

Contribution of Children's Self-Organised Musical Activities to the Lifelong Learning of Preschool Teachers

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to point out the importance of children's active, exploratory manner of acquiring musical skills and knowledge in authentic processes of performing, creating, and listening to music as a form of a constructivist paradigm within the framework of music education (Webster, 2011; Wiggins, 2016). With adequate support and motivation from teachers during the process of education, such activities can develop into the child's self-organised musical activities. During the conducted action research (AR), children's musical activities were encouraged, tracked, and documented. With the appropriate support ("scaffolding") and motivation from preschool teachers, they have developed into self-organised creative musical activities of children. It was concluded that a stimulating spatial and material environment, active participation of children in the creation and organisation of musical activities, as well as adequate and unobtrusive encouragement and support from preschool teachers can affect the increase in the frequency of self-organised creative and musical activities of children in the process of education. Through the AR, preschool teachers enrich and develop their competencies necessary for implementing high-quality creative and musical activities, which are important for children and their development. The spontaneity and creativity of the child and the direct experience in musical and creative activities are forms of lifelong professional development and training of preschool teachers, who, because of the children, reinvent and excite their own, often repressed, creativity.

Keywords: *action research; lifelong learning of preschool teachers; preschool children; self-organised musical and creative activities.*

Introduction

Children have a natural need for creative syncretic expression through various artistic areas (Vygotsky, 2004). They spontaneously create and express themselves through the medium that suits them best. One of these, the so-called *creative singing* (Voglar, 1989), which entails the simultaneous invention of melody and lyrics, is a natural activity for a child from an early age. Here, the child's environment is a particularly significant factor, and it should support and encourage such a spontaneous musical and creative expression of the child. In addition to parents and family, preschool teachers play a significant role in this process, given that today children spend a large amount of time in educational institutions.

In the field of music education, it is generally accepted that music education should, by its nature, be based on practice (Elliott, 2009), i.e., that the ability to learn music depends on and is rooted in the ability to acquire knowledge of music "in action" (Elliott, 1995). Numerous authors advocate for children's deep involvement in musical experiences within the context of a music-learning community which encourages and nurtures their musical and personal actions (Burnard, 2013; Marsh, 2008; Wiggins, 2016). Webster (2011) and Wiggins (2016) emphasize a constructivist approach to music education in which the adoption of musical knowledge is encouraged and enabled through musical participation in authentic musical processes of performing, creating, and listening to music. Such an approach to learning provides a supportive learning environment that involves a rich and aesthetically appealing material environment, as well as the organisation of space that ensures access to materials and unhindered activities that encourage children to explore and play. Attractive and interesting materials contribute to the independence and self-sufficiency of children in the organisation of activities (Slunjski, 2011). Children always strive to create meaning and understanding and are simultaneously influenced by and dependent on the context in which they find themselves (Still, 2011). Thus, they feel free to make decisions in choosing the proposed props, materials, tools, etc. In accordance with this, the task of the preschool teacher is to create a comfortable atmosphere in an educational institution in which children, in their own way, will be able to express themselves spontaneously and freely, and thus satisfy their need for genuine expression.

Some authors point to the responsibility of the preschool teacher to provide materials and space for the child's exploratory play as an unpredictable activity, starting from the perspective that materials can stimulate the child's activity and adoption of knowledge (Fredriksen, 2012). Given that learning is a result of personal discovery and experience, rather than instructions and imposed adult perceptions, the provision of adequate materials has a positive impact on the acquisition of new skills in the child (Berger & Cooper, 2003). Providing adequate spatial-material and social conditions, over time, results in self-initiated and self-organised activities of children in preschool institutions, which are in many ways useful for the development of the child into a confident, persistent, responsible, creative, independent, and successful adult.

