

## **The musical imagination of children, expressed through painting**

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**Abstract:** *Educating the capacity to visually render the images of a musical piece, in children, requires that they already have a certain amount of knowledge and skills, both musical and graphical. The mutual influence between the musical activity and the painting one is attained in two directions: on one hand, the musical image influences the children's drawings and, on the other hand, the visual image helps children perceive the emotional nuances of music more profoundly. Overall, art and the artistic phenomenon, in general, play an important part in the multilateral educational process. The artistic act and its evolution, as compared to the children's various activities, help them develop an integral, creative and sensitive personality.*

Key-words: *musical activity, painting, artistic act, children, imagination, education.*

### **1. Introduction**

Children's multilateral development is the primordial task of the contemporary educational system, which affirms the importance of the teaching-learning-assessment activity, which, in its turn, is focused both on the competency of the teacher and the interest shown by the person who assimilates the amount of knowledge – in this case, the child. Overall, art and the artistic phenomenon, in general, play an important part in the multilateral educational process.

The artistic act and its evolution, as compared to the children's various activities, help them develop an integral, creative and sensitive personality. Introducing the young generation to the artistic creation helps them to understand their thoughts and feelings more profoundly. By acting directly upon the human body (through the various sense organs), art awakens numerous associations with various sensations, which contribute to the formation of a unitary approach on the various art types and phenomena. Hence, starting from the complex, theoretical, aesthetic and psychological influences that art exerts upon the human personality and also, relying upon our teaching experience in this regard, we can define this phenomenon as an oriented, systematic process of consecutive and simultaneous

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influencing of the emotional and rational spheres, through artistic works of different types and genres, which also interact with one another.

An essential factor in increasing the efficiency of children's aesthetic education is the teachers' use of special, innovative methods, as well as the ensurance of optimum conditions in the organization of children's initiation into the various types of art and creative activity. The success of this education depends, however, not only on the teacher's pedagogical training, but also on the psychic-pedagogical interaction between the teacher and the pupil. In the practice of teaching children, there has been found that such an interaction is very easily and efficiently established in the synthesis of various types of art.

Combining the musical activity with painting substantially contributes to the formation of a well-developed and complex artistic perception, as the most subtle chords of the human being are struck and put to vibrate on the same wave frequency. The research that has been performed so far, aimed at studying education-related problems in the young generation has enabled the drawing up of some concise programs of teaching painting and music in schools.

In order to establish a proper program of musical and painting activities, one must first choose an adequate musical repertoire, by taking into account the children's age and level of training, as well as the principle of study – from simple to complex. The teacher is to pay proper attention to the link between music and painting, as well as to the interaction between the elements within each of these two types of art.

One method that can largely be used is the comparison between different types of art (not only music and painting), in order to reveal to the children the tight correlations, the dialectic interaction between numerous types of art, which are only apparently different. This method of training will help children to see the link between different musical timbres and the varied colors of the color palette. Cultivating in children the capacity to render visually the images of a musical piece requires that these children also acquire some musical and graphical knowledge and skills. Also, the graphical representation shall depend on the children's limited life experience and on their individual creativity. The children will be proposed to watch various documentaries, containing images of natural landscapes, which will be accompanied by a soundtrack suited to each landscape. This method will largely stimulate the mental processes of comparison, analysis and rendering – through images – of a song or of another musical piece that has been listened to. The graphical illustration for a melody, performed firstly by the teacher, will hugely and efficiently motivate the children, giving them the courage and self-confidence to express graphically a song performed by them or a musical piece they have just auditioned. After the music teacher is handed over the drawings made by the children, he or she will analyze the results and will decide whether they can move on to the studying of a new musical piece, much more complex, or whether the previous activity should be resumed. This way, the children who did not understand

very clearly what they had to do will assimilate the information much better and those who got good results will deepen their understanding of the subject matter.

