# Gramotnost, pregramotnost a vzdělávání

Odborný recenzovaný časopis zaměřený na problematiku čtenářské, matematické, informační a přírodovědecké gramotnosti a pregramotnosti

3/2024 ročník VIII

PEDAGOGICKÁ
FAKULTA
Univerzita Karlova

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Univerzita Karlova, Pedagogická fakulta
Praha, 2024

# Music Education in the 21st Century: Approaches and Challenges

Dear readers,

We are pleased to present the third issue of the eighth volume of the journal *Literacy, Preliteracy, and Education*, which this time focuses on the issue of music literacy. Music is not only a means of artistic expression but also a key factor in cognitive, emotional, and social development. The contributions published in this issue reflect interdisciplinary approaches to music education and its applications in various pedagogical and scientific contexts.

The first contribution, *Translational Music Education* by Wolfgang Mastnak, presents a theoretical concept bridging the gap between neuroscience research and music pedagogy. The author emphasizes the need for an interdisciplinary approach that could enhance the scientific relevance of music education and support its systematic integration into broader educational contexts. The second article, *Pedagogical and Didactic Competencies of the Teachers* by Zuzana Selčanová and Jiřina Jiřičková, focuses on the pedagogical and didactic competencies of music education teachers. The study provides an overview of key knowledge and skills essential for effective music education and connects theoretical concepts with practical approaches.

The third contribution, *Exploring the role of body movement in music education and choral practise through autoethnography* by Jiřina Jiřičková and Johann van der Sandt, examines the significance of bodily movement in music education and choral practice. The authors employ an autoethnographic method to explore how movement influences musical awareness, coordination, and expressive abilities of students and singers. In another paper, *Singing in music education as a tool for the development of children's communication skills* by Johann van der Sandt, the author discusses the role of singing in music education as a tool for developing children's communication skills. The study highlights not only the musical but also the social and emotional benefits of choral singing and calls for its integration into modern pedagogical methods.

This issue also includes reports from international conferences. Jan Pirner summarizes the key themes of the *Cho-*

 DOI: 10.14712/25337890.4843

*ralia Magna 2024* conference, which focused on choral art, its educational aspects, and its role in building cultural identity. Marek Valášek and Jiřina Jiřičková provide a report from a music education conference at the Faculty of Education, Charles University (*Music pedagogical conference on research and practice of music education*), which featured stimulating discussions and workshops on the didactics of music education. Another report focuses on the interdisciplinary conference *Let Us Learn to Look and Sing* in Pilsen, which created space for dialogue between visual and music education.

Finally, we present a review of the publication *Creativity in music education or some notes on creative music activities*, prepared by an international team of authors. The review by Tatiana Zbořilová emphasizes the importance of creativity in music education and connects theoretical insights with practical models of music teaching.

We hope that this issue will bring inspiring insights not only to music educators but also to the scientific community and the wider professional public. We thank all the authors for their contributions and the readers for their interest in the field of music literacy.

Happy reading!
Editorial Team
*Jiřina Jiřičková, Monika Kadrnožková, and Anna Kucharská*

GRAMOTNOST, PREGRAMOTNOST
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# Translational music education

*Wolfgang Mastnak*

**Abstract:** Learning music is one of the core tasks of music education, alongside psycho-affective responses, cognitive understanding, aesthetic immersion and creative activities. While all these performances are inextricably intertwined with central-nervous processes, music educational theories and models are markedly lacking neuroscientific substantiation. Regardless of these shortcomings, a wealth of studies on neuro-cognitive music processing may profoundly elucidate music educational topics, hence the idea to bridge the gap between music-neuro-lab outcomes and music educational practice. About 30 years ago, translational medicine was designed to improve the application of lab-derived results in clinical practise – referred to as 'bench-to-bedside'. Inspired by this concept, the term 'translational music education' was coined. Integrating music-related psychobiological findings gives rise to epistemological meta-syntheses and theoretical frameworks, alongside comparative research on system compatibility between music education models and relevant lab data on music processing. This approach enhances the scientific reliability of music educational theories and highlights the distinct benefits of music education, such as music's role as a powerful booster of neuroplasticity, which is the basis of all learning and developmental processes. Distinct interdisciplinary and international research collaboration is essential for advancing translational music education, which is expected to increase the recognition of music education within the broader scientific community while significantly improving teaching techniques.

**Keywords**: complexity sciences, diversity and inclusion, interdisciplinary education, neurosciences, philosophy of science

## Introduction

From the perspective of the philosophy of science, the question 'How scientific is music education?' arises, accompanied by arguments that music education models have mainly been based on subjective theories and reflective practice. The rationale behind this harsh criticism goes hand in hand with the complementary dualism of music education routine and research. Regarding music education as a scientific discipline, several key questions emerge: What are its fields of research? What research methods are being applied? And how are the results



DOI: 10.14712/25337890.4844

evaluated in an epistemological way as well as according to theories of truth?

A great deal of comparative music education research, such as the discovery of changes in national curricula or scrutinising differences between music education methods, typically applies techniques similar to those used in historical or jurisprudential realms, while, for instance, German music education strongly inclines towards philosophical considerations, such as 'aesthetic experience' in classroom education. Given the multifaceted spectrum of music education topics, there is no doubt that issues concerning musical learning in its broadest sense, along with its key mechanisms, play a crucial role. However, what are the most effective methods for exploring their characteristics and determining factors?

Examining the interdisciplinary domain of aesthetics may help to shed light on this issue in music education. While the ground-breaking works of Gustav Theodor Fechner (Ortlieb et al., 2020) differentiated psychological from philosophical approaches, today's aesthetics broadly encompass three areas: philosophical and arts-related aesthetics, empirical aesthetics, as pursued by the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics (MPIEA), and neuroaesthetics (Iigaya et al., 2020), which focus on the central nervous mechanisms underlying aesthetic experience and judgement. This methodological triad also applies to key issues in music education and may inspire a holistic understanding of music-related learning processes.

In the context of music education, inferential considerations suggest distinguishing between three methodologically distinct realms: (i) philosophical and phenomenological approaches, subjective theories included, (ii) empirical approaches, encompassing a broad scope of standardised quantitative and qualitative designs as well as reflective practice, and (iii) neuroscientific and neuro-cognitive approaches, which elucidate the central nervous mechanisms underlying music-associated learning processes.

A wealth of studies relating to the first two areas have been published in journals such as *Philosophy of Music Education Review* (Indiana University Press) and *Music Education Research* (Taylor & Francis), reflecting topics like 'philosophising in music education' (Jorgensen & Yob, 2023) or presenting robust empirical results based on meta-syntheses of qualitative studies, such as how teachers can support students' musical learning (Fredriksson et al., 2024). Despite encouraging older publications (e.g. Collins, 2013), studies exploring the central nervous and neuro-cognitive factors of learning music are still rare, though they are vital for achieving a comprehensive in-depth understanding of music education.

Exploring the realm of neuroscientific research on music cognition, music

experience and creative music activities, however, opens new horizons. A surprising wealth of studies touch upon music education topics, without, however, providing music education methods By way of illustration, functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) explores how the right inferior frontal gyrus of the human brain processes micro-melodies and motifs (Cheung et al., 2018), we learn about neuro-cognitive control of tonal stability (Li et al., 2021), and we get insights into how distinct interplay between the anterior cingulate and medial prefrontal cortex modulates the sense of musical dissonance (Bravo et al., 2020). Moreover, we get familiar with brain activations related to music experience and musical errors (Sakai et al., 2022), and, regarding cross-cultural music education and pupils with a migration background, how acculturation impacts music memory (Demorest et al., 2010). We are faced with cerebral functions modulating the musical impact on emotions and sociability (Sachs et al., 2018) or with what is going on in our brain during musical improvisation (Beaty, 2015).

The lack of neurosciences in music education and scientific findings with notable music educational relevance gives rise to an intriguing idea: considering lab-derived research as potentially applicable to music educational practice may result in inferential metasyntheses – in other words, a theoretical framework of neuroscientific music education. This idea, however, aligns with the principles of translational medicine, hence the proposed term 'translational music education'. But what is 'translational medicine'?

Translational Medicine (TM) is linked to the expression 'bench to bedside', indicating the transition from lab-based research to clinical practice. Its origin is inextricably intertwined with the disillusioning discovery that only a small part of scientific outcomes find their beneficial application in clinical practice. The term was coined in the late 1990s, and Worboys et al. (2021) refer to the British Medical Journal, which characterised TM as a process: 'TM is then about the movement of ideas, materials and technologies from research laboratories, through evaluation and trials, to routine clinical application.' Accordingly, Translational Medicine can be seen as a principle encouraging the shift from research to practice, today also involving digitalisation and artificial intelligence (Baxi et al., 2022), for instance. And it was precisely this close dynamic connection between scientific findings and their clear-cut application in practical areas that inspired the concept of 'Translational Music Education'.

## Key features of Translational Music Education

And yet, there is a crucial difference between translational medicine and translational music education. While most medical lab-based research inherently aims to improve clinical and public health practices, neuroscientific research on musical processes and music processing does not necessarily intend to impact on music education. This crucial difference requires a certain ex post facto construction – in other words, translational music education has to search for relevant scientific findings that may ultimately serve as key constituents of dynamically built theoretical frameworks. Nonetheless, this process will eventually result in explicitly neuroscientific music education research, and initiate translational collaboration, much like in medical fields.

### Impact on Scientific Music Education Frameworks

Bringing the notion of 'music education frameworks' into play simultaneously raises the question of whether music education can be regarded as a system with its innate internal logic, or whether it is rather an umbrella term encompassing the totality of ideas and practices around learning and teaching music. This question is far from trivial and evokes the science-theoretical problem of what definitions are and what they stand for.

Broadly speaking, we can distinguish three different types of music education frameworks or systems: (i) heuristic concepts based on in-depth considerations alongside an inherent inner logic, created and suggested by individuals, (ii) the open totality of music education practices and positions, and (iii) tentative plans to unearth the 'true nature of music education', akin to discovering natural laws. By way of illustration, Victoria Boler (2020) proposed a philosophical framework of music education consisting of the triad utilitarian, aesthetic and praxial philosophy of music education.

Such music education systems and frameworks (usually) imply areas of music education such as the history of music education, cross-cultural music education, or music education techniques, each (scientific) sub-discipline requiring specific research methods. In this regard, the present article focuses on mechanisms underlying mental processes with key relevance to music education, such as learning, experiencing or understanding music – in other words, without certain brain functions there is no musical experience or musical learning, hence their crucial significance for music education frameworks.

## Music Education and the Essence of Music

While it may seem trivial to emphasise that music plays a crucial role in music education, posing questions about the nature and essence of music is not trivial at all. Being a key authority in theoretical realms dealing with music, musicology is faced with a myriad of definitions, such as Saint Augustine's famous delineation 'ars bene modulandi' and 'ars bene movendi' [the art of fine modulation and motion], or cross-cultural semantics around music, including the phenomenon of languages without a specific word for what English-speaking people call music, with Inuit being a well-known example. Moreover, dealing with the phenomenon of music involves ontological issues (Nussbaum, 2007) such as the notion of 'musica universalis' between Pythagoreanism and Daoism, Kepler's 'harmonices mundi' or Leibniz's theory of pre-established harmony (Vamvacas, 2009).

Although this article's aim is not to explore the essence of music, we must remember that without music-processing brain functions, there would be no awareness of music, and without cognitive processors in the brain, there would be no philosophy or ontology of music. However, this paper does not advocate any kind of neuroscientific reductionism; rather, it acknowledges the ontological autonomy of different entities – comparable to Karl R. Popper's Three Worlds Theory (Popper, 1972), which differentiates between the physical world, which also contains biological objects such as the human brain, the world of mental states or processes, such as experiencing music, and the world of objective contents, such as cultural objects, music included. Similar to the metaphor that a poem's sense cannot be discovered through a chemical analysis of paper and ink, we highlight different ontological qualities of music, mind and brain, while still emphasising the inevitable necessity of brain functions for all music processing, music education topics included.

These considerations relate to key issues of music education. For instance, the first German music educational concept issued after World War II, Michael Alt's (1968) 'Didaktik der Musik. Orientierung am Kunstwerk' [The Didactics of Music. Orientation towards the Work of Art], was harshly criticised for two shortcomings: first, it widely ignored the individual learning music, and second, it narrowed the subject of music education down to what he called 'Kunstwerk' [the work of art], implying an aesthetic value hierarchy that sharply conflicted with the open-minded nature of music education. In contrast, Dankmar Venus (1969) argued that music education should focus on distinct interactions between music and the pupil, suggesting a model that aligns closely with today's neuroscientific positions on music education.

## Identification of the Benefits of Music Education

For decades, international music education has faced scrutiny from authorities who question the importance of music within public education and come up with convincing reasons for replacing it, for example, with a second or third obligatory foreign language or intensified training in IT and AI. Consequently, music educators have sought compelling justifications, such as 'music education supports individual personal development', 'music education is essential for understanding sociocultural traditions and, consequently, for becoming a well-rounded member of society', 'music is an important emotional counterpart within a dominantly cognitive school environment' or 'music education nurtures creativity and an aesthetic sensibility'. However, such a line of reasoning stems from within music education circles and is consequently ranked or 'unmasked' as being self-serving. Moreover, many such explanations lack a scientific foundation, making them vulnerable to interdisciplinary criticism and analyses, whereas translational statements may cogently advocate music education. However, translational logic is not merely a form of justification; it also serves as a powerful tool for unearthing fresh evidence as to why music education is far from being marginal.

More than a decade ago, a much-noticed Harvard study (Wan & Schlaug, 2010) called music making 'a tool for promoting brain plasticity across the life span', and Merrett et al. (2013) pointed out that musicians' brains differ structurally and functionally from non-musicians' brains, including variations in volume, morphology, density, connectivity and function across a broad variety of central nervous regions. Complementary to these basic studies, more recent research focuses on specific topics such as music as a booster and facilitator of neuroprocessing mechanisms during foetal and neonatal development (Chorna et al., 2019) and the beneficial impact of music on brain connectivity in the treatment of neurological disorders (Speranza et al., 2022). Given that the entirety of mental development, including learning and personal growth, is vitally and substantially linked to neuroplasticity, such neuroscientific outcomes are of striking importance for educational systems. They greatly advocate music education activities such as learning an instrument, group improvisation or live vocal arrangement – and when combined with dance as another strong booster of brain plasticity (Teixeira-Machado et al., 2019), complex models such as Elemental Music & Dance Education gain immensely in importance.

There is no doubt that music enhances neuroplasticity as well as the complex dynamic connectivity of neural networks,

which mirror our mental capacity, flexibility, adaptability and creativity. While in arts education domains the term 'creativity' is often reduced to inventiveness within artistic processes, from an interdisciplinary perspective, creativity is one of the fundamental traits of human beings. It is inextricably linked to the evolution of the mind, including the evolution of the genetic networks that shape human creativity (Zwir et al., 2022), and is indispensable for scientific progress and epistemic worth (Sánchez-Dorado, 2023). Moreover, the phenomenon of creativity is interrelated with the dynamics of the Default Mode Network DMN, hence the importance of this huge central nervous functional complex for music education (Mastnak, 2018). In this context, we have to emphasise that there is a certain rivalry between the DMN and cognitive executive processors of the brain, which are needed to solve, for instance, mathematical tasks. In other words, permanent overstimulation of this regions inhibits DMN-activities and results in an adverse imbalance of the central nervous system – or in other words, the human brain.

Why are humans creative? Why do they have a sense of beauty? Why do they seek love and strive for identity? And why are there huge inter-personal differences such as between extraversion and introversion, rigidity and flexibility, agreeableness and hostility, interests and intelligence? There is one simple answer: Our genes are masterminds and game-changers. However, there is an obvious difference between the biochemical structure of a gene and the genetic effect on our body and mind. This transition is the focus of the relatively young discipline of epigenetics, and while music is (most probably) not able to alter DNA, it may significantly impact on epigenetic processes. We know today that listening to music regulates human microRNA expression (Nair et al., 2021), and a recent study (Gallazzi et al., 2024) pointed out – with significant relevance to psychopathological manifestations in today's children and adolescents – that music has profound effects on emotion, cognition, mood regulation, stress reduction and social inclusion, and that researchers have begun to explore links between these benefits and epigenetic modifications, suggesting that aesthetic experiences might induce dynamic and/or stable changes in gene expression profiles.

At this point, we conclude our elucidation of the translational identification of music education's features and benefits, and state that further interdisciplinary research is needed. Translational music education is a scientific discipline in statu nascendi and may importantly change modes of music education reasoning, alongside the development of novel music education models and theories.

## Compatibility of Music Education Systems

The question of how to prove theories is a core issue in scientific realms. While in some disciplines, such as mathematics, absolute proofs are possible, philosophy of science points out that empirical or correspondence-theoretical hypotheses (Mastnak, 2021a) cannot achieve absolute verification – only the possibility of falsification. The seminal work of Karl Popper, in particular his treatise *Logic of Scientific Discovery* (Popper, 2002), suggested the so-called 'degree of corroboration' as a measure of robustness (Lienau & DeSalle, 2009). For instance, evidence-based medicine uses standardised research designs such as randomised controlled trials (RCTs) to assess effect sizes of treatment tools. However, complex issues, which we frequently deal with in music education, do not allow such applications: multifactorial conditions make reliable scientific discoveries and proofs difficult.

Although there is high-ranking empirical research in music education, and a few research centres – e.g. in China – use neuro-imaging to elucidate music-educational processes, the lion's share of music education models still lack robust substantiation – at least according to theoretical scientific criteria. The present article encourages translational approaches and systemic meta-syntheses (Mastnak, 2021b) to construct relevant theories, such as in the realm of neuro-cognitive music education (Artýktay, 2024). This is one promising path, while another is to scrutinise existing music education theories with regard to relevant, e.g. neuro-cognitive, findings – a process that may result in the substantiation of music education positions, the discovery of errors or the improvement of explanations.

There are good reasons to assume that if music education practice is successful, its key mechanisms and associated explanations align with relevant neuro-cognitive theories. A comparative look at psychology may illustrate this assumption. Although both psychoanalysis and cognitive-behavioural therapy proved to be effective interventions, their theories were conflicting and gave rise to heated debates. Eventual comparative research, however, discovered unexpected theoretical similarities between both areas, while neurosciences highlighted that the Default Mode Network can be seen as a sort of unconscious information processor – and this was a final harmonising link between the former 'enemies'.

