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## **PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN'S CREATIVE EXPRESSION IN SINGING**

*Izvirni znanstveni članek / Original Scientific Article*

### **Abstract**

In the article the results of the research on primary school children's creative expression in singing are presented. Two hundred and five junior school age children (7-11 years old) participated in the study. The bulk of the material was collected through observation. Additional data were obtained through analysis of video recordings. Information was also collected from the subjects of the study. The research data showed that the level of creative expression in singing is not high among junior school age children. Almost one third of the subjects were assigned to the low level of creative expression in singing, and only one fourth – to very high level of creative expression in singing.

**Keywords:** creativity, creative expression, singing, primary school children

### **Izveček**

#### **Kreativno izražanje osnovnošolskih otrok pri petju**

V prispevku so predstavljeni rezultati raziskave o ustvarjalnem izražanju osnovnošolskih otrok pri petju. V študiji je sodelovalo dvestopet osnovnošolskih otrok, starih 7-11 let. Večina gradiva je bila zbrana z opazovanjem. Dodatni podatki so bili pridobljeni z analizo videoposnetkov. Informacije so bile zbrane tudi s strani raziskovanih subjektov. Rezultati so pokazali, da pri osnovnošolskih otrocih raven ustvarjalnega izražanja pri petju ni visoka. Skoraj ena tretjina subjektov je bila razvrščena v nizko raven ustvarjalnega izražanja pri petju in samo ena četrtnina v zelo visoko raven ustvarjalnega izražanja pri petju.

**Ključne besede:** ustvarjanje, ustvarjalno izražanje, petje, osnovnošolski otroci

### **Introduction**

Intensive research on creativity began in the middle of the last century. Some scientists (Wallas, 1945; Piirto, 1999; Treffinger, 1979; Butkienė, Kepalaitė, 1996) analyze creativity as a process which consists of separate stages: perception and formulation of an idea or a problem, active consideration of the problem, search of probable solution variants, its development, evaluation, and realization. Many psychologists (Guilford, 1950; Torrance, 1988) determine creativity as thinking of a person. The other group of authors (Taylor, 1999; Finke, 1990; Simonton, 1999; Weisberg, 1999) describes creativity as ability or a complex of abilities (capability to discover the essence, to decline wrong presumptions and stereotypical ways of thinking, to orientate and find a solution in

non-standard situations, and etc.). Among previously mentioned concepts of creativity an evident tendency to describe creativity as a quality of a person (Edwards, 1989; Sloboda, Howe, 1991) or a complex of qualities distinguishes (Jovaiša, 1993; Cropley, 1999; Walberg, Arian, 1999). Scientists present a distinctive complex of qualities characteristic to a creative personality. Such concepts of creativity influenced the research on creativity in music as well.

For a long time the focus of attention in the research on creativity in music activity has been on the creative process and the ensuing musical product (Balkin, 1991; Webster, 1991; Wiggins, 1996; Davidson, 1991). Investigations of creativity in musical practice tend to spotlight improvisation and composition. Other creative areas of musical practice, such as performance, listening to, and evaluation of music, tend to receive fragmentary attention (Mazzola, Park, Thalmann, 2011). Over recent years a tendency to analyze musical creativity without emphasizing one or the other musical activity reveals. It is recognized that traditionally distinguished musical activities (performance of music, creation of music, music listening and analysis) vary in their nature, therefore, their analysis on the basis of the same methodological approach is inconsistent as well as expectation of the same characteristics of the expression of creativity. According to P. Burnard (2012), we cannot unambiguously define musical creativity, thus, various musical creativities manifesting in different musical activities need to be investigated.

