

# ***Music and Joy in Education***

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Music is omnipresent. Just as music is all around us, there is also naturally a space for it within us. Music, given specifically to the human being, is our privilege. Many authors, as Levitin or Sacks, agree that our nervous system is perfectly adapted for music. Music is part of our nature. Levitin (2006) argues that we are all more musically equipped than we think because the human brain is hardwired for music. According to him, music is encoded at the very heart of human nature, perhaps even more fundamentally than language. Oliver Sacks, like many authors, believes that music can appeal to all people, even those who have no formal knowledge or are not, in his words, overly musical. Music can be enjoyed and responded to on the most intimate level. (Sacks, 2015) According to Sacks, we follow the rhythm of the music unconsciously, even when we are not consciously listening to the music, and our faces and body postures mirror the "story" of the melody and the thoughts and feelings that the story evokes. (Sacks, 2015, p. 1)

Music permeates all aspects of our lives, both in its ubiquity and its antiquity (Levitin, 2006). Music has naturally changed and adapted over the course of evolution, and with it the perception of its importance and its place in society. While in the past it was a manifestation of the everyday life of most people, the last five hundred years, according to Levitin (2006), have divided society into those who are music listeners and those who actively perform music. However, music is still taken for granted by society, as something that is there and will always be so.

Music has an undeniable effect on our emotions and through music we can influence individuals in many ways in different life situations, from prevention to treatment, as well as the general population of school-age children. The authors of the *Czech Background Study on Music Education*, which was prepared by a team of authors in connection with the forthcoming revision of the Framework Curriculum for Education at primary and secondary schools in 2019, also attribute to music an irreplaceable role and an irreplaceable ability in the educational process in the emotional sphere of the developing personality of pupils. The link between the emotional aspect and the social aspect is very clearly mentioned in the following words: „*When we are feeling pessimistic, we may need to rely less on our habitual forms of musical engagement, and turn more to shared music experiences – either through playing with*

*others, intentional therapeutic engagement in music, or sharing and discussing emotions elicited through music with trusted others.*“ „*Music does not act independently; its potential is activated when we appropriate it. How, when and where we do that is at least as important as the music itself..*“ (McFerran, 2016, pp. 113) To this we cannot but add the statement of Byrne, who says: „*Music is a social glue - it holds families, nations, cultures, and communities together.*“ (Byrne, 2013, pp. 344)

Emotional engagement in education in general has been addressed by a number of authors. For example, Marquardt and Waddill (2004), Qi (2012), and Rogers (1961) all take a humanistic, learner-centred approach. They attribute a large role in the learning process to the affective domain, self-esteem, motivation, and emotional satisfaction. Similarly, Cornelius-White (2007) consider empathy, unconditional positive regard, genuineness, non-directiveness and critical thinking as the foundation of the learning process. According to Ingleton (1999), emotions determine the level of activity in learning. Emotions shape and are shaped by social relationships, self-esteem, and identity. Trigwell and colleagues (2012) found a correlation between emotions and a deeper approach to learning and higher achievement. Fredrickson found that negative emotions narrow a student's learning interest while positive emotions broaden it. (Fredrickson 2001; Fredrickson and Branigan 2005; Fredrickson and Joiner 2002) Based on their research in academic settings, Naude, Berg & Kruger (2014) identified what they believe are important principles of learning in an optimal learning environment. These included, for example, creating the environment as a safe space in which students can feel comfortable or actively and directly engaging students in the learning process.

Within the formal education system of European countries, there is clear social and policy support for paying attention to children's personal engagement, fulfilment, and enjoyment in learning. Griffith is convinced that there is the chance of including education as part of a good life. (Griffith, 2012). An English Education policy document, *Excellence and Enjoyment*, for example, states: „*We want schools to continue to focus on raising standards while not being afraid to combine that with making learning fun. Our goal is for every primary school to combine excellence in teaching with enjoyment of learning.*“ (DfES, 2003)

In the framework of primary education and primary music education, the focus on the emotional level of children's personality, the social climate of the classroom and school, and

joyful learning is nowadays an important space for the intentional action of creating the overall cultural awareness and expression of children, the aesthetic orientation of children towards the fulfilment of the so-called cultural competence, as well as a space for a whole range of other possibilities for psychological and ultimately healing effects on the entire child population. In the Czech environment, which nevertheless can represent the European space, Mastnak & Jiříčková (2021) call for a broader discussion on the role and importance of music education, especially in the context of the experienced period of quarantines and restrictions in education caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. This can happen within the framework of basic music education through a systematically grasped and comprehensive encounter with music. It is therefore a space that can be seen as having enormous potential for enriching children's perceptions of the world around them, and of themselves. A space that is not an ideal - it is influenced by many aspects and various influences - yet it can clearly be seen as a means that can and, according to research, does contribute to the quality of children's mental health and the creation and reinforcement of social and cultural norms.

