

PLAY AS A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION OF THE CHILD WITH ART¹

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Abstract:

In art, as in other artistic-educational activities, we find psychophysical release, equally in the role of passive recipient, active performer, or even on an expressive level, through our creation. In this publication, we seek to emphasize the variability of play that can be integrated into the art-educational activities of preschool children. Music is very close to the dramatic, and therefore verbal, arts. The paper gives practical examples of working with music and motion, with the possibility to creatively embody and imitate dramatic situations arising from the nature of music. At the same time, it is important to create space in education for individuals to gain a positive relationship with the arts through their activity, improvisation and personal experiences.

Keywords: art, play, improvisation, child, preschool age.

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Introduction

Preschool age is a period in which the child is very intensively influenced by the whole social environment, giving him the basis for further growth, development and self-realization. The more stimuli from the environment a child receives, the more developed, more mature and enriched he/she becomes. The nursery purposefully deepens the aesthetic level of the child throughout the preschool period until the beginning of schooling, creates in him the skill of aesthetic self-realization, all-round cultivates and holistically develops the personality of the preschool child. Through art education, the nursery very effectively stimulates all spheres of the psyche, but above all the emotional and moral development of the child. It develops higher aesthetic feelings through which it integrates musical, dance, visual, literary and dramatic experiences into one complex aesthetic experience in which almost all the senses are involved. *“Education towards art and art education in today’s schools does not aspire to create art; it is aimed at understanding art as an intrinsic part of every person’s life.”* (Homzová, 2015, p. 8) Art is an important part of our lives, known as a specific form of human activity. In the life of a child, art plays an irreplaceable role. A child does not even realize that he is connected with art from an early age. Children like to draw, dance, sing, watch or play theatre (role-play). Therefore, it is important to deepen a child’s relationship with art and culture, even at pre-school age (Švábová, 2021).

The child’s contact with art

Art is present in everyone’s life. It makes time more pleasant, entertains, soothes, stimulates and influences the whole organism, and at the same time shapes personality, develops cognitive functions, emotional and motor spheres, and moral, social, aesthetic and cultural attitudes. It is defined as „(...) an area of human artistic activity characterised by the aesthetic values it represents; also the product or products of such activity“ (Dubisz, zv. P-S, p. 1545, in Drejer, 2017). Contact with art is an important element of human existence because “through art and in art, people create their world of shapes and colours, sounds and words, events and problems, experiences and emotions, as well as personal and shared experiences” (Suchodolski 1997, p. 160, in Drejer, 2017).

By contact with the art a child „(...) achieves an expansion of the world of his experiences and the world as an integral part of his personality“ (Tyszkowa 1979, p. 7, in Drejer, 2017). Art prepares children to perceive, understand and experience the value of its products and the content contained therein, as well as to acquire

the concepts related to them. It also leads to the development of causal thinking, the source of which is exploration, i.e. „*the discovery and investigation of the nature of some phenomenon, some thing*“ (Dubisz, op.cit., zv. A-J, p. 632, in Drejer, 2017).

Preschool children are characterized by high spontaneity, which allows them to engage in exploratory activities while maintaining the applicable rules. Therefore, their work and creative thinking should be developed. Exploration is the essence of child development through art. Its basis is „the child's mental activity, such as the need to satisfy intellectual curiosity, not the mere variability of phenomena, as in looking at pictures in a book or a film, not extraordinary and sensational phenomena, but a thorough understanding of surrounding and ordinary things through a close knowledge of the details and a knowledge of the cause or manner of their action“.

