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DEVELOPMENT OF MUSICAL PERCEPTION OF PRE-SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN IN THE FAMILY

Key words: *Family, educational method In our family, teaching aid The Children's House, methodical publications and audio media*

Today, families have access to unprecedented material and cultural possibilities. However, the problem still persists of how to meet a child's material and spiritual needs in a balanced way. From the earliest stages of her development, a child needs to experience the values of goodness because these remain in her consciousness and will strengthen her in teenage and adult years. A child should be able to experience the joy of beauty so that later she learns to discern what is bad taste and nonsense in the arts. To experience the values of truth is indispensable for a child's development, so that in his later years, he will be able to spot various guises of manipulation, half-truths and lies. More than ever it is of paramount importance today that a child learns to perceive the order of things and relationships! Such an order exists in the family which can imprint the child with the feeling that he is an important part of the family and that his opinions matter to the other family members. A safe roof is characteristic of a good house, likewise, human beings carry within themselves a home built and developed since their earliest infant years. In her home, a child takes her first „steps of reason“, receives support for her will and is enveloped in loving emotions. For very young children it is important to link and relate everything so that she learns to perceive, grasp and understand the outer world as well as herself. A wealth of musical and artistic experiences emanating from human relationships within a family and, later, kindergarten, gives to the child a certain mutuality and accumulates the very values of goodness, beauty, truth and order. Parents in a healthy family will be naturally getting close to the child, inspiring him to useful work and creative activities, noticing his troubles and needs, giving him enough of their time. They can, for example, show approval with his behavior, give praise, say thank you, etc. In this way, they can sow into the child's consciousness the seeds of the most beautiful human virtues, the virtues of kindness, reliability, honesty, faithfulness, peace, and many others. These in turn become the stuff binding the family together and motivating the child's behaviour. That is why it is indeed important that the ideas of Jan Amos Comenius enter more deeply into our families. In his *Book of the Nursery-school Teachers (Informatorium školy mateřské)* Comenius attributes great importance to elementary artistic activities, stressing, above all, music activities. His approach to education combines rea-

son, work, ethics, religion and aesthetics. In the present day and age, there is a lot of talk about the disintegration of traditional family values. One of the sources of this disintegration is the fact that for many parents it is not too important to have regular and sensitive contact with their child, they are not willing to give their children their free time. These parents are driven by the changing demands of their work or profession, by earning a living, and such like. This shift, which took place after 1989, fueled mainly by an increasing focus on the importance of material values and a declining sense of and feeling for beauty. For a society, these values are of the same importance as the development of reason. I write in defense of artistic and aesthetic education which some still consider inferior in the educational curriculum. Artistic and aesthetic education has been important in the past and continues to be important in the future! Therefore, the fact music education has been removed from the curriculum of the last two years of elementary schools in Slovakia is a great setback. We all need to exert efforts so that this unfortunate situation in Slovakia is remedied and does not 'spread' to more EU countries. International cooperation is, in this regard, absolutely essential. The *In our family* teaching method derives from the above mentioned principles. It focuses on the development of skills in individual artistic areas so that an integrating element enters the consciousness of a child (a common denominator) which can, with its motivational energy, create attitudes and direct the forming personality in the right direction.

A natural source of this motivation is the home, one's family – consisting of grandparents, parents and children – all internally connected with thousands of experiences. Our method uses *The Children's House* teaching aid and a number of methodological publications and recordings which will be introduced later in the article. We believe that this is the best way how to put the ideas of integrative music education and poly-aesthetic education into practice while fully respecting the general development of a child's personality. We activate his senses and develop his skills of perceiving time, space, as well as the artistic and social background. In this way, a child naturally develops taste, trains her fine motor skills, her sense of space, time, society and art.

A child learns about *space* both in the macro- and micro-sense of the word, learning to understand and use words denoting height.

Perception of *time* in the short- and long-term horizon is enabled by the fact that the child lives together with grandparents, parents, and siblings of different ages, thus acquiring experience with different generations.

A child first perceives *society* in the natural surrounding of the family. Good relationships between and among siblings, parents and grandparents enter the child's consciousness as values which can accompany her throughout her life. If the child plays with the characters created in the *Children's House* environment, he can fill with content a great number of intellectual games in which he can identify with various professions. This will develop the child's artistic skills, among others, and help him gain valuable experience from the life of adults. From the intellectual and artistic point of view, the method introduced in this article implements into practice current pedagogical approaches to personality development (above all the personalistic and socio-constructivist approaches) with help of music, artistic, literary-theatrical, and constructive activities. The *In our family* method was developed in cooperation and with the support of the Grants Agency of the Charles University in Prague, the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the International Visegrad Fund IVF in Bratislava. Their support is gratefully acknowledged.

