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## **Music as a means of integration into a multicultural society**

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### **Introduction**

Latvia is a multicultural state. Latvians, who form the majority of the population, have lived together with other ethnic groups for many centuries, and the cultures of the different groups have influenced the others. The total area of Latvia is 64,000 km<sup>2</sup> and its total population is 2,345,800. Latvians constitute 58.2 %, Russians 29.2 %, Byelorussians 4.0 %, Ukrainians 2.6%, Poles 2.5 %, Lithuanians 1.4 %, and other groups 2.1 % (Statistika, 2002, p.43).

Each nation has its own outlook, which determines the identity of the culture of its people, and it is through familiarisation with their own ethnic culture that people become open to other cultures. The integration of cultures takes in everyday communication, and music has a particularly favourable influence on such integration. This paper analyses the role of the musical responsiveness of children attending pre-school musical classes, in which emotions and feelings are fostered in a multicultural environment. The study is related to a review of pedagogical and psychological literature and based on the analysis of an empirical study conducted at a pre-school educational institution 1998-2001.

### **Emotional responsiveness**

Emotional responsiveness to music is an inborn faculty of every child. An infant's emotional responsiveness in communication with its mother ensures the development of many psychological processes in the baby. Cultural identity is shaped from the very beginning of a child's life as the child begins to successfully accept the culture of others. The period of early childhood/pre-school is the most sensitive period of a child's development, during which he/she responds emotionally to various situations.

Latvian folk pedagogy has been making use of training exercises designed to promote continuity in intergenerational communication for many centuries. In the family a child acquires an understanding of human values, and the originality of Latvia as a nation lies in the fact that children's emotional responsiveness is cultivated from birth through song, ensuring the existence and self-assertion of the Latvian nation as a singing nation over time. Latvian folksongs are a form of oral folk art, transferred by word of mouth from one generation to another thorough singing and listening (Liduma, 2002).

The folk pedagogy experience suggests that the first thing a baby hears is a lullaby sung by its mother. The child is familiarised with the world through the content of various songs, and this enriches the child's notion of the world and her/his understanding. Children learn songs about the family, nature, birds and animals. Finger games and songs are also useful for a pre-schooler as they promote manual dexterity, coordination of movement and motivation for work, and ensure the child's sense of well-being.

The rich heritage and emotional power of Latvian folksong promotes integration of different ethnicities into the Latvian cultural environment. The lyric and musical contents of songs, corresponding to the child's age, promote the growth of emotional

responsiveness in the child. Emotional responsiveness ensures the development of emotions as psychical processes. Responsiveness is the ability to react and to show one's interest and proactive attitude. Responsiveness creates attitudes, which demonstrate the increasing richness of the emotional responsiveness. Regular repetition of musical sessions cultivates positive attitudes in the child: positive attitude promote the formation of deep feelings as personal properties, and their manifestation in the everyday social environment (Liduma, 2002).

Studies have shown that a human foetus is capable of hearing sounds as early as five to six months during the prenatal period. It responds emotionally to musical sounds with like or dislike. Sound is the first sensory perception. The baby focuses its attention on the mother's voice and ambient sounds. Coordination between vision and hearing begins. It is known that a person perceives 90% of information through vision and about 9% through hearing. Music is perceived both through vision and hearing, as well as by movement, and the aural perception of music can be sensory, emotional or intellectual. The imaginative and emotional memory is of special importance in this respect. It manifests itself in the ability to memorise music, recollecting one's visual, audible, motile and tactile impressions, experiencing emotions and feelings (Liduma, 2001).

Games play a large role in the emotional upbringing of a pre-schooler. Emotional experiences brought about by the contents of songs develop a system of emotional relationships in a child. Children transfer their experiences to concrete situations of everyday life, and exercise their emotional attitudes in play activities. Emotions are expressed in body movements: mimicry, pantomimic, vocal mimicry, i.e. expression of one's emotions through intonation and voice timbre.

A child is born with an inner need for sound production, and at this age a central task is to establish contact with the child by means of expressive speech. Speech development is based on positive emotions arising from one's activity. As a result of the timely formation of emotional responsiveness to music, a one-year old child acquires emotional experiences and takes pleasure in listening to adults signing, tries to reproduce the sounds, listens to music with pleasure, reacts emotionally to contrasting music, makes active movements when listening to music and responds to musical games with movements.

