

Awareness of the Good Start Method and its Application in the Current Pedagogical Practice in the Czech Republic¹

Milena Kmentová

Abstract: This article presents the results of a contact questionnaire survey aimed at obtaining information on kindergarten teachers' awareness of the Good Start Method (GSM) and its application. The results of the questionnaire survey were supplemented by data obtained by research of electronic resources.

The article briefly characterizes GSM and describes data collection and analysis associated with this method. The survey was conducted from 5/2018 to 6/2019 in ten regions of the Czech Republic and brought 326 relevantly completed questionnaires. More than half of the teachers had no knowledge of the existence of GSM, 39 % of the teachers had mediated information and 7 % of the interviewed had personal experience with GSM. The categorization of further responses showed that the current form of GSM serves mainly as a source of inspiration, as only four respondents confirmed that they use the whole GSM systematically. However, the large number of respondents reported using parts of GSM or working on similar principles relating to at least certain extent to original materials.

The search of electronic resources identified 60 facilities (mostly kindergartens and primary schools) offering children/pupils professional implementation of GSM. These facilities are found across the whole Czech Republic, with the prevalence of the Moravian-Silesian Region, where the author of the Czech version of GSM, Jana Swierkoszová, has been working.

This research is a part of wider pedagogical research aimed at boosting interest in GSM and developing methodological material implementing GSM principles containing a new musical component. The research results reflect the Czech version of GSM as a living source of inspiration whose potential still remains unexploited.

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Keywords: Good Start Method, Czech Republic, pre-primary education

Introduction

This research report presents the results of a contact questionnaire survey, the aim of which was to determine the level of current kindergarten teachers' awareness of the Good Start Method (GSM) and to describe ways of its application in pedagogical practice. Subsequently, the results of the questionnaire survey were supplemented by data obtained by research of electronic resources. The questionnaire survey is a part of wider pedagogical research, which, among other things, analyzes the music component involved in the current Czech version of GSM, confronts the presumed rhythmic abilities and skills of preschool children with the results of individual diagnostics, and creates and based on broad pilot research verifies the lessons inspired by GSM principles with a new musical component.

The impulse for the realization of the questionnaire survey was the critique by an anonymous evaluator of the Technical Agency of the Czech Republic, who commented on the application for financing

a project aimed at the innovation of the Czech version of GSM. He reported that it seemed useless to innovate something which had already been well functioning for many decades. His statement was probably as unfounded at that time as my assumption that the GSM potential in the Czech Republic remains unexploited, and that the general awareness of the method itself is despite many years of effort made by the author of the Czech version, PhDr. Jana Swierkoszová, Ph.D., relatively little. It was, therefore, necessary to obtain hard data.

Characteristics of the Czech version of the Good Start Method

In its current Czech form, the Good Start Method is a pedagogical therapeutic method aimed at re-education of psychomotricity² problems of children at the turn of pre-school and school periods. It strives to develop all skills and competences preceding the processes of acquiring reading and writing. It includes 25 lessons having a fixed structure of

² The term and concept of psychomotricity has more than a century of tradition. It is based on a holistic view of a human individual whose motor skills, along with other psychic functions, are inseparable parts of the interacting system. This benefits diagnostic and re-education methods that systematically target the development of motor skills in favor of re-education of other psychic functions (Bucher, 1980; Blahutková, 2007).

activities. Each lesson is accompanied by one selected song which goes through the processes of initial motivation to the realization of the graphic pattern which is the culmination of all previous exercises. Physical activities are guided by the musical factors of the song and follow the levels of gross motor, fine motor and graphomotor skills. To develop fine motor skills and reproduce the rhythm, a pair of cloth pads filled with hail is used. The development of communication skills in all language levels (passive and active vocabulary, phonematic hearing, self-expression) also has a fixed position in each lesson. No matter whether GSM is implemented in groups or individually, it should always provide an opportunity for each child to experience success and enjoyment. Regarding this aspect, the role of a sensitive lecturer is indispensable. He/she leads the group in a pro-social atmosphere not only in opening and final assessments but also throughout the whole lesson, and he/she should highlight the progress of each child and help him/her to overcome any difficulties (Bogdanowicz & Swierkoszová, 1998).

