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Playing with music as a support method to improve communication skills in three-year-old children

Abstract: The article deals with the way musical games during lessons may develop children's communication skills. A theoretical method, i.e. analysis of scientific literature, was used in the writing of this article. Theoretical possibilities of playing with music to promote communication skills were explored and described and the following conclusions were drawn: 1) Musical components (singing, playing instruments, rhythm, listening to music) should be integrated to promote development, as children are able to participate and independently develop creative musical improvisation; 2) Playing with music contributes to the development of musical hearing, motor coordination, language development, emotional and social skills, and communication and independence skills; 3) Playing with music contributes to the development of social and communication skills, which includes the ability to cooperate with peers or adults; 4) Playing with music constitutes a support method for the improvement of communication skills for children up to the age of three.

Key words: three-year-old children, playing with music, support method, communication skills.

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Zabawa z muzyką jako metoda wspomagająca poprawę umiejętności komunikacyjnych u trzyletnich dzieci

Abstrakt: Artykuł dotyczy sposobu, w jakim muzyczne gry podczas lekcji mogą rozwijać umiejętności komunikacyjne u dzieci. Teoretyczna metoda, t.j. analiza literatury naukowej, została użyta w niniejszym artykule. Teoretyczne możliwości bawienia się z muzyką w celu promowania umiejętności komunikacyjnych zostały przebadane i opisane, oraz zostały wyciągnięte następujące wnioski: 1) Elementy muzyczne (śpiew, granie na instrumentach, rytm, słuchanie muzyki) powinny być zintegrowane w celu promowania rozwoju, ponieważ dzieci są w stanie samodzielnie rozwijać twórczą improwizację muzyczną; 2) Bawienie się muzyką przyczynia się do rozwoju słuchu muzycznego, koordynacji ruchowej, rozwoju języka, umiejętności emocjonalnych i socjalnych, oraz umiejętności komunikacji i samodzielności; 3) Bawienie się muzyką przyczynia się do rozwoju umiejętności społecznych i komunikacyjnych, które obejmują umiejętność współpracy z rówieśnikami lub osobami dorosłymi; 4) Bawienie się muzyką jest metodą wspomagającą proces poprawy umiejętności komunikacyjnych u dzieci w wieku do trzech lat.

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Słowa kluczowe: trzyletnie dzieci, bawienie się muzyką, wspomagająca metoda, umiejętności komunikacyjne.

1. Introduction

This paper describes some theoretical aspects of playing with music as a support method for the development of communication skills in children up to the age of three. The following research question has been formulated: what is the method of playing with music to promote the development of communication skills in children up to three years of age?

The objective of this study is to update the content creation and the use of music in classes in order to examine its subsequent effectiveness in the development of communication skills in children up to the age of three.

On the basis of findings collected by several authors and in the light of theoretical justification, the preconditions of playing with music remain in accordance with the level of children's development. Lessons are designed in such way that they reveal children's inner resources and extract perspectives for self-fulfilment in order to promote their musical development and communication skills. They reveal opportunities for a creative approach, imagination and joy, as well as for the development of the ability to understand the feelings and needs of peers. In such circumstances, cooperation between peers and adults, which constitutes a part of the process of a music permeated lesson, surfaces and is further reinforced.

This paper examines and describes the process of an elementary music lesson e.g., activity, method, content, environment and pedagogical observations, as well as the diversity of tasks, children's motivation which supports the promotion of their communication skills.

This particular topic was chosen as pedagogical opportunities promoting the development of children's communication skills through methodology of playing with music had been insufficiently scrutinised.

2. Methodology

An analysis of scientific literature was conducted to reinforce the theoretical basis of the research.

3. Results

Theoretical substantiation is based on scientific findings in Latvian, Russian, European and American literature. This was done to show a close relationship between playing with music and the development of

communication in three-year-old children. If the development takes place in favourable conditions and there is no delay in speech development, then communication is also successful, however, not everything always goes to plan.

Development of children up to the age of three

The first years of life are unique. It is then when children grow out of being infants to become small children and when their personality develops and is clearly manifested.

Between the age of one to three children are very active, energetic, emotional and curious. However, how they will evolve, and how their communication skills will develop is determined by many different circumstances and as a result they may end up being shy or communicative, calm or persistent, silent or talkative (Gazala, 2009).

An this age, children learn about the world by playing and they express themselves in play. They still have difficulties to follow the rules, so they do not implement them or better still, they play on their own without rules (Svence, 1999). The benefits of play are immeasurable. Chanatal Gazal writes that playing has a very important role, as it facilitates the physical, mental, social and emotional development, teaches how to start social relationships, allows to freely express emotions, and helps to develop creative abilities and imagination (Gazala, 2009).