Music education comprises a wealth of schools of thought such as Orff-education, Jaques-Dalcroze's Eurhythmics (Fédération Internationale des Enseignements de Rhythmique, 2019), Roscher's Polyaesthetic Education (Allesch & Schwarzbauer, 2009), Eherenforth and Richter's Didactic Interpretation (Richter, 1994) and Mastnak's (2020) Ontolo-

gical Music Education. We are faced with an enormous diversity of related scientific foundations, for example, Didactic Interpretation importantly involves philosophical hermeneutics, while Carl Orff expressed profound cultural-anthropological ideas, today complemented by multidisciplinary approaches (Kalcher, 2022).

The interdisciplinary issue of how and/or to what extent these theories are consistent with relevant neuroscientific and neuro-cognitive findings calls for action. In other words, to compare these music education theories and models with relevant neuropsychological, neuroendocrinological, quantum-neuroscientific etc. findings can markedly improve their scientific robustness. Such cross-theoretical analyses and evaluation modes are in line with paradigms of translational music education research as proposed in this article. Furthermore, they may, elevate the recognition of music education within the broader scientific community. However, interdisciplinary and international collaboration is needed, and we hope that Czech colleagues will actively contribute to this endeavour.

## Discussion and Prospects

All known populations have given birth to their very individual musical cultures, which is a strong indicator that music is inherent to the nature of the human race. This argument implies associated genetic and hereditary dispositions, and interdisciplinary research is on the verge of discovering music-related human genomics as well as the bio-cultural origin of music (Beccacece et al., 2021). While human beings are equipped with such genetic dispositions, recent research has highlighted the crucial importance of gene-environment interplay for the development and performance of music skills (Wesseldijk et al., 2023).

In this context, gene-environment interplay involves functions of specific music-sensitive processors in the brain, which decisively modulate a child's distinct (musical) acculturation. Similar to the acquisition of language, complex stimuli are integrated and form—starting as early as the third intrauterine trimester and with considerable impact on prenatal music therapy (Ji et al., 2024)—the child's holistic music experience, identity and understanding. The existence of these powerful central nervous processors gives rise to the question of the extent to which music education can contribute to musical talent and skills. Additionally, it prompts inquiry into the issue of whether translational music education is rather a descriptive approach analysing music-educational processes from neuroscientific or microbiological perspectives (Johnson, 2024), or whether it aims to influence music education practice, such as by improving teaching models.

Considering such topics, we may expect a watershed in music education,

where subjective theories and individual experience-based teaching techniques will be either replaced or complemented by science-based methods. It is highly likely that the optimisation of teaching modes will emerge from complex approaches that respect the value of professional experience as well as ideas. Thus, translational music education is based on interactive processes, compatible with paradigms of complexity sciences (Sturmberg & Martin, 2022), and aimed at improving music education epistemology and truth theory. International efforts are needed, and we eagerly look forward to substantial Czech contributions.

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A VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ, 8, 3, 19—36

PŘEHLEDOVÁ STUDIE

# Pedagogical-didactic competences of the teacher

*Zuzana Selčanová, Jiřina Jiřičková*

**Abstract:** This study presents a general overview of pedagogical and didactic competences as subcategories of professional teacher competences. Although pedagogical and didactic competences are discussed separately in the literature, their interpretation sometimes overlaps in terms of content. This study maps the general knowledge about these selected sub-competences and based on theoretical findings, specifies their role in the context of the professional competences of music teachers.

**Keywords:** Pedagogical-didactic competences, pedagogical competences, didactic competences, professional competences, teacher, music teacher

Pedagogical and didactic competences are part of the so-called professional competences, from which the structure of teacher qualifications is derived. The issue of teachers' professional competences is addressed in general terms in a review study of the same name by the authors (Jiřičková & Selčanová, 2022). Professional competences, including pedagogical and didactic, develop during the training for the profession, during the teacher's professional activity, and based on his/her personal experience. Professional competences are closely linked to general competences and are usually understood as a complex of subcompetences forming a so-called qualification or competence profile (Friederich & Schelle, 2023; Bořkovec et al., 2023). The competence approach in education is reflected in the educational curriculum, making issues of professional development strategies increasingly important (Veteška et al., 2011; Veteška & Tureckiová, 2020). In the literature, we find different conceptions and classifications of both the professional and the specifically pedagogical and didactic competences of teachers.

According to Karimi, there are three main types of teacher competences in the literature: "professional attitudes, didactic competencies and subject matter competencies" (Karimi, 2014, p. 30).

An example of a more structured classification of professional competences



DOI: 10.14712/25337890.4845

can be found in the typology of Švec, which distinguishes between psychopedagogical, communicative, diagnostic, personality and developmental competences (Švec, 1999). Vašutová (2001) separates the pedagogical and didactic aspects of competences. She defines subject competence, didactic/psycho-didactic competence, pedagogical competence, diagnostic and intervention competence, social, psychosocial and communicative competence, managerial and normative competence, and professional and personality-cultivating competence. These seven competences together form the core of the so-called professional standard (Spilková & Tomková, 2010).

*The Competence Framework for Graduate Teachers* (Bořkovec et al., 2023) defines the most recent professional competences using a structured classification. It is based on the *Strategy of the Education Policy of the Czech Republic until 2030+* (Frič et al., 2020), and specifies the professional prerequisites and competences of a teacher who "*is able to manage the demands of the profession, apply modern teaching methods, and respond to the changing needs of a heterogeneous population of children, pupils and students*" (Bořkovec et al., 2023, p. 6).[1]

This study maps other selected professional competences, listed under different labels and connotations in various classifications, namely pedagogical and didactic competences. Last but not least, it defines the pedagogical-didactic competences of a music teacher.

## Terminological background

In the area of competences, we encounter rather broad terminology that is not well-anchored. In English-language literature, the terms 'competence' and 'competency' are used, with 'competence' appearing in both singular and plural forms. These terms are applied in various contexts and with different meanings. 'Competence' is usually associated with the demonstration of competent performance, while 'competency' represents "*a combination of knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes, and values*" (Knowles et al., 2005, pp. 212-213). We associate 'competence' with practical action content, while 'competency' is understood more comprehensively (Hutmacher, 1997). In other words, 'competences', in the sense of eligibility for a profession, can be seen as a set of interrelated personal qualities (knowledge, abilities, skills, ways of activity) related to a certain range of subjects and

[1] *The Graduate Teacher Competency Framework* is divided into six areas: the subjects taught and their delivery to pupils; Planning, leading and reflecting on teaching; Learning environments; Feedback and assessment; Professional collaboration, and Professional self-concept, development, ethics and mental health.

processes essential for performing tasks effectively and productively; 'competency', on the other hand, can be defined as "*a person's possession of a set of relevant competences, including their attitude towards them and the subject of activity*" (Khutorskoy, 2003, p. 69).

We encounter various labels in the literature regarding a teacher's pedagogical and didactic competences. Czech and English literature uses the terms 'pedagogical competence' (e.g. Sahana, 2018; Pantić & Wubbels, 2010) and 'didactic competence' (e.g. Gošová, 2011; Smékalová, 2020). Some authors discuss pedagogical 'skills', 'requirements', 'professional knowledge', or 'pedagogical activities' (Spilková & Tomková, 2010). The meaning of the terms pedagogical competence and didactic competence/s sometimes overlap; therefore, some authors do not separate them from each other (Rotport, 2008a). The term 'didactic knowledge and skills' is used, for example, by Hartl and Hartlová (2000),[2] while Kyriacou (2012) refers to so-called key teacher skills.

A teacher's professional knowledge includes knowledge, skill, experiential, attitudinal, and value components (Spilková & Tomková, 2010). Shulman defines professional knowledge as "*a codified or codifiable aggregate of knowledge, skills, understanding and technology, ethics and dispositions, and collective responsibility – as well as ways of representing and communicating them*" (Shulman, 1987, p. 4).

The document *Competent Teachers of the 21st Century: the ISSA International Professional Quality Framework* (Tankersley et al., 2011) describes the desired quality of teacher performance in line with the latest international pedagogical and didactic trends. It uses the term 'pedagogical requirements' and focuses on specific teacher skills, such as working with the family and community or developing democratic values, emphasising the creation of inclusive environments. *A framework of professional teacher qualities. Evaluation and self-assessment sheet* present so-called models of quality and effective teachers (Tomková et al., 2012). The required pedagogical competences can be further characterised in the context of these models.

Most models include subject knowledge, pedagogical-psychological, didactic and general knowledge, as well as the attitudes, values, personal qualities, and pedagogical and didactic skills of teachers. These skills are mainly related to peer communication, social climate, teaching strategies, and the diagnosis and evaluation of students (Tomková et al., 2012). Similarly, Blömeke (2022) defines teaching quality as a reflection of observable teacher behaviour. This

[2] According to Hartl and Hartl, skill is: *"a disposition acquired through learning to perform an activity correctly, quickly, and economically by an appropriate method"* (Hartl & Hartl, 2000, p. 121).

quality is characterised by classroom management, cognitive activation, pupil support and domain-specific quality characteristics.

## Pedagogical competences

The English terms 'pedagogical competency' or 'pedagogical competences' are used in the literature in both singular and plural forms. For Diaconu, the term 'pedagogical competences' means "the educator's capacity to express their opinion on a pedagogical problem based on extensive knowledge of the laws and determinants of educational phenomena; in a narrower sense, it refers to a person's ability to perform at some level all typical tasks specific to the teaching profession" (Diaconu in Gliga, et al., 2002, p. 27). Conversely, Sahana works with the singular form and understands pedagogical competence as "*performance, knowledge and skill in teaching and learning, thus, it includes teachers´ capability to manage the teaching and learning process from the planning stage to the evaluation stage*" (Sahana, 2018, p. 797). In addition to teachers' knowledge, skills and abilities, Pantić and Wubbels also include teachers' beliefs and moral values in the concept of pedagogical competence. Thus, besides cognitive components, they also emphasise motivational aspects (Pantić & Wubbels, 2010). Channa and Sahito (2022) talk about pedagogical competencies in the context of the designation of minimum professional standards.[3]

In Czech literature, both the singular and plural forms of the term pedagogical competence appear. The difference is usually that the singular form denotes a general pedagogical ability or competence, while the plural form includes individual sub-skills that together form an overall competence—pedagogical competence.

According to Dytrtová and Krhutová (2009, p. 53), a graduate with pedagogical competence is oriented in education and learning through educational systems. Gošová understands pedagogical competence as the teacher's ability to control the education processes and support the development of students' individual qualities. A teacher with pedagogical competence knows children's rights and respects them in his/her work (Gošová, 2011).

The issue of developing pedagogical competences is currently a widely discussed topic in the context of undergraduate teacher training. In this regard, Spilková (2001) emphasises a holistic

[3] According to Chan and Sahito, teachers with low levels of teaching ability are referred to as unqualified, while teachers with high levels of teaching ability are considered qualified. Pedagogical competence reflects the way a teacher can teach a subject while following didactic principles such as teaching from the known to the unknown, from the concrete to the abstract, or from the simple to the complex (Channa & Sahito, 2022).

approach based on the teacher's complex work, in which the interconnectedness of individual components plays an important role. Similarly, Nezvalová understands pedagogical competence as "*the target and complex areas of the future teacher's development that will create the preconditions for his/her professional pedagogical thinking and acting*" (Nezvalová, 2003, p. 12).[4]

Vašutová, who specialises in tertiary education, further characterises pedagogical competence as: *"(...) a set of specific and highly expert knowledge, skills, attitudes and experiences that reflect the dynamics of educational processes at the tertiary level and the changes in the student population, their intellectual and personality aptitudes, individual interests and educational needs*" (Vašutová, 2002, p. 136). In the context of the above pedagogical competence, Vašutová breaks down the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes into specific areas, including interpersonal strategies, personal development and professional socialisation, the management of learning activities, the transformation of knowledge into curriculum, instructional design, the use of specific methodological procedures in teaching, student assessment, evaluation of teaching, self-evaluation and self-reflection, and, last but not least, pedagogical creativity (Vašutová, 2002). This is exemplified, for instance, in the creation of learning materials.

Similarly, Švec understands the pedagogical competence of a university teacher as the sum of the university teacher's prerequisites for effective pedagogical activity in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of teaching, as well as further communication with students. In addition to pedagogical knowledge and skills, pedagogical competence also includes knowledge of the psychology of learning and teaching in higher education, sociology, management, and other disciplines that the teacher applies in addressing pedagogical challenges and guiding students (Švec, 1992).

According to Podlahová (2012, p. 13), pedagogical competence is related to interpersonal strategies, student learning strategies, developing students' personalities and their professional socialisation, managing students' learning activities, transforming new scientific knowledge into curriculum, designing curricula and courses, the use of heuristic, activating and learning-enhancing methodological approaches in teaching, the application of information and technology, student assessment strategies, the development of

[4] In the context of undergraduate preparation, Korbel et al. in their study *Developing Teachers' Pedagogical Competences as a Tool for Preventing Leaving the Profession. A comparative mini-study of the Teacher Alive and PAQ programs* reported that "*teachers who have higher confidence in the pedagogical competencies studied have, on average, lower tendencies to leave the profession"* (Korbel et al., 2021, p. 2).

learning texts and teaching materials, as well as self-evaluation and self-reflection.

In the Czech literature, we also encounter the term 'psycho-pedagogical competence'. Švec (1998) describes it as: "*the skill to analyse the learning from a didactic and psychological point of view*" (Švec, 1998, p. 28). Švec also speaks of the skills to define and operationalise learning objectives to an analysis of the learning, formulate differently challenging learning tasks of varying complexity that align with the learning objectives and the level and abilities of the pupils in the classroom, and prepare visual learning materials to stimulate pupils' learning activities (Švec, 1998).[5]

Similarly, the so-called psycho-pedagogical competence is conceptualised by Vašutová (2007), who includes in this construct the skills to analyse the material, formulate learning tasks, organise pupils' learning activities, and respond to educational situations (Vašutová, 2007).

Mazáčová speaks about the so-called pedagogical-psychological-didactic competences. She characterises them as "*the teacher's ability to work with the curriculum in such a way that it is transformed into the pupil's (student's) awareness and ability to think in the given field, form opinions, discuss, solve tasks and orient themselves independently*" (2014, p. 22).

## Didactic competences

Similar to the pedagogical competences mentioned above, didactic competences are also found in the Czech literature in both singular and plural forms. Vašutová (2007) and Smékalová (2020) use the plural. The latter author focuses on identifying the quality and quantity of teachers' didactic skills and their influence on students' learning competence. She understands didactic competence as "*the number of didactic skills needed for adequate didactic analysis, transformation, externalisation and internalisation of the curriculum by pupils*" (Smékalová, Terminology section, para. 3, 2020).

According to Vašutová, this component of competences covers the selection and didactic transformation of the curriculum, the design and evaluation of teaching, and, for example, learning styles. Together with other competences, it contributes to the achievement of educational objectives (Vašutová, 2007, p. 32).

Gillernová (2003, p. 84) refers to didactic skills as competences that "*express the didactic and methodological*

[5] In the context of the university preparation of future teachers, Švec understands pedagogical competence as a set of prerequisites for a university teacher to engage effectively in the preparation, implementation and evaluation of teaching, as well as further communication with students. In addition to pedagogical knowledge and skills, pedagogical competence also includes knowledge of the psychology of learning and teaching in higher education, sociology, management, and other disciplines that the teacher applies in solving pedagogical problems and guiding students (Švec, 1992).

*readiness of the teacher*". The concept of didactic competence is also frequently used in the context of pre-service teacher preparation. For example, Filová (1994) examines the effect of higher levels of didactic skills on student teachers who have completed a continuous period of teaching practice.

Rotport works with the concept in the singular and considers didactic competence an important component of the professional standard of a teacher of professional subjects. He specifies its content and identifies how it differs from other competences, especially subject-matter and pedagogical competences.[6] At the same time, he highlights the close link between pedagogical and didactic competences (2008a). He further points out that a substantial part of the content of subject-specific competence should be included in didactic competence, especially the issue of creating content for teaching subjects from the relevant disciplines. According to Rotport, a teacher who has acquired didactic competence is proficient in teaching and learning strategies and is able to transform methodological approaches and specifics within a particular subject to suit each pupil and align with the school's focus. At the same time, he/she can create his/her teaching materials and projects to ensure effectiveness and fulfil the stated objectives (Rotport, 2008b).

A number of authors, such as Vašutová (2001), Spilková (2002), Švec (2005), Miklošíková (2013) and Bořkovcová (2013), use the term 'psychodidactic' or 'psycho-didactic' competence, or 'psychodidactic competences' (Spilková & Tomková, 2010) or 'psychodidactic skills'. By "psycho-didactic competence", Švec means the teacher's ability to stimulate students and lead them to independence in acquiring knowledge and understanding. This presupposes the ability of the teacher to work with the curriculum, taking into account the age and individuality of the pupils (Švec, 2005). According to Spilková, psycho-didactic competences are complex psycho-didactic skills

[6] Rotport lists the requirements that didactic competence in a future teacher could include. These include knowledge of the curriculum of the type of school; an understanding of the importance of a particular subject within the curriculum of the type of school; the ability to select relevant knowledge from the relevant professional disciplines and transform it into the curriculum of their professional subjects for the type of school; and the ability to transform the methodology of learning about the relevant professional discipline to suit the way students think and apply it in the classroom; the ability to integrate interdisciplinary knowledge into their teaching subjects; the knowledge of teaching and learning strategies in theoretical and practical terms, in conjunction with knowledge of their psychological and social connections; the ability to use modern information and presentation technologies to support pupils' learning; and the ability to correctly assess the learning outcomes of their pupils, taking into account the relevance of the subject matter, the individual peculiarities of the pupils and the requirements of the particular school (2008b, p. 13).

that facilitate the teacher's handling of pedagogical situations and represent the focus of the teacher's professional competences (Spilková, 2002).

Bořkovcová states that a teacher who has acquired psycho-didactic competence has mastered strategies in teaching and learning. They can transform methodological approaches and specifics within a particular subject based on the needs of each pupil. Part of this subcompetence is the teacher's ability to create teaching materials and projects and to use adequate assessment methods (Bořkovcová et al., 2013). Didactic and psychodidactic competences are defined in detail by Spilková (2002) and Miklošíková (2013).

Zilcher, Chytrý and Lanková (2019) discuss the so-called inclusive-didactic competencies of teachers. The authors point out that high pro-inclusive didactic competences in teachers have a statistically significant effect on the attitudes of pupils with disabilities.

Diaconu defines didactic professional competence as *"an ensemble of cognitive, affective, motivational capacities which together with the personality features give to the teacher the qualities necessary to carrying on a didactical activity which fulfils the proposed objectives and has very good results"* (Diaconu in Gliga, et al., 2002, p. 27).

