



MUSICALLY GIFTED CHILDREN'S DYNAMICS

DINAMICA DOTĂRII MUZICALE A COPILOR

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The strategic educational problem of modern education becomes acutely transparent when we deal with children of great artistic talent. Music and art is the domain in which the manifestation of natural talent that is above the average level can become obvious if certain conditions are complied with. Gifted children need special attention with a view to evaluating adequately their creative potential.

It is known that one of the main objectives of the educational process is the discovery of the pupils with aptitudes in different domains.

In general the speciality literature defines musical endowment in terms of musical competence. Looking over the scientific investigations realized in this domain, two somehow contradictory tendencies are noticed: the studies are either too specialized or too general, with some exceptions. On the one hand, there is a series of isolated studies regarding the musical disciplines that are very specialized. (For example, the motor skills of the piano soloist), on the other hand, many researches treat musical endowment as a general feature, without trying to clearly differentiate between the forms of musical manifestation: composition, vocal interpretation, instrumental interpretation etc. The diversity of musical activities makes difficult the establishment of some definitive characteristics of the musical talent. It is difficult, but not impossible. As you will see, there is a set of special dimensions that are essential for the musical talent, a common nucleus, without which we can't talk about musicality in general.

Despite the type of culture (Western versus Eastern), the musical per-

ception or the influence of the musical stimuli starts to manifest itself before birth. The data presented by Blum in a recent study indicate positive effects that are obvious when listening to music before birth. It affects the ulterior perceptive and motor development. The musicality forms and manifests itself very early, even in very limited conditions, for example at the children whose parents are death. It is surprising that from early age the children's musical behaviour is very similar to that of adults, the development of aptitudes and musical skills is relatively rapid that is more than the simple functionality of auditory organs.

It is indisputable that the early auditory stimulation, the musical experience from childhood, is indispensable for the achievement of superior performances in the musical domain. If we take into account the fact that the number of connections is more important than the one of neurons in the development of the cortex and that these connections are formed as a result of sensory stimulation, it is easy to understand the mechanism behind this phenomenon. A rich auditory stimulation at early age can facilitate the formation of neuronal nets involved in the processing of musical in-

formation. The richer and more diverse are the formed connections, the more the arrangements can cover a larger gamut of information, respectively more complex forms of organization of this information which is essential for the music production.

The talented children or better said those who are very receptive to the specific stimuli of the musical domain, from the age of two respond to music through movements and manage to capture small music sequences. At about the age of three they start to sing more accurately, respecting from the beginning only the melodic contour, and then gradually recognizing the correct pitch of the tones. Also at the same age, the spontaneous, improvised singing is gradually replaced by the recognition and imitation of some songs more familiar to the child. From this moment the development of aptitudes and musical skills gain in complexity, quality, but in essence they don't change much. As to the vocal intonation, this aptitude or at least its initial form appears relatively early, even in parallel with learning speech. But we are not speaking about singing in the true sense of the word: the child vocalizes and sings spontaneously, so far without any tendency of organization, but in a form, however, recognizable.

The stages of development of vocal interpretation include, at an initial stage, rendition, imitation of some short melodic and rhythmic sequences, in which only the melodic contour is kept. Regarding the correct pitch of the sounds, that is the precision of the intonation, the child is far from the complete exploitation of his potential yet. At the age of two the interpretation sums up at the repetition of some melodic phrases, accompanied more by enthusiasm than technique. Gradu-

ally the interpreted musical phrases become longer, step by step the child begins to combine them. The complexity of the sung musical sequences grows as well with time. The age or more exactly the period of life in which the correct recognition of the pitch of the sounds appears varies relatively much. This aptitude can develop in musically gifted children even at the age of three. However, these cases are extremely rare, the development of correct recognition (and especially the reproduction) of the pitch appears at older ages than this.

At about the age of five or six the vocal interpretation starts to respect structure and tonality (the pitch of tones), reaching to incorporate the majority of characteristics specific to the adult interpretation. The organization follows similar patterns to those used and applied by adults, even if the vocal diapason is still limited and resumes itself only at the possibility to interpret some small and distinct melodies. A little bit later the child manages to maintain a constant rhythm. Concerning the age index, the musically gifted children present signs of their potential and a lively interest for music at the age of five, period in which the majority of the gifted ones start their musical education as well. As to the proper musical creation, the spontaneity with which the children, starting from the age of six play experimenting with sounds, try to compose music and improvise, is interesting. They adventure themselves in the exploitation of the musical domain, trying to play different musical instruments or instruments that are not used in this way (pseudo instruments), transforming and combining the sounds and melodies, creating rhythms through gestures and movements of the body etc. Vanda Weidenbach draws our

