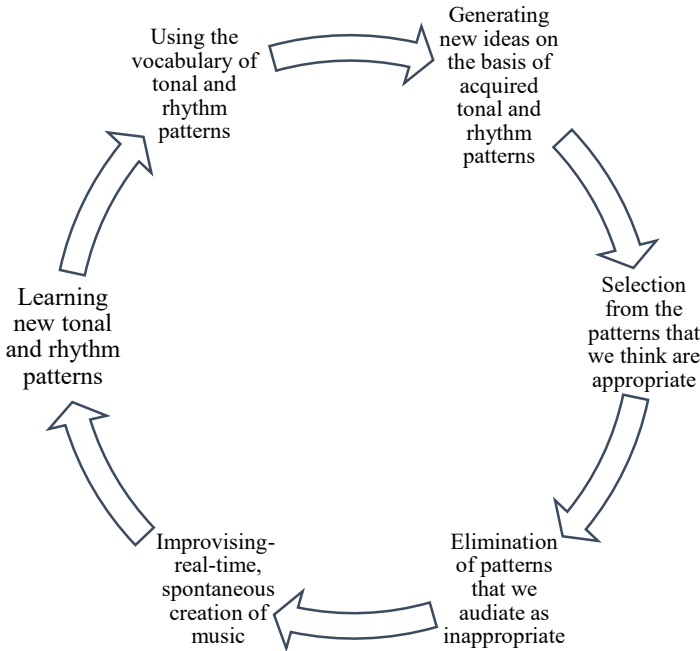
## Diagnosis of Improvisation Readiness in Creating Students' Musical Potential

The main goal for using tests (of musical skills, achievements or readiness) in music education includes (Kołodziejcki, 2012) helping the teacher in teaching through adjusting educational activities to pupil's individual skills and needs. In order for students to develop their readiness for improvisation, the teacher has to know whether the pupil's skills in tonal range are higher or lower than his/her rhythmic predispositions so that they can possibly compensate the deficiencies through appropriate exercises. Without mastering musical vocabulary through listening, that initially involves a small<sup>8</sup> number of tonal patterns in major and minor harmonic tonality, and rhythm patterns in binary and tertiary metre, irrespective of the level of their musical aptitude, pupils will not be sufficiently prepared to creatively communicate in a musical dialogue through improvisation (Gordon, 1989, 1998, 1999b). New musical ideas are produced on the basis of learnt tonal and rhythm patterns, and, thanks to audiation, students may acquire musical sense (Hickey & Webster, 2001). This is illustrated in the chart below.

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8 From scientific seminars with prof. Edwin E. Gordon I have learnt that the number of 20 tonal patterns and 20 rhythm patterns is enough to start exercising improvisation.

Figure 4. *Cyclic Process of Development of Improvisation Skills*



Source: the author's own study.

That is why teachers should, first of all, focus on teaching the readiness for musical improvisation, and not only on the ability to improvise, as the skills are representation of what we have already learnt to audiate (Gordon, 1989, 1999b). The questions on the level of musical improvisation readiness in pupils are answered by the results obtained in the readiness records:<sup>9</sup> *Harmonic Improvisation Readiness Record* (HIRR) and *Rhythm Improvisation Readiness Record* (RIRR). The first one, HIRR, that is *Harmonic Improvisation Readiness Record*<sup>10</sup> is designed for younger and older students and adults of all ages. The goal of HIRR is to objectively help the teacher to determine whether individual students present necessary readiness to learn harmonic improvisation. Then, thanks to information obtained during testing, teachers adjust their teaching to individual musical differences during improvisation. This recorded,

9 E. E. Gordon (1999b, 2001) does not call them tests, but records, as they measure neither musical skills nor achievements. The focus is on the measurement of the improvisation readiness, which I define tentatively as a **current quality level or informal guidance and formal education towards undertaking musical** (rhythm and harmonic) **improvisation**.

10 This is the Polish name use in the book: Gordon 1999b.

17-minute-long group test consists of 43 harmonic tasks that are performed in various scales (e.g. C major, A minor) and tonalities (major, minor harmonic). All the tasks presented are performed in the same, uncomplicated rhythm. Each task comprises of three chords of the same length, and the tonic chord is the first and the last one of the C major scale. All the necessary directions with practical exercises are on the recording. The students are asked to listen to pairs of harmonic patterns and to mark on the answer sheet whether they think the patterns in each pair are the same or different. If the students are not sure, they are asked to mark the column with a question mark (Gordon, 1999b, 2001). The other, RIRR, is designed, like HIRR, for students and adults of all ages. The goal of this test is to determine the rhythm improvisation readiness. This 20-minute-long group test consists of 40 pairs of rhythm patterns. Each pair is based on the same simple melody line in C major scale. Each melody line contains only four uncomplicated rhythmic values of various pitch. The directions for RIRR together with practical exercises are, similarly to HIRR, on the CD. The students are asked to listen to pairs of patterns and to mark on the answer sheet whether they think each pair is the same or the duration of the second example is longer or shorter than of the first one. If the students are not sure, they are asked to mark the column with a question mark (Gordon, 1999b, 2001).

## Final Remarks

Contrary to the common way of defining improvisation as undertaking actions without being prepared, improvisation in music is a **cognitive process** in which, due to audiation, **consciously and unconsciously, on an ongoing basis, we use the real-time, assimilated musical patterns** (tonal and rhythm) in known and unknown systems of meanings (metre and tonality). This process requires two types of musical thinking: using known rhythm and tonal patterns to generate new musical ideas, and to eliminate the ones that do not meet the conditions of musical sense (after Miner, 2007). The process is extremely complicated and conditioned by numerous variables. As the concept of Edwin E. Gordon's improvisation in music is derived from basic obligations towards a child, that consist in developing their musical potential visible in musical skills – tonal and rhythm ones, with, as in the case of proper audiation, sequential procedures (more on the subject in Gordon 1999b), pre-school teachers should, as a part of musical education, use verified formulas offered by the music learning theory more often. Guidelines for teaching improvisation at school, although



not connected directly to the discussed theory, were suggested by two NAFME<sup>11</sup> members: David C. Edmund and Elliott C. Keller (2019):

- experience first, before intellectualizing (use theory and reflection),
- improvise within structure/syntax (use tonal and rhythm patterns in syntax with tonality/scale and metre),
- improvise by ear (use hearing medium, imitate and audiate),
- improvisation is a way of being in music,
- balance improvisation freedom with structure (do not be afraid of transgressions in music).

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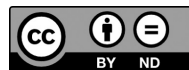
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## Stimulation of Auditory Perception in Children Using Maria Montessori's Developmental Materials

Stymulowanie rozwoju percepcji słuchowej u dzieci z wykorzystaniem materiałów rozwojowych Marii Montessori

### KEYWORDS

auditory perception, stimulating auditory perception, Montessori method, sensory material, prepared environment, child development, sensory development

### ABSTRACT

Auditory perception is an important area of a child's cognitive development because it determines the development of speech and influences writing and reading skills. Irena Polewczyk defines it as "active reception of auditory stimuli scattered around a person, based on the ability to differentiate speech sounds and their analysis, synthesis and interpretation in accordance with the knowledge, memory and experience that a person has" (Polewczyk, 2017, p. 149). The human body is adapted to receive impressions from the outside world; it segregates, processes and interprets them in the mind. In this way, a person acquires experiences that determine the development of subsequent, more and more precise skills. In the process of developing auditory perception, an important role is played by the child's immediate environment, which, through appropriate interactions, influences the process of shaping auditory functions. The aim of this article is to present theoretical assumptions regarding the development of auditory perception and the possibilities of stimulating auditory development through the use of Maria Montessori's teaching aids. The first part of the article describes the development of auditory perception in children. Then, theoretical assumptions regarding Montessori development aids and the possibility of using them in developing auditory skills are presented.

## SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

percepcja słuchowa,  
stymulowanie  
percepcji słuchowej,  
metoda Montessori,  
materiał zmysłowy,  
przygotowane  
otoczenie, rozwój  
dziecka, rozwój  
sensoryczny

Percepcja słuchowa jest istotnym obszarem z punktu widzenia rozwoju poznawczego dziecka, ponieważ warunkuje rozwój mowy oraz wpływa na kształtowanie umiejętności pisania i czytania. Irena Polewczyk definiuje ją jako: „aktywny odbiór bodźców słuchowych rozporozsonych wokół człowieka, oparty o umiejętność różnicowania dźwięków mowy oraz ich analizy, syntezy i interpretacji zgodnej z wiedzą, pamięcią i doświadczeniem, które posiada człowiek” (Polewczyk, 2017, s. 149). Organizm ludzki jest przystosowany do odbioru wrażeń ze świata zewnętrznego, segreguje je, przetwarza oraz interpretuje w umyśle. W ten sposób nabywa doświadczeń, które determinują kształtowanie kolejnych, coraz bardziej precyzyjnych umiejętności. W procesie rozwoju spostrzegania słuchowego ważną rolę odgrywa najbliższe otoczenie dziecka, które poprzez odpowiednie oddziaływania ma wpływ na przebieg procesu kształtowania funkcji słuchowych. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie założeń teoretycznych dotyczących rozwoju postrzegania słuchowego oraz możliwości stymulowania rozwoju słuchowego poprzez wykorzystanie pomocy dydaktycznych Marii Montessori. W pierwszej części artykułu opisano rozwój percepcji słuchowej u dzieci. Następnie przedstawiono założenia teoretyczne dotyczące pomocy rozwojowych Montessori oraz możliwości ich wykorzystania w rozwijaniu sprawności słuchowej.

## Introduction

The ear is a sense organ that receives sound stimuli from the environment. This information is processed and integrated in the brain structures and, together with impressions from the other senses, build mental representations of the external world. Properly functioning hearing makes it possible to register acoustic stimuli and thus obtain information about the surrounding reality (Kurkowski, 1998, p. 289). Auditory perception is developed in children already in prenatal life and it is one of the first sensory systems that determine proper development due to the wide range of functions it performs. Hearing is responsible for receiving, identifying and discerning sound stimuli, locating them in space, and remembering them. Thanks to these tasks, a person learns to function in the surrounding world by shaping adaptive reactions to the stimuli he/she receives.

The role of perception is to give meaning to impressions. Making sense means going beyond purely sensory processing to create our own understanding of the physical reality we experience. This involves many different mental processes, such as synthesising parts into a whole, assessing sizes, shapes, distances, intensity and pitch of sound;

estimating what is unknown and uncertain based on known features; recalling past experiences with a currently operating stimulus, comparing various currently operating stimuli, associating the perceived features of stimuli with appropriate ways of reacting (Zimbardo, 1999, p. 266–267).

Hearing enables the reception of various acoustic stimuli and registers even subtle stimuli, which often constitute warning signals and ensure safety against threats. In turn, listening to the sounds of nature or pleasant music leads to calmness, achieving a state of internal balance, and builds concentration of attention. Moreover, hearing plays a socialising role because it is a communication tool that allows one to function freely in social life. Through well-developed auditory perception, a person learns to identify and understand emotions.

The development of perception in children is continuous and is related to improving the interpretation of processed information. As you grow up, the so-called sensory sensitivity, which manifests itself in increasing precision in perceiving stimuli, and sensory sensitivity, i.e. the ability to distinguish information, improves. Moreover, due to high activity, the child acquires the ability to intentionally receive stimuli, which is manifested by increasing concentration of attention and conscious search for specific sensations. The last and most important stage is the period when the recorded stimuli become the subject of cognition and serve to improve one's own sensitivity and sensory sensitivity (Matczak, 2003, pp. 51–53).

