

**“TOUCHING A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT”
AS A NEW APPROACH TO MUSIC LESSON:
THE JOINT PROJECT OF TARTU HANSA SCHOOL, DESCARTES
SCHOOL AND TARTU SECOND MUSIC SCHOOL, 2017–2019**

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to highlight the impact of a new approach on teaching and learning music and to share the experiences of instrumental group teaching in the co-operation with comprehensive schools and Tartu Second Music School. Group instrumental teaching - this form of study first was implemented in Tartu County as part of a joint project that began three years ago. The aim of the joint project was to introduce to children different music instruments in order to support their development and learning ability in primary school. The content of the joint project was as follows: the pupils of the 1st grade of comprehensive school learn to play three different music instruments (e.g. violin, piano, ukulele, accordion, Estonian zither or percussion) during one year at a music school. One music instrument is played for six weeks, one lesson (45 minutes) per week. A learning group consists of four-six students and the learning session ends with a concert at the sixth week. The project is intended to support general education.

For mapping and describing the opinions on project outcomes, we carried out a survey based on three semi-structured questionnaires. The aim of the survey was to find out music learners' (N=121), parents' (N=121) and teachers' (N=13) opinions on the project's outcomes.

The results based on the opinions of the parents show that the emotional attitude of the children was strongly positive. The children were very fond of musical instrument lessons. The results of this study show that progress was made in the development of children at all three levels according to the classical distribution of personality structure, i.e. cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. Based on the specificity of each musical instrument, the children gained new knowledge, developed their creativity, sense of rhythm, coordination, emotion, sociality. Group instrumental lessons offered a very social learning environment for the children. The pupils learned to play instruments and listen to each other at the same time, shared the gained knowledge, helped each other and increased their community spirit. The children also learned to take responsibility,

improved their ability and courage to perform. The teachers emphasized the increase in manual dexterity at the psychomotor level.

Keywords: *new approach to music lessons, group teaching, co-operation*

Introduction

Group instrumental teaching is an increasingly common form of instrumental learning in the world, less common in Estonia. There have been discussions about the challenges and possibilities of group teaching, about the advantages or disadvantages of group tuition and individual/private (one-to-one) teaching within music education in recent times (European Music School Union, 2016).

Many musicians, music teachers and researchers have found the many potential benefits of group instrumental teaching for students (Lennon, 2013, 2015; European Music School Union, 2016; Topham, 2017; Conaghan, 2014, 2019; Barley, 2019; Lee, 2019). Lennon (2013) has suggested that well handled series of group lessons actually had more educational potential than the traditional 'conservatoire' style one-to-one teaching that seems so highly valued. For instance, Lee (2019) has totally revolutionised her studio from private teaching to only group teaching. Conaghan (2019) has highlighted/underlined that all general education students have to equal opportunities to study the instrument. Today, nearly 2.000 students continue to enjoy stringing at Irish schools and this tuition is free.

Group instrumental teaching as a form of study was first implemented in Tartu County (Estonia) as part of a joint project that began three years ago. Different partners had to be involved in the joint project. The co-operation project involves elementary school students from two comprehensive schools: Tartu Hansa School and Tartu Descartes School. The third partner school is Tartu Second Music School. The project is supported by the Education Department of Tartu City Government.

The content of the project was following: the pupils of the 1st grade of comprehensive school learn to play three different music instruments (e.g. violin, piano, ukulele, accordion or percussion, as well as small Estonian zither (with seven strings) during one year at a music school. One music instrument is played for six weeks, one lesson (45 minutes) per week. A learning group consists of four-six students and the learning session ends with a concert at the sixth week. The project was part of an outdoor study program. Attending music school took two school hours (according to comprehensive schools' timetable). Within one hour, the children went to the music school on foot and came back from there also on foot in any weather. During another 45-minute school hour, children studied one musical instrument in the music school. The project is intended to support general education.

Aim of the research: to highlight the impact of a new approach to teaching and learning music and to share the experiences of group instrumental teaching in cooperation with comprehensive schools and Tartu Second Music School. The aim of the joint project was to introduce to children different instruments in order to support their development and learning ability in primary school.

Object of the research: the profile overview of the opinions of the pupils, their parents and teachers on the joint project's outcomes. Pupils of the 1st grade of comprehensive

school who attend music school with the aim of becoming acquainted with three different musical instruments within one year.

