

## **Dance education of Silesian kindergarten teachers in Poland**

### **Abstract**

The article presents deliberations on acquisition of additional professional qualifications by elementary education teachers in the scope of rhythmic and dance. The topic is presented from the perspective of changes and events that are significant in the Polish educational system, or related to a social and professional human activity. The prepared material includes theoretical references, studies and analyses results, which may pose a trigger for modification of the elementary education functioning manner in Poland.

**Key words:** *dance, teacher, elementary education, professional qualifications, educational system in Poland.*

### **Introduction**

In a situation of contemporary social and educational transformation, a teacher – regardless of whether they are at the professional adaptation stage or they hold long-standing pedagogical experience – encounters a problem of improving or complementing their professional qualifications (Juszczuk 2011, p. 15). The current increase in the pace of life and a competitive labor market modify the requirements put forward for pedagogues employed in kindergartens and first grades of the elementary school within the Polish educational system. This process exerts certain impact on their activity in the professional environment and motivation for improvement of qualifications within the scope of lifelong learning.

### **Educational dimension of dance and movement with music and needs of a child**

Dance and movement with music pose a specific kinds of artistic activity of a man. It appears in life of practically every individual in diverse forms. Dance is created by movement, which is a base of expression of internal conditions and transfer of symbolic contents on a non-verbal plain (Kisiel 2005, p. 153). Children show great interest in dance what arises from a deeply rooted need of a young organism to move and have fun. Pleasant emotional experiences that accompany a physical activity pose an additional power for an individual that motivates for action in various situations. A child, while having fun, makes its dreams real (Kisiel 2013, p. 72). Therefore, it can learn much quicker and more effectively. A child acquires even complex knowledge subconsciously, in a natural manner. Movement as a factor that support proper psychological development of children, correcting distortions, poses a basis for

numerous teaching methods, i.e.: those by Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, Rudolf Laban, Rudolf Steiner, Carl Orff, Weronika Sherborne, Batii Strauss. Younger children prefer such activities as running or jumping, and find it difficult to carry out slow movement that require balance. Older children find more pleasure in abstract movements related to the feeling of space filled with movement, or exercises based on contact with others. Nevertheless, it is worth starting music and movement classes with basic forms in case of work with children, i.e. walking, jumping and running, to then shift to more spontaneous motion and ordered movement with music and dance (Suświłło 2001, p. 24). Benefits brought by movement and dance governed by music discipline are first of all: the chance to developed awareness of one's own body, improvement of visual and motor coordination, positive influence on harmonized development of the whole organism, stabilization of lateralization, strengthening of the rhythm feeling and sensitization to music, realization that there is space where we are present and move, learning to share space with others and establish close contact with them. Dance with frequent and spontaneous changes of partners, allows to "discover" new persons in a close contact, while sharing of space becomes a source of common experiences and sympathy (Kisiel 2006, p. 67). In case of such tasks it is important to trigger trust and cooperation, which provides a possibility to feel what a community is. Finally, it can be stated that attractiveness of dance also contributes to intensification of group processes perceived as making the bonds stronger and developing atmosphere that supports cooperation (Kisiel 2011, p. 153). Dance and music-movement classes, as a form of activity, are included in recommendations of the *Core curriculum* and are present in practical operation of music and rhythmic classes in kindergartens, and musical education and extra-curricular activities in the younger years of primary school (Kołodziejcki & Kisiel 2018, p. 161). Music and dance activity is the most often utilized in works with pre-school and elementary school children (Weiner 2010, 154). It is defined and described as independent willingness expressed by pupils to carry out a specific music task. The issue of music education of children in pre-school and elementary school children was undertaken by numerous pedagogues, mainly those working in the field of music pedagogy, i.e. Dorota Malko, Ewa Lipska, Beatrix Podolska, Maria Przychodzińska, Małgorzata Suświłło, Wiesława Sacher, Agnieszka Weiner, Mirosław Kisiel, Romualda Ławrowska, Maciej Kołodziejcki, Lidia Kataryńczuk-Mania, Beata Bonna and others.