During development, the sense organs undergo a process of improvement and specialisation. In early childhood, it occurs automatically due to the multitude of incoming information from the environment and the need to analyse and segregate it by the central nervous system. However, already in the first year of life, the essence of the child's own activity is noticed, which exercises the sensory apparatus through individual actions.

Numerous observations and studies show that sensitivity increases when the received impressions have a specific function in action, especially when they are important for the performance of tasks. Sensations are then a source of important information, which causes active focus on the content of sensory experiences and their reception (Matczak, 2003, p. 54).

## Development of Auditory Perception

Hearing develops already in the fetal period, and in the first trimester of prenatal development it is the most developed sensory organ. Around the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> month of fetal life, the baby's response to sound sensations is noticed, which means that



these stimuli are received and processed by the nervous system. Auditory memory and sound differentiation are also developed in the prenatal period. Research shows that the child is more sensitive to high-frequency sounds (Kurkowski, 1998, p. 291).

Even though its hearing was developed in utero, the newborn shows primarily reflex reactions to acoustic stimuli, which proves the immaturity of the nervous system. Hearing functions are improved by the child's increased activity and sound stimulation. Thanks to intensive psychomotor development, around 2–3 months of age the so-called cooing occurs, i.e., sounds articulated in a posterior manner. During this period, the efficiency of head movements increases, thanks to which the child can follow and locate sound stimuli. Around 4 months of age, you may notice a reaction to the tone of speech. The child develops the ability to differentiate intonation and sound intensity. In the 6<sup>th</sup> month of life, babbling is observed, i.e., frequent reproduction of sounds produced by the baby and the environment. This phenomenon is the result of the maturation of the brain's association fields in the area of auditory-motor coupling. The later months of the child's life bring the development of locomotion and manipulation skills. The infant learns the acoustic features of the surrounding world and gains the ability to differentiate auditory stimuli. At this stage, the child also develops the ability to vocalise in order to communicate his/her own emotions and needs. Around the first year of life, a child pronounces syllables and sequences of syllables and tries to imitate words spoken by people around him. During this time, the child also masters the basics leading to the development of phoneme hearing. The second year of life is the time when there is a strong need for communication, which is why hearing functions develop, especially in the area of speech sound perception. The child creates auditory patterns of words and stores them in his or her mind. The need to remember and distinguish them contributes to improving auditory memory, phonemic hearing and discovering the phonological and phonetic structure of utterances (Kurkowski, 1998, p. 292–293). In the third year of life, the child expands vocabulary and improves grammatical correctness. The next stage is the ability to analyse sounds, i.e., the deliberate, sequential identification of sounds, and sound synthesis, i.e., combining sounds into a whole. The ability to analyse and synthesise voice determines the process of acquiring writing and reading skills. Phonemic hearing disorders negatively affect speech reception and its development. Moreover, they make it difficult to acquire reading and writing skills (Kruczyńska & Kurkowski, 2015, p. 63). In turn, difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word reading and low spelling skills are characteristic of dyslexic disorders which have a neurobiological basis and result from a phonological processing deficit (Erbeli et al., 2021, p. 1).

Auditory perception is shaped by one's own activity and experiences. The environment, parents and teachers also play an important role, as they are responsible for creating a stimulating environment in a conscious and planned way. One of the most



important educational and didactic tasks is to prepare children to master reading and writing skills, based on phonological competence, i.e., awareness of the sound structure of language and the ability to reflect and manipulate speech sounds. M. Lipowska considers the ability to auditorily differentiate phonemes, perform operations on syllables, phonemes and intra-syllable elements as the components of phonological competence (Lipowska, 2001, pp. 24–44). Writing and reading are complex processes based on the ability to isolate phonemes. The child learns the correlation between sounds and letters, which enables letter encoding of words (in writing) and their decoding (reading) and gaining access to the semantic layer (Snowling et al., 2020, p. 503).

Each oral statement consists of a number of acoustic elements. A very important component is the prosodic system, which consists of intonation, stress, rhythm, quantity, pause and tempo, and facilitates the transmission of meanings, intentions and emotions of the interlocutor. A child participating in linguistic interactions develops prosodic competences by experiencing the expressive melody of the messages addressed to him. He learns to notice suprasegmental phenomena and features and their meaning, which later influences the development of fluent reading comprehension skills (Wysocka & Kwaterewicz, 2018, p. 330). Prosodic competence is biologically determined due to the efficiency of physiological hearing and the ability to differentiate sound intensity, duration and timbre. Auditory memorisation of specific structures, sound association of speech and auditory self-control are also important. The efficiency of cognitive functions enables the adequate interpretation of suprasegmental phenomena and the adaptation of one's own prosodic behaviour to the communication situation (Wysocka, 2014/2015, p. 122).

The ability to analyse prosodic features develops already in early childhood. Prosodic structures noticed in the child's environment allow for distinguishing individual linguistic elements from the sequence of speech, such as phrases and words. The child learns their structure and meaning and notices the functions of prosodic phenomena in communication (Wysocka, 2014/2015, p. 124).

Physical, phonemic and prosodic hearing are part of the perceptual biological abilities which, despite their mental foundation, are fulfilled in the social sphere of man, because they directly influence his communication skills, and, as Grabias states, "language and linguistic behaviour organise social life, and their deficiencies place an individual on the margin of this life" (Grabias, 2012, p. 38). Each linguistic interaction requires knowledge related to the communication situation and the rules that govern it. In the socialisation process, a person develops communication competence regarding patterns of interactive behaviour and rules for constructing statements. Moreover, members of social groups are equipped with mental mechanisms for generating grammatically correct sentences of a given language, i.e., linguistic competence (Grabias, 2012, p. 21). Acquiring language and communication competence at an appropriate

level enables the development of cultural competence, i.e., the ability to participate in culture through the interpretation of symbolic behaviour (Michalik, 2016, p. 20).

Stimulating auditory functions which constitute the biological basis for the development of language and communication skills, will have a positive impact on the development of linguistic, communicative and cultural competences. “Both competence and implementation are built primarily on the biological capabilities of the individual and are an expression of the mobility of his brain and the state of peripheral processes involved in the implementation of statements” (Grabias, 2012, p. 39).

## Maria Montessori's Teaching Aids

Montessori's development material was created on the basis of the researcher's and her colleagues' long experience in working with children and experimental psychology research, as well as aids created by French doctors Itard and Seguin, used in working with children with intellectual disabilities (Montessori, 2014, p. 91). The teaching materials constitute a specific system of subjects enabling the improvement of a specific skill. “Each group exhibits one constant characteristic, but to varying degrees. We are, therefore, dealing with gradation in which the change occurs evenly from one subject to another, and the difference is constant and, if possible, determined mathematically” (Montessori, 2014, p. 92). Montessori developmental aids implement the principle of grading and isolating difficulties, which means that, in the course of work, individual exercises increase the level of difficulty and always refer to one selected skill that is improved. Montessori, through many years of experience in working with children of different ages, noticed that a child's attention is labile and easily distracted. Therefore, the elements of the sets have the same form, color, shape and size, differing only in one specific feature. Such organisation of assistance helps focus the child's attention on improving a specific skill and develop sensory sensitivity (Guz, 2006, p. 40). Moreover, aids designed to develop the senses have features that can be graded, and putting the extreme elements of the set together creates the most striking contrast and allows you to highlight differences that are easy for a child to notice. Montessori development materials assume the child's own, spontaneous activity due to the included error control. Thanks to the possibility of self-control, the child becomes more aware, careful, accurate, and develops concentration of attention. “Self-control guides the child's activities, outlines the goals of action, and is a means to achieve perfection” (Guz, 2006, p. 43). In addition, it shapes critical thinking, develops the ability to analyse actions taken and their effects, improves senses and mental activities, enriches knowledge, and strengthens self-esteem. Through sensory material, children learn through experience and build representations in their minds of specific sensory

phenomena that are difficult to explain in words. "We give them some abstraction and they learn to understand it thanks to our teaching materials. We call this mechanism "materialised abstraction" (Montessori, 2019, p. 112).

Maria Montessori emphasized the aesthetic aspect of the prepared aids, which serves a motivating function. "Color, shine, harmony of forms, make objects attractive to children, attract their attention, encourage them to use them in activities" (Guz, 2006, p. 44). The child's prepared environment in the kindergarten and Montessori school attracts attention and encourages the child to be active, explore and repeat exercises. Montessori material is always available in limited quantities and serves a specific purpose, which introduces harmony and order into the course of action and builds structure in the child's mind. Moreover, each aid is available in one copy, thanks to which the child learns to make decisions, be patient and plan their own work. Teaching materials are presented during individual, short lessons, the so-called presentations, during which the teacher presents the purpose of a given aid by performing a model demonstration. Then the child has the opportunity to act independently and freely, explore the exercise and decide how long he or she will engage in a given activity. The great variety and orderliness of help in the child's environment result in the development of independence and decision-making, in accordance with the child's developmental possibilities and interests (Guz, 2006, p. 45–46).

## Stimulating Auditory Perception in Maria Montessori's Method

Maria Montessori's auditory perception improvement program begins perversely by drawing attention to silence, which is the reference point for all sounds registered by the hearing organ. Montessori developed the so-called silence lessons, which not only shape children's sense of silence in the educational process, but also allow them to turn inward and discover their own feelings and thoughts. Silence exercises require effort, inhibition and self-discipline, but observations show that children willingly participate in them (Guz, 2006, p. 34). Experiencing silence gives you the opportunity to concentrate on sounds from the environment, consciously direct your attention to individual sounds, and develop the ability to identify and differentiate them.

Montessori drew attention to children's increasing ability to hear auditory perception and notice stimuli with minimal differences. She distinguished four classes of auditory sensations that come from silence, the human voice, sounds (murmurs) and music (Montessori, 2014, p. 121). The differentiation of sounds is created using six wooden boxes, available in two sets. Each can produce a slightly different sound. As the child learns the sounds, he or she can grade their intensity and arrange the cans

in order from the loudest to the quietest. The presence of two sets also makes it possible to find pairs of the same sounds (Montessori, 2014, p. 121). Exercises with noise cans sensitise the child to subtle differences in sounds, which later translates into the differentiation of phonemes that are similar to each other, but stand out due to one distinctive feature, e.g., the degree of proximity of the speech organs.

Another material, important from the point of view of the development of auditory perception, is a set of eight bells producing different tones corresponding to the C major scale in two sets, and a set of bells presenting semitones. Children learn to differentiate tones, find pairs and arrange them in the right order (Montessori, 2014, p. 122). Numerous scientific studies prove that musical structures are similar to prosodic structures, therefore stimulation of musical hearing translates into greater sensitivity of prosodic hearing. “Exercises using music teach the child to differentiate sound features and develop the perception of melody (intonation), accent, tempo and rhythm in both music and speech” (Wysocka, 2014/2015, p. 130). Moreover, there is a relationship between the perception of rhythm and phonological awareness and the development of language skills. Children who scored better in the area of phonological awareness had higher abilities to distinguish complex rhythms (Gordon et al., 2015).

In her language development program, Montessori included a number of materials to improve phoneme perception. Phonemic hearing is a basic skill that enables the identification and discrimination of basic linguistic units, i.e., phonemes, and more complex structures, i.e. words and utterances. Moreover, it shapes the phonological system in the mind. Properly functioning phoneme hearing is an obligatory condition for developing the ability to analyse and synthesise syllables and sounds. It is one of the basic processes determining the development of writing and reading skills (Gruba, 2012, p. 7).

Phonological sensitivity develops gradually. Stanovich (Maurer, 2003) used the concept of a continuum of phonological sensitivity, taking into account its various levels. The ability to focus on phonemes and manipulate them indicates the deepest level of development of phonological sensitivity in a child, but distinguishing only larger parts of spoken language, i.e. a syllable or intra-syllable elements, indicates its low level (Maurer, 2003, p. 14). Phonemic hearing exercises should be adapted to the possibilities and skills of children, starting from shaping the perception of units that are easier for the child to hear, ending with distinguishing the smallest elements, phonemes, slightly different from each other.

