

**PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
THROUGH MUSIC EDUCATION**

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Abstract

The study focuses on a small but important segment of Hungarian culture, the musical education of children aged 3-7. Its central theme is to examine how the adaptation of folk games and related movements can be one of the most complex developmental forces in the personality development of this age group. This is because this period is fundamental in terms of cultural transmission and plays an integrative role in aesthetic education. As the pre-school child develops musically, his or her memory, imagination, associative abilities, creativity, attention and interest are constantly being developed through joyful activity, since his or her movements in connection with folk play are not yet guided and determined by the meaning and content of the text, but by the melody and its rhythm and the spontaneous feeling of joy associated with them. The role of musical education, and within it of folk games, is also evident in the process of emotional education, socialisation, intellectual development and language development. The links examined and presented demonstrate that folk games help children to develop skills that will enable them to become school-ready and to continue to develop in adult life.

Keywords: early childhood music education, folk games, personality development, cultural transmission, emotional education, socialisation, skills, school readiness

Discipline: musicology

Absztrakt

A KISGYERMEKKORI SZEMÉLYISÉGFORMÁLÁS ZENEI NEVELÉSSEL

A tanulmány a magyar kultúra egy kicsi, de gyermekeink szempontjából egyik jelentős szegmensére, a 3-7 éves korosztály zenei nevelésére fókuszál. Központi témája, hogy megvizsgálja miként lehetséges, hogy a

népi játékok és a hozzájuk kapcsolódó mozgások adaptálása az egyik legkomplexebb fejlesztőerő a korosztály személyiségfejlődésében. Hiszen a kultúraátadás szempontjából ez az időszak alapozó jellegű, s az esztétikai nevelés területén integratív szerepet tölt be. Az óvodás gyermek zenei fejlődésével emlékezete, képzelete, asszociatív képessége, kreativitása, figyelme, érdeklődése állandó örömteli tevékenység útján fejlődik, hiszen a népi játékhöz kapcsolódó mozgását ebben a korban még nem a szöveg jelentése, tartalma, hanem a dallam és annak ritmusa, valamint az ezekhez kötődő spontán örömméret irányítja és határozza meg. Az érzelmi nevelés, a szocializáció, az értelmi és az anyanyelvi fejlesztés folyamatában is nyilvánvaló a zenei nevelés, s ezen belül a népi játékok szerepe. A vizsgált és bemutatott összefüggések bizonyítják, hogy a népi játékok hatására olyan készségek alakulnak ki a gyermekekben, amelyek birtokában iskolaéretté válnak, s megállják majd helyüket későbbi felnőtt életükben is.

Kulcsszavak: kisgyermekkorai zenei nevelés, népi játékok, személyiségfejlesztés, kultúra átadás, érzelmi nevelés, szocializáció, készség, iskolaérettség

Diszciplínák: zenetudomány

Music and games, involving playful movements and evoking various emotions, is a natural condition of children's lives. As Zoltán Kodály wrote, „Singing is the instinctive, natural language of children, and the younger they are, the more they want to accompany it with movement. Singing games in the open air represent the integration of music and physical exercise, and provide the greatest source of joy in children's lives. Preservation of these ancient games is of paramount cultural and national interest. Those who did not play these games in childhood, miss an important part of their national identity.” (Kodály, 1982, 62-63.)

During my teaching career, spanning 40 years, I have always laid great stress on activities that may contribute to the development of auditory perception, music, rhythm and movement in preschool music education. Over the past decades, I have continuously followed the work of several kindergarten and dance teachers who lead groups of preschool children. Detailed analyses of their lessons and discussions with trainee kindergarten teachers have greatly expanded my experience and knowledge. For many years now, I have also been

researching and collecting variants of folk games and nursery rhymes associated with rhythmic movement from various regions of the country.

This study will focus on a small segment of our culture, which is nevertheless very significant for our children, i.e. the music education of children aged 3 to 7 years, the development of sense of rhythm and movement associated with it, and its role in children's personality development.