From the centuries of school music education, which was based on the teaching of singing, music in schools was transformed in the second half of the 20th century by many factors into a subject rich in content, a subject that tries to record at least some of the sub-areas of the great world of music. It is carried out through activities, permeated by the creative expressions of children, filled with group activities, and constantly evolving in its content. Vocal, instrumental, musical movement and listening activities, build on each other, complement each other. Music education is an integrative subject, which is quite naturally permeated by the content of other arts, elements of drama education, film, and audio-visual and dance education. Music education must be seen as a subject contributing to the fulfilment of key competences, as an integral part of the education system. Learning about music, learning to understand music, communicating with music, communicating through music with oneself and with others takes place while developing musical abilities, skills, knowledge, and attitudes.

Research confirms a direct link between learning and neural plasticity. In the context of music education in schools, teachers create an environment that supports children's brain activity in virtually every conceivable neural area. Among other things, we stimulate and develop in children their ability to reflect, which according to Siegel (2007) is a basal area for the development of so-called mindful awareness, building and developing empathic

relationships and emotional skills. The American neuropsychiatrist and author of *The Mindful Brain* calls for systematic training in reflection, which in turn leads to the ability to regulate one's body, fine-tuned communication, emotional balance, flexibility, empathy, insight, intuition, fear modulation and morality. Working on the above-mentioned areas can naturally be sensitively woven into school music education, which touches on all these areas in its content. Furthermore, various research (e. g. Greenberg, 2007) suggests that training in social and emotional skills promotes child resilience and can tap into the neural circuits of executive functions. Siegel's challenge can be further supplemented by the aspect of joyfulness, which can unquestionably contribute positively to the effective functioning of the functions.

To what extent do children today need to experience joy in their learning? How important is it that their music education is joyful, that they look forward to music lessons? A separate and distinct chapter would of course be the area of motivation for music education, both by teachers and pupils. As far as enjoyment in relation to music is concerned, research has focused primarily on emotional reactions in relation to listening to music. For example, Williams examined the emotional responses of child listeners when listening to music in concert. While the youngest children tended to be tired while listening to music, school children showed a calming effect, and the oldest category showed increased joy. Based on his research, he concluded that emotional reactions to music vary according to the type of listeners (young, old, classical music experience) and whether the music is live or reproduced. However, Williams found that listeners show the strongest emotions with live music. So, is it the immediate, live music that causes joy in music education classroom encounters?

Naturally, there are many aspects of music lessons that can make children happy. It is not only the direct contact with live music that undoubtedly leads children to like to sing together, make music, move to music, listen, talk about music, and create together. Methodologically oriented materials can be found in the literature, which are intended for teachers as a source of motivation and inspiration to make their teaching enjoyable. The joy of the experience is also related to mindfulness. Jiříčková, in her article *When Children Sing with Joy* (Jiříčková, 2014), notes that, especially for younger children, the importance of alternating musical activities, methods and forms of music education should be perceived at school.

In the context of Czech music education, suggestions for activity-based approaches to music education in a broader context and in cross-curricular connections can be drawn from

several sources, e.g., Jiříčková (2014, 2019, 2021) or Pospíšilová (2014, 2019). The principles of Orff Schulwerk, the methods of elementary composition and the emerging efforts towards a team model of music education teaching permeate music education to a large extent. "

### **What is the music education that leads children to be joyful?**

**Children enjoy and get satisfaction from learning new things.** Things they understand. In the context of music lessons, they learn new songs, the lyrics of songs convey knowledge, customs, everyday life of ordinary people. Alongside folk songs, where the folk wisdom of previous generations is passed on and made clear to them, children enjoy learning songs about things they know from everyday life, as well as songs with words that spark their and develop their imagination, and songs that have no deeper meaning, songs that make children relax.