Singing is variety of the language, it increases vocal range, helps to improve the culture of speech and pronunciation. With the help of vocal exercises we can eliminate speech defects, and the position of the body while singing as well as movement performed alongside with music help to form correct body posture, to strengthen muscles. Singing solo or together with the others expands and changes a function of children's development and growth, a consequence of their socialization into cultural institutions (Welch, 2005). Singing may provide an education in one of the oldest and the most popular forms of musical activity. Researchers recognize different benefits of singing. Studies have found that singing enriches intonational which students (1) deepen their knowledge in music, language, and culture; (2) develop vocal skills in both singing and speech; (3) boost their social skills in a multicultural and global society while developing a strong sense of self-identity and understanding of others; (4) enhance emotional expression (Beatriz, Chen-Hafteck, Crawford, 2013). Singing not only helps to establish and maintain social relations, but is also a manifest expression of lifestyle, values and beliefs. Singing requires coordination of timing and pitch as well as synchronous breathing, therefore, singing is a likely candidate as a social bonding mechanism (Dunbar, 2012). Feelings of connectivity and inclusion with fellow singers are also important. Choirs and singing groups can create an accepting environment in which interpersonal connections are developed (Joseph & Southcott, 2014), cause a general improvement in mood in this social setting (Clift & Hancox, 2001; Clift & Morrison, 2011; Kreutz, 2014; Bornstein & Erev, 1994; Tauer & Harackiewicz, 2004). Singing requires behaviours that have been shown to increase interpersonal closeness and motivate positive social behaviour (Cirelli, Einarson, & Trainor, 2014; Kirschner & Tomasello, 2010).

While evaluating singing the central focus is on the characteristics of performance. An initial requirement to the singers is precision of performance and not its creativity. The leaders of the vocal ensembles are under severe pressure to meet the existing traditions of performance. Moreover, every musical group is expected to prepare as many musical performances (in concerts, festivals, competitions) as possible. Singing activity which is product oriented is based on systematic rehearsals aiming at completeness of performance. Therefore, while singing a person has much less opportunities of expressing oneself creatively in comparison with improvisation, composition, and arrangement (Norris, 2010).

The peculiarities of creative expression in singing need to be analyzed separately from other activities because creative expression has a distinctive consistent pattern. The urgency of the research on creative expression in singing is especially important in junior school age children's education because: 1) Singing does not require any special preparation or knowledge of creative activity, therefore, it is the most accessible type of music activity in junior school age; 2) Voice is the first musical instrument which a child can control even before starting the school. The issue of a creative child's participation in singing is especially relevant in Lithuania where music education revolves around rich vocal traditions.

Investigators of singing as of a sphere of creative activity (Ware, 1998; Piličiauskas, 1998) agree that performance of a musical text is not in itself a creative act. Singing can be called creative when a performer has a distinctive conception of the piece and consciously strives to transmit that conception to the listeners.

When performing music, peculiar meaning falls on knowledge of what and how it should be performed. A performer has to understand the intentions of a composer, style of a composition, traditions and standards of performance, interpretations of previous performers. A singer also creates for himself/herself a subjective conception of musical symbols noted down by a composer, looks for appropriate ways of conveying it, foresees the peculiarities of the development of a musical composition (Elliot, 1995; Ware, 1998; Henry, 1996). Therefore, interpretation of music can be described as solution of problems.

Performance of a musical composition in scientific literature is compared with the stage of illumination of creative process pointed out by G. Wallas (1945). During it one blends with emotional contents of a composition, musical idea is given meaning by voice, face expression, and body movements. The main means of musical expression, used to render the artistic view of a composition, are artistically suggestive sound, characteristic of precise intonation, rich timbre, correct articulation and breathing, expressive phrasing and etc. The success of music interpretation depends on emotionality and artistry of a performer as well. In this sense a performer's face and body movements' expression is important as it reflects the concernment of a person performing music, tendentiousness of position, artistic experiences (Ware, 1998; Balkin, 1991; Reimer, 2000).