### **A teacher as a child's guide in the world of music and dance**

An elementary education teacher must face a challenge of introducing a child into the world of music. A teacher stands right after the parents to undertake the task to shape the child's personality, helping in development of an individual potential. The teacher's didactic

and artistic skills and their personal predispositions impact development of the pupil in the scope of all personality spheres (Pituła 2008, p. 7).

A basic task of a teacher in the scope of music and dance classes should be care over improvement of skills and development of basic music and dance competences of their pupils (Ławrowska 2003, p. 56). Furthermore, a teacher plays a significant role in shaping the higher needs of a young man, in the process of stressing such values as good and evil - heading towards the ability feel and appreciate aesthetics of art, in the field of education. Literature suggests that a teacher, who makes their pupils familiar with music, singing and dance on an elementary education level is a person with high professional competence, skills of gathering and processing new information, qualified for creative and effective actions (Kisiel 2007, p. 109). Such an educator should be distinguished with creative abilities, high aesthetic sensibility, they should know basics of music, have knowledge in the scope of psychology and aesthetics, and be recognized with the competence of inspiring pupils and triggering hidden skills and possibilities in them (Sacher 2012, p. 143). A teacher should first of all get the children familiar with a language of music, sensitizing the young audience to its particular elements. It is also significant to develop music skills by applying various forms of activity, i.e. singing, playing on instruments, moving to music, creating music and listening to the music actively. Apart from substantive competences, a pedagogue, who teacher music may find it helpful to be capable of reading a simple music notation making them able to learn and teach new songs and dances. It also seems handy to be able to play an instrument, at least on a basic level. The most important role of a music and dance teacher in elementary education is skillful motivation of the pupils to listen and practice music actively. Thus, a pedagogue should know basics of musical and movement development of a child and its needs to trigger interest in various forms of activity.

Within recent year in Poland, significance of the topics raised in the theoretical part of the article, as well as polarization of pedagogical actions in the field of music and dance in elementary education have become an inspiration to undertake studies on the forms of professional development in the area of rhythmic and dance, for teachers of pre-school and early school education.

### **A teacher competent to introduce a child in the scope of dance education**

Empirical material collected during the survey questionnaire research, interview and as a result of documentation analysis, allowed to answer the question put forwards in the project: *What motifs encourage the elementary education teachers to improve their professional competences and qualifications in the scope of rhythmic and dance?* The research was carried out between 2016 and 2017, in a group of 67 female teachers, students of post-graduate studies,

major *rhythmic and dance in music and movement education of children* and among principals of selected educational centers, such as kindergartens and elementary schools. There was also a review of educational documents and websites carried out in search of information about offers in the scope of professional improvement of teachers in elementary education in the scope of rhythmic and dance (Kisiel 2017, p. 173-186).

A significant part of the subjects were female teachers working in kindergartens (65.7%). About 34.3% of the researched ladies were employed in schools. In this research population four persons were employed in a private kindergarten or a day-care center. The remaining group of respondents worked in public facilities (kindergarten or school). Analysis of the obtained data suggested that the greatest group of respondents were contract teachers (46.3%), another was formed by nominated teachers (25.4%) and certified teachers (17.9%). The smallest group was posed by internship teachers (10.4%). The respondents came from various environments. 26.9% are teachers from rural schools and kindergartens, 34.3% come from small cities, up to 25 thousand inhabitants, and 38.8% of the teachers worked in big cities. A part of the respondents declared to have additional music competences (3.8%). These skills were specified as: attendance or completion of a 1st grade music school (9 persons), informal education – private music lessons (7 persons), attendance or completion of a community music center course (5 persons), attendance or completion of a 2nd grade music school (2 persons) and graduates of another artistic school (3 persons). The remaining respondents (61.2%) declared that they acquired basic music competence during specialist studies. The number of hours devoted to music education of pedagogy students, specialty of music and pre-school education, is from 90 to 135, depending on the mode of completed studies, and it included: music appreciation classes, basics and methodology of music education in kindergarten and 1st-3rd grade of elementary school (bachelor studies) and music activity of a child in kindergartens and 1st-3rd grades (master studies). Schedules in the Silesian province offer a comparable yet a slightly lower pool of didactic hours intended for music education of the students. Without any doubts, the time of studies is an opportunity and the last period, where certain effective impact may be exerted on an individual or on a group, stimulating the shaping process of pro-music and aesthetic attitudes of academic youth. There are several universities that offer post-graduate studies in the scope of dance education in Poland: WSB University Dąbrowa Górnicza, University of Physical Education in Waesaw (AWF), University of Social Sciences in Lublin (WSNS), University of Rzeszów (UR) and other.