The state of phonemic hearing depends largely on training and on exercises in recognising one’s own sounds and those of other people. Its condition is influenced by ortho-phonetic and musical exercises. The state of phoneme hearing determines the expressive and impressionistic form of texts (Rocławski, 1991, p. 27)

Through exercises with small objects called “sound games”, the child learns in three stages to distinguish the onset, pairs of phonemes and the position of the phoneme in a word. Sound games are an extremely important stage in improving phonemic hearing and constitute a basis for learning letters and writing. The teacher decides on the selection of material taking into account the principle of grading difficulty. The easiest sounds for children to recognise are sounds pronounced with prolongation, i.e., vowels, sonorous consonants, and fricatives. It is more difficult to distinguish the so-called momentary consonants, i.e., plosives, and differentiate *i* and *j*. In shaping phoneme perception, it is also important to pay attention to the position of the sound in the word. It is easier for a child to hear the first vowel that forms an independent syllable, the last consonant of a word and the first consonant in the initial syllable than to identify the missing sound in a word or to identify the last vowel in a word, the vowel in the mid-voice and the sound in the consonant group (Styczek, 1982, p. 18).

It is worth preceding the exercises in distinguishing sounds with various games that will make children aware of specific segments occurring in the language, i.e., sentences, words, syllables, which is why it is important to read stories to children and comment on the text they hear, teach rhymes, lists, rhythmic and musical-verbal games (Guz, 2006, p. 53). Developing phonetic hearing and the perception of individual sounds is important for developing the skill of phoneme analysis, i.e., consciously distinguishing the sounds that appear in a word.

A child with appropriate auditory sensitivity is ready to learn letters. In the Montessori method, this is achieved by a sandpaper alphabet, i.e., blue and red tablets with letters cut from sandpaper glued to them. The entered letters are associated with the corresponding sounds, thanks to which the child can identify, distinguish and remember them. An additional aspect supporting the perception of letters is tracing rough shapes with your fingers, which triggers muscle memory. After acquiring most of the letters, the child starts working with the so-called movable alphabet that allows you to compose words and sentences using letters cut out of plastic. The movable alphabet gives you the opportunity to improve phoneme analysis by precisely selecting letters that appear in sequence. “The word is arranged letter by letter, according to the sounds that make it up [...]. It is both a word analysis and a great means of improving spelling” (Montessori, 2014, p. 187).

## Summary

Montessori developmental material provides many opportunities to develop auditory perception in younger and older children. Aids in the field of sensory and linguistic exercises improve hearing at various levels and thus influence the process

of developing reading and writing skills. These processes depend on the processing of information, i.e., sounds in a word, words in a sentence, and sentences in a longer utterance, and children who are preparing to start learning to write and read must, first of all, become aware of what elements spoken and written language are made of (Maurer, 2003, p. 7). Auditory perception develops gradually, therefore Montessori development aids based on recognising and distinguishing sounds and tones build primary skills and constitute the basis for developing skills requiring greater precision in registering stimuli, e.g., speech sounds. In turn, exercises to improve phoneme hearing, introduced in stages, taking into account the principle of grading difficulty, enable successive achievement of the ability to identify and differentiate sounds and lead to the development of sound analysis skills, which determine the correct writing of words. The mental operations that participate in the process of phoneme analysis are complex and may not appear at all without conscious teaching activities (Tijms, 2004, pp. 300–308). Sabina Guz, in her book entitled *The Montessori Method in Kindergarten and School*, describes research on the developmental achievements of children in preschool and school. The researcher's aim was to compare the results achieved by children educated according to a commonly used model in Polish educational institutions and in the Montessori system. The analysis of material regarding auditory perception and the development of language skills showed better results obtained by children from Montessori classes (Guz, 2006, pp. 95–162). It can, therefore, be concluded that Montessori pedagogy significantly supports the development of auditory perception through its fundamental assumptions, i.e., a prepared environment, which is a rich offer of teaching materials and tasks, and an individualised organisation of the educational process, taking into account the needs and capabilities of each child.

Stimulating auditory perception according to Maria Montessori's principles is also possible in kindergartens and traditional schools. Montessori developmental aids are available on the market, but some of them can be made yourself. However, you should remember to design the teaching situation in such a way as to make it easier for the child to concentrate and learn. The tasks given to the child must be clear, transparent and take into account one, improved difficulty. Materials for independent work should include error control, i.e., specific markings that exclude the need to involve adults. Individual exercises should be adapted to the child's level, taking into account the principle of grading difficulty. When working with younger children, it is worth remembering about physical and motor involvement to meet their motor needs. The presented exercise can be repeated many times, taking into account various variants (Guz, 2006, p. 20). Children working with Montessori materials often show great interest, concentration and involvement in a given activity, which is called attention polarization. Thanks to this special concentration and long-term repetition of a given task, children are able to acquire the practiced skills without any noticeable effort.

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## Pedagogy of Play in the Music Education of Third Grade Elementary School Students. Research Report

Pedagogika zabawy w edukacji muzycznej uczniów klasy trzeciej szkoły podstawowej – raport z badań

### KEYWORDS ABSTRACT

pedagogy of play,  
music pedagogy  
of play, music  
education, early  
childhood education

Classes taught at school should be a space where students have the opportunity to fully develop, discover themselves, awaken and develop their potential and passions, as well as to acquire the knowledge necessary for effective functioning in the world. The use of properly selected methods during classes is essential to create an environment in which children can study and develop. Pedagogy of play incorporates a wealth of methods that offer a number of benefits and advantages that come with learning through play. Play triggers joy in children, creates space where they can be themselves, explore and be creative while improving the competencies necessary for life. Pedagogy of play also creates a favorable environment for working with children in music classes. The freedom and dynamics of play perfectly match the child's musical activities. The main purpose of the study was to investigate how children function and perform during classes that incorporate musical pedagogy of play. The study was conducted using qualitative field research conducted at Bogdan Jański Elementary School in Kraków, Poland. The results of the study suggest that pedagogy of play creates a friendly environment for the development and formation of various competencies in children during a music class.

## SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

pedagogika  
zabawy, muzyczna  
pedagogika  
zabawy, edukacja  
muzyczna, edukacja  
wczesnoszkolna

Zajęcia prowadzone w szkole powinny być przestrzenią, w której uczniowie mają możliwość pełnego rozwoju, odkrywania siebie, rozbudzenia i rozwijania swojego potencjału i pasji oraz zdobywania niezbędnej wiedzy do prawidłowego funkcjonowania w świecie. Stosowanie odpowiednio dobranych i wyselekcjonowanych metod zajęć jest bardzo istotne, aby stworzyć dzieciom środowisko, w którym mogą się kształcić i rozwijać. Pedagogika zabawy to bogactwo metod, które oferują korzyści płynące z nauki poprzez zabawę wyzwalamą w dziecku radość, stwarzającą przestrzeń do bycia sobą, eksplorowania, twórczości oraz doskonalącą kompetencje niezbędne do życia. Pedagogika zabawy stwarza również bardzo korzystne warunki do pracy z dziećmi na zajęciach muzycznych. Wolność i dynamika zabawy idealnie komponuje się z muzyczną działalnością dziecka. Głównym celem badań było poznanie funkcjonowania dzieci podczas zajęć muzycznych z wykorzystaniem pedagogiki zabawy. W pracy posłużono się metodą jakościowych badań terenowych. Zostały one przeprowadzone w Szkole Podstawowej im. Bogdana Jańskiego w Krakowie. Wyniki badań sugerują, że pedagogika zabawy stwarza przyjazne środowisko do rozwijania i kształtowania różnorodnych kompetencji dzieci podczas zajęć muzycznych.

## Introduction

Play is inextricably linked to childhood. It is one of the earliest activities undertaken by children, through which they develop their ingenuity and creativity, while honing the multiple competencies needed for proper functioning. Play has a rich tradition in child rearing. Already Plato believed that upbringing and teaching should be based on freedom and autonomy rather than coercion (Kędzior-Niczyporuk, 2008). This gave rise to the creation of pedagogy of play the main idea of which is to stimulate learning through play that sparks interest and engages the child while giving them pleasure and a sense of security.

There is no doubt that music plays an important role in human life. It is of great significance in the formation of a child's personality, as well as their aesthetic, emotional and artistic sensitivity. Its greatest value is its beauty, which leads to deep aesthetic experience, and its phenomenon consists in its unique and inimitable nature, which has an impact on individual development (Sacher, 2015). The artistic value of music is also connected with the depth and richness of feelings, emotions and moods associated with experiencing it. Urszula Bissinger-Ćwierz, who uses the term "musical pedagogy of play", defines this method as "any joyful musical expression and reception, expressed as sound, singing, vocal improvisation, rhythm, movement, dancing, playing instruments, painting, drawing, role-playing, defining emotions

and experiences while exposed to the influence of music” (Bissinger-Ćwierz, 2007). Music-related methodological inspirations in pedagogy of play are drawn from rich and diverse sources. The facilitation activities fit in well with the modern concepts of music education E. J. Dalcroze (Bogdanowicz, 2015) and C. Orff (Kataryńczuk-Mania, 2022) aesthetics R. Steiner (Choczyński, 2013), creative movement R. Laban (Kierzkowska, 2018), and W. Sherborne and active musicianship advocated by B. Strauss (Burczyk, 2019). Similarly, the developments in art therapy, music therapy (Konieczna-Nowak, 2013), and choreotherapy, which includes dance, have been regarded as important contribution. The facilitation of music in pedagogy of play is not a new concept of music education and upbringing, but a methodological suggestion that enriches the already existing systems. It is a syncretic methodology of music-based group activity, combining a variety of pedagogical, psychological and cultural trends. It should also be seen as an active form of learning about music in a very broad sense. Such facilitation further aims at creating a “language of music and art” that should take into account the natural abilities and current mental predispositions of the audience. Good contact and the opportunity to “converse with the language of art” have a fundamental impact on the development of music competence understood as a stock of knowledge, experience and skills in this field. To encourage musical activity, it is good to use a variety of activities that allow direct contact with sound, movement, image and words, offering one the opportunity to receive music with the body, heart and mind. Bissinger-Ćwierz distinguishes the following methods promoting personal and musical development (2007, p. 11):

- introductory methods for lesson starters;
- methods involving dance as a form of artistic expression;
- methods developing vocal expression;
- methods relying on the use of instruments;
- methods integrating music, visual arts and paratheatrical activities;
- relaxation methods.

Musical pedagogy of play, combining the autonomy, freedom and joy of play with all forms of musical education, creativity and motor activity that music brings, enables the creation of a space in which children discover themselves and the world, develop their sensitivity, awareness of their own body and space, as well as learn how to establish interpersonal relationships (Mardell et al., 2023).

## Purpose and Research Problem

The main purpose of the study was to investigate how children function and perform during classes that incorporate musical pedagogy of play.

The main research problem has been defined as whether and (if yes) to what extent activities using musical pedagogy of play constitute a teaching-learning environment that develops the basic general skills promoted by the curriculum of integrated early childhood education.