Since music is the language of human feelings, to teach a child to understand music means teaching it to react to human feelings. The development of emotional responsiveness is achieved by three kinds of activities: listening to music, singing, and moving to musical accompaniment. Each of these activities is of pedagogical value in promoting the child's overall development.

Psychologists suggest that at the age of about three to four years a child becomes capable of recollecting his/her childhood impressions as long-term memory mechanism develops. One component of this is the associative link between what is memorised and the prompting emotional experience. Emotions are of great importance in the process of development of long-term memory and imagination (Nemov, 1994).

### **Interrelationships between music and speech**

The specific importance of music is that music can express one's emotional state. Music and speech have common features as means of communication; both have a

certain content, both are perceived by hearing. The main difference lies in the way they reflect their contents. Using the voice, a person conveys his/her emotional state: joy, worry, tenderness, grief, etc. Intonation is conveyed by means of timbre, pitch, voice power, speech tempo, accents and pauses. Musical intonation has the same properties of expression. The content of speech is perceived through the meaning of words – the designative function. The content of music manifests itself through auditory images – the expressive function. In musical activity, sensitivity shows itself as emotional excitement at the sound of music. Pitch plays a leading role in the perception of musical sounds, and musical hearing is the ability to discern pitch. The pitch of musical sounds differs from timbre through the feeling of melody flowing in certain directions, and the intervals. The sense of musical pitch is predetermined by the perception of the movements of pitch; the ability to intone a sound with one's voice. The sense of rhythm is a capacity for feeling music while moving about, of sensing the expressiveness of musical rhythm and reproducing it precisely. A child learns to sing gradually as a result of numerous exercises, cultivating skill in controlling the vocal apparatus and developing the notion of musical hearing. Outwardly, emotional responsiveness manifests itself through body movement, but can also be expressed in the child's opinions of the music he/she has listened to.

The child's growth into the national culture is a succession of the ethnic traditions and values of the given nation. Simultaneously, the cultures of other nationalities are being comprehended, understood and accepted.

### **Formation of attitudes**

A pre-schooler needs support from adults to realise cultural values. The timely commencement of exercises determines the formation of the child's attitudes. Growth and development are interrelated. Physical growth is visible, but physical and psychological developments are united processes. It is therefore important for a person to achieve a well-balanced development of intellect, emotions and will. Imbalances are caused by the wrong choice of means of upbringing on the part of adults, whether in the family, kindergarten or at school (Spona, 2001, p.19). Every child has an inborn need to know the world. A need for self-assertion stimulates the child's activity. Comprehensive development means a balance of physical, psychological and social development.

### **Upbringing: a purposeful cultivation of a harmonious and multifaceted personality**

The content of upbringing is the formation of attitudes, the integrated feature of personality, formed by the totality of one's life experience, learning activity and feelings and efforts of will, and manifest through one's values, goals, ideals and norms. Attitudes continue to form and develop throughout a lifetime. An attitude formed in an activity situation is called situational or episodic: its effect on the child may be of different duration depending on the power of the experience. Amazement at discovery is of special importance. In communication with pre-schoolers adults must rethink the choice of session contents and learn to foresee the effects on the child's vulnerable psyche. In music lessons, emotional experience is an everyday phenomenon, since studying music means learning the world of emotions.

In the pre-school years it is important to ensure the formation of appropriate attitudes, since childhood impressions have a residing value. Habits serve as the basis for formation of steady attitudes. They are viewed as human automatic activity, which can be sustained

in the process of experience accumulation by systematic exercise, and habitual attitudes towards oneself, other people, the state, the society, cultural values, labour and nature develop. Habits may be developed in activity exercises in which systematically repeated activities reinforce habits of diligence, helpfulness, industry, independence and responsibility. These are of special importance in the pre-school institution, since an understanding of phenomena and interrelations are developing in the child when he/she watches and imitates adults.

The musicality of a child is of great significance for his/her psychological development. Musical development is successful if stimulated as early as the prenatal period. It requires regular cultivation in a musical environment in early childhood by means of music relevant to the child's age, since early childhood is the period of the most rapid development of the child's brain. The main carrier of the national culture and the expression of Latvian identity is song. Teaching music promotes the integration of children of other cultures into the Latvian cultural environment.