We must always bear in mind that preschool children are developing personalities, with their personality traits varying with age. They are unique and irreproducible wonders of nature, with individual talents, abilities, skills, needs, personality traits and behaviours. They develop best through playing a lot, and for this they need love, security and freedom. Their characteristic feature is that they are emotionally driven, they are honest, unprejudiced, and have great powers of imagination. If a child does not know something about the world, they will use their vivid imagination to fill in the details, just as natural peoples or members of traditional cultures do.

We can integrate many elements of Hungarian folk culture into kindergarten education. From the

very beginning of childhood we can exploit the wealth of knowledge that has been honed and handed down from generation to generation. Folk poetry may be used in story and rhyme sessions; a variety of folk games are useful in music education, folk crafts involving activities with natural materials in visual education, and game sequences consisting of basic movement forms and steps in developing movement. The complex process of aesthetic education builds on the inclination of children for spontaneous and original speech, singing, movement and visual expression. The main task in literary, music, visual and environmental education is to develop the child's specific abilities through various activities within a playful context.

Kodály's concept (method), which defines Hungarian musical education, basically applies the values of folk culture to the development of children's musical skills and abilities. Its aim is to teach children a musical mother tongue and the manual skills and subconscious contents associated with it. This period in a children's life is therefore fundamental for the transmission of culture and plays an integrative role in aesthetic education. The important role of music education is also evident in the process of emotional education and socialization. The communal nature of circle games offers many opportunities in this area. Singing develops the children's sense of belonging, dissolves their inhibitions and improves their awareness of rules and the songs that are played to them have a profound impact on their emotions.

The emotions they experience not only help them to understand each other's personalities, but also raise their awareness of the importance of adaptability. Achieving intellectual development requires biological maturity. If the sense of balance is underdeveloped in a child, s/he will have more difficulty in performing motor tasks, and the centres that control their functioning will develop more slowly. This also shows that tasks aimed at improving one area will strengthen other areas to

the same extent. Thinking can be developed through the varied texts, movements and spatial forms associated with singing games, while creativity and imagination can be developed through improvised movements and dancing, setting music to rhymes and stories, and sometimes improvised instrumental accompaniment.

What does all this mean for preschool music education? Children's movement activities and desire for movement are at their peak at age 3-7, therefore kindergartens must do their utmost to promote the child's well-being by establishing a rhythm in their life, in which physical activity plays a central role. Children enjoy movement because movement provides opportunities for playing and is a source of pleasure. It is adults who can supply children with such opportunities, and this is where the responsibility of the kindergarten teacher lies. Besides physical education, it is music education that can best serve the child's intensive and multifaceted movement and psychosomatic development. Movement, combined with joint singing, playing and moving, develops the abilities and personalities of kindergarten pupils in a multifaceted and complex way. Through joyful activities, the 3-7 year old child's memory, imagination, associative abilities, creativity, attention and interest develop rapidly in parallel with the development of music, since at this age movements related to games are not yet guided and determined by the meaning of the words, but by the melody and its rhythm and the spontaneous sense of joy associated with them.

The varied elements of movements in folk games play an important part in developing gross motor skills and increasing physical endurance. The movements involved in walking, running, clapping, crouching, spinning and skipping induce both physical and mental activation thus creating a close link between the two. The development of the sense of balance is also linked to this, as it is already complete by the age of 6-7 years.

From this it follows that this ability can be developed in later years only to a limited extent, even with a great deal of extra work. Its emergence and development is closely related to the perception of rhythm. If children are to sense the rhythm of movement, they must possess a certain level of development of the sense of balance, while at the same time the latter is strengthened and developed by rhythmic movement.

The development of fine motor skills is of particular importance in the process of learning to write, because music development can effectively promote the proper use of writing tools, the control of hand movements and proper hand-eye coordination (for example, through the perception of the uniform rhythm of songs and rhymes achieved through various forms of movement – touching fingers together, tapping knees, „nutcracking” by hitting fists together, clapping, using musical instruments and objects in games, handling and passing on to each other head-dresses, etc.).