Methods

For mapping and describing the opinions on project outcomes, we carried out a survey based on three semi-structured questionnaires: one for music learners, the second for their parents and the third for teachers. The aim of the survey was to find out music learners' (all together N=121), parents' (N=121) and teachers' (N=13) opinions on the project's outcomes. In April of the 2017/2018 academic year, the first survey was carried out. 66 questionnaires were received. In May of the 2018/2019, the second survey was conducted. 55 questionnaires were received. In June 2019, the questionnaire for 16 teachers was distributed. We received back 13 answers from teachers.

The questionnaires were analysed qualitatively as well as quantitatively. The analysis was undertaken quantitatively using the *Statistical Package for Social Sciences for Windows* (SPSS). The data table of the SPSS statistics software contains numerical data as categorical data had been entered into the table with the help of numerical codes. I used summative qualitative content analysis as a method in my research (Lahterand, 2008, 297–199). The answers were carefully read and grouped, similar answers categorized and coded then. As stated above, categorical data are entered into the SPSS programme with the help of numerical codes. The answers were analysed with the SPSS 20.0 statistics package.

SPSS for Windows is a data analysis system that provides very good tools for managing and statistical analysis of great data sets. In the research were used study materials developed by Katrin Niglas, Professor of Data Analysis at the Institute of Information Science at Tallinn University, in 2008 (www.tlu.ee/~katrin). Data were managed in the SPSS data window into which data can be entered and processed in two modes: on the Data View and the Variable View. The data table (Data View) thus contained rows (cases) and columns (variables). Each line on the data sheet corresponds to a case, in this research - to one respondent (121 pupils, 121 parents, 13 teachers). Each column corresponds to one variable (in this study to one possible answer).

As the question may contain different answers, it was more productive to create a separate variable for each possible answer. When questions contain more than one answer, a method was chosen where a separate variable was created for each possible answer and the possible values were no/yes, entered into the SPSS data sheet with the numerical code 0 and 1. Researcher operated with the dichotomously coded questions with several possible answers/for multiple choice questions. Thus, for multiple choice questions, variables were created on a binary scale 'No'=0 and 'Yes'= 1.

It was not necessary to provide a detailed description of the data coding in the article as it is general knowledge in the case of the SPSS programme for reaching the necessary results (percentages, graphs, bar charts etc.). The SPSS data table only contains numerical values, which enabled me to get percentages of answers.

Results of the Research

A. The feedback from the pupils on a joint project

The following questions were asked to the pupils of the 1st grade of comprehensive school (N=121):

1. *What instruments did you play at the music school in this school year?*
2. *Which musical instrument did you like the most? Why?*
3. *Which of the musical instruments did you not like? Why?*
4. *What do you want to say to a music teacher?*
5. *Would you like to continue studying music at a music school next year with one particular instrument? (a) If YES, what kind of instrument would you like to study in depth? if NO, why not?*
6. *What do you recommend for next year's Grade 1 kids who are learning to play a musical instrument?*
7. *What did you like the most in a class of instrumental lessons?*

In answer to the first question, the children named the following different musical instruments: accordion, piano, percussion (among these triangles, xylophone), ukulele, violin.

Now about the answers to the second and third questions. Based on pupils' responses, no instrument distinguished itself as a special preference. Children liked most violin – 37 respondents or 30.6% answered like that, ukulele – 29 respondents or 24%, piano – 22 respondents or 18.2%, accordion – 20 respondents or 16,5%, percussion – 8 (6,6%). But paradox is that while ukulele was one of the most liked musical instruments, it was also a more frequent musical instrument that was not liked by children – 28 of respondents or 23.1%. In other words, a quarter of the children did not like ukulele and the children often answered: *the ukulele playing makes my fingers sore* (C2.8; C1.7, C1.8; C1.44, C1.), *ukulele hurts fingers* (C1.4, C1.6, C1.28, C1.37, C1.47, C1.55 and others); *difficult to play* (C.2.40; C1.63, C1.65 etc.). Playing the violin also hurt the fingers of the left hand (C1.13, C1.1).

Children were very fond of musical instrument lessons. Pupils' answers to the question "What do you want to say to the teacher?" see in Figure 1. The children thanked and praised the teacher (46.3%). For instance, one child writes/lists in capital letters: *1. The piano teacher is nice. 2. The violin teacher is good. 3. The ukulele teacher is cool.* (C1.3), or simply: *You are good* (C2.54). Here were also recommendations with a critical arrow (14%). For instance: *Play more with the kids. The violin supply teacher played with us a lot* (C1.58); *There could be more play in a lesson* (C1.16); *The pieces of music to be learned could be more complex* (C2.20), *The lessons could be a little longer* (C2.25), and positive recommendations were 12.4%. For instance: *Teach in the same way* (C1.13).