The National Curriculum for Early Childhood and Preschool Education (NKRPOO, 2014) emphasizes the value and positive impact of such activities on the child, pointing out that they contribute to the development of key competencies for lifelong learning, primarily initiative and entrepreneurship, as well as civic competencies. Slunjski (2011) emphasizes the purposefulness of children's self-initiated and self-organised actions for their learning, which is reflected in their natural alignment of task complexity with their individual and developing capabilities, which, in addition, positively influences their motivation and increases their readiness for further activities. In such activities and with adequate support of the preschool teachers, children follow their interests and their inner motivation, which leads them to new knowledge, new unforgettable experiences, and new skills. In this process, out of many directions the activity can take, children choose the one that is the most interesting, the most challenging and the most suitable to them in relation to previous knowledge, experience, and abilities, and therefore, the most valuable one in the context of development and learning. The educational process, which emphasizes the self-initiated and self-organised activities of children, provides comprehensive learning (the only natural learning for the child), the development of metacognitive abilities, and the development of general creativity as a desirable feature in modern society (NKRPOO, 2014).

The self-organised activities of children are also an impressive source of new knowledge about children and the ways of their education for preschool teachers, as well as the opportunity for professional development and improvement of the quality of their own practice by way of adequate stimulation of such activities (their formation, maintenance, and development) and the realisation of their own role in them. A good understanding of the child's activities, as well as a clear understanding of the child's interests, help the preschool teacher in planning the educational process and developing new and interesting ways to encourage the overall development of the child.

The paper presents a conducted action research (AR) on children's self-organised musical activities, the starting points of which are some of the core values highlighted by the NKRPOO (2014): autonomy and creativity. The development of creativity and autonomy in the child are closely intertwined. A creative child will have an idea how to initiate and organise their activities, while greater freedom in activities will stimulate and support creative thinking and authentic actions.

Musical activities in preschool, although often guided, are both exploratory and creative and can promote the development of both creativity and autonomy, especially if children are their initiators and creators. Musical creativity in the educational process in preschool institutions is manifested in many musical activities, and the direction in which an individual musical activity develops depends on the endless creativity of the children who initiate it, and adequate support and encouragement of the preschool teacher. In addition to conducting reproductive musical activities based on familiarity, adoption, or repetition of nursery rhymes, singing games, and counting rhymes, preschool teachers are also expected to encourage children to independently

study, discover, and create music that is usually accompanied by the child's musical experience. To fulfil this role, the preschool teacher must abandon the bias that only actions that are precisely planned and managed directly by preschool teachers are appropriate for children's development, and learn to evaluate the process itself, and not just the outcome (Slunjski, 2008). "Precise planning of children's activities, that is, focusing on their own plan, can make preschool teachers insensitive to identifying the real interests, needs, and knowledge of children. (...) Instead of precise planning, teachers reflect and offer opportunities to children (they create an environment for research and learning), closely monitor what children are doing, and seek to support the direction in which children develop their own activities" (Slunjski, 2008, p. 67). Thus, it is the role of the preschool teacher to motivate the child in the right direction, give them support, the so-called *scaffolding*, but without providing ready-made solutions or demonstrating specific skills. In this way, the quality of the learning experience (process) depends not only on the musical materials but also on how adults shape that experience (process) to create personal meaning for the child (Neelly, 2001, in Berger and Cooper, 2003). *Scaffolding* represents "the type and quality of cognitive support that an adult can ensure for a child's learning, which predicts the child's own internalisation of mental functions" (Mercer, 1994, p. 96). Thus, through quality support and leadership, teachers and preschool teachers can contribute to expanding children's abilities and possibilities, supporting them by "pushing" them beyond their current abilities and levels of understanding (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005).

In this way, the focus is on listening to the child, in which the preschool teacher and the child together become co-constructors of knowledge and skills. It is, therefore, a matter of joint construction of knowledge, where preschool teachers should provide temporary support to the child in the acquisition and development of new skills and knowledge, i.e. abilities, understanding, etc. Thus, the support (*scaffolding*) between the preschool teacher and the child, i.e. between teaching and learning, "becomes truly mutual" (Rinaldi, 1993, p.7).