Karimi sees didactic competences as *"an integration of professional attitudes, knowledge and skills"* that *"enables the individual to fulfil his/her role and effectively influence the students' learning process"* (2014, p. 30). According to her, didactic competences *"(...) require training beyond experience*" (Karimi, 2014, p. 30).

Many authors point out that didactic competences can be included in the cycle of quality planning and implementation to ensure quality education. In this sense, didactic competences are considered an important part of curriculum design, teaching evaluation, and reflection (Shulman, 1986; Turner-Bisset, 2003; Peterson & Tonnesen, 2006; Gilis et al., 2008; Liakopoulou, 2011).

Lukášová (2003) distinguishes pedagogical and didactic competences. To didactic competences, she adds the term 'subject competences', which expresses the aspect of qualified orientation in the content and meaning of the taught subjects and their implementation to a specific school class and specific pupils.

## The pedagogical-didactic competences of a music teacher

The issue of pedagogical-didactic competences of music teachers in general is rarely addressed in the Czech literature. The requirements for music education teachers and the development of the teacher's pedagogical and musical creativity have been dealt with in the past by Sedlák (1979, 1985). Suggestions for the development of teacher skills can be

found in Holas (1995, 1999, 2004), who offers a brief but precise and still relevant insight into the issue of music pedagogy, especially for students at art colleges and in continuing education programmes for teaching staff. Synek´s *Didactics of Music Education I* contributes to developing the skills of the future teacher at the first level of primary school (Synek, 2004).

Kružíková presents supportive didactic materials for pupils with disabilities in the field of music (Kružíková, 2020a, 2020b) and in artistic areas (Kružíková, 2020c). They focus primarily on developing pupils' abilities and skills, but topics that link theoretical knowledge with practical experience also significantly develop teachers' competences.

The professional competences and abilities of future music education teachers in the Czech language environment are touched upon by Lišková (2011), Gajdošová (2010), and Šrámková (2011), who mention the teacher's personal prerequisites for teaching educational and artistic subjects.

Among the authors focusing on the professional competences of music teachers are Puffer and Hofmann (2022) and Kozyr et al. (2021). Kozyr et al. define the competence of a music teacher as „*a body of knowledge in art pedagogy, as well as relevant practical skills and experience, allowing it to be conceptualised as a multifaceted characteristic of an individual*" (Kozyr et al., 2021, p. 70). According to Kozyr, a music educator should

- possess the personal abilities and personality traits required for music educators;
- have the ability to solve problematic situations in art teaching;
- have the professional and pedagogical qualities necessary for the effective performance of professional functions in art teaching;
- be capable of interacting effectively with all subjects of the art learning process, employing the fluent knowledge and skills in pedagogical and artistic communication that are necessary for both the purely informative part of art learning and for creatively productive artistic collaboration by providing an optimistic emotional accompaniment to the learning process;
- be familiar with the existing system of psychological and pedagogical art history, musical performance, musical theoretical knowledge, skills and abilities, including knowledge in the field of the motivational and emotional spheres of the individual;
- possess the ability to act productively based on fundamental knowledge, experience and values;
- have the appropriate quality of professional training according to the state standard of the relevant competency (Kozyr et al., 2021, p. 70).

The National Occupational Framework (MPSV, 2012), which contains a central database of competencies, includes, among other things, experti-

se and skills in the performing arts and creative arts. It also records so-called soft competences, competences for creativity and performance competences.[7]

Much research has focused on examining the competencies, knowledge and skills of music teachers in their practice (Ballantyne & Packer, 2004; Barnes & Shinn-Taylor, 1998; Biasutti, Frate & Concina, 2019; Broeske-Danielsen, 2013; Ferm, 2008). The studies listed above work with empirical material obtained from, for example, the reflective journals of participating music-teaching students. The above-mentioned studies also indicate that reflection on their own experiences supports the development of professional competences in future music teachers…

A study by Breeze, Bolton, and McInch (2023) examines the wider competencies of secondary music teachers in Wales, emphasising their significance over subject-specific skills alone. This research focuses on music teacher competencies in the context of developing a new curriculum framework. Similarly, Burton (2011) addresses the issue of curricular and cultural competences in the context of teacher reform.[8]

One of the few authors who delves more deeply into pedagogical and didactic competences in the field of music education is Holas (2004). He points out that for music teachers, these are important not only for professional education (musical and pedagogical-psychological) but also for general education, including orientation in other disciplines and socio-cultural areas. Holas does not use the term 'pedagogical competence' directly but refers to 'pedagogical work' for music teachers. According to him, a teacher should in his/her activity:

- know the laws of human musical development,
- be familiar with a sufficient number of musical compositions for use in teaching,
- be able to develop creative thinking in pupils and students,
- be able to evaluate the performance of pupils and students.

In addition, Holas emphasises the importance of the music teacher's social-psychological skills (Holas, 2004).[9]

As indicated above, given the limited amount of literature that explicitly addresses music teachers' pedagogical and didactic competences, it is impor-

[7] The existence of the Central Competence Database (CDK) is based on the need to orientate competences in order to define qualification requirements. The CDK maintains a set of competences for all jobs on the market and responds flexibly to the National Occupational Competence Framework (NOC), which works with vocational, general and soft competences. More also available at: https://cdk.nsp.cz/napoveda.

[8] The author points out that a strong collaboration between the school (i.e., teaching practice) and the university (i.e., the preparation of future music teachers) helps pre-service music teachers acquire the necessary cultural and curricular competences.

tant to specify them in more detail. To define these competences more precisely, the selected classification of general pedagogical and didactic competences, as well as the content and specifics of the subject of music education, should be referred to. This requires taking into account both the narrower and broader educational contexts of the field as defined in curriculum documents (Ministry of Education, 2001; Ministry of Education, 2023). Since the conception of pedagogical and didactic competences is often intertwined in the literature, we will hereafter use the term pedagogical-didactic competences in the context of music education teachers

Based on the general characterisation of professional competences by Vašutová (2007, pp. 35-36), the following spectrum of pedagogical-didactic competences of music teachers can be proposed:

## Pedagogical-didactic competences of a music teacher

A music teacher:

- is proficient in theoretical and practical strategies of education and learning, including the integration of artistic and creative aspects, while taking into account psychological and social knowledge and causal relationships;
- effectively uses basic didactic materials and methodological repertoire in teaching music education;
- can adapt music education to the individual abilities, skills and needs of the pupils, as well as to the requirements of a particular school;
- knows strategies for supporting pupils' individual qualities in music and within the broader context of the arts;
- is familiar with the broader context of the educational area defined by curriculum documents, follows trends in the field of music education, and applies his/her knowledge in the context of comprehensive music education teaching and inter-subject connections;
- based on knowledge of curriculum documents, can create a school curriculum for the area, including the field of music education, and use it in the creation of projects related to their teaching;
- knows assessment methods in music education, including their psychological aspects, and is able to use asse-

[9] The existence of the Central Competence Database (CDK) is based on the need to orientate competences in order to define qualification requirements. The CDK maintains a set of competences for all jobs on the market and responds flexibly to the National Occupational Competence Framework (NOC), which works with vocational, general and soft competences. More also available at: https://cdk.nsp.cz/napoveda.

ssment tools in line with the developmental and individual characteristics of pupils and the requirements of the school;
- uses music and other technologies effectively to improve the quality of teaching and to apply a differentiated approach that supports pupils' learning;
- is able to reflect on the educational activities of their pupils and self-reflect on their own actions;
- demonstrates a committed and motivated approach to teaching their field; is able to stimulate interest in music in pupils.

The above set of pedagogical-didactic competences of a music teacher represents a set of interrelated knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes. These competences enable effective planning, implementation and evaluation of music education teaching. They include the mastery of educational strategies in both theoretical and practical terms, the ability to adapt teaching to the individual needs of pupils, current social stimuli, the use of appropriate didactic materials and technologies, a knowledge and implementation of curriculum documents, as well as the ability to make cross-curricular connections. The portfolio of pedagogical and didactic competences of a music teacher also includes the ability to apply appropriate assessment methods and to support the individual development of pupils in the field of music education.

These competences are formed during the teacher's pre-graduate training and further developed during professional practice and education. At the same time, they are influenced by other factors, such as personal growth and motivation to teach music education. Pedagogical-didactic competences are crucial for the implementation of high-quality and comprehensive music teaching.

The aforementioned *Competence Framework for Music Education Graduates*, which will describe in detail the professional competences of future music education teachers, will contribute significantly to the further development of the issue.

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# Exploring the role of body movement in music education and choral practise through autoethnography

*Jiřina Jiřičková, Johann van der Sandt*

**Abstract:** Body movement is deeply rooted in musical expression in all cultures and has an important place in music education and choral practise. This article explores how movement — whether conscious or instinctive — shapes the training and performance of choirs, focussing on the dynamic relationship between conductors and singers. Using auto-ethnographic narratives, the article traces the developmental paths of two individuals involved in music education, focusing on how movement has influenced their development as educators and performers.

Based on a comprehensive theoretical framework that includes the methods of Zoltán Kodály, Émile Jaques-Dalcroze and Carl Orff (Orff-Schulwerk), the article emphasises the deep connection between music and movement. It explores how this synergy promotes cognitive, physical and emotional growth by introducing movement-based practises such as body percussion, rhythmic gymnastics, expressive dance and conducting gestures. These exercises have been shown to improve musical understanding, concentration and emotional expression.

By comparing personal narratives, the article highlights both similarities and differences in the way movement is integrated into choral training. The findings emphasise the inextricable link between music and movement and demonstrate its transformative power in fostering deeper musical engagement and building a sense of community among teachers and learners. Ultimately, the article argues for the continued inclusion of natural movement in artistic and pedagogical practise, emphasising its role as an essential component of music education and the choral arts.

**Keywords**: movement, pedagogical approach, autoethnographic, comparison, choir environment.



DOI: 10.14712/25337890.4846

## Introduction

Across cultures, movement, including body percussion, is deeply intertwined with musical expression. Whether deliberate or spontaneous, movement accompanies musical activities, forming an integral part of how singers and conductors communicate in choral settings. Observing choirs in performance reveals diverse approaches: some remain stationary, others incorporate meticulously rehearsed choreography, while many exhibit natural, organic movements that breathe life into the collective performance.

In music education, teaching and learning have long aligned with interactive rhythms resembling a dance (McIntyre & Cole, 2001). Educators who reflect on their intuitive sense of rhythm can gain profound insights into the pedagogical frameworks that have shaped their practice (Hwang, 2019; McIntyre & Cole, 2001).

This article examines the developmental journeys of two individuals in music education, highlighting how movement has influenced their personal and professional growth. Adopting an autoethnographic perspective delves into pivotal educational experiences that shaped a choral conductor's use of physical activity in their work. By analysing these narratives, the study identifies commonalities and offers recommendations to enhance pedagogical approaches in choral training.

## Theoretical Framework

Music naturally encourages young children to move and serves as a medium for expressing physical and mental states. The rhythmic structure of music motivates movement and promotes cognitive, emotional, physical and social development (van der Sandt & Jiřičková, 2023). This synergy improves concentration, auditory skills, imagination and musical memory. According to Mabingo (2019), movement enhances engagement by transforming music into a shared, immersive experience, while music simultaneously defines and energizes dance, fostering rhythm-driven, collaborative interactions.

Historically, Zoltán Kodály emphasised conscious singing by incorporating melodic analysis and hand signs to aid pitch accuracy. Emile Jacques-Dalcroze emphasised the unity of rhythm, body and mind and used movement to internalise musical nuances such as tempo and dynamics (Jaques-Dalcroze, 2000). His approach combined rhythmic gymnastics (eurythmy), solfčge and improvisation. Similarly, the Orff Schulwerk integrates music and movement as inseparable, using body percussion, folk dance and spontaneous exercises to teach rhythm and instrumental techniques (Keetman, 1977; Kugler, 2013).

Hartmann summarised these systems by placing Kodály's emphasis on singing, Dalcroze's emphasis on physical expressi-

on and Orff's emphasis on creativity and improvisation, highlighting their shared value (Hartmann, 2021). Pedagogues such as Jenčková and Tichá advocate natural movement expression to deepen musical understanding and encourage relaxed singing, emphasising its importance for children's development (Jenčková, 2005; Tichá, 2005; 2024).

Nowadays, musical movement activities are widely integrated into curricula, even though the natural expression of movement is declining in some cultures. Efforts to preserve these traditions emphasise their importance in promoting holistic musical and personal development.

## Literature Review: Movement in Music Education

Rhythm is a fundamental music aspect deeply rooted in daily life and motor skills. Activities such as walking, jumping and running depend on rhythmic patterns that, when mastered, promote complex interactions, social skills and enjoyment of life (Sedlák, 1989). Movement reflects and promotes the perception of rhythm and forms a basis for child development. In some cultures, e.g. in parts of Africa, traditional practices such as carrying children in rhythmic patterns influence rhythm perception and show how cultural contexts shape the understanding of rhythm (Ayres, 1973). In contrast, research by Pretorius and Naude (2002) suggests that such practices can impair visual integration skills, indicating different developmental outcomes.

The dynamic interaction between rhythm and movement stimulates cognitive, emotional and social development. Research shows rhythmic activities improve auditory discrimination, problem-solving, and emotional regulation (Bautista & Ho, 2021; Chronopoulou & Riga, 2012). With music, movement improves physical coordination, social interaction and creative expression and thus promotes holistic development (Jiřičková, 2023). Rhythmic movement sharpens attention, memory and phonological awareness while strengthening communicative skills such as listening, sequencing and vocabulary development. Familiar songs and movement-based games support language learning and self-expression (Kaiser, n.d.). These activities also promote motor skills, creativity, body awareness and self-confidence (Dodge & Colker, cited in Kaiser, n.d.).

Synchronised movements play a crucial role in promoting social bonding and prosocial behaviours. Kragness and Cirelli (2021) link these behaviours to neurohormonal and cognitive factors, suggesting that synchrony has evolved as a survival advantage for group cohesion (Zaraska, 2020).

Rhythmic auditory stimulation (RAS) offers therapeutic and cognitive benefits beyond education. It helps to res-

tore motor function in conditions such as Parkinson's disease (Thaut, 2008). In addition, engagement with music promotes spatial awareness, which is essential for navigating and organising objects, as early musical education improves spatial and spatio-temporal skills (Rauscher, 1999; Maresch & Sorby, 2021).

For children aged 6–10 years, movement-orientated methods effectively promote musicality, creativity and engagement (Szirányi, 2021). Sedlák (1985) and Jenčková (2005) emphasise holistic approaches that integrate motor skills, social interaction and emotional expression to foster a deep connection to music. Movement is an effective pedagogical tool integrated into music, especially during choral performances and rehearsals. Choral singing is about more than just producing sounds; with movement, it is important to promote learning and development. Integrating conducting knowledge and skills into music lessons benefits performance precision, musical clarity, and conceptual understanding (Kelly, 1999). Activities that combine movement and music promote rhythm, motor skills, confidence and language development (Palupi et al., 2019; Mizener, 2008; Badriyah et al., 2020; Kelly, 1999).

Movement is fundamental to child development and promotes physical, cognitive and social-emotional growth. Early childhood movements enable children to explore and understand their environment (Siregar et al., 2021). Basic movement skills such as walking, running and jumping form the foundation for an active lifestyle and are crucial for refining essential skills (Cools et al., 2009). Cognitive development is closely linked to movement, as demonstrated by Piaget's theory, which emphasises its role in early intelligence and knowledge acquisition (Leppo et al., 2000; Cools et al., 2009; Akbar, 2020; Siregar et al., 2021). In addition, physical activity supports social-emotional development by fostering self-confidence, emotional expression and social skills.

Movement is increasingly recognised as essential to shaping and communicating the musical vision in the evolving art of choral conducting. Effective choral conductors translate their musical ideas into precise physical gestures that enhance performance accuracy and musical clarity (Chen et al., 2013; Kelly, 1999). Further research could explore the potential benefits of personalised virtual conductors tailored to individual singers or ensembles (Takatsu et al., 2016).

Children's natural tendency to move while engaging with music emphasises the deep connection between rhythm and movement in their development. This interplay fosters musical growth and contributes significantly to cognitive, physical and emotional development, making movement an indispensable element of music education. Van der Sandt and Jiřičková (2023) emphasise the domi-

nant presence of movement in children's experiences and urge educators to consciously incorporate it into their pedagogical practice to create more dynamic and effective learning environments.

## Methodology: Autoethnographic Approach — a Comparative Analysis of Researcher Narratives

Autoethnography is a research method that combines the researcher's personal experiences with sociocultural analysis to provide a unique lens for understanding cultural phenomena (Ellis et al., 2011). This study utilises an autoethnographic approach to compare the narratives of two researchers and use their reflective accounts to explore the meaning of movement in music and choral education. By systematically analysing personal experiences, the study links individual insights to broader cultural contexts (Adams & Manning, 2015). This methodology is based on the belief that research is inherently political, socially just and socially conscious (Ellis et al., 2011). It emphasises self-awareness and reflexivity and is consistent with transpersonal psychology's focus on self-discovery and transformation through lived experience (Raab, 2015). By bridging the personal and academic spheres, autoethnography enables researchers to critically examine their practises while engaging with broader societal implications (Deibert et al., 2021). The comparative analysis of the two researchers' narratives highlights their unique perspectives on movement in music education. Through themes of personal growth, pedagogical innovation, and the integration of movement into classroom practice, the study uncovers connections between private experiences and public educational practices (Raab, 2015; Deibert et al., 2021).

This study employs a thematic analysis of the researchers' narratives, organised around the following areas, to examine the role of movement in choral- and music education:

- **Personal background in movement and rhythm:** Exploration of formative experiences with movement, including education and participation in movement-based activities;
- **Movement in pedagogical practices:** Analysis of how conductors use movement to enhance rhythmic precision, phrasing, and dynamics in choral rehearsals;
- **Rhythmic intuition and conducting style:** Investigation of the influence of improvisational movement on individual conducting styles;
- **Collaboration through movement:** Evaluation of movement's role in fostering group cohesion, rhythmic energy, and vocal expression;
- **Impact on student outcomes:** Assessment of how movement influences

student engagement, confidence, and rehearsal dynamics.

Brief biographical profiles of the two researchers provide context for their perspectives and give insight into the personal and professional experiences that characterise their narratives. This thematic framework facilitates a comprehensive analysis and enables the researchers to gain deeper cultural insights through their reflective enquiry.

Using autoethnography, this study contributes to the discourse on embodied pedagogical practises and offers practical and theoretical insights into the integration of movement in music education.

## Narratives

This section presents the narratives of the two authors of this article (Researcher 1 and Researcher 2), whose pedagogical approaches emphasise the integration of movement and rhythm in the music and choral classroom. Each researcher offers a unique perspective on how these elements shape their teaching and influence student development.

