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## **EDUCATION THROUGH PLAY IN THE FIELD OF MUSIC – CONTRIBUTION OF MONTESSORI METHOD**

**Abstract:** An important area of modern education is music education, through which children acquire knowledge and skills. Music is also an important tool that fosters the development of personality, intellectual, physical and psycho-motor development, the development of language, emotional and social development. It also represents the means by which the individual expresses himself. Since the idea of modern education is to keep the child at the forefront of attention, it is supposed to use methods that facilitate learning, develop creativity and encourage research among children. Those methods should also encourage children to participate actively in the process of learning and acquiring knowledge.

A play appears as spontaneous activity that is fun and initiated by desire of child, with flexible rules. A child is playing even if it is not aware of the motive of its activity. In educational terms the greatest value of play is that it is able to attract and keep the children's attention on intended contents, as well as to motivate them to participate actively in certain activities. Therefore, some educators today call for a constructivist approach to education – education through play. Because of playful activities and sensory didactic materials, the idea of freedom and of child who “builds” itself, the method of Maria Montessori can be used to improve the education in the field of music. The paper discusses education through play at preschool age in the field of music on the example of Montessori method.

**Key words:** *music education, preschool age, play, education through play, Montessori method.*

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## INTRODUCTION

At the end of the last century, Sloboda drew attention on the poor quality of music education. He argued that if an individual does not have a talent for music, he should not “waste” time on music, but rather to focus on, he says, mathematics or business studies (Sloboda, 1999: 455). A few years ago, however, UNESCO (2012) reports on the benefits of education that includes art subjects. Like this conceptualized education enables balanced intellectual, emotional and psychological development of the individual, but also of the society. It strengthens his cognitive development, encourages and improves the acquisition of skills necessary for life. According to this document, in most cultures art (and music as one of arts) is an integral part of life, so considerable attention is paid to the education of young people in this field. As Cunha and Karvalho say, music education, through singing and playing an instrument, listening to music, movement and playful activities, can contribute to the overall development of child (Cunha & Carvalho, 2013: 134). Modern music education implies acquiring knowledge and skills related to music. In such a way music also represents the medium by which an individual expresses himself. In modern educational approach, the child is at the center of attention. Therefore, modern methods of education should facilitate learning, develop creativity and encourage research among children. Also, they should encourage students to participate actively in the process of learning and acquiring knowledge. Researches have shown that when children are surrounded by rich perceptive atmosphere and environments that offer a wide range of listening and visual experiences, they become motivated to learn music (Wang, 2008: 32). An important condition for realization of childrens’ activities, according to Emil Kamenov, is the existence of structured educational environment in which child can find, in an accessible form, cultural and social incentives for its optimal development. This environment differs significantly from what is provided by traditional educational institutions, that puts children in a passive position and seeks to adopt specific concrete knowledge, skills and habits, by developing only deductive-convergent intelligence (Каменов, 2010: 45). This is also supported by Michelene Chi (2009), who suggests that the best learning comes from contexts that are not only active or constructive, but interactive, which is usually not the case in the context of official educational institutions.

Children are beings of rich, diverse capabilities, beings with potential to eventually direct their own growth. They can learn to be aware of the power of their own mind and to decide for which purpose they will use it. However, this can not be achieved without help – or it would be a long, slow process, and only few of them would particularly succeed (Donaldson, 1982: 108). The mind of child is able to adopt culture at an age much earlier than anyone could have assumed. However, this happens in accordance with activities of child itself. A child can appropriate culture only through action and wider awareness of its own self (Montesori, 2006: 220). It should be also noted that in all activities of child the role of preschool teacher is very

significant. It is on her to discover what are the possibilities of child. She should think about concepts of education again and again, to test them and to understand the meaning of these concepts in the light of results of modern researches and new data that have been reached. The second duty of preschool teacher is to discover and demonstrate the importance of these concepts for transforming society and also for modern education. As Koçak (2003) states, the preschool teacher's mission does not end with realizing activities from preschool program. The purpose of education is to educate children in general conditions and to prepare them for future life (according to Arslan, 2009: 2550). By organizing the environment, by contents proposed to children and by directing activities, preschool teacher can also make the results of such learning significant for childrens' development (Kamenov, 2008: 27).

