

## CREATIVE ABILITY OF STUDENTS AS A PRECONDITION FOR THE SUCCESSFUL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S MUSICAL CREATIVITY IN TEACHING MUSIC IN LOWER GRADES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The effectiveness of teaching music in lower grades of primary school depends on competences of pre-service and in-service teachers who have to teach the subject curriculum. During their formal education, student teachers at pedagogical faculties acquire elementary knowledge of the theory of music and didactic-methodical competencies, but the important factor of successful teaching has to be their musical-performing and creative abilities. In this paper we examine the musical and creative abilities of student teachers in the final year of their bachelor studies (N = 48), by analyzing their products within the course of the Methodological Practicum of Music Teaching. Descriptive method and procedure of qualitative analysis of obtained student teachers' products in the field of music creation were used. The results show that student teachers' musical and creative abilities and the quality of their creative products do not exceed the level of curriculum requirements for teaching music in the fourth grade of primary school. The aim of this paper is to determine the level of creativity aptitude of student teachers in order to improve it by adequate methodical procedures and training in order to achieve an optimal level sufficient for developing musical and creative activities in teaching young children in a regular school context. On the basis of the obtained results, it can be concluded that frequent neglect of work in the field of developing children's musical creativity in music teaching practice is connected with teachers' insecurity about their own creative abilities and competencies necessary for teaching music.

**Keywords:** *creative abilities, musical creativity, student teachers, music teaching.*

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## Introduction

Starting from the current state of affairs in the educational practice in which the teaching of musical culture is marginalized, in this paper we wanted to shed light on the factors which brought about this situation. An especially neglected area of work in the primary school is musical creativity. Bearing in mind the fact that children of this age have a natural need for free creative expression, and that the contents of the Curriculum entail the realization of different forms of creativity, the main responsibility lies in the hands of the teacher who plans and organizes lessons. In order for the above mentioned area of work to reach its potential in the modern teaching/learning process, we looked into the possibility of developing competencies of students/future teachers for the realization of children`s musical creativity. The focus of work in this area lies in encouraging, monitoring and evaluating children`s creative activities. In that sense, it is necessary for the teacher to possess, apart from musical abilities, a certain level of creative ability. The aim of this paper is to determine the level of creative predispositions of students so that we could, by using adequate methodological procedures and training, improve them to the optimum level sufficient for the realization of the musical-creative activities when working with children at lower elementary grades.

### *The students' competences for the realization of music*

In the modern understanding of the educational process, the interest of teachers and researchers is especially aimed at the *outcomes* of learning, as the "final development qualities which should be encouraged in education" (Pekeč 2011) and *competences of the teacher*, which "should provide professional standards according to which teaching is considered successful" (*Standards of competences for teaching professionals and their professional development* 2011). What can be concluded from the previously said is that in the function of ensuring the quality of the education, in order to have a greater and more productive engagement of the learners in the learning process, it is necessary to establish the standard competencies of teachers for their teaching.

It is a known fact that the notion of competence is used in all areas of human dealing pointing to somebody`s acknowledged expertise, being well-trained for a job, having the qualification for a certain task (Požar 2016), but in the context of pedagogic-educational work it is defined as the inner capacity of the teacher, "an integrated set of personal characteristics, knowledge, skills and attitudes that are needed for effective performance in various teaching contexts" (Tigelaar et al. 2004).

Knowledge as the key teacher competence is most frequently defined with-in four areas: subject matter knowledge, pedagogical-psychological knowledge,

knowledge about the school and learner's social context, and didactic-methodological knowledge (Grossman 1990, according to Avramović, Stanković, Vučkaić 2009: 127). In the pedagogical literature there exists a number of models<sup>2</sup> which came about in an attempt to describe and determine the corpus and the categorization of teachers' knowledge. In relation to different sources of knowledge, we can talk about personal knowledge, knowledge acquired during initial [undergraduate] education and continuous improvement within the curriculum, and knowledge gained in practice.