The musical works that the teacher will propose for audition will be selected according to the degree of complexity of the type of music being approached, namely songs, instrumental program music and instrumental non-program music. The principle "from simple to compound" shall also be applied within each type of music tackled. The teacher will start with children's songs, as their musical images are accompanied by a poetic text, making them more accessible, as compared to the other types of music mentioned above. They will be followed by the works of instrumental program music, because, although they lack the poetic text, they have a title which reveals the subject matter, thus helping the children. The last one to be tackled will be the instrumental non-program music, as it has neither a text, nor a title. Since the children may have some difficulties in perception, it must be the last one to tackle, namely when the children reach an adequate level of musical training.

In the following paragraph, I shall give an example of how to render musical works through drawing, but not before I mention a few moments from my personal work practice.

I work as a music teacher at the "Athens" private school in Bucharest. It is a Greek school which hosts children of Greek people operating in Romania. The education system comprises the following age categories: kindergarten, primary school and secondary school. All the disciplines are taught in Greek. I have music classes with children of all the ages mentioned above. In my activity, in order to render graphically a musical image, I tackle various songs, depending on the age of the children involved and I make them get acquainted with the universal instrumental classical music. Throughout my teaching activity, I have noticed a very interesting fact, which is that children have a keen interest in listening to program music, which is based on a fairytale or a narrative. From this category, there are some pieces which are highly successful amongst children: the ballet suites "The Nutcracker" and "The Sleeping Beauty" by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, "The Children's album" by the same author, "Pictures at an Exhibition" by M. Mussorgsky, "Flight of the Bumblebee" and the Opera "The Tale of Tsar Saltan" (the instrumental fragment "The Brave Men") by N. Rimsky-Korsakov, the ballet "Romeo and Juliet", the symphonic fairy tale "Peter and the Wolf" by S. Prokofiev, Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons" concert cycle, the Pastoral Symphony (The Symphony No. 6 in F major, Op. 68) by L. van Beethoven (the parts: "Thunderstorm" and "Shepherds' Song"), as well as "Scenes from childhood" and "Album for the Youth" by R. Schumann, etc.

In the following paragraph, allow me to illustrate one of the ways in which such an activity can be conducted. As a musical image, I have chosen the musical fragment "The Brave Men" from the Opera „The Tale of Tsar Saltan" by N. Rimsky-Korsakov, which I consider fit for 1st -grade children. At first, they are announced the title of the musical piece and presented with a few important data

about the composer of the music and the fact that it was inspired by the reading of the fairytale with the same name, written by the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin. The teacher is to briefly present the entire fairy tale to the children and then indicate the content of the fragment they are about to hear:

“Here's a wonder, though, worth telling -  
... The ocean swells in thunder,  
Surges with a mighty roar,  
Overflows a barren shore,  
Leaving, wonderful to see,  
Thirty stalwart knights and three,  
All in mail a-gleaming bright,  
Marching proudly left and right;  
Each one brave beyond compare,  
Tall of stature, young and fair,  
All alike beyond belief,  
Led by Chernomor, their chief” (as translated into Romanian by A. Lupan).

The children shall listen to this fragment once, and then the teacher shall present the content to them; after that, they are to listen to the musical piece again. Before the second audition, the music teacher will emphasize to the children the music's heroic character, the pretty intense sonority throughout the entire fragment, as well as the special expressiveness of the instrumental accompaniment, which imitates the roar of the storm surges. The teacher shall also discuss the ending, which fades away, suggesting the departure of the brave knights. During the second audition, the music teacher may utter, in the background, the fairy tale fragment that corresponds to the musical fragment being heard, in order to facilitate the children's understanding of it. At the end of the audition, the children shall have to account how they imagined the appearance of these knights. The teacher shall ask the children what they were going to draw; what colors would they use; how would they make the knights appear, in the drawings, just as mighty as they appeared through music; how would they illustrate the sea and the waves, during and after the storm; what color would they use in the background of the drawing; what the appropriate position of the paper sheet would be (horizontal or vertical), as well as other questions that would help the kids illustrate graphically their musical image, to the best of their ability. When analyzing the children's drawings, by comparison, the teacher shall have to point out which of the drawings have rendered the musical image correctly. He/she will also point out the inspired choice of colors and technical means used by some of the children, so that the other, less inspired kids would learn from it and do a better job at the next assignments.