In an opinion poll, 100 of 144 respondents said that they did not consider music sufficiently valuable to practise it every day and to learn it diligently at school on all levels. This response suggests changes in the values system is causing changes in attitudes to music. Unless a balanced musical perception and mastery is ensured, there will be no understanding of the role of music in the cultivation of human feelings. During an empirical study that lasted three years, I investigated musicality in 144 pre-schoolers: I examined their emotional responsiveness, musical hearing, sense of rhythm, voice volume quality and singing capacity. 40% had a high level, 20% medium and 40% a low level of emotional responsiveness. There appeared to be an interrelationship between musical development and command of speech. Rapid personal development takes place at the pre-school age, and purposefully organised training sessions make it possible to promote this development through the choice of forms and contents relevant to the given age level. Having identified the level of musicality at the beginning of the experiment, I chose the contents of music lessons, which by developing musicality promoted the child's integration into the Latvian environment of the multicultural society.

During the school year 1998-99 I cultivated movement coordination, body control, knowledge of several mathematical elements through singing, direction command and music notation recording and promoted the children's creativity, self-realisation and self-assertion as well as improved their physical, mental and emotional development. I concluded that the contents of lessons should be supplemented with new original songs. In cooperation with Latvian composers a collection of songs entitled 'Maizes supulisi' (Cradles of Bread) was compiled. I worked with the collection during the 1999-2000 school year, and found that the contents of the songs promoted emotional responsiveness, interest, self-assertion, motile creativity and a sense of rhythm in pre-schoolers. The children's voice range became wider, they acquired more singing skills, and their interest in music and song grew.

During the third year of research the contents of lessons was supplemented with some playful songs encouraging communication skills in pre-schoolers and teaching them to control their bodies, for example, 'Songs of Fingers', 'Head, Shoulders' and 'Squat down'. The children mastered the melodic direction up and down by means of songs of t.<sub>8</sub> volume, for example, 'Week', 'Small House' and 'In Riga a Cart is Moving Quickly'.

Performance of songs was accompanied attractively by audible gestures and creative body movements.

A well-balanced content of music lessons promoting musicality development in pre-schoolers and their integration into a multicultural environment was achieved, with a sharing of cultural values taking place in the form of interrelations.

### **Practising music in a multicultural society**

Many musical events with participation by all generations - children, youngsters, people of mature age and the elderly - are held in Latvia. The Latvian traditional Song and Dance Festivals serve as a means for integration, since the participants are people of different ethnic groups who are interested in music and in the art of dancing.

In the summer of 2001, when Riga celebrated its 800<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, an original kind of singing took place in the city centre at the Freedom Monument. People of different ethnic groups did not feel divided since they all had experienced the course of Latvian history through song. One could hear songs sung in different languages, their contents telling the peoples' life through the centuries, under the control of different powers, but everyone in our multicultural society could join in the common chorus. Many expressed a positive attitude to the event, even if they watched from the sidelines. The free chorus sang all day, from early morning until late at night. The conductors, soloists and accompanists changed, and tired singers were substituted by others. The night ended with fireworks on the embankment of the Daugava River.

The Latvian folksong festival 'Riga dimd' appeared to be a means for integration of several cultures. Ethnic Russians especially like the Latvian song 'Kur tu tecī, gailīti manu' ('Where are you going, my little cock?') for its liveliness and agility, and the playful songs 'Sesi mazi bundzeniēki' ('Six little drummers') and 'Tudalīn, tagadīn' ('Right now') are widely known.

Several musical contests are held regularly, such as 'Calis', which is for three-five-year old children at pre-school establishments; 'Poskanas' for children from pre-school age to adolescence; 'Saules zakis' for schoolchildren. In the musical contest 'Do-Re-Mi' different performers take part, both ensembles and soloists. Representatives of each nation sing songs in their native tongue. In this year's contest, held in the Central District of Riga, groups from different nations took part: Poles sang in the Polish languages, a Russian school in Russian, and Ukrainians in Ukrainian. A vocal ensemble from a part-time school for people with special needs expressed their integration into the multicultural society in the language of gestures, which moved the audience greatly.

Integration into Europe and the wider world occurs in a variety of ways, among them through learning folksongs and the original songs of different nations, and by listening to music. Since English is an international language, the majority of the society of Latvia integrates into Europe by singing English folksongs and other songs in English. The Latvian vocal and instrumental pop-group 'Prata Vetra' (Brain Storm) were popular at the Eurovision Festival in 2000, and in 2002 the Latvian singer Maria Naumova (an ethnic Russian) received the recognition of Europe's musical public and the Grand Prix at the same Festival, thereby contributing to the musical image of Latvia and its recognition in Europe.

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