Together, these narratives explore the transformative role of movement in music education, demonstrating how rhythmic and physical engagement can enhance musical understanding, promote emotional expression, and foster a collaborative spirit within the ensemble. The section concludes with a comparative analysis and discussion of these two narratives, highlighting their shared values and distinct approaches to integrating movement and rhythm in their teaching practices.

### Researcher 1

**Brief Biography**

Researcher 1 has over two decades of experience in education, specializing in music education, pedagogy, and choral conducting. During her academic training in the Czech Republic, she focused on Music Education, Teaching for Lower Secondary Levels, and Foreign Language Teaching. As part of her studies, she spent a year on a scholarship abroad, where she actively participated in a university choir and began conducting a senior choir, a role she continued for several years, regularly traveling to work with its members.

She also pursued extensive musical training, completing five years of solo singing and earning a diploma in piano performance. During this period, she participated in choral activities and completed foundational training in choral conducting. After completing her studies and spending a year abroad, she founded a children's choir, which she has directed for over 20 years. The choir has since grown to include three age-based sections with approximately 100 singers.

She has achieved habilitation in Music Theory and Pedagogy and has directed other choirs for both children and seniors. In addition to her choral work, she has taught at various educational levels and is currently a university lecturer specializing in the didactics of music education for primary and secondary school educators. She also conducts workshops designed to engage children, seniors, and practicing teachers, as well as pedagogical training sessions for students and educators.

Researcher 1 is deeply committed to the children's choir she established, which has become one of the most prominent in its region. Under her leadership, the choir regularly participates in competitive and non-competitive events, significantly contributing to the local cultural scene. Its activities include weekly rehearsals, weekend retreats, summer music camps, and performances in both domestic and international venues.

The choir, under her direction, has recorded multiple CDs and staged several children's operas and musicals, further cementing its reputation and cultural impact.

**Personal background in movement and rhythm**

My connection with rhythm and movement began in early childhood. In kindergarten, I loved swaying to the rhythm of music, joyfully jumping and dancing—sometimes alone, with other children, or alongside my mother. These activities often included clapping, stomping to accompany songs, and playing Orff instruments. At home, I sang in my mother's choir and followed her guidance in complementing folk songs with rhythmic movements. My mother often sang expressively, performing various children's songs accompanied by improvised movements, creating a playful and creative musical atmosphere.

From a young age, I thoroughly enjoyed attending the dance department of the elementary art school. Those classes often included rhythmic gymnastics elements, making them even more engaging. As I grew older, my involvement in dance shifted toward modern gymnastics and the fundamentals of expressive dance. In my free time, I loved inventing dance sequences inspired by the music I heard.

In seventh grade, I started attending a country dance club with a classmate and later transitioned to modern dance courses, which featured dance elements set to pop and rock music. Like many of my peers, I took a six-month introductory course in ballroom dancing during high school but chose not to pursue it further. However, I continued dancing on my own at home and after school. Alongside dance, I explored music by learning piano and guitar and led a theatre group.

At 17, I returned to expressive dance and enrolled in the elementary art school to study it more formally. This renewed

my connection to movement and music, allowing me to discover how movement could express emotions and moods. I found it especially rewarding to align my movements with the tone length and qualities of the music, a process that felt natural to me.

One of the most significant influences on my journey in expressive dance was my teacher, whose approach blended various methods over the decade I danced under her guidance, with some breaks in between. While my dance education was deeply intertwined with music and movement, my experiences in school choirs—spanning early elementary school through college—did not incorporate movement as a teaching component. Despite this, my experiences with rhythm and movement have remained a fundamental part of my personal and artistic growth.

**Movement in pedagogical practices**

I incorporate various music and movement elements in my choir classes to enhance engagement and learning. These include body games, conducting gestures, phonogestics, mime, elementary movement improvisation and simple dance elements. The variety and complexity of these activities vary depending on the age of the children; younger learners experience a wider range of physical activities. For example, when I introduce a new song to seven- or eight-year-olds, I often have them start by acting out the movement of the melody with their hands. Other times, they might go to the song's beat and explore its character — whether light, bouncy, or dance-like.

The children clap rhythms or rhythmic excerpts from the song with their bodies. Depending on age and circumstances, these can be basic forms of body percussion or more advanced activities. In the beginning, the children master one type of body play and gradually add other variations, such as clapping in different positions (e.g. in front of the body, behind the body, above the head or under the leg) and with outstretched palms or arms.

I adapt the activities according to the needs of the group. For example, the children can play individually, in pairs facing each other, in small groups, in a circle or freely scattered around the room. Movement serves as a means of self-expression in preparatory rhythmic or vocal exercises or the natural accompaniment of a song with gestures. Sometimes, we incorporate dance steps, such as the mazurka, the polka or the waltz, which younger children enthusiastically take up. I incorporate dance steps as part of the choir choreography for older singers. We work together to find the most effective hand movements or gestures that suit the choir's positioning and the singers' creative input.

Many children already have experience with sports and some with dance, but their involvement in movement-based

activities increases significantly over time. At the age of 15, many choir members participate in introductory ballroom dance classes, as I did when I was their age. Older singers also enjoy physical activities, including body games or other movement elements, if they fit the song's character.

Kinaesthetic learning is important in my lessons, especially with younger students. Over time, as singers develop a solid foundation in music theory and note reading, I encourage them to sing from sheet music. Even then, movement remains an essential component: singers often hold the sheet music with one hand while tapping the metre or tracing the melody in the air with the other. As a choirmaster, I sometimes use hand signals in front of the choir to visualise melodic progressions, creating a visual and physical connection to the music.

This dynamic integration of movement into choir rehearsals promotes a holistic learning environment that supports both musical development and physical expression. It encourages singers of all ages to engage intensively with music and combine theoretical knowledge with physical experience.

**Rhythmic intuition and conducting style**

When rehearsing and conducting my children's choir, I prioritise precision in my gestures to provide clear direction and strictly adhere to instructions. However, I do not always rely solely on traditional conducting gestures. I use my hands in certain moments to "paint" the piece's mood, aiming to convey changes in melody or agogics expressively. The children respond attentively to my gestures, adapting their singing immediately. Interestingly, even when my gestures are imprecise, or I unintentionally misrepresent a section, the children follow my lead and sing accordingly. While unnoticed by the audience due to our collaborative approach, these moments highlight the strong connection between my conducting style and their intuitive response.

Each choir rehearsal follows a structured format, beginning with warm-up exercises and then singing and practising several songs at varying difficulty levels. The focus of my conducting gestures naturally shifts depending on the specific demands of each piece. To maintain the children's attention and motivation, I frequently incorporate diverse movement-based activities tailored to the characteristics of the song being rehearsed. For instance, I may employ different forms of movement accompaniment or emphasise particular physical gestures to enhance engagement.

I also encourage the singers to actively participate in shaping these movement activities. They are welcome to suggest alternative variations or adapt the movements I introduce if the adjustment does not conflict with an exact require-

ment—for example, precise rhythmic tapping. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of ownership among the singers and enriches the rehearsal process by integrating their creativity into our practice.

By balancing precise instruction with expressive and adaptive gestures, I strive to cultivate technical accuracy and artistic interpretation in my choir, fostering a dynamic and engaging learning environment.

**Collaboration through movement**

I have observed that movement activities, particularly those involving pairs or small groups, are highly enjoyable for children, especially those in the younger school-age range. These activities have the added benefit of encouraging children to repeat tasks multiple times without realising they are engaging in a learning process. I find that regular repetition of such activities helps to strengthen their sense of rhythm. Less experienced pupils often learn effectively through imitation, supported by their more experienced peers. Within our choir rehearsals, whether in our rehearsal room or during regular practice sessions, I notice increasing confidence in movement and rhythmic activities, accompanied by the joy of successfully completing manageable tasks.

I integrate a variety of motivational activities during choir training and choir outings. These not only develop the rhythmic skills of the singers but also serve as a form of entertainment that enhances their overall well-being. When working with older children, I observe that preparatory rhythmic and movement exercises significantly improve their proficiency and self-confidence. This, in turn, allows them to move naturally in other contexts without overthinking their actions. Their relaxed demeanour fosters free, natural singing and creates a subconscious space for deeper emotional engagement.

On some occasions, I have used deliberately expressive gestures to enhance the emotional intensity of a particular song. However, I noticed that the children tended to perceive the activity more as a theatrical performance in these instances. This experience has led me to consider the balance between expressive movement and maintaining a natural, intuitive connection to the music.

**Impact on student outcomes**

The way I apply movement elements in my choir is deeply influenced by my childhood experiences with movement, my formal studies, and the educational methodologies I prioritise. Over the past 20 years, my approach has evolved significantly, mainly as I have gained a deeper understanding of Orff-Schulwerk principles and incorporated elements of Dalcroze training. I have observed that singers who spend a substantial amount of time in the choir embrace this move-

ment-based approach as natural. It often lifts their spirits, fosters enthusiasm, and visibly enhances their motor skills. As the singers gain more experience, I am able to introduce more complex rhythmic ostinatos and polyphonic structures into our repertoire.

When I notice a choir member struggling with a rhythmic challenge, I adapt the activity to a simplified version that allows them to remain engaged and included. Additionally, I sometimes rearrange the group spatially, interspersing less confident members with stronger singers who can provide subtle support. This approach ensures that all members feel secure and confident within the ensemble.

Mistakes during rehearsals are handled light-heartedly, reinforcing a supportive and collaborative atmosphere. If choreography is momentarily disrupted during a performance, choir members instinctively offer subtle cues to help each other recover. Movement is seamlessly integrated into our choral sessions, contributing not only to the singers' enjoyment of music but also to the overall structure of the lessons and the development of their vocal and physical coordination.

## Researcher 2

### Brief Biography

Researcher 2 completed his undergraduate and postgraduate studies in music and pursued advanced training in choral conducting at an institute in the Netherlands. Throughout his career, he has worked as a composer, conductor, arranger, and adjudicator, with experience at both national and international levels.

He has conducted a wide range of ensembles, including children's choirs, youth choirs, university choirs, and adult choirs. He also founded a chamber choir dedicated to the recording, development, and preservation of regional choral music. Additionally, he directed a mixed student choir that received various awards and contributed to the international reputation of a boys' choir as a leading ensemble in its category.

Since 2015, he has been based in Italy, where he serves as a professor of Musicology and Music Education. He conducts multiple ensembles, including a university choir, a male choir, and a provincial youth choir. He also directs an organization focused on providing musical education for children through singing.

Over the course of his career, Researcher 2 has participated in numerous choral and educational projects, contributing to the fields of music education and choral conducting as a lecturer, adjudicator, and conductor.

### Personal background in movement and rhythm

Reflecting on my early experiences with movement education, I realise how profoundly they shaped my confidence, cre-

ativity, and discipline. Movement and rhythm were integral to my daily life, with childhood memories filled with rhythmic clapping, foot stomping, and spontaneous dancing during moments of joy or communal celebration.

A transformative moment was my introduction to drumming in a community where contributing to a collective rhythm fostered empowerment and belonging. I discovered that my individual rhythm contribution, however small, was essential to a larger whole. These experiences nurtured a somatic awareness, making movement and rhythm a path for self-expression, resilience, and confidence.

Rhythmic practices also fuelled my creativity, mainly through improvisation. Experimenting with syncopation and tempo felt like a playful dialogue with movement and sound, teaching me that rhythm can be structured yet flexible. This freedom encouraged risk-taking and expanded my creative boundaries.

Discipline was another key outcome. Achieving a steady rhythm required focus, patience, and consistency, which instilled perseverance in my personal and professional life. This rhythm of engagement now informs my teaching, where I highlight rhythm as a pathway to self-expression and growth.

Movement education also deepened my appreciation for kinaesthetic learning, where physical engagement enhances understanding. This insight has shaped my teaching philosophy, prioritising active, physical engagement to create meaningful and transformative learning experiences.

**Movement in pedagogical practices**

Movement is an essential tool in my teaching, encouraging interaction and deepening students' understanding of music. I firmly believe in the power of rhythm and music to bring people together and create meaningful connections. Throughout my career, I have seen how these elements, rooted in ancient tribal traditions, unite communities in a way that words often cannot. While modern society has moved away from such practises, I have found that incorporating rhythmic and movement-based activities in the classroom can reignite that deep sense of belonging.

For me, educational spaces are dynamic environments where movement and music come together to create profound opportunities for learning, cultural exchange and collaboration. Through my work in music and choral education, I have seen how incorporating movement into musical activities fosters deeper engagement, enhances learning and connects the diverse backgrounds of participants.

Movement, whether through rhythmic activities or choral performances, becomes a powerful tool to connect people and allow them to communicate and collaborate beyond words. I have seen

these practises transform classrooms and rehearsal spaces into vibrant communities where unity and common purpose thrive. This belief in the transformative power of movement and music fuels my passion and inspires me every day in my work. I recognise the physical nature of rhythm and use movement to make abstract musical concepts more tangible. Activities such as clapping, body percussion and call-and-response exercises help students to internalise rhythm in a kinaesthetic way. This approach makes learning intuitive and strengthens the link between rhythm, memory and development. Psychologists have found that rhythm promotes memory from an early age. This can be seen in children's natural reactions to rhythmic sounds and rhymes, which emphasises the role of rhythm in language and memory formation.

Movement also makes music lessons more accessible to students struggling with traditional notation or theoretical concepts. Students develop an instinctive understanding without feeling overwhelmed by analysis by embodying rhythm through actions such as clapping or swaying. This reflects historical practices where rhythmic patterns fostered cultural and emotional foundations.

Incorporating movement into pedagogy promotes inclusion by appealing to different learning styles and ensuring students can engage and excel. Ultimately, integrating movement and rhythm in the classroom fosters community strengthens memory and confidence, and introduces students to the universal language of music.

**Rhythmic intuition and conducting style**

Rhythm is the cornerstone of my conducting philosophy and characterises my gestures and the entire musical experience of my ensembles. My early immersion in rhythm has profoundly influenced my approach. I emphasise that conducting is not limited to the movements of the hands but involves the whole body. Every subtle to expansive gesture conveys dynamics, phrasing and emotional intent. At its core, rhythmic intuition is essential to creating a common pulse, synchronising understanding and effectively communicating musical ideas.

I firmly believe that choristers must also master basic conducting patterns. In rehearsals, they are encouraged to conduct as they sing, harmonising their physical gestures with the beat and momentum of the music. This dual engagement deepens their rhythmic understanding and cultivates a grounded sense of flow, resulting in dynamic, coherent and rhythmically secure performances.

Synchronising rhythmic understanding within the ensemble encourages collaboration and responsiveness. By modelling rhythmic energy and encouraging physical interaction with the beat,

I create an environment where music is intuitively felt as a living force. This foundation allows the singers to connect with the music and each other deeply, fostering individual creativity and collective expression.

For me, rhythmic momentum is the backbone of music. It provides a subconscious framework that allows singers to feel safe while exploring the emotional and artistic dimensions of the repertoire. Together, we cultivate an ensemble that performs and embodies rhythm as an integral, living element of the musical journey.

**Collaboration through movement**

Movement is a powerful tool for fostering cooperation and unity in choirs, promoting trust through shared rhythmic and physical activities. Exercises such as clapping, stepping, and synchronised gestures create a collective sense of rhythm, breaking down barriers and encouraging singers to shift focus from individual voices to the ensemble. By engaging choir members in movement, I help them embody rhythm and dynamics, transforming their understanding into a deeply felt experience that enhances musical performance and interpersonal connections.

My appreciation for collaboration and creativity in choirs was shaped by my experiences in South Africa, where music, movement, and rhythm were deeply interconnected. Conducting and teaching in this context often encouraged choristers to contribute choreography ideas, fostering a shared sense of responsibility and creativity. These collaborative efforts enriched performances and strengthened the group's connection to the music. Now working in Europe, I continue to prioritise movement in rehearsals, guiding singers more directly but still encouraging their input to ensure inclusivity and dynamism. Movement serves as both an artistic and unifying force within the ensemble.

Incorporating movement transforms rehearsals into collaborative experiences. Simple rhythmic exercises evolve into complex patterns that require singers to synchronise and connect, reinforcing a shared rhythm. Gestures, swaying, or striding in unison allow the choir to cultivate a cohesive sound and emotional resonance. Movement becomes a common language that deepens ensemble connections and fosters collaboration and trust.

One of the most rewarding outcomes is seeing choristers taking ownership of the they make. Inviting them to contribute to choreography or experiment with gestures turns rehearsals into spaces of exploration and expression. This approach strengthens their connection to the music and fosters community, resulting in performances imbued with collective joy and meaning.

Whether in South Africa or Europe, I remain committed to the transformati-

ve power of movement and collaboration. This philosophy celebrates the shared heartbeat of music, the beauty of creative unity, and the deep connections that emerge when individuals come together to create something greater than themselves.

**Impact on student outcomes**

Integrating movement and rhythm into the classroom significantly improves student outcomes and fosters personal growth, creativity and a deeper connection to music. Rhythmic body percussion and movement exercises allow students to physically experience rhythm through clapping, tapping, stomping and stepping. We start with simple patterns and increase the complexity so that the students internalise the rhythm through repetition and transform it from an abstract concept into a tangible experience. Call and response exercises strengthen this connection by combining sound and gesture to improve listening, movement skills and rhythmic understanding.

I use spatial dynamics and movement-based phrasing to explore musical expression, such as rising to represent crescendos or imitating legato lines with arms outstretched. These activities encourage emotional engagement and personal interpretation, making movement a bridge to expressiveness. Role-playing and storytelling through gesture immerse students in the narrative aspects of music, deepening their interpretive skills and understanding of the emotional qualities of music.

Improvised movement and dance foster creativity and confidence by allowing students to respond freely to rhythms and melodies, encouraging self-expression and independence. Learning form through movement mapping, i.e. assigning movements to sections of a piece, anchors students' understanding of the musical structure and builds their confidence in navigating compositions.

Props and instruments, such as scarves and percussion instruments, extend the movement to visualise phrasing, dynamics and rhythm. Mirror exercises promote awareness of the ensemble and teamwork and improve sensitivity to timing and group cohesion. Mindful movements at the beginning or end of the lesson improve concentration and the willingness to learn.

This active, movement-based approach transforms passive observation into participation, promoting body awareness, coordination and an enduring love of music. It promotes resilience, adaptability and creativity and enriches students' musical and personal development.

## Comparative Analysis of Teaching Styles: Similarities and Differences

### Personal background in movement and rhythm

Researcher 1 and Researcher 2 provide personal insights into the profound impact of rhythm and movement on their lives, but their perspectives differ in focus and methodology.