Music can play a role in developing linguistic skills in the mother tongue, especially the ability for oral expression and comprehension of verbal information, as well as eliminating speech defects. The steady beat of songs and rhymes prepares for continuous speech, and this can be enhanced through regularly repeated movements. If we are to prevent learning difficulties that may be experienced later on (dyslexia and other difficulties in learning to write, read or count), it is of paramount importance to realize that movement (e.g. clapping, stepping, tapping and other rhythmic movements adapted to the words) have an irreplaceable role.

To make children feel the rhythm, tasks such as pronouncing words rhythmically syllable by syllable will also help to learn syllabification, while using playful word-elements will provide practice in pronouncing various sound sequences. We may find plenty of examples for such tasks in rhymes and singing games alike. If teachers take into consideration the individual gifts and abilities of

the children, and if they focus music education on their needs, then the children will develop the skills and abilities that will help them to become ready for school and enable them to get on well at school as well as later on in adult life. Music, rhythm, movement, dancing and game activities will ensure for them a complex experience and at the same time opportunities for development that will enrich their emotional life, expand their vocabulary and general knowledge, and make their movements more coordinated and aesthetically more satisfactory. Those who are surrounded from birth by music and singing games from „a pure spring” (as Bartók puts it) will be spiritually and mentally different from those who have not had this experience.

„The intellect of children[...] is a clean slate, in which both good and bad can equally be engraved, leaving a lifelong imprint.[...] This is the responsibility that those who enter the teaching profession must undertake. Music education is one of the most controversial areas of education: in no other area are children exposed to so many and so many different external influences as here. A teacher whose heart is full of trashy music and is ignorant of the beauties of noble music, the thrilling experience of listening to masterpieces and the exalting feeling of emotional fullness and elevation that comes with them cannot in good conscience teach children to love music. Therefore, responsibility towards the child obliges teachers to do some soul-searching!” (Törzsök, 1982, 26).

- Music education should start as early as possible. „It is in the kindergarten that it should begin, where the child learns in a playful way things that are too late to learn in primary school.” (Kodály, 1982, 93.)
- Music education should be focused on singing. „Singing liberates, encourages, does away with inhibitions and shyness. It concentrates the mind and trains you for attention and discipline. It moves the whole person, not only a certain

part of it. It develops the community spirit." (Kodály, 1982, 304.)

- It is important to give priority to activity. „The direct and natural relationship with music is reinforced by the practice of movement combinations, which must be approached in a complex way, combined with literary and visual activities.
- Folk games lay the foundations for the subconscious elements of national identity. In preschool music education folk traditions represent the best device to lay the foundations for national identity. Rhymes, game songs and folk songs may teach children principles that continue to be valid even today.
- A top priority is to form an organic connection between music and physical activity in the educational process. „The instinctive, natural language of children is singing, and the younger they are, the more they want to move at the same time ... Singing games in the open air have since time immemorial been the greatest source of joy in children's lives.” (Kodály, 1982, 62.)

At about the same time as Zoltán Kodály, several music teachers from all over Europe were reforming the structure and methodology of music teaching (Carl Orff in Germany, Emile Jaques Dalcroze in Switzerland, Shinichi Suzuki in Japan, Justine Bayard Ward in the USA, Edgar Willems in Flanders and Maurice Martenot in France). Their methods are known and used worldwide. All of them lay special emphasis on the role of early childhood, the importance of starting to learn music at an early age, and active participation in the process of making music. All of them recognize the importance of free rhythm, free melody, and improvisation, which appear in Kodály's work as a means for active style study. While the pedagogies of Kodály and Willems are vocally based, Orff and Dalcroze start from the vibrations and the movements of the body.

Dalcroze's vocal material reflects the tastes of the early 20th century French school.