Exploration as a life form of development requires constant observation, constant repetition, focused attention, comparing similar things, grouping and classifying them. This develops basic cognitive functions such as attention, perception, memory, reasoning, and intelligence (Kunowski 1993, p. 207, in Drejer, 2017). A child's creative activities in the field of art depend on his stage of cognitive development. In preschool, they are mainly characterised by spontaneity and freedom, which is translated into expressive creativity, while at the early schooling stage, the child begins to observe closely what is related to the field of art he or she is exploring. In this period, children are able to formulate hypotheses concerning concrete experiences and to make deductions based on the results. This is the period when, alongside concrete-image thinking, abstract thinking gradually begins to develop (Petlak, Komora, p. 58, in Drejer, 2017). The activities of pre-schoolers are exploratory in nature. Children begin to analyse the effects of their cognitive and creative activity. They compare them with others and discover previously unknown elements of the artistic reality with which they enter into relationships. They influence their senses, evoke appropriate impressions and inspire their thinking, resulting in the ideas, concepts and judgements about art that they learn.

Art as play

According to G. Droppová (2014, p. 12) „*the field of art in nursery schools has a great input potential, as art activities belong to children's spontaneous play of pre-school age, and thus (for most children) are activities that are self-motivating.*“ Art has a model character, i.e. it does not describe reality directly, but creates

analogies and models of it, thus encouraging children's play activities. In doing so, art supports multiple aspects of children's play. Children enjoy the fact that in art activities they create sensory material (cf. J. Piaget) and at the same time work with their emotionality and imagination. Therefore, children at this age like to incorporate artistic (aesthetic) activities into their play; it can even be said that artistic activities not infrequently act directly as play and become, for a shorter or longer period, the children's main occupation (Mistrík, in Kolláriková, Pupala, 2001, 2010).

Play is a significant phenomenon, it is a symbol of childhood, and in the preschool period, it is an essential activity for the child, through which he initiatively participates in learning about the world around him and tries to verify his knowledge, mentally process it and actively find out how he can cope with it. A synthetic, integrated view of play is given by M. Podhájecká (2008, p. 7 – 8), according to whom „*play represents the most natural activity in the life of a child, through which he absorbs into his consciousness a huge amount of knowledge, stimuli, experiences. It is an information gateway into the child's soul, which can convey to him an influx of sensations, feelings, impulses, which can transform them into a comprehensible form and help to transform them into knowledge.*“ It is characterized by spontaneity, self-purpose, symbolism, and creativity.

Play as a basic human activity is an activity reflecting sociocultural reality in specific processing by the subject as an interindividual expression of the processed influence of reality on the individual in an imaginary and symbolic situation through its strategy and using play symbols, focused on the process of play (not on the product) as an activity enabling to overcome the contradiction between what the individual can, may, knows, wants to realize, and between what he does not know, cannot, must not, and does not want to do in reality. (Kikušová, S., 2012, p. 105, in Droppová, 2014, p. 12) In the nursery school environment, play is a daily activity for children, and at this time they like to participate in artistic (aesthetic) play activities that directly enter into play, thus engaging the children. Art as play supports play activities. These activities are intended to develop the cognitive and non-cognitive characteristics of the child's personality and to develop the child's imagination and emotions (Mistrík, in Kolláriková, Pupala, 2001, 2010). The child plays, learns, develops, and all because he creates. Visual, musical, and dramatic play teaches the child creativity. Artistic expression has its sources in play with movement, an instrument, a puppet... The child learns through play creative problem-solving techniques to be able to use them in life.

Art not only teaches us to learn about the world around us, but it is also a means of education. In a child throughout the preschool period, we try to deepen aesthetic sensitivity. The child acquires new knowledge and develops imagination

and emotionality while familiarizing himself with art. The information that the child acquires through art becomes part of the children's experiential world. This means that the more information he or she receives from the environment, the more developed and mature he or she becomes. (Dolinská, 2020) Art gives an image of reality and conveys information through sensory perception. Children get more information through art than through the media (Mistrík, in Kolláriková, Pupala, 2001, 2010).