Researcher 1's experience is firmly rooted in structured activities, beginning in childhood with clapping, dancing and playing Orff instruments. Formal dance training, including rhythmic gymnastics and expressive and modern dance, shaped her artistic development. Music was central to this journey as she participated in her mother's choir, learned piano and guitar and led a theatre group. A key influence was a teacher whose varied methods, spanning over a decade, created a strong connection between music and movement. Although her school choir experience did not include a movement component, Researcher 1 highlights how rhythm and movement became integral to her artistic identity.

In contrast, Researcher 2 sees rhythm and movement as inextricably linked to daily life and community interaction. Early experiences such as rhythmic clapping, spontaneous dancing and drumming fostered a sense of belonging and self-expression. Improvisation provided a creative outlet to explore rhythm's structured yet flexible nature. For Researcher 2, rhythm was also a means to develop discipline, resilience and personal growth — qualities that inform his teaching philosophy today. His approach emphasises kinaesthetic learning, where physical engagement promotes understanding inspired by his transformative experiences.

While Researcher 1 emphasises formal education and artistic progression, Researcher 2 focuses on rhythm's collaborative, improvisational and adaptive aspects. However, both believe in the transformative power of rhythm and movement, not only as tools for education or art but as profound mediums for self-expression, growth and connection.

In her teaching practice, Researcher 1 uses movement to embody music. She integrates body percussion and improvisational dance to foster rhythmic intuition and emotional connection. This approach enhances students' creativity, memory, coordination and confidence. Both researchers integrate principles from Orff Schulwerk and the Dalcroze pedagogy and use structured movement exercises to support rhythmic understanding and promote ensemble cohesion. Their students develop vocal technique, physical coordination, and cooperative skills by synchronising body and voice. Both Researchers' methods demonstrate

the potential of rhythm and movement to promote musical education and personal development.

## Movement in pedagogical practices

Researcher 1 and Researcher 2 emphasise the transformative role of integrating movement into music lessons, albeit with different emphases and approaches. Both researchers agree on the importance of movement in deepening musical understanding and engagement. Researcher 1 views movement as a universal tool that helps to internalise rhythm and improve memory, while Researcher 2 emphasises its practical application in choral contexts to enrich rehearsal dynamics and performance.

A shared focus on accessibility and integration emphasises their methods. Researcher 1 addresses the value of movement for different learning styles, while Researcher 2 adapts activities to different age groups and physical abilities to ensure inclusion in the choral environment. Both researchers also advocate kinaesthetic learning, which is central to musical development. Researcher 1 emphasises the ability to make abstract musical concepts more tangible, and Researcher 2 illustrates this through detailed examples such as clapping, body play and dance steps that enhance students' musical understanding. In addition, both emphasise the motivational benefits of movement, with Researcher 1 highlighting the ability to generate enthusiasm through rhythmic exercises and Researcher 2 developing engaging physical activities for younger and older singers alike.

Despite these shared principles, their approaches differ in scope and focus. Researcher 1 takes a broader perspective, placing movement within a cultural and psychological framework and exploring its universal relevance in different educational contexts. In contrast, Researcher 2 takes a more specific focus and applies movement directly to choral rehearsals using age-appropriate strategies and practical techniques. Researcher 2 also addresses different group configurations, such as working in pairs, circles or freely distributed groups, tailored explicitly to choir members' needs. Researcher 1 presents a distinctive perspective by emphasising the unifying power of movement in her work. Whether in music education or choral work, her methods emphasise how movement cultivates a common purpose and connection between participants, making it a fundamental aspect of her practise.

Regarding developmental considerations, Researcher 2 addresses age-specific strategies by introducing more uncomplicated dance steps for younger children and adapting activities for older singers with prior physical experience. Researcher 1, on the other hand, emphasises the timeless and universal benefits of

movement that apply to all ages and learning levels. Furthermore, the contexts in which they use movement differ: Researcher 1 views it as a universal cultural and pedagogical tool, while Researcher 2 relates it directly to vocal performance and provides concrete examples of how movement complements the dynamics of rehearsal work.

Both narratives emphasise the profound impact of movement in music education, with shared priorities of kinaesthetic learning, accessibility and student engagement. While Researcher 1 takes a theoretical, overarching approach, researcher 2 offers a detailed, practise-orientated perspective tailored to age and experience. Together, these complementary viewpoints illuminate the multifaceted value of movement in promoting musical growth, inclusivity and cohesion.

## Rhythmic intuition and conducting style

Both researchers underscore the centrality of rhythm as a foundational aspect of conducting and ensemble work. They argue that conducting extends beyond traditional hand gestures, involving the entire body as a medium to express musical intent and convey artistic expression. A shared emphasis is placed on rehearsals' collaborative and interactive nature, which fosters engagement and creativity among singers. Additionally, both researchers highlight the importance of tailoring gestures and rehearsal activities to meet the specific needs of the ensemble, whether these adaptations serve expressive or motivational purposes.

Despite these similarities, the researchers diverge in their approaches. Researcher 2 prioritises rhythmic intuition as a holistic framework, advocating for both conductors and choristers to master conducting patterns to deepen their rhythmic understanding. In contrast, Researcher 1 emphasises the precision of gestures, particularly in working with younger singers, and incorporates movement exercises tailored to their developmental stages to maintain focus and engagement. While Researcher 2 views rhythm as an unconscious and unifying force in music, Researcher 1 adopts a more practical perspective, adapting gestures and movements to align with the specific requirements of individual songs. Moreover, Researcher 1 explicitly incorporates improvisation and flexibility into rehearsal activities, encouraging singers to propose variations, whereas Researcher 2 focuses on achieving synchronisation and shared rhythmic momentum within the ensemble.

## Collaboration through movement

Both researchers underscore the significance of movement in music education, emphasising its role in fostering rhythm

and engagement within choral settings. Researcher 2 highlights movement as a tool for promoting unity and emotional connection within choirs, while Researcher 1 focuses on its importance in developing rhythmic skills and sustaining engagement, particularly among younger singers. Both adopt collaborative and inclusive approaches, valuing the active participation of ensemble members. Researcher 2 encourages choir members to contribute ideas for choreography, while Researcher 1 emphasises peer learning through imitation and group interaction. Furthermore, both researchers recognise the emotional dimension of movement, noting its ability to enhance trust and confidence. Researcher 2 observes that movement helps singers embody rhythm and dynamics, while Researcher 1 highlights its role in fostering a natural singing style and building confidence.

Despite these shared perspectives, the researchers differ in their focus and methodologies. Researcher 2 primarily explores the experiences of adult or mixed-age choirs in diverse cultural contexts, including South Africa and Europe, with an emphasis on artistic and cultural collaboration. In contrast, Researcher 1 concentrates on younger, school-age children and the developmental benefits of movement in music education. The types of activities they advocate also diverge: Researcher 2 emphasises ensemble exercises such as clapping, tapping and synchronised gestures to promote unity. In contrast, Researcher 1 emphasises smaller, often repetitive tasks performed in pairs or groups that develop essential skills and encourage elementary musical creativity.

Researcher 2 approaches movement through a philosophical lens, viewing it as a means of artistic expression, emotional depth and collective harmony in performance. In contrast, Researcher 1 takes a more pragmatic stance, viewing movement as a developmental tool to balance expressive gestures and natural singing. This perspective also addresses practical challenges, such as the fact that younger singers often misinterpret expressive movement as too theatrical, leading to an adaptation of teaching strategies. Researcher 2, on the other hand, focuses less on such challenges and more on movement's transformative and unifying potential.

In summary, both researchers advocate for incorporating movement into choral practice, though their emphases differ. Researcher 2 prioritises collective artistry and emotional connection, while Researcher 1 highlights developmental benefits and practical strategies tailored to younger learners.

## Impact on student outcomes

Both researchers recognise the significant role of movement in enhancing students' musical development, empha-

sising its ability to foster creativity, engagement, and a deeper connection to music. Movement is incorporated to improve rhythmic understanding and physical coordination, linking bodily actions to core musical concepts such as rhythm, dynamics, and phrasing. Both also emphasise the importance of creating a supportive and collaborative environment through movement, promoting teamwork, ensemble awareness, and mutual support among participants. Additionally, each researcher highlights the necessity of adapting movement exercises to suit the specific needs of learners, ensuring inclusivity and sustained motivation for all students.

Despite these shared perspectives, their approaches reveal notable differences. Researcher 2 strongly emphasises using movement to facilitate emotional expression and personal interpretation of music, employing role-playing storytelling and improvisation techniques. This approach enables students to express themselves freely and creatively. Moreover, Researcher 2 integrates a diverse range of props, including scarves, ribbons, small percussion instruments, and kinaesthetic exercises, which are less prominent in Researcher 1's methodology.

Researcher 1 takes a more methodical approach, emphasising the gradual development of skills over time to help singers build confidence and feel more comfortable with their movement. This approach ensures that the naturalness of the movement complements and enhances the musical expression. As students progress, more complex rhythmic challenges and spatial arrangements are carefully introduced to encourage steady growth. Researcher 1 also tailors the movement exercises to involve all choir members, focusing on the spatial and relational dynamics within the group. A relaxed, light-hearted attitude towards mistakes or disruptions during rehearsals is encouraged, creating a cooperative and supportive atmosphere.

In contrast, Researcher 2 relies on imaginative methods, such as visualising musical forms and improvising to melodies, to encourage creativity and exploration. While Researcher 1 emphasises group engagement and cohesion, Researcher 2 focuses more on achieving specific learning outcomes centred on movement.

## Summary

The comparative analysis shows that both researchers emphasise the transformative role of movement in music education, recognising its ability to enhance rhythmic understanding, creativity and engagement while promoting collaboration and integration. Researcher 2 emphasises movement as a universal and artistic tool, using props, improvisation and storytelling to facilitate emotional expression and personal

interpretation, with a broader focus on cultural and psychological frameworks. Researcher 1 adopts a structured and pragmatic approach, carefully designing movement exercises to align with specific developmental stages. This method places a strong emphasis on cultivating children's musical and creative abilities while promoting engagement and practical skill-building, particularly in younger learners. While Researcher 2 emphasises movement's artistic and unifying power, Researcher 1 underscores the developmental advantages of movement, offering practical strategies to help singers achieve a natural, unselfconscious expression in harmony with music. This process is supported by a light-hearted and adaptable rehearsal environment, fostering both growth and creativity. Despite these differences, both approaches emphasise the profound impact of movement on musical growth and ensemble cohesion.

## Conclusion

This autoethnographic study sheds light on the intricate relationship between movement and music education by comparing the narratives of two researchers. Through reflective analysis, the study explores how movement shapes choral practice, influences pedagogical approaches, and enhances educators' and performers' personal and professional development. By integrating movement into the music classroom, the study emphasises the transformative potential to enhance musical understanding, promote collaboration, and build community among learners and performers.

Regarding the autoethnographic approach, this methodology offers unique advantages as it allows researchers to combine personal experiences with broader cultural and pedagogical insights. It enables deep introspection and a holistic understanding of the dynamic interplay between conductors and singers – teacher and pupils, revealing how movement influences teaching and learning. However, this approach has certain limitations, including the potential for subjectivity, difficulties in generalising the findings beyond the specific context of the researchers, and the inherent constraints of qualitative research, which limit the diversity of perspectives by excluding contributions from a larger sample of researchers. These insights pave the way for investigating how cultural, institutional and personal factors influence the inclusion of movement in music lessons. Future research could explore the cross-cultural applications of movement in music education, including the benefits of adapting musical movement strategies from diverse cultural traditions. its impact on learners with different abilities, and the long-term cognitive, emotional, and social benefits of embodied musical practises. In addition, investigating the adaptation of peda-

gogical concepts such as Kodály, Jaques-Dalcroze and Orff-Schulwerk to modern educational contexts offers a promising direction for further study.

From a practical perspective, this study provides several recommendations for music education. Teachers and conductors are encouraged to regularly integrate movement-based activities such as body percussion, rhythmic games and expressive dance into their lessons to improve rhythmic precision, musical expression and group cohesion. Movement should not only be seen as a tool, but as a fundamental part of music teaching that promotes the holistic development of learners by addressing their cognitive, physical and emotional abilities.

This study reinforces the notion that movement is an essential and universal component of musical expression that transcends cultural boundaries and enriches both individual and collective experiences. By advocating for the preservation and promotion of natural movement as a pedagogical and artistic tool, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on music education and emphasises the transformative potential of embodied musical practise.

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# Singing in music education as a tool for the development of children's communication skills

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**Abstract:** This chapter examines how singing in music education serves as a valuable method for developing children's communication skills. Far from being merely a musical exercise, singing opens unique opportunities for children to express themselves, form social relationships and improve emotional well-being, providing a solid foundation for lifelong communication skills. When singing in a group, children develop essential skills - such as attentive listening, empathy and cooperative teamwork, which contribute to their social identity and emotional health. However, group singing is in decline, partly due to digital distractions and changing pedagogical methods, which threatens its place in today's school programmes. Citing relevant research by academics on the subject, this chapter emphasises the urgent need for an innovative, holistic teaching approach to reintegrate singing into music lessons. It argues that including singing in formal music curricula can develop musical skills and social and emotional competencies crucial for building responsible and engaged members of society.

**Keywords:** Singing, music education, social skills, communication skills

## Introduction and Literature Review

Singing, a joyful and fun activity, is crucial in engaging children in music and involving them deeply in their education (Marsh & Young, 2016). For young learners, music is not just a separate concept; it is naturally interwoven into their everyday experiences. As Welch (2001) states, singing is an essential element of childhood and development, which children would continue to do even without formal music lessons as it is a basic human behaviour. Music is an active, shared experience for children – a perspective emphasised by Small (1998), who stresses that music is not just an object but an activity that people do together. Small further argues that it is crucial to understand music as an action rather than a "thing". Singing becomes

 DOI: 10.14712/25337890.4848

an interactive, playful way for children to express themselves, connect with others and become aware of their surroundings (Niland, 2019). This chapter examines how singing promotes the development of communication skills in children.

Gordon (1990), Gardner (1993), and May (2013) all stress the importance of fostering musical abilities in early childhood, as young children are naturally receptive to environmental influences. Educators play a crucial role in this process. Niland's (2019) study highlights the positive effects of singing activities, showing improvements in communication skills, creativity, identity, and agency. The ages of 3 to 5 represent a crucial period for music education, as children rapidly absorb information. With educators at the forefront, Gardner's advocacy for early musical exposure helps create a solid foundation for child development.

Research by Kreutz et al. (2015), Keeler et al. (2015), Blank and Adamek (2010), and Welch et al. (2014) reveals the emotional impact of music on the brain. Their findings indicate strong links between singing and children's social integration, reduced stress, and increased positive emotions. These studies also indicate that regular singing supports learning, sound processing, language, and literacy, all linked to accelerated brain development. For educators, understanding music's emotional impact is essential.

Reimer (2009) and Regelski (1996) underscore music's role in holistic growth, describing it as a universal human trait that fosters personal development, problem-solving, and critical thinking. As a universal art form, singing promotes emotional expression and bridges cultural divides. Reimer (2009) further suggests that singing in religious contexts can be a profound spiritual experience, connecting individuals and a sense of the divine.

Barrett et al. (2018) and Hallam (2015) affirm the value of early musical activities for well-being, relaxation, social bonding, spiritual growth, and even immune support. Clift and Hancox (2001) highlight singing's benefits, including relaxation and spiritual enrichment. Hallam (2015) also notes that musical activities improve auditory perception, language, memory, spatial awareness, self-regulation, creativity, and academic performance. Hungarian composer and educator Zoltán Kodály emphasises active participation in music, promoting emotional expression and community identity (Mabini, 2024).

Research consistently demonstrates that early exposure to music and singing has a profound, lasting impact on children's development, enhancing cognitive growth, social-emotional well-being, and overall learning. Experts agree that musical experiences reveal vital aspects of children's emotional, cognitive, and social growth (Ilari & Gluschankof, 2009). Music is naturally wo-

ven into daily life for many children, from rhythmic interactions with caregivers in infancy to so-mi chants preschoolers use to engage with friends (Lee Nardo et al., 2006). Music educators build on these spontaneous interactions, helping children develop skills that bring lifelong enjoyment and fulfilment (Lee Nardo et al., 2006).

Early musical experiences also play a critical role in brain development, with scientific studies showing that music supports essential cognitive functions (Maureen, 2007). Because the first five years establish the foundation for all areas of learning, fostering a 'music vocabulary' of listening and singing is as crucial as developing early skills in language, maths, and other core areas (Fox, 1991). This scientific evidence provides educators with a solid basis for understanding and promoting the benefits of music in early childhood education.

Understanding the stages of child development is vital to effective teaching. As children progress, their cognitive, social-emotional, and learning capacities change, requiring educators to adapt their methods to these evolving stages (Allen et al., 2015; Ruiz et al., 2016). Cognitive development is a layered process shaped by developmental stages, which educators should consider when tailoring teaching strategies. Piaget's cognitive theory, though criticised for emphasising stages over continuous growth (Alahmad, 2020), remains invaluable for understanding the progression of children's thinking abilities (Young, 2024).

Research from anthropology, psychology, and medicine (Cowell et al., 1992; Dawson et al., 1992a; Weinberger, 1998; Hyde et al., 2009; Haslbeck et al., 2020) further underscores the role of music in brain development, suggesting that children acquire knowledge most holistically during their first year. Language and motor skills develop in tandem with social-emotional abilities, forming an integrated foundation. Around 12 to 24 months, children enter a more active phase, using movement, sensory exploration, and emerging rhythmic awareness, which is the ability to recognise and respond to patterns of sound and movement to engage with the world.

Music exposure is beneficial even before birth, as the auditory and vestibular systems mature in the womb. This allows the foetus to respond to sounds and lays the groundwork for language skills. For educators, understanding these developmental stages is critical in supporting holistic learning.

As children approach school age, the focus shifts from gross to fine motor skills, with music supporting this transition. Songs and rhythmic activities foster motor skills, socialisation, and language learning across all stages, encouraging children to think holistically and interactively and grasp the world's interconnected nature. Motiva-

tional songs, such as 'The Wheels on the Bus' or 'If You're Happy and You Know It ', tailored to a child's age and interests, make learning engaging, as young children are especially drawn to rhythms and words.

A caregiver's songs during routines provide rhythmic and emotional support for infants, creating a warm learning environment. As children grow, outdoor environments - at home or in school - are ideal for exploration. They experiment with sound-making objects like wooden spoons and pans, and educators can provide materials to support rhythm exploration, helping children improvise and interact musically. Rhythmic greetings help focus young children, while movement songs offer security, particularly for shy children or those with motor challenges.