### EDUCATION THROUGH PLAY

Some historians have defined a play and its rituals as essential elements of human civilization, as well as sources of creativity from which came the poetry, music, drama, dance and religion (Голомб, 2012: 129). A play appears as a spontaneous activity that is fun and initiated by desire of a child, with flexible rules. A child is playing even if it is not aware of its activity. Therefore, a play can be defined as an activity that is not intended to create an object that can be used, but it is a purpose of itself. The special value of play is that it engages a child more than a real life. It boasts a child more perfect than usual, operating line of greatest resistance and moves to the next stage of development (Kamenov, 2009: 13). As Žarko Trebješanin states, a play has an important role in the development of child's thinking, imagination, emotions, empathy and social intelligence. Through playing social roles, a child learns the rules of interpersonal relationships, learns and exercises its social role, but also complementary and reciprocal roles, mastering social skills (Голомб, 2012: 12–13). A play provides the opportunity for improving and practicing almost all abilities, from perceptual-motor (e.g. eye and hand coordination, movement, dexterity, etc.), intellectual (e.g. memory, prediction, conclusion, problem solving, etc.), emotional (e.g. sociability, will, empathy, restraint of aggression, etc.), as well as the ability of communication and creativity (in all aspects and using medias of all arts) (Kamenov, 2009: 29).

Nowadays, some educators call for a constructivist approach – education through play, as developmentally appropriate alternative to traditional, didactic method (Fisher et al., 2011). Thus, children would be able to learn in a way that is natural and spontaneous for them. Angeline Lillard (2013) states that education conceived in such way would starts from *free play* (in which children play independently), and through *guided play* (where adults oversee and direct play), would reach *didactic play* (where teacher instructs children directly) (Lillard, 2013: 137). Learning through play often achieves a greater degree of interactivity when play is guided. In guided play preschool teacher speaks or demonstrates to children how to handle learning materials. Throughout play, children communicate both with

teacher and materials. Learning through play makes a child focused, creative, practical and with positive emotions. At the end of activities in which children learn through play, preschool teacher can improve the quality of knowledge that children will acquire by commenting on their discoveries, playing together with children, asking open questions about what they have learned, or researching didactic materials on some new, different way.

In educational terms the largest value of play is that it is able to attract and keep child's attention to the amenities provided, as well as to motivate it to participate actively in certain activities. Within a play, the most important are those activities that represent an active construction of child's experience and intense use of all of its potentials. In that way, child is given an opportunity to overcome the disparity observed in traditional teaching process, which is reflected in discipline as condition for successful learning. A discipline is at the same time means of limiting the creativity and interest in child. The advantage of play is that child creates a situation that is under its control, which it can fully understand and feel safe, in contrast to the confusion of real life. In a play, child is in a less risky situation than in normal life, so it has an opportunity to try different behavior combinations that would not be tried under some functional pressure (Каменов, 2010: 36).

If we talk about education through play and art, it should be emphasized the attitude of Vićentije Rakić, which says that play and arts tend to one goal – free processing of life. Therefore they belong to those phenomena which contribute to the establishment of the inner balance of life (Ракић, 1946: 22). The author further states that, among three sensory spheres that play and art restore (sensual – static, visual and auditory), the most ephemeral are stimuli of the youngest sense (sense of hearing), and the most persistent and most capable of repeating are stimuli of the oldest (static sense): one simple melody or dance can more often and with longer effect stimulate us than some painting, statue or any imitation of external sounds (Ракић, 1946: 44).

At this point, it should be emphasized that play does its developmental activities primarily through mental structures that engage in children and through intellectual operations embedded in its rules, and not through contents. Contents are only means for achieving certain educational goals, and as such they can be perfected or replaced with more effective means. More important than contents are methods that are applied, the attitude towards children, the goals that are guided by preschool teacher, because they are the force that forms them (Каменов, 2010: 12).