The main research problem formulated in this way requires that specific research problems also take the form of questions:

1. Whether and – if yes – to what extent the use of musical pedagogy of play in class facilitates the acquisition of such skills such as:
  - active attitude towards new experiences;
  - perseverance in pursuit of one's goals;
  - reflective reasoning;
  - effective communication;
  - understanding game/play instructions;
  - performing tasks independently;
  - presenting personal point of view;
  - generating interesting and unconventional ideas;
  - interacting and working in a group;
  - establishing positive relationships with others;
  - providing assistance;
  - understanding and interpreting one's own and other people's experiences and emotions?
2. Which games are most popular among students:
  - introductory (class starters);
  - based on dance (integration dances, dance-rhythm improvisations);
  - developing vocal expression (music games involving sound, movement and rhythm, playing with voice, playing with songs);
  - involving instruments (percussion instruments);
  - integrating music, art and paratheatrical activities (art games with staging games, with art and music);
  - inducing relaxation (soothing and calming effect, active relaxation)?
3. What teaching aids make working with a group easier and more attractive?

## Method

In order to look for answers to the above research problems, qualitative field research was carried out. As stated by E. Babbie, this method allows “direct observation of social phenomena under natural conditions” (Babbie, 2019, p. 309). The author points out that the use of the term “qualitative field research” allows one to distinguish

this observational method from others that are designed to provide data for quantitative analysis. This is because the premise of field research is to provide mainly qualitative data, or “observations that cannot be easily reduced to numbers” (Babbie, 2008, p. 321). The key advantage of this method is that, through a direct encounter with a given social phenomenon, it enables the researcher to achieve a holistic perspective of the problem under study and thus gain a deeper insight and a more complete understanding of it. Field research is particularly suitable for learning about those attitudes and behaviours that can best be understood in their natural setting. Moreover, conducting interviews should be an integral part of the entire field research process. Their purpose was to gather feedback on the activities conducted from all children participating in the study. The interview made use of the sentence completion technique: “During the activities I liked/didn’t like...”. The children, immediately after the classes, answered the same questions in turn. The study was conducted at Bogdan Jański Elementary School in Kraków from November 20 to December 22, 2023. The total of five classes were conducted, held weekly during five consecutive weeks. Twenty-three third-grade pupils were surveyed. None of the participants in the study attended music school and thus no one showed more knowledge and skills in music education than the others.

## Analysis and Results

Children involved in the study participated in activities using musical pedagogy of play. The games were selected from a wealth of suggestions available in such publications as: *We Learn by Playing. Third Grade*, and *Musical Pedagogy of Play in Group Work*. All games were very carefully selected and adapted to the conditions in which they were to be carried out, as well as to the age, interests, abilities and skills of the children. Well-prepared games should be oriented to the needs of the participants rather than the teacher. They ought to take place in an atmosphere of acceptance, safety and friendship, and they are to promote collaboration while being diverse and creative.

The following methods used in each class are part of the musical pedagogy of play:

- introductory – serving as lesson starters;
- using dance as a form of artistic expression;
- developing vocal expression;
- involving the use of musical instruments;
- integrating music, visual arts and paratheatrical activities;
- relaxation.

U. Bissinger-Ćwierz (2007) defines the term “method” as general categories of play identified by the purpose they serve. By “techniques” she means specific activities such as play, exercises and games (p. 11).

The survey was followed by an analysis of the results, which are detailed below.

### 1. Autumn games with music by Antonio Vivaldi

Objectives:

- to create bonds within the group;
- to stimulate imagination;
- to improve concentration;
- to develop motor expression;
- to exercise the organs of speech;
- to develop the ability to cooperate with others;
- to shape music taste.

Aids: paper, scissors, crayons, soundtracks – a piece by Antonio Vivaldi entitled *Autumn*.

*Autumn*, tambourine, rattles, sleigh bells, Antonio Vivaldi’s piece: Concerto for strings in D minor, RV 128, Largo.

Number of participants: 22

Stages of the class:

- “Music notes” – each child creates a business card on a cut-out music note – writes his or her name on it, decorates it and glues it to his/her T-shirt;
- “Falling leaves” – the children listen to the sound of leaves and dance like leaves falling from the tree. When the music falls silent, they lie down on the floor;
- “Cacophony of syllables” – one child leaves the room. Each of the children in the room is assigned a syllable of a word, e.g. “ka-szta-ny” (chestnuts), “ka-łu-ża” (pond), “zo-łę-dzie” (acorns). The child returns to the room, the other children sing their syllables to a popular Polish folk rhyme (*Wlazł kotek na płotek [A cat has climbed the fence]*), and the task is for the child to guess what word the group is singing;
- “Impulse” – the children are seated in a circle, each holding a musical instrument. They are asked to successively send an impulse according to the rhythm of Antonio Vivaldi’s *Autumn*;
- “Illustrating music in silence” – the children listen to *Autumn* by Antonio Vivaldi. Their task is to illustrate it with crayons to express their feelings;
- “Active relaxation” – the children lie down face up on the floor. The teacher plays some baroque music and gives instructions:
  - a) Lying eights – children trace a figure of eight in the air first with the right hand, then with the left hand and then with both hands. Later they trace the figures with their right leg, then the left leg and, finally, with both legs;

- b) Gymnastics – children touch the left elbow with the right knee and vice versa;
- c) Symmetrical scribbles – they trace patterns, geometric figures, letters and complete words in the air using the right and left hands simultaneously;
- d) Marching – children bend the left leg at the knee, bend the right hand at the elbow and make smooth, alternating movements.

In-class performance of third-grade pupils:

The first class aroused a lot of curiosity and excitement in the children. They were very interested in the facilitator and the games they were introduced to. The feedback the children gave was often along the lines of: “I liked everything because I like dancing, singing and drawing”; “It was fun because I like music a lot”; “I liked it because it was fun and creative”. The children showed engagement and persistence while working; most of them demonstrated respect and acceptance towards others; they did not laugh at their peers, and they were kind and non-judgmental. For the most part, they approached the task independently and, when possible, produced interesting and creative ideas. The art game “Illustrating music in silence” turned out to be the most popular, followed closely by the “Cacophony of syllables”. The observational data was reflected in the interview conducted with the group. The art game was accompanied by Antonio Vivaldi’s music, which inspired the artwork. During the interview, the children said that “it was nice to draw to the music”; “this music is nice”. They found the second game enjoyable as “It was interesting and funny”; “I had fun”; “It was very funny”. The game that integrated music and art, even though most interesting, was apparently misunderstood. The children were asked to use crayons to draw or doodle to the music in order to express their own feelings; they were supposed to transfer the emotions evoked by the music onto paper. However, they went on to draw whatever they felt like, including horses, music notes, an autumn landscape, or even themselves. These creations were inspired more by the topic of the class and the games they had previously performed rather than the emotions felt while listening to the music. Of all children only one boy did the task as directed. With all the other children it was difficult to observe a reflection of their own emotions. The game that received the least attention was the “Active relaxation”. The children’s task was to lie on the floor and follow the teacher’s instructions while listening to baroque music. The children were unable to calm down and instead they were loud, talking to each other. This should not, however, be seen as misbehaviour. Watching them, one could get the impression that they were bursting with emotions and energy. The activities that preceded the relaxation game had made the group very lively, and the children could not calm down enough afterwards. During other games: “Notes”; “Falling Leaves”, and “Impulse”, the children did not show much involvement or perseverance, but their joy of play, movement and musical expression was obvious. The attitudes and behaviours to be observed in the study participants were selected based on the advantages and benefits

offered by pedagogy of play. However, not all of them were directly observable. In the case of these activities, it was difficult to capture the ability to interpret emotions experienced by classmates or the willingness to help others.

## 2. In the wonderland. Discovering the magic of music

Objectives:

- to develop in children the ability to interact with each other;
- to develop smooth movements;
- to exercise vocal organs;
- to practise concentration;
- to develop cooperation skills;
- to shape one's music taste;
- to develop the ability to interpret music.

Aids: percussion instruments, cards for drawing lots, soundtrack: music from the *Harry Potter* movie by John Williams.

Number of participants: 21

Stages of the class:

- "Welcome spells" – the teacher greets the children with the following words:

*Hocus pocus, everybody focus...*

The teacher repeats this greeting several times, in different ways: shouting, whispering, very slowly, etc.

- "Puppet" – the children get into pairs. One is a puppet, enchanted by the other with an imaginary wand used to control the partner. The task is performed to the *Harry Potter* soundtrack;
- "Chain of sounds" – the teacher comes up with a sound (e.g. a witch's laughter, fear, witchcraft, etc.), the children repeat after the teacher in chorus, then each child in turn comes up with a sound while the other children repeat;
- "Spell" – the teacher divides the children into four groups by drawing cards numbered 1 to 4. Each group comes up with a "spell" which is expressed by the sound of instruments, body and voice. All groups present their "spells" in front of the other children;
- "Enchanted pencil" – the children draw music note cards and find their match to work in pairs. One of each pair draws lines and shapes on the back of the other to the rhythm of music from the *Harry Potter* movie and the other mimics the movements felt on the back;
- "Flying carpet" – by lining up from tallest to lowest children find their match in height and weight to perform the task; next, the teacher divides them into



3 groups of 8. The children take the 4-point kneeling position one next to the other, and one child lies down on top of them imitating a “flying carpet”.

In-class performance of third-grade pupils:

Of all the games, two: the introductory “Welcome Spell” and the art game “Enchanted Pencil” generated the greatest interest. While performing the two games, the children were very persistent and involved. There was also a considerable interest in the “Spell” game, during which the pupils were supposed to come up with spells and express them with the sounds of instruments, body movements, singing/ words. However, this game, which the majority of the children enjoyed, was affected by the lack of integration between some groups who were supposed to work together. Some of the children did not want to cooperate since, as they said, “they were not fond of some other kids in the group”. This game also generated group conflicts. The children struggled to reach an agreement as to what the spell should sound like and how it would be presented. Some of the children even stood aside and did not want to participate in the task. When interviewed, the children reported that they found this game more attractive than the others, yet some openly stated that they did not “get on” with their peers, which was the reason why they did not like it. The groups that reached an agreement presented their spells with great joy and involvement, they demonstrated the skills in co-operation and networking. The game was accompanied by a variety of emotions. It was observed that the negative emotions were connected with relationships among peers rather than with the game itself. However, even the most attractive games and teaching aids did not facilitate the positive attitudes toward peers. In this game, the main teaching aids were percussion instruments which proved to be very helpful as they inspired the children when they were inventing the spells and expressing them through their body movements. According to the interview, the game the children enjoyed the most was the “Flying Carpet”. There were only three girls who said they did not fancy this game because it was “dangerous”. They said they were afraid they would “get hurt”, “fall” or “a heavy friend would crush them”. This confirms the previous observations, as those girls were reluctant to participate in the game and it was assumed that they found it unattractive or that they did not like the other children in their group. The “Enchanted Pencil” was another game that the children described as “attractive” during the feedback interview. It was observed that they were eager to cooperate with their partners and demonstrated creativity through their very interesting and imaginative works. This game was accompanied by music from *Harry Potter* which proved very inspiring and aroused emotions in the children, which they demonstrated through artistic expression. The observations led to the conclusion that the game that attracted the least interest was the “Chain of sounds”. The children seemed to be confused and did not quite know what the activity required from them. They had difficulty coming up with new and interesting noises, and needed

inspiration and help from peers or the teacher. Some had trouble imitating the noises that others came up with and then kept silent or made a completely different sound. The “Puppet” game proved attractive, but the children did not perform it as directed. Instead of playing the role of a magician who directs a person with a “wand”, they imitated the partner like in another well-known game called the “Mirror”.

### 3. Santa-themed music activities

Objectives:

- to practise associations;
- to develop the “giving” and “receiving” attitudes;
- to practise concentration;
- to develop large motor skills;
- to develop the ability to cooperate with others;
- to develop motor, vocal and theatrical expression;
- to form creative attitudes;
- to exercise patience and ability to calm down;
- to exercise perceptiveness and agility.

Aids: soundtrack – the *Jingle Bells* song, ball, sleigh bells, all objects found in the room.