The front part of the House is a melodic musical instrument. There are five stories, represented by a staff, with eight small windows which are placed in the staff's spaces and lines. Beating on the sound stones with a wooden stick produces tones of the C-scale. The windows display faces of eight characters which form one family. The portrait of grandfather Cyril represents the note 'c1'. The upper window (green) shows the face of grandmother Daniela. When hitting the adjacent sound stone, we hear the note 'd1'. In this way, all notes of the C-scale are represented. The yellow window with tone 'e1' displays father Emil, the brown window with tone 'f1' mother Františka. Both parents are followed by pictures of their children Gustík (early school age), Adámek (pre-school), Hanička (older toddler) and Cecílka (younger toddler) representing tones 'g1' with a blue, 'a1' with a violet, 'h1' with a white and 'c2' with a red window shutter. The gable above the windows bears the name of the House and a mechanical clock where you can move the hand watches. The back and the right part of the House are open for children to play with characters, household animals, furniture and equipment which can be made with help of the *In our Little House (V našem domečku)* material. There is a triangle hanging at the top of the roof area. The left part of the house is conspicuously decorated by the G clef. A drum is incorporated in the roof, masked as a roof window. The house has two floors (it is available in a one floor only version) and can be moved around on small wheels. The ground floor is occupied by grandparents (one room and a kitchen), the first floors by parents (one room and a kitchen) and the second floor by the four children (one room for the boys, one room for the girls). House animals live below the roof. *In our Little House* is aimed at pre-school children aged five and above. It contains a wealth of pictorial material on semi-cardboard which the child can cut out with scissors (the authors are working at another booklet to develop the taste and imagination of children with tasks such as finishing a half-drawn picture, alternating the shape of objects or characters, choice of colours, etc.). The child folds, glues, and stabilises the pictures of persons and furniture, thus already at a very young age improving his perception of space, the size of objects and the environment of the rooms. Human characters in his hands become alive with stories, poems and songs, inspired by another book with the title *Once There Was a Little House...* Via the stabilised figures in a home environment, the child deepens her bond with children's prose and poetry. She also acquires a higher quality and confidence with her oral presentation skills. She identifies with the characters and incorporates into the game the views and experiences from the life of her own family's members. The stories can inspire parents and nursery school teachers to many other activities, such as organising a carnival. The child can prepare for a carnival for example by imitating a staging the characters know from stories of *Once There Was a Little House...* or by singing together with other children songs from *Songs for Our Children* while simultaneously acting out the songs with gestures. In the hands of a pre-school child, all models will come alive and they will resonate with his ideas and imagination. Perhaps, in a way, they will thus become even a mirror of life in his family or school.

The *In Our Family* teaching method includes the following books, booklets and audio material:

- *Once There Was a Little House...* by Miloš Kodejška, Renata Ferstová, Zuzana Špůrová, Pavel Jurkovič and Václav Fischer (illustrated by Jana Lamserová). It comprises of ten stories, poems and songs, linked with a uniting thread and based on the real life of children, their parents and grandparents. An introduction outlines theoretical knowledge from the fields of art and psychology, as well as

methodological suggestions for working with children. The compilation is aimed at children aged 3 to 8, hoping to spur their literary, theater, music and various other activities. A German translation is also available.

- Pavel Jurkovič and Václav Fischer composed ten songs which have been recorded in the Realm of Puppets studio in Prague under the title *Songs from the Children's House*. One part of the recording features both music and singing, the other just the music for children and adults to sing along. Jana Hudáková translated the songs into Slovak and they were recorded in the studio of the Prešov Radio, Slovakia.
- *Integrative Music Education of Pre-School Children*, a university textbook, by Miloš Kodejška (translated into Slovak in cooperation with Daniel Šimčík from the Faculty of Education, Prešov University, Prešov, Slovakia).
- *Family Songs for Our Children* by Jaroslav Vereb a Daniel Šimčík, in cooperation with a team of Slovak, Polish, Czech and German authors. The songs are based on poems by Michal Tkáč, half of the songs are complemented with a dance choreography designed by Božena Viskupová. A considerable merit for technical cooperation goes to Libuše Novotná.



Fig. 1. Children's House

- Jaroslav Vereb recorded instrumental versions of the songs from *Family Songs for Our Children*. They complement the whole project and will be of great help to those parents and teachers who cannot play the piano nor the guitar.
- *In Our Little House*, designed by Jana Lamserová (in cooperation with Miloš Kodejška) features over 150 blueprints on semi-cardboard which, following instructions, can be turned into complete interior equipment for four rooms and two kitchens. The blueprints include eight characters and two animals. This booklet inspires children over five to various constructive and artistic activities.
- *In our family – English for Pre-Schoolers* is a textbook written by Libuše Novotná from the Rolino Language Studio, in cooperation with Miloš Kodejška, and to be published soon. All our life, we like to come back home with the wish to draw new strength and love. Then, one day you come to realise that if you can share these values, you become even more happy and through this generosity become somehow more beautiful. If a child had at its disposal all the teaching material which implement the *In our family* teaching method, we believe it could create the much desired ‘bridges to cooperation’ between individual family members and between the school and the family. And it is this wish which drives the work of the team of authors of *In our family*.

References

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Summary

DEVELOPMENT OF MUSICAL PERCEPTION OF PRE-SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN IN THE FAMILY

The author leads a team of Czech and Slovak experts on pre-school music education. The article discusses the importance of positive family environment surrounding a pre-school child. It introduces the educational method, *In our family*, which is based on the integration of artistic skills and on the five human senses. It emphasizes the role of music in the healthy development of individual personality. The author introduces the teaching aid called *The Children's House* and other publications related to it.

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