The comprehensivity of access to all components of psychomotricity and the significant involvement of the music component makes GSM unique compared to other programs and methods designed for the development and possibly re-education of the abilities of preschool children. For example, it is possible to compare it with the Stimulation Program

for Preschoolers and Children with Postponement of School Attendance *Maxík* or with the program presented in the publication by Milena Lipnická (2007).

GSM finds its application within the first year of compulsory education (i.e., in the last grade of kindergarten), where it plays stimulating, preventive and possibly prophylactic roles. In the case of children diagnosed with the risk of specific learning disabilities, it has a re-educational character. For the same reasons, it represents a suitable educational tool for children in preparatory classes, i.e., children with postponement of school attendance. In the first grades of primary school, it finds its use within the pre-syllabus period. In pedagogical-psychological counselling centres, the therapeutic character usually involves maximum individual approach and modification of GSM according to the possibilities and needs of a child/pupil. A similar approach is expected when using the method in special schools. At all levels, the use of GSM also has a significant diagnostic value for the educator (Swierkoszová, 2013).

The GSM is implemented in pedagogical practice by the Good Start Method Set, which contains a methodological manual, a workbook of lists with graphic patterns and supporting exercises for their implementation, and a CD (formerly a tape) with recordings of songs.

Origin and distribution of the Czech version of the Good Start Method

The Czech version of GSM began to be formed after 1982 under the leadership of Jana Swierkoszová. The original source of inspiration was the Polish *Metoda Dobrego startu*, whose origin and development had been under the auspices of Marta Bogdanowicz since the 1970s. The sources of the method, however, must be sought in France, where the first target group had been the World War I disabled, and then in the *Le Bon Départ Method*, which Theá Bugnet adapted in the 1940s for children at the beginning of learning reading and writing. More information on the development and content of the Polish version of the method (Bogdanowicz & Swierkoszová, 1998; Zelinková, 2000).

After the meeting of Jana Swierkoszová and Marta Bogdanowicz in 1982, a several of collaborators began to participate in the preparation of the Czech version of GSM. At the beginning of 1983, the Regional Educational and Psychological Counselling Centre in Ostrava issued the first form of the method for its verification within the practice of counselling work in the region. Practical experience, teachers' requirements and the reflection on the use of GSM in counselling centres contributed to the current form of the GSM set, which stabilized in 1998 (the year of publication of the methodological

manual, worksheets and music recording) (Bogdanowicz & Swierkoszová, 1998).

The Good Start Method Set has never been over-the-counter and its dissemination has always been associated with a one-day course (accredited educational programme) led by Jana Swierkoszová. In recent years, Kateřina Nikelová has also participated in lecturing the seminar. The KASIMO publishing house provides the reprints of the materials (worksheets are needed by every child). Since 2014, in addition to the entire set, a DVD with a video recording of the implementation of one lesson with a group of pre-school children in the kindergarten environment is available to the graduates of the course. Completion of the seminar entitles graduates to use the method when working with children/pupils/clients.

Research

Subject and aim of research, research issues, research sample

The subject of the research was the current kindergarten teachers' awareness of GSM and ways of implementing this method. The research answered the following questions:

- What is the awareness of the existence of GSM among current kindergarten teachers?
- To what extent is GSM used in pedago-

Table 1. The core of the questionnaire

I do not know about the existence of GSM.	
I know about the existence of GSM, I do not apply it myself, and I do not know any colleague or facility where GSM is applied.	
I know about the existence of GSM, I do not apply it myself, but I know a colleague or facility where GSM is currently applied.	
We have materials for GSM (handbook, worksheets, tape with songs recordings) in our kindergarten.	
	in 2000 or earlier.
I attended a GSM course	between 2001 and 2010.
	between 2011 and 2018.
I systematically use the entire GSM.	
I use some lessons of GSM.	
I use some elements selected from GSM lessons.	
Based on GSM principles, I create my own educational materials concerning the area of graphomotor development.	
I have attended a GSM course, but currently I do not apply any of this method in educational practice.	
I have other experience with GSM and its application than this questionnaire describes (e.g. as a parent, past experience, etc.) Please specify:	
Here you can provide further information / attitudes in relation to GSM not covered by the questionnaire.	

gical practice in its original form, i.e., according to materials and course by Jana Swierkoszová?

