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## **THE RESEARCH ON THE ROLE OF A FAMILY IN SHAPING VOCAL COMPETENCE OF CHILDREN IN PRIMARY SCHOOL – DISCUSSION TOPIC FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**

### **Summary**

In the article the results of the research concerning the family conditions of the level of vocal competence of children in early primary school are presented. The aim of the research was to specify the level of development of vocal competence of pupils and point out the factors of family environment and activities undertaken by parents which help to shape vocal competence of children. The above factors include general education, musical preparation of parents, their musical interests, attitude to music, musical activity and presence of musical instruments at house. The following activities stimulating the development of vocal competence were also diagnosed: singing for and with a child, praising, encouraging a child to sing and surrounding a child with music.

### **Introduction**

The growing popularity of TV programmes promoting musical talents may lead to the misleading impression that vocal competence of our society is satisfactory. The research in this area conducted among different age groups<sup>1</sup> as well as everyday observations do not confirm the above statement. Quite the opposite, they show that the minority of Poles have good singing skills. It is necessary to start shaping singing skills as early as possible in order to change this unfavourable tendency. Singing skills are not unattainable or given only to a few people. They may be accessible for the majority of people, provided that the activities stimulating their development are taken early, first in the families and later in kindergarten and school.

The first years of primary school are especially prone to shaping vocal competence. This is the period of the change from game activity to task activity, focus on the results and accomplishments and intense development of the basic abilities as well as improvement of the musical abilities and skills. In this period children are also particularly prone to musical shaping including singing skills. Between the age of 6 and 7 there is a substantial change in the approach to the music which is no longer only a background or component of games. The willingness to take on musical tasks is increasing, including the willingness to conscious

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<sup>1</sup> See B. Kamińska, *Kompetencje wokalne dzieci i młodzieży – ich poziom, rozwój i uwarunkowania*, Warszawa 1997; K. Lewandowska, *Rozwój zdolności muzycznych u dzieci w wieku szkolnym*, Warszawa 1978; B. Bonna, *Rola środowiska rodzinnego i przedszkola w kształtowaniu umiejętności muzycznych dzieci. Zastosowanie koncepcji Edwina E. Gordona*, Bydgoszcz 2005.

corrections of singing, and the sense of keynote and the inclination to end the melody on it contribute to the improvement of intonation accuracy.

Between the age of 7 and 9 the learning of singing by means of musical inculturation is in progress and it is intensified by education in school<sup>2</sup>. Singing may serve then as a component of games and relaxation, a measure of emissive and solfeggio exercises and melodic improvisation or as an example of the problems in the "theory" of music<sup>3</sup>. The further development of vocal abilities of a child depends strongly on the place of singing in the syllabus and on the personality of the teacher<sup>4</sup>. The primary teaching period ends with the period critical for the development of correct intonation in singing. Later the correction of the intonation is connected with the necessity of using particularly successful teaching methods and considerably greater effort of the teacher. It is highlighted that in this phase of musical development children should acquire basic vocal abilities<sup>5</sup>. Petzold observed that the most important changes concerning the improvement in the repetition of pattern melodies occurred among 6-7 year olds<sup>6</sup>. As it can be concluded from the research of B. Kamińska conducted in different age groups, vocal competence is being developed until the adolescence, but the most intense development takes place until the age of 9<sup>7</sup>.

Family has the fundamental function in the support of the comprehensive development of a child by means of making the surrounding culture familiar. According to H. Gardner, the culture of the individual plays crucial role in the assessment of the level of actual intellectual potential<sup>8</sup>.

The aim of family is to provide success for its members, namely, aspiration to their more perfect, comprehensive and fuller development. Such formulated aim is closely connected with the fact that in the centre of family should be a human being – a person. Among the external aspects of such an attitude there are behaviours of family members which express the assertion of rights, fulfilment of basic and developmental needs, the exchange of love and other values<sup>9</sup>. Normally formed family becomes a reference group for its members. The individual consciously and strongly identifies with it, as its member and representative, and creates and accepts the views, attitudes, habits and patterns of behaviour cultivated in the family<sup>10</sup>. Among the conditions which influence the quality and level

<sup>2</sup> B. Kamińska, *op. cit.*, s. 28; see also: M. Manturzevska, B. Kamińska, *Rozwój muzyczny człowieka*, [in:] *Wybrane zagadnienia z psychologii muzyki*, ed. M. Manturzevska, H. Kotarska, Warszawa 1990, p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> Jankowski, by: Kamińska, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Welch, by: Kamińska, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> B. Kamińska, *op. cit.*, p. 29; see also: M. Manturzevska, B. Kamińska, *op. cit.*, p. 40-44.

