

# ACTIVE PERCEPTION OF MUSICAL WORKS AND A CHILD'S EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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1. Introduction
2. Multidimensional nature of listening and terminological consequences
3. The didactics of music perception in Poland
4. Emotional development through contact with a piece of music
5. Practical implementation, combining the idea of active listening to music with emotional development
6. Conclusion



## Ad. 1. Introduction

The problem of listening to music is an important and complex issue of the Polish pedagogical thought. Preparing an addressee that is sensitive to art is related to the specificity of contemporary reality, which was formed under the influence of the information revolution, having its beginnings in the second half of the 20th century.

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- Never before have **cultural goods and forms of cultural participation** been so easily achievable and diverse at the same time.
- **Modern educational institutions** should therefore shape students' s ability to choose works of arts that are artistically, morally and aesthetically valuable, as well as prepare the students for active experiencing, reading and understanding of those artworks.
- The above mentioned tasks are possible to implement inter alia **in integrated early childhood education** through a new understanding of the concept of **“education through art”**. Its essence includes syncretic forms combining music with literature and fine arts. Furthermore, contact with a piece of music becomes a carrier of aesthetic values oscillating around the contemplation of beauty, bur also, and perhaps above all, emotional and cognitive values affecting the harmonious development of the child's personality. It should be emphasized that music being one of the branches of art combines specific contents, identified with musical elements and symbolic contents, referring to the extramusical world of concepts and emotional states (6, 1999, 16-17).

Ad. 2. **A multidimensional nature of listening** to music caused the fact that in the pedagogical literature function interchangeably the terms such as “perception” and “reception”, in spite of their semantic difference, appearing in etymological, psychological and musicological definitions.

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And despite that these two concepts are derived from Latin

“reception” means: the adoption, acquisition or absorbing something (2. B., 2000).

On the other hand, “perception” is a conscious sensory organ response to an external stimulus, a way of responding and receiving impressions (2. A., 2000).



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In cognitive psychology, scientists emphasize the differences in a nature of both concepts.

“Sensory reception” is a **passive element of the cognitive process**, which *involves reflecting stimuli in receptors, that is sensory organs. It is a necessary condition and the first stage of the cognitive proces* (10, 2006, 278).

However, “perception” (*perceiving*) is a **process of active interpretation** of *sensual data using contextual guidance, attitudes and previously acquired knowledge. As a result, the perception process leads to object recognition* (10, 2006, 278).

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**On the basis of the concept of musicology, the above mentioned terms were being distinguished due to the nature of musical experience:**

being **the sum of individual experiences** that make up a particular type of attitudes and impressions in ”reception”;

**individual**, and simultaneously **subjective** in “perception” (11, 2005, 27).

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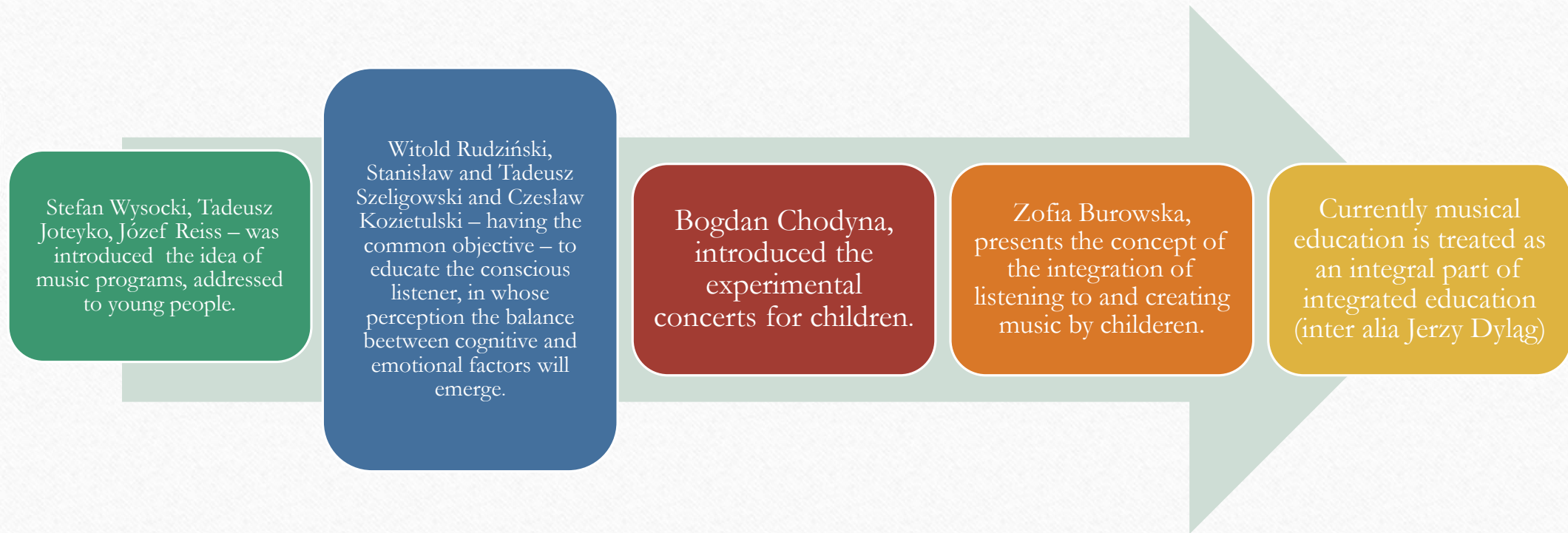
### Currently in a music encyclopedia