Number of participants: 22.

Stages of the class:

- The “Gift” – everyone offers a “gift” to the person sitting on the left; that is, the children invent and name objects beginning with the first letters of their names, e.g. Teresa – turkey;
- “Musical impressions” – the children get into groups of three and stand one behind the other. The child in front is the leader and the two behind are imitators. The child in front improvises by dancing to the music while the other two imitate his or her movements. Then the leader changes. The game is accompanied by “Jingle bells”;
- “Sing as much as you can” – the children sit on the chairs to form a circle while the teacher stands in the center. Everyone sings the “It’s snowing” song. When the teacher throws the ball on the ground, everyone changes places, and the teacher looks for a place to sit. The person who doesn’t find a place stays in the middle. All participants start singing again and the game continues;
- “Naughty Elves” – the children are divided into two groups that face each other. Between them stands a “conductor” who conducts the groups one at a time (at his discretion). The group the conductor is not conducting at the moment and is behind his back, takes on the role of “naughty Elves” who disturb the performance. The task of the conductor is to catch the guilty “Elf”. Such an “Elf”, if caught, becomes the conductor;

- “Sounds of the sleigh” – the children are divided into groups and assigned roles. In one group there are actors and musicians. The children are tasked with creating and acting out a scene with Santa Claus in the leading role. The rest is left up to the children to work out. The task of the “actors” is to act out the scene while the “musicians” are supposed to create a musical setting for the scene.
- “Soundless Bells” – the children move sleigh bells so that no sound is made by them.

In-class performance of third-grade pupils:

As regards these activities, all the games proved to be very popular among the children, with the introductory game “Gift” and the relaxation game “Soundless Bells” being most attractive. During the former, the children became very involved in coming up with “gifts” for their classmates. Whenever they struggled to come up with something starting with a given letter of the alphabet, they said funny, non-obvious things, which brought them a lot of joy and satisfaction. Many positive emotions were observed, together with a lot of kindness towards each other and the ease of making contact with others. The other suggestion (the relaxation game), during which the children’s task was to move the sleigh bells so that they did not make a sound, turned out to be both very exciting and interesting for them. The children were very excited about this game, and any sound made by the bells generated strong emotions in them. One could see great concentration on the correct performance of the task. In addition, the children were eager to cooperate and, if necessary, instructed each other on how to move the bells correctly and offered help. The sleigh bells turned out to be a great teaching aid and were definitely the main attraction of this game. The children reported that it was this game that was most often mentioned as the most attractive and interesting.

Another game that the group also enjoyed was “Sounds of the sleigh”. The task was to invent and reenact scenes about Santa Claus. The game generated a lot of positive emotions. The children were very cooperative and involved in performing the task. The majority played their roles correctly while the scenes they presented were very imaginative and original. To develop background music, the children used various percussion instruments and numerous objects available in the room. For example, they used chairs and pillows to create Santa’s sleigh while reindeer harnesses were made from sashes available in the room. Another game mentioned by the children was the “Naughty Elves”, which also relied on the use of percussions. Initially, some children had difficulty understanding its rules, but over time, after observing their peers, they understood how the game worked. The children playing the game felt a lot of emotions and excitement, and the fact that they could play the role of “naughty Elves” and make “noise” with instruments brought a lot of joy and fun. The “Musical Impressions” game produced a high level of children’s involvement, willingness

to cooperate and strongly positive peer-to-peer relationships. All of the children had very interesting ideas and came up with original movements and gestures. The game was accompanied by the famous song called “Jingle bells”, which positively influenced the mood in the group as the song’s rhythmic and melodic nature was reflected in the children’s dance. The “Sing as much as you can” game was reported as the least interesting of all the suggestions. The children’s concentration was mainly directed at the ball and how to change and find a place to sit as quickly as possible, rather than at singing, which was essential to this game.

#### 4. Winter-themed music activities

Objectives:

- to establish tactile contact;
- to practise sound – movement response;
- to practise body posture;
- to practise concentration;
- to develop motor expression;
- to develop the ability to cooperate with others;
- to practice motor coordination and develop gross motor skills;
- to calm down.

Aids: percussion instruments, soundtracks: Antonio Vivaldi, *Winter*, *Snow is falling* by Shakin’ Stevens, dice, candles, paints, cards.

Number of participants: 13.

Stages of the class:

- “Good morning” – the children walk around the room. When the teacher plays a particular instrument, they greet each other in a predetermined way: e.g. rattle – they greet using hands, tambourine – they greet with elbows, etc.;
- “Group expression of music and movement” – the teacher divides the class into 3 groups. Their task is to come up with a dance of snowflakes to the *Snow is falling* song. Afterwards, each group performs their dance;
- “Bad winter” – the teacher divides the children into 6 groups, each group is assigned a part of the popular Polish folk song *Zima zła [Bad Winter]*. One person throws the dice. The group whose number is drawn will then sing their line. The task is to throw the dice and sing until all parts of the song have been sung. This can be done against the clock and repeated several times:
  - group I – Hu! Hu! ha! Hu! Hu! ha! Our winter’s bad!
  - group II – It pinches noses, it pinches ears;
  - group III – It gusts snow in the eyes;
  - group IV – With a whirlwind in the field it rushes!
  - group V – Our winter’s bad!
  - group VI – Our winter’s bad!

- “Conductor” – the teacher divides the class into sections of percussion instruments and conducts the “orchestras” to *Winter* – a piece by Antonio Vivaldi;
- “Winter postcard” – listening to *Winter* by Antonio Vivaldi, the children use candles to draw a winter landscape on a sheet of paper and then paint the sheet with paints using their fingers;
- “Massage with instruments” – the children get into pairs and then give each other a massage with percussion instruments.

In-class performance of third-grade pupils:

The games that proved to be the most popular with the children were: “Group expression of music and movement”, and “Massage with instruments”. During these games, the children showed great involvement in the activities, demonstrated persistence and cooperation with their peers. Feedback received from the children confirmed our earlier observations as they most often mentioned these games as the most attractive. During the dance game, the children showed their ingenuity and created interesting dance patterns. The play was accompanied by a lot of positive energy. Inventing moves and cooperating with their classmates brought the children a lot of joy and satisfaction, and the presentation of dances was met with respect, acceptance and applause. The children created a dance routine to the song *Snow is Falling* which is very joyful and lively. One could feel the energy that came with the music in the children’s behavior and dance. In this game, music, as a teaching aid, proved to be inspiring and encouraging. The game the children also found very attractive was the one in which they massaged themselves with instruments. Interestingly, playing this game, the children took inspiration from previous activities. When massaging a friend or colleague, they tried to do it in such a way that the instruments did not make any sound. The instruments in this game inspired them to look for unconventional solutions. A game that also aroused interest among the children was “The Evil Winter”. Despite the initial difficulty in understanding its rules, they generally enjoyed the game. Much excitement came from tossing dice and the designated parts of the song that the children were asked to memorize. During this game, they demonstrated their ability to interact with each other. “Winter Postcard” and “Good Morning” aroused less enthusiasm. The art game using candles and paints made the children very curious, because, at first, as they said, “they couldn’t see what they were drawing” and they found it exciting, whereas later they could paint with their fingers and “get dirty”, which gave them a lot of fun. Antonio Vivaldi’s song in the background served as an inspiration, boosting creativity and setting the pace for doing artwork. The game they liked least was the “Conductor”. The children reported that they were already familiar with this game and “didn’t want to play it again”. In this case, it is difficult to assess whether the game was unattractive, or whether it lacked a “whiff” of novelty, which normally has an invigorating effect and promotes involvement.

### 5. Christmas is coming – a musical celebration

Objectives:

- to integrate the group;
- to familiarize children with graphic notation;
- to consolidate the concepts of high and low sound;
- to develop the sense of rhythm;
- to develop musical sensitivity;
- to calm down.

Aids: soundtracks: Polish carols, *We wish you a Merry Christmas* (song), round cards – “baubles”, crayons, glue, paper Christmas tree, cards, percussion instruments.

Number of participants: 18.

Stages of the class:

- “Write my name” – each child approaches the nearest person who writes the first letter of the child’s name; the game then follows by asking the next person to write the second letter of the name, and so on;
- “Christmas prancing” – the children are introduced to the lyrics of the song called *We wish you a Merry Christmas*. Then, the teacher gives the first command: “Make a turn when you hear the word ‘Christmas’”. The teacher turns on the music and the children follow the command. Next, another movement is added: “Hop when you hear the word ‘wish’”. The teacher turns on the music and the children perform the two commands. The game continues like this as more commands are given:
  - Christmas – turn;
  - wish – hop;
  - merry – clap your hands;
  - happy – squat;
  - we – touching hands with knees;
  - New Year – wave your hands above the head;
  - you – point your hands at others.
- “Sound tree”. The teacher draws a Christmas tree on the board. Various musical symbols are then added to the tree: “f” (*forte*) – right and left side of the Christmas tree; “p” (*piano*) – right and left side of the Christmas tree; “<” (*cre-scendo*) – in the middle of the tree between *piano* on the left and *forte* on the right; “>” (*diminuendo*) – between *piano* on the right and *forte* on the left; *soprano* – at the top of the Christmas tree; *bass* – at the bottom of the tree (in the trunk); and vowels, e.g. “ooo”, as baubles. The teacher then explains the meanings of all of the symbols and names. The task is to sing according to the teacher’s instructions: for example, if the teacher points to the vowel “ooo” followed by *soprano* and *forte*, it

- means that the children will sing the voice “ooo” in a high voice, loudly. The teacher pointing to *diminuendo* means that the children should sing quieter and quieter;
- “To the rhythm of carols” – the children are divided into 5 groups, each group taps out the rhythm of a selected carol and the task of the other groups is to guess the title or sing a fragment of the carol;
  - “Decorate a Christmas tree” – each child receives a round piece of paper and decorates it to make a “bauble”. Then the teacher plays some Polish carols and each child, one by one, to the rhythm of the music, come up to the tree and glues their bauble saying one Christmas wish. The task is completed when the Christmas tree is filled with all the children’s baubles;
  - “Rhythmic farewell” – each child makes up his/her own farewell on a musical instrument, the other children “respond” in the same way.

In-class performance of third-grade pupils:

The most popular games were the “Christmas pranks” and “We decorate the Christmas tree”. The children especially enjoyed the dance game. Their task was to make the right move or gesture depending on the word they heard in a song. The children were positive and joyful during the game. There was a lot of excitement, too, and when someone failed to make a move at the right moment, the children found it funny and laughed. On the other hand, the art game, with its elements of paratheatrical activities, came with plenty of emotions. One could see the great impact of the background carols, which brought a festive dimension to the activity. While making their wishes, the children showed great involvement and sensitivity. The game aroused a lot of joy in them and brought an atmosphere of kindness and fun. Making wishes was difficult for some children since they were confused about what to say. Then their peers helped them by giving some prompts. Decorating baubles and attaching them to the Christmas tree appeared to be the most attractive of all the activities. The children created very interesting and unique items. They showed ingenuity and creativity and some even managed to demonstrate truly original creations, such as origami baubles.

The introductory and closing games did not arouse much interest in the children. The “Write my name” game proved to be too easy as the task was performed very quickly and without much involvement. The “Rhythmic farewell” did not excite the children either, even though one could observe some emotional response towards the end of the activity. While playing, the children reported that “it was fun” and “it’s a pity there won’t be any more of these activities”. During the “To the rhythm of carols” game, the children faced numerous difficulties. They were reluctant to cooperate with each other, failed to agree on what song to play on the instruments, and were unable to maintain an even pace when performing the song. The difficulties encountered made it difficult for the children from other groups to guess carols performed by other groups. The least attractive game for the children was the “Tree of Sounds”. First of all,

it turned out to be too challenging. The participating children did not understand the musical symbols explained by the teacher and later during the game they got confused and failed to follow the instructions. They quickly lost interest in the activity and several withdrew from the game. During the game, instead of following the instructions shown by the instructor, the children tried to imitate her singing.