- To what extent is GSM an inspirational source for the application of musical activities aimed at the development of pre-school graphomotor?

A questionnaire survey and a qualitative quantitative analysis of the obtained answers were the research methods. The inquiry was represented by the form of a combination of a personal and a written questionnaire - the answers were writ-

ten at my presence, with the possibility to ask and have the questions explained in detail. The questionnaire provided particular answers describing various possibilities of familiarity, experience and use of GSM. The respondents marked with a cross all the statements they identified with. At the end of the questionnaire, there was an open space to capture other possible facts, experience or opinions relating to GSM (Table 1).

The research sample consisted of participants of seminars focused on the application of musical activities in



Figure 1. The number of questionnaires obtained from individual regions of the Czech Republic. Source: author

logopaedic prevention, which I lectured:

- educational programme for further education of pedagogical staff called *Music activities within the acquisition of Czech as a second language*³ organized by the National Institute for Further Education;
- accredited seminar *Musical Activities in Development of Vocabulary of Preschool Children* organized by Portál publishing house;

- a series of seminars of *Music Activities in Logopaedic prevention*⁴ was organized by the College of Education and Social Sciences, the Secondary School of Education and the Grammar School, Prague 6, Evropská 33;
- other seminars regarding this topic, which I lectured due to invitations of individual kindergartens in Prague and Central Bohemia.

By enrolling in the seminar explicitly

³ Download from: http://www.nidv.cz/vzdelavaci-programy/3175-hudebni-cinnosti-pri-osvojovali-cestiny-jako-druheho-jazyka?search=Kmentov%C3%A1&filter_finished=0&program_code=

⁴ <http://hudebnisos.cz/event/show/30>

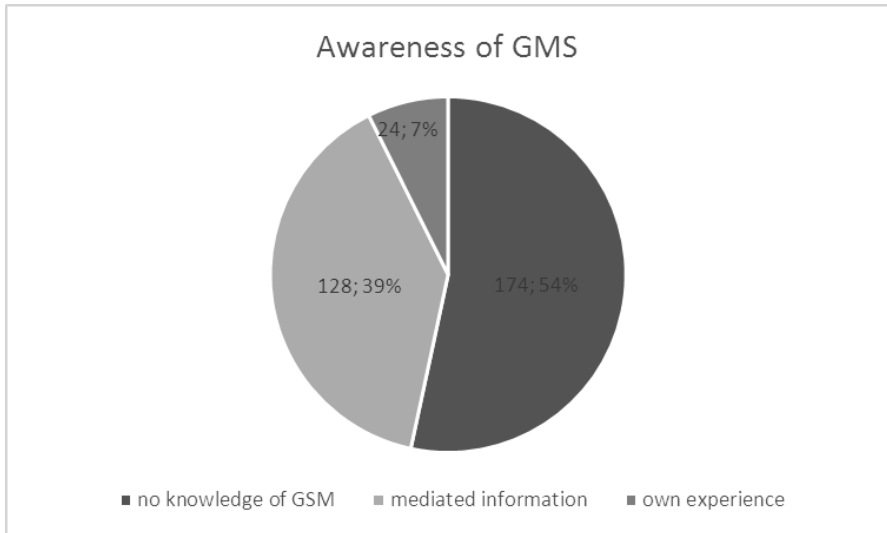


Figure 2. Awareness of the Good Start Method. Source: author

focused on musical activities, the participants showed their interest in music education and competences to conduct musical activities. For this reason, the research sample could not be considered as completely representative; however, it can be concluded that concerning this filtered group, there might be a higher probability of interest in GSM expected than among kindergarten teachers in general.