Play, creativity, improvisation

The importance of **play** in terms of aesthetic education is also emphasized by Hatrik, who points out that *„children's play in preschool contains in germ all the aspects and dimensions of the future synthesis, the integrative model of artistic or aesthetic education that we posit as an ideal. The child experiences the world through powerful images, embedded in archetypal symbolism, accumulated through phylogeny - like a miracle“*. (2003, p. 47, in Balcárová, 2013, p. 33) Music education at this age should also be seen as one big play, which has many secrets just waiting to be gradually revealed. At the same time, every teacher of pre-primary education must realise that the child perceives holistically, and syncretically. This phenomenon is aptly characterised by J. Hatrik, that *„Preschool age provides insight into the miracle of childhood syncretism when the integrative functions of the paleo-brain are not yet blocked“* (in Balcárová, 2013, p. 33). Musical games are a means of developing a child's musicality. E. Baranová (2008) points out that one of the richest sources of emotional experience, according to psychological research, is a concrete action, an activity. The most popular activity of a person from an early age is play, which is an important factor in the development of his personality.

Children are by nature *creatively active*; they react and behave like **creative artists** to present themselves and be positively evaluated. Their artistic artefacts are appropriate to their level of ability, their level of previous musical experience, and their opportunities to perform musically (Schneiderová, 2001, Balcárová, 2013). The child learns creative problem-solving techniques through play so that he or she can use them in life. For the child, creation is play through experimentation, attempt and dialogue. The child learns to combine, but also **to improvise** (Droppová, 2014, p. 12). Improvisation is about allowing the child to open up and express their natural creativity as much as possible. There are many ways to improvise and it is important to encourage the child *to improvise in different ways*: musical, dramatic, movement, art, etc. Creating gives the child the

opportunity to learn to work in a group but also to find solutions independently, the child has the opportunity to be a creator and a performer at the same time, he does not think in terms of “I play well or badly”, he develops abstract thinking, he learns to express emotions through art and observing the child improvising allows us to get to know him from a different perspective.

The prerequisites for **creativity** are certain qualities such as heightened receptivity, retention of impressions, imagination and imagery, the ability to express oneself, and good memory. Play is not only the means with which the child explores the world, it is the activity that brings him the greatest psychological balance at an early age. According to Lowenfeld, play is an expression of the child's bodily impulses, which teaches him to understand and know his surroundings, which prepares him for life, and enables him to fit in harmoniously with his friends. She considers children's play to be the outward expression of the child's emotional life. She says that play has as much function for the child as art has in the life of adults (Read, H. E., 1967, p. 184, in Droppová, 2014, p. 13). Thus, the game is the most natural life activity for preschool children, it motivates, develops interests, and leads to independence and creativity. In children's games, we find a reflection of the surrounding life (Švábová, 2012). It is syncretic, it fully engages the child's senses and imagination, it allows the child to fully immerse himself in the situation and at the same time have a distance from it, it allows him to imitate reality and at the same time adapt it to his liking. Children use their imagination, play and daydreaming to relive the experience and reflect on it. One way to access the image fixed in the amygdala is through art. This in itself is a medium of the unconscious. The emotional centres of the brain are highly receptive to symbolic meanings: to being conveyed through metaphors, stories, or myths. Freud called this understanding a “primary process.” Sometimes it is art that allows children to confide experiences they would not otherwise dare to talk about (Goleman, D., 1997, p. 201, in Droppová, 2014).

Musical art and improvisation

At preschool age, musical development is very important, because the foundations of his musicality are being formed. Music is considered the most effective kind of art in this period. Music education aims to develop the child's musicality. It is conditioned by the genetic predispositions of the parents in the form of biological, physiological and psychological structures. Musicality is a quality that creates in us a relationship with music that evokes positive emotions (Derevjaniková, 2016). The family environment and, consequently, music

education in nursery school, in addition to the non-negligible influence of the media environment, creates conditions not only for the perception of artistic elements but above all for the child's musical self-realisation in the spectrum of musical activities. Through observation, aesthetic perception and musical self-realisation, the musical educational process, in games and play activities, concentrates a high degree of interaction of all the components involved based on the experience, and often the tension, excitement of the child's musical production, which is the result and unmistakable proof of the child's naturalness. Each individual, and therefore the child, identifies with the music in his or her way. Children learn different songs and nursery rhymes, and at the same time perceive music of different provenance from the media, often music that does not correspond to their mental level and their level of musical ability, or music that often does not even meet the elementary artistic criteria. (Schneiderová, 2001) In the nursery school environment, children encounter musical play, they like to sing, dance, recreate the situation with movement, and express themselves according to their own ideas and emotional experience. All of this has a joyful effect on them as they are introduced to the world of music, rhythm, tempo and different sounds (Švábová, 2020).