## THE MONTESSORI METHOD

Maria Montessori (1870–1952), observing the educational system of her time, noticed that there existed many methods, approaches and social goals, but none of them actually took life into account. According to what was conceived, education was separated from both biological and social life (Montesori, 2006: 39). She considered that the idea of freedom, which should inspire teaching, is universal. A freedom-based educational system should aim to help a child to acquire it, and its special goal should be to make a child free of those relationships that limit his spontaneous manifestations. The author states that while child is progressing this way, it will begin to express freely, with greater clarity and precision, revealing its true nature. Therefore, the first educational impact on child should be aimed at guiding the child through independence. No one can be free if he is not independent. In order to gain this independence, the active expression of personal freedom must be directed from the earliest childhood (Montesori, 2017: 72). The request for freedom, independence and self-activity Maria Montessori set up in the framework of developmental and moral freedom and clearly defined conditions of freedom and independence assumptions of child. Freedom understood as building competencies for action, is at the same time the goal and the path, which child is going through in its development. On this path it is necessary that child feels safe and has protection, monitoring and assistance of adults (Bašić, 2011: 205). The existing dispositions of every child are the starting point for pedagogical interaction with the environment, rather than for consolidating the existing stage and state of development. The environment, materials and contents used for learning have their function only if the development is going further, or if they enable, as Vigotsky says, the zone of proximal development (Bašić, 2011: 209).

The method of Maria Montessori is based on theoretical foundations similar to earlier European educational philosophies of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Seguin and Itard. She believed in child's natural intelligence. Children are viewed as active authors of their own development, under the influence of natural, dynamic, self-satisfying forces within themselves, which open the way of growth and learning (Edwards, 2002: 1). Teaching takes place in carefully prepared, aesthetically pleasing environment that, together with sensory materials, serves as pedagogical means. Parents also have an important, partnership role in child's education. The progress of each child is assessed by different means if compared to tests and marks of traditional educational institutions. Maria Montessori observed the development of children as sequence of six-year periods and each of them possesses specific characteristics and sensitivities. The period from birth to age of three the author considers as a period of "unconscious absorbing mind", while the period from the age of three to six as a period of "conscious absorbing mind". In both periods, child needs the stimulation of all senses, the regulation of movement, the order and freedom of choice of activities and sensory materials. Child aged 3–6 years is more attracted to stimuli than causes. Therefore, during this period, it should be

methodically exposed to incentives that will enable the rational development of senses and thus create the basis for the development of further mental abilities. Also, through the training of senses it is possible to detect and correct defects that would otherwise become unnoticed or become obvious when they are so serious that it would be no longer possible for a child to adapt to its environment (Montesori, 2017: 161). It is important to note that teachers introduce new content in the field of practical life, senses, mathematic, language, science and geography, as well as art and music, and demonstrate it only at the moment when an individual or small group show readiness to progress (Humphryes, 1998: 6).

Slavica Bašić resumes Montessori method and says that child's development assistance should be indirectly realized in two ways: (1) through preparation of pedagogical environment and (2) through caring organization of child's independent and free activity. She further states that a child can "build" itself and use the potentials of an environment for its own development, to find its own way and position in society only if it is assisted by other people. Montessori does not put teachers and children in an inequitable relationship, but in a relationship of connectivity, but also distance. A teacher gives a free space to activities of children, standing aside, but showing appreciation of those activities (Bašić, 2011: 210).