However, there is a difference between the facility of professional singers and young children to perform music creatively. Unfortunately, there is not much research in the aspect of creative music performance of children. Therefore, the **aim of this study** is to reveal the peculiarities of primary school children's creative expression in singing. **The object of the study** is primary school children's creative expression in singing. **The research methods are:** analysis of educational documents, philosophical, psychological, pedagogical, musicological literature; the inventory of creative expression in the singing of junior school age children; adapted Dembo-Rubinstein test; analysis of video recordings, statistical data analysis.

### **The methodology of the research**

As previously mentioned, the researchers of creativity in music activity encounter many problems: the variety of creativity conceptions, the specificity of children's creativity, the lack of the research on creative music activity, and other. Therefore, in the beginning of the research we tried to determine the contents of creative expression in the singing of junior school age children.

With this aim theoretical and empirical model of creative expression in the singing of junior school age children was formed. The analysis of literature encouraged us to choose the standpoint of creativity as a personality feature. *Originality, fluency, flexibility, sagacity* of a child's thinking and activity were chosen as the main qualities of a creative personality. Referring to the main parameters of creativity, the empirical indicators of junior school children's creative expression in singing were excluded: pupils' creativity through singing activity is revealed by unconstraint of music performance (singing is light, without tension, the mood of a musical composition is deeply felt, different moods are used while singing, adaptation to the ensemble occurs), sensitivity (different moods are used in singing, adaptation to the ensemble occurs), purposefulness (more important pieces of a song are pointed out, peculiarities of vocals are applied), expressiveness (the character of a song is conveyed expressively, the ways of a song performance, which have been discussed, are added).

The research has been organized referring to the inventory based on theoretical and empirical model of junior school children's creative expression in singing. Four hundred and ten 3rd- 4th grade pupils from five primary schools in Lithuanian towns took part in the research. The children's teachers (altogether 17 teachers of music of the subjects) were involved in purposeful observation of their pupils' singing and assessed how often they successfully demonstrated creativity. The main criterion of evaluation was the stability of excluded features of creative expression. Teachers evaluated how often pupils succeeded in performing one or other act. Four levels of creative expression were excluded: very high (when a pupil almost always succeeds in performing one or other act), high (often succeeds), middle (just sometimes succeeds), low (almost never succeeds).

It should be noted that primary discussion with music pedagogues showed that teachers encountered difficulties in identifying creative musical performance during the assessment of children's singing. Therefore, teachers were trained to evaluate pupils and

received instructions regarding the criteria and the procedure of evaluation. Analysis of video recordings was used for this purpose. Before the research 15 pupils of 3rd-4th classes, each of whom performed two well known to them songs of different character, were filmed. Video recordings were watched together with teachers, pupils' singing was analyzed, consultations on how children should be evaluated were held. Depending on the character of singing, teachers and the expert of this research ascribed pupils to one of four levels of creative expression in singing: very high, high, middle, low. Such preparation of music teachers to take part in the research assisted in obtaining objective research results. Comparison of expert and teachers' evaluations has showed that there are no statistically significant differences among these evaluations ( $p > 0.5$ ).

Information was also collected from the subjects of the study. Adapted Dembo-Rubinstein test was used: pupils were presented with tasks, where a vertical line was drawn next to each empirical indicator. It was explained to the children that the upper point of the line meant that they succeeded in performing one or other act almost always, the middle point –sometimes, and the lower point – that so far they had not been successful, and etc. Children were asked to mark the place in the line, which would reflect their opinion about how often they succeeded in performing a song creatively. Children's answers were evaluated in a ranking scale.

### **The results of the research**

Perhaps the most exhaustive data was retrieved from the teachers who assessed the stability of excluded features of creative expression in the singing of junior school age children.