<sup>6</sup> R. Shuter-Dyson, C. Gabriel, *Psychologia uzdolnienia muzycznego*, Warszawa 1986, p. 126.

<sup>7</sup> Kamińska, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>8</sup> H. Gardner, *Inteligencje wielorakie. Teoria w praktyce*, Poznań 2002, p. 80.

<sup>9</sup> T. Kukotowicz, *Rodzina w procesie wychowania*, [in:] *Pedagogika rodziny na progu XXI wieku. Rozwój, przedmiot, obszary refleksji i badań*, ed. A.W. Janke, Toruń 2004, p. 43.

<sup>10</sup> Z. Tyszcza, A. Wachowiak, *Podstawowe pojęcia i zagadnienia socjologii rodziny*, Poznań 1997.

of educational activity of family there are three groups of factors: economic and social, cultural and psychopedagogic<sup>11</sup>.

As far as the impact of family on musical development of child is concerned it should be highlighted that family has a special role in shaping its abilities, skills, musical interests and musicality<sup>12</sup>. The creator of Music Teaching Method E.E. Gordon pays special attention to the significance of early musical experiences in the family environment for the optimization of musical development of a child<sup>13</sup>.

In the literature of the subject it is pointed that individual differences concerning the moment of the first attempts to sing and speak and the further development depend mostly on the frequency with which people sing or talk to the child<sup>14</sup>. The differences in the family environment start to influence also learning songs and dances of 3 years old and older children<sup>15</sup>.

The research on exceptionally talented children shows that in every case the children received huge support from parents, other family members, teachers and frequently members of the society. H. Gardner claims that "nobody, even extremely talented, can make progress in solitude"<sup>16</sup>. According to B. Kamińska among the most important functions of family in the support of musical development are: providing early experiences important for musical development; sharing and passing musical meanings during the direct musical interactions with family and friends; familiarizing children with musical works; rousing and fulfilling the musical needs, passing the system of values and norms of communing with music; teaching new patterns of activities, behaviours and new roles; providing the emotional support, advice and help when needed<sup>17</sup>. J. Sloboda points to the positive impact of parents' musical interests. Parents do not have to have considerable musical abilities, but they should value dealing with music. The research conducted by J. Sloboda showed that parents of the students with major musical accomplishments have the willingness and motivation to devote resources for the musical education and to participate actively in the process<sup>18</sup>.

According to the research quoted by B. Kamińska the environmental conditions of the level of vocal competence include: musical activity of the members of family<sup>19</sup>, rich musical culture of the family<sup>20</sup>, mother who sings for and with children, members of the family interested in singing and making music in the family and listening to music via recordings. Kirkpatrick lists also musical education

<sup>11</sup> S. Kawula, J. Brągiel, A.W. Janke, *Pedagogika rodziny*, Toruń 1997, p. 75.

<sup>12</sup> B. Bonna, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> See E.E. Gordon, *Umuzycznianie niemowląt i małych dzieci*, Kraków 1997; E.E. Gordon, *Sekwencje uczenia się w muzyce. Umiejętności, zawartość i motywy*, Bydgoszcz 1999.

<sup>14</sup> Michel, by: R. Shuter-Dyson, C. Gabriel, *Psychologia uzdolnienia muzycznego*, Warszawa 1986, p. 196.

<sup>15</sup> Moog, *ibidem*, p. 197.

<sup>16</sup> H. Gardner, *Niepospolite umysły*, Warszawa 1998, p. 72.

<sup>17</sup> Kamińska, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>18</sup> J. Sloboda, *Poznanie, emocje i wykonanie. Trzy wykłady z psychologii muzyki*, Warszawa 1999, p. 29.

<sup>19</sup> Shelton, Kirkpatrick, Lewandowska, by: B. Kamińska; *op. cit.*, p. 82.