In the domestic pedagogical literature teachers' competencies were described and analyzed in a great number of theoretical and empirical works (Gojkov, Stojanović 2015; Despotović 2010; Sučev 2008; Kundačina, Marinković 2012; Korać 2014; Stojanović, Mišić 2018; Pavkov, Živčić 2013). The consideration, discussion and establishment of teachers' competences for teaching in the music education can be reduced to a few expert papers (Sudzilovski 2015; Škiljević 2012; Svalina 2015; Vidulin, Cingula 2016; Šulentić Begić 2012; Nikolić 2018).

In the literature written in English there has been a greater interest in researching the professional competencies of teachers for the realization of music education in primary schools. The greatest number of works (Mills 1989, 1996; Wiggins, Wiggins 2008; Seddon, Biasutti 2008; Hennessy 2000; Holden, Button 2006; Ruddock, Leong 2005; Jeanneret 1997) have pointed out that future primary school teachers, as well as teachers with different work experiences of teaching, consider music education to be the most complex and the most demanding area of educational work. Considering music competencies to be a stable and unchangeable category that cannot be improved, teachers lose self-confidence for the realization of music activities (Hennessy 2000; Holden, Button 2006). They state that the undeveloped perceptive musical capabilities (observation and reproduction of the rhythm and melody), musical-performing capabilities (playing a harmonic musical instrument and knowing the technique of playing children's musical instruments), but also insufficient knowledge of the theory of music are all important reasons why music education in primary school should be done by a specialist music teacher, and not the primary school teacher (Mills 1989; Holden, Button 2006). In the conclusions of the research of musical competencies of future teachers, Mills (1996) has pointed out that future teachers had more developed musical competencies than the majority of learners at primary school. The research carried out in Croatia (Nikolić 2018) showed that the quality of the teaching process in music education, as well as the attitudes of primary school teachers about the importance of the realization of the music education, can be positively changed during initial [undergraduate] teachers' education.

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<sup>2</sup> Elbaz 1983; Shulman 1986, 1987; Wilson, Shulman, Richert 1987; Freire 1985, 1996; Tardif 2002; Gauthier 1998, Pepper 2008, according to Fernandez 2014: 80.

*Creative abilities as an important segment of primary school teachers' competencies*

The initial [undergraduate] education of teachers in our surroundings is in the didactic-pedagogical sense more content-rich and "more concretely directed towards the preparation for teaching practice" when compared to specialist teachers that realize teaching in higher grades of elementary school (Avramović, Stanković, Vujačić 2009: 138).

On the other hand, primary school teachers lack a set of specific skills, abilities, and knowledge which are necessary for the methodological modeling of the specific contents and delicate areas of work, as is children's musical creativity. In order to encourage creative expression of the learners in primary school, it is necessary to create a creative atmosphere in the class, to motivate learners, and to develop strategies by which the creative potential of children can be further developed (Kvašček 1981: 455, according to Gajić 2004: 88). The set tasks can be realized only by a creative teacher, who apart from musical and pedagogical competencies, has sufficiently developed creative abilities. In relevant studies about the characteristics of the creative individual (Polland 1994; Segal 2001; Torrance 1965), fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration are distinguished as important characteristics of creative thinking (Chronopoulou, Riga 2012: 196). Torrance founded his system of developing the creative abilities of learners on the stated theoretical postulates (Torrance 1965), out of which certain components in the adapted variation can be applied in children's musical education. This included forms of musical creativity which are achieved with regard to the initial idea and initiative of a teacher: the construction of musical thought based on the offered motifs, designing musical units based on the given text, or the combination of musical ideas of teachers and learners. The efficient educational strategy is the use of association connections between different artistic areas. The common characteristics of musical and visual work enable the students a spontaneous representation of music experience by visual elements without necessary guidelines and explanations. The analogy between the spoken and music syntax makes it easier for learners to understand the logic of the melody progression based on which they will complete the incomplete melody-rhythmic unit or realize the "music dialogue" in the form of questions and answers. The integration of the contents of different artistic areas and the structural connectedness can be accomplished only if the teacher has a high level of knowledge in a single artistic area: music, visual arts and literature. Apart from the stated preconditions, the creative abilities of learners can be recognized and developed only by the primary school teacher who himself/herself has such potential and abilities. During the formal education of future teachers, not enough attention is devoted to this segment of students' competencies, which results in their insecurity, lack of motivation