“reception” is defines as a kind of music perception determining a type of reception being representative for a given historical period, geographical territory, national and social group etc. Thus it is the reception of music characteristic for a specific historical-cultural circle (1, 2006, 738)

However, “the perception of music” is defines as *a complex cognitive process associated with the perception of musical phenomena. Music perception may be accompanied by the processes of analysis and synthesis of musical materials, associations, musical and extramusical ideas, aesthetical valuation and emotional experiences* (1, 2006, 678).



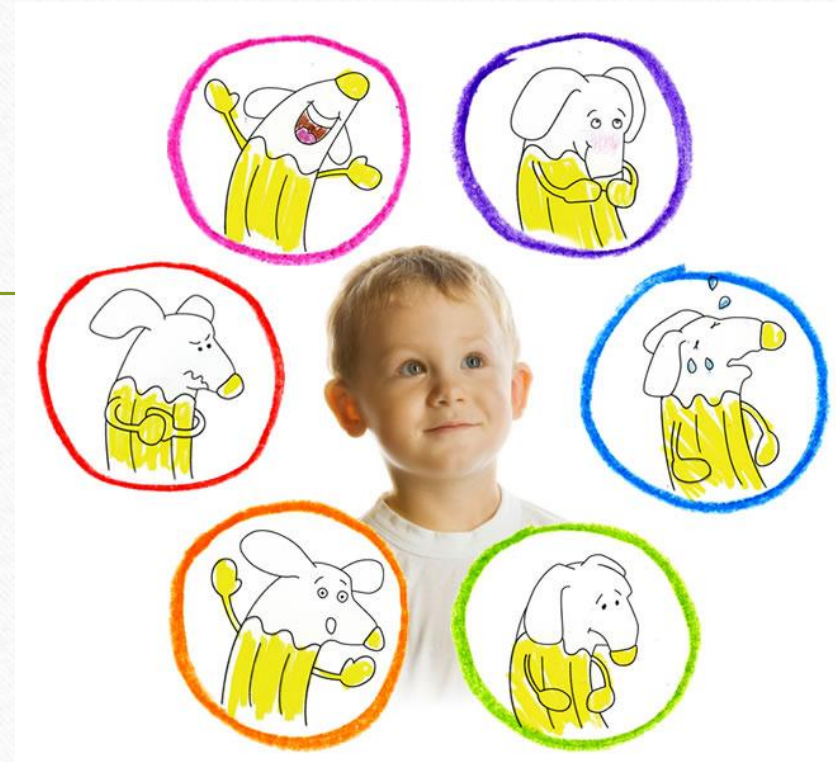
### Ad. 3. The didactics of music perception in Poland has a long-term tradition, derived from the twenties of the 20th century.





## Ad. 4. Emotional development through contact with a piece of music

- **Emotional development** through contact with a piece of music is possible due to **the nature of music, understood as a symbolic representation of emotions**. It is the **symbolic content** in the arts which has a special significance for emotional education. On the one hand music may raise connotations with external aspects of affect such as the physical and mimical expression, and on the other hand it may bring out the internal structure of emotions reflected in the time-dynamic form of a musical composition (6, 1999, 153-154, 233).