<sup>20</sup> Moog, by: B. Kamińska; *op. cit.*, p. 82.

of parents as one of the conditions<sup>21</sup>. According to B. Kamińska it is necessary to include factors such as: music and singing as a value in the closest family (attitude to music, singing and place of the music in the life of the members of the family, the kind of music which is most valued); quality, quantity and kind of early contacts of child with music and early positive musical experiences (moment of the beginning of musical stimulation, frequency of contact with music, musical dialogue with child, proper patterns of correct intonation); musical fascination (influence on the emotional and motivating sphere, creating the possibilities of positive musical experiences, praising child's singing and other musical accomplishments, encouraging to sing)<sup>22</sup>.

### Methodological context of the research

The theoretical and cognitive aim of the research is to specify the role of the family environment in shaping of vocal competence of 7 years old children. However, the practical aim is connected with indicating the factors of the family environment and influences within family which optimize the process.

Vocal competence was tested among 55 pupils of the first class of primary schools in Rojewice, Rojewo and Bydgoszcz. In case of 46 families the analysis of the family environment<sup>23</sup> was also carried out. In general, the tested group consisted of 101 persons.

During the research the problems connected with the answers to the following questions were formulated: What is the level of vocal competence of the pupils? What factors in the family environment and influences of the parents are supporting the development of vocal competence of children?

The main research method was diagnostic poll by means of which the data enabling the analysis of the level of vocal competence in terms of family conditions were acquired. During the research the questionnaires and tests of vocal abilities of the pupils were used<sup>24</sup>. It was assumed that children who obtained 0-3 points had low vocal competence, whereas children who obtained 4 and 5 points had high musical abilities. The assessment was performed according to the scale prepared by B. Kamińska<sup>25</sup>:

0 points – mono declamation, own melody or numerous changes in the melody contour, so the melody is no longer recognizable,

1 point – singing the melody contour. Melody can be drawn, but it cannot be written down on the staff,

<sup>21</sup> Kirkpatrick by: R. Shuter-Dyson, C. Gabriel, *op. cit.* p. 200.

<sup>22</sup> B. Kamińska, *op. cit.*, p. 82-83.

<sup>23</sup> In 2009 the research was conducted by Aleksandra Kinal. In spite of the fact that 55 children were tested, only 46 families gave back the filled questionnaires.

<sup>24</sup> Children were asked to sing well-known to them song „Jestem uczniem” by S. Karaszewski and E. Witkowska and their performance was assessed.

<sup>25</sup> B. Kamińska, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

2 points – particular phrases of the song are tonally coherent but they are not tonally connected in the whole. Singing child often changes the pitch between the phrases,

3 points – singing which is one tonal whole and indicates the awareness of pitch but numerous intervals are sang not accurately,

4 points – singing in one pitch, accurately sang intervals, single incidental mistakes,

5 points – singing is correct, in one pitch, intervals are sang accurately.

### The results of the research

The data collected by means of the assessment of the performance of a specific song informs that only 20% of examined children have high level of vocal competence, namely, that their singing is correct in terms of intonation and it is maintained in one pitch with the possibility of rare incidental mistakes. The remaining 80% of the pupils have low level of singing abilities and the performance of the song is characterized by numerous irregularities which substantially distort melody of the song. There are numerous mistakes in singing of these children, such as mono declamation, abundant changes in the melody contour (melody is no longer recognizable), lack of tonal coherence and inaccurate singing of many intervals.

The acquired results are in large measure coincident with the research of B. Kamińska who proved that less than 10% children after kindergarten sing with correct intonation and 6 years old children singing incorrectly are a developmental norm in our country. In the kindergarten children have the greatest difficulties with mastering the ability to get the voice of singing and the motor abilities connected with using voice<sup>26</sup>. Low vocal competence of 6 years old children is confirmed also by the earlier B. Bonna's research which shows that among the performance and improvisation musical abilities of children singing is the least mastered<sup>27</sup>. Another researcher who examined vocal competence of children is M. Kołodziejski. He established that 50% of the examined pupils of the first class have low level of vocal abilities, 47% average and only 3% high<sup>28</sup>. However, the author used different scale of assessment and it should be taken into consideration while comparing the results.