The child's musical play implies the spontaneous musical expression of the child that occurs at the moment, during the child's play. It can include pre-existing songs, melodies, and verses transmitted by word of mouth or through contemporary media, as well as a wide range of improvised songs, dances, and rhythmic lyrics (Countryman, 2014). It has been found that adults, in general, can improve their behaviour and further encourage children's musical play, i.e., their self-organised musical activities, by attaching importance to such activities. Paying attention, observing a child's actions, making positive, encouraging and descriptive comments, and asking open-ended questions that encourage children to further study sounds and continue and enrich their own activities are among the appropriate adult behaviours. On the other hand, criticism and correction of "non-traditional" musical activities of children, that is, those actions that adults do not tend to perceive as musical actions, but more frequently as chaotic "beating" and noise instead, have a negative impact on such actions of the child (Berger & Cooper, 2003).

Research methodology

Context and participants

The action research presented in this paper was conducted in the year 2016/2017 at the central facility of a public preschool institution in Zagreb – *Tratinčica* Kindergarten. The study participants were children aged 5 to 7 years, their preschool teachers and a trainee preschool teacher, who also played the role of a critical friend.

Research questions

In the context of self-organised musical and musical-creative activities in the preschool institution, the following research questions were asked:

- 1 How to increase the frequency of self-initiated and self-organised musical events in the educational process within a preschool institution?
- 2 Do self-initiated and self-organised musical activities in the educational process contribute to encouraging the musical and creative expression of the child and to the lifelong learning of their preschool teachers?

Problem identification – circumstances and the record of the initial state

The initial state was identified through analyses of the spatial and material environment of the music centre, the educational process in the context of musical activities, and the personal views of preschool teachers on musical activities and the perception of their own role in them.

By analysing photo documentation and critical reflection, a clear picture of the initial state and problem was obtained:

- a scant supply of materials for studying the sound and musical expression, as well as their lack of structure;
- the rare emergence of self-initiated activities of playing instruments, singing and exploring different sounds;
- uncertainty of preschool teachers regarding their role in self-organised musical activities of children.

Aims of the research

From examining the initial state and the identified problems, the following research objectives were derived:

- to enrich the spatial and material environment of the music centre in the living room,
- to awaken and increase children's interest in musical activity and sound research,
- to increase the frequency of self-initiated and self-organised musical activities in the group,
- to strengthen the competencies of preschool teachers in the implementation of creative musical activities and adequate stimulation of self-organised musical activities,

- to practise the preschool teachers' and the children's reflection and self-reflection skills.

Methods of monitoring and documenting the AR flow and effects

The most frequently used methods for collecting data and documenting the flow and effects of the study were:

- photographing children and preschool teachers (photo documentation),
- recording children and preschool teachers with a video camera (video documentation),
- recording children and preschool teachers with a voice recorder (audio documentation; transcriptions of critical reflections of preschool teachers and the critical friend, as well as conversations with children).

The study emphasized the importance of critical reflection sessions, during which preschool teachers shared their experiences and reported on the conducted activities, recent findings, and planned actions for the coming period, and came up with new findings and understandings related to their own practice.

Research framework

From the set goals of the study, an AR framework plan was created, based on theoretical and practical knowledge about the spatial and material environment, about the role of preschool teachers and about the characteristics of children's development and their ways of learning.

The framework plan of the implemented AR consisted of two rounds. In the first round, it was planned to introduce changes in the spatial and material environment, while in the second round it was planned to focus more on practical action, active participation and role of preschool teachers in the context of musical activities and the acquisition of preschool teachers' competencies to conduct creative and encourage self-organised musical activities. According to a flexible action research methodology that adapts to a specific situation (Cohen et al., 2007), the time frame for conducting the research is not set, and the aims and the plan of the study are perceived as flexible and susceptible to change.

After two rounds, and at the initiative of the preschool teachers, the AR continued through the third round, which focused more on collaboration with parents and other co-professionals outside the institution, who can contribute to the advancement of the educational process in the context of musical activities and the acquisition of children's new knowledge and experiences of musical culture.