Up to the 18th month, children play alone, seeing their peers as things to explore, for example, by prodding them with fingers or by touching. At an early age, when a child is awake, musical material may be offered as a musical background, so that it starts developing musical experience. During this time, children do not feel sufficiently confident, and sometimes even fail to dare to look curiously at their surroundings. To understand an object and to explore how it works, babies examine it by tasting it. It is only when they need a lot of intimacy, adult assistance and support. One-year-old children understand a lot more than they can say, and talking to them expands their vocabulary and understanding. Children create their reality out of everyday experiences, out of certain things and impressions (Elnebija, 2008).

From one and a half until two years of age, children start playing with peers. The situation changes at the age of about three when children already know what to expect and consequently develop at least two schemes, i.e. *adult* and *child*, and begin to play with other children as well (Svence, 1999). From the age of two, children start playing to imitate adult activities, and their attention should be drawn to the surrounding sounds, as well as to sounds which they can create themselves. An adult is needed to be copied, to be an expert in skills and abilities, an assistant, organizer of joint activities, creator of self-esteem and social skills (Svence, 1999). Gazal explains socialization as an ability to understand which be-

haviour is acceptable in the society in which we live and an ability to learn how to reasonably, responsibly and respectfully treat other people. Social development and interaction significantly evolve and change in children between 1 and 3 years of age, which is determined by a number of factors, such as cultural environment, family atmosphere, and people whom they have to face (Gazala, 2009).

At the age of two, children become independent from adults and their whole nature is taken over by sheer joy of movement. At this time, it may be difficult to deal with strong emotions, therefore children must be helped to manage their impulses (Elnebija, 2008).

Children at this age can create action plans within their playing and games and begin to develop abilities to coordinate movement with parts of their body and objects. They develop the ability to solve actions not only by error and attempt method, but also by sudden revelation when having researched something for a long time, children suddenly find the right solution (Svence, 1999). One of the most extraordinary features of the human brain is its ability to acquire spoken language, but it is a complicated process (Sousa, 2005). The apparent genetic predisposition of the brain to the sounds of language explains why normal young children respond to and acquire spoken language quickly. Living in a language environment, children are able to differentiate native language sounds, but they must produce phonemes, which is the result of genetically determined neural programs.

At the age of three, children learn about the world by experimenting, they make toys a subject of one imaginative idea by examining the use of various objects and phenomena. Words are used to make order by sorting and comparing items (Elnebija, 2008). Also, they form an ability to generalise, to find new associations between already known functions or meanings of objects. They begin to fantasise and differentiate, as well as to imitate (Svence, 1999). By then, speech has evolved, sentences are mostly made up of two or three words, and children are already able to talk about what is not visible at a given moment (Elnebija, 2008). However, in order to clearly communicate with others, they need sufficient competence. Their brain must detect words from the stream of sounds. This is not an easy task, because people do not pause between words when speaking. The family has an impact on this, so mothers speak to their babies in a higher pitch, with a special intonation, rhythm and feeling (Sousa, 2005). In music, it is also possible to change pitch, intonation and rhythm.

In general, children from 18 months to 3 years of age like to work independently, and with time they are able to be more persistent and can focus longer. This need for independence and self-dependence gives them the drive to solve the problems they face. They want to act the whole time and often change the type of activity. Children may be taught something only when they display interest and motivation. The basic task of adults is to create such an environment where children are faced with

certain problems, to put things and objects visible and accessible for them to gradually learn step to move from easier to more difficult tasks. In this way, it becomes easier to differentiate the range of tasks and use them in the planning of own pedagogical acts. Ausma Špona writes that confidence and deep inner conviction of teachers that their requirements are adequate are very important (Špona, 2006).

Playing with music is one of many creative acts, as it presents an opportunity for children to joyfully express themselves in music: singing, dancing, playing various musical instruments, listening to different sounds and so on. It is important when planning a lesson with music, to think about the development of children's hearing and voice, about the effect of music on the formation and promotion of their personalities, emotional, intellectual and creative abilities and language development.

Playing with music as a method

Music organically permeates our lives and is perceived by all senses. Also, in the process children act, gain experience and express it to others. It is therefore important to understand the importance of playing with music during lessons, because the language of music provides information which links thinking with movement, speech, emotions, games and other activities.

Its main practical aim is to create in children initial skills and abilities by means of creative music making. The teacher's task is to involve children in participation in music games; to speak, tell stories and introduce material by means of musical intonation, images and atmosphere in order to promote the ability to communicate with each other.

