

**Kmentová, Milena. *Musical and Speech Expressions of Preschool Children and their Mutual Influencing.*
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Sound expressions and speech communication are the most immanent manifestations of human beings. However, if we consider the sound expressions of humans in their entirety, we cannot include only speech but also musical expressions. Speech and music are extremely closely linked, as they are both used as means of communication. This is despite the fact that each of these systems features primarily communicative and aesthetic roles to different degrees. Speech and music accompany people from their birth, though once again to different degrees in their different roles – from perception to the production of sound expressions. It is therefore logical that Milena Kmentová dedicated her publication to the presence of both these phenomena in preschool children. The publication is the result of a three-year scientific project focused on research on the interconnection of speech and music while they are being acquired. The research was aimed at pro-

ving the potential of this process and its effectiveness.

The author devotes the first half of the book to theoretical aspects of the issue under research. She builds on the current knowledge of the relevant phenomena and specifies which knowledge related more closely to the needs of her research. First, the author focuses on definition of the key concepts: the central concept constitutes a human with their sound expressions. The parameters of sound expressions can be revealed in both speech and music. This is why Kmentová deals with the characteristics of these relationships in the following part of the publication, claiming that unlike musical notation, these means in the form of what is called the paralinguistic component of speech are difficult to detect or are unrecordable. And yet their role in the first stages of life is the most important thing a child can perceive in communication. Related to this is the

classification of hearing as a sense for phonemes and timbre, the properties of which show that they develop to a large extent separately, and therefore do not imply a direct effect between speech and the recognition of music.

The theoretical background of the publication further includes a chapter devoted to the neurophysiology of musical and speech expressions. The definition and characteristics of auditory attention refer to a phenomenon encountered both by teachers and parents or even those who come into contact with adults in various situations. It is basically a matter of concentration and response to sound stimuli, factors that are indispensable for upbringing and education. The treatise on the neurophysiology of musicality refers to the research that has demonstrated that musical activities are not exclusively a matter of one cerebral hemisphere. Musical activities thus contribute to the overall development of perception and thinking, as well as to the correction of neurophysiological defects. This complexity, which is due to the interaction of both hemispheres (with the author referring to the latest research), is reflected, amongst other things, in the perception of speech. Languages based on intonation, i.e. on the principle in which melody is the carrier of verbal meaning, create particularly favourable conditions for the perception of music and especially of pitch.

Further on, the author examines the

ontogenesis of children in terms of the development of musicality and speech and deals with disorders in both these areas. She refers to the statement of Ivan Poledňák on the relationship between amusia and problems with speech comprehension. Kmentová nevertheless distinguishes between permanent amusia and developmental delay. She focuses on the issue of language comprehension by children from bilingual families and from environments with a different mother tongue and emphasizes the stress caused by being present in a different language environment. The stress provokes a wide range of reactions and may become a serious obstacle to upbringing and education.

The author devotes a special chapter to the role of music therapy in the correction of speech disorders. Referring to proven sources, Kmentová reminds us of the role of the subject area in the relief of speech imperfections, as well as specific learning difficulties. These disorders are caused by numerous psychomotor factors, and music therapy provides opportunities to find a positive relationship with one's own self, one's own body, and one's surroundings, and to reconcile these factors. This is one of the reasons why, according to the author, inspiring with music therapy can be used in upbringing and preschool education. However, the author considers similar inspiration to lie in the linkage of music education with the speech the-

rapy – specifically music activities with graphomotor exercises. Here, however, she realises that the originally Polish version of the method requires a qualified adaptation to the Czech environment. (In this context, there is a parallel with the transformation of another system, namely the system of music education. The original “Schulwerk” methodology by Carl Orff could not be applied in the context of Czech music education and had to be adapted by the leading Czech composers and pedagogues Petr Eben, Ilja Hurník, and Vladimír Poš.)

The second half of the publication presents experimental and basic research focused on music as a means of cultivating speech in preschool children with atypical speech development. The author used a methodology based on musical expressions featuring the means of expression that correspond naturally with the means of speech. In improvised or imitative musical expressions, the pupils, especially those with a different mother tongue, were strengthening grammatical categories, phonemic norms, and the meanings of words (short tunes, for instance, explained what is good to eat and what is not). The author researched these linguistic musical plays. She focused on the diagnosis of musicality and speech skills on a rating scale from zero to four. She monitored traditional musical skills while involving children in musical activities and their speech skills alike. The music test invol-

ved tasks examining comprehension of linguistic expressions (colours, body parts) and monitored the child’s sensitivity to pulsation and rhythm, adherence to the key, and singing expression. In the speech test, the ability to form sentences, activate vocabulary, express oneself, engage in a conversation, express oneself fluently, and distinguish vowels and the meanings of words conditioned by the differences between them (e.g. gum – game) were monitored. The results of the tests confirmed the interconnection of singing and speech skills. It turned out that children with speech problems faced difficulties in singing too. Children with speech problems also start to sing spontaneously relatively rarely. On the other hand, these children often resort to playing on their body or on musical instruments if they want to express themselves through music. The tests proved the importance of training too. The musical games learned by the children later led to their elementary independent manifestations. The conclusions of past musical-psychological studies have also been confirmed, specifically that there are generally very few truly non-musical individuals.

The author drew conclusions and recommendations for educational practice from the findings of the basic research. Restricting musical activities to mere singing does not meet children’s abilities or needs and hinders the development of their musicality. However,

singing education with an emphasis on speech and linguistic expression remains irreplaceable.

In her experimental research carried out in a special nursery school for one year, the author monitored the effect of her methodology on the development of speech and musical skills. The results confirmed the progress of the children's musical and speech skills, as well as improvements in the field of phonemic differentiation. It turned out that music can play an important role in the cultivation of speech skills, though the path to such cultivation leads through listening and instrumental activities. These have the potential to prepare the mental and motor skills for what is the most characteristic (and sometimes also the most difficult) feature of humans, namely verbal expression.

The publication surveys a research study carried out in the age category where personal development begins. It focuses on skills that have a far-reaching impact on a person's inclusion in society. Though this aim is primary and indisputable, it also takes into account other, broader contexts of the issues under study. Each chapter is introduced by a statement made by an eminent personality – a psychologist, philosopher, writer, or actor – or by a popular saying. All these statements relate to music, but above all to humanity. They confirm that exploring the preconditions for verbal expression and music represents a significant help in the journey through life.

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