

# INNOVATIVE DIDACTIC TOOLS AND CLASSICAL MUSIC IN CHILDREN'S MUSICAL PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES AS A PART OF THEIR DANCE TRAINING AT PRIMARY SCHOOLS OF ARTS

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In today's technologically advanced world, interactive education plays a key role in motivating and actively involving students in the education process. Because of the digitalized world in which today's youth lives, and because of their fascination with video games, an increasing number of teachers use of educational and playful teaching methods that help students develop critical thinking skills.<sup>1</sup> This paper presents possible ways to integrate selected didactic tools into dance education. It analyzes the use of audio aids, virtual programs and selected didactic devices (tablet, kinect, dance mat) as tools that help develop a creative educational atmosphere and motivate the children to dance activities to classical music.

Keywords: Didactic tools. Tablet. Kinect. Dance mat. Creative educational atmosphere. Primary school of arts. Dance education. Classical music.

## 1 Music in our lives

Today, our society is influenced by a rapid increase in knowledge. Consequently, the requirements for education and teaching are also changing. Schools as educational institutions that prepare individuals for life in the society have started to partially change their customary teaching methods and forms. One of the tasks in today's school education is to prepare the youth for their future personal and professional life in an increasingly technologically oriented society.<sup>2</sup> Thanks to rapid technological developments and globalization, contemporary listeners, and not only young ones, are surrounded by music everywhere. However, the strong impact of the media and of the social networks tends to promote unilaterally oriented musical styles, such as pop, r&b, or rap; in dance art, it is hip hop and contemporary. Popular music thus becomes a natural part of young people's lives. By selecting classical music, we want to focus young people's interest on other than contemporary popular music to enrich their musical perspectives.

Various pieces of research, specialized articles and opinions of psychologists confirm that music plays a very important role in people's lives and helps develop various aspects of their personality.<sup>3</sup> Contemporary popular music consists of simple tones which are constantly repeated. To a great extent, the lyrics of these songs reveal various sexual topics, contain inappropriate phrases or even reflect other, negative sides of the society, such as the use of drugs and other substances. Therefore, it is more than necessary to lead children to classical music, to the authors who composed it, and to their lives. This way, they learn to differentiate between music that enriches and music that does not actually tell them anything.<sup>4</sup> Because, according to many, classical music supports the emotional side of people, develops their fantasy, motor skills, memory and logical thinking, and enhances their creative features and supports the coordination of various physical activities. Several statements emphasize also its positive influence on the development of brain activity.<sup>5</sup> By listening to classical music, children learn to improve their concentration ability on a single particular thing, and also improve their social skills.<sup>6</sup> Susan Hallam, professor of education and music psychology in London, explains that

preferences of music develop based on the musical styles that the child experiences in its childhood. Therefore, listening to classical music already in the first years of primary school may lead the children to develop a positive attitude to it and, when they get older, they may be able to appreciate a wider range of musical styles.<sup>7</sup> She draws our attention to children aged 9 to 12. There is no doubt that children are naturally inclined to music and are able to evaluate it subjectively. Our own experience reveals that various musical styles have a various influence on us and evoke a wide range of emotions and feelings. Several pieces of research confirm that it is classical music that has the most favourable influence on the harmonious development of a child. It is melodious, emotive, and carries the message of the various moods and mental states of its authors. We are trying to lead children to develop the ability to listen to classical music consciously, to find sources of inspiration in it, and to have a positive experience of it.<sup>8</sup>

The parent and the environment in which the child grows up play a major role on the selection of musical styles and musical preferences. Often, if the parents are inclined to classical music, if they listen to it at home or in the car on journeys, after some time, the child starts to be automatically interested in what kind of pieces these are, who composed them, and what the musical instruments they hear in the pieces are.<sup>9</sup> However, a single musical style should not be forced on a child because the opposite effect might occur and the child might stop caring about that musical style. Children should get the opportunities to discover their own preferences. However, if we teach the child to perceive classical music in an appropriate way, we will not regret this decision later on in life.