## Conclusion

The field research presented in this paper has confirmed that classes using musical pedagogy of play provide a teaching-learning environment that develops the basic general skills required at this stage of education, i.e. arousing cognitive curiosity, developing creativity and the awareness of experienced emotions, the need and ability to identify with social groups, as well as skills in logical, critical and creative thinking. As the results of the study suggest, the method of musical pedagogy of play creates favourable conditions for the development of basic skills in children alongside appreciation of musical experience and self-expression while fostering diverse, mutual contacts and group integration. Music, in turn, shapes the children's personality, sensitivity and influences their mental and physical development. The abundance of activities offered by the musical pedagogy of play enables the achievement of teaching and learning outcomes and makes the educational process more attractive. In addition, games that integrate music, visual arts and paratheatrical activities were most appreciated by the children, which is not at all surprising. Children enjoy colors, sounds and movement, experience strong aesthetic emotions, and easily succumb to the influence of art as spectators and listeners. Child creativity is a dynamic activity that offers a great potential for personality formation. It develops creative skills while teaching children how to think and ask questions. Such activities give children courage, boost their confidence, and put them in a happy, invigorating mood. Musical, artistic and paratheatrical games can provide pleasant impressions and experiences while developing the child's emotional and mental capacity. In particular, activities that integrate music and visual arts develop imagination, which is an important aptitude factor in any field of art. It is, as it were, a driving force that stimulates intellectual and mental processes. Among the teaching aids that the children found most attractive was also the music itself. The children often stated that they enjoyed exposure to music during various activities. The use of percussion instruments during the classes also met with great interest, especially as one of the games required that the instruments be used without making a sound.

In conclusion, it can be assumed that musical pedagogy of play constitute a teaching-learning environment that is characterised by emotional security, joy of learning



and creativity. It brings a lot of pleasure, which means energy, fantasy, communication, and makes group work more spontaneous, focused and surprising. All children's activities using musical pedagogy of play help to build an atmosphere of relaxation and freedom. They awaken latent curiosity, as well as engage and invite children to interact with the surrounding reality.

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## Recognizing Modal Versions of Tonality by Students of Preschool and Early Childhood Education

Rozpoznawanie modalnych wersji tonalności przez studentów edukacji przedszkolnej i wczesnoszkolnej

### KEYWORDS    ABSTRACT

music listening, early musical education, musical skills, tonality

The vast majority of preschool and early childhood teachers admit that they have problems with implementing musical issues. Experimental research indicates that the inability to sing, move to music, differentiate tonality and meter, improvise, read and write down music, is mainly caused by deficits in audiation. The article focuses on research results regarding the effectiveness of recognizing a melody presented instrumentally in eight tonalities: 1. Major; 2. Dorian; 3. Phrygian; 4. Lydian; 5. Mixolydian; 6. Aeolian; 7. Harmonic Minor; 8. Locrian. Due to the purpose of the research, the rhythmic content of all versions was the same, and the procedure used allowed for comparing students' attention by determining the time of receiving (listening to) the melodic line and the moment at which they gave the answer. Listening skills help develop critical thinking skills, which are important in any form of communication: speaking, singing, reading, writing or synthesizing information.

## SŁOWA KLUCZE    ABSTRAKT

sluchanie muzyki,  
wczesna edukacja  
muzyczna,  
umiejętności  
muzyczne,  
tonalność

Zdecydowana większość nauczycieli przedszkoli i wczesnoszkolnych przyznaje, że ma problemy z realizacją zagadnień muzycznych. Badania eksperymentalne wskazują, że niemożność śpiewania, poruszania się w rytm muzyki, różnicowania tonacji i metrum, improwizowania, czytania i zapisywania muzyki wynika głównie z deficytów audiacji. W artykule skupiono się na dwóch podstawowych elementach muzycznych – tonacji i rytmie. Przedstawiono wyniki badań dotyczących efektywności rozpoznawania melodii prezentowanej instrumentalnie w ośmiu tonacjach: 1) durowej; 2) Dorian; 3) frygijskiej; 4) lidyjskiej; 5) miksolidyjskiej; 6) liparyjskiej; 7) molowej harmonicznej; 8) Locrian. Ze względu na cel badań zawartość rytmiczna wszystkich wersji była taka sama, a zastosowana procedura pozwoliła na porównanie uwagi uczniów poprzez określenie czasu otrzymania (wysłuchania) linii melodycznej oraz momentu, w którym udzielili odpowiedzi. Umiejętności słuchania pomagają rozwijać umiejętności krytycznego myślenia, które są ważne w każdej formie komunikacji – mówieniu, śpiewaniu, czytaniu, pisaniu lub syntezie informacji.

## The Need for Early Music Teaching

The vast majority of preschool and early childhood teachers admit that they have problems with implementing musical issues. Children are accustomed to artistic activities that provide relaxation and pleasure, and limit the assessment of their development and effort. If music classes in kindergarten and music lessons at school take place at all, they are often conducted by people who are not prepared well enough in this area of education. Teachers use ready-made lesson plans and background music (serving as accompaniment), but they are unable to decide on their own what, when, why to teach, and how to work with children who do not want to sing or play instruments (Krajewski & Schmidt, 2014).

The greatest value resulting from musical activity is the variety of actions based on commitment. This is made possible by the implementation of the concept of audiation development, which teaches how to achieve specific goals, communicate effectively within a group, correctly recognize sounds, keep one's own and other people's reactions in memory, and function harmoniously. Success in the process of learning music is determined by access to individual resources, ease of adaptation, perception, reception, and assimilation of sounds, and the ability to present music. A teacher implementing the concept of audiation development improves the effectiveness of the activities of each person performing specific musical tasks. Appropriate education is needed to maintain the potential of innate musical abilities and support the development of children's

audiation skills. Convincing observations, analyses, opinions and arguments justifying the importance of the preschool and early school period are provided by Edwin E. Gordon's music learning theory (Zwolińska, 2019, pp. 112, 114).

In the process of musicalization, concentration of attention is important, i.e. the ability to consciously direct and maintain interest in specific activities. Good ways to practice this ability include: listening carefully, teaching accuracy, releasing excess energy, making decisions, consistent action, planning tasks and appreciating the child's effort. Drawing attention to what is happening in music is possible thanks to frequent changes in the tonality, dynamics, timbre and tempo of the songs. Musical education in early childhood allows not only to build solid foundations for the development of the musical language, but also opens up opportunities to acquire various skills in a natural way (Zwolińska, 2011, p. 147).

Changes in students' opinions, emotions and feelings depend on teachers' behaviour in various social situations, i.e. on what they do, think and feel. The teachers' effectiveness increases if they are perceived as decisive and competent (Giggio & Friedman, 1986), and their choice of the optimum dose of expressiveness results from knowledge of cultural norms (Goleman, 2007). Lack of musical refinement is often associated with a deficit of social skills, emotional disorders or behavioral disorders. An important part of the definition of a music learning disability is its exclusions: incompetence in this area does not result from a lack of musical ability, mental delay, emotional disorders, or cultural differences.

Experimental research indicates that the inability to sing, move to music, differentiate tonality and meter, improvise, or read and write down music, is mainly caused by deficits in audiation, which is independent of discrepancies in talents and achievements, and is related to the musical content, that is, the components of experience (Gordon, 1997). Using tests, you can identify the level of children's musical talents and, on this basis, take effective actions in the field of tone and rhythm (Gordon, 1979, 1982, 1989, 1991). Unfortunately, the inability to learn music is not decreasing, and the disturbing reasons for this increase are the lack of basic knowledge about the development of musical abilities, the lack of financial incentives to work with particularly gifted students, as well as inadequate preparation of teachers by universities.

Most students of preschool and early childhood pedagogy have great difficulties in learning music and are not competent to take up the profession of a teacher managing the musical development of a small child. If the musical development of future teachers is neglected in childhood, they are unable to acquire the desired skills in listening, singing, improvising, reading and notating music. This means that in educational and professional practice, no specialised intervention on their part will be possible. Research by Edwin E. Gordon (1997, 1999) shows that all children, regardless of their level of talent, can achieve the ability to understand music to a degree appropriate to

their abilities, provided that they receive intensive educational exposure over a long period of time by a competent teacher.

This report focuses on research results regarding the effectiveness of recognizing a melody presented instrumentally in eight tonalities, which required competent auditory differentiation. Listening to music is a learned communication skill that includes three stages: receiving, giving meaning and reacting to sounds. Receiving means attending to the whole message and consciously paying attention to some things and ignoring others (Wolvin & Coakley, 1996). The presented research focused on the overall perception of melodies and conscious attention to their characteristic features in tonality.

Creating meaning depends on how listeners understand the sound of the received information (Bohlken, 1995), and this requires readiness to listen in various situations (Wolvin & Coakley, 1994; Roberts, 1998). Two elements transform skillful sound recording into competent listening: motivation to listen effectively and the ability to listen effectively in various situations (Morreale et al., 2011). A competent recipient has this readiness even when the situation is not important or intriguing to him.

## Research Method

The answer was sought to the following question: What is the effectiveness of listening to the same melody that is tonally different? A test was developed presenting the melodic line in eight tonalities: 1. Major; 2. Dorian; 3. Phrygian; 4. Lydian; 5. Mixolydian; 6. Aeolian; 7. Harmonic Minor; 8. Locrian. Due to the purpose of the research, the rhythmic content of all versions was the same. The use of this tool allowed us to compare the choices of 134 students from the same field of study (Preschool and Early Education Pedagogy) who studied at the Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz. Most of the subjects had comparable education in music education, and they were recruited on the basis of voluntary and informed consent to participate in the experiment. The musical stimulus was a twelve-bar melody in a duple meter, which was differentiated into eight modal tonalities. Individual versions were played to each person using a CD, and based on the indicated choices the correctness of identifying the eight tones was determined.

## Procedure

First, musical aptitude was measured using a test named *The Advanced Measures of Music Audiation* (AMMA) by E. E. Gordon (1989), and then the effectiveness of listening to modal tonal versions was checked using the LTC\_1 Test in which each

variant referred to a different tonality. Ambitus, i.e. the range between the lowest and highest notes in all melodies was within the range b-c2, and their rhythmic content was the same. Listening to all examples, by every participant, took place in one series. The entire test consisted of six sets (one lasted 2:29 minutes), each of which presented the same tonal series, but their exposure took place in a different order and none of them was repeated. In this way, the analysis of decisions made by students (including the occurrence of errors) excluded the incidentalness of events. The break between subsequent exposures of tonality was always the same and corresponded to two bars of the meter being implemented. Due to the length of the test tasks, the test was conducted in two parts within one week.

The procedure used allowed for comparing students' attention by determining the time of receiving (listening to) the melodic line and the moment at which they respond. The study took place in controlled conditions, and the melody played as long as the subjects focused their attention. The total examination time for one person was 35 minutes. All test melodies were electronically recorded on a Solton KETRON X3 synthesizer in order to control possible associations of the presented melodies with a specific timbre of the selected musical instrument that was known to the subjects (preferred or averse) (Gordon, 1984; Trzos, 2014; Kendall & Carterette, 1993; Zacharakis et al., 2014). In this way, it was ensured that the remaining elements of the presented modal versions (rhythm, time, tempo, dynamics, timbre, method of playback) were the same throughout the study.