**Children encounter music they understand,** the musical language is close to them and can be grasped by them. Quite naturally, such encounters create a space where children feel comfortable, where a base is created for further communication with other children, with teachers, a space for learning tolerance towards others, their vision of the world around them, expressing themselves non-verbally with the help of music, active engaged listening to music, concentrated listening to music and different sound environments.

*"It fills children with joy when we introduce them to music that we ourselves find beautiful."*  
As Byrne mentions, *"Music has that geometry of beauty, and for that reason, ..., we love it."*  
(Byrne, 2012, p. 358)

In primary music education, children are encouraged **to interact with music and musicians actively, through activities**, so that they are not just recipients or observers of the world of music but perceive the meaningfulness and joyfulness of a proactive approach to music itself, like the arts in general. Younger children naturally overwhelmingly welcome the inclusion of music and movement activities through which children can express their thoughts, feelings, and moods in a variety of musical and non-musical contexts.

**Children enjoy being introduced to the world of music in a way that is appealing and meaningful to them,** in the spirit of Comenius: *"We must stimulate the pupils' senses with what attracts them."* (Komenský, 1946, p. 96)

**It fills children with joy when we sing with them**, play with them, recite nursery rhymes with the younger ones, return to elements of folklore that the children know from their early childhood, play familiar or just heard melodies, listen to the same piece of music that has already been introduced to the children, the children have understood it and now they know how to listen to the music. The sense of the familiar, from which we move on to the unknown in the future, fills children with security and confidence, strengthens their self-esteem and gives them a sense of self-assurance. *"Just as much as learning is repeated in the classroom, children like to have certain activities, situations repeated to them."* (Jiříčková, 2014, p. 106)

**It fills children with joy when they repeatedly return** to specific music in music sessions, either based on the teacher's preferences or their own. It is not for nothing that they say: *"Repetition is the mother of wisdom."* The repetition of children fulfils Comenius' pedagogical principle, but at the same time it is not and should not be mechanical, but engaged, consolidating the children's knowledge, and strengthening their relationship to music itself and to the activities that are related to it, that arise from it, that lead directly to it.

**It fills children with joy when they are allowed to "enter" the music**, when they perform it themselves, become part of it. Coupled with this is the fact that this happens in the context of school music education in community with others, in intermingling and influencing each other, in imitating each other. In musical activity, children are sometimes the author, sometimes the performer, the listener, but they can also take on multiple roles at the same moment, being accompanied, complemented, supported.

**Children are filled with joy when they discover the musical world in activities performed together** – group singing, discovering their own vocal skills, the sound possibilities of musical instruments, objects, applications, listening to others, searching together for possible solutions to the wording of a musical situation. Children naturally develop non-violently in joint interaction with others. Levitin adds: *„Collective music making may encourage social cohesion – humans are social animals, as music may have historically served to promote feelings of group togetherness and synchrony, any may have been an exercise for other social acts such as turn-taking behaviours. Singing around the ancient campfire might have been a way to stay awake, to ward off predators, and to develop social coordination and social cooperation within the group. Humans need social linkages to make society work, and music is one of them. “(Levitin, 2006, pp. 258) the connections connected to the musical material*

that they can "touch" themselves: *"Human nature enjoys the practical implementation of things, because...to govern things means to always create, transform and build something."* (Komenský, 1946, p. 96). Through play situations, elementary improvisation and elementary composing, children's creative abilities are developed, and they encounter a variety of sounds, where each is perceived as musical.

**Children are filled with joy by a playful approach to musical activities.** Among the musical games, which are age-appropriate in their structure and content, activities can be included, among many others, that promote children's joyful settings. These can include relaxation, release activities, noting down emotions or playful activities associated with engaging the breathing function or creative movement improvisations; experiencing music education as a space of encounter with art (according to Mastnak & Jiříčková, 2021), for example.

**It fills children with joy if "the journey is the destination",** the emphasis is not on the outcome itself, but on the process of discovery, the search for solutions.

**Children are filled with joy when they can explore the world around them,** including the world of music, in a safe and calm environment, without fear and tension. *"... they need to be in an environment and a collective where no one attacks them, no one argues with them or competes with them, to be in a place where they can perhaps forget for a while about performance, disagreements, parents' separation..."* (Jiříčková, 2014, p. 105). In such situations, a big role of the music teacher is to be able to relax the children with his/her attitude and approach, to offer them a space to express their state, their emotions through music, or to find some soothing or distraction through listening to music.