Data collection process

Data collection took place from May 2018 to June 2019 in ten regions of the Czech

Republic and regarded the above-mentioned educational programmes. It was finished when the ratio of responses received in questionnaires seemed to provide no new information more, and the planned National Institute for Further Education programmes in Olomouc and Zlín were cancelled due to the lack of interest from teachers (repeatedly for the second year). The number of questionnaires obtained in individual regions is shown in Figure 1.

Completion of the questionnaires was always performed with the approval of the organizer of the training programme, and there were always about 7 minutes

at the end of the event to complete it. I always mentioned to the respondents who Jana Swierkoszová was, the principle of linking gross motor, fine motor and graphomotor aspects with a song support, and on a flipchart or blackboard I showed two graphical patterns accompanied by singing: from lesson 1B with the song *Šel tudy* and lesson A2 with the song *Pásla ovečky*. I acquainted the respondents with the aim of the questionnaire survey and other areas of GSM research. The map shows the distribution of all 331 questionnaires obtained. However, only 326 questionnaires were, subsequently, analyzed, as 5 questionnaires contained concurrent marking of contradictory claims and were, therefore, excluded as irrelevant.

Results of data analysis from questionnaire survey

Based on the marked statements, the respondents were categorized into three basic categories:

- has no knowledge of the existence of GSM;
- has mediated information about the existence of GSM;
- has had her own experience with GSM because she attended a course of Jana Swierkoszová or as a student of the University of Ostrava or as a mother accompanied her own child to GSM lessons.

Representation of the respondents in these categories is shown in the graph (Figure 2).

Other submitted answers in the questionnaire tried to capture various possibilities of applying GSM and its elements in practice. Concurrent marking of various statements led to setting of categories which illustrate the non-/use of GSM and its principles in practice in detail. Let us first concentrate on a group of those respondents who had only mediated information about GSM.

Most respondents who have only mediated information about GSM or their kindergartens provide written GSM materials and literature do not apply GSM principles consciously in their practice and do not link music activities with the development of graphomotor. This group represents 32% of the entire research sample. In the graph below, they are subdivided into further three subgroups depending on the availability of a colleague familiar with GSM or the availability of GSM written materials at their workplace. (Reversing the histogram into negative values highlights the non-application of GSM principles). In contrast, 23 teachers (7% of the entire research sample) indicated that even without detailed information, they use similar principles when working on the development of graphomotor or they use available GSM materials. Again, they are divided into three subgroups, see graph (Figure 3).

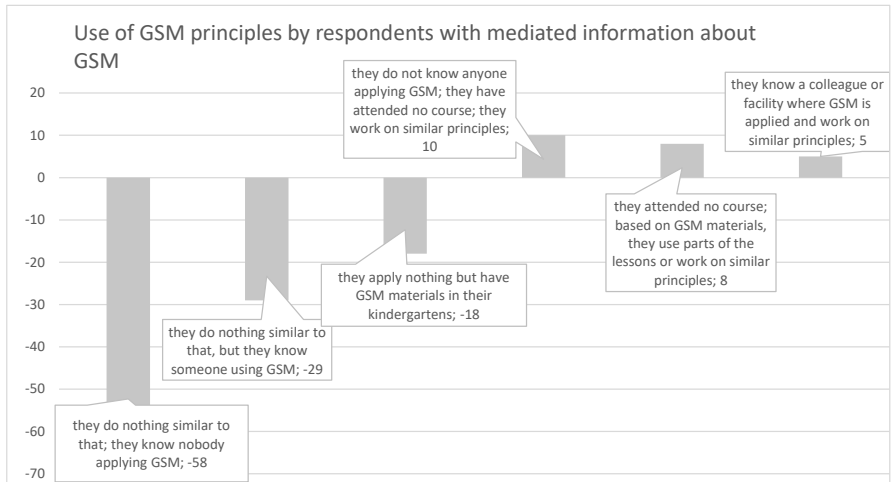


Figure 3. Applying the Principles of Good Start Methods by responders with GSM mediated information. Source: author