The course of the study

The first round of the AR – creating changes in the spatial-material environment

In accordance with the established research framework, after cleaning and sorting the available instruments and discarding the defective ones, the preschool teacher studied the children's views on their music centre. Given the children's vague responses,

proclaiming her personal attitude to the shortcomings of the music centre, the preschool teacher encouraged children to express their own desires, interests, and ideas on how to organise the music centre. After analysing audio recordings of conversations with the children and reflections with the critical friend, a framework plan for the first round of the AR was drawn up through workshops on restoring/repairing old and weathered instruments, creating new instruments (noise-makers, guitars, drums, do-re-mi bottles, and rainsticks), and creating a game of *Sound Memory*.

To make this plan available to children and to use it as a reminder and a kind of “check-list” on which the conducted activities will be ticked, a list of planned activities was put up on a portable board in the living room throughout the first round of AR. All activities which had been planned were implemented with the addition of an electronic sound synthesizer familiarization activities. The electronic sound synthesizer was provided in collaboration with the director and the critical friend. This activity resulted in special joy among children. All activities sought to encourage autonomy in the organisation of activities and autonomy in children as much as possible, while preschool teachers were most often providers, assistants, moderators, and observers. Their notes, as well as photo and video documentation, were used for analysing the activities and the reactions of children in them – reflections on the action. Through regular reflections with the critical friend, impressions of the educational process were jointly considered, conclusions necessary for subsequent planning were made, and good ideas about the children’s interests, needs, and abilities, as well as the direction in which individual activities developed each day were obtained. Contributions to activities (restoration/repair of old and weathered instruments) initiated by individual children in the group were also provided by several parents who repaired individual instruments at home and returned them to the preschool institution.

Self-organised musical activities in which the children participated during the first round of the AR included the study of the sounds made by new instruments (noise-makers, drums, guitars, sound synthesizer, do-re-mi bottles, rainsticks), independent playing on old and new musical instruments (music creation), the *Little Orchestra* game (joint playing on old and new musical instruments, together with the “conductor”), setting a certain beat on the drums and its repetition, the *Dance as I Play* game accompanied by the electronic sound synthesizer, the *Peter Pan Ballet* dramatic play accompanied by the electronic sound synthesizer, playing the electronic sound synthesizer to notes, and the *Open Mic* game.

Activities were carefully monitored and recorded by preschool teachers. Thus, for example, while tracking the development of activities to introduce children to the electronic sound synthesizer, the following actions were observed: exploration and listening to the sounds (random playing on different parts of the keyboard); creation of melodies (encouraged by the preschool teachers); the emergence of interest in learning to play famous songs (marking keys with colours, flowers, musical notation of the *Bratec Martin* song (Frère Jacques)), and creative musical activities (playing melodies and enjoying the sound). In doing so, several games emerged spontaneously:

Dance as I play (one child plays a musical instrument, while other children dance, emphasizing the tempo, dynamics, and mood of the melody with movement) and the dramatic play of *Peter Pan Ballet* (a dramatic representation of the story of *Peter Pan* through dance, accompanied by the electronic sound synthesizer). The initiators of this activity were three girls who had watched the ballet “*Peter Pan*” in the Croatian National Theatre with their parents.

Reflection on the first round of the AR

Reflection on the first round of the AR was conducted at two levels: that of children and preschool teachers, and that of preschool teachers and the critical friend. Most children have singled out making a rainstick as the funniest workshop, and the electronic sound synthesizer was the most beloved new instrument. In addition, children themselves have noticed that they were much more likely to participate in musical activities and use the newly created instruments in their play. A motivating spatial and material environment of the music centre influenced the emergence of interest in musical activities in children and the emergence of self-organised musical events. In addition, children are natural/spontaneous creators of music (Elliot, 2009), initiators of musical activities (Burnard, 2013), actuators of musical ideas (Wiggins, 2007) and musical innovators (Marsh, 2008).

The attitude of adults to children as equal creators of the educational process also had a significant influence on the emergence of children's musical activity. Despite the great differences between the preschool teachers and the children in terms of knowledge, status, and age difference, the preschool teacher's respect for the child as an equal partner in the educational process leads to respect and tolerance for the child, acceptance of his/her activity content, and agreement and disagreement with his/her opinions and views (Bašić, 2009).