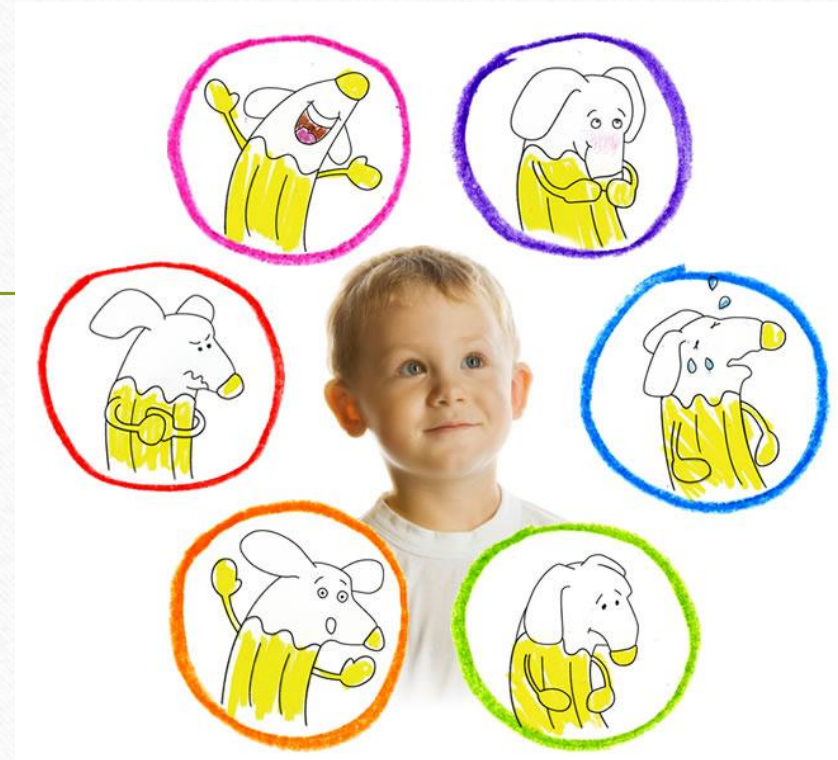


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Ad. 4. Emotional development through contact with a piece of music

**Reading, naming and interpreting various emotional categories within musical pieces allows us to develop the ability to control the emotional states.**

According to psychologists, bigger behavioral problems have these children, who can not precisely define their feelings: they do not distinguish annoyance from anger, anxiety from sorrow (5, 1998, 22).



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Even 5-6 year old children should possess the ability to understand and express their emotions. As claimed by psychologists, they should also be capable of compassion and understanding of emotional states of both their playmates and fictional characters (8, 2000, 113). What is more, on the basis of experiences and observations acquired during the kindergarten years, a child starting school should not only feel various emotions – anger, joy, sorrow, fear, shame, jealousy, embarrassment, guilt etc. – but also acquire the ability to control his reactions.



Educational practice indicates that the level of development of a given emotion mentioned above is varied. Therefore, the key to self-control is to stimulate the development of emotional intelligence.



According to Daniel Goleman, it begins with naming your own emotions and assimilation of behaviors, which allow you to control the stimuli that cause them. The next step is to develop empathy, which is the basis for the acquisition of social competence (9, 2007, 58-60).

Exploring the emotional side of music is also associated with experiencing musical elements – such as melody, rhythm, agogics, timbre, articulation, harmony – as a whole. The sound of musical works is unique and it is difficult to determine the scheme of its perception, as oftentimes the same arrangement of musical elements may involve different emotions.

The hearing (audio) experiences acquired during the acculturation process a child may use in the process of communicating his own internal experiences and emotions. A special development of a child's perception abilities takes place at about 7-8 years. The transition from pre-operational to operational thinking causes the increase of reflective awareness of musical structures and patterns, for instance, a child recognizes the sound of melody in spite of the changes in dynamics, rhythm and timbre (12, 2002, 256).



Ad. 5 Practical implementation, combining the idea of active listening to music with emotional development, is the concept of Jerzy Dyląg, which includes several units (4, 2006, 234-240):

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1. The **global cognition** of a musical composition takes place during repeated listening to it. **The teacher's role** is reduced to helping children recognize the nature and mood of a given musical work and paying their attention to both its form and components. Thanks to the teacher's active teaching attitude children are able to feel and name the following emotion categories: contentment, surprise, love, anger, sorrow, fear, shame and disgust.

2. All the musical and emotional experiences acquired in this way become the foundation of interpretation activities during “the composer play”. Interpreting the above listed experiences in different codes – artistic, musical, language, pantomime – allows children to experience greater satisfaction that comes from direct contact with art, as well as to express their emotions through various activities.



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Anger expressed in the pantomimic code.