Another important feature of Montessori method certainly are didactic sensory materials. Children are free to choose materials and use them as much as they like, based on Maria Montessori's theory that children will work or act according to what they need cognitively (Colgan, 2016: 134). The material for development of senses consists of series of objects that are grouped according to a certain physical quality that they have, such as: color, shape, size, sound, texture, weight, temperature and so on. There are, for example, group of bells that reproduce musical tones, series of tiles representing color shades, groups of geometric bodies of the same shape, but of different dimensions, or of different shapes, or of the same size, but of different weights, etc. Each group of objects presents different degrees of the same quality; there is a correct but gradual difference between different objects and, where it is possible, mathematically determined. The general rules, however, can be changed based on child's character. Each serie of objects, whether it produces sound or represents different colors, is graded so that it has maximum and minimum for which the boundaries are determined or, more precisely, each serie is conditioned by ways in which child uses it. When two opposites are put together, they clearly show the differences that exist within the series and thus determine the most striking contrast that material can achieve. The strong contrast between opposites makes their differences obvious and provokes interest in child even before it begins to use them (Montesori, 2017: 118–119). The role of didactic materials is to encourage child to be active. The ability of an object to attract a child does not depend on its quality, but rather on the ability to engage child actively (Montesori, 2017: 122).

The sensory material can certainly be considered as materialized abstraction. It shows color, size, shape, odor and sound in a clear, tangible and properly graded manner that allows child to analyze and classify these properties (Montesori, 2017: 193).

## MONTESSORI PLAYS IN MUSIC EDUCATION

In Montessori's method, music education is cultivated in a serious way. As in all other areas of development, child is given free choice and freedom of expression (Montesori, 2017: 300). It starts from the idea of analysis, or separation of parts of sufficiently complex whole to exercises, which themselves represent interesting tasks. Due to its characteristic that it is dominant activity in childhood, a play is in the center of Montessori method's activities, but it is guided and controlled. It is used as an intermediary for child's development in this area, as well as in the widest sense. Therefore, it could be said that Montessori's education has elements of education through play. Namely, children can use contents – sensory materials for development of musical abilities freely, when they feel willing and interested to deal with them. They can play or experiment with them, compare the sounds they produce with respect to different characteristics – the quality of sound, pitch and loudness. A child has freedom within the structure (preschool program, environment, didactic materials), but at the same time its activity and play are monitored and guided by preschool teacher. Also, it interacts with preschool teacher and peers, and all the activities that it implements are motivated from within, and not rewarded from outside. All this makes learning and acquiring knowledge and skills comfortable. As Angelina Lillard says, the goal is to make child's behavior constructive for its development, as well as for the community (Lillard, 2013: 142).

In the Montessori method the great attention is paid on rhythm area. The author considers it as important because it represents the basis for exercises of rhythmic gymnastics and dancing, by which children gain the perfect sense of balance. Also, children learn how to control hand and foot movements. An exercise called *Walking along the line* can be considered as preparation of child's motor organs. In the initial phases of the exercise, children walk along the line until they develop a sense of balance. Later, this exercise can serve as a basis for development of play, as it can be accompanied by lullabies, or certain music phrases that are easy for interpretation and that are constantly played (similar to repeating exercises for the development of other abilities), giving children an opportunity to improvise, conceive and take new steps, to march or make combinations of movements and steps. Maria Montessori noted that sometimes, while listening to music and sitting around the room, while watching others walking along the line, children often accompany tempo correctly with their hands. Occasionally, some children behave as conductors. She says that the precise way in which child learns to follow tempo of music before learning a split on three and four quarters is the evidence that education of senses has an origin in musical rhythms. Children first follow meter without considering rhythm, but after a while they feel rhythm and begin to follow it, and their movements are adjusted with beginning of each bar (Montesori, 2017: 303).

Performing music is also significant activity in Montessori method. The approach is playful. Each child in the group has simple instruments that are adapted to its age and abilities. It is free to use them at any time it wishes, uninhibited with

technical details. The only task of preschool teacher is to give short guidelines on how to use and play the instrument, similar to those used for other materials. Thus, a child can independently explore instruments, get acquainted with capabilities of instruments, experiment in creating sound, to play, but also to compare sounds of different instruments. Due to simplicity of instruments themselves and freedom of children to spontaneously deal with creation of sound and music, there is an increasing interest in them. As an upgrade of play related to playing a musical instrument it happens that children start to play together, so they can get a real feel for music.