A high-quality spatial and material environment is one of the significant values on which modern education and education in preschool institutions is founded. According to the Reggio pedagogy of Loris Malaguzzi, space is the “third educator” (Miljak, 2009) that, if designed with high standards, indirectly helps children organise their own activities. The accessibility of materials to children, their diversity and variety, visual appeal, logical supply, etc., are especially important, as well as spatial organisation that encourages interaction between children. It allows grouping of children into smaller groups and allows for unhindered activity, promoting a pleasant atmosphere in the group (NKRPOO, 2014; Slunjski, 2008, 2012). In addition to all this, the flexibility of the educational process which provides children with a free choice of activities (according to their interests, abilities, and needs), is crucial and allows sufficient time for these activities and their development. Such an environment directly communicates the image of the child and his/her learning and education that the preschool teacher represents and applies in his/her daily work (Miljak, 2009).

Based on the experiences, observations, and conclusions from the first round of the AR, the preschool teachers supplemented the course of the action research by proposing the third round, which would focus on the study of children's musical experiences

in collaboration with musicians. In addition, they built a framework plan for the second round of the AR (making changes to preschool teacher practices), changing the approach to developing, recruiting, and planning activities, and emphasizing the importance of adapting one's own role in them.

The second round of the AR – Creating changes in the practice of preschool teachers

The aim of the second round of the AR was to strengthen the competencies of preschool teachers in promoting children's musical creativity and to adapt the educational process to the context in which musical activities are conducted. It was sought to develop creative, "non-stereotyped" musical activities that promote musical creativity in children, which at the same time would be conceptualised so that children could perform them on their own and upgrade them according to their own interests. Based on the findings from the first round of the AR, the observed children's interests, and self-organised activities from the first round of the AR, the following activities were planned: the *Movement Representation* game, the *Pass the Sound On* game, *Little Music School*, a four-station musical range, and speech singing. Within the framework plan of the second round of the AR, the preschool teachers set additional tasks to achieve a more frequent emergence of self-organised musical activities of children through interdisciplinary activities of linking musical activities with kinesiological activities (games with singing, folk dances...). In adopting new music content, the initiative and direction management of the activities were, as much as possible, left to the children, paying special attention to praising and supporting the children's initiative and to the active engagement of the preschool teachers, without imposing the direction of development of the activity.

During the second round of the AR, the preschool teachers sought to encourage and engage more children in activities. For example, the self-organised activity of two boys, which took place in the first round of the AR (setting a certain beat on the drums and having to repeat it), was named *Little Music School* by the preschool teachers. The children often repeated the game, moderating the rules according to their abilities, ideas, and interests. In addition, through the activities of the musical range consisting of four stations that had different music games by default (playing the synthesizer, *Little Music School*, *Sound memory*, and *The Bowl* – drawing a paper with the name of a song, a counting rhyme, or a singing game, and performing it in as original a way as possible), it was desired to attract children who rarely or never participated in musical activities. In addition to the above activities, the preschool teachers sought to introduce more games with sounds and movement into their educational practice (*Movement Representation*, *Pass the Sound On*). The preschool teacher's speech-singing prompted children and educators to engage in a dramatic activity (process drama) based on which the story of *Seeking a Witch who Loves to Sing* was created, which children later often told using speech-singing.

Modelled on the first round of the AR, the tracking of the second round of the AR activities was implemented by observing and recording the preschool teachers'

observations, photo, video, and audio documentation, and regular reflections with the critical friend. The self-organised activities of children, the way they develop, the impact of the procedures and actions of preschool teachers on the emergence of self-organised activities, as well as the relationship of each individual child to music and musical activities, their individual characteristics, abilities, and interest were monitored. The children's self-organised activities during the second round of the AR included the following: *Little Orchestra*; telling a story along with the accompaniment of an electronic sound synthesizer; the *Little Music School* game (repeat the beat, repeat the melody); the *Open Mic* game; playing the synthesizer in pairs – “conversation” through music; a movement/dance *Rhythmic Gymnastics* game and the dramatic game of *Seeking a Witch who Loves to Sing*.