and, as an ultimate result, the neglect of children's music creativity in their future pedagogical-educational work. In the latest research of the university education "learning is treated as the product of interactive play of a number of factors" and the learning outcomes greatly depend on capability, work and motivation (Mirkov 2009: 256). The research dealing with the creativity problem so far, oriented towards education in elementary and high school, but also all the theoretical postulates, the empirical data and the pedagogical implications can be applied to education at the university level.

According to Carl Rogers, important factors for the development of creativity are motivation, openness for new experiences, the ability to play spontaneously with elements and ideas, and the encouragement of free creative expressions (Gajić 2004: 88). Similar learning models can be applied to encourage inventiveness and creativity, out of which we have already mentioned analogy as a procedure of creative learning in the context of creativity. Analogy as a procedure of creative solutions to the problem was defined by Gordon, stating that during the creative process it is most important to enable learners to independently, in a creative way, connect the elements which are at first sight irrelevant (Gajić 2004: 89).

Although it is impossible and unacceptable to give grades for children's musical creativity (Burnard, White 2008; Sefton-Green 2000), teachers are expected to encourage, nourish, and develop the creativity of learners. In that context, the recognition and evaluation of creativity and creative work of learners can be perceived as important information for the manner of planning and organization of practical work in this area (Kokotsaki, Newton 2015:1). The thinking of primary school teachers about the creative activities and efforts by learners is that they are not a mechanical process, but rather aims at producing a certain measure or the innovative approach by which they would encourage or "open" the learners for the new experiences and opportunities (Kokotsaki, Newton 2015: 2). The same measures can be undertaken also in the initial [undergraduate] education of future teachers in the music-creative area.

Musical education of good quality, as opposed to other subjects in primary school, apart from the fact that there exist basic categories of teachers' knowledge, entails the creative integration of all types of knowledge and music-pedagogical abilities. Unfortunately, a widely spread opinion is that the teacher should know only the specific contents and that s/he does not need any other skills (Fernandez 2014:79).

"In the context of teacher education a central issue is the definition of what are the skills that a teacher needs to know to teach" (Fernandez 2014: 80). Despite the belief of many that the primary school teacher should above all be knowledgeable about subject matter, teaching practice shows that this is not the only characteristic of a good teacher (Fernandez 2014: 79). S/he is expected to have the most dominant and active role in encouraging the creativity of

learners in school. The encouragement of creativity overcomes the concepts of learners' creativity in education "which supports the creative growth" or creates "creative atmosphere in the class" (Maksić, Pavlović 2009: 283).

Creativity is a pedagogical aim and the educational strategy which sets "high demands and expectations regarding the expressing and development of learners' and teachers' creativity" (Maksić, Pavlović, Pavlović 2009: 281). In that sense, the development of the innovative and creative abilities of students, future teachers, exceeds the framework of music education and represents the pre-condition of teachers' competencies in the overall pedagogical-educational work. Acquiring and development of special skills and knowledge, as are creative pabilities, can benefit students in concrete activities in their future teacher work (Mirkov 2009). Teachers' competencies for the 21<sup>st</sup> century entail the "knowledge base" necessary for practical work, but also a number of skills which are further developed during the educational activities (Fernandez 2014).

### **The methodological framework of the research**

Based on theoretical grounds and the research so far in the area of creativity and inventiveness, we decided on a qualitative methodology which, apart from the evaluation of the creativity products, also includes observation of the creativity process itself and observations about student activities during classes. The problem of the research are the creative abilities of students as a precondition of the successful realization of the children's musical creativity in primary school.

