

CREATIVITY IN MUSIC EDUCATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH: CHOICE OF TOPIC

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Abstract

Human functioning in a dynamically changing reality requires creativity. In this context, the author draws attention to the potential of music education in building a creative attitude among the young generation. The author also mentions activities that stimulate students' creative potential through musical activity, the inspiration for which can be found in recognized concepts of musical education, the achievements of R. Steiner, R. Laban, C. Freinet and M. Montessori, as well as in art therapy and pedagogy of play. Referring to the four-aspect paradigm of creativity, the author presents her own proposals for activities (group instrumental improvisation Music That Will Scare the Lion and the so-called "painting music" to Spring from the Four Seasons series by A. Vivaldi) stimulating the progression of creative skills on musical material and their evaluation. Noticing the difficulties and pitfalls in implementing the process of music education aimed at developing creative potential, she calls for changes in the existing school practice in Poland in the field of music education for the young generation.

Key words: music education, creativity, creative competences, teaching creativity

The issue of creativity in the music education of children and youth seems to be one of the most important elements of reflection on the way of implementing the music education process. Modern societies need creative people who will boldly and effectively respond to the challenges of the postmodern world. Currently, Margaret Mead's words about the dominance of co-figurative and post-figurative cultures, within which it is not possible to use ready-made patterns of conduct developed in the past, are coming true [1]. In contemporary Poland, two fundamentally different visions of socio-cultural development compete with each other. The first one is a **model based on the continuation** of processes existing in the economy, politics and social life, strongly dependent on international corporate policy, the financial market and labour productivity [2]. Possible consequences of this path of development include: "the dictate of work efficiency, reducing its costs, creating new tax havens, new privileged groups, deepening social inequalities, further social stratification", which will result in such behaviours as "consumerism and mindless pursuit of everyday goods" [3, pp. 9-10]. In this approach, education, focused on the <rat race> to prestigious universities and prestigious fields of study, "only strengthens competition, builds an individualistic orientation towards the <I>, isolates, alienates, and consequently leaves the individual alone with its problems in a hostile and incomprehensible world" [4, p. 10]. The harmfulness and social consequences of such processes are highly predictable. The second vision of development is based on the belief in the **possibilities inherent in creativity and innovation** of both Polish society as a community and its individual units. It is based on the analysis and description of what our society has managed to achieve in the period after 1989. "It is a vision of development based on change through the development of mental and cultural competences. (...) Polish creativity and entrepreneurship, the ability to overcome difficulties (an example here is bureaucracy and the unfriendly nature of our offices and institutions) prove the great potential of creativity (the proverbial <A Pole can do it>). This concept of development assumes that the basic resource with which we can compete with other countries today is culture" [5, pp. 10-11]. The validity of this line of thinking is confirmed by the spectacular successes of young Polish scientists, students, pupils in various international competitions, reviews, festivals, in which they prove the effectiveness of education focused on the development of creative competences in various areas of human cultural functioning. This text will be devoted to showing the need for such thinking about music education at school.

Contemporary concepts of creative attitudes are developed in opposition to theories describing the mechanisms of outstanding creativity. The theory of *everyday creativity* concerns the everyday activity of a person, their attitudes towards the problems and difficulties they encounter, understanding creativity primarily as a resource supporting people's well-being. Such an egalitarian (not elitist) approach to creativity, which originates from humanistic theories of individual development indicating creativity as a primary human need, is currently adopted in psychology and pedagogy (M. Debesse, R. Gloton and C. Clero, K. Urban, E. Nęcka, W. Panek, S. Popek, J. Renzulli, K.J. Szmidt et al.). It is assumed here that the ability to create is not a genetically determined property and does not depend on general (intelligence) or special (directional) abilities, but that its basis is the creative potential inherent in every human being. Assuming that the development of creative dispositions is subject to stimulation, researchers agree that the first stage of school education should be considered particularly important for the development of an individual's creative competences – it is then that children demonstrate the greatest plasticity in shaping attitudes, as well as the greatest ability for creative behaviours and susceptibility to their stimulation [7]. A child's creativity is fundamentally different from an adult's creativity - it is a natural need whose specific features are: cognitive curiosity, imagination, fantasy, thematic and construction games, and art (including music) and can be expressed in many ways, which are the result of the need to act.