Reflection of the second round of the AR

Self-confidence, a positive self-image, and a relaxed and supportive environment during the second round of the AR triggered the emergence of children's creative musical expression. In addition to giving an attractive name to one of the conducted activities, the individual approach of the preschool teachers to each individual child had especially contributed to the child's sense of success and interest in initiating, implementing and participating in self-organised musical activities. This approach to the child with respect for his/her needs, interests, etc., has been pointed out by Maleš et al. (2003) as one of the responsibilities of the preschool teachers in their educational practice. In addition, through unobtrusive but active participation, the preschool teachers had gained a much better understanding of children's interests, reflections, and individual abilities, which they used for future planning of educational practice, as well as for adapting their own strategies and methods. At the same time, in the children's self-organised activities, they also observed the spontaneous integration of several different activities into one, which is characteristic of both the holistic nature of the child and the need for syncretic expression (Vygotsky, 2004). Through self-organised musical activities, children strengthened their social skills and entered into effective social interactions. The child's self-organised play, which often involves physical activity in playgrounds, yards, and parks, contributes to the development of their social and creative skills (Sawyers, 1994). In addition, the factor of entertainment and imaginary games as a common element of numerous self-organised physical activities of the child contributes to their internal motivation and promotes creativity, identity, and self-realization (Wheaton, 2010). Thus, such actions are considered as significant, meaningful actions that contribute to the satisfaction of common psychological needs, such as enjoyment, autonomy, self-determination, competency development, and self-affirmation (Caldwell & Smith, 2006).

In the second round of the AR, it was confirmed that, in addition to a stimulating physical and social environment which the child trusts (a sense of security), he/she is, even at an early age, able to “independently plan and organise many of his/her own activities, manage them, and develop his/her intellectual, social, emotional, creative, and other potentials through them” (Slunjski, 2012, p. 64).

The child's self-esteem (confidence in his/her own abilities) is of special importance here, because a child with low self-esteem will be afraid even to start an activity and will not believe in the possibility of succeeding in it. On the other hand, a child with high self-esteem will be more motivated, more persistent, and therefore, more successful in everything he/she does (Starc et al., 2004).

In addition to the many benefits of ensuring the child's participation in musical activities, such as his/her intellectual, social, and personal development, Hallam (2015) particularly emphasizes the development of a child's personality and confidence. The same author further points out that music contributes to the child's self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-confidence, improved mood, greater motivation, and better behaviour. The aforementioned values are the basis and prerequisite for the self-organised musical activity of the child in an educational institution. Thus, a child's high confidence is both a prerequisite and a product of self-organised musical activities in preschool.

The third round of the AR – Enriching musical impressions and experiences

The third round of the AR was conducted with the aim of enriching the experience and impressions, as well as enhancing the children's knowledge of musical culture through meetings with musicians (three meetings with musicians were planned), with the creation of a framework plan and its implementation co-designed by the group's preschool teachers and the critical friend. The following activities were planned: an instrument-themed *Memory* game, creating a music- and instrument-themed board game, instrument- and musician-themed artistic activities, active listening to various genres of music, and the *Music Quiz* game.

During the third round of the AR, there were minor deviations from the framework plan, and due to the lack of children's interest, the creation of the board game on the theme of music and instruments was not implemented. Also, one of the meetings with musicians (a visiting preschool teacher who plays the guitar) was replaced by a research activity to study the guitar. Inspired by the visit of a musician who played the violin, the twin brother and sister, who are learning to play the flute in a musical preschool, expressed a desire to perform in front of other children from the group. While meeting another musician, the children became familiarised with various musical genres (ballad, rock, country, gospel, jazz, and opera), after which they sang the *Bubamarac* song in the respective styles, accompanied by piano or guitar.

All the meetings with musicians were documented with the help of photographs and video recordings, as well as the children's artworks. The encounters did not promote new self-organised activities, but they influenced the enrichment of previous activities that had been conducted in the two previous rounds of the AR with an emphasis on dancing and free, creative expression through movement.

