DEVELOPING RHYTHMIC SKILLS OF PUPILS IN THE FIRST GRADE OF PRIMARY MUSIC SCHOOL

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Abstract

Reproduction of rhythm represents the basic skill acquired through theoretical music subjects. Understanding and performing rhythm is very important for pupils who are at the beginning of music education. The first steps of solfeggio teachers with first grade pupils in primary music schools should encompass access to rhythm and meter. The solfeggio teacher should harmonize auditory experience with musical literacy, which is the basic task of rhythm teaching. The didactic models used in solfeggio teaching in some cases prefer the auditory model and in others cases prefer the visual model.

The aim of this study was to compare two teaching methods in mastering rhythmic skills. In one class of the first grade primary music school applied auditory method and visual in the second. The monitoring results of pupil’s achievement was conducted twice during the school year.

The paper is based on assumption that the pupils of first grade can understand the rhythm more easily if the visual method is applied. In order to confirm or reject the hypothesis a comparison was conducted of pupils achievement. In one group the rhythm and meter teaching was conducted via the visual method and in the second group via the auditory method. Analysis of the results did not confirm the hypothesis. The methods applied have shown that pupils had successfully mastered the rhythm exercises, in both first year classes.

The results of this study could represent the motivating impulse for such a research to be conducted in several music schools. The research was conducted at Music school “Josif Marinkovic” in Vrsac, during the academic year 2016/17. The study included two classes (44 pupils) of first grade primary music school.

Keywords: Didactic models, gifted children, rhythm, solfeggio, teaching methods,

INTRODUCTION

Latent rhythmic feeling is an innate predisposition of the human body (Vasiljevic,2000). Before one year of age, children show an interest in music. They listen to music and body movements follow the rhythm. Synchronization of body movement and music do not comply, but the presence of movement is present. With the children’s growth the body movements that accompany the music become more harmonious.

In preschool institutions teachers apply designed rhythmic musical activities and develop children’s sense for dynamics and tempo.

When selecting appropriate children’s songs, preschool teachers work on developing a feeling for two-piece and three piece rhythm types. These didactic models have the aim to discover and develop children’s musical abilities. Children’s discovered primary music talent

1 Specialized paper
can be developed in music school. The start of musical education is connected closely with the development of rhythmic abilities. The rhythm can’t be separated from music tempo even though they are conceptually and substantially different.

In music school in the methodology of music teaching it is necessary to determine the kind of rhythmic abilities that solfeggio teachers should follow in order to promptly intervene and correct the irregularities.

Vasiljevic Zorislava lists five elements that should be followed in rhythmic abilities. They relate to the maintenance of a balanced pulse and the ability to cluster knocks, the response to the change of music tempo, observation and execution of different rhythmic types, as well as the ability of the agogic tinting and polyphony monitoring of different rhythmic relationships between voices (Vasiljevic,2000a).

The solfeggio teacher should perform these complex tasks, in order to develop pulsations and agogic tinting, which are essential for development of stylistics.

In the practical teaching of solfeggio the development of rhythmic abilities can conducted through various didactic approaches to the rhythmic-metric aspect (Karalic,2014). The difference is reflected in the routing operation that can be highlighted in the auditory experience or the visual perception. If is justified methodically to give priority to the auditory approach in music, when teachers focus on skills and ability of reproduction duration, emphasis and grouping of tones in the whole and on phrases (Vasiljevic,1985;Gostuski,1968). Other teachers are oriented towards musical literacy, where priority is given to abilities of reading notes. In teaching of solfeggio rhythm and meter can be approached in two ways, which can be combined in practical work with children. The first, auditory model, might be labeled as direct, and the second, visual model as indirect, because it requires from children to read musical notation and connect them to the auditory perception.

In the selection of the auditory or the visual model, it is important to make a distinction between approaches to the rhythm. That is whether the rhythm is studied as a whole, or as a set of two separate but interrelated components- rhythm and meter (Karalic, 2014: 227).

The rhythm as a whole, refers to duration and accentuation, while the meter represents method of observation and recording the rhythm in relation to the basic grouping of knocks and their type (Vasiljevic,1985a). The rhythm and the meter can be noticeably different in the visual format, because they are represented by different symbols. The rhythm is indicated by symbols which define duration and highlighting of tones, while the notation of meter is represented by different symbols indicating the measure (4/4, 2/4 and all.) grouping of notes and tact lines.

