

PROBLEMS OF GROUP MANAGEMENT IN PRESCHOOL MUSIC LESSONS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The research was implemented within the framework of the University of Latvia master's study program "Pedagogy" course "Effective classroom management". During the action research, the researchers identified group management problems in music lessons at educational institution X, in group Y. Key problem identified was the insufficient attention of children at the beginning of the lesson. The research proceeded to also look for possible solutions. The aim is to analyse current methods of delivering effective music classes in a pre-school setting, and propose and validate new strategies to improve the beginning of a music lesson. The study involved 17 preschool children (11 boys and 6 girls), a music teacher, and two group teachers, and an observer. The study was conducted from October 2019 to March 2020. The first results of the action research show that as the teacher changed her classroom activities, introduced certain group management techniques, such as signalling and acoustic counting, and repeating these as a routine activity in each lesson, children's attention improved significantly at the beginning of the music lesson and became more sustained.

Keywords: *educational attainment, group management, music lessons, preschool.*

Introduction

Based on the observations of the music teacher and in conversations with the preschool teachers, it was found that the children's attention at the beginning of the music lesson was not immediate and the children needed more time to get ready for the lesson. In private preschool X, all lessons take place in one classroom, including a music lesson, so the children are in their classroom before the music lesson and are busy playing with toys and each other. The beginning of the lesson is complicated by the fact

that the music teacher needs to enter and leave the classroom several times before starting the lessons, to bring all the necessary materials for the lesson – musical instruments and other attributes – so it is difficult for children to understand when the teacher has brought all the things and the music lesson can begin. That is why the **research problem** was focussed on how to draw the children's attention to a clearly understandable common beginning of the lesson. To find possible solutions to the problem, the research question was investigated – what should the teacher change in her pedagogical activity to ensure that all children are paying attention at the beginning of the music lesson? **The aim** is to analyse current methods of delivering effective music classes in a pre-school setting, and propose and validate new strategies to improve the beginning of a music lesson. The following **research tasks** were put forward and carried out:

1. To study topical issues of classroom management in the latest studies of the last decade, in conjunction with the behavioural and attention problems of preschool children.
2. To carry out pedagogical observation in preschool X.
3. Observe and define a specific problem of class management to be solved.
4. To use class management techniques in action according to the developed plan.
5. To implement action research in three cycles.
6. To perform a repeated pedagogical observation after performing pedagogical activity promoting positive behaviour.
7. Conclude and make proposals for further action.

Theoretical background

School success today requires that young children be taught more than just academics (Taylor & Dymnecki, 2007). Subject matter and lesson content are undoubtedly important, but the delivery and environment must support children in the learning process. Preschool teachers identify disruptive behaviours as the biggest challenge that they face while trying to manage their classrooms (Jalongo, 2006). To identify classroom management problems, a study of raising the hand during the morning lap was analysed. Vargo and colleagues conducted an experiment limiting the opportunity for children to express themselves during the morning circle lesson with the help of colour cards (Vargo, Heal, 2014). The results of the study show the ability of children to gradually adapt to the new system, with a decrease in the number of arms raised in the limited phase and an increase in the number allowed.

During early childhood, between the ages of 3 and 5 years, attention systems develop rapidly (Jones et al., 2015; Posner et al., 2014). Child

development experts say that normal attention span is 3 to 5 minutes per year of a child's age (Schmitt, 2011). Therefore, a 2-year-old should be able to concentrate on a particular task for at least 6 minutes, and a child entering kindergarten should be able to concentrate for at least 15 minutes.

Dominguez and colleagues in a longitudinal study focused on the study of children's learning behaviours in preschool age (Dominguez, Vitiello, 2010). It was concluded that as children grow older, their behaviour becomes more adaptive, with all participants working together to achieve better results, and changes in the classroom affected learning behaviours (emotional support, instructional help, children's active involvement). The first peer-based community where children learn how to behave in different social situations is preschool.