During reflection on the third round of the AR, a significant impact of meeting musicians and their instruments on children's creativity in creating their own musical activities was observed. It is also interesting to observe the longer engagement of boys in activities which involved playing music, as opposed to musical dance activities in

which girls participated longer. However, the sounds of guitars and drums motivated the boys to dance. In addition, this round of the AR confirmed the influence of peers on the emergence of certain interests in children. The children, motivated by their peers playing the recorders in front of them, showed an interest in playing the instrument. The influence of peers, along with parents, preschool teachers, and school teachers is one of the forms of external motivation for musical activity (Lehmann et al., 2007). In one of the conducted researches it was established that children who had previously experienced a strong live music experience were more motivated to participate in musical activities, as opposed to the children who did not have the opportunity for such a musical experience (Sloboda, 1990).

Evaluation of the action research

The evaluation was carried out using an assessment questionnaire created by the critical friend, and it examined the research goals achieved as well as the manner in which they were achieved; i.e., the changes that occurred during the AR. The questionnaire combined the findings from all three rounds of the AR (on the children's interests in musical activities, on the children's self-organised musical activities, on creativity in children's musical expression, on the specificities within the group), and considered the views of preschool teachers on the implemented AR. At the end of the questionnaire, the preschool teachers assessed their own satisfaction with the AR, scoring it from 1 to 7, with 1 representing "extremely dissatisfied" and 7 representing "extremely satisfied", as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Part of the assessment questionnaire of the „Ptičice“ preschool group

Special contribution of the action research:	
For children:	For preschool teachers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – enhanced social skills (especially in more withdrawn children) – increased levels of self-confidence in all children (especially in potentially gifted boys, as well as in several children with low self-esteem) – discovered musical potential and giftedness for participation in musical activities in several children – great success in children's autonomous action, creative expression, and creativity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – a better understanding of children's activities, reflections, and individual abilities (children learn and act holistically) – enhanced competencies in open communication with children and unobtrusiveness in encouraging children's initiative and creativity – enhanced competencies in supervision and monitoring of children – improved reflection and self-reflection abilities – enhanced competencies in the implementation of musical and musical-creative activities in educational practice
Assessment of satisfaction with the overall action research (with respect to the above goals):	
Extremely dissatisfied	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely satisfied

Conclusion

Through active participation, observation, study, and reflection of the conducted musical and musical-creative activities in educational practice, the preschool teachers have improved and adapted their theoretical and practical knowledge and eliminated prejudice regarding their differences.

Considering the defined research questions, on which the AR was based, it was concluded that with a stimulating spatial-material environment, active participation of children in creating the educational process, and adequate unobtrusive motivation from the preschool teachers, it is possible to influence the increase in frequency of self-initiated and self-organised musical activities. This particularly pertains to children's musical and creative activities in the educational process.

The research confirmed the possibility of children's independent organisation and implementation of musical and creative activities, which was also the main goal of the conducted AR. The main prerequisite is the child's sense of security, recognition, and appreciation from the preschool teachers. With this in mind, the preschool teacher should get a good and realistic understanding of children's interests, thoughts, abilities, and ideas. It is important since "the perspective of developing children's autonomy in the educational process is determined not only by the traits and capabilities of children but also by our understanding of children and their capabilities, as it has the greatest impact on the formation of the educational process" (Slunjski, 2011, p. 222).