In practice, solfeggio teachers are faced with a dilemma, when starting work with first grade pupils. The curriculum indicates that work on rhythm should be conducted by combining auditory and visual methods. This approach means that pupils are literate, because it is necessary to read musical notation and connect it to auditory perception. The pupils can enroll in the first grade of primary music school and the first grade of primary school. This group of pupils begins to learn basic literacy, which requires great concentration and attention. The pupils are engaged on a daily basis to learning the letters and musical notations, simultaneously. Parallel learning of letters and musical notations can be a large load for the pupils; consequently the resistance to solfeggio learning is possible, if not even expected.
It is assumed that pupils who had already learned to read and write would more quickly master the rhythm of both approaches. Their achievements would be higher than pupils who are learning only through the auditory rhythm method. The pupils who have learned the rhythm with combined methods may be more successful than pupils who had access to the auditory method. Therefore, the survey was conducted to clarify dilemmas whether the pupils that entered the first class of music school before they acquire the basic literacy, can complete all of the tasks as well as pupils who had enrolled after they had learned how to read and write.

THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of research:

The study was conducted in two first year primary music school classes with the aim to check which didactic model for the perception of rhythm and meter will help the pupils adopt them more effectively.

In one class (Class A) work on fostering and developing the rhythm took place so that in the first semester the accent was put on auditory perception. In the second class (Class B) the perception of rhythm was taught through the visual method.

The research hypothesis:

The pupils who were subjected to the visual didactic model will be more efficient in overcoming rhythmic tasks.

The research instruments: The study implemented a descriptive method of evaluating the efficiency of mastering rhythm with four parameters (very successful, successful, good and satisfactory). The evaluation was assessed by the solfeggio teacher twice during the school year (at the end of the first semester and at the end of the school year). After the evaluation the results were summarized and compared.

The dependent variables: The auditory and the visual model.

The independent variables: Gender and age of subjects.

The research sample:

Class A consisted of 20 pupils who were attending the first grade of primary school and the first grade of music school. Class B consisted of 24 pupils, who attended the second and the third grade of primary school and the first grade of music school.

The survey was conducted during 2015/16 school year at Music school “Josif Marinkovic” in Vrsac.

The organization of the research:

When the study began (September 2015.) the pupils were beginning to learn the letters in elementary school. Therefore the solfeggio teacher decided to apply the auditory model in methodology of processing of rhythm. The teacher thought that shouldn’t burden children with writing notes. Learning notes was postponed for second semester.

The first tasks that the pupils had to learn were to develop the rhythm and accurate intonation. The sense of the rhythm was developed with auditory method consisting of:

- Learning to accurately and clearly pronounce the words of a children’s song text.
- Clapping.

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The solfeggio teacher’s task was to present the meaning and importance of rhythm to the pupils. Another important activity was learning the correct pronunciation of words to children’s songs. The solfeggio teacher has worked on:

- Breathing exercises.
- Vocalization exercises.
- Exercises of cantabile and parlando.

Breathing exercises involved the practice of proper inhalation and exhalation of air. The pupils were practicing to take in a deep breath, hold it and then gradually discharge. The children performed these exercises with curiosity because they were accompanied by imitation of activities that were familiar to them (blowing candles on a birthday cake). After successful mastery of technique breaths of air, the teacher introduced in the program exercises to hold the air (Cinc, 2015). The solfeggio teacher conducted these exercises, so that the pupils learn how to properly dispense the air. The goal was for the pupils to become aware of the importance of a balanced presence of air in the lungs, no matter what rhythm is implemented. The vocalization exercises included work on correct pronunciation of vowels.

The vocalization exercises were used to develop ambitus of voice, precise intonation and the skills for proper use of air and for connecting tones (Romanu, 1973). The solfeggio teacher did not use ready-made patterns for vocalization exercises. She made patterns taking into account the children’s age. Because the amplitude of children’s voice is small the simplest form of vocalization were used. Vocalizations that were used based on a few tones of musical scales and have begun with tone do 1, because most children can sing it without difficulty. Children also practiced to separately perform vowels, which were combined in the same vocalization exercise (each tone with another vowel or the same tone with more vowels). The solfeggio teacher was practicing with the pupils a text which followed a melody. The pupils practiced parlando successfully, because the words of children’s songs were simple and rhymed.

The exercises were conducted so that short notes were sung on different tones of the scale, up and down (sixteenth to the syllables ma-me-mi-mo-mu). Each syllable fitted one note. The next group of exercises related to diction in speech and singing.