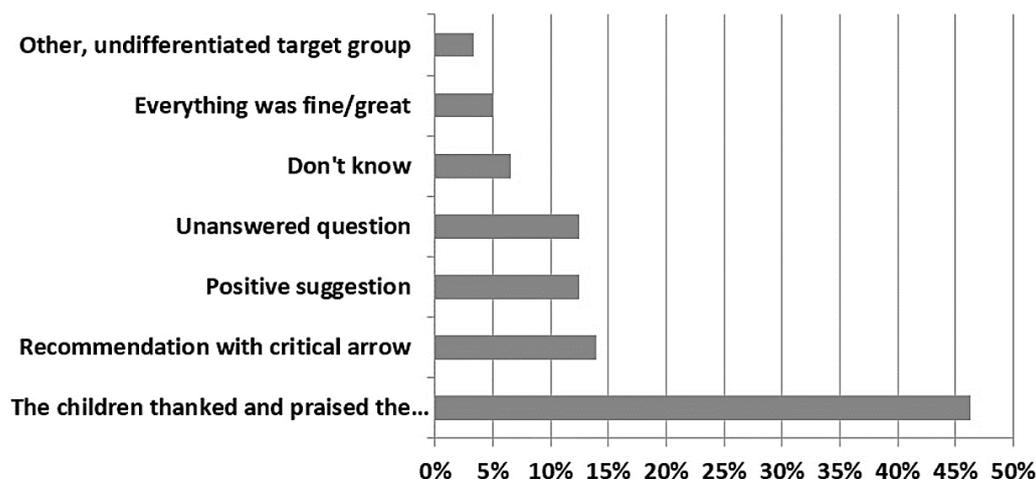


Figure 1. Children's answers to the question „What do you want to say to the teacher“ (N=121)

However, 32.2% did not answer the question “What kind of instrument would you like to study in depth?”. The piano came first in the hierarchy of preferences (24%) only the next was the violin, then the ukulele.

To the question „Why don't you want to continue playing the instrument in depth“, the answers were divided as follows: 83 respondents or 68.6% simply did not answer, 13 (10.7%) seven (5.8%) answered that the agenda was tight and six (5%) simply did not want said that it was difficult.

To the following question “What do you recommend for next year's Grade 1 kids who are learning to play a musical instrument?” almost half of the children (47.9%) responded to the question with a positive suggestion on how to learn. 25 pupils (20.7%) wished briefly to succeed. 16 of the pupils recommended actively taking part in a musical lesson.

Based on pupils' responses to the questions “What did you like the most in a class of instrumental lessons? What was the most fun?” the following semantic categories were distinguished:

- 1) *Most of all I liked playing different instruments/practicing/studying* – 53 children (43.8%) mentioned it;
- 2) *Playing games* – 34 respondents (28,1%). It means that one third of the children highlighted playing games;
- 3) *Liked the teacher and the lesson* – 19 respondents (15,7%);
- 4) It was also mentioned that *I liked certain tunes, in particular new tunes* – eight respondents (6.6%);
- 5) *I liked concerts and performances together* – eight respondents (6,6%);
- 6) Seven children (5,8%) replied that *everything was great*;
- 7) *Self-creation and independence were also valued* among five children (4.1 %);
- 8) Four children (3.3%) enjoyed singing during the lessons;
- 9) Five children did not answer this question.

Table 1. Distribution of children's answers to the question „What you liked the most in a class of instrumental lessons?“ (N=121)

ANSWERS CATEGORIES	FREQUENCY	%
Playing different instruments, practicing	53	43.8
Playing games	34	28.1
Liked teacher and the music lessons	19	15.7
Liked certain tunes, new tunes	8	6.6
Liked concerts	8	6.6
Everything was great	7	5.8
Liked self-creation and independence	5	4.1
Enjoyed singing during the lesson	4	3.2
Unanswered	5	4.1

B. The feedback from the parents on a joint project

The results of the survey show that the parents felt that the emotional mood of their children was strongly positive during the project. To sum up, researcher was amazed at how positive the project was from the parents' perspective.