A basic identity between the different approaches is that they start with valuable music and by training the ear they lead the children to valuable music. The differences lie in the practical aim: while Kodály developed a concept designed to educate the nation and to exert influence on a mass scale, and made the recorder the centerpiece in music education for children, Willems created an extracurricular music school where after a preparatory period of 3 years, everyone learns to play the piano and melody instruments and practices coral singing. The piano is also an essential instrument in Dalcroze's method. Orff uses xylophones, metallophones and rhythm instruments to support the singing of pentatonic children's songs in early childhood.

Movement is a priority in all these methods, although in Kodály's method this is manifested mainly in teaching folk roundelays. So we have several great masters with several approaches to teaching music. Perhaps it is worth considering how, by adapting some of the ideas of the other methods, the work of our teachers can be made more meaningful and effective. Since one of the most characteristic features of the 3-7 age group is a high degree of activity and agility, which also has a decisive influence on the development of their adult personality, teachers should do their utmost to create, already at this stage of life, the conditions for regular and effective movement in a game context. Movement development in this age group is characterised by the perfection of movements that have already been learnt and the emergence of the first movement combinations.

This development is manifested in three areas: „It is manifested in improved performance, in the quality and accuracy of movement execution and in the combination of already acquired movements” (Farmosi, Gaál, 2007, 9). In terms of motor development, the 3-7 year age range is not a uniform

period. Research shows that 3-4 year olds are still characterised by the specificity of toddler movement. A major change affecting all forms of movement, such as crawling, walking, running, hopping, throwing, catching, pulling, pushing, hanging, turning, rolling and balancing, comes at age 5. With the development of these movements the basic conditions for the young child's psychological development come into being.

The biological joy deriving from performing movements and the feeling of self-confidence deriving from successful execution provide irreplaceable childhood experiences that have an influence on subsequent personality development. And since the primary aim of movement development in this age group is to train for natural, harmonious movement, to develop physical abilities, to satisfy the child's need for exercise and to develop the child's emotional and volitional sides, movement activities must be varied and must pervade the whole of kindergarten life. Beyond music and physical education lessons they must be present in free play, environmental and aesthetic education as well as in care and self-care activities. The most important tasks for movement development in the age group under study are:

- development of physical and motor skills,
- development of large movements, sense of balance, sense of metrum and rhythm
- through rhythmic activities, development of fine motor skills, eye-hand and eye-foot coordination;
- development of the body schema by gaining familiarity with the body parts and
- coordination between them and promotion of the development of personal zone, achieving complex coordination between auditory and visual stimuli and movements, development of movement-related vocabulary (Wirkerné, Tamásiné, 2015).

By repeating spontaneous movements children become aware of the consequences of their motor

behaviour, and try to act it out again and again. The intention to repeat implies that the link between motor behaviour and its consequences is already beginning to be ingrained in the cerebral cortex. Movement skills develop together with motor skills (conditioning, coordination, joint flexibility). Motor skills are a prerequisite for performing movement activities (Báthori, 1991).

A very important factor in developing motor skills is that, while this is the most favourable age for the development of these skills, it is very vulnerable to faulty methods. The mistakes made at this age have a much more lasting effect than at other periods of the child's life. The development of large movements is a priority area for 3 year olds, but in a more advanced form it must continue in all age groups, as it is the basis of all movement. A particular movement sequence develops several functions at the same time, so it is difficult to isolate the different areas. Therefore, large movements must always have a privileged role in education and development, because subsequently they will be further fine-tuned and specified in detail. Hopping, for example, will develop into jumping, landing will become more and more secure, promoting the development of fine motor skills related to balancing. Among large movements, walking, running, crawling, slipping, climbing and jumping cannot be separated from the balancing functions. Even the simplest form of movement can be made more difficult, therefore they can only be described only according to the functions to be developed by the given task.