The solfeggio teacher performed with each pupil individually all exercises that were related to singing and correct pronunciation of words. In that way the teacher could estimate the musical potential of every child. After a solo exercises the pupils sang together. They were allowed to self-select the song which they performed as soloists and the songs which they sang in a group were chosen together with the teacher.

The pupils accepted with pleasure the exercises of rhythm that were performed with stepping and pronouncing text, because they were dynamic, were performed away from the desk and allow the creativity in motion. Rhythm exercises that pupils performed clapping palms have shown that children often lagged on tact and their concentration was not adequate always. Their attention was attracted by other sound effects from the environment or the clapping was independent of the song’s rhythm.

The exercise, in which the rhythm was determined by tapping on the desk, were much more interesting for the pupils then the previous.
The pupils were motivated for work when the class dynamics were frequently changed, and when new content was introduced during the class. The solfeggio teacher noted that pupils were more creative when they work in two groups. One group recited songs and the other followed the rhythm by stepping and clapping. The pupils accepted and cooperated well with the teacher during this combination of exercises. The pupils performed these exercises during the first semester.

Eight and nine years old children attended class B. In elementary school they were attending the second and third grade and the first in music school. The investigated group consisted of twenty-four pupils. There were 14 (58%) girls and 10 (42%) boys. 18 pupils attended the second grade of primary school (75%) and 6 (25%) third grade. In that class the visual model was used. In the first classes rhythm was taught using the same didactic method as in class A. After several lessons, the text of song which the pupils have sung was switched to the musical system. The pupils were introduced to the concept of scale and concept of tones. On the line system the tonal height and names of tones are represented. The pupils were introduced to the **C-major** scale first. The rhythm on the musical scale is determined by duration and accentuation of notes (stressed and unstressed tact). The pupils have determined the duration of notes by visual perception. First of all the whole note was presented to the pupils, and then half and quarter notes. When they accept that the duration of notes is marked by rhythmic intervals and connect these terms visual and auditory, pupils were introduced to the concept of counting units. They learned 2/3, 3/4, 4/4 of tact.

Recording of rhythm is connected to pauses that are necessary for the understanding of note duration. Every note is accompanied by an appropriate break. On the note system the pupils learn form of notes, shape of breaks and extended duration, which represent elements of rhythm.

**RESEARCH RESULTS**

Class A consisted of 20 seven year old children. They simultaneously attended the first grade of elementary school and first grade of music school.

The results of rhythm activities that have been evaluated at the end of the first semester are shown in Table No 1.

*Table No 1. Results of the auditory model*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results</th>
<th>very successful</th>
<th>successfully</th>
<th>good</th>
<th>satisfactorily</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Correct pronunciation and singing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making time by stepping and singing the words of a song</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making time by clapping</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making time by tapping on a desk</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 20
Through the analysis of the obtained results it can be concluded that two (10%) pupils had completed all of the didactic methods very successful. It could be assumed that these pupils are musical gifted, therefore their work will be monitored in cooperation with instrument teachers. Through the analysis of the achievements of other pupils it was concluded that the proper pronunciation and singing represented a difficulty for five pupils and making time by clapping (seven pupils had shown only satisfactorily results).

The method making time by stepping and singing the words of a song was suited for all pupils. Such interactive content was interesting because the pupils could demonstrate their creativity. Making time by clapping wasn’t suited for pupils with a less developed attention span. The results showed that 60 to 70% of pupils were grouped in the successful and good categories. This indicates that most pupils were motivated and showed that they understood the basic settings of rhythmic exercises.

Class B consisted of 24 pupils aged eight and nine. When the study began they were attending the second or third grade of primary school and the first grade of primary music school. Because they know to write and read, their rhythmic activity program was implemented through the visual model. The visual model contained introduction to the musical notation, appearance of notes, form of musical pauses and duration of notes. The results that pupils achieved at the end of the first semester of the auditory and visual perception were shown in table number two.