In order to acquire the answer to the second research question the factors characteristic for the family environment of children with high and low vocal competence and parental influences were compared. It helped to establish which of them influence the development of singing abilities.

<sup>26</sup> B. Kamińska, *op. cit.*, p. 150; The research of vocal competence of children in early years in school in Poland was conducted also by K. Lewandowska, see *op. cit.* and A. Weiner, see *Kompetencje muzyczne dzieci w młodszym wieku szkolnym. Determinanty, zależności, perspektywy rozwoju*, Lublin 2010.

<sup>27</sup> See B. Bonna, *op. cit.*, p. 165-166.

<sup>28</sup> M. Kołodziejski, *Koncepcja Edwina E. Gordona w powszechnej edukacji muzycznej*, Płock 2008, p. 146.



The factors in the family environment significant for the development of vocal competence of children include general education, preparation and musical interests of parents, presence of the musical instruments at house, the attitude of parents to music and their musical activeness. As a result of the analysis it was established that among children who sing correctly only 9.09% of the respondents has primary or vocational education, 6.64% has secondary education and 27.27% higher education. In case of children singing incorrectly, lower levels of education are represented by 40% of parents, secondary education by 40% as well and higher education by 20% of respondents. Therefore, it may be concluded that parents of children with high vocal competence have better education than parents of pupils who sing incorrectly.

Another factor which distinguishes both groups is musical preparation of parents. In the group of children with high competence 45.45% of the respondents have at least one kind of such a preparation (private music lessons, learning how to play instrument by oneself, music centre), whereas among the children with low abilities only 14.29% of parents have such a preparation. The above data proves that in the group of pupils singing correctly there are distinctly more parents with musical preparation.

Further analysis showed that the elements which considerably diversify both groups are presence of the musical instruments at house and musical interests of the parents. In almost all families of children singing correctly there are musical instruments (90.91%), whereas among children with low singing abilities such families are a minority (42.86%).

The important factor which helps shaping the vocal competence of children is the attitude of parents to music. The depiction of the data points to the fact that the layout of the results in this respect is more favourable in the group of families of children with high vocal competence. From the analysis of the data one may conclude that among the 63.64% of families of pupils singing correctly and 27.26% of singing incorrectly music is considered to be a substantial value. Moreover more than a half of parents of children with high competence (54.55%) and twice less of the respondents with low competence (25.81%) express very positive attitude to music.

The other element which helps to shape singing abilities is musical activeness of the parents. It is conditioned by musical interests shown in various forms of contact with music. The analysis showed that 80% of the parents of children with high singing abilities declared musical interests and almost a half less of parents of children with low abilities (42.42%). During the research different forms of musical activities of parents (playing instruments, participating in dance groups, singing in a choir or vocal group, reading books about music and collecting musical records) were diagnosed. It was proven that both groups were diversified, in favour of the parents of children singing correctly, by reading books and playing

instruments. According to analysis, 60% of the parents of pupils with high abilities and only 18.75% of the parents of pupils with low competence read books about music. Moreover, in the families of children with correct intonation 45.45% of parents play musical instruments, whereas the percentage of such people in the families of children singing incorrectly is almost three times lower and amounts to 11.43%. Activities connected with dancing are taken up by more parents of children with correct intonation (60%) than parents of children with incorrect one (33.33%). As far as collecting musical records and singing in a choir or vocal groups are concerned, the differences are slight but still they are in favour of the parents of children with high competence. Analysis showed that recordings are collected by 20% of parents of pupils with high singing abilities and 10% of those with low, whereas 50% of the parents of children with correct intonation and 46.88% of the parents of pupils with low vocal competence sang in the past or still sing in vocal groups.

From a point of view of a musical development of a child the most crucial issue is the quality of early impact of family environment undertaken in this respect. Early, conscious and systematic activities of family to provide a child with various musical stimuli such as singing for and with it, surrounding a child with valuable music, produce the effect of the increase of musical skills and better understanding of music as well as create the readiness to master the competence quicker and more competently<sup>29</sup>.