The activity of achieving musical literacy is based on exercises for senses and on recognition of musical sounds produced on bells that are first settled in pairs, and then in degrees (Montesori, 2017: 304). It is interesting to note that children themselves, through play and activity, get knowledge about theory of music. Maria Montessori says that the great help in learning is an opportunity for children to “handle” notes (objects that make individual sounds) on their own. Objects are completely identical except for the sound they produce. They represent materialized sounds, so they can be separated, mixed, returned, just like objects used to train other senses. Children have already used this material, and the last step is to bind different names for different notes, as well as in other exercises.

The environment in which children will have an opportunity to listen to music, to independently explore sounds, to get acquainted with elements of music through play contributes to encouraging and developing their ability to understand music. Exercises for developing senses provide the necessary basis for music education. The child involved in these exercises is prepared for listening to music and will therefore move faster in the field of music (Montesori, 2017: 155).

## CONCLUSION

Nothing that has been created in childhood can be completely destroyed. What child incorporates into itself for all time remains as an integral part of its personality (Montesori, 2006: 101). However, in today educational system, especially in pre-school education, the importance of play and arts is not sufficiently appreciated for, as Vićentije Rakić says, raising life’s freshness, supporting spiritual and physical development, and maintaining the inner balance in life (Ракић, 1946: 52). Traditional education often tends to be focused on teacher, neglecting developmental and other needs of child.

Maria Montessori has developed the method in which the idea of education with child at the center is dominant. Also, teacher is not given a leading role. She rather directs the educational process and prepares a suitable learning environment. Montessori rejected the idea that program should be based on abstract social goals. According to Colgan (2016), Pestalozzi’s dreams of a free educational institutions, Frobel’s emphasis on early education, Spencer’s naturalism, Rousseau’s belief in

starting with concrete rather than abstract learning, and Dewey's "learning by doing" – all resonate in her resulting educational work (Colgan, 2016: 126). Her somewhat constructivist approach, where learning is fostered through use of materials rather than through direct instruction, includes child's choice in materials provided, free movement in the room, and learning at one's own pace and according to his capabilities. Montessori emphasized independence as opposed to social learning, because she believed that children from early childhood should acquire the habit of focusing on individual work and success rather than on permanent association that is evident in traditional schools.

If we talk about music education, Montessori method proposes education that would allow children to begin to understand the laws of music in their ways, to spontaneously, through playful activities explore, learn and create music, activating their own senses and learning capacities. The emphasized importance of free choice of children and playful activities can be a significant contribution of Montessori method to modern music education in pre-school institutions.

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## **ОБРАЗОВАЊЕ ИГРОМ У ОБЛАСТИ МУЗИКЕ – ДОПРИНОС МОНТЕСОРИ МЕТОДЕ**

### **Резиме**

Значајна област савременог образовања је музичко образовање, преко кога деца стичу знања и способности. Музика је и важно средство које подстиче развој личности, интелектуални развој, физички и психо-моторни развој, развој језика, емоционални и друштвени развој. Представља и средство којим се појединац изражава. Како је идеја савременог образовања да ученик буде у центру пажње, требало би користити оне методе које олакшавају учење, развијају креативност и подстичу истраживање код ученика. Такође, требало би да подстакну ученика да активно учествује у процесу учења и стицања знања.

Игра се јавља као спонтана активност која је забавна и иницирана жељом детета, са флексибилним правилима. Дете се игра и ако при том није свесно мотива своје активности. У васпитно-образовном погледу највећа вредност игре је у томе што је у стању да привуче и одржи дечју пажњу на предвиђеним садржајима, као и да их мотивише да активно учествују у одређеним активностима. Стога одређени едукатори данас позивају на један конструктивистички приступ образовању – образовање игром. Управо због игровних активности и сензорних дидактичких материјала, идеје слободe, детета које само себе „изграђује”, метод Марије Монтесори се може искористити за унапређење образовања у области музике. У раду је разматрано образовање игром у области музике на примеру Монтесори методе.

**Кључне речи:** *музичко образовање, игра, образовање игром, Монтесори метода.*