The basis of playing with music is simple, as it incorporates tasks appropriate to children's developmental stage. It is a method which has been developed and described by Tatajana Tjutjunikova from Moscow in two of her books – *Elementary Music Making* (2005) and *Hundred Musical Secrets for Children* (2003). In the method, the components of pre-school musical development education, such as: singing, playing the instrument, musical hearing, as well as the sense of rhythm, musical games, and their use in pedagogical practice, are all integrated. The author describes communicative games and dances, improvisation with sounding gestures (human body as an orchestra of sounds) as a methodical method of working with children, the implementation of the idea of creative activity regarding the theme of *sounding gestures*, games with sounds for practising speech by combining speech and movement as a methodical way of work, improvisations with self-made rhythmical instruments, improvised playing of poetry and fairy tales, as well as improvised movement as a basis for creative music making, i.e. correlation between movement and music in syncretic playing with musical forms (Тютюникова, 2005). Their tasks are to develop children's musical and creative abilities, to evoke

emotional response to music, to create musical perception, musical hearing, the sense of rhythm, and to develop artistic taste (Apare, 1979).

When playing with music, children are allowed to show their knowledge, emotions, they can be who they are, show what they feel on a given day, with whom they want to cooperate, who they love and which music they want to listen to (Тютюникова, 2005). It is important to note that the preconditions of elementary playing with music are different from pre-school educational requirements, e.g., the components of musical development are integrated through musical games, where motivation and interest in participation are encouraged in children and as a result, musical development is promoted instead of creation and the use of separate musical developmental components for the development of children's musical abilities.

Self-made rhythmical instruments (shakers, maracas, sticks of various sizes, drums, etc.) and natural materials (nuts, stones etc.) are used in the lessons, as well as thematic materials and visual aids are designed. Everything is adapted to the children's developmental level, to their needs and interests.

Communication

Communication is a process in which there is an exchange of information between the sender and receiver. The receiver decodes a message and provides feedback to the sender. There are auditory means, such as speaking, singing, tone of voice and non-verbal means, such as body language, sign language, touch, eye contact etc.

One of developmental tasks of early childhood is learning to talk. From birth, babies communicate through sounds (crying, cooing, squealing), facial expressions (eye contact, smiling, grimacing) and gestures/body movements (moving legs in excitement or distress, and later, gestures like pointing.) Babies continue to develop communication skills when adults respond to their efforts to "tell" others about what they need or want (*Supporting...*). Children generally speak clearly, but may have trouble pronouncing some words (Waun, 1998).

Some information and ideas may help foster communication. This means listening and talking to children (Howard, 2002), but this is not enough when communication skills develop not so fast and easily. Communication is a complicated process in which children obtain a lot of information and we want them to respond. We wait for words and phrases, but children can express their thoughts and feelings also non-verbally, i.e. gestures, mimics, and some sounds which are not words.

Communication should preserve children's and adults' self-respect (Waun, 1998). To help them understand its importance and develop the skills of listening to others, we must act in different ways. It is possible to practice role-playing to help children learn proper ways of addressing

adults. With younger children we can play games like the telephone game. Playing music is also a good option. Later, it is important to use different tones when speaking, therefore elementary activities with music can promote these skills.

Playing with music as a support method for the improvement of communication skills

In order to understand and to prove that playing with music can be seen as a support method, three basic types of communication have been researched: communication with gestures, simultaneous use of language and gestures, as gestures are the fastest way to learn the language, and performing a gesture and the waiting of a response, followed by the presentation of an action (Самохвалова, 2011). Starting from their first day of life babies express themselves with the help of sounds. Infants are capable of expressing both dislike and satisfaction, and showing how great his joy of life and well-being are, all with their voice. In order to promote the development of speech, it is especially important to frequently talk to your baby as early as is possible (Helbrige, Vimfens, 2000). It has been observed that simultaneous speaking and using the language of gestures makes infants perceive and understand what adults want more quickly.

Children younger than one year of age cannot yet answer like adults. Thus, we can only watch their reactions, which mostly relate to the way we speak to them. In this case, the expression, intensity of the sound and also facial expression and gestures are more important for children than the content of what is said (Helbrige, Vimfens, 2000). During this period, one prerequisite would be necessary: to provide your child with practice of its language understanding on everyday basis, by uttering the same words in a particular case or situation. Children, in the second year of their lives start using monosyllabic and two-syllable words, then they begin forming sentences consisting of two words, but the language of gestures is very important for them at this time... . During this period, children express their thoughts with the help of gestures: references to objects, approval or rejection, loss of objects, the wish to be held in arms, the wish to come up to them and references to the size of an object (Цейтлин, 2000).

Some gestures are adopted independently up to the age of three, by mimicking, others are consciously and purposefully taught by adults (Цейтлин, 2000). In order to make the language of gestures understandable, gestures must be lasting to be able to create associations and preserve their meaning. It does not happen right away, because when adults start to accustom children to sign language, they use gestures inaccurately and inappropriately to the situation for some time. Therefore, to stabilize

a gesture, it is necessary to repeat it several times in the presence of adults (Цейтлин, 2000).