The following questions were asked to the parents (N=121):

- 1) *What kind of feedback did your child receive about the instrument lessons?*
- 2) *What made you happy with this project?*
- 3) *What was it about this joint project that raised questions for you? (What was the problem for you?)*
- 4) *What are the options for your child to continue playing the musical instrument?*
- 5) *I want to say that....*

Let's first look at the categories that emerged from the parents' answers to the question "What kind of feedback did your child receive about the instrument lessons?" (See Table 2):

- 1) 51 parents or 42.1% of respondents answered like "Very positive feedback shortly, the child really liked them";
- 2) Respectively 48 respondents or 39.7% answered like "About instrumental lessons and music school in general";
- 3) 47 respondents or 38.8% answered like "Description of the child's emotion, often repeated by words such as excited, cheerfully, "fierce", child's eyes were shining. The child was filled with passion, the child was happy, used the word "cool", the child's eyes were shining, was fun, was exciting, was very pleased";
- 4) 33 respondents or 27.3% answers about specific music instrument like "The value of trying different musical instruments";
- 5) 17 respondents or 14% answered like "The child shared new information and new knowledge at home";
- 6) 10 respondents or 8.3 % answered like "There was no feedback from the child/the child didn't speak (anything) at home. The mother had to ask";
- 7) Six respondents or 5% answered like "The child praised the teacher";
- 8) Two respondents or 1.7% stressed positive response to concerts;
- 9) There was only one negative response to the concerts/performances;
- 10) Four parents (3.3%) did not answer this question.

Table 2. The categories that emerged from the parents' answers to the question "What kind of feedback did your child receive about the instrument lessons?" (N=121)

ANSWERS CATEGORIES	FREQUENCY	%
Very positive feedback	51	42.1
About instrumental lessons and music school in general	48	39.7
Description of the child's emotion (excited, happy, cheerfully, "fierce", child's eyes were shining, etc.)	47	38.8
The value of trying different musical instruments	33	27.3
The child shared new knowledges at home	17	14.0
No feedback from the child (at home)	10	8.3
The child praises the teacher	6	5.0
Unanswered	4	3.3
Positive response to concerts	2	1.7
Negative response to concerts	1	0.8

Here are the parents' answers to the question "What made you happy with this project?" The following semantic categories were distinguished in the case of making happy with the project:

- 1) 70 parents or 57.9 % of respondents answered like that children got to know/try different instruments;
- 2) Respectively 26 respondents or 21.5% mentioned gaining new knowledge, broadening horizons, highlighting the need for a joint project;
- 3) Respectively 25 respondents or 20.7% highlighted the need for a joint project;
- 4) 22 respondents or 18.2% stressed children's growing interest in music, the desire to study further;
- 5) 19 respondents or 15.7% mentioned children's positive emotions during instrument lessons;
- 6) 15 respondents or 12.4% stressed the importance of concert experience;
- 7) Four respondents or 3.3% expressed appreciation/acknowledgement of music teachers' contribution to children's aesthetic development;
- 8) Two respondents or 1.7% stressed that the main results of this project – development of children's creativity and independence;
- 9) 10 respondents or 8.3% did not answer this question.

116 parents did not answer to the questions "What was it about this joint project that raised questions for you?" "What was the problem for you?" It can be concluded that the vast majority of parents, 96%, did not have any questions about the project. Only three parents (2.5%) pointed out the need for better information about the concerts. One parent pointed out the need for music teacher feedback on the student's progress (P1.32).

Parents' answers to the question "What options do you see for continuing with a musical instrument?" were as follows:

- 1) 22 parents or 18.2% of respondents answered that the child doesn't continue playing the instrument;
- 2) 21 respondents or 17.4% could not answer this question;
- 3) 15 respondents or 12.4% answered like „The child starts a Hansa school in a hobby class“;

- 4) 13 respondents or 10.7% answered that their child will begin studying at a music school next year;
- 5) 12 respondents or 9.9% answered that continuation depends on the child's best interests;
- 6) 10 respondents or 8.3% answered that the child will not continue due to overload;
- 7) Eight respondents or 6.6% answered that their child is already learning the instrument;
- 8) Six of respondents or 5.0% answered that their child continues in both hobby group and/or music school;
- 9) Two of respondents or 1.7% answered that their child does not continue due to lack of financial means;
- 10) Two of respondents or 1.7% answered that their child continues (independently) under the guidance of family members;
- 11) Two of respondents or 1.7% answered that their child will continue in the school hobby group;
- 12) 1 of respondent or 0.8% answered that the child studies at music school;
- 13) Seven of respondents or 5.8% did not answer this question.

Summarizing the results of the survey, it is obvious that: a) one fifth of parents do not consider necessary to continue playing the instrument and 17.4% of them were in doubt, answering „I can't say, it's still open, *vague*“; b) children continue to attend a general education school in a hobby circle rather than a music school (parents' reasons: busy schedule of children, as well as children's priorities are other fields of interest).

