

THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN THE IDENTIFICATION AND SUPPORT OF MUSICALLY GIFTED STUDENTS

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Abstract: The paper discusses the role of teachers in the identification and support of musically gifted students. The goal is to point out the role of teachers in the identification and support of musically gifted students, but also the importance of timely discovery of musically gifted students for the development of musical abilities. Musical giftedness is the earliest of all giftednesses. The role of the teachers in the identification of musically gifted students is great and of great importance for the further advancement and development of musical abilities. It is the teacher's responsibility, but a great challenge, to design and implement more complex musical activities that encourage and direct the development of musically gifted students. In this regard, the teacher should encourage students to engage in music – sing more complex songs, listen to quality musical works, play children's musical instruments, but also refer them to activities within children's musical creativity. Methodical instructions for the realization of certain musical activities are given in the paper.

Keywords: musical education, giftedness, teacher, identification of the gifted.

1. INTRODUCTION

Talented individuals, considering their potential contributions in various areas of life and work, represent a significant resource in modern society. From the need to define the concept of giftedness and create frameworks for identifying and supporting the gifted, numerous theories about gifted individuals have emerged. The phenomenon of giftedness, being a complex occurrence, is approached from various perspectives, making it a subject of study for psychologists, educators, sociologists, methodologists, and other researchers. Despite the abundance of research on giftedness, there is no universal definition of the term. Koren defines giftedness as “a unique combination of traits based on which an individual is capable of consistently achieving significantly high performance in one or more areas of human activities” (Koren, 1989: 9). Tanenbaum suggests that the manifestation of a child's potential giftedness into adult manifest giftedness requires the interaction of five psychological and social factors: general ability, specific abilities, non-intellectual facilitators (achievement motivation, appropriate self-concept, and mental health status), environmental influences (family, peer group, school and the community in which the individual lives, economic, social, legal, and political institutions), and chance factors (luck) (Bulaja, 2016, according to Hjužak, 2006). American educator Joseph Renzulli (1978) defines giftedness as the product of the interaction and interdependence of above-average abilities, motivation, and creativity, while Gagné (2000) considers someone gifted if they possess intellectual, socio-affective and sensorimotor abilities. Nešković interprets giftedness “as the product of the interaction and interdependence of above-average abilities, motivation, and creativity, and that it is more pronounced if these three factors are more present, connected, and interacting with each other” (Nešić Bajgo, 2017: 83, according to Nešković, 2005). Intellectual giftedness usually manifests at an early age, while motivation and creativity gradually develop and come to the fore later on. If the environment is stimulating and the child's development is accompanied by understanding and encouragement, the possibility of developing creativity and motivation is higher.

Although the interpretations of the phenomenon of giftedness by the mentioned authors differ, it can be noted that they all agree on the potential of a child to achieve above-average results in one or more areas of human activities, emphasizing the significance of high abilities as factors of giftedness. Similarly, we consider significant the understanding of giftedness as a dynamic phenomenon conditioned by the influence of a stimulating environment. In this regard, the environment in which a child grows, learns and develops is a factor that can encourage giftedness, but also slow it down and prevent it from expressing itself. Therefore, recognizing and identifying gifted children is extremely important for ensuring adequate support for their further development.

2. RECOGNITION AND IDENTIFICATION OF MUSICAL GIFTED STUDENTS

It is well-known that among all forms of giftedness, musical giftedness emerges earliest and can manifest in various ways. Musical giftedness “as a specific ability, typically appears around the age of three” (Palinkašević, Stolić, 2016: 262, according to Andre, 2008) and can be explained as “an organic fusion of a high degree of musicality with spiritual, intellectual, and emotional qualities” (Radičeva, 2008: 95). Many authors emphasize the importance of

timely discovery of children's musical giftedness to ensure the progression and development of their musical abilities. Parents play a significant role as the first factor in recognizing children's giftedness (Barzut, Blanuša, 2020), followed by teachers whose responsibility is to take on the role of early encouragement and discovery of musical giftedness from parents (Čudina-Obradović, 1990). Considerations about “the importance of immediate surroundings, primarily classroom teaching, for the development of inherited musical potentials” (Lelea, 2014: 56, according to Lelea, 2005) have sparked numerous studies indicating school as one of key factors in the development of students musical giftedness in contemporary education.