The aim of this paper is to establish the level of the creative predispositions of students based on their musical-creative works. The investigation into the music-creative abilities of students of the final year (N = 48) was carried out during regular classes of the subject The Methodological Practicum of Music Teaching. The respondents had basic theoretical knowledge about children's musical creativity, the factors which have an impact on creative activities and products and about the curricular demands for the primary school. From numerous forms of creative expression, simple and often present form of musical fill-in tasks was chosen – "music questions and answers". Although it is not a form of completely free creative expression, it is important as a good basis for getting acquainted with the basic principles of music syntax and music form, and for further creative advancement and development. Based on the designed musical answers we can identify: a feeling for the formal completion of the musical thought, a sense of closure, harmony feeling, a feeling for the melody movement, inventiveness in the sense of unusual solutions, music experience, pre-knowledge, and the level of creative predisposition.

In order to have the characteristics of a “question”, the initial motive, which is given to students, ended in the dominant function (examples number one and three). The second example ended with the fifth degree, but within the tonic function. Students had a task to complete the three melody examples: the first in the form of 2-bar musical motif in 2/4 time signature, second as 2-bar musical motif in 4/4 time signature and third example as a music sentence made of 4 bars. Before designing and writing down the adequate music phrase, they listened to unknown examples of the complete music thought which came about by connecting the motives in the harmonically reciprocal relationship – questions and answers.

## Discussion

In order to create the complete picture about the creative abilities of students, we also used data about their personal experience of the competencies for the realization of the children’s music creativity. They expressed insecurity, lack of self-confidence and stage fright in front of a group of students while they reproduced designed music motives. This was due partly because of the inadequate demands of the curriculum by which there must be choice of creative forms for each grade in particular, without clearly defined didactic-methodological instructions for their application. The acquired methodological knowledge during studies enable them to plan and realize the contents, but cannot compensate for the lack of personal creative experiences and capabilities in the area of creativity.

After writing down and completing music units, they had the task of singing their “answers” by using solmization syllables. Most of the respondents could not sing their example, whereas other students’ melodies, when sung, did not match the example which were written down. Based on that, we can conclude that the completed melodies are not the expression of their melodic feeling and reflection of their creative ideas; rather they represent the application of knowledge from the theory of music. Creating and writing down the melody at the same time is a double task, which hinders the process of free creative expression (Požgaj 1988; Radičeva 1997; Svalina 2013) and the precedence should be given to the oral reproduction.

The works are grouped according to the following parameters:

1. The ending of the melody with the first degree and the authentic cadence
2. The answer ends in tonic, but does not follow the logic of leading a melody and does not cadence in harmony with the “school” (music) practice (Začkalik, Stambolić 2005)
3. Musical phrases which end with a half-cadence (including the ending on 2<sup>nd</sup> degree), but the music unit is in accordance with harmonic rules and rules of melodic architectonic (Radičeva 1997)

4. Musical answers in which the completeness of the music thought is achieved by plagal cadence (which often appears as an expansion after the authentic cadence)
5. Works in which motifs of the treated songs are recognized
6. Works which contain rare ideas in comparison with the other members of the sample (Guilford). This particular characteristic was not defined by us as originality, but inventiveness, because they came about due to theoretical knowledge.

Familiar motifs were taken from the songs *The Lilac Tree Has Blossomed* (*Razgranala grana jorgovana*), *A Birthday Song* (*Rodjendanska pesma*) and *A Stroll* (*Šetnja*), but with changed rhythm and meter. The melody is the basic means of expression on which they recognized and memorized the composition.

The first example, due to its simplicity, did not offer the possibility for a greater reach, and exactly with this example the answers of the students were identical or very similar. The continuation of the melody started most of by repeating the last tone in the given melody (tone *fa*), and the same in the range of melody ( $c_1 - f_1$ ). A few examples of inversion are also not a sign of exquisite ability, but a logical ending of the musical thought of a gradual ascending melody matches the melody descending gradually.