Thanks to its specific impact on human emotionality and its semantic ambiguity, music, like no other art, can awaken the imagination of children and young people, make them aware of the possibilities of their own imagination and stimulate the will to try to create. Composers' imagination enriches the audience's imagination, becoming a source and tool for the act of creation, because the ideas or information contained in a musical work, reaching their consciousness, can inspire or play a catalytic role for their own searches and creative acts. Creative activity in contact with music, expressed mainly through improvisations (free or with a certain discipline imposed) and attempts at one's own creativity, takes place at various levels of knowledge and perception. At younger school age – stimulated by auditory and kinetic-motor stimuli – it is undertaken naturally and results from the need for expression. In this type of child's activity, as part of the continuation of the musical education process, we observe a gradual loss of the unrestraint and spontaneity characteristic of the earlier period of life. This results from the student acquiring a specific musical code characteristic of a given cultural circle and an increasingly stronger need to subordinate themselves to its conventions.

Creativity, in the context of a student's musical activity, is usually considered in a purely attributive dimension [8]. The consequence of such an approach is assigning a special role to the product, in other words – the tangible and observable effect of musical activity. However, references to the tradition of the achievements of thinkers associated with humanistic psychology – especially Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers and Erich Fromm – currently lead many researchers to the recognition that – also in the area of human musical activity – it is justified to talk about creativity in other aspects – especially about creative thinking, action, creative mental operations or creative potential. Inspirations for the educational process that stimulates students' creative abilities through musical activity can be found in both the recognized concepts of musical education and the concepts of aesthetic education by Rudolf Steiner, the creative movement by Rudolf Laban, or the pedagogy of Célestin Freinet and Maria Montessori; the achievements of art therapy are also important, especially music therapy and choreotherapy (for example: “movement stories” with music) or art therapy (e.g. the popular “painting music”), as well as play pedagogy.