An exploration was carried out in order to get familiar with the situation and conditions

related to music and rhythmic teaching in selected centers, describing qualification of persons employed to carry out the classes in the scope of music education and rhythmic. Studies were carried out on a group of directors from 44 kindergartens and 47 elementary schools in Katowice. The collected data allowed to draw a conclusion that in 37.3% cases of the studies educational center, music classes in 1st-3rd grades and rhythmic in kindergarten are realized by early school education teachers, or pre-school education, respectively, rarely proving additional music education. When it comes to the studied kindergartens, there is a drop in rhythmic teacher's employment from the outside, and a minor increase in specialists hired for hours or permanently. A partial image of the performed exploration shows that in case of 1st-3rd grades of an elementary school music education is carried out first of all by teachers with pedagogical experience (31.9%), although this process is increasingly often marked with presence of specialists in the scope of music (11.0%).

Great significance in music education of the young generation is attached to extra-curricular activities, devoted to gifted or highly motivated children in kindergartens and elementary schools. Statements of the studied educational facilities principals suggest that in 69.2% of cases, additional music classes are carried out for children. The obtained data suggest that the offer for kindergarten children included educational classes in rhythmic, modern dance (e.g. *zumba*) and music folklore (songs, dance, games) – 40.6%. Pupils from 1st-3rd grades were offered with: vocal, dance and instrumental classes (playing on percussion instruments, *bam bam pipes* (Bum Bum Rurki®), chromatic bells or a soprano flute) – 28.6%. In other facilities, the extra-curricular music classes for children were organized occasionally, or they were not there at all.

The presented results of analyses imply a conclusion that elementary education facilities need teachers, who hold music qualifications necessary to carry out specialist rhythmic (in a kindergarten) and dance education classes (in a school). Therefore, aptness of some universities in relation to the proposed educational offer directed at elementary education teachers in the scope of *rhythmic and dance in music and movement education of a child* is observed. Expansion of practical knowledge of the students, equipping them with additional movement, dance and musical skills and the ability to include movement and music into the didactic process during the classes (e.g. music and PE, extra-curricular activities, etc.) has become the purpose of the organized post-graduate studies in the scope of music and movement education. The program of selected majors of studies covered the following educational areas: child song, rhythm, movement technique, logo-rhythmic, rhythmic didactics and methodology, modern dance, national dance, dance in a circle, stage performance, didactics and methodology

of dance, principles of music-theory and exercises, instrument, artistic setting, scenarios, conspectus, projects, didactics and methodology of music appreciation classes and a diploma paper seminar.

Improvement of elementary education teachers' qualifications is usually related to the willingness to obtain particular benefits by the interested parties, seen in a further or closer perspective. According to the analyzed list of data, 40.65% respondents declare that additional qualifications are one of the most important benefits that they see in taking up post-graduate studies in the specialty in question. After that there was improvement or acquisition of new skills in order to carry on with their current work (35.51%). An important place in declarations of the researched was occupied by a statement related to the possibility of carrying out additional music and movement classes in their family center (10.75%). The opportunity to find employment in other educational and cultural facilities was seen by 8.42% of the respondents, while 4.6% of them started post-graduate studies with a purpose to improve their self-assessment.

According to the assumed main objective of the research, there was an attempt to obtain information about the most important motivational factors for taking up the post-graduate studies on the major of *rhythmic and dance in music and movement education of children*. The obtained results showed that the researched teachers employed in kindergartens stated that the most important motivational factor to acquire qualifications in the scope of rhythmic and dance is to obtain additional hours in work with children (27.3%) and keep their current employment as a music animator (22.7%). The showed data comply with the current situation when it comes to employment of music specialists in a kindergarten. Principals of the facilities in question seek pedagogues with additional musical qualifications, at the same time being employed in their facility, and entrust them with realization of rhythmic and dance classes. They explain that such a teacher is available, they can adjust to the organizational and educational needs of a kindergarten in a flexible manner, and know what music and dance program to select while recognizing the children's needs. Furthermore, many believe it is crucial to eliminate additional fees for the classes, what is significant for financial burden of parents.