attention to the fact that we have to accept the idea according to which all the people have a potential for musical performance. In this approach the musical skills are not exclusively the result of "genetic luck", on the contrary their acquirement is realized through a long and intense implication in different musical experiences. Thus, the success in the musical domain also has to be analyzed from the perspective of the factors which influence learning. The author synthesizes the factors which proved to be very significant in the determination of the musical success through their positive influence on learning and commitment to the musical domain: the early exposal to musical experiences, environment, cultural factors, motivation, encouragement and support, trust in oneself, efficient teaching (positive and encouraging), efficient practice strategies, efficient learning strategies (of music), the influence of peers, the study of a musical instrument, opportunities for musical performance.

The same author (Vanda Weidenbach) draws the attention that in the dispute regarding the inborn or acquired character of the musical talent, there are many data which suggest that the musical aptitudes are formed in a normal process of enlightenment in the first years of life. The best example in this sense is "the absolute pitch" about which it was believed for a long time that it has an inborn origin, being uninfluenced by experience or more exactly without a decisive influence. The recent data, thus, prove that it can be acquired in the process of learning. At the same time the absolute pitch doesn't seem to be such an efficient predictor regarding the musical performance as it was spoken about in the speciality literature for a long time.

In the conception of Sloboda the *superior musical performance* has two big components: a technical and an expressive one. *The technical component* refers to the mechanic aspects of musical production - the speed of execution, the control of sound duration and intensity, the synchronization of movements etc. *The expressive component* refers to variations introduced by the musician in the parameters of the performance (rhythm, timbre, intensity etc.) which are intended to influence the cognitive and aesthetic aspects of the musical production. The technical and expressive skills are relatively separable, in the sense that it is possible that a performer executes technically perfectly a piece of music, but without expressive force and vice-versa. The interaction between these two components, their reciprocal influence become obvious if we think, for example, that the realization of some expressive parameters is not possible without mastering the instrument from a technical point of view.

As to the development of the musical talent, Sosniak describes three phases. In the *first phase* the play still predominates, the child discovers the pleasure of musical activities, accompanied by the parents' encouragement and eventually that of the teacher of music. The perseverance lacks so far, the exploration of the domain, the acquisition of specific knowledge not being systematic. At the same time, we don't look for objective criteria for the measurement of the performance. The appearance of preoccupations in this sense already indicates the next phase. The *second phase* that comes at the age of ten till thirteen is characterized through precision and growing discipline. The aim is the continuous perfection of the interpretative technique, the en-

richment of skills which will allow the acquirement of a bigger precision in the respective domain of musical activity. More and more attention is given to technical details, the child spends more and more time practicing, he learns to "tolerate" the variations. The *last phase* is that of individualization, personalization of the performance. It is the period of commitment to a musical career and of discovery of the vocation of musician. This is reflected in the more emphasized growth of time given to this domain through a critical attitude towards the personal performance.

The music consultant, Lloyd Schmidt affirms that the musical endowment can be conceived and identified on the bases of three dimensions: a) performance skills, b) composition or creative abilities, c) musical-perceptive skills.

The most fundamental model of the musical talent is offered by Joanne Haroutounian. Following the elements of Renzulli's model, the author circumscribes the musical talent through three basic categories: a) musical skills and abilities, b) creative interpretation, c) commitment. These categories have been elaborated on the basis of the speciality literature, the content analysis of some existent and used rating scales, as well as on the basis of some interviews with experts in the domain and teachers of music. These three categories are defined through some essential components which are further detailed.

Music aptitudes and abilities:

1) *Tonal memory* is the basic musical aptitude. It refers to the mental update of music sequences and rhythms, to the capacity of "thinking musically". It is an indispensable component, for example, in the comparison and discrimination of sounds. The people

with deficiencies in this sense are not capable to compare with success two sounds because they can't keep activated in their memory the auditory representation of the sounds for sufficient time in order to do the comparison. As a result, these have serious difficulties in learning songs, melodies because they can't maintain active the tonal pattern of the melodies.

2) *Rhythmic sense* refers to the capacity to support a continuous rhythm with accuracy, to render rhythmic sequences of different lengths, but which doesn't resume itself only at this. The rhythm is a basic music attribute. The capacity to respond fluently, easily to different rhythms, modifications in rhythm and tempo is also important. The musical execution supposes the planning of produced musical sequences, and the rhythmic structure constitutes to a great extent a support in this process. The rhythmic gradations also represent the element around which the expressivity of the interpretation is shaped.