**Table 1. The Peculiarities of Creative Expression in the Singing of Junior School Age Children (%)**

Criteria of creative expression in singing	Empiric indications	The level of creative expression				
		low	middle	high	very high	total
<b>Unconstraint (Fluency)</b>	singing is light, without tension	9,8	26,3	38,5	25,4	100,0
	mood of a musical composition is deeply felt	7,8	27,8	37,1	27,3	100,0
<b>Sensitivity (Flexibility)</b>	different moods are used in singing	13,2	30,7	31,7	24,4	100,0
	adaptation to the ensemble occurs	7,3	22,9	37,6	32,2	100,0
<b>Purposefulness (Sagacity)</b>	more important pieces of a song are pointed out	14,6	31,7	38,1	15,6	100,0
	peculiarities of vocals are applied	21,5	31,7	31,7	15,1	100,0
<b>Expressiveness (Originality)</b>	character of a song is conveyed expressively	7,8	27,3	38,5	26,3	99,9
	the ways of a song performance, which have been discussed, are added	11,2	35,6	37,5	15,6	99,9

We noticed that pupils most often succeed in singing freely and sensitively. Two thirds of pupils sing lightly, without tension, while performing music they feel the mood of a composition, expressively convey the character of a song. This confirms the proposition that the ability to experience the contents of a song being performed emotionally and to express it externally (mimic, pantomime) is characteristic to pre-school and junior school age children. According to the propositions of the scientists who investigated emotions (Izard, 1980; Jakobson, 1978; Katinienė, 2000), pupils of this age are characteristic of emotional sensitivity, ability to express their emotions distinctively externally (they are more distinct than those of adults).

It was also ascertained that three fourths (37,6% almost always succeed, 32,2% often succeed) of the respondents are successful at adapting to the ensemble while singing, and it is not surprising. The activity analysis of music pedagogues showed that teachers pay a

lot of attention to the choice of repertoire attractive to pupils and corresponding to the peculiarities of their age. It is possible that such data was influenced by purposeful attempts of children to perform the songs that they like creatively and take part actively in new to them form of music performance (singing in an ensemble, a choir).

A little different situation turned out after the analysis of the data on purposefulness of singing. It appears that almost a half (31,7% sometimes succeed, 14,6% never succeed) of the subjects have experienced difficulties in revealing important moments of contents of a song. Similar results were obtained after summarizing the data on the application of vocal peculiarities while conveying artistic view of a song. We suppose that such data tells about the lack of experience in singing, as well as in music interpretation of this age pupils. It should be noted that many Lithuanian music pedagogues have got the qualification of a choir leader. Thus, teachers' competence in this sphere is high enough. Therefore, a presumption can be made that music teachers were just more demanding to their pupils in this aspect.

It has also been ascertained that pupils are the least successful at supplementing (with movement, mimic) to the performance of a song (11,2% are mostly unsuccessful, 35,6% - rarely successful). We think that these results are also partially predetermined by poor pupils' experience in creative activity. Moreover, after the analysis of methodic recommendations to teachers, published in Lithuania, it has been noticed that many of them are oriented to the development of vocal skills. Meanwhile, stimulation of pupils' creativity in interpreting musical compositions is almost not being discussed about. It is possible that the pedagogues who evaluated pupils have less experience in this sphere.

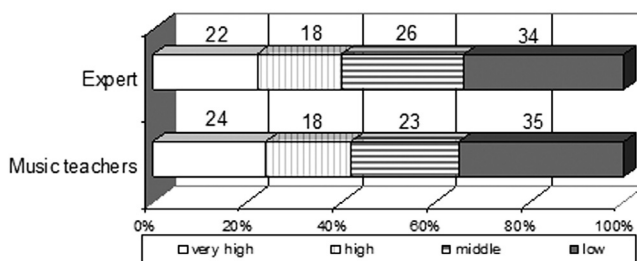
With the aim to reveal the peculiarities of creative expression in the singing of junior school age children more exhaustively, information was gathered from the subjects themselves. It was believed that a pupil's point of view to himself/herself, to his/her strength and abilities is a very important pledge of successful creative activity. After comparison of the data obtained from teachers with the data retrieved from pupils, it has been noticed that pupils evaluate themselves much more higher than the pedagogues who teach them. For example, when comparing pupils in accordance with average level, teachers point out that there are more than a third of such pupils. Meanwhile, there are only 7,3% of pupils who think the same. After comparison of the results of self-evaluation from teachers and pupils by separate indicators, we can notice similar tendencies: in all cases the majority of the subjects point out that they are successful at singing often. Only some pupils point out that they are still not successful at this activity.