Of particular importance is the change in the understanding of the role of the preschool teacher in children's musical and musical-creative activities, given that their usual role of the interpreter has been replaced by the role of motivator and observer. The activities conducted did not necessarily require the preschool teachers to have singing and instrument-playing skills, for which numerous studies show that preschool teachers, as well as school teachers, do not feel sufficiently competent (Welch, 1995; Hallam et al., 2009; Hennessy, 2000; Ruddock & Leong, 2005; Russell-Bowie, 2009; Seddon & Biasutti, 2008; Stunell, 2010; Young, 2009; Bačlija Sušić, 2018). Studies have shown that musical and musical-creative activities in the educational practice of preschool teachers are neglected because of the insecurity of preschool teachers and insufficiently developed competencies in this area (Sundin, 1995; Garvis & Pendergast, 2011; Ehrlin, 2012; Doğan & Tecİmer, 2017), as well as insufficiently developed consciousness of the purpose of music education, particularly the creative way of conducting musical activities in working with children (Lee, 2012). In the course of the conducted activities, several skills emerged into view more prominently, such as the skills of observation, studying, analysing, and adequate encouragement of each individual child or group of children, as well as the social and communication skills and the creative potential of the preschool teacher. In the course of the research, based on their observations and true listening to the children, the preschool teachers met the individual needs of the child and developed musical activities accordingly, adapting them to the capabilities and characteristics of the development of an individual child,

as well as the characteristics of the whole group. This has also awakened, motivated, and cultivated their own creative potential in creating the educational process.

It is, first of all, crucial that preschool teachers develop an awareness of the importance of musical activities and, in particular, the importance of encouraging the creative potential of the child through musical and creative activities. Given that the results of the studies confirm the interest and desire of preschool teachers to further improve musical competencies (Vidulin, 2016; Đurđanović & Stošić, 2017; Bačlija Sušić, 2018), it is necessary to acquaint preschool teachers with ways to encourage the musical and creative potential of the child both during their undergraduate and graduate *Early Childhood and Preschool Education* studies.

Creative work provides us with an understanding of human life and enrich it. It is creativity that makes us human (Sawyer, 2012), and humanity and creativity are important in every vocation, especially in the vocation of a preschool teacher and in working with children. By actively participating in children's musical and creative activities, the preschool teachers also encourage their own, often repressed, spontaneity and creativity, which further contribute to their overall professional development and lifelong learning. The Croatian musical pedagogue, Elly Bašić, believes that "uncensored, spontaneous, motor and syncretic expression is still present in every adult. We only need to peel off the dogmatic layers, deposited there by education and upbringing" (Bašić, 1987, p. 205).

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Doprinos djetetovih samoorganiziranih glazbenih aktivnosti cjeloživotnom učenju odgojitelja

Sažetak

U radu se želi ukazati na značaj djetetova aktivnoga, istraživačkog načina usvajanja glazbenih vještina i znanja u autentičnim procesima izvođenja, stvaranja i slušanja glazbe kao oblika konstruktivističke paradigme u okviru glazbenoga obrazovanja (Webster, 2011; Wiggins, 2016). Uz adekvatnu podršku i poticaj odgojitelja u odgojno-obrazovnom procesu, takve aktivnosti mogu prerasti u djetetove samoorganizirane glazbene aktivnosti. Tijekom provedenoga akcijskog istraživanja (AI) poticane su, praćene i dokumentirane djetetove glazbene aktivnosti koje su uz primjerenu podršku („scaffolding“) i poticaj odgojitelja, prerasle u samoorganizirane glazbeno-stvaralačke aktivnosti djece. Zaključeno je da poticajno prostorno-materijalno okruženje, aktivno sudjelovanje djece u kreiranju i organiziranju glazbenih aktivnosti te adekvatno i nenametljivo poticanje i podrška odgojitelja, mogu utjecati na povećanje učestalosti samoorganiziranih glazbeno-stvaralačkih aktivnosti djece u odgojno-obrazovnom procesu. Putem AI, odgojitelj obogaćuje i razvija svoje kompetencije koje su potrebne za provođenje kvalitetnih i za djecu i njihov razvoj značajnih glazbeno-stvaralačkih aktivnosti. Djetetova spontanost i kreativnost te neposredni doživljaj pri glazbeno-stvaralačkim aktivnostima, predstavljaju oblik cjeloživotnoga profesionalnog razvoja i učenja odgojitelja koji, zahvaljujući djetetu, ponovno otkriva i pobuđuje svoj često zatamljeni kreativni potencijal.

Ključne riječi: *akcijsko istraživanje; cjeloživotno učenje odgojitelja; djeca predškolske dobi; samoorganizirane glazbeno-stvaralačke aktivnosti.*