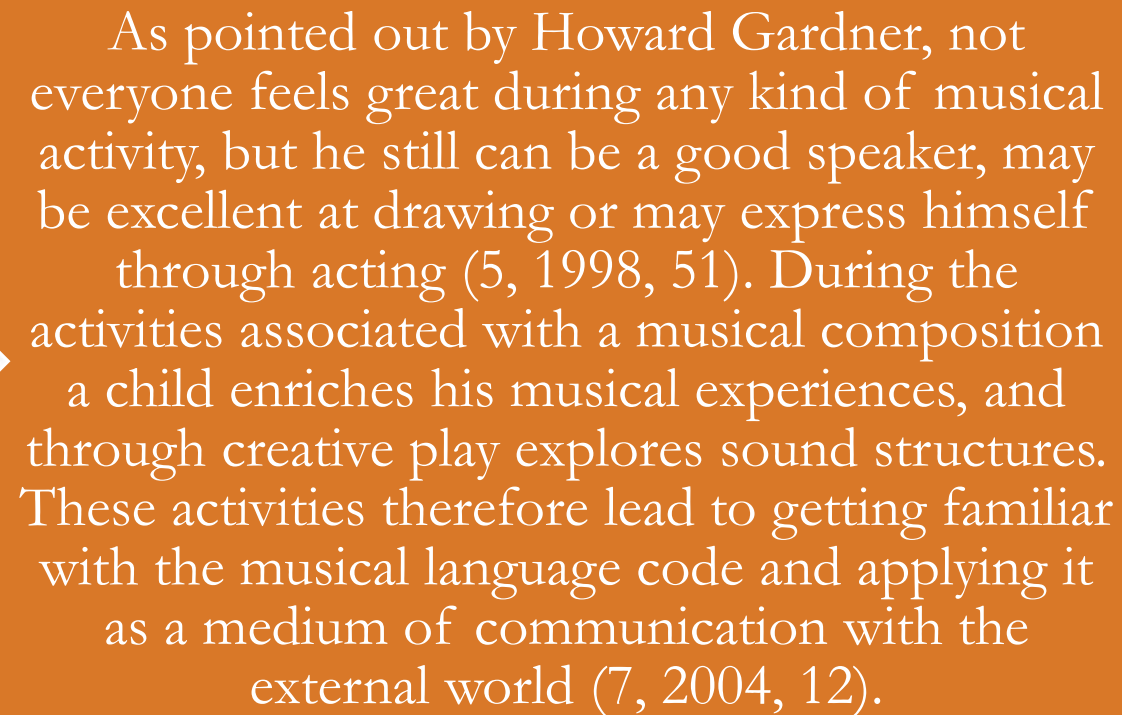
Phot. Joanna Szczyrba

Anger expressed in the musical code.



„Cheerful fear” expressed in the artistic code.





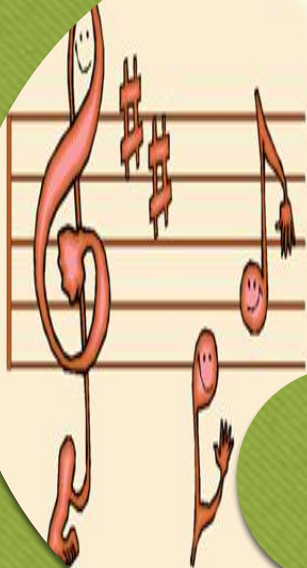
As pointed out by Howard Gardner, not everyone feels great during any kind of musical activity, but he still can be a good speaker, may be excellent at drawing or may express himself through acting (5, 1998, 51). During the activities associated with a musical composition a child enriches his musical experiences, and through creative play explores sound structures. These activities therefore lead to getting familiar with the musical language code and applying it as a medium of communication with the external world (7, 2004, 12).

### 3. Selection of the musical works for children:

- Especially affordable for pre-school and early school children are **songs** and **instrumental compositions**. When selecting the musical works one should take into account its short duration, from a dozens of seconds to 2-3 minutes, and evoking positive emotions and societal values with the means of a given pieces of music.

While listening to the song, children are focused mainly on the verbal layer and concrete contents of the work. The teacher's task is to direct attention to the emotional and aesthetic content and to search, together with children, musical elements responsible for bringing out a given emotion.

The perception of instrumental compositions is difficult, because the emotions arise as a result of the perception of the arrangement of sounds (7, 2004, 13). A good method is to construct image titles or a "plot", which, according to the findings of psychologists, facilitate the memorization of certain musical fragments (12, 2002, 232).





## Ad. 6 Conclusion

The answer to the postulates of modern pedagogy and psychology is the active perception of music. Its essence includes the cognition of musical works through the integration of intellectual activities – such as the global cognition of musical compositions, analysis and synthesis of its structures and forms – with the emotional experience and interpretation of the acquired experiences within different codes: literary, musical, visual arts and pantomimic.

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Thank you for your attention

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