## 2 Music in Education

Our teaching experience in primary schools of arts, conservatories, workshops and intensive dance courses reveals that the pupils come across classical music only sporadically. In a more specific form, this fact can be seen in the preference for new trends even in the teaching process and in the musical physical activities at primary schools of arts. Educational standards for the dance specialization at primary schools of arts prescribe musical accompaniment only for the folk dance subject, e.g. "verbunk" recruiting dance (Myjava region) – "Z hory vietor veje" song, transfer of weight with a springing action (Myjava region) – "Pred bučkom, za bučkom", "Do krutu" dance (Liptov region) – "Frajer môj listoček" song, Cindruška dance (Liptov region) – "Ej, Cindruška, cindruška" song etc.<sup>10</sup>

Teaching the techniques of classical dance requires collaboration with an accompanist who chooses pieces from his own musical materials. If the teacher does not have the opportunity for such collaboration, he uses compositions from piano/orchestral recordings that suit the given technical combinations. Musical accompaniment is not prescribed even for jazz or modern dance, and the selection of the songs is up to the teacher. Methodological guides for the creative dance subject contain descriptions of various exercises on different topics for the given year but the musical material is not prescribed, and the teacher can decide on his own what musical genre to select. Work with various musical instruments and musical recordings (improvisations on a theme) is assumed, but teachers often work

<sup>1</sup> Čavojský, I.: *Implementation of Information and Communication Technologies into the Teaching Process*. Zborník príspevkov JuvenilnáPaedagogica, 2012, p. 71. 319 p.

<sup>2</sup> Vančíková, K.: *Education and the Society*. Banská Bystrica: Faculty of Education, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, 2011, p. 55-57. 164 p.

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<sup>7</sup> Harris Sarah - *Playing classical music to your child can improve their listening skills later on in life*. [online]. Daylimail.co.uk. January 2014. [Retrieved on 26/07/2018].

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without musical accompaniment and create sounds with their own body, for example the exercise – the Hearts.

The pupils stand in a circle with eyes closed, place their hand on their heart and perceive its beating and rhythm. They stamp this rhythm with their feet. On an audio signal by the teacher, they start walking and, on another signal, they stop, perceive the changed speed of their heartbeat and stamp this changed beat. On a new signal, they again pick up speed (now with eyes open), and the exercise continues. Now, they stamp, clap or “scat” the rhythm (they pronounce nonsense syllables, letters and sounds rhythmically). At the same time, they perceive the changed intensity and speed of their breathing.<sup>11</sup>

To maintain the interest of the pupils in creative activities, dance teachers often use well-known songs from contemporary popular music (r&b, hip hop). An initial survey used in primary schools of arts and conservatories in Slovakia also supports this conviction. The survey was to find the extent of using classical music in the teaching process of physical and dance subjects, in choreographies for various concerts and performances or for other physical activities. The responses reveal that classical music is most often used mainly for exercising techniques of classical dance and for the choreographies of these dance techniques. 369 e-mails were sent out, 30 respondents responded, and there were 18 positive answers, i.e. that they used classical music. Even in spite of the small number of responses and a possible doubt of the validity of the survey, we have decided to take the results of this survey into account because we assume that classical music is indeed used to a very small extent.

Table 1 – Results of the survey, selection of responses

	Question: Do you use classical music (Mozart, Vivaldi, Beethoven, Bach, Tchaikovsky, Zelenka ...) in the teaching process and for creating choreographies for final concerts, competitions and similar performances? If so, which composers and which compositions do you use?	Question: What is the proportion of choreographies with classical music and choreographies with modern music at final concerts?
Private Primary School of Arts, Bratislava	1: They use little classical music, in choreographies mostly for ballets (P. I. Tchaikovsky), in the teaching process, the accompanist more often chooses modern melodies, classical music is most often used in lessons of creative dance (F. Chopin, J. S. Bach, A. Dvořák).	2: They did not answer this question.
Primary School of Arts, Bratislava	1: They use classical music for choreographies for final concerts (C. Orff, P. I. Tchaikovsky, J. Melkovič). In the teaching process: folk music for lower years, film music and contemporary music for upper years.	2: They did not answer this question.
Primary School of Arts, Bratislava	1: They use classical music for choreographies (P. I. Tchaikovsky); in the teaching process, in the form of piano accompaniment (accompanist). Mostly, for choreographies from classical dance, they use modern compositions in slow tempo (film music).	2: about 10% classical music, 20% slow modern music.
Primary School of Arts, Dolný Kubín	1: They do not use classical music.	2: They did not answer this question.
Primary School of Arts, Piešťany	1: They use classical music in the teaching process for techniques of classical dance and for the creative dance subject (P. I. Tchaikovsky, A. Vivaldi, C. Saint-Saëns, F. Lehár, C. Debussy).	2: Each style is represented to the same extent.
Primary School of Arts, Sereď	1: They use classical music in the teaching process in the form of recordings; for choreographies for final performances to a smaller extent (W. A. Mozart: Lullaby, arranged by R. Čanaky and M. Podhradská).	2: They did not answer this question.
Primary School of Arts, Šurany	1: They use classical music in modern arrangements (Z. Keating).	2: Classical music : modern music – 1:2.