A group of 24 respondents who reported personal experience with GSM based on studying, attending a course, or accompanying their own child was also divided by non- / application of the principles, parts or complete GSM. No mother-teacher currently applies GSM principles in her practice. This subgroup, together with other course graduates who currently apply nothing of GSM, represents another 3% of the total research sample. Most graduates of the course belong to the subgroup of those, who apply elements and some GSM lessons. One of the graduates of the University of Ostrava reported similarly that she met GSM during her studies and Jana

Swierkoszová's teaching. Four teachers (1.2% of the whole research sample) reported that they work with the whole GSM systematically (one of them, from the position of kindergarten principal, sends all teachers of her kindergarten to the course gradually). Again, the column orientation in the histogram of the graph (Figure 4) highlights the non- / use of GSM, its elements or principles.

Results of research of electronic resources

In the school year 2019/20, I supplemented the results of questionnaire survey with electronic resources research. Using the

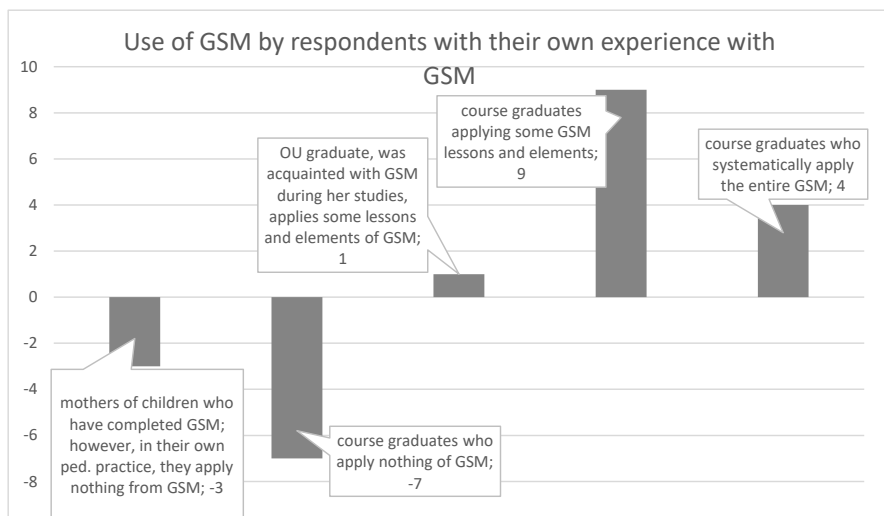


Figure 4. Use of the Good Start Method by respondents with their own GSM experience. Source: author

Google search engine, I was looking for institutions offering children / pupils involvement in systematically organized lessons of GSM on their websites. I found 60 institutions which provided GSM between 2012 and 2020. These were predominantly kindergartens and primary schools; nevertheless, there were also four pedagogical and psychological counselling centres, one youth centre, one Salesian youth movement club and one outpatient department of clinic speech therapist. The representation of institutions in individual regions is shown in the map (Figure 5). Corresponding to our expectations, the

highest number of institutions offering GSM was found in the North Moravian Region, where Jana Swierkoszová lives and professionally worked at Educational and Psychological Counselling and the University of Ostrava. The electronic search partially complements the picture of the implementation of GSM in other Moravian regions, where the contact questionnaire survey was not organized.



Figure 5. The number of institutions implementing the Good Start Method in the regions of the Czech Republic. Source: author

Answers to research questions

The results of the questionnaire survey and research allow us to answer the research questions.

What is the awareness of the existence of GSM among current kindergarten teachers?

- More than half of current teachers have probably never met GSM in any way. A relatively large proportion of teachers (39% of respondents involved in the questionnaire survey) have at least mediated information about GSM. Only a minimum number of

respondents (7% of respondents) have their own experience with GSM.

To what extent is GSM used in pedagogical practice in its original form, i.e., based on materials and course by Jana Swierkoszová?

- From all 326 respondents, there were only four teachers (1.2%) who reported that they use the entire GSM systematically. However, the results of the electronic search are much more optimistic, as 60 institutions, predominantly kindergartens (50), across the whole Czech Republic, claimed implementing GSM. Nevertheless,

regarding the total number of kindergartens in the Czech Republic, it is still less than one percent.⁵

To what extent is GSM an inspirational source for the application of musical activities in the development of pre-school graphomotor?