The melody line of all three music answers is based on the contrast principle. By alternating the ascending and descending, gradual and leaping movement, students achieved in their music answers the wavy movement of the melody with the distinct continuity of the tone line. The choice of the interval contributes to the impression of the simplicity of the melodic component. The most frequently used interval movements are the second and thirds, with rare examples of the application of intervals bigger than fifth (sixth). The melody of the music answer range from the octave ambitus ( $c_1 - c_2$ ) which is suitable for the learners of the fourth grade and for the characteristics of the melody of the children's music expression. The simplicity of the melodic component in the music examples can be found in the pronouncedly diatonic movement of the melody. By looking into the melodic flow it was determined that students, in most cases, do not know the principles for the logical leading of the melody line. The exception is the design of the melody in the first music answer, where in a 2-bar example the students showed that they understood the principles of leading the line in the cadence process. The applied ending melody formulae were typical endings for the songs learned in music lessons in primary school. In the other two examples of music answers, a greater variety of ending the melodic flow was recognized, which can be considered to be an inventive procedure by the students.

In music answers by the students, short rhythmic values and simple combinations of eighth notes and quarter notes were used. The motor character of

the rhythmic outline, which was achieved in the music examples by the combining of shorter notes, point to the fact that students understand the significance and effect of the rhythmic-kinetic dynamics in the music flow (Despić 1993:12). The more complex rhythmic phenomena, (syncopated rhythm and dotted rhythm, triplet, and the four-part division of the beat) are not present, although the students have enough music knowledge for their application. By that the simple character of the thematic material of the music, the work of students is additionally stressed.

All the examples had the same scale and tonal foundation, C major scale. In the application of the melodic movement the gravitation towards one tone is present. That tone, in the majority of cases, is the first degree of C major, but besides melodic closure with the root tone of tonic, the students finished the music phrase with the third and the fifth of the tonic chord. The ending of the melody by the second degree is also present which is interpreted as the ending of the music phrase within the dominant function. Although the ending by the second degree is considered to be unstable, it is a frequent music practice of cadence in children's folk songs, so it is supposed that the knowledge of the mentioned music literature influenced the music-creative expression of the students. In the three particular cases (all three concerning the first task) the music answers of students were finished with the subdominant function, i.e. by the root tone and by the third of the subdominant chord. In this way the students weakened the cadence effect at the end of the phrase and left the music example "open" for further music development. Apart from the choice of the final tone (melodically), the cadence with the ending effect are in the music answers of students weakened also in the metrics/rhythmic (the final tone as eighth on the position of the unaccented beat).

The students reached the ending tone in three ways: by the gradual descending movement, which is the most frequent case, an interval leap (fourth, fifth, sixth) or resolving by a skip. The signal of the ending of the music phrase is recognized by the appearance of the cadence. In every example of the music answer there is an expressed sense for the cadence process, with better and worse music solutions. The table shows the relationship of the type of cadences which were applied in the music examples. The advantage by far was held by the authentic cadences with the usual position of the harmonic functions D-T, the ending in the form of the half cadence music answer exists also (T-D, and less frequently also T-S). As in the other music literature in general, the plagal cadence, with the position of harmonic functions of S-T, was rarely applied in the creative student's work. We suppose that such an ending of the music thought is the spontaneous intention of the students for the ending of the music thought to be represented by the tonic function, but without theoretical or sound understanding of the character and persuasiveness of the harmonic progression which is realized in the process of cadence. In a smaller number

of students' answers, the ending of music answer with tonics was present (the third or the fifth). The melody which leads to the last tone does not follow the logic of building the melody and is not cadenced with established practice (Zakalik, Stambolić 2005), so such examples can be identified as minor typical cadence progression. Although latent, it is possible to recognize the alternation of harmonic functions in the melody. The examples based on only one harmonic function (tonic – with the presence of non-chord tones) are rare, as are those where all the three major functions are recognized (tonic, subdominant and dominant). In connection with that, the most frequently present was the presence of alternating the tonic and a dominant harmonic function within one tonality.

Concerning the motivic content, it was possible to identify in the works motifs of well-known songs (*The birthday song*, *The Lilac tree has blossomed*, *The Stroll*), where the rhythm and the metric foundation had been changed. In the notational appendix which follows it is possible to recognize the motivic material of the children's song *The Birthday song*.