### 3 Innovative didactic tools

In this paper, we focus on the development of a creative educational atmosphere by imparting classical music and dance activities by innovative didactic tools and didactic techniques such as tablet, dance mat and kinect used for subjects of the dance specialization at primary schools of arts.

Tablets are modern electronic devices that can be used for various purposes. They are used in the field of multimedia since they can play the majority of the widely used formats. Their common functions include Internet connection (wifi or, in more expensive models, 3G module), playing music, playing videos (even in HD quality in more expensive models), reading electronic books and playing games. They can be operated through a touchscreen which covers most of their surface.<sup>12</sup>

Dance mats, or dance pads, combine games and sports, and are meant for all age categories. After a simple installation (connecting to a PC), a dance program starts and the composition and the difficulty level can be selected. The principle of the game is to step on the fields on the mat in the right moment, according to the flow of the coloured arrows on the computer/television screen. The musical accompaniment is varied, and its advantages include the possibility to work with a composition of your own choice, which will be inserted in an mp3 format into the StepMania program (included in the installation package).<sup>13</sup>

Kinect is a device that can sense figures in front of the television/computer, transfer their movements into the console, and show it in games or applications. This way, it enables you to control a character in the application without a controller, move in the menu, control the playing of the videos etc. It senses the figure(s) (multiplayer) without the necessity of lighting, it can determine their distance from the camera based on the image, subsequently distinguish the limbs, the head, the joints, and use these in the application.<sup>14</sup>

Because of the possibility to select the music freely, we decided, based on the educational standards, to use and work with Camille Saint-Saëns's composition *The Carnival of the Animals*. We took inspiration from the music education curriculum for primary schools (ISCED 1 – primary education). The suite consists of 14 short and humorous compositions about various animals, with onomatopoeic elements. Thanks to their subject-matter, the animals, the pieces can be depicted by physical movements easily. This makes them suitable for children. Some movements of the suite, especially *The Swan*, the *Aquarium*, and the *Finale*, are used in films and advertisements, so they may sound familiar to the children. The composition lasts about 20 minutes, which may appear quite demanding for a child listener. However, the movements themselves are short, which helps keep the children's attention always active.<sup>15</sup>

#### 3.1 First phase of the research

In the first phase of the research, we used a selected didactic tool, a tablet, for preparing a musical dance composition with an experimental group. Thanks to its dimensions and easy manipulation, it is suitable for working in spaces where the pupils do not have to sit at a computer or laptop but can move freely. The first part of the lesson consisted of becoming familiar with the device and determining the workflow with it. We worked with one tablet, with the Paint program installed in it. The pupils learnt to use the basic tools of the program, such as to change the colour of the brush, change the thickness of the brush, use the eraser, select shapes etc.

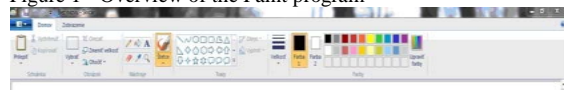
<sup>12</sup> What is a Tablet. [online]. Tabletstore.sk. 2011. [Retrieved on 26/07/2018].

<sup>13</sup> Dance Mats DDR.CZ - What, How, Why. [online]. Tanečnickoberce.sk. [Retrieved on 26/07/2018].

<sup>14</sup> Saver – Presents: XBOX 360 Kinect, You are the Controller!. [online]. November 2010. [Retrieved on 26/07/2018].

<sup>15</sup> Le carnaval des animaux » de Camille Saint-Saëns. [online]. Musicologie.org. June 2016. [Retrieved on 01/10/2017].

<sup>11</sup> Puobišová, D.: *Methodological Guide for Creative Dance for Years 3 and 4 of Level I of the Primary Study of Dance Specialization at Primary Schools of Arts*. Bratislava: Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, 2005, p. 8. 62 p.