Preschool plays a major role in the landscape of the educational system and also in the approach and way of implementation of music activities in it. The professionalism of the teacher is key to the identification and development of music abilities in pre-schoolers. This implies many other factors such as problems of the professional qualifications of preschool teachers and the whole teaching staff, specifically lack of sufficiently developed music pedagogy curriculum and group management strategies and skills. Sometimes there exist objective reasons why sufficient attention cannot be devoted to musical education and content (Činč, 2018; Pfiffner, 2011). Several researchers emphasize that effective pedagogy consists of an appropriate curriculum, teaching methods, and classroom management strategies (Epstein, 2015; Parsonson, 2012).

Methodology

Analysing the theoretical literature of classroom management, it is concluded that various methods can be used to correct the behaviour of children in preschool (Dominguez, Vitiello, 2010; Rönnerman, 2012; Vargo, Heal, 2014). According to Rönnerman, action research involves collaboration between researchers and practitioners; in this collaboration, it is crucial to take advantage of the knowledge and expertise that exists among the staff and to challenge both scientific and practice-based knowledge and skills (Ljunggren, 2016). In this action research a music teacher, two group teachers, and an observer participated. The role of the observer was to identify the issues for music lessons beginning by observation of teacher's and children's activities starting a lesson. Three observations took place in a private preschool institution X, where 17 preschool children (11 boys and 6 girls) in a mixed age group from 3 to 6 years of age were observed. The music lesson took place in a group room. Other lessons take place at different times in this same room. The layout of the room has an open-plan

layout, in which toys and various learning materials are freely accessible to children.

After the first observation, behavioural problems were identified as mild, so corrective behaviour plan was developed together with teachers and used to change the behaviour for the whole group. At the beginning of the lesson, a song was to be played, as a signal that the music lesson is about to commence and also giving them context to the teacher's preparations of the room for the lesson. This will be a new, unusual signal meaning the new routine for children, which will indicate that the children should sit in a circle at the designated place immediately after the song has finished.

The rules for starting the lesson were designed as a game in which all the children in the group can take part in. When they hear Pharrell Williams' song *Happy*, the children can freely dance and move to the music. At the moment the song has finished and music has stopped, the children are to be seated in a circle at the designed place, quietly waiting for the other members of the group to do the same. The teacher counts up from 1 to 10 until everyone is seated and announces that they are the winners of the game. The game was played every music lesson twice a week.

The research was coordinated with the founder of the private preschool X and group educators. The teacher's activities before the beginning of the music lesson, its introduction and the children's behaviour at the beginning of the lesson were observed. Observations were recorded in the observation report created by the authors. Data were collected for the first 10 minutes of the lesson.

Results

The first cycle of the study was the observation of a music lesson. Observation was conducted of the teacher's activities before the beginning of the music lesson, their introduction of the lesson itself, and the children's behaviour during this lesson organisation and introduction. The observation was made in November 2019, data were collected for the first 10 minutes of the lesson. Table 1 shows the number of children who followed the teacher's instructions, and the number who did not. As the teacher prepared the room for the music lesson, and involved the children to help in the process, the children's responses and attention to what the teacher said was variable. Observational data show that the teacher needed 6 minutes to start the lesson.

Table 1. Activities in the first observation

Time	Teacher's activities	Number of children	
		Following teacher's instructions	Not following teacher's instructions
00:01	The teacher enters the classroom, greets children and preschool teachers, and says that the music lesson is starting soon. The teacher goes to the part of the classroom where the music lesson will take place and puts the necessary materials for the lessons on the windowsill.	8	9
00:02	The teacher is asking children to help her to move one table closer to the windowsill to put the electronic piano on it. The teacher thanks children for the help and leaves the classroom to bring electronic piano.	8	9
00:03	The teacher enters the room with a piano. She asks the children to sit down on the carpet in a circle while the piano and other instruments are prepared for the lesson.	4	13
00:04	The teacher invites everyone to start a music lesson by picking up the drums. The teacher sits on the carpet, and starts singing the opening song <i>Hello</i> , plays the drums and continues to invite the children to join, naming individually those who have not yet joined.	8	9
00:05	The teacher continues to sing, inviting the children to the circle to join the lesson, while expanding the circle for everyone to sit.	11	6
00:06 – 00:07	The teacher continues the lesson by singing a <i>Hello</i> song.	12	5