3) *Perceptive listening* supposes the perception of the delicate differences in the pitch of the tones, rhythm and melody. Discrimination means the comparison of two rhythmic, tonal and melodic sequences as well, followed by the decision of the type "similar/ different". This thing is impossible without the mental formation of some structures.

4) *Contextual discrimination* – the understanding of the musical production can't be separated by the musical context. Contextual discrimination means the capacity to identify patterns, melodies, eventually even instruments in the musical process, in a much larger context.

5) *Performance* – except the representation, discrimination and mental structuring of the musical information, a basic component is the perfor-

mance or the effective interpretation. The author includes in this dimension the individual's capacity to render, sing or play a melody with accuracy and natural ease. It should be mentioned that although this component is usually the most obvious and most "palpable", it cannot be conceived without the components listed above.

Creative interpretation:

6) *Experimenting with sounds*— at earlier ages this takes the form of a play with sounds, so that later the child passes to manipulation, transformation, and extension of musical ideas. This thing supposes harmonic fluency and flexibility.

7) *Aesthetic sensitivity* refers to the capacity of becoming aware of the changes in the atmosphere, the dynamic and colouristic side of music.

8) *Expressiveness* refers to the manifestation of expressive implication in the musical activity or the reaction to music.

Commitment:

9) *Perseverance* is the manifestation of superior concentration as well as the interior motivation for music. Being a fundamental condition for the acquisition of expertise in the musical domain, perseverance or commitment refers to the individual interest for all the musical activities, the complete immersion in this domain, the maintenance of a certain level of motivation indispensable for the long-term, systematic and deliberate preparation, sometimes during 10 years.

10) *Readiness to refine ideas* – the young musician is critical and self-critical, he has high aspirations. (Due to the age characteristics, this component can be included in the model or rather can be taken into consideration only at people who reached the formal stage of thinking.)

It is known that the musically gifted children have certain indivi-

dual characteristics which all the participants of the educational process have to know and especially the teacher of musical education. Among these characteristics we emphasize:

- As a rule, these pupils are very active and always preoccupied by the solution of some problems that are connected to this domain. They tend to work more than others, paying much attention to things and phenomena which don't always correlate directly with the object of study. At first sight it seems that these pupils don't pay pregnant attention to all the school subjects. They need special attention and support from the teacher for the continuous development of their aptitudes.

- They insistently realize their expected aims and through this of course bring "prejudices" to the teacher, because these pupils seek to get into the essence of things and remain completely satisfied by the undertaken actions.

- These pupils want to be appreciated and approved.

- Due to the aptitudes that they possess, they progress more than the others in the individual work. These aspects are especially visible in the work with the additional literature, in the activities of artistic creation.

- The pupils from this category are apt to get into the essence of things, they are critical and self-critical.

- Every phenomenon causes a lot of questions to which they insist to get explicit and definitive answers.

- Those course hours which are modelled through the application of problematic methods present interest for them, while their classmates are satisfied with the learning of the communicated facts by the teacher.

- These pupils are ready to learn individually.

- Unlike their colleagues, the musically gifted pupils skilfully analyse,

overlap, and discriminate the studied facts, especially those that belong to musical art.

- The majority of these pupils propose themselves major aims which are unrealisable for their peers.

Along with the individual features characteristic to the gifted children, we can also emphasize the following traits of personality which demand to be improved/ taken into consideration by the teacher in the training process of the gifted children, in supporting/ encouraging the artistic and cognitive discourse:

- the special interest towards the activity of thinking;
- extra competences for their age;
- tendencies to independently find an answer to any question that appears during the learning process;
- the wish to make discoveries, to create, to invent;
- the manifestation of interest towards diverse information and knowledge from different domains;
- the manifestation of an exceptional memory;
- the presence of an extraordinary imagination;
- a major tendency for games, for the exercise of innovation;
- the high capacity to show personal judgements/thoughts;
- the manifestation of special patience for the realized activity

(learning, creation, game etc.);

- the tendency and readiness to actively participate in extracurricular activities;
- the multiple interest for the study of the diverse literary sources (encyclopaedias, dictionaries etc.);
- interest for research;
- the manifestation of a quite developed feeling of truth;
- the raised tendency for experimentation/innovation and the risk to carry on different actions in the domain of learning;
- the presence of humour for funny things;
- the manifestation of high responsibility for the undertaken actions;
- the manifestation of an increased productivity, tendency to anticipate the learning processes set by the school programs.

Summarising the above mentioned, we will remark that the pupils with musical aptitudes (musically gifted) represent a specific category which raise advanced exigencies for the teacher of music. They belong to: the objective and early diagnostic of the level of development of the musical aptitudes, their correlation with the individual characteristics, the elaboration and competent application of special pedagogic strategies oriented towards the continuous development of capacities.

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