*Example 1: The notation of the creativity work with the motive of the well-known / familiar song*

We consider the individual cases of the melodic-rhythmic invention as exceptions, bearing in mind that these motives cannot be connected with the theme of a certain song. Varied and partly changed repetition are the most common procedures in works with a motif, but there are examples of the application of diatonic transpositions in the melody. We believe that their application does not reflect the conscious intention of students; rather they are the result of the accidental, spontaneous leading of the melodic-rhythmic flow. Much more frequent, however, is the presence of the new motivic material (without elaboration of the initial motifs of the music in question) which either contributes the impression of a fragmented structure without a stable cadence, or a musical conclusion which does not fit into the "standard model of the music sentence" (Ristić 2009: 51).

The structural rounding in the form of the music period was achieved in only two examples (both in the third task). With enough similarities between the beginnings of the music question and answer and enough difference between their cadence progressions students have shown that they possess feeling for the construction of the higher order structure.

In the following notational example it is possible to recognize the meeting of several criteria of successful work: the ending of the music answer by using

the authentic cadence, leading the tone line according to the principles of melody architectonics, and in the structural sense, the success of the task can be observed in the periodic structure of music thought.



*Example 2: The music notation of the creative work in the form of the period*

Apart from the qualitative aspect, the evaluation of the creative work can be completed by the quantitative data about the number of students and the expected level of the creative achievement.

*Table 1: The Characteristics of the creative works of students*

Characteristic of works	Authentic cadence (%) (D-T)	Ending on the first degree (%)	Half-cadence (%)		Plagal ending (%)	Number of students in total (%)
			on S	on D		
The first example	<b>31</b> (64,5)	<b>4</b> (8,3)	<b>3</b> (6,2)	<b>5</b> (10,4)	<b>5</b> (10,4)	<b>48</b> (100)
The second example	<b>37</b> (77,0)	<b>4</b> (8,3)	-	<b>4</b> (8,3)	<b>3</b> (6,2)	<b>48</b> (100)
The third example	<b>33</b> (68,7)	<b>3</b> (6,2)	-	<b>4</b> (8,3)	<b>8</b> (16,6)	<b>48</b> (100)
Works in total	<b>101</b> (70,1)	<b>11</b> (7,6)	<b>3</b> (2,0)	<b>13</b> (9,0)	<b>16</b> (11,1)	<b>144</b>

Despite the simplicity of the music expression, the analyzed works have shown that the students had a developed sense for the ending of the music phrase and that they could understand how they can independently incorporate the signals of ending in their works (Table 1). In some cases, typical ending melodic-rhythmic formulae of the majority of children's songs can be recognized, so we will not classify them as examples of inventive solutions; rather, they are a reflection of students knowing children's music literature of the intended to area of performing music. As far as the works with the best marks are concerned, certain regularity in designing all the three works is present (the ending on the tonics, the harmonic sense and the melody lead in the correct way).

*By way of a conclusion*

The importance of work on the development of the music-creative capabilities of learners in primary school is pointed out in the defined outcomes for the subject Music education. It is expected that learners are capable of creating music effects such as music illustrations of the surrounding sounds, of designing suitable movements with the music, of designing rhythmic units and rhythmic accompaniments for the counting chants and simple songs, of providing adequate answers to music questions by using the rhythmic instruments of the voice, of composing simple melodies for the dedicated short text. The mentioned forms of childrens' music creativity can only be successfully achieved by a primary school teacher who, apart from didactic-methodical knowledge, possesses a certain level of musical and creative abilities necessary for the encouragement of learners' creative expression.

The research carried out on the sample of the fourth year students of the Faculty of Education, future primary school teachers, has shown that they do not have enough confidence in their own music abilities and that the possibilities of their music expressions are limited. The simplicity of the music expression in their creative works matches the simplicity of the material and of other characteristics of children's music. Based on all that, it is possible to conclude that the music-creative abilities of students and the quality of their works do not exceed the curriculum requirements for the fourth grade of primary school. These indicators are at the same time implications for further work on creating teaching situations and methodical approaches in the area of music during the initial [undergraduate] education of teachers, which should be steered towards development of the performing and creative abilities of students.

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## Section IV

# Teaching Competences in Language Education

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