Analysing the data in Table 1, it is concluded that children's behavioural problems can be classified as mild behavioural violations of the rules. In the group management, the behaviour of each child is significant with dealing group dynamics. It was observed that several children at the same time were disturbing others by doing different activities from the teacher's making them distracted from the task performance.

The second observation was made in January 2020, data were collected for the first 7 minutes of the lesson. There were two months between the first and second observations, for a total of 10 lessons in which the game was played. The observations were noted in Table 2. Observational data show that the teacher needs 4 minutes to start the lesson, which is 2 minutes less than during the first observed lesson.

Table 2. Activities in the second observation

Time	Teacher's activities	Children's activities	
		<i>Following teacher's instructions</i>	<i>Not following teacher's instructions</i>
00:01	The teacher enters the classroom, holding a music speaker with Pharrell Williams' song <i>Happy</i> on. The teacher greets the children and the teachers.	15 children are immediately coming to the part of the classroom where the lesson will take place and starting to move and dance.	2 children are sitting at the table and observing ongoing activities.
00:02	The teacher leaves the classroom to bring electronic piano. After returning she starts to prepare the space for the lesson.	15 children keep dancing, jumping, and moving, performing different body movements.	2 children are sitting at the table and observing ongoing activities.
00:03	The song has finished. The teacher is standing and counting from 1 to 10.	6 out of 14 children sit down on the carpet in a circle where they were just dancing. 3 out of 14 children keep dancing and moving while teacher is counting from 1 to 10. When teacher hits 10, they sit down. 5 out of 14 children are standing and looking at the teacher.	2 children are sitting at the table and the preschool teachers gives them to use modelling clay. 1 child goes to the bathroom.
00:04	"What were the rules? Are the children who sat down first, the winners?"	15 children are sitting in the circle, four of them answer a question together by saying "yes". One child adds, that those who have sat down by the end of the song are the winners.	2 children are sitting at the table using the modelling clay.
00:05	The teacher is inviting everyone to start the music lesson. She starts singing <i>Hello</i> song and playing the drums.	15 children are sitting in the circle participating in the lesson.	2 children are sitting at the table using the modelling clay.
00:06 – 00:07	The teacher keeps running a lesson by singing <i>Hello</i> song and passing the drums around the circle.	15 children are sitting in the circle participating in the lesson.	2 children are sitting at the table using the modelling clay.

In the second observation, there was a significant increase in the number of children following the teacher's instructions. 15 out of 17 children were involved in the game and were actively moving and dancing as the song was played.

The third observation was made in March 2020, data were collected for the first 7 minutes of the lesson. There were two months between every observation. The third observations are noted in Table 3. It shows a small increase in the number of children following the teacher's instructions, compared to the number of children following instruction in the 2nd observation.

Table 3. Activities in the third observation

Time	Teacher's activities	Children's activities	
		<i>Following teacher's instructions</i>	<i>Not following teacher's instructions</i>
00:01	The teacher enters the classroom, holding a music speaker with Pharrell Williams' song <i>Happy</i> on. The teacher greets the children and the teachers.	15 children immediately are coming to the part of the classroom where the lesson will take place and starting to move and dance.	2 children are sitting at the table and observing ongoing activities.
00:02	The teacher goes out of the classroom to bring electronic piano. After returning she starts to prepare the space for the lesson.	16 children keep dancing, jumping, and moving, performing different body movements. Some children are dancing all around the classroom.	1 child is sitting at the table. The preschool teacher is giving him modelling clay to use.
00:03	The song has finished. The teacher sits down on the carpet in the lesson's circle and starts to count from 1 to 10 in order to wait for everyone to sit down in a circle. She is holding drums in her hands.	7 of 10 children sit down on the carpet in a circle where they were just dancing. 3 of 10 children keep dancing and moving while teacher is counting from 1 to 10. When teacher hits 10, they sit down.	2 children are sitting at the table and using the modelling clay.
00:04	The teacher is asking: "What were the rules? Are the children who sat down first, the winners?"	10 children are sitting in the circle, four of them are answering the question together by saying "yes". 5 children stop dancing and sit down next to others while they are listening and answering the question.	2 children are sitting at the table and using the modelling clay.