The identification of musically gifted students is a complex, lengthy and demanding process. It involves the engagement of “music pedagogue and psychologist, who are the only ones capable of carrying out proper identification and selection of talented children” (Lelea, 2012: 59–60) using various tests (musicality, auditory tests, psychological tests of musical abilities, etc.), after which they can “organize appropriate and systematic musical guidance for the gifted” (Lelea, 2014: 60). This doesn't exclude teachers from engaging in, within the bounds of their competencies, fostering the musical guidance of the gifted. According to some authors, teachers most often recognize abilities such as “a sense of pitch; intensity (volume) of tones; duration (time) of tones; sense of harmony and consonance of tones; the extent of memory or memorization and a sense of rhythm” (Stolić, 2015: 328), so the further development of these musical abilities largely depends on the teacher.

After identifying musically gifted students, it is a significant responsibility for teachers to devise activities that will aid in the development of their abilities, which can be a considerable challenge. In order for students with specific educational needs to receive “appropriate education, accurate identification is necessary, but not sufficient. It is becoming clear that gifted children have complex needs that are not easily met by regular education. In addition, it is increasingly recognized that the society in which a gifted individual lives, and even the class that a child attends, can dramatically influence whether that individual will experience his giftedness as a burden or an opportunity” (Barzut, Blanuša, 2020: 119). The role of motivation in working with musically gifted students “cannot be ignored, because the effect of other significant prerequisites for student achievement in music depends on its quality, degree and manner of expression” (Lelea, 2014: 60). In addition to musical giftedness, “gifted individuals develop all the competencies that will allow them to more easily 'cope' with giftedness, as insufficiently developed socio-emotional competencies can often lead gifted children to falter in academic achievements” (Jeremić, Milenović, 2017: 3, according to Šefer, 2005).

As already mentioned, in contemporary education, the role of the teacher is crucial for the initiation and progress of musically gifted students. Through his actions, the teacher integrates school goals, the curriculum, student activities, his way of working, but also different developmental contexts (Lelea, 2014, according to Lelea, 2005). In their work with musically gifted students, teachers have overlapping roles: teacher (transmitting knowledge and skills), expert (bringing ability and experience, accumulated knowledge), guide (knowing the path to success and indicating how to overcome obstacles, allowing individuality in finding solutions), advisor (advising on expected and possible standards of the domain), friend (a source of emotional support), and model (an example of certain values, attitudes, and behavior) (Lelea, 2014, according to Lelea, 2012). The development of children's musical abilities and skills is entrusted to teachers, therefore, the extent to which students musical abilities will develop and progress depends on the teacher's expertise, engagement, ability, and love for music. The teacher's responsibility is to consider all segments of music education – from choosing a song for the student to sing, to vocal and instrumental music that the student will listen to. It is crucial that the teacher listens to the students, is aware of the goals of their behavior, and encourages them to express their ideas, experiences, thoughts, and feelings evoked by specific musical activities. Only in this way will the teacher positively influence the development of musical abilities and the overall personality of the student.

3. ADAPTATION OF REQUIREMENTS OF MUSIC CULTURE TEACHING TO INDIVIDUAL ABILITIES OF STUDENTS

Teaching of music culture at younger school age includes the following musical activities – music performance, music listening and children's musical creativity. Music performance involves activities such as singing, playing musical instruments and engaging in musical games. From the first grade, students learn to sing songs by ear (children's, traditional, singing games). In the third grade, when musical literacy begins, students perform simpler examples (singing and playing) from sheet music.

Playing children's musical instruments is planned from the first to the fourth grade. It involves introduction with children's instruments, playing techniques and instrument crafting. The curriculum specifies that first and second-grade students play rhythm instruments (sticks, jingles, small drums, cymbals, triangles, and tambourines), while in all subsequent grades, they also play melodic instruments (block flute, metallophone, and xylophone).

Listening to music, as an activity, aims to develop students ability to respond to musical stimulus, conscious observation of elements of musical expression, form musical taste and cultivate the love for music. Within children's musical creativity, students can create accompaniments for songs, improvise movements to music, express musical impressions through literature or visual arts, and from the second grade onwards, engage in melodic-rhythmic improvisations based on given texts.