In the preschool period, musical intelligence begins to dominate in the child, and the characteristic feature is the sense and feeling for rhythm. Through his activity, he acquires a sense of rhythm and its variations. (Doyon, 2003) Children develop musical memory and imagination, easily remember rhythms and rhymes, express themselves spontaneously in **improvised singing and games**, and externalize their impressions and experiences. They increase the accuracy of their reproduction of musical rhythm and the rhythmicity of their singing, which begins to be intonationally correct. „*Some children at this stage of development readily improvise and sing entire <arias> of their production. These vocal improvisations are most often accompanied by a variety of movement games, and are often a form of interpersonal contact and rhythmic-melodic entertainment*“ (Manturzevska, 1990, p. 35, in Drejer, 2017). Children also enjoy creating their own „songs“ about events that are important to them. They then use the two or three sounds they have acquired, which they repeat continuously in a vocal range that is comfortable for them (Przychodzińska 1989, p. 154, in Drejer, 2017). The dominant form is the singing of an intermittent series, i.e. the alternation of several notes of undefined pitch. The melody is difficult to discern because it is an individual variation of the original (Górniok-Naglik, 2000, p. 57, in Drejer, 2017).

Improvisation in creative dramatics

Improvisation is one of the basic methods of creative dramatics, which is interdisciplinary and teaches through play and experience. Improvisation is a spontaneous activity that can be mastered by children. It gives them the space to act and react freely, it is based on an inner feeling, and it is transformed into a benefit and a need. What is important here is the experience that arises from different experiences and results in new experiences that lead to more self-knowledge and personality formation. According to Bekéniová (2012), in improvisation, the child has the space in creative activity to express himself, formulate his ideas clearly and distinctly, present his views, solve practical tasks creatively, subject his views and those of others to criticism, and thus gain openness to change his attitudes and to evolve.

Motivating themes for improvisation must correspond to the age of the individuals and be based on real life, their own experiences or taken from literary, artistic or musical sources. Improvisation in induced dramatic situations develops creativity, imagination, fantasy, communication, cooperation, and the ability to respond to different motivating themes or topics (Šváblová, 2018). Through improvisation, the child reacts in a playful way to his surroundings, realizes his desires, and experiences, and forms an aesthetic attitude to various kinds of art.

Improvisation to music

Music and various musical activities in pre-primary education activate the senses and open the door to children's spontaneous and creative expression. Musical activities make use of *mass, group, pair and solo improvisation*. Mass improvisation is the most popular form, because here the whole group works in the same situation, leaving the space free. The smaller and more timid the children are, the more we apply and use *mass improvisation without contact*. It is good for loosening up and removing any barriers of those involved. If the whole group works and is well motivated, there is natural learning and development of the child's personality (Šváblová, 2017). The preschool child perceives music more emotionally, responds, and discovers a simple and direct rhythm that pleases him (Way, 1996). There is a hidden curiosity in the child, he is interested in the surrounding world, therefore it is necessary to accept individuality, to create a stimulating environment in which, under the influence of music, nursery rhymes, dance, song, children's games and various creative activities associated

with movement, he has the opportunity to realise, react, spontaneously imitate, create a story, express his feelings and experiences.

Improvisation and playing with music are children's first joyful entry into the world of music. Musical activities in the school environment allow this entry and their application broadens the child's horizon, through their activity they come up with authentic and original ideas, experience reality more deeply, and integrate knowledge about themselves and the world around them.

Practical demonstrations of music work and improvisation

Each child perceives the music and can react spontaneously to it with his/her movements. Music motivates the child to express himself in movement and to represent situations. In addition to walking through space in different variations (non-rhythmic, rhythmic, combined with arm movements) and formations (wheel, line, queue, crowd, free space, wave), pantomime activities are important and motivating, capturing the character of the music. Simple rhymes, games, and songs using body play (clapping, slapping, stamping, snapping, and knocking) are popular.