Table 2. Results of visual rhythm perception

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Very successful</th>
<th>Successfully</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Satisfactorily</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correct pronunciation and singing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12,5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making time by stepping and singing the words of songs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12,5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making time by clapping</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12,5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making time by tapping on a desk</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12,5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to the note system, note form, duration and breaks</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12,5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An analysis of the achieved results showed that three (12,5%) pupils achieved very successful results. When these results are compared to the results of pupils from class A, it can be determined that the percentages obtained are similar (10 and 12,5%). Among the respondents 12,5% of the pupils performed their tasks without difficulty with the assessment of “very successful”. These pupils were assumed to be gifted and their achievements will be monitored in cooperation with instrument teachers, in order to develop their potentials in a synchronized way.
The results of the research showed that introduction with the note system, the shape of notes, the duration and breaks were a difficult task for ten (41%) pupils. These data were significant for the solfeggio teachers because it was necessary to intensify visual rhythm exercises during the second semester in order to make pupils’ achievements better.

In the second semester the rhythm elements were practiced by visual techniques both of classes.

The achievements of both classes are presented in Table No 3.

Table 3. The achieved results of the visual model for pupils of both classes (A and B)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Class A</th>
<th>Class B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very successful</td>
<td>Successfully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f %</td>
<td>f %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ability to record the rhythm with the notes</td>
<td>2 10 4 20 10 50 4 20</td>
<td>3 12 5 7 29 10 42 4 16,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the concept of counting units</td>
<td>2 10 4 20 10 50 4 20</td>
<td>3 12 5 7 29 10 42 4 16,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying height of tones and names of tones</td>
<td>2 10 4 20 10 50 4 20</td>
<td>3 12 5 7 29 10 42 4 16,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ability to assess the duration of notes</td>
<td>2 10 4 20 10 50 4 20</td>
<td>3 12 5 7 29 10 42 4 16,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total: 20</td>
<td>Total: 24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The comparable analysis of the obtained results could not confirm the hypothesis, according to which the pupils who started rhythmic activities with the visual method would master the tasks more easily than pupils who got acquainted with the rhythm through the auditory method.

The results marked with a “very successful” in the analysis of rhythmic methods concerning the recording of rhythm with a note sign, understanding of the concept of unit counting, recognizing tonal height and the names of the tones and the ability to assess the duration of the notes shown that two (10%) pupils from class A and three pupils (12,5%) from class B, responded to all tasks.

The solfeggio teachers concluded that these pupils are potentially gifted, because they mastered both aspects of rhythm without errors.

It was noted that the pupils of both classes showed similar percentage of achievements. This fact had a practical significance because it showed that pupils, who attend first grade of elementary school and first grade of music school simultaneously, can successfully master
the exercises in rhythm, as well as the pupils who know reading and writing before starting the first grade of music school.

Parameter “good” was estimated for 50% of pupils from class A and 42% of pupils from class B. The solfeggio teachers concluded from the data that first grade pupils have mastered the initial tasks of rhythm. It was important for the successful continuation of their schooling.

CONCLUSION

The paper presents a comparative analysis of the achievements in mastering the rhythm activities of two classes of first grade Music school “Josif Marinkovic” in Vrsac.

In the professional musicology literature there exists the attitude that for the beginning of musical literacy a visual model is more effective (Miocinovic, 2002). We wanted to compare the achievement of pupils who started their musical education with the auditory model (in the first semester) with the achievement of pupils who started the rhythmic exercises with the visual model. It was assumed that pupils who started the rhythmic education with the visual model will be more successfully in mastering the rhythm tasks than the pupils who worked with the auditory model.

The analysis of parameter “very successful” has not proven the established hypothesis. By comparing the percentage results, it was found that 10% of pupils of class A and 12.5% of pupils of class B rated “very successful”

The parameter “satisfactorily” related to the weakest results. An analysis of this parameter showed that 20% of pupils of class A were assessed in this way, while in class B this percentage was lower (16.5).

By analyzing the results of other parameters, there were no significant deviations between pupils of class A and pupils of class B.

By analyzing all parameters set for the assessment of success in rhythmic perception, it was concluded that 70% of pupils in the first grade Elementary music school “Josif Marinkovic” in Vrsac, completed their rhythmic activities very successful, successfully and good. On the basis of the obtained results the solfeggio teachers concluded that the activities related to basic music literacy and rhythm understanding were done well and that the pupils were motivated to continue their music education.

The research had a practical application because it answered the question: “Can seven year old children, who simultaneously started their regular schooling in elementary school, realize all the planned tasks in a music school”?

On the basis of the obtained results, it was found that pupils who started the rhythm exercises through the auditory method, in the first semester, during the second semester learned to record the rhythm by note characters, understood the concept of counting units, recognized the tonal heights and names of tones and shower that they could evaluate duration of the note. The results showed that seven-year-olds didn’t show weaker results than children aged eight or nine.
REFERENCES