**Children enjoy exploring their own musical abilities and knowing that they are learning new things,** understanding something new, moving forward in their skills. The children appreciate the non-threatening motivated feedback from other children and the teacher.

**Children enjoy sensitively and meaningfully included moments of calm, rest, relaxation.**

**Children are filled with joy when the teacher himself is full of enthusiasm.** "It is very important for children to have a teacher in front of them in the school environment who really listens to them. (Jiříčková, 2014, p. 106) Similarly, it is desirable for the teacher to be able to listen to other suggestions from the pupils, discuss them together, and if possible, include their wishes in joint activities. The need for a joyful teacher is supported by a centuries-old

statement by Comenius: *"For it is not only poets who want to bring benefit and pleasure, but everyone who teaches usefully, since only those who bring benefit can bring pleasure at the same time."* Comenius continues, *"Mental health is half of our being..."* (Komenský, 1946, p. 93)

The joyful and conscious attitude of teachers, their lifelong learning and motivated approach to teaching in general, forms an integral part of the joyful implementation of music education with the positive inner involvement of the child. The joyful approach of the teacher, his or her guidance, leadership and cooperation with the child must be based on many aspects. These include, for example, a sense of self-confidence, self-assurance, joy in partial achievements, willingness to learn, and participation in the development of children's cultural competence. And above that, *"So naturally, when children sing joyfully, it is a joy for the teacher too."* ((Jiříčková, 2014, p. 106) Let it be supplemented with Comenius' statement: *"Let the teacher take a warm interest in teaching."* (Komenský, 1946, p. 27)

Let us now return briefly to the introduction of the aforementioned *Background Study on Music Education* in the Context of the Czech Republic. In it, the collective of authors set out recommendations to help improve the quality of general music education. These include an emphasis on pointing out the fact that music effectively develops creativity as a fundamental dimension of a young person, an appeal for constant reminders of the irreplaceable role of music education in the formation of values and the aesthetic criteria of a young person, or an emphasis on the positive influence of music education on the formation of social bonds in classroom, singing and instrumental collectives. *"Properly and well taught music education creates a space for individual self-realization and socialization within the collective."* (Background Study, 2019, pp. 29) The *Excellence and Enjoyment* states, *"We want schools to continue to focus on raising standards while not being afraid to combine that with making learning fun. Our aim is for every primary school to combine excellence in teaching with enjoyment of learning."* (DfES, 2003). From the psychological and neurological point-of-view, music, rather than simply being a complex sonic pattern produced and received for aesthetic or hedonic ends, can better be interpreted as a communicative medium complementary to language that may be foundational to manage complex social relationships (Cross, 2010). For this, social and emotional skills are required. The development and application of emotional

skills facilitate the shift in mindset necessary for enduring positive emotions and achieving sustainable happiness (Crum & Salovey, 2013).

Comprehensive programs involving music education have been developed to increase emotional skills and emotional intelligence. Recent longitudinal studies support the efficacy and impact of these programs. The research suggests that emotional intelligence is a set of skills that can be improved through *training* — like and together with music skills (Brackett et al, 2008). Music education can clearly contribute to a positive school climate, to children's wellbeing, and to the creation, consolidation and development of social relationships in the classroom, and in the music education classes themselves, through the implementation of a diverse range of teaching methods and forms and an activity-based approach to teaching through a complex of musical activities, and in conjunction with the development of creative aspects and an integrative approach to the subject, to create a joyful disposition and motivated encounter and communication with and through music.

## Resources

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## Abstract

**In contemporary institutional education, an important function of music education is to create a dynamic balance between the left hemisphere of the brain, which is more analytical, and the right hemisphere, with its centres responsible for the ability to perceive and experience complexity. From a narrower conception of the subject, elementary music education, the music education available to children of compulsory school age, has developed in the European context into a subject in which vocal, instrumental, listening and movement activities are intertwined, permeated by creative aspects. Collaboration and communication play an important role in finding a way to understand music as a specific means of communication. Music activates the nervous system, allowing both children and teachers to gain specific musical experiences. Music education in the context of the needs of contemporary society and the educational system helps children to develop their key competencies. The acquisition and consolidation of these competencies takes place in a safe and aesthetically effective context where singing, playing, making music, moving and creating are a joy for children. Experiencing joy in the classroom contributes to a motivated approach to learning about the world around them, acceptance of others and themselves, quality of mental health, and the ability to be a whole person. Joyful music education means a joyful school.**

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