Incongruence of teachers' and pupils' evaluation is not surprising. Many pedagogues and psychologists point out the inadequacy in this age pupils' self-evaluation. In the opinion of J. Piaget, while evaluating and describing himself/herself, a primary pupil uses a very small amount of independent parameters. According to the assertions of the author, it is related to the immaturity of a personality of this age child and undifferentiated sphere of meaning evaluation. Lithuanian psychologist A. Petrulytė (2001) points out that the majority of primary pupils evaluate themselves positively, and most often they evaluate

themselves by the efforts they put in and not by the results obtained. These propositions are confirmed by the results of the research of the scientists who investigated adequacy of junior pupils' self-evaluation. Authors indicate that 44% of pupils' and teachers' evaluations coincide. Twenty-seven percent of pupils overestimate their knowledge, 15% - underestimate. On the other hand, it is possible that such data was influenced by poor experience of children's self-evaluation. Observation of teachers' activity showed that music pedagogues rarely ask pupils to describe their own singing as well as of their classmates, pupils are almost never encouraged to analyze successful or unsuccessful activity

After the analysis of the obtained research results on creative expression in the singing of 3rd-4th form pupils, the aim was to ascertain general distribution of the subjects according to the levels of creative performance as well.

**Chart 1. Distribution of Junior School Age Pupils According to Levels of Creative Expression in Singing: Evaluation of Music Teachers and Expert (%)**



As we can see, junior school age pupils are not very creative in singing. Almost a fourth of the subjects are ascribed to the middle level and even a third of them – to the low level of creative expression in singing. Just a sixth of the subjects can be described as creative in music performance and a fourth – as very creative.

After the comparison of information obtained from video recordings with the results of teacher observation, no greater difference was noticed among distribution of pupils according to the levels of creative expression. We can affirm that after proper instructions of teachers, they are capable of identifying creative expression in the singing of junior school age pupils.

## Conclusions

Evaluation of pupils' creativity while singing is one of the most problematic spheres of musical creative activity: while performing music it is necessary to follow the traditions of performance of a particular genre, while singing with the others (in an ensemble, a choir,



in a classroom) it is necessary to coordinate one's singing with the others as well as with the general interpretation of the composition, quality of the performance of music depends on existing skills, on experience in performance of music, and on expressiveness and suggestiveness of the performer. The research data has showed that the level of creative expression in the singing of junior school age children is not very high. Almost one third of the subjects were assigned to the low level of creative expression in singing, and only one fourth – to very high level of creative expression in singing.

Pupils are the least successful at supplementing to the already discussed performance of a song, there is lack of purposefulness and expressiveness of performance. They are the most successful at performing music freely and sensitively, two thirds of the third and fourth form pupils often sing lightly, without tension; the mood of a musical composition is deeply felt, different moods are used while singing. The following confirms the proposition of scientists that the ability to experience the contents of performed songs emotionally and to express them externally (mimic, pantomime) is common to pre-school and primary school children.

Pupils of this age evaluate their singing much higher than the pedagogues who teach them. The majority of the subjects think that they succeed in performing a song. Meanwhile, in the opinion of pedagogues, there are twice less of such children. Teachers encountered difficulties in identifying creative musical performance during the assessment of children's singing. However, after the acquaintance of the pedagogues with the parameters of creative music performance, after the discussion about children's evaluations in this aspect, teachers can be objective evaluators of creative expression in the singing of junior school age children.

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