## Results

The results obtained below show the relationship between musical aptitude and test results. Variables relating to the results of the test were divided into two groups: 1. quantitative and 2. dichotomous. Quantitative variables are those in which the result is the number of recognized melodies, i.e. all ending in “\_SUM” and the number of recognized melodies in particular tonalities (Maj., Dor., Phry., Lyd., Mix., Aeol., Harm. and Loc.). Correlations were calculated for these variables. Dichotomous variables, on the other hand, are those in which we received information about whether the melody was (1) or not (0) recognized, i.e. all with the ending “\_w”. In this case, the so-called odds ratio (OR) was not calculated. The results determining the level of musical talents were expressed in percentiles.

## Level of Musical Aptitude and Tonality Recognition – Quantitative Variables

The data was analyzed in two dimensions: tonal (Tonal\_C; Table 1) and rhythmic (Rythm\_C; Table 2) regarding students' listening to music; and supplemented with general results (Total\_C; Table 3).

In the tonal range, the analyzed variables were not normally distributed, which was revealed by the significance of the Shapiro-Wilk test result ( $p \leq 0.05$ ), so Spearman's  $r$  correlation coefficient was used. The level of tonal aptitude (Tonal\_C) was defined as the percentile score on the Tonality subtest (AMMA). A significant relationship was revealed between the level of tonal abilities and the induced change in 2 out of 15 test results: B\_SUM ( $p = 0.045$ ) and Mix ( $p = 0.015$ ). These relationships are positive. It can be concluded that the better all tonalities were recognized, the better the results were in terms of listening to tonality in these two aspects (Table 1).

Table 1. *Correlations of LTC\_1 Test Results with Tonal\_C (E. E. Gordon's AMMA) in the Tonal Dimension*

LTC_1 Test result	Tonal_Correlation			
	R	<i>p</i>	Relation direction	Relation strength
A_SUM	0.168	0.053	---	---
B_SUM	0.173	0.045	positive	W
C_SUM	0.142	0.103	---	---
D_SUM	0.081	0.351	---	---
E_SUM	0.022	0.797	---	---
F_SUM	0.128	0.139	---	---
OG_SUM	0.161	0.064	---	---
Maj	0.119	0.169	---	---
Dor	0.103	0.238	---	---
Phry	0.15	0.084	---	---
Lyd	0.159	0.067	---	---
Mix	0.21	0.015	positive	W
Aeol	0.161	0.063	---	---



LTC_1 Test result	Tonal_Correlation			
	R	<i>p</i>	Relation direction	Relation strength
Harm	0.071	0.415	---	---
Loc	0.122	0.161	---	---

Source: the author’s own research. Legend: Maj – Major; Dor – Dorian; Phry – Phrygian; Lyd – Lydian; Mix – Mixolydian; Aeol – aeolian; Harm – Harmonic minor; Loc – Locrian; W – very weak

In the rhythmic dimension of music listening, the relationship between the level of rhythmic skills and test results was checked. Quantitative variables were also analyzed. Similarly to the tonal dimension, the analyzed variables did not show a normal distribution (significance of the result for the Shapiro-Wilk *W* test  $p \leq 0.05$ ). For this reason, the Spearman’s *r* correlation coefficient was also used in the rhythmic dimension. It turned out that the result of rhythmic abilities (Rhythm\_C) showed a significant relationship between 10 out of 15 detailed results of the LTC\_1 test ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). These correlations turned out to be positive. It can be assumed that the better the general rhythm recognition abilities, the better these people were able to differentiate the tonal details of the presented melodies. The rhythm of the tasks did not cause a significant additional burden on the perception of musical content. These relationships were revealed in three of the six series (A\_SUM; B\_SUM; C\_SUM) and the overall result (OG\_SUM), and in six of the eight tonal versions of the same melody (Table 2).

Table 2. Correlations of LTC\_1 Test Results with Rhythm\_C (E.E. Gordon’s AMMA) in the Rhythmic Dimension

LTC_1 Test result	Rhythm_Correlation			
	R	<i>p</i>	Relation direction	Relation strength
A_SUM	0.273	0.001	positive	W
B_SUM	0.2	0.02	positive	W
C_SUM	0.217	0.012	positive	W
D_SUM	0.111	0.202	---	---
E_SUM	0.137	0.115	---	---
F_SUM	0.135	0.121	---	---

LTC_1 Test result	Rhythm_Correlation			
	R	<i>p</i>	Relation direction	Relation strength
OG_SUM	0.251	0.003	positive	W
Maj	0.24	0.005	positive	W
Dor	0.193	0.025	positive	W
Phry	0.252	0.003	positive	W
Lyd	0.22	0.011	positive	W
Mix	0.19	0.028	positive	W
Aeol	0.217	0.012	positive	W
Harm	0.121	0.165	---	---
Loc	0.156	0.072	---	---

Source: the author's own research. Legend: Maj – Major; Dor – Dorian; Phry – Phrygian; Lyd – Lydian; Mix – Mixolydian; Aeol – Aeolian; Harm – Harmonic minor; Loc – Locrian; W – very weak.

The tested relationships between quantitative variables were also related to the general results of the musical aptitude test (Total\_C) and the test results (LTC\_1 test). Also in this approach, the analyzed variables did not indicate a normal distribution (significance W – Shapiro-Wilk  $p \leq 0.05$ ). Therefore, Spearman's  $r$  correlation coefficient was used in further analysis. It was revealed that the general level of musical talents (Total\_C) significantly correlated with the level of 9 out of 15 results of the LTC\_1 Test ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). The discussed correlations also revealed a positive direction. It can be assumed that the better the recognition of tonality and rhythm, the better results the students obtained in the aspects (A\_SUM; B\_SUM; C\_SUM; OG\_SUM) and in five out of eight tonal versions of the same melody – Table 3.

Table 3. *Correlations of LTC\_1 Test Results with the Overall Total\_C (E. E. Gordon's AMMA)*

LTC_1 test result	Total_Correlation			
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>	Relation direction	Relation strength
A_SUM	0.238	0.006	positive	W
B_SUM	0.212	0.014	positive	W

LTC_1 test result	Total_Correlation			
	r	p	Relation direction	Relation strength
C_SUM	0.188	0.029	positive	W
D_SUM	0.109	0.211	---	---
E_SUM	0.071	0.412	---	---
F_SUM	0.149	0.087	---	---
OG_SUM	0.221	0.01	positive	W
Maj	0.19	0.028	positive	W
Dor	0.159	0.066	---	---
Phry	0.231	0.007	positive	W
Lyd	0.204	0.018	positive	W
Mix	0.224	0.009	positive	W
Aeol	0.192	0.027	positive	W
Harm	0.102	0.24	---	---
Loc	0.149	0.087	---	---

Source: the author’s own research. Legend: Maj – Major; Dor – Dorian; Phry – Phrygian; Lyd – Lydian; Mix – Mixolydian; Aeol – Aeolian; Harm – Harmonic minor; Loc – Locrian; W – very weak.

### Level of Musical Aptitude and Detailed Test Results. Analysis of Dichotomous Variables

A dichotomous variable can be interpreted as the occurrence or absence of an event. In this case, it is about the accuracy of recognizing the objective modal tonality of the modified melody. The OR index determined the level of relationship between the occurrence and intensity of the independent variable (here: Tonal\_C) with the probability of correctly determining a given tonal version of the melody. It was assumed that:

- OR = 1 means no relationship;
- OR > 1 means the positive direction of the relationship (i. e. the higher the value of the independent variable, the greater the chances of an event occurring that is understood as the correct determination of objective tonality);

- $OR < 1$  means the negative direction of the relationship, i.e. the higher the value of the independent variable, the lower the chances of an event occurring (understood as the correct determination of objective tonality).

The strength of the relationship was determined as follows:

- in a positive direction – e.g.  $OR = 1.026$ , which should be understood that each unit of the independent variable (here: percentile) increases the chance of an event occurring by 2.6% (because in 1.026 more than 1 “appears” 0.026, i.e. 2.6%);
- in the negative direction – e.g.  $OR = 0.98$ , which should be understood that each unit of the independent variable (here: percentile) reduces the chances of an event occurring by 2% (because in 0.98 to 1 there is a “missing” of 0.02, i.e. 2 %).

The analysis revealed that the tonal level of abilities (Tonal\_C) has a significant relationship with the respondents’ chances of correctly recognizing 6 out of 48 tonal structures of the same melody ( $p < 0.05$ ). These relationships are positive, which means that the higher the level of tonal abilities, the greater the chances of recognizing different versions of the same melody. The effectiveness of recognizing exposure to the modal version of tonality turned out to be significantly higher due to the level of tonal abilities, mainly in series A tasks (A\_1\_w:A\_8\_w), and in six exposures these relationships turned out to be significant (A\_2\_w: i.e. Doric tonality) and highly statistically significant (A\_3\_w; A\_4\_w; A\_5\_w; A\_6\_: i.e. Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian, Aeolian). The order of the presented versions in this series was consistent with the diatonic shift of the degree of the next melody. It can be assumed that the natural order of the presented tonal versions could have been additionally related to the effectiveness of determining the transferred “tonal center”, and, consequently, a given tonality. The analysis was performed separately for the tonal dimension (Table 4), rhythmic dimension (Table 5) and overall results (Table 6):

Table 4. *Relationships Between the Level of Tonal Abilities (Tonal\_C AMMA Test) and Dichotomous Determination of Modal Versions of Tonality (LTC\_1 test)*

Melody (LTC_1 Test)		Tonal_C – AMMA by E. E. Gordon		
Modal tonality	Melody in series	OR	<i>p</i>	Relation direction
Maj	A_1_w	1.001	0.89	---
Dor	A_2_w	1.026	0.02	positive
Phry	A_3_w	1.037	0.003	positive

Melody (LTC_1 Test)		Tonal_C – AMMA by E. E. Gordon		
Modal tonality	Melody in series	OR	<i>p</i>	Relation direcion
Lyd	A_4_w	1.033	0.004	positive
Mix	A_5_w	1.029	0.011	positive
Aeol	A_6_w	1.039	0.002	positive
Harm	A_7_w	1.021	0.068	---
Loc	A_8_w	1.008	0.461	---
Aeol	B_1_w	1.007	0.642	---
Lyd	B_2_w	1.018	0.097	---
Loc	B_3_w	1.018	0.075	---
Maj	B_4_w	1.007	0.46	---
Harm	B_5_w	1.02	0.093	---
Phry	B_6_w	1.015	0.311	---
Mix	B_7_w	0.997	0.82	---
Dor	B_8_w	0.978	0.156	---
Phry	C_1_w	0.989	0.42	---
Harm	C_2_w	1.019	0.193	---
Lyd	C_3_w	1.004	0.683	---
Maj	C_4_w	1.029	0.006	positive
Loc	C_5_w	1.006	0.557	---
Aeol	C_6_w	1.035	0.071	---
Dor	C_7_w	0.997	0.825	---
Mix	C_8_w	1.021	0.062	---
Mix	D_1_w	0.999	0.924	---
Maj	D_2_w	1.019	0.066	---
Lyd	D_3_w	1.017	0.12	---
Dor	D_4_w	0.985	0.251	---
Loc	D_5_w	1.004	0.677	---

Melody (LTC_1 Test)		Tonal_C – AMMA by E. E. Gordon		
Modal tonality	Melody in series	OR	<i>p</i>	Relation direction
Harm	D_6_w	0.99	0.399	---
Aeol	D_7_w	0.998	0.863	---
Phry	D_8_w	1.01	0.387	---
Loc	E_1_w	1.001	0.941	---
Lyd	E_2_w	1.014	0.219	---
Phry	E_3_w	1.005	0.689	---
Maj	E_4_w	0.996	0.667	---
Mix	E_5_w	1.023	0.093	---
Harm	E_6_w	0.993	0.492	---
Dor	E_7_w	0.987	0.478	---
Aeol	E_8_w	0.985	0.194	---
Harm	F_1_w	0.998	0.871	---
Maj	F_2_w	1.005	0,632	---
Phry	F_3_w	1.012	0.259	---
Dor	F_4_w	1.012	0.316	---
Lyd	F_5_w	1.005	0.666	---
Aeol	F_6_w	0.992	0.527	---
Loc	F_7_w	1.015	0.142	---
Mix	F_8_w	1.023	0.129	---

Source: the author's own research. Legend: Maj – Major; Dor – Dorian; Phry – Phrygian; Lyd – Lydian; Mix – Mixolydian; Aeol – Aeolian; Harm – Harmonic minor; Loc – Locrian.