One of the main rules of playing with music is cooperation between peers and the teacher. The more successfully the teacher establishes the cooperation between children, the better communication abilities will be promoted (Тютюникова, 2005). Daina Dzintere, in her book *Game – the promoter of the life skills of a child*, states that a good pedagogue, who can understand and support children's intentions, thoughts and efforts, who will indirectly guide cooperation, as well as encourage and support, is indispensable (Dzintere, Stangaine, 2007). Inge Flēmiga, in her book *The development of an infant and developmental disorders*, maintains that children from the 18th month of life, love to play with other children and are also ready to play with adults (Flēmiga, 2001). We may infer from this that playing-with-music lessons would be required to offer such educational-methodical tasks which would promote both cooperation between children as well as cooperation with adults.

During such lessons, gestures and facial expressions constitute one of the best known and most usable forms of communication. If adults use gestures and adapt them as an addition to their speech and change them according to the needs of a situation, then children who have not managed the language and signs yet, will understand that the language of gestures is the primary mean in the development of communication.

In addition to sign language as a communication tool, facial expression, individual sounds and a sound range (so-called vocalization) are also used (Цейтлин, 2000). Children express their thoughts by gestures, as well as their will and needs: e.g. they point to objects (with hand, head-turning and specific eye gaze), express their likes (bend their head) or dislikes (turn the head expressing rejection), when an object disappears (put hands behind their back), when children want to be held in arms or want you to come up to them they form a fist pointing toward themselves). It is important to note that a gesture can become a sign of communication only when it creates associations about a certain action and is unchanging (Цейтлин, 2000). The conclusion is that it is possible to integrate playing with music by musically permeated components into lessons by means of basic types of communication skills, and as a result children's communication abilities will improve.

Communicative games and dances, improvisation with sounding gestures (the human body – an orchestra of sounds), as a methodical way of working with children, creative activities for implementation of the idea regarding the theme of *sounding gestures*, games with sounds for practising speech, combining speech and movement, improvisations with self-made rhythmical instruments, improvised playing of poetry and fairy tales, but also improvised movement as a basis for creative playing with music, i.e. correlation between movement and music in the syncretic forms of musical playing are all described in the already mentioned publications.

This work method proposed by the author is practically not possible to perform without means of communication. For example, in improvisations with sounding gestures, actions take place within the scheme: vision – hearing – movement, i.e. children look at the actions of adults, hear the rhythm and tempo, how fast it is executed and imitate. Facial expressions and gestures, also musical environment are all used as the main means of communication. Another example, i.e. games with sounds for speech practice are constructed around the following scheme: speech – movement. It is important to note that when spelling out a text, intonation is important. The text is recited (a poem or a simple four-line verse) in accordance with children's level of development, and then it is interpreted into movement. In this case, both the gestures as well as facial expressions are important. Children up to three years of age imitate adults and acquire new experiences. In improvisations with self-made rhythmical instruments, improvised playing with poetry and fairy tales is similar to the previous two: vision – hearing – speech – movement. The main accent is laid onto the fact that performance, intonation, gestures, facial expression and movement interact unconsciously.

In order to improve children's communication skills, teachers must support and promote children's communication with peers as early as possible, because they look for their place among their peers. There are children who fit in well in groups, but there also such children who prefer to play alone. Therefore, it is even more important for adults to understand the conditions which define the formation of mutual interactions between peers and to help children feel equal. Music is able to influence people's mind, feelings, will and imagination in many diverse ways. Its influence is rooted in the physiological reactions of the whole organism.

Children acquire the skill of forming mutual relationships from surrounding people, such as parents, other adults or peers, as well as from other external conditions.

Playing with music offers children the possibility to feel free, just the way they are, without the danger of making an error. The transition from the imitation of adults to self activity is instituted at an unconscious level. The components of musical development are worked out according to the level of development and according to individual needs. Playing-with-music lessons open a new world of sounds to children and a diversity of rhythms and musical relationships. Children are occupied, delighted with the environment of musical sounds where they are not better or worse, but are all equal. At the same time, they develop the perception of sound characteristics and quality. Furthermore, all this happens in the form of musical games, through which children perceive the musical environment of sounds much better.

Discussion

Can we consider playing with music as a support method for the development of communication skills?

Is it possible to promote the development of communication skills by using plays with music in three-year-old children?

4. Conclusions

1. Organizing musical games, into which components of musical development are integrated, promotes children's musical development (coordination of movements), the development of their communication skills, as well as emotional and social development etc.

2. During lessons which make use of music all components of creative musical activities (singing, musical ear, playing instruments, listening to music and musical games) must be integrated in accordance with children's level of development, which is pre-established in the course of cooperation processes, so that children are motivated to participate independently in musical improvisations, thus encouraging their musical development and improvement of communication skills.

3. It is possible to integrate musically developed components with basic types of communication skills into lessons with music, and as a result to improve children's communication abilities.

4. Playing with music is a support method for the improvement of children's communication skills up to the age of 3.

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