The sense of balance of the body depends on the vestibule (balance sensing centre) located within the inner ear. The three semicircular canals found here, with the help of the fluid that they contain, detect the movement of the body, the exact direction of movement and even its intensity. When a body is out of balance, it tries to regain its balance by activating various muscle groups.

Naturally, the more skilled a child is in back-and-forth feedback (balance perception and motor response), the sooner they will regain balance. (Tótszöllősyné, 1999) This movement process can only be achieved through a lot of practice. 3-year-old children still experience difficulty standing on tiptoe, in a row or in a line, 4-year-olds have difficulty standing on one leg, but in six-year-olds the different muscles of the sole already work alternately to maintain balance.

Emergence of the sense of balance and the related sense of rhythm is complete by age 6-7. At later ages, these abilities can be developed only at the cost of vast amounts of effort and to a small extent. Children practise this skill in games played with the kindergarten teacher, who recites rhymes for rocking, bouncing, lullabies, etc. Naturally, a cosy atmosphere is also a particularly important aspect of this. Parallel with the development of these two abilities children will learn to sense the rhythm of movement, and rhythmic movement has a washback effect, strengthening the sense of balance.

Development work based on the transfer effect of large movements gradually progresses to fine movements over the 3 or 4 years. To enable these movements, the child must acquire the ability to control small muscle bundles separately. The more inhibitory processes – braking, sudden stops - are present in the child's movements, the more coordinated his movements and the more developed his fine motor skills are.

During the kindergarten years we play many fine-movement games with the children to develop a sense of steady rhythm. The eye-hand, eye-foot coordination development area develops control of a larger area of muscle movement compared to fine motor movement, but a smaller area compared to large movements. These areas of control include, for example, jumping, turning, throwing and rolling a ball, kicking it, dropping a handkerchief, clapping in front of or behind the body, etc. One of the

most sophisticated forms of eye-hand coordination is manifested in the skill of writing. This coordination skill develops around the age of 5. Through experiencing movement we form a map not only of our environment, but also of our own body. This is what we call the body schema. The sense of balance and the information gained from body positions are combined with visual information and become integrated into a functional whole to form the body schema. From various kinds of feedback the child develops an internal picture of the location of body parts relative to other body parts. Therefore it is necessary for children to learn their own bodies and body parts and to experience their own movements. (Tamásiné, 2015).

The information that children experience as their bodies move is deeply imprinted in their memory. It is while performing movement that they first get information on the circle (e.g. run around in circles). Perceptual stimuli act in combination with the visual (they see the shape) and verbal stimuli (they hear the name) while running, crawling and jumping in and out. This makes memorisation more effective, because movement and form perception develop simultaneously in these exercises. Consequently, it is not only through hearing, seeing, tasting and touching that the world can be sensed, but also through movement.

The importance of words in rhymes and songs increases with age, and becomes an important source for enriching the children's mother tongue vocabulary. Some of the words that children encounter in songs and rhymes are no longer used in everyday discourse, but their understanding is facilitated by the context of the game. Kindergarten children, by learning the words of singing and rhyming games may receive a cultural heritage of enormous value. Although at the age of 3-4 this heritage is still very limited in terms of the meaning of the texts, its importance increases with age, and together with the „repetitions” the psychological

impact is immeasurable. The speech, movement and behaviour patterns learnt in games, repeated in real-life situations, serve to reinforce the children's sense of security, and the increasingly conscious interpretation of the meaning and context play an important role in deepening mother tongue skills.

Folk games, because they do not belong to a written culture, do not possess a single, original, fixed, authentic form. These melody variants are not copies or imitations, all of them are original, of equal value, expressing the different tastes of people living in different regions. Their users, i.e. the children, have constantly modified them to best suit their purposes and tastes. Children have always been active users of these games, and have obviously shaped them, and so the games have been honed in this way down the generations until they reached their present form. This cultural diversity should be preserved and care should be taken to ensure that the same variant does not spread all over the country to the exclusion of all others, and to foster the continued use of local variants in the different regions.

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