In the rhythmic dimension, it was found that the level of students' talents (Rythm\_C) had a significant relationship with the chances of recognizing 12 out of 48 melodies ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). These relationships were positive, which explains that the higher the potential for recognizing rhythmic structures, the more frequent cases of correct audiation of modal structures. It can also be assumed that people with a high level of rhythmic talents (Rythm\_C) had greater comfort in listening to modally modified

musical structures whose rhythmic content was unchanged. A higher level of rhythmic talents helped these people to select musical content based on tonal and rhythmic content and, at the same time, control the variability of the former.

It was noticed that most of the compounds turned out to be significant mainly for tasks in series A, where exposures of subsequent tonal versions were organized in a natural modal order. Moreover, most correct results of people highly talented in rhythm concerned tasks constructed in major tonality (A\_1\_w; C\_4\_w; D\_2\_w) – tables 5, 6. It can be assumed that this is a consequence of the musical education received by the surveyed students based on the dominant system, evenly tempered according to the order of a 12-point scale. It is worth wondering what the possible impact on the results obtained by students educated on the basis of solutions other than the major-minor system could be. This aspect should be further investigated in longitudinal studies.

Table 5. Relationships Between the Level of Rhythmic Abilities (Rhythm\_C) and Dichotomous Determination of Modal Versions of Tonality (LTC\_1 test)

Melody (LTC_1 Test)		Rhythm_C – AMMA by E.E. Gordon		
Modal tonality	Melody in series	OR	<i>p</i>	Relation direction
Maj	A_1_w	1.028	0.019	positive
Dor	A_2_w	1.041	0.003	positive
Phry	A_3_w	1.05	0.001	positive
Lyd	A_4_w	1.053	<0.001	positive
Mix	A_5_w	1.037	0.006	positive
Aeol	A_6_w	1.061	<0.001	positive
Harm	A_7_w	1.059	<0.001	positive
Loc	A_8_w	1.017	0.165	---
Aeol	B_1_w	1.019	0.268	---
Lyd	B_2_w	1.015	0.23	---
Loc	B_3_w	1.032	0.009	positive
Maj	B_4_w	1.006	0.578	---
Harm	B_5_w	1.005	0.728	---

Melody (LTC_1 Test)		Rhythm_C – AMMA by E.E. Gordon		
Modal tonality	Melody in series	OR	<i>p</i>	Relation direction
Phry	B_6_w	1.029	0.086	---
Mix	B_7_w	1.016	0.315	---
Dor	B_8_w	0.995	0.788	---
Phry	C_1_w	0.9995	0.973	---
Harm	C_2_w	1.011	0.477	---
Lyd	C_3_w	1.003	0.795	---
Maj	C_4_w	1.069	<0.001	positive
Loc	C_5_w	0.994	0.586	---
Aeol	C_6_w	1.021	0.285	---
Dor	C_7_w	1.009	0.58	---
Mix	C_8_w	1.016	0.2	---
Mix	D_1_w	1.005	0.758	---
Maj	D_2_w	1.02345	0.048	positive
Lyd	D_3_w	1.018	0.145	---
Dor	D_4_w	0.985	0.34	---
Loc	D_5_w	1.004	0.749	---
Harm	D_6_w	0.998	0.877	---
Aeol	D_7_w	1.005	0.7	---
Phry	D_8_w	1.004	0.736	---
Loc	E_1_w	1.007	0.521	---
Lyd	E_2_w	1.037	0.01	positive
Phry	E_3_w	1.011	0.384	---
Maj	E_4_w	1.02	0.089	---
Mix	E_5_w	1.029	0.061	---
Harm	E_6_w	0.996	0.737	---
Dor	E_7_w	0.979	0.328	---



Melody (LTC_1 Test)		Rhythm_C – AMMA by E.E. Gordon		
Modal tonality	Melody in series	OR	<i>p</i>	Relation direction
Aeol	E_8_w	0.998	0.856	---
Harm	F_1_w	0.99	0.487	---
Maj	F_2_w	1.015	0.199	---
Phry	F_3_w	1.034	0.014	positive
Dor	F_4_w	1.009	0.493	---
Lyd	F_5_w	1.001	0.96	---
Aeol	F_6_w	0.99969	0.983	---
Loc	F_7_w	0.998	0.874	---
Mix	F_8_w	1.008	0.639	---

Source: the author’s own research. Legend: Maj – Major; Dor – Dorian; Phry – Phrygian; Lyd – Lydian; Mix – Mixolydian; Aeol – Aeolian; Harm – Harmonic minor; Loc – Locrian.

The analysis of the overall results in terms of dichotomous variables showed that the overall level of abilities (Total\_C) revealed a relationship with the chances of recognizing 11 out of 48 melodies ( $p \leq 0.05$ ). These relationships are mostly highly statistically significant and positive. This means that the better the recognition of tonality and rhythm, the greater the chances of recognizing these melodies. Most of the observed relationships in this area, as well as in the tonal and rhythmic area, were revealed in the tasks in series A. This fact was described above, concluding with the need for further research in this area.

Table 6. Relationships Between the Level of General Abilities (Total\_C) and Dichotomous Determination of Modal Versions of Tonality (LTC\_1 test)

Melody (LTC_1 Test)		Total_C – AMMA by E. E. Gordon		
Modal tonality	Melody in series	OR	<i>p</i>	Relation direction
Maj	A_1_w	1.012	0.24	---
Dor	A_2_w	1.035	0.004	positive
Phry	A_3_w	1.047	0.001	positive

Melody (LTC_1 Test)		Total_C – AMMA by E. E. Gordon		
Modal tonality	Melody in series	OR	<i>p</i>	Relation direction
Lyd	A_4_w	1.043	0.001	positive
Mix	A_5_w	1.033	0.007	positive
Aeol	A_6_w	1.052	<0.001	positive
Harm	A_7_w	1.037	0.004	positive
Loc	A_8_w	1.014	0.199	---
Aeol	B_1_w	1.013	0.388	---
Lyd	B_2_w	1.016	0.15	---
Loc	B_3_w	1.024	0.025	positive
Maj	B_4_w	1.007	0.503	---
Harm	B_5_w	1.015	0.23	---
Phry	B_6_w	1.023	0.143	---
Mix	B_7_w	1.003	0.81	---
Dor	B_8_w	0.984	0.324	---
Phry	C_1_w	0.992	0.557	---
Harm	C_2_w	1.016	0.299	---
Lyd	C_3_w	1.003	0.757	---
Maj	C_4_w	1.047	<0.001	positive
Loc	C_5_w	0.999	0.945	---
Aeol	C_6_w	1.03	0.115	---
Dor	C_7_w	1.002	0.895	---
Mix	C_8_w	1.019	0.094	---
Mix	D_1_w	1.004	0.787	---
Maj	D_2_w	1.022	0.041	positive
Lyd	D_3_w	1.018	0.115	---
Dor	D_4_w	0.982	0.204	---
Loc	D_5_w	1.005	0.676	---

Melody (LTC_1 Test)		Total_C – AMMA by E. E. Gordon		
Modal tonality	Melody in series	OR	<i>p</i>	Relation direction
Harm	D_6_w	0.993	0.557	---
Aeol	D_7_w	0.999	0.942	---
Phry	D_8_w	1.01	0.411	---
Loc	E_1_w	1.002	0.839	---
Lyd	E_2_w	1.026	0.041	positive
Phry	E_3_w	1.008	0.479	---
Maj	E_4_w	1.005	0.645	---
Mix	E_5_w	1.026	0.068	---
Harm	E_6_w	0.992	0.45	---
Dor	E_7_w	0.982	0.351	---
Aeol	E_8_w	0.989	0.375	---
Harm	F_1_w	0.992	0.567	---
Maj	F_2_w	1.008	0.439	---
Phry	F_3_w	1.02368	0.049	positive
Dor	F_4_w	1.013	0.307	---
Lyd	F_5_w	1.002	0.845	---
Aeol	F_6_w	0.993	0.608	---
Loc	F_7_w	1.007	0.492	---
Mix	F_8_w	1.018	0.257	---

Source: the author’s own research. Legend: Maj – Major; Dor – Dorian; Phry – Phrygian; Lyd – Lydian; Mix – Mixolydian; Aeol – Aeolian; Harm – Harmonic minor; Loc – Locrian.

## Discussion

Effective music listening must be taught from the earliest years of life. A child must experience a variety of musical presentations before the age of eighteen months in order to develop the readiness needed to learn music later in life. After this time, he/she will engage in the use of spoken language and music will be pushed to the

background (Gordon, 1997). The youngest children should be provided with many opportunities to grow up by listening to live music. You need to sing to and for the child so that he or she can make his or her own attempts under control, which will result in progress in the development of musicality. Listening to music is a matter of training, so without controlled practice organized by competent teachers, children will be growing up in random situations and developing bad habits.

To achieve the appropriate level of tonal or rhythmic content, it must be learned in conjunction with the skill level. The internal meaning in music, which Gordon describes as syntactic, is given by the listener and is based on his sense of tonality and meter. The external meaning, however, is programmatic, suggesting various events and images in addition to sound effects. Most teachers direct students to derive external meaning from music and devote very little time to the internal aspects of music. It should be emphasized that the sense of tonality is the basis, as it is a preparation not only for the ability to appreciate music, but also for reading and writing music (Gordon, 1999, pp. 195, 222).

Children need to hear a lot of Major, Minor, Doric, Mixolydian, Phrygian, Lydian and Locrian chants to be able to notice differences in tonality. The more diverse material a child hears, the better his/her tonal sense will develop, which manifests itself in the ease and speed of learning and harmonizing melodies. Teachers responsible for music education in kindergarten and early school grades should be able to differentiate and sing short melodies without words to children so that they can hear the relationships between sounds and be able to imagine a given melody in different modes (Zwolińska, 2004, p. 30).

In the analysis of the research results, the diagnosis of the individual musical potential of the surveyed students turned out to be crucial. When considering the fluency of processing a series of musical sounds in eight versions (tasks) for the same melody, it is necessary to seek explanations for previously incomprehensible phenomena. As other studies report, these phenomena concern the fluency of processing tonal content based on: 1. experience accumulated so far (Tobby & Cosmides, 2001; Temperley & Tan, 2013); 2. the related level of musical talents and preferences (Reber et al., 2004; Tekman, 2009; Kendal & Carterette, 1993; Shepherd & Sigg, 2015) and 3. the ability to audiate the general musical syntax (Gordon, 1997).

Effective listening during music classes brings many benefits. Improving listening skills helps develop critical thinking skills, which are important in any form of communication – speaking, singing, reading, writing, or synthesizing information (Hunsaker, 1991). Researchers point out that listening skills play a central role in assessing one's communication skills (Campbell & Inguagiato, 1994; Graves, 1995), and people who have this skill are perceived as more competent (Hass & Arnold, 1995). If teachers

create opportunities to listen to diverse musical material in terms of tone, rhythm and style, they will teach children to listen to, understand and transform music.

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