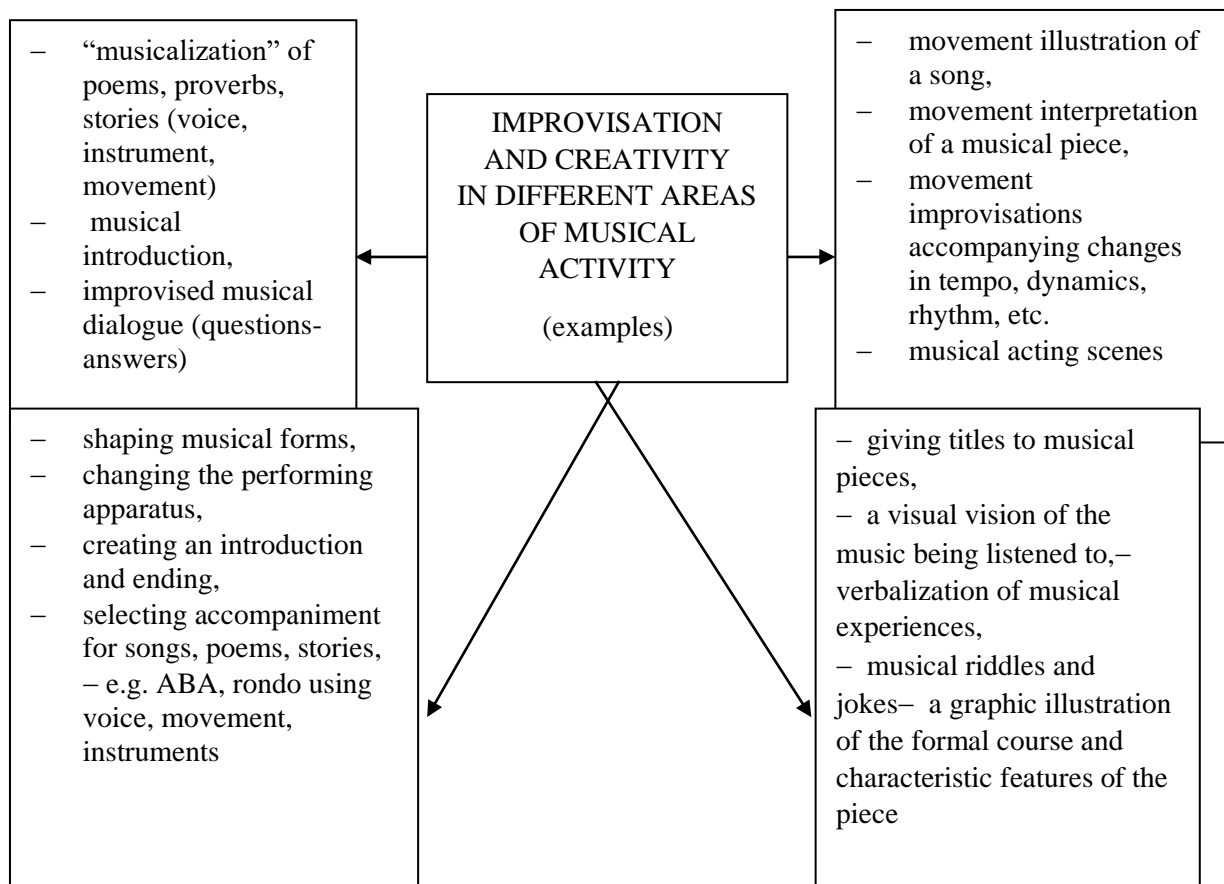


Fig. 1. Improvisation and creativity in various areas of students' activity during music classes – selected examples [9, p. 184].

Developing creativity in music education – presenting elements of own research

The need to express inner experiences, so characteristic of a human being, finds special opportunities for realization and satisfaction in art, while creating a unique opportunity to develop his creative skills and sensitivity. In this context, I would like to present elements of educational activities that I conducted with 10-year-old children (N = 50) in two primary schools in Gdańsk. They were the result of theoretical reflection, which found its expression in the design and implementation of an innovative music education program with an emphasis on musical activity during *action research*. In the proposed series of music classes, I did not attempt to teach creativity, but I tried to create opportunities and conditions inspiring creative exploration in the field of music or with its participation – mainly such explorations where students would not be limited by a lack of specialist performance skills. All of the forms of musical activity listed above (see Figure 1) that developed creative predispositions were implemented; here I would like to present a broader description of two educational activities carried out in this area:

- group improvisations using Carl Orff's instruments entitled *Music That Will Scare a Lion*,
- individual creation of the artistic vision of a musical piece – Antonio Vivaldi: *Spring* from the *Four Seasons* cycle.

Group Musical Improvisation *Music That Will Scare a Lion*

This group activity (3-5 students) consisted of instrumental improvisation. In this task, only the means of performance were specified (each student could choose any instrument from the Orff instruments

available in the school set), while other structural elements, such as rhythm and pitch of sounds, their dynamics, method of production, etc., as well as the formal structure of the resulting musical composition, were optional. Their selection was left to the authors, in order to leave as much space as possible for unfettered expression and creative freedom. The expected consequence of the lack of detailed preliminary instructions was to be a variety of musical statements. It was therefore (in principle) a free creation – on a given theme – in which the individual elements of the musical construction created as a group were selected with regard to the expressive and sound possibilities of the selected instruments in mind.

Both the final performance of the planned creative improvisation with the use of instruments and the self-reflection, evaluation of the creative process made by the students, were recorded in an audiovisual version. Before starting the task, the children familiarised themselves with an illustrative representation of a lion's roar in the appropriate part of *The Carnival of the Animals* by Camille Saint-Saëns, listened to songs from the film *The Lion King* and watched a fragment of the film *In Desert and Wilderness* based on the novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz (winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1905). Reading the semantic codes of such different works supported the process of children understanding that aesthetic phenomena are revealed in various contexts that change over time and that they expand the contemporary understanding of the world with their new approach, while retaining echoes of the old ones with which they do not lose the bond [10].