- The application of GSM parts, some lessons, elements or principles prevails over the application of the entire GSM in its original form. A total of 10% of the respondents of the questionnaire survey reported using this way of GSM, and one third of them had personal experience with GSM. However, more than a third (35%) of all respondents, despite having personal or mediated information, find no sources of inspiration in GSM.

Discussion

The validity of the conclusions drawn here can be to some extent questioned concerning several factors. The research sample of the questionnaire survey is not representative in terms of balanced representation of all regions of the Czech Republic. It can be assumed that greater representation from Moravian

regions, especially from the North Moravian Region, would influence the results towards greater awareness of GSM. This assumption is confirmed by the results of the research of electronic resources. Nevertheless, all respondents attending the seminar where the questionnaire survey was held showed a deep relation to music education, which increased the probability of encountering GSM. If the questionnaire had been distributed to all teachers globally, the GSM familiarity might have been lower.

What is the reason for the relatively low awareness of GSM, although Jana Swierkoszová has been propagating, training and ensuring the printing and distribution of materials for its implementation until 2018/19?⁶ One of the possible factors could be the fluctuation of teachers, in terms of not staying in such a difficult job, or retirement: many graduates of GSM courses running to the end of the 20th century are no longer active in education. Failure to remember information may also have a certain impact: if GSM is only mentioned when attending secondary school or university studies of kindergarten teaching, but the information is not connected with experiencing at least

⁵ The Statistical Yearbook of Education on the Ministry of Education website lists 5287 kindergartens in the school year 2018/19, <http://toiler.uiv.cz/rocenka/rocenka.asp>.

⁶ At present, Kateřina Nikelová is continuing to train in the Moravian regions. In cooperation with Markéta Kutnohorská, daughter of Jana Swierkoszová, with DYS-center Prague, it is planned to renew the offer of courses in the school year 2020/21.

one practical lesson, this knowledge can easily be forgotten.

The relatively high proportion of responses within the categories of “I know but I do not use” and “I know but I use only parts, principles” can support the hypothesis that movement-metro-rhythmic disbalance of music components in many lessons and / or too fast tempo of recorded songs makes GSM implementation in its current form too difficult. This hypothesis is supported by the respondents’ free statements at the end of the questionnaire: “only some songs worked”, “Songs are too fast, the graphic pattern is often unrealistic to the rhythm.” Further research will be devoted to the analysis of kinetic factors (meter, rhythm, pulsation, tempo) of the songs used.

It is worth mentioning here that the development of the Czech and especially the Polish method was accompanied by pedagogical research, which has repeatedly demonstrated the positive influence of GSM on the development of pre-reading and reading skills of children and pupils. The contribution of the method to reeducation of manifestations of specific learning disabilities is also supported (Bogdanowicz, 1985).

Conclusion

Psychomotricity is rightfully in the focus of pedagogical diagnostics of preschool children and children at the turn of

preschool and school attendance. The Good Start Method is one example of a holistic view of the development of psychomotricity with the potential for prophylaxis and re-education in cases of being under the risk of difficulties resulting from an uneven development of the child’s psychomotricity. Moreover, this method heavily relies on the musical component and the effectiveness of promoting the development of non-musical abilities through musical activities, which has been proven repetitively.

Awareness of the existence of the Good Start Method in the Czech Republic is satisfactory: 46% of current teachers have at least mediated information about GSM or direct experience with this method. Unfortunately, only 1% of potential users among pedagogical staff use this method in its current form. For 10% of teachers, GSM is an inspirational source or part of the other materials they use. From this perspective, the potential of GSM in the Czech Republic seems unexploited. We may hope that the whole educational project aimed at reviving interest in GSM will operate effectively and in near future.

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Mgr. Milena Kmentová, Ph.D.

Faculty of Education, Department of Music Education

Charles University

milena.kmentova@pedf.cuni.cz