Encouraging children's musical individuality builds self-esteem and character. Children explore their physical surroundings and abstract ideas through singing, sounds, and gestures, using play to engage with all their senses. Music's rich aesthetic and exploratory potential opens doors to endless experiences children can enjoy through play. Educators without formal musical training can foster meaningful learning by guiding children in simple sound exploration. As May (2013) suggests, an ideal environment for music learning supports diverse experiences through play, exploration, and social interaction, allowing children to engage in creativity freely.

## Singing and the Development of Social competences

The concept of 'social competence' has long been debated among scholars, with numerous definitions reflecting its multifaceted nature. The variety of definitions may be as great as the number of researchers working on the subject (Varner, 2020). Social competence must be understood as a behavioural achievement at the heart of social skills. However, it also encompasses the acquisition of social and cognitive skills, the judgement of others and the psychological risks individuals take when experimenting with new forms of interaction. Often, "appropriate social behaviour" is used synonymously with "social competence" or "social skills". Goldfried and D'Zurilla (1969) and Junge et al. (2020) view social competence as a person's effective response to specific situations, emphasising the ability to achieve desirable outcomes while creating mutual benefit in interactions (Lecroy & Beker, 2014). Social competence is also the basis for the broader 'soft skills' category.

'Competence' refers to the essential attitudes, skills or knowledge required to perform a particular action. Therefore, an exhaustive definition of 'social competence' is challenging, as 'socially intelligent' behaviour is highly context-dependent (Brinkschulte, 2022). Socially intelligent behaviour is essential for a successful life and has far-reaching

implications for academic achievement, peer relationships, family dynamics and participation in activities. As Gooding (2009, p. 35) points out, children and adolescents who face social, academic or behavioural challenges can experience immediate and long-term effects on their academic and social success.

Research by Bracken and Fischel (2007) and Lane et al. (2004) found that social and behavioural difficulties can correlate with poor academic performance in childhood. In addition, children with deficits in social skills are at risk of dropping out of school, having strained social relationships, engaging in substance abuse, and even facing peer marginalisation (Lane et al., 2004). Gooding (2009) cites the American National Association of School Psychologists, which defines social skills as knowing what to say, making informed decisions and acting appropriately.

The potential of music to develop social and particularly communication skills has been widely studied (Campayo-Muńoz & Cabedo-Mas, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2023; Welch et al., 2020). Improving communication through musical activities is an area of growing interest, as music is recognised as a promising tool for promoting important social skills.

## Communication as a social skill and the role of music in its development

Communication and social skills are crucial for a child's social development, especially when interacting with peers and in the school environment. Educators play a crucial role in recognising and supporting children's different communication styles, contributing to their social and academic progress (Sigafoos et al., 2008; Maleki et al., 2019; Sidera et al., 2018). Effective communication forms the basis of children's social adjustment and is vital to building social competence, with language skills enabling deeper peer interactions (Brooks-Gunn, 2005). In particular, social and emotional skills interact closely with cognitive skills, reinforcing and promoting children's long-term potential (Marta, 2015).

The importance of communicative and social skills for the social development of children, particularly in dealing with peers and in education, cannot be emphasised enough. Educators who recognise and encourage individual communication styles help to support children's overall social and academic growth. Francis (2015) categorises children's communication into four main types: outgoing, reserved, self-interested, and passive. For educators, understanding a child's primary communication style provides insight into their social identity and peer interactions. It is important to remember

that while communication style reflects personality, it can also be influenced by factors such as health, medication and developmental changes. For example, children with a passive communication style who initiate few interactions often become more socially engaged through structured activities such as music. Such activities offer these children new opportunities to express themselves and build social relationships.

The development of communication skills, which are crucial for social growth, begins in infancy and continues throughout childhood. Gooding (2009) divides social skills into three categories: interpersonal skills (relating to others), self-related skills (self-regulation) and task-related skills (task fulfilment). These skills are fundamental not only to musical development but also to social functioning in general. Music-making can promote positive communication, cooperative behaviour and impulse control - skills essential for social and academic success (Váradi, 2022).

McClung (2000) also emphasises the importance of verbal and non-verbal communication, positive peer interaction, cooperation, self-discipline and responsibility in the classroom. For music educators, by integrating social skills into music education, the music classroom becomes a platform for essential life skills that equip children with the tools for effective interpersonal relationships and personal growth.

The intersection of music education and the development of social skills emphasises the importance of communication in a child's life. By harnessing the social potential of music, educators contribute significantly to raising children who are confident, socially competent and well-prepared for future interactions. Children gain invaluable insights into their personalities through singing, movement and musical instruments - they become more aware of their emotions (Abril, 2011). In addition to self-awareness, musical activities also promote emotional and social skills. When making music in a group, children practise empathy and role-play, developing an understanding of the experiences of others. Music provides a unique space in which children can interact safely and free from judgement with peers of different abilities, encouraging constructive interactions (Music, 2016). As Gooding (2009) states, these interactions support musical expression, interpersonal skill building, non-verbal communication and even positive behaviour change.

A successful musical activity typically requires a positive social setting, which enhances social and interpersonal communication skills. Davies (2013) underscores the connection between music and communication, showing how activities like singing and instrument playing help children cultivate essential mental skills for communication.

Engaging in musical activities can benefit a wide range of cognitive and communication skills, offering practical and developmental advantages (Miendlarzewska & Trost, 2014). Engaging in musical activities strengthens:

1. **Concentration and Focus** – Sustained attention, essential for both music and communication.
2. **Listening Skills** – Attentive listening aids understanding of both spoken language and musical nuance.
3. **Self-Expression** – Music provides a creative outlet, a key element of effective communication.
4. **Memory** – Enhances long-term and short-term memory, which is crucial for language learning.
5. **Phonological Awareness** – Sensitivity to pitch aids in understanding vocal intonation.
6. **Rhythmic Skills** – Recognising rhythm improves fluency in both language and reading.
7. **Anticipation and Adaptability** – Skills for predicting and responding support effective communication in conversations.
8. **Nonverbal Communication** – Encourages eye contact and body language, which are vital in social settings.
9. **Vocabulary and Syntax** – Songs introduce new words and support sentence formation.
10. **Sequencing** – Recognising patterns in music mirrors language structures.

Davies (2013) further explains that music reinforces these skills through structured sequencing, memory enhancement, and pitch awareness, all integral to language development. Rhythmic training, like clapping or reciting poetry, improves children's grasp of language's prosodic elements, which supports reading and writing skills (Liang & Taft, 2020). Participation in musical activities also hones the ability to distinguish sounds, a key factor in language development. Music offers a non-verbal medium for self-expression, fostering creativity and enhancing listening.

Singing and music-making are transformative for children's language and cognitive development, contributing to vocabulary growth, sentence building, and memory. The repetitive nature of songs (like rhymes and structured patterns) helps children internalise language structures, making it easier to recognise and use new vocabulary and sentences (Bintz, 2010; Yuntina, 2021). Vocal learning, which involves mimicking sounds, is also essential, as it lays the groundwork for language. Additionally, singing strengthens auditory memory, aiding vocabulary retention and long-term language acquisition. Research highlights how singing supports children's vocal performance and psychological well-being, indirectly benefiting language learning (Rinta, 2008).

In essence, singing promotes language acquisition by expanding vocabulary,

improving auditory memory, enhancing vocal control, and boosting psychological health, making music an invaluable part of early language and cognitive development.

Musical activities also enhance phonological awareness, which is crucial for reading readiness (Phillips et al., 2008). Studies indicate that music helps children build foundational literacy skills by breaking down sounds, understanding them, and reassembling them in words (Evans, 1998; Ziolkowski & Goldstein, 2008). Through music, children develop essential skills for decoding language.

Finally, integrating music into educational settings enhances social and emotional competencies. Activities like singing and group music-making teach children skills essential for social interaction:

1. **Anticipation** – Nursery rhymes help children predict what is next, fostering focus.
2. **Turn-Taking** – Group music requires listening and responding, reflecting social skills.
3. **Nonverbal Cues** – Songs with motions encourage eye contact and coordinated gestures.

In Singapore, the Ministry of Education's music programme highlights music's ability to cultivate skills like critical thinking, empathy, and resilience (MOE, 2023). Musical activities nurture core values—such as responsibility, respect, and resilience—by encouraging children to work collaboratively, persevere through challenges, and appreciate the efforts of others.

Music education thus plays a critical role in shaping children's social and emotional skills. Music promotes values like responsibility and empathy and prepares children to thrive academically and socially. Music enables children to express themselves, build connections, and develop the skills needed for lifelong success.

## The role of music in the development of Social and emotional competence

Music has a profound influence on nurturing children's social and emotional skills, thanks to its collaborative nature (Camerlinga et al., 2022). Children who participate in musical activities – especially in ensemble settings – learn to cooperate, navigate friendships, and manage group dynamics (Bishop, 2018). With teacher guidance, they can practice connecting with others, thus building foundational skills for social and emotional growth. In today's complex world, music education helps cultivate relevant competencies (Weston, 2020):

- **Global Awareness and Cultural Engagement**: Music connects children with their cultural heritage and introduces them to global traditions,

sparking respect for cultural diversity. Engaging with various musical styles fosters openness to new perspectives and prepares children for a globally minded outlook.

- **Critical and Creative Thinking**: Through listening, analysing, and refining their musical work, children engage in both critical and creative thinking. Activities like composing and improvising develop flexible thinking and problem-solving skills, critical components of reasoning and creativity.
- **Communication, Collaboration, and Information Processing**: Music sharpens communication skills by enabling children to express emotions and ideas through sound. Group music-making fosters teamwork, listening, and responsive interaction. Additionally, encoding and interpreting musical information enhances their cognitive processing abilities.

Music education provides a structured and expressive space for children to develop these vital skills. Exposure to diverse musical traditions broadens cultural awareness, while the creative demands of music strengthen critical thinking. Performing in groups hones communication and teamwork skills, equipping children with versatile, lifelong learning abilities (Bugos, 2016).

In his highly acclaimed and seminal work of more than 50 years ago, Merriam (1964) shows that music is a social behaviour that can be studied using the methods of anthropology. Merriam's examination of the role of music in child development, which is still relevant today, recognises its influence on emotional growth, social skills and cultural connection. He emphasised that music is more than just entertainment — it helps children develop identity, community and a sense of belonging:

1. **Emotional Expression and Aesthetic Appreciation**: Music allows children to express emotions they might struggle to verbalise while fostering an appreciation for beauty and creativity. This nurtures emotional intelligence as children learn to articulate feelings through rhythm and melody.
2. **Entertainment and Communication**: Music serves as a playful yet meaningful form of communication, helping children connect at a level beyond words.
3. **Symbolic Representation and Physical Response**: Music carries symbolic meaning, which aids children in understanding abstract ideas and cultural values. Physical movement to rhythm further enhances body awareness, motor skills, and coordination.
4. **Social Norms, Cohesion, and Cultural Rites**: Group music fosters respect for social cues, and in cultural or religious settings, it reinforces communal identity and respect for shared traditions.

5. **Cultural Continuity and Social Integration**: Music connects generations, passing down stories and traditions that form a child's cultural foundation. In group settings, it fosters unity and a sense of shared purpose.

Campbell and Scott-Kassner (2013) echo these ideas, highlighting music's role in whole-child development by nurturing intellectual, emotional, and social growth. Whether musically trained or not, educators can incorporate music into daily learning, fostering creativity and focus. Allowing children to experiment with sound and rhythm encourages individuality alongside teamwork.

Children build skills like concentration, listening, and rhythmic control through music, often without realising they are learning. Merriam (1964) and Campbell and Scott-Kassner (2013) advocate for integrating music into education to support the growth and creativity of future generations.

## A Personal reflection

My journey with singing and its transformative power began in my birth country, South Africa, where music is deeply woven into the social and educational fabric. Growing up and later working in this environment, I experienced firsthand the rich choral traditions that are integral to South African schools and communities. During my time as music director of the Drakensberg Boys Choir, an institution known for its exceptional musical and educational standards, I witnessed how singing can shape young people both musically and holistically. The boys from diverse backgrounds were united through song, building bridges across cultural boundaries and fostering a sense of shared identity. This experience reinforced my belief in the profound impact of singing as a tool for education and personal growth.

Almost without exception, there are choirs in South African schools. Singing is more than a musical activity; it is a communal expression, a means of storytelling and a vehicle for cultural preservation. Even outside of a formal setting, singing often thrives in families and communities, serving as both a celebration of heritage and a spontaneous act of joy. Like many other traditions worldwide, singing has been diminished by modern distractions and changing priorities in education. This decline worries me as it risks losing an invaluable medium for developing musicality, communication, empathy and cooperation.

In my current role as a professor of music education in Italy, I continue to advocate for the integration of singing into children's lives. In my work with children aged 8 to 14 and as the director of a youth choir, I experience how singing can promote children's emotional, social and cognitive development. Singing in a group teaches attentive listening, empathy and teamwork – skills

crucial to their holistic education. Through a carefully selected repertoire, I aim to help children connect with texts that promote their emotional growth and cultural awareness. Inspired by Zoltán Kodály's philosophy that singing is a child's birthright and a gateway to their cultural heritage, I incorporate folk songs and music with integrity into my lessons. Kodály's belief that every child deserves access to the music of their cultural roots resonates strongly with my own experiences and practises.

Singing provides an unrivalled platform for developing children's communication skills. It bridges the gap between self-expression and social interaction, helping children to articulate feelings and ideas as they learn to listen and harmonise with others. The communal act of singing fosters a sense of belonging and community, a quality that I believe is particularly important in our increasingly fragmented world. In addition, singing promotes cognitive development by improving memory, language skills and musicality. In my classrooms and at choir rehearsals, I see music's impact on children's confidence, creativity and resilience.

Reflecting on my journey, I realise that singing has always been more than just an artistic activity for me — it is a means of nurturing the whole child. Whether in South Africa, where music is a vibrant part of the national tapestry, or in Italy, where I continue to explore its educational potential, singing remains a profound force for development and connection. It is a privilege to contribute to the preservation and innovation of this tradition and to ensure that the next generation carries on the legacy of singing, enriched by its power to educate, unite and inspire.

## Conclusion

The decline of singing in schools is influenced by several factors, both internal and external, which require careful study. One crucial factor is the role of digital technology in reshaping music education by shifting students' focus from traditional singing to electronic music production. As Cain (2004) notes, children's growing interest in digital instruments may reduce their enthusiasm for singing, a change that is likely related to evolving musical tastes and pedagogical practices. The proliferation of popular genres such as rock and pop, favoured by digital access, further adapts music teaching to today's listening habits, influencing both students and educators, and could lead to singing traditions taking a back seat.

Despite this trend, singing still has a high cultural value and is essential for personal and social development. It contributes to emotional resilience, social bonding and even national identity, as studies by Tekman and Hortaçsu (2002) and Bohlman (2002) show. European cho-

ral traditions, in particular, have long strengthened cultural cohesion (Gorski, 2016), but paradoxically, the importance of choral singing in schools has declined in recent years (Huisman Koops, 2008; Gustafson, 2008). Educators are working to emphasise the benefits of music for children's development, although research shows that many young people prioritise other academic subjects over music when they enter secondary school (McPherson & O'Neill, 2010).

Educators are challenged to pursue innovative approaches that make singing attractive and relevant in today's digital landscape to counteract this decline. By reintroducing singing as a core component of music education, schools can preserve their national musical culture and promote the overall development of students. Educators must develop contemporary teaching strategies that combine children's digital literacy with traditional singing practices to provide a balanced, engaging musical experience.

In conclusion, singing is an effective and engaging tool for developing children's communication skills. Through singing, children learn a rich vocabulary, rhythm, and natural flow of language, which helps them understand pronunciation, intonation, and expression better. Songs often contain repetitive patterns and simple melodies, making it easier for children to memorise and practise new words, improving their receptive and expressive language skills. In addition, singing in a group encourages social interaction and cooperation, boosting self-confidence and a sense of belonging. By incorporating singing into early learning environments, educators and parents can create a fun and effective way for children to build foundational communication skills that will benefit them throughout their lives.

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# Choralia magna 2024 International Conference on Choral Art, Hradec Králové, 18–20 October 2024

*Jan Pirner*

**Abstract:** The article summarises the most important topics of the international scientific conference on choral art, which took place within the framework of the Choralia magna national festival of children's, youth and adult choirs in 2024 in Hradec Králové.

**Key words:** conference, choral singing, choral movement, culture, wellbeing, education, National Information and Consulting Centre for Culture (NIPOS), Association of Choirmasters

Choralia magna was the collective name for the largest choral event of the Year of Czech Music and the largest single gathering of non-professional choral singers since 1990. Choralia combined a national festival of children's, youth and adult choirs, an international conference on choral art, and a series of concerts for the Year of Czech Music. This event was the fulfilment of a long-held dream of the main organisers—four professional staff members[1] of the National Information and Advisory Centre for Culture[2]—to bring together all age groups of choral singers in one place. In its history, NIPOS had never organised such a large-scale choral event, and over 50 amateur choirs of children, youth and adults met in Hradec Králové over four days, participating in 15 concerts, 46 workshops, lectures, debates and round tables, as well as a three-day international conference. NIPOS was able to rely on excellent co-organisers (the Association of Choirmasters, the Centre for Artistic Activities Hradec Králové and Jitro Primary Art School Hradec Králové), reliable and willing volunteers, and domestic and foreign partners (the National Awareness Centre, the European Choral Association, the Faculty of Music and Dance of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, the Faculty of Education of the University of Hradec Králové, the Institute of

[1] Barbora Hanslianová, Zuzana Jandová, Petr Koronthály and Jan Pirner.
[2] Hereinafter referred to as NIPOS.



DOI: 10.14712/25337890.4849

Arts – Theatre Institute, and the Czech Music Council), to whom many thanks are due.

The main theme of the conference was amateur and professional choral singing, an artistic pursuit that tens of thousands of people in the Czech Republic engage in in their free time. The organisers divided it into six thematic blocks on Friday and Saturday, with Sunday morning devoted to joint conclusions.

The first block, entitled **Caring for Choral Singing in the Czech Republic and Europe**, was devoted to cooperation between the international, public and private sectors. The session was chaired by Kateřina Klementová, who, together with Zuzana Jandová, introduced the "biotope" of Czech choral singing, highlighting its specific needs and emphasising that choral singing is one of the most popular leisure arts disciplines in the Czech Republic. NIPOS director Lenka Lázňovská summarised the basic legislative framework within which Czech culture operates, reminding attendees that its financing is not solely the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture, but primarily of municipal and regional governments. Sonja Greiner, Secretary General of the European Choral Association, presented the wide-ranging activities of this multinational organisation and stressed the importance of the individual national centres – it should be noted here that the Czech Republic currently lacks such cooperation. Mihela Jagodic followed this up with a description of the activities of JSKD,[3] its parent organisation, and the counterpart of NIPOS in Slovenia, whose activities are extensive and reach deeply into all regions of Slovenia. The session concluded with a contribution from Richard Uhlíř, chair of the Association of Choirmasters, a non-profit umbrella choral organisation that sponsors a number of choral activities, including progressive NIPOS shows for children and youth, as well as the activities of the Czech Choirmaster's Choir. Jaroslav Vávra, president of the Union of Czech Choirs, was also scheduled to speak in the first block, but had to cancel his participation at the last minute due to family reasons.