In their work, teachers will often encounter musically gifted students, and it is their responsibility to motivate and further engage such students by assigning more complex tasks compared to their peers. Given the differences in abilities, inclinations, and knowledge among musically gifted students, individualized instruction is crucial for their progress. Individualized instruction resolves “one of the main contradictions of the class-hour system, which lies in the fact that instructional programs, methods, and conditions are unequal for all students, while their capabilities vary significantly” (Đorđević, 2003: 30).

Therefore, it is essential for teachers to adapt the mentioned musical activities and tasks to each student. In doing so, they contribute to the development of students musical abilities. Teachers should enable students to sing more complex songs, listen to high-quality musical pieces, play children's musical instruments and encourage them to engage in music and guide them towards activities within children's musical creativity.

Playing children's musical instruments

Whitin this musical activity, students are trained to play individually on rhythmic and melodic instruments of Orff's instrumentation, but also to participate in active collective music making, which contributes in the best way to the encouragement and development of specific musical abilities. Students have complete freedom to express their creativity, explore and improvise and thus develop their musical abilities. In practice, it has been shown that “a class that plays, in a pleasant and interesting atmosphere, more easily overcomes the demands of music teaching from unconscious, spontaneous experiences to conscious perception and understanding of musical phenomena and laws” (Stojanović, 1996:65). Even in the lower grades of elementary school, the teacher can contribute to a more comprehensive and better understanding of students musical expression through various content and work formats. In addition, by making music in the sections of free musical activities, students will get to know and love music even better. In this way “they will demonstrate to their parents and to the wider social community that they have not learned music only in the scope of narrow classroom knowledge“ (Bratić, Filipović, 2001: 144), but have a well-rounded and richer understanding of music that they can showcase to others.

In schools where a teacher or teachers who play certain instruments work, additional classes are organized for gifted and interested students in playing certain instruments. Classes take place in groups of up to four students, or from five to nine students when working with block flute, tambourines, mandolins or Orff's instrumentation. Depending on the possibilities and interests of the students, small musical ensembles are formed in additional classes. Students are given the opportunity to create new melodies by individually or collectively, “observe and express their opinions about what they've listened to, provide suggestions and instructions to others, and share personal experiences created through listening” (Joksimović, 2018: 153), and in school and other events and competitions, students showcase their individual and group achievements from additional music classes.

Musical games

Musical games are games in which the musical thought is the initiator and carrier of all the actions that take place in the games. When selecting musical games, consideration should be given to age appropriateness, the character of the game and the set goal. Also, before the first performance of a certain musical game, it is necessary to make certain preparations, namely: introduce the students to “the name of the game and the lyrics of the song that they will learn to sing later (show a picture of an animal or a toy); briefly explain and show what and how to play; process the movements part by part, and only then move on to the game as a whole (along with the song)” (Ječmenić, 2015: 39). Musical games are divided into: games with singing, games with instrumental music, didactic musical games and musical dramatizations.

Games where students describe the song through movements

These games represent the freest form of singing games. Depending on the content, they can be performed in various formats. They develop the students ability to express the lyrics of a song through movements, thus introducing them to it. During these games, teachers should guide students to listen carefully to the music and synchronize their movements with it. In these games, movements are coordinated with the music based on tempo, rhythm, melody and dynamics.

Games with instrumental accompaniment

After performing singing games, students should become acquainted with games that involve instrumental music. These games contribute to the development of a sense of rhythm, the cultivation of auditory skills, and a lively and cheerful mood. Additionally, they enhance motor coordination, concentration, socialization, and contribute to the correct body posture. Also, they are significant because they develop students ability for active listening,

experiencing, and emotionally reacting to music. These games involve simple steps and choreography adapted to the students abilities, including walking, hopping in place or while moving, turning around, moving left, right, forward, backward, squatting, clapping hands and more. Through these games, students express the character or expressive elements of the music through their movements, devising movements that reflect their experience of the music and their ability to express it through movements. Games with instrumental accompaniment can be folk, free-form, or without a specific content (Đurković Pantelić, 1998). During the exercise, the teacher's back is turned to the students, who are standing in a semicircle. The teacher initially performs the game as a whole, then explains the details of the choreography. Students adopt the steps in parts, with counting and initially without instrumental accompaniment, and later with instrumental accompaniment. The parts are then combined and practiced as a whole.