The selection for the groups was spontaneous and it should be noted that no child was excluded, and cooperation in the groups – although of course with episodes of quarrels and disputes – was relatively harmonious. By observing the creative process of many of the respondents, one can conclude – using Robert J. Sternberg's term – that they developed analytical intelligence, which is associated with the ability to analyse and verify one's own ideas [11, p. 157]. The collected musical material is, above all, evidence of the students' own expression expressed through playing non-melodic instruments (because these were the only ones chosen), which is perfectly reflected in the visual part of the recording. All final products of the students' team creative activity had an open, free form, and in two cases, episodic. In some of the recordings (3 out of 7 groups whose presentation was recorded) one can notice a well-thought-out and consistent cooperation between the performers in order to build dramatic tension and shape the dynamics of group improvisation, a certain sonic sensitivity and great inventiveness in rhythmic exploration. Interestingly, it was these proposals of Music That Will Scare The Lion that found the greatest appreciation during the final evaluation carried out by all the children, which also indicates the developing ability to evaluate the music they listen to and their musical sensitivity. The musical products created by 10-year-old children – with onomatopoeic elements, randomly constructed polyrhythm and polymetrics, searching for unusual sounds of the instruments used, creating free forms – are closer to the sound and aesthetics of contemporary music than even to the simplest, traditional one. Agreeing with the opinion of Maria Przychodzińska [12], I believe that this type of creative tasks can be one of the ways to learn and understand the latest artistic music, preparing and "opening" the child to various sound experiences.

"Painting Music" - a drawing for *Spring* by A. Vivaldi

Stimulation of the student's development by combining various educational contents and interactions related to his/her multifaceted activity certainly corresponds to the assumptions of Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences [13]. It combines a multifaceted analysis of the child's development with the search for various areas that may constitute his/her developmental "specialty". Therefore, in the educational activities undertaken as part of our own research, we attempted to support the development of students' creative thinking and aesthetic sensitivity, which would integrate their musical and artistic activity (musical intelligence in connection with visual-spatial intelligence). Although a musical piece "lives" only during its performance and is not precisely semantically defined, and a work of art is static, exists in a specific space and presents content in a more unambiguous way, the connections between visual art and music have been observed since the earliest eras of cultural development, when syncretism was the most characteristic feature of practicing art. Despite significant differences between visual and musical products, the same terms are used to

describe them: composition, texture, colour, contrast, dynamics, statics, timbre, harmony, which testifies to the centuries-old tradition of their connections and the links existing between them [14, p. 177].

Artistic expression as an activity of self-expression, most often inspired by some aesthetic experience, is a popular and frequently used form of activity among children and adolescents. Many researchers believe that "inspiration for artistic activities is one of the most important forms of supporting creative thinking and creative action" [15, p. 49], which is why its various forms are used when designing educational tasks. In the series of music classes conducted, the inspiration for the artistic activity, the final effect of which was an individually made picture, was a piece by Antonio Vivaldi entitled *Spring*, which is part I of his famous composition *Le Quattro Stagioni*, op.8.

The entire school class participated in the classes, but the proposed form of activity was focused on the individual, their individual preferences and interests, as well as abilities. In connection with this assumption, when organizing "painting music", each student was provided with a separate work space and a set of materials, giving the opportunity for personal and, if possible, unrestricted contact with the world of art. In order not to limit the students' imagination and creative thinking, and to encourage them to search for various solutions, I did not provide the title of the presented musical piece. As a result of musical inspiration, the students took up artistic activity, painting their own picture to music, based on individual associations. Not all children wanted to give their work a title. Those that appeared: "Flowers and Butterflies", "The Sorceress's Grotto", "Spring", "A Walk in the Rain", indicate a developed ability to feel the expression and character of the music being listened to. The resulting pictures demonstrate considerable skills of the examined children in creating this type of artwork – they are made carefully, with attention to the selection of colours, correct arrangement of elements, and thoughtful use of space (in the interview, the class teacher confirmed the relatively frequent creation of artwork in the examined group). They were also rated very highly by competent judges (the average rating on a scale corresponding to school grades in Poland from 1 to 6 was 5.1). Most of the works are realistic in nature, depicting, where the dominant motifs were trees, birds, sun and flowers, but there were also a few images with abstract features. The use of colour ranges referred to the moods and emotions read in the musical work – they were often uniformly pastel, joyful. However, many compositions indicate that, in addition to the cheerful mood, there are also illustrative effects of a thunderstorm in the middle section of the Vivaldi piece that we have listened to. This is most clearly visible in the work with a 3-part compositional arrangement, where a black cloud with lightning is visible in the middle ground. This work was commented on by one of the expert judges: *"It is amazing how adequately the author was able to convey the musical content in his work. The colour scheme of the work and the arrangement of elements remain in close connection with Vivaldi's composition"*. Some of the works also tried to convey the rhythmic elements of the piece - as the repetition of certain sequences in works of an abstract nature.