The musicologist Eva Velická chaired the second session, **The Choral Movement as a Part of Culture**, which featured inspiring projects related to choral singing. Kateřina Bryndová summarised the origins and development of the Prague Philharmonic Choir Academy, a project that enables young graduates of music schools to learn more about professional choral singing and gain experience in a major choral ensemble. Musica Orbis Prague Festival Director John Tregellas introduced this successful international choral project and affirmed to the con-

[3] Javni sklad Republike Slovenije za kulturne dejavnosti.

ference participants that choral singing remains one of his lifelong passions. Jiří Klusoň, a legal expert from the Ministry of Culture, presented on copyright and choral singing in the digital age, followed by choirmaster Monika Václová, who shared three perspectives on the role of the choir in the educational projects of the Czech Philharmonic, the Prague Cantilena and the mixed choir Subito. The session closed with a contribution from composer, publicist and editor-in-chief of the music stations D-dur and Jazz, Lukáš Hurník, who presented A Thousand Voices of Advent—the largest concert of the Year of Czech Music—where a thousand singers performed alongside the Symphony Orchestra in December.

**Choral singing and wellbeing**—a currently popular and widely discussed topic—was the focus of a separate block of the conference, led by the teacher and choirmaster Jiřina Jiřičková. All the presentations clearly showed the significant physical and psychological benefits of choral singing, as confirmed by both domestic and international research. These effects were explored from multiple perspectives: Lukáš Holec, choirmaster of the Medvíďata children's choir from Český Krumlov, discussed the impact on children's choirs; Monika Kolasa Hladíková, a university teacher and singer from Poland, examined the role of voice education; and Alena Tichá, a voice teacher, along with phoniatrist Jakub Držata, presented findings from their long-term research. Scott Ferguson, an American choirmaster and university teacher, also shared his experience in wellbeing and transgender choristers.

**Choral singing in an international context** operates under different conditions in each country, yet choir directors and choirs have many things in common. However, with the exception of international competitions and friendly exchanges, Czechs have few opportunities to get to know the choral traditions of individual countries. Moreover, the wealth of foreign inspiration was so extensive that twice the allotted time would have been needed to cover it all. Jan Pirner filled in for the excused chairperson Lenka Dohnalová from ATI,[4] while Mihela Jagodic stepped in to present the state of choral singing in Slovenia, and Latvian choirmaster Jânis Lapsa provided insights about the choral scene in his country. This was followed by an overview of choral traditions in the United States from Scott Ferguson, and in Poland from Monika Kolasa Hladíková. Milan Kolena, an experienced juror at numerous competitions in Europe and overseas and an organiser of choral festivals in Slovakia,

[4] Arts and Theatre Institute.
[5] Národné osvetové centrum.

shared his perspective on international competitions. Michal Stahl described the work of the National Awareness Centre[5] and presented the current situation of choirs in Slovakia, and choirmaster Zuzana Buchová Holičková presented the conclusions of the pilot year of the Vox Choralis symposium for choirmasters of youth and children's choirs.

Marek Valášek, choirmaster and Head of the Department of Music Education at the Faculty of Education of Charles University, chaired the session **Choral singing and education**. His key question was whether our educational system produces well-trained choirmasters and choral singers. Experienced speakers from the ranks of professional choirmasters and teachers agreed that the roles of choirmaster and conductor, as well as those of choral and solo singer, require the same level of detailed study and rigorous preparation, without which excellence cannot be achieved, the quality of results being determined by the individuality of the particular person. Miriam Němcová, choirmaster, conductor and teacher, Magdalena Hajóssyová, long-time soloist and professor of singing, Adolf Melichar and Lukáš Kozubík, choirmasters of opera and philharmonic choruses, and Grażyna Wilk Biernot, solo and choral singer, shared their extensive experience.

The final session of the conference, **The Choral Movement as a Part of Society**, offered participants a completely different perspective on choral singing compared to the previous sessions. It focused on disadvantaged children and minority groups, emphasising the choir as a social entity, as a place of safety and trust even in difficult environments. The session was chaired by Martin Rudovský—author of the first paper, dramaturge of the Prague Symphony Orchestra FOK, chair of the Pavel Jurkovič Society, and, above all, an active musician and singer—who presented his experiences with communal singing and the therapeutic function of music in children's homes. Brigita Müllerová, a choirmaster and teacher, continued the discussion with a description of the activities of the Rarášci choir and her path to Romani music. Educator Radka Jarolímková summarised her many years of experience with a choir of primary school children with special educational needs, while choirmaster Marek Stanka introduced the successful Prague gay choir Doodles. New hope for a shared future was presented by the choirmasters of the Czech-Ukrainian choir, Sonjašnyk Martina Sirová and Eva Beňová.

On Sunday morning, the conference opened with a performance by the children's choir Rarášci from Trmice, led by choirmasters Eva Beňová and Hana Šindelářová, with a dramaturgically original programme of Romani songs. This was followed by a presentation of the conference outcomes by NIPOS director Lenka Lázňovská and expert Kateřina

Klementová, and closed with an inspiring spatial composition, My Siberia, by Roman Zabelov and Markéta Labusová. The main goals of the conference were fulfilled – the conference helped to map the current state of choral art in the Czech Republic, presented its strengths and weaknesses, placed it in the context of Czech culture and presented inspiring examples from home and abroad. It also contributed to the further emancipation of the choral movement, allowing it to better and more precisely articulate its needs and demands and reach out to society as a whole. Additionally, the event demonstrated that choral singing also has an economic impact.

Choral singing has a long tradition in the Czech Republic and remains one of the most popular leisure activities; statistical findings support its significance, innovative projects (such as the large-scale concert A Thousand Voices of Advent) help to promote it, and it has been proved that choral singing has a positive impact on human health and enriches the social life of the population. Although there are only a few professional choirs in the Czech Republic, the country boasts several thousand amateur choirs. Together with the organisers of the conference, we can therefore look forward to the next opportunity for a similar gathering.

The project was realised with the financial support of the Ministry of Culture, the Czech Recovery Plan and the European Union.

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# Music pedagogical conference on research and practice in music education

## Report on the conference held from 19–21 September 2024

*Marek Valášek, Jiřina Jiřičková*

**Abstracts:** This report provides an overview of a music education conference with international participation in September 2024, hosted by the Department of Music Education at the Faculty of Education, Charles University, Prague. Over three days, participants presented scientific papers, two symposia, and practical studies. The conference featured numerous inspiring workshops, a meeting of music education didacticians, a memorial session dedicated to Pavel Jurkovič, and a very successful and musically well-prepared accompanying programme with three evening concerts. The conference was held on the occasion of the 90th Anniversary of the Society for Music Education of the Czech Republic.

**Keywords:** Music pedagogy, music education, conference, Society for Music Education in Schools of the Czech Republic, course of the conference

## Introduction

An international conference serves as a meeting place for experts from a given professional field, a place for the transfer of experience, the presentation of research results from specific areas or new publications, professional discussions, and inspiring workshops. It is also a place for collegial networking and human connections. The Music Education Conference on Research and Practice in Music Education, which took place at the Faculty of Education of Charles University from September 19-21, 2024, encompassed all these aspects and was also dedicated to the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Society for Music Education of the Czech Republic. The conference was attended by speakers from



DOI: 10.14712/25337890.4850

the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Austria, Germany, and Italy, as well as nearly 100 students, guests, and teachers.

## Conference Proceedings

The conference opened with a welcome address from its main expert and programme guarantor, PhDr. Jiřina Jiřičková, Ph.D., Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Education of Charles University and teacher in the Department of Music Education.

The first two conference days began with keynote plenary lectures on current issues in contemporary music pedagogy: *Music education as a Means of Health Promotion* (Dr. Phil. Dr. rer. nat. Dr. paed. Dr. paed. habil. Dr. rer. medic. Dr. sportwiss. Wolfgang Mastnak, Beijing Normal University BNU & Hochschule für Musik und Theater München) and *The Relevance of Leo Kestenberg's Music Pedagogy and its Influence on the Formation of the Foundations of National Concepts of Arts Education in the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe* (Prof. Dr. Jaroslaw Chacinski, Pomeranian University in Słupsk). Since the conference had an important sub-theme, namely the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Society for Music Education of the Czech Republic, the third plenary lecture was devoted to this topic. It was presented by the long-standing chair of this society, PaedDr. Jan Prchal (Jabloňová Elementary School in Liberec, UJEP in Ústí nad Labem) and was entitled *90 Years of the Society for Music Education against the Background of the Revision of the National Frameworks Curriculum*.

In connection with the anniversary of the society, the conference participants also remembered Pavel Jurkovič during a memorial programme led by Mgr. Jana Žižková (FZŠ Umělecká, Prague 7) and PhDr. Jarmila Kotůlková (former chair of the Czech Orff Society).

The conference programme was structured into parallel, professionally specific sections.

The scientific part featured presentations by respected foreign and Czech scholars: *Training the Non-Specialist Music Teacher: a project to increase artistic and musical skills through an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach at the Free University of Bolzano* (Prof. J. v. d. Sandt (University of Bolzano), *The Role of Improvisation in Introducing Contemporary Music - Experiences from the Educational Artistic Project* (Prof. G. Konkol, Stanislaw Moniuszko Academy of Music in Gdansk), *Challenge Well-being: Pathways to satisfied music teacher students & classroom music teachers* (Prof. G. Sammer, Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg), *Examining the Factors Influencing Students' Musical Attitudes* (J. Váradi, Ph.D., University of Debrecen), *Researching the Quality of the Musical Environment of the Contemporary Family and its Influence on the Development of the Musical Abilities of a Child of Younger*

*School Age* (PaedDr. L. Kaščáková, Ph.D., Comenius University in Bratislava), *The Teacher as a Key Actor in the Music-educational Process* (J. Jurášová Šteigerová, Ph.D., Comenius University in Bratislava), *Music Education in the Context of Regional Education and Folk Culture in Slovakia after 1989* (PaedDr. M. Krušinská, Ph.D. (Catholic University, Ružomberok), *Cooperation between Artistic Disciplines in Concerts for Children and Youth* (Mgr. M. Václavová, Comenius University in Bratislava), and *Singing with Soul: Traditional and Alternative Singing Techniques* (Mgr.art. S. Maggioni, Art.D. (Comenius University in Bratislava).

The Faculty of Education of Charles University was represented by a number of contributions: a paper on *Subject Competences of Music Education Students at the Undergraduate Level (research probe)* (Prof. PaedDr. M. Nedělka, Dr.; PhDr. Petra Bělohlávková, Ph.D.; PhDr. Helena Lipková, Ph.D.), a requested lecture, *Creative Interpretation as a Part of the Analysis of a Musical Work in the Framework of Undergraduate Preparation of Music Education Teachers* (PhDr. P. Bělohlávková, Ph.D.), a summary report, *Reflection of Music Creative Workshops by Students of Teachers at the Faculty of Education of Charles University* (PhDr. J. Jiřičková, Ph.D. ), *The European Music Congress EAS in Prague in 2005: 'Everything depends on a good beginning'* (Doc. PaedDr. M. Kodejška, CSc.), and *The Teacher's Musical Skills through the Eyes of Kindergarten Teachers - first results of a questionnaire survey* (Mgr. M. Kmentová, Ph.D., in cooperation with PhDr. J. Chumchal, Ph.D. (Pedagogical School and Secondary Medical School Krnov, University of Ostrava)).

Two representative symposia were also held during the conference, both addressing highly topical themes and linking professional knowledge with the reality of school practice. These were of great interest to the conference participants, who discussed them together long after they had finished.

During the conference, there was also a meeting of didacticians – an informal group of teachers of didactically-oriented subjects in the undergraduate training of future music education teachers. Thanks to the activity of colleagues from the Faculty of Education of Palacký University in Olomouc, these regular meetings have become a tradition, and the above-mentioned discussion block, held this time under the auspices of the Department of Music Education in Prague, provided valuable inspiration for the participants.

Practical contributions also enriched the conference. *Improvisation in a Course for Future Music Teachers at University* (Mgr. G. Gvozdevskaia, Ph.D., University of West Bohemia in Pilsen), *Music Tempered by Youth - International Music Festival* (Mgr. J. Štefanová, dipl.um., ZUŠ Sedlčany), *Piano Compositions of J. S. Bach* (MgA. J. Lukš, J. E. Purkyně University, ZUŠ Praha-Satalice, ZUŠ Brandýs nad Labem-Stará Boleslav), *The School Band*

*in Primary School* (Mgr. A. Benda, ZŠ Vratislavice nad Nisou, Liberec), *Breath, Music and Speech - an Alphabet for Long-term Satisfactory Teacher Practice* (Mgr. E. Čermáková, Music School Čermáček) and *Project Teaching in the framework of Music Education and Cooperation with Artists* (Mgr. M. Mužík, 2nd Elementary School Bezručova, Říčany).

## Workshops

Throughout the conference, a number of inspiring workshops were held for student and teacher participants, each lasting approximately ninety minutes. The variety of topics and the number of workshops undoubtedly exceeded the average for similar conferences.

Mgr. Art. T. Boroš, PhD., ArtD. (Ped Faculty of Comenius University, Bratislava) and doc. I. Šiller (Academy of Arts Banská Bystrica, OZ Superar Slovakia) conducted a workshop entitled *Music as an Act*. The father and son duo, L. Bořek Sr. And L. Bořek Jr., presented *The Charanga Platform - a Valuable Tool to Support the Teaching of (not only) Music at Elementary Schools and in Music Education* and Ing. J. Musil (DISK Multimedia, s.r.o.) gave a broader presentation on *Multimedia in Music Education*. Mgr. Lenka Pobudová from the Vinoř Elementary School in Prague conducted a workshop entitled *With Listening and Activity; Music Education is a Joy*, Mgr. K. Šrámková, DiS. (PedF UK) led the workshop *Integration of Yoga into Music Pedagogy*, P. Windsor, Ph.D. (Gymnázium Blansko) presented *Welcome to the Magical World of Tintinnabuli or Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten Arvo Pärt Under the Microscope*, Mgr. J. Jablunka (VŠPS and SPgŠ Kroměříž) ran the workshop *Music Education in the Year of Czech Music*, and Mgr. J. Širická, Ph.D. (KHV Palacký University, Masaryk Elementary School Velká Bystřice) explored *The iPad as a Teaching Aid*. For younger children, the workshops included *Autumn Musical Inspiration for Children and Teachers in Kindergarten* by PhDr. O. Kozánková, Ph.D. (Duhovka Elementary School Prague, Biskupská Elementary School Prague) and *Musical Activities with Boomwhackers in Preschool and the Pre-Reading Period* by Mgr. Milena Kmentová, Ph.D. Both of these workshops were conducted with the active participation of children.

Prof. G. Sammer conducted the *Impulses for Creative Work in Music Lessons* workshop, and Prof. J. v. D. Sandt the workshop *Ubuntu! – I am because we are! – African Music is Used as a Vehicle for Developing Important Educational Domains*.

On Friday evening, the Children's Folklore Ensemble *Kytice* gave a performance (ages 8–11) showcasing their work with children

## Cultural programme

The music pedagogical conference also featured a rich cultural programme. On

the evening of 18 September 2024, the *Piccolo Coro & Piccola orchestra*, under the direction of Marek Valášek, presented a new CD with premiere recordings of works by contemporary Czech composer Jiří Teml as part of the International Festival of Spiritual Art. On 19 September, a concert was held at the Czech Museum of Music, featuring young artists—successful participants and medal winners of the national competition for children and young people, the Music Olympics of the Czech Republic, organised by the Society for Music Education of the Czech Republic in cooperation with the Faculty of Education of Charles University and the Grammar School and Music School of the Capital City of Prague. In the first part of the concert, young singers and instrumentalists performed their compositions, while the second half of the evening was prepared by the *Aries percussion ensemble* from the Jabloňová Elementary School and Elementary Art School in Liberec under the direction of Mgr. Sergey Grigorenko.

The concert on Friday, 20 September, also at the Czech Museum of Music, was dedicated exclusively to vocal music. In the first half, the vocal quintet *Zefiro*, led by artistic director Mgr. Čeněk Svoboda, Ph.D., delivered a brilliant stylistic interpretation of repertoire from the Renaissance and early Baroque periods, while the second half of the concert featured 20th and 21st-century popular Music performed by the *Oktet Praha ensemble* under the direction of Sylva Sasková. Both ensembles gave admirable, thoroughly professional performances, demonstrating the vast range of vocal music.

## Conclusion

The broad thematic spectrum of contributions highlighted several problems and issues currently being addressed in the field of music education and music pedagogy, underscoring the need for further professional research in subfields, which is a prerequisite for the discipline's further growth and streamlining. At the same time, through the large number and variety of active, well-attended workshops, the conference engaged practising teachers and participating students alike, who could not help but notice how much potential music education offers and how creatively motivated music educators can be. In this way, the conference symbolically fulfilled its purpose – to honour the legacy of previous generations of music educators, to celebrate the exceptional anniversary of the Society for Music Education of the Czech Republic in the European context, to critically assess the current state of the ongoing revision of the Framework Curriculum for Primary Education, and to face with resolve the challenges that lie ahead for music education. What remains certain is that our music education continues to be shaped by excellent and passionate music educators.

## Acknowledgements

The conference was held with the financial support of the Faculty of Education of Charles University. Sincere thanks and admiration go to all members of the organising team of the Department of Communication and Marketing of the Faculty of Education, Charles University, for the exemplary preparation and organisation of the three-day conference.

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# Let us learn to look and sing.

## The art and music conference at the faculty of education of the university of west bohemia in pilsen enabled the hitherto lacking professional dialogue on the revision of art education in the framework education programme for basic education

*Věra Uhl Skřivanová, Monika Plíhalová, Jaroslav Bláha, Johannes Kirschenmann, Jan Mašek*

## Introduction

On 1 November 2024, the Departments of Art and Music Education and Culture of the Faculty of Education of the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, in cooperation with the Departments of Art and Music Education of the Faculty of Education of Charles University in Prague, organised the first interdisciplinary art and music conference https://www.ucmesedivatazpivat.fpe.zcu.cz/. Eighty speakers and a total of 200 participants attended. The conference was dedicated to the founder of *art comparatistics*, doc. Jaroslav Bláha.