Figure 1 - Overview of the Paint program<sup>16</sup>

Subsequently, we divided the experimental group into 4 smaller groups, pairs. We chose 4 movements of *The Carnival of the Animals* in advance: Aquarium, the Swan, Introduction, Fossils. Each pair used the device only for one piece. During the first playing of the Aquarium, the first pair drew their ideas into the program together. Subsequently, the movement was played again, and the pairs had the task to transfer the drawn images into physical movement. If they did not manage to do so at first, we played the piece to them again, and the pupils had one more chance to prepare. Then they demonstrated the dance variations created by them to their classmates. The other pairs first looked at the drawn image on the tablet and then, after playing the composition, they watched how the interpreters carried out their task. The demonstration was followed by a short discussion about the achieved results, about the way in which the pair worked, and about the feelings that arose during the preparation of the dance variation. The process was repeated in the same way for the other pairs, too. The other pairs, who were not working with the tablet, had the task to listen to the piece and then to work, therefore this work was more complex in the way they worked during the lesson. From the discussions, we found that the pairs which did not have the tablet when listening to the composition improvised separately. They were not able to describe their ideas to each other. Random movement sequences occurred, created not from the initial listening but directly on the second playing of the musical piece. In some cases, if the pair which worked with the tablet asked for the piece to be played again, these invented physical variations looked differently. The pairs which drew their ideas into the tablet could repeat their physical/dance variations almost precisely several times in a row.

The whole lesson progressed in a positive atmosphere. Initially, the pupils were surprised with the selected didactic tool and their attention was slightly distracted. Later, when the conditions had been explained to them and they learnt to use the Paint program, they were able to focus their attention to the music and to listen to it actively. The pupils' performance during the lesson was not equal, the pairs who used the images drawn in the Paint program made greater effort to transfer the image into movement, while their classmates who worked with imaginary ideas were not able to show the same sequence of movements twice, since they did not have the chance to rely on a real image. This frustrated them, in some cases they even refused to perform in front of their classmates. Another problem was the big interest in working with the selected didactic tool. Some of the pupils were unable to concentrate on themselves and work on the task because they wanted to work with the tablet.

In the control group, we proceeded in a regular way. In the beginning, we listened to the selected movements of the suite. This was followed by improvisation on the heard pieces and the teacher observing their work. After the improvisation, we had a short discussion about how the pupils felt about working with the given movement and what it evoked in them. Another improvisation followed, but now they knew what animal the given piece represented. The movements used by the pupils in the improvisation were depictions of the movements of the animals. Another step was practising the dance variation by demonstrating the physical material by the teacher. This work was unilateral, i.e. the teacher showed the movement sequences and the pupils repeated them. This way, they familiarized themselves even with an abstract movement material which did not represent the movements of the animals depicted in the given musical pieces. At the end of the lesson, the pupils were able to present the movement variations to the teacher. Thanks to the attractiveness of the musical material, we could work with the

pupils well and quickly. Their performance was even, since all of them were learning the same movement variation together. An interesting moment was the demonstration of the abstract movement material to the musical composition on the theme of animals. The pupils were surprised at how they could work with music in a different way, not only descriptively depicting the activity of the animal represented by the composition in movement. However, the final discussion revealed that the pupils would like to work with abstract movement sections to a different music, for example they mentioned Miro Jaroš's songs or their favourite song, *Despacito* (Luis Fonsi).

#### 4 Conclusion

The use of the selected didactic tools in dance education is still in the process of research. The results of the research carried out will be used for the verification of the set goal that, by integrating innovative didactic tools and didactic devices (tablet, dance mat, kinect) into the musical dance activities of the pupils specializing in dance at the primary level of arts education has a positive influence on developing a creative educational climate. Also, the results will serve as an inspiration for the teachers of primary schools of arts who have the ambition to incorporate information and communication technologies into the process of teaching appropriately and efficiently. At this level, it is important to convey the work with compositions through games, initially through improvisation where the children can discover forms of expression and the possibilities of their own bodies by experimenting. The clear dynamic changes, the contrasts of the movements and the non-musical themes of the selected composition (various animals) increase the pupils' interest in depiction by movement. This work contributes to the active involvement of the pupils into the creative process. Their interest in working with classical music is maintained by the attractiveness of the movement material that they choose themselves and that is close to them. Listening to the music in itself does not give them such an experience as when they can feel it in movement and expression. Familiarity with the emotions and feelings arising from the music and expressed in movement develops skills like empathy, understanding and optimism. At the same time, the children learn forms of expression and discover the abilities of their own body, they realize who they are and create who they will be. At a time of globalization and extreme technological development, this approach is indispensable for the children.

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