The musical works included by the teacher for this particular repertoire will be selected according to certain criteria, as follows: they must have a high artistic

quality, they must be accessible and they must transmit emotion, thus being fit to be expressed graphically. After the audition of the musical works, the children will identify the musical images, which will help them, in the future, to successfully render the impressions from the audition. Here is the example of a repertoire which can be used for the first stage of “painting” of musical images: (“Miorița” by P. Ștefănescu, ”Albinuța” (The little bee), Cântecul soarelui (The Sun Song) by E. Mamot, “Câți ca voi” (How many like you) by E. Mândru, ”Zăpada” (The Snow) by A. Petrache, etc.). All these children's songs include some pretty relevant musical images and a pretty rich and varied emotional palette. The repertoire can be modified in accordance with the children's artistic perception abilities and, also, with their interests, because this is the only way a creation laboratory can be set up. Through these songs, which contain a set of pretty suggestive verbal and musical images that can be easily rendered graphically, music will become, for children, not only a source of aesthetic emotions, but, also, a learning subject full of meanings, which can be discerned and understood. During the audition of the musical works, the main aim is to help the children identify the emotions that the song generates, through the means of expression of the selected repertoire. During the audition, the little children will feel the beauty of the melody, the intonational richness and its dynamics, as well as the variety of its rhythmic pattern. Fascinated by the beauty of the melody and by the lyricism of the text, the children must clearly recognize the link and interaction between them, the way they complete one another (music and poetry).

In order to facilitate the graphic rendering of the musical image, the music teacher shall ask the children certain questions, such as: questions aimed at outlining the subject matter and the image (“What are you going to draw?”), questions meant to help the children render the expressiveness of the music by graphic means (“What colors are you going to use, in order to render the sad or cheerful character of the song, as clearly as possible?”, “How can you represent graphically the lively music from the song's introduction?”), questions that will suggest the means of expression of the drawing (“What are you going to draw in order to render the message from ”Miorița” by P. Ștefănescu or ”Chindia” by Alex. Pașcanu?”, or “How will you arrange the characters on the drawing sheet?”), questions that outline the plane of the graphic development of the musical image: ”With what images are you going to start the drawing?”, as well as other types of questions. The drawings of some children, as well as their answers to the questions may not correspond with the subject of the song; this is why the teacher must first draw the children's attention on the most characteristic aspects of both the music and the text of the song.

By analyzing the results of the musical audition activities, the music teacher will have to consider two aspects, namely: 1- the degree of rendering, through graphic means, of the emotional character of the song, 2 – the capacity to transpose the means of musical expression into means of graphical expression. In most cases, it will be the poetic images that will prevail in the children's drawings, and not the

musical ones, but there may be situations in which the musical side of the song is very well outlined, thanks to the musicality of the children and, hence, materialized through varied and original means of graphical expression, thus emphasizing the emotional side.

The most accessible component of the song, in terms of its expression through graphical means, is its emotional character, which children usually render through colors, through the drawing's structure and the dynamics of the positions of the characters portrayed. The poetic text helps the children understand the predominant emotional character in the song, but it is the interaction between music and lyrics that helps them express the emotional character of the song graphically, much fuller. Being a type of synthetic art, the song contributes to the creation of a well-determined and unitary artistic image in children's vision, thus developing their musicality. The graphical transposition of the musical image constitutes one of the components of the cycle of activities aimed at developing children's aesthetic perception, musicality and creative skills.

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