The main topic was the revision of *the Framework Education Programme for Basic Education* (RVP ZV) in the field of *Arts and Culture*. In the documents for the new RVP ZV, the field of *Visual Art Education* is merged with *Film and Audiovisual Education*, and the field of *Music Education* is merged with *Drama and Dance and Movement Education*. Many teachers and experts oppose the planned changes. They are concerned about the decline in the hourly allocation for the existing core subjects of *Arts and Culture*, i.e. visual art and music education, as well as the unprofessional treatment of the educational content of all fields of arts education, and the suppression of developed visual art and music didactics. Some puzzling hybrid fields are emerging, and it is unclear how they will be implemented in schools. As a result, the conference became a platform for a genuine professional dialogue on the education programme for arts education,



DOI: 10.14712/25337890.4851

the real possibilities of the Czech education system, and the need to convey the basics and continuity of visual art and music education to primary school pupils.

The conference stressed the need to preserve core disciplines while also exploring the possibility of integrating other domains of arts education. Unfortunately, we note that no dialogue on this topic has been conducted with experts in the fields of visual art and music education since the beginning of the curriculum revision by *the National Pedagogical Institute of the Czech Republic* (NPI ČR). As a result, 14 experts in the fields of visual art and music education from various universities and schools have resigned from the working groups of the NPI ČR. From the outset, the revision was approached as a kind of social mandate rather than as an opportunity to achieve the goals professionally and realistically, thereby offering children equal education opportunities. Differentiating arts education in different primary schools will only exacerbate inequalities in access to education.

The unconventional format of the conference was attractive and relaxing for participants. In a very friendly atmosphere, there were numerous musical performances by students of the music department, a performance by the *Jiřičky* children's choir, a happening by Prof. Kurt Gebauer, several exhibitions and performances by students of the visual art department, and, of course, contributions from conference participants from across the Czech Republic and abroad. The opening plenary lecture was given by doc. Jaroslav Bláha on the interdisciplinary topic *Between the Seen and the Heard*, which traced the so-called musical phase of painting, two levels of the relationship between painting and music, whose genesis relates to the emergence of the artistic and musical avant-garde from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries until the First World War.

The conference papers and the results of the discussion will be published in a professional monograph. The structure of this book has already taken shape at this point, as the conference helped to crystallise three main thematic areas, namely: *Curriculum and Educational Content of Arts Education, Artistic Comparison, and Digital and Audiovisual Literacy.*

## Curriculum and educational content of arts education

Section A addressed the most pressing issue: the application of various artistic disciplines—art, music, film and audiovisual arts, movement and dance, and drama education—into primary school practice. There was a discussion on including these fields of arts education in a way that would not disrupt the continuity of existing primary arts education, i.e. visual art and music education. The presenters outlined the possibilities of integrating other fields of arts education,

which are considered complementary nowadays, into the new curriculum, insisting that there is a space for them in elective subjects. Based on examples from abroad, it was found that in all the countries presented, visual art and music education function as essential arts education, and other artistic disciplines in basic education are considered optional. For example, Finland and Germany's curricula and education programmes were presented in depth. The changes being prepared in the Czech Republic therefore have no precedent anywhere in the world (cf. Uhl Skřivanová & Plíhalová, 2022).

The conference also showed the contemporary state of didactics and research in visual art and music education. Competence frameworks have become a focus of interest, whether in terms of the recommended European key competencies for general education or the emerging professional frameworks for teacher graduates in the Czech Republic.

The follow-up doctoral colloquium initiated a discussion on current topics in the didactics of art and music education. The first thematic area focused on the crucial goals of art and music education in the context of the contemporary world. Across the presentations, there was an emphasis on an active, creative and critical approach to artistic creation. PhD students see visual art and music education as important components of general education. The second common theme was innovations in teaching methods in visual art and music education. The presenters reflected on the possibilities of interpreting art in teaching, experimenting with means of artistic expression, overcoming stereotypes and prescriptive methods, creative composing, and the use of humour as a tool of education. The third recurring theme was the linking of visual and auditory means of expression. In music activities, we can encounter different types of graphic recordings that facilitate the students' creative process. Methods of comparing visual art and music offer further creative impulses.

## Art comparatistics

Section B was devoted to art comparatistics. The term *art comparatists*, which has not yet been fully established in the Czech environment, is promoted by doc. J. Bláha. In the past, the term *comparative art history* was used. However, this term related to the outdated linear concept of art history, which has not been valid for more than thirty years. It has been replaced by the coherent principle of complex structural connections, not only in different temporal cross-sections but also in disciplinary contexts. This approach, which involves working with cross-cutting themes, has replaced the chronological interpretation of art history.

Doc. J. Bláha found his ideal environment for applying and developing the specific field of art comparatistics at the Department of Art Education of the Faculty of Education of Charles University in Prague, where he began teaching

in 1985. For more than thirty years, he taught the comparative course *Contexts of Art 1* and *2* and published, among others, the monographs *Výtvarné umění a hudba I, 1 a 2* (2012, 2013) and *Křižovatka geneze moderního malířství a hudby* (2007). Later, at the Department of Art Education and Visual Culture of the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, he continued to teach similar comparative subjects, which have become the theoretical basis for the didactic use of interdisciplinary relations in the future pedagogical practice of graduates (cf. Bláha, 2020).

In section B of the interdisciplinary conference, discussions built upon the work of doc. J. Bláha, exploring the possibilities of using art comparison in school practice. It was evident from the contributions that cross-curricular reflection on the expressive possibilities of different art forms teaches pupils and students to consider the deeper structures of artworks and better understand their historical and societal contexts.

## Audiovisual education and film as part of arts education

Section C dealt with digital and audiovisual literacy. Participants agreed that current film and audiovisual education outputs only replicate the model of professional filmmaking practices to introduce teachers, students and the public to the issues of creating a complex film medium. Individual attempts to conceive a methodology of teaching film and audiovisual education are primarily suitable for various extracurricular activities and hobby film clubs. They are an example of a misunderstanding of the essence of the contemporary creative concept of visual art education and art pedagogy.

It is impossible to invent a new field of education, an interdisciplinary "potpourri", called *Visual and film/audiovisual education*, without making any effort to explore the professional connections deeply. If we want to build a curriculum for the next generations responsibly, integrating film and audiovisual education into visual art education, which has a sophisticated teaching methodology and is a fundamental pillar of art pedagogy, must be deepened in practice (Duncum, 2004; Mašek, 2022; Mašek & Zikmundová, 2012).

The NPI ČR and the current team of experts in the field of *Arts and Culture* should recognise that in designing the curriculum, it is necessary to build on the sophisticated methodology of the art disciplines and to consider the moving image and sound in the context of the development of learners' creativity. An example of this approach is the methodological publication *Učit se film* (2015) by doc. J. Vančát and doc. M. Smetana, which applies the best methodological practices of arts education.

## In conclusion – visual art and music education as a basis for general education

In the current visual age, where social media images play an increasingly important role, concepts along the lines of those in Comenius' *Labyrinth of the World and Paradise of the Heart* are more relevant than ever. The philosopher of education, Jan Patočka, rightly recognised Comenius as the founder of universal education in a democratic society and an opponent of one-sided approaches in education (1997). Long before compulsory schooling existed, Comenius wanted education in all basic subjects for all people–"artificium omnes omnia docendi!". And this can only be achieved in compulsory education in primary state schools with education courses of fundamental importance.

In art education—often the only place where students learn to reflect and look critically at media images—visual literacy is cultivated. At the same time, the subject is dominated by practical activities. This practical work is crucial for cognitive development, especially in the early years. It is a way of putting an idea on paper, regardless of how organised the idea is, or a process of modelling, constructing or conceptualising thoughts. This multilayered creative act enables learners to articulate their relations to the world.

Images and music, like language, are part of every human culture. In the evolutionary development of mankind, music has helped to organise the life of human communities. Even today, human communities are formed through communal singing or through the music of different generational cultures. In music lessons at school, individual voices combine to form a choir. In an orchestra, different instruments come together according to the score to create a sonic experience. This requires courage and enhances social skills and the complexity of music perception, just as image perception enhances the brain's cognitive performance.

Of course, theatre, self-produced film, and dance as an expressive game with one's own body belong in a school that introduces the rising generation to the whole range of cultural inventions from past to present. But every stable house stands on a solid foundation, a foundation from which other arts education subsequently draws. Visual art and music lessons connect the present with history and tradition and transmit Europe's cultural heritage. They encourage critical reflection on what we take for granted and develop the ability to make responsible judgements. In primary school, visual art and music education are indispensable foundations for all further education, where head and hand, mind and heart merge.

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# Creativity in music education: some notes on creative music activities

## Jiřičková, J., Tichá, A., Appermont, B., Schrooten, E., Janata, L., Kadlec, P., … & Windsor, P. (2024). Kapitoly ke kreativním hudebním činnostem.

In today's turbulent and changing world, discussions and questions about the need for creativity are frequent. Creativity is emphasised as a fundamental cornerstone in the wider social context, serving as a bridge not only between data and research but also in decision-making in everyday life and practice.

A comprehensive understanding of musical contexts, encompassing neuroscience, music psychology research, technological advancements and their application, can also be effectively fostered through creative uses of music that require open thinking. This approach can also be reinforced by the creative use of music in the classroom.

The second volume of the textbook *Kapitoly ke kreativním hudebním činnostem* (2024) (Chapters towards Creative Music Activities), which follows the first volume *Kapitoly z kreativní hudební výchovy* (2023) (Chapters on Creative Music Education), opens up questions and provides answers by defining creative music education through theoretical reflection, in-depth research, and an orientation towards current research trends. The practical component of the book consists of model scenarios for creative music education. A crucial focus is placed on the role of the teacher's personality, including considerations for the prevention of vocal fatigue. These areas are examined within an international co-authored framework. Both publications are available via open access online.

This publication is an output of the project *Kreativní interakce jako zdroj motivace a inovace ve výuce vysokoškolských pedagogů a v pregraduální přípravě pedagogů HV* (Creative Interaction as a Source of Motivation and Innovation in the Teaching of University Teachers and in the Undergraduate Preparation of ME Teachers), implemented by the Department of Music Education of the Pedagogical Faculty of Charles University, with the support of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, the National Renewal Plan and NextGeneration EU.



DOI: 10.14712/25337890.4852

What aspects constitute creative music teaching?

Improvisation and composition are highlighted in the textbook as creative musical activities that provide the opportunity for broad reflection on the creative aspects of perceiving music. At the same time, creative musical activities are part of the music education curriculum, in which " *... the teacher evokes the child's musically creative potential in problem situations with the aim of developing creativity as a permanent feature of the child's personality*." (p.11.)

The conceptual arrangement of the chapters offers, at first glance, an interesting view of possible readerly discourse. Alternatively, the topics are so varied (creative) that their arrangment offers flexibility and freedom in choosing a chapter. This can serve as a compass for students, graduates, and teacher-readers, aiding the search for a foundation for both practice and theory.

The chapter entitled *Creative Approaches to Sound-Oriented Pedagogy in Music Education* explores ways of engaging with music using a holistic social approach. The author of the chapter, Lukáš Janata, presents music leadership through sound-oriented pedagogy.

He also introduces the works of 20th century composers whose compositions align with the concept of sound-oriented pedagogy (sound exploration, improvisation, the listening and perception of sonority, graphic scores, singing and movement activities). Under the guiding motto of "discover - drill – create", it encourages linking principles with the diverse possibilities of pedagogical approaches in contemporary settings. In this respect, the principles of sound-oriented pedagogy are programmatically connected as tools to support teachers in guiding students.

The section *Stimulus for the implementation of creative activities* focuses on stimuli that are key to creativity and is written by Bert Appermont and Erik Schrooten. They draw on several sources that emphasise principles of play (Huizinga, 2016; Bernard, 2012). The authors themselves state that they place composing in the context of making, "*...it is often too methodical and not artistic enough. The musical result is then not original or convincing enough*." (p.37).

To challenge established mechanisms and expand the „playing field of creativity", the authors are inspired by several impulses from art. They reference Priscilla Monge's artwork *The football field* as a metaphor for the music pedagogical process, described by the authors as "*... unpredictable, constantly changing.*" (p.39).

To enhance the applicability and usability of each model, these chapters are framed as specific schools of thought and methods. We believe that fostering the development of this type of approach and way of thinking within the Czech context requires experiential support

and preparation for music educators, enabling them to become familiar with the principles and integrate a piece of the new world into their practice.

*Folk Dance in Music Education* (Eva Vlčková and Jiřina Jiřičková) is a contribution exploring the integration of movement in music education. The authors of this subchapter respond comprehensively to the phenomena within their topic, describing individual historiographical excursions and ethnographic regions of the Czech and Slovak Republics, anchoring the specifics of the selected areas for use in music education.

The final subchapter in this section examines the potential of educational concerts, featuring examples of past events by the author of the subchapter, Petr Kadlec, along with conductor and composer Marko Ivanović. The importance of educational concerts in shaping children's attitude to music is unquestionable. Including this factor in the textbook and incorporating it into music education classes is a unique opportunity—potentially within the framework of global aesthetic awareness—to foster a comprehensive interest in music among children.

To effectively apply these stimuli in practice, it is essential to implement support sessions where each stimulus can be explored through direct experience and the integration of various methods. This approach could at the same time promote a holistic teaching process, fostering a reciprocal learning environment between teacher and pupil. In this respect, this part of the textbook provides an excellent platform for exploration and for realising human potential.

The fourth chapter, *Model Creative Musical and Educational Situations*, is the broadest in terms of content and contains eleven model situations. "*Modelling of creative musical situations can be seen as an established musical pedagogical method.*" (p.81).

The diversity of this practically oriented chapter is immediately apparent, as it presents multiple approaches. The model situations are categorised by age, catering for younger pupils, as well as for both younger and older pupils.

The very concept of "modelling" situations in music education is intriguing. The term modelling implies the processes of creation, development, progression, and refinement into a final form. It aptly highlights the importance of considering individual situations in the classroom, for the collective, the pupil and the teacher in the context of music education. As the following text suggests, these outcomes are highly individualised while also aligning with current scientific, multidisciplinary perspectives on the effects of music on human beings.

Did the modelling of situations in music education achieve concrete results?

By recapitulating the titles of the individual chapters—each representing a spe-

cific model situation—the detailed insight into each topic is evident. Another clear outcome of this creative diversity is the variety of issues structured to support the child's development. The chapters are clearly worded to guide the reader from preparation to implementation. Perhaps the only limitation for the reader may be the necessity of having a high level of interest in the subject matter, as the depth of application suggestions requires motivation to implement topics grounded in practice, involving time-consuming preparation, repetition with students, and reinforcement, even when used in a cross-curricular context.

What specific chapter titles are presented to the textbook reader?

*In the Musical Ypsilonia or Creatively with songs containing named words* (Jiřičková Jiřina and Michal Horák), *Creative work with voice and Slovak folk song* (Martina Procházková), *On the road with dance and song* (Lucie Dajčar and Lenka Pospíšilová), *Contrabass as inspiration in the teaching of ME* (Olga Kozánková and Eva Šašinková), *Examples of the use of folk dance in music education classes* (Eva Vlčková), *Creative rhythmic activities with percussion* (Eva Kolandová and Jan Bísek), *Time to create - Assignment of creative activities* (Bert Appermont and Erik Schrooten). Model musical and educational situations for older pupils were presented by Lucie Hilscherová (*Development of vocal expression through song repertoire*), Jan Prchal (*MOSAIC or Every pupil a composer)*, Monika Václová (*Cestopis 1608*), and Patricia Windsor (*Swing goes to Town*).

The textbook also devotes two chapters to meetings, which are essential for strengthening teacher cohesion in the music teaching process. The first is: *Meeting with the artist Richard Novák* by Petr Kadlec, and the second meeting is a reflection on the process-important topic*: Prevention of voice fatigue of the teacher and its correction as a condition for the implementation of music teaching* by Alena Tichá. The textbook thus creatively concludes by addressing issues that are closely related to our human nature.

Music education in the Czech school system has long been strengthened by a comprehensive teaching approach that integrates vocal, instrumental, listening, and movement-based musical activities, all of which interact and build upon one other. In the current debate about the form, content and future of music education, we can draw inspiration and creativity from the very essence of creative output—connecting new ideas with what has been proven and established over decades as a result of the thinking and work of countless teachers, composers, artists and pupils.

Supporting lifelong musical interest and holistic development is best cultivated in a school environment founded on strong interpersonal relationships. It is essential to emphasise that the interplay between creativity, music, and school—forming the foundation of the

pedagogical relationship between teacher and pupil—fosters both interaction and creativity.

"*...to enhance their self-esteem and provide them with informative feedback about their creative potential and abilities*" (p.15). As a pedagogical approach, the above method can also kick-start divergent thinking, encourage creative connections and inspire the search for new practices and contexts across various aspects of life and professional practice.

We believe that harnessing this human potential is a principle that is woven throughout this textbook, as no theoretical „modelling" can exist without human collaboration. It is our hope that the vibrant, living essence that breathes from the textbook will inspire readers to engage in creative collaborations that can resonate deeply within a music education setting.

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**Název: Gramotnost, pregramotnost a vzdělávání**
Odborný recenzovaný časopis zaměřený na problematiku čtenářské, matematické, informační a přírodovědecké gramotnosti a pregramotnosti
**Číslo 3/2024, ročník VIII, webová adresa:** http://pages.pedf.cuni.cz/gramotnost/

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**Jazyková korektura:** Simon Gill
**Grafická úprava časopisu:** MgA. Denisa Kokošková
Evidence periodického tisku: MK ČR E 22524, ISSN 2533-7882 (Print), ISSN 2533-7890 (Online)

**Vydává:** Univerzita Karlova, Pedagogická fakulta, M. Rettigové 4, Praha 1, 116 39
**Adresa redakce:** Gramotnost, pregramotnost a vzdělávání, Katedra psychologie PedF UK, Myslíkova 7, Praha 1, 116 39, e-mail redakce: gramotnost@pedf.cuni.cz
Návrh obálky a sazba: MgA. Denisa Kokošková, tiskárna a DTP: Nakladatelství Karolinum
Cena za 1 ks: 80 Kč, roční předplatné 200 Kč + poštovné a balné
**Distribuce:** ADISERVIS s.r.o., Na nivách 18, 141 00 Praha 4 – Michle, IČO: 28367499, tel.: 241 484 521, mobil: 603 215 568, e-mail: adiservis@seznam.cz
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ISSN 2533-7882