The questionnaire for the parents included the question about singing for a child which is undertaken very frequently and in different stages of life. This factor in different stages diversified both groups in favour of the parents of children singing correctly (slightly) or in favour of parents of children singing incorrectly (considerably), hence the results were different than expected. It is worth noting that the development of vocal competence of children is conditioned by listening to the correct singing of parents in terms of intonation. The incorrect singing of parents has major consequences since the child acquires wrong intonation which is later extremely difficult to correct. Analysis showed that during the infancy half of the examined parents of children with high vocal competence (54.55%) and 71.43% of parents of children with low competence sang for them. During the next period the results in both groups were similar, which means that 45.45% of pupils singing with correct intonation and 42.86% of pupils singing incorrectly frequently listened to singing of their parents. During the period of kindergarten 36.36% of respondents sang for children with high competence and 60% of respondents sang for children with low competence. At present 54.55% of the parents of pupils singing with correct intonation and 46.86% of the parents of children singing with incorrect one frequently sing for their children. Among the songs the respondents listed songs known from their own childhood, songs for children and lullabies.

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<sup>29</sup> B. Bonna, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

Singing with a child is extremely important for shaping vocal competence. In this area the results were slightly more favourable for the families of children with high vocal competence. The analysis showed that this form of activity is undertaken by 36.36% of the parents of children singing correctly and 21.21% of the parents of children singing incorrectly.

Among the factors which influence the development of vocal competence there are also praising and encouraging to sing. The results show that the layout of data is more favourable, especially for praising, for the families of children singing correctly (81.82%). In the group of the pupils with low singing abilities there are substantially less parents who praise their children for singing (51.72%). Further analysis showed that 63.64% of parents of children with high vocal competence and 57.58% of parents of children with low vocal competence encourage children to sing.

Another important form of influence is surrounding child with music. The tests showed that more than a half of parents (54.55%) often listen to music in the presence of children singing correctly. In case of children with bad intonation it is 41.94% of parents. It is worth noting that in the both groups it is mostly light popular music. Especially important factor for the musical development of a child, including vocal competence, is contact with live musical performances. In the examined group such a possibility is provided by 36.36% of the families of children with high singing abilities and by 34.29% of the families of children with low competence.

### **Conclusion**

The diagnosis of the level of vocal competence conducted among pupils of first class of primary schools proved that huge majority of seven years old children sing incorrectly. A rather small group of the respondents can sing with correct intonation. It may be concluded that the level of singing abilities among the tested pupils is not satisfactory, which is especially meaningful since the ability to sing is shaped mostly in the period of primary school.

The primary role in the support of singing development in the period of early childhood is played by family environment, among others, by creating the conditions to optimize the process and undertaking various forms of musical activities. The research shows that the following factors in the family environment are especially important for the development of vocal competence: general education, musical preparation of parents, presence of the musical instruments at house, musical interests, music as a value and attitude of parents to music. In the group of families of children singing correctly the layout of the results in the above aspects is more favourable. The above aspects of the family environment seem to help in mastering high level of vocal competence of pupils.

The next factor which influences the quality of singing of children is musical activity of the parents. Among the various forms of activities both groups (especially group of children singing correctly) diversified activities connected with playing the instrument, reading books and dancing. In the families of children singing correctly there are definitely more respondents who undertake such forms of contact with music. The other forms, namely singing in a choir or vocal group and collecting musical records, are also more frequently realized by the parents of children with high competence but the difference between the groups is not so significant.

Undertaking the activities which stimulate the development of vocal competence in the family environment is connected with musical activity of parents towards children. Such activities include singing for a child frequently in the early periods of life, signing with a child, praising and encouraging a child to sing as well as surrounding a child with music. The analysis showed that the most significant factor for the development of singing ability is praising, since in this area the layout of results is more favourable for the group of families of children singing correctly. Both groups are also diversified, although not so significantly but still in favour of parents of children with high vocal competence, by singing with a child, encouraging to sing and surrounding child with music which may lead to a conclusion that the above factors are also important in shaping vocal competence of children. Only in case of singing for a child frequently and in different periods of life the results are ambiguous.

It may be stated that the presented results of the research on the development of vocal competence of pupils in early classes of primary school seem to confirm the importance of the family environment in shaping singing abilities and in numerous aspects they are in conformity with the earlier research in this area<sup>30</sup>. On account of the above statement, it is necessary to undertake intense activities to make parents aware of their role in the process of developing singing abilities, since as first teachers they might have decisive role.

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