In case of teachers employed in younger grades of an elementary school, a significant factor that motivates to acquire additional qualifications was: improvement of workshop. music and dance skills (38.3%), and such as in case of pre-school education teachers, gain qualifications to realize additional classes in rhythmic and dance (31.9%). An early school education teacher in an elementary school is entitled to carry out music classes, but they observe high pressure of the music environment lately, intended to entrust musical education only

to specialists. For many pedagogues this will mean no didactic hours to reach the 18-hour full time employment in the school. Early school education teachers' attitude to develop music and dance interest in pupils from 1st-3rd grades within extra-curricular classes is also worth emphasizing, as the expert musicians are not inclined to do this.

The complementary studies in a form of an interview were carried out during the second and third semester of the WSB post-graduate studies in Dąbrowa Górnicza. The students are already capable of stating with full responsibility what has changed in their work since they undertook the course in the scope of rhythmic and dance. It could have been found out from various answers that the respondents noticed a change in their previous work with children. Plenty of ladies claimed that their classes have become more varied (32 answers), and their awareness of music and movement classes improved (25), thus enhancing the quality of realized activities. Some of the respondents admitted that they intensified the music and movement classes in their centers (14). The students proved a greater number of interesting ideas (11) when compared to their colleagues, preparation of presentations that were interesting in terms of choreography (32), and what is more, their own interest in dance also improved (22).

From the perspective of previous declarations, review of the complementary results became significant, showing self-assessment of music and movement competences of the respondents, acquired within the course of specialist education during qualification studies. Therefore, the respondents were asked to evaluate ten fields of their music, dance and methodological skills. Particular field of professional preparation were assessed in accordance with the following scale: very high, high, average, low, very low. The gathered and analyzed information allowed to conclude that majority of the researched teacher's assess their preparation to work with children as high or average. Each note was different, and dependent on the kind of the evaluated sphere. The lowest score was awarded by the teachers to their preparation for playing an accompanying instrument like piano, keyboard, guitar, accordion, etc. In this scope, majority of respondents stated that their preparation is average, and in numerous cases also low or very low. The post-graduate female students evaluated their skills in the scope of playing non-melodic school instruments, flute and chromatic bells as high and very high. A similar, relatively high level was presented in the categories of: *knowledge of national and folk dances from selected areas of the country* and *the skill to prepare dance and music-movement choreography*. The highest number of scores was awarded to preparation for music and movement games, to music and with music. After that there is knowledge of selected methodological systems and concepts, i.e. those by E. Jaques-Dalcroze, C. Orff, B. Strauss, and the ability to arrange songs on school instruments. A note comparable to the

average and low competence of playing a melodic accompanying instrument was given to the knowledge of the principles of music and efficiency in reading a musical notation. These two categories are highly important in teacher's music education as they decide to a great extent on effective utilization of music material by a teacher. They are especially helpful in reading new songs and handy in music mobility in case of work with children. Hence, in case of other edition of studies, it is worth enhancing and paying attention to education in this field.

### **Conclusion**

The presented studies results suggest that elementary teachers know and understand this important role of dance education in work with children. They also notice their shortages in particular spheres of music and dance competence. Therefore, they try to compensate them as they can, through participation in various form of professional improvement. The educational offer in a form of post-graduate studies, major *rhythmic and dance in music and movement education of children* became especially helpful, making it possible not only to acquire a new specialty, but also to improve the level of knowledge and skills, as well as development of individual artistic interests. Music education requires teachers to posse's certain knowledge and skills, as they need to combine music art with expression and teachers' experience. What is more, it is worth keeping it in mind that music elements accompany the pupils and students not only during music appreciation classes, games and activities with music and to music, bit also during other actions that arise from the pre-school and school duty.

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