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.

In these activities, music, by stimulating sensory impressions, imagination and triggering children's cognitive processes, stimulated artistic activity and, consequently, provided an incentive to talk about the created works. During verbalization, the children tried to present the elements of their artistic vision and their meaning, somehow "incidentally" partially revealing their interests and the world of values. In their statements, boys much more often drew attention to objective, auditory properties: e.g. *"here I marked these strong sounds"*, whereas girls' statements more often contained emotional accents: *"I am with my sister in a meadow with fragrant flowers and I feel calm"*, *"this bird is happy and listening, what the trees rustle "*. However, some children did not want to or were unable to talk about their art work. This situation was especially true for students who were not fully satisfied with the artistic result they had achieved. Encouraged to comment on their colleagues' work, they pointed out the strengths they had noticed, which clearly aroused a sense of pride and satisfaction, as well as a sense of fulfilment in the authors – at this stage of development not fully able to hide their emotions, including positive ones. Positive emotions, further strengthened by approving statements from teachers (one additional person, who later acted as a competent judge, was present in the final phase of creating the works and during the discussion summarizing the classes), in accordance with the assumptions of positive psychology, could play an important role in the process of stimulating creative activities, maximizing the competences of these students in the described research area.

The presented activities undertaken in the process of musical education of 10-year-old children fit into the framework of teaching (to) creativity, which is aimed at developing students' individual abilities to think and act creatively, which are so necessary for the 21st century man. In pedagogical practice, there are many possibilities and ways of including music in the process of building creativity in a young person. Most forms of musical activity undertaken during the learning process are creative in nature, although the creative contribution of an individual to this activity has a different scope and requires different predispositions and skills. In research on creativity, depending on the theoretical and methodological orientations adopted, different aspects of this phenomenon are emphasized, which is referred to in the literature as the four-aspect paradigm of interpreting creativity.

This applies to:

- product (attributive aspect),
- creative process (processual aspect),
- the creator – his/her set of abilities, intellectual properties or personal characteristics (subjective aspect),
- external factors that condition the creative process (inhibitor-stimulator aspect) [16, p. 28].

As previously noted, creativity within music education – also in the presented fragment of my own research – is considered mainly in the attributive aspect, where an important role is assigned to the product created as a result of musical activity. It is worth recalling, following Maurice Debesse, the important distinction between childhood *créativité* and mature *création*, which is explained by "the children's lack of craftsmanship, their unawareness of the laws governing a given field, the functionality of the child's products and the improvisational nature of their actions" [17, p.229]. This distinction is particularly necessary in the case of creative musical expression, where the need to master a range of skills is a condition sine qua non for satisfying creative action. Thus, the creativity of older participants in education – especially with the use of the world of sounds! – "can and should be realized on the basis of reliable knowledge and skills, without which creativity itself, the creative process, is doomed to sterility and ordinariness" [18, p. 114]. However, in this case, modern technological solutions can provide significant help. There are a number of computer programs for creating music at various levels (e.g. creating accompaniment to songs in various styles and using various electronically generated instruments). This provides a great opportunity for aesthetically satisfying creative activity, especially for older children and young people.

Shaping students' creative dispositions in the process of music education is an important task for contemporary schools, because they give an individual a chance to cope with the needs of a changing, dynamic reality. However, this is not an easy task given the number of difficulties that Polish schools are currently facing, which includes music education implemented within the public education system. The current music education programs do not really support the development of creativity, and are still focused mainly on reproduction and consolidating logic based on teaching theory. They are dominated by behaviourism, instructivism, algorithm or the so-called "following the trail". It's high time for changes and I hope that educational decision-makers will finally notice the potential of music education in the presented area of currently important activities.

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