Movement improvisation combined with rhythmic and impressive music can actively influence the child, and to stimulate unusual manifestations. Simple movement exercises are combined with the recitation of favourite nursery rhymes, speeches, music and movement games, and songs. The movement performances are based on the text, which is interesting in its content, and rich in images, and the child has unlimited space to creatively represent various activities and situations based on his/her imagination and fantasy.

In the spring season, activities in which children show joy at the arrival of the warm rays of the sun, the awakening of nature, and the singing of little birds are popular. They spontaneously and cheerfully recite nursery rhymes, and songs, in which they apply children's movement creativity, playfulness, clapping, stamping, jumping around the space, looking up and summoning the sun and then dancing, singing and playing.

Movement improvisation and nursery rhyme: spring is coming (Švábová, 2012, p. 74 – 75)

„*Ide jar, ide jar, sniečko nám hladká tvár!* (jumping around the space with hands raised above the head)

„Hrej, hrej, hrej, nech je koniec zimy zlej!“ (clap your palms and stomp your feet towards the circle)

„Slniečko už hreje, na deti sa smeje.“ (jumping around the space with hands raised above the head)

Movement improvisation and nursery rhyme: Hup, hup, hupi, hup

(Ďuríčková, 1984, p. 21)

Hup, hup, hupi, hup, (children bend their knees lightly in rhythm)

nožičkami dupi, dup! (stamping feet on the space)

Tlap, tlap, tľapi, tľap, (clapping of palms)

zavrtím sa ako chlap! (spinning on its own axis)

Movement improvisation and song: This is how the butterfly flies

Objectives: role-playing to recreate and imitate dramatic situations, orientation in space, rhythmic sensitivity and cooperation.

Methodological procedure: The children move freely around the space and freely and spontaneously improvise the content of the song according to the recited lyrics.

Takto letí motýlik, takto letí vtáčik (imitate the flight of a butterfly and a bird with your hands)

Takto letí lietadlo, cez biely obláčik. (spread your arms and represent the flight of an airplane)

Takto skáču opice, (gently hitting the head with the hands and circular movements on the tummy)

takto skáču žabky. (imitate a frog jumping in space)

Takto skáče zajačik, čo má biele labky. (to represent jumps, fingers above the head to represent ears)

R: /: Báb-báb, bum-báb, haťa-paťa, zumba. (2x clap, 2x slap and repeat)

Báb-báb, bum-báb, haťa-paťa, bum.:/ (2x clap, 2x slap, 2x clap, hands in the air)

Reflection: what was difficult to recreate and imitate? Which animals did you like to impersonate? What did you enjoy the most?

If the teacher joins in the creative rendition, the more pleasant and cheerful the atmosphere in the group is.

Nowadays there is a wide variety of different rhymes, games, songs, and stories. The educator must be aware of what methodological material he will work with to penetrate the children's world and experience the action. It is the pedagogical mastery that depends on how he can motivate, activate, and arouse interest in the creative work of children. M. Zelina (2011) points out that every educator must be a professional and in education create stimulating themes in which children have the opportunity to express themselves, to experience emotionally, and to enrich themselves with new experiences, which brings valuable results, but also products (children's theatre).

Conclusion

To prepare today's children for work and life in society, it is necessary to develop in them a wide range of qualities that make up their personality. Above all, activity, independence, creativity, skill, the ability to concentrate, the ability to apply knowledge in practical life, and the ability to present one's own opinion and to be able to defend it. Communication with art requires learning to understand the forms in which it is presented and to learn 'aesthetic surprise' through a work of art that is of real value to the individual. We can only speak of the influence of art on what we become when we experience it through our artistic activity. Art education is, therefore, an essential element of communication with art, especially through play, which stimulates the functioning of the child's (pupil's) cognitive and, in particular, affective sphere, to learn the language of art and be able to use it in the future.

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