Musical dramatizations

Musical dramatizations are the most interesting but also the most demanding type of musical games when it comes to preparation for their performance. They are performed with a dramatization of the text, and require preparation at the level of correlation between various focused activities: musical education, physical education, visual arts, Serbian language, and the world around us/nature and society. Performing musical dramatizations necessitates rehearsing the song, mimicking and staging movements, preparing costumes and the stage and rehearsing the choir and orchestra. Alongside mastering and rehearsing the song, suitable costumes (for specific seasons, animals, flowers), props and the stage are being prepared. The teacher needs to introduce students to the whole story and then assign roles after which students adopt the roles by rehearsing. Dramatization can be divided into parts that students practice separately and then merge into a whole. Following didactic principles, the teacher should choose dramatizations in line with the students capabilities and interests.

Didactical musical games

Didactical musical games are a type of musical games with established rules that develop students musical abilities (rhythm, ear training, musical memory, voice, etc.). These games allow students to unconsciously adopt certain rhythmic-melodic concepts, as well as concepts related to dynamics, tempo, character, etc. Each game has a specific goal and educational task to achieve, such as mastering a rhythmic or melodic problem, recognizing various sound sources, identifying children's instruments, recognizing the voice's timbre, etc.

Children's musical creativity

Children's musical creativity significantly activates "children's invention, imagination, and their ability to communicate and experience external events and internal impulses" (Vukomanović, Matić, 1989: 9). Besides that, it influences the development of cognitive abilities and skills. It contributes to better communication and children's socialization, develops creativity, the ability to express experiences and emotions through musical activities, activates children's creative behavior, and influences the shaping of a creatively oriented personality. It is essential to encourage children's musical creativity "so that, during further schooling, the richness of a child's creative potential can come to full expression" (Vukomanović, Komnenić, 1981: 12). Children's musical creativity can manifest in various ways, such as creative singing, improvisation of movements to music, expressing musical impressions through literature or art, improvising rhythmic accompaniment, improvisation of rhythmically-melodic unit and melodic-rhythmic improvisation on a familiar song lyrics.

Proper selection of exercises based on a creative approach helps develop children's creative abilities and achieves the important task of aesthetic education.

Creative singing

Creative singing is spontaneous children's singing and is very important for the development of children's musicality and voice. It influences imagination, creativity, self-confidence, contributes to the development of aesthetic criteria, and social interaction with other children. Therefore, it's necessary for the teacher to encourage students to participate in creative singing.

Improvisation of movements to music

The improvisation of movements to music is the most common form of children's musical creativity. While singing songs or listening to instrumental music, students devise movements that correspond to it. Some movements students can perform while singing or listening to instrumental music include clapping hands, dancing in a circle, etc.

Improvisation of rhythmic accompaniment

This form of children's musical creativity involves devising and performing rhythmic accompaniment to already learned songs and counters in the following way: one student's task is to devise rhythmic accompaniment on an instrument of their choice, while other students sing the learned song or counter.

Art expression under the influence of music

Art expression under the influence of music stimulates creative abilities in students in visual arts. When words are insufficient for students to express their impressions and feelings about a piece, they spontaneously add art

expression. Art expressions under the influence of music are valuable and help understand students experiences while listening to instrumental pieces of program music. It is preferable that the teacher initially plays children's art songs to the students, after which they express their impressions through art, and then gradually introduces instrumental compositions of a program character. The teacher should motivate students to listen to an unknown composition without revealing its title. This way, students express their personal experiences of the heard piece through art.

4. CONCLUSION

Musical giftedness emerges earliest among various forms of giftedness. Timely recognition and identification of musically gifted students is of paramount importance for the development of their musical abilities and love for the art of music. Working with musically gifted students requires the expertise of teachers but also represents a significant challenge, and requires thoroughly teacher preparation. Teachers are required to adapt musical activities to the abilities and possibilities of gifted students, to encourage, motivate and additionally engage them by setting more complex tasks. Proper selection of musical activities and methodically correct work will encourage and contribute to the development of students musical abilities. In practice, musically gifted students are often overlooked. Therefore, it is necessary to provide teachers with additional support and education through seminars to enable them to effectively work with musically gifted students. Additionally, efforts should be directed towards raising awareness of the significance and specific needs of musically gifted students in music education.

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