Time	Teacher's activities	Children's activities	
		<i>Following teacher's instructions</i>	<i>Not following teacher's instructions</i>
00:05	The teacher is inviting everyone to start the music lesson. She starts singing <i>Hello</i> song and playing the drums.	16 children are sitting in the circle participating in the lesson.	1 child is sitting at the table using the modelling clay.
00:06 – 00:07	The teacher continues the lesson by singing <i>Hello</i> song and passing the drums around the circle.	16 children are sitting in the circle participating in the lesson.	1 child is sitting at the table using the modelling clay.

The significant increase in the number of children following instructions (observed between 1st and 2nd observation) was not only sustained but slightly increased over time, between 2nd and 3rd observation. This demonstrates the children's' effective adaptation to the new rules. From this we may conclude that the new group management method has been effective.

The data of all observations were summarized in the table, comparing the changes in the number of children at the beginning of the lesson, choosing the first, fourth, and seventh minute as reference points in Table 4.

Table 4. Comparison of the number of children through three observation

			Time		
			00:01	00:04	00:07
First observation	Number of children	<i>Following teacher's instructions</i>	8	8	12
		<i>Not following teacher's instructions</i>	9	9	5
Second observation	Number of children	<i>Following teacher's instructions</i>	15	15	15
		<i>Not following teacher's instructions</i>	2	2	2
Third observation	Number of children	<i>Following teacher's instructions</i>	15	15	16
		<i>Not following teacher's instructions</i>	2	2	1

After the development and implementation of the problem-solving plan, it was observed that the involvement of children is immediate and sustainable. There are significant improvements as more children join the beginning of the music lesson, referring to the new signal (song) and

routine. There were several months between observations, during which the game was played regularly, making it a routine. Using the group management technique, signalling the beginning of the lesson with the help of a song, children's self-regulation was developed. The number of children who participated in the game by moving to the rhythm of the music and then sitting in a circle increased by comparing the data between the first and last observation.

Conclusions

At the beginning of the action research, it was found that children's attention is distracted, which hinders the progress of the lesson. Attention is also disturbed by the music teacher entering and leaving the group several times, bringing the necessary tools, thus confusing the children as to when the teacher is actually ready for the lesson to begin. To solve the problem, the teacher introduced a new routine at the beginning of the lesson, playing a song that signals the start of the music lesson. There were a number of benefits to using a signal as a method.

Firstly, the song was a clear signal that the music lesson is about to start, and children have to get ready for it by putting away their toys and coming to the designed place for the lessons. Efficient signals save time and lower disruptions.

Secondly, the duration of a song was suitable for the music teacher to prepare for the lessons by bringing all the necessary materials.

Finally, the song being played attracted children's attention and they were ready to react instantly to it by movement. Using the music as a stimulus for improvised body movements, it helps children to express themselves and use creativity through a movement which is important to develop at preschool age.

Evaluating possible solutions to the problems, a corrective behaviour plan was developed, taking into account both the teacher's recommendations and helping the children to concentrate on starting the music lesson, without having to wait for some children to join. Positive strategies used by teachers such as encouraging and drawing attention to positive behaviour increase desirable behaviour while decreasing undesirable one.

After the implementation of the plan, positive results were observed, which encourages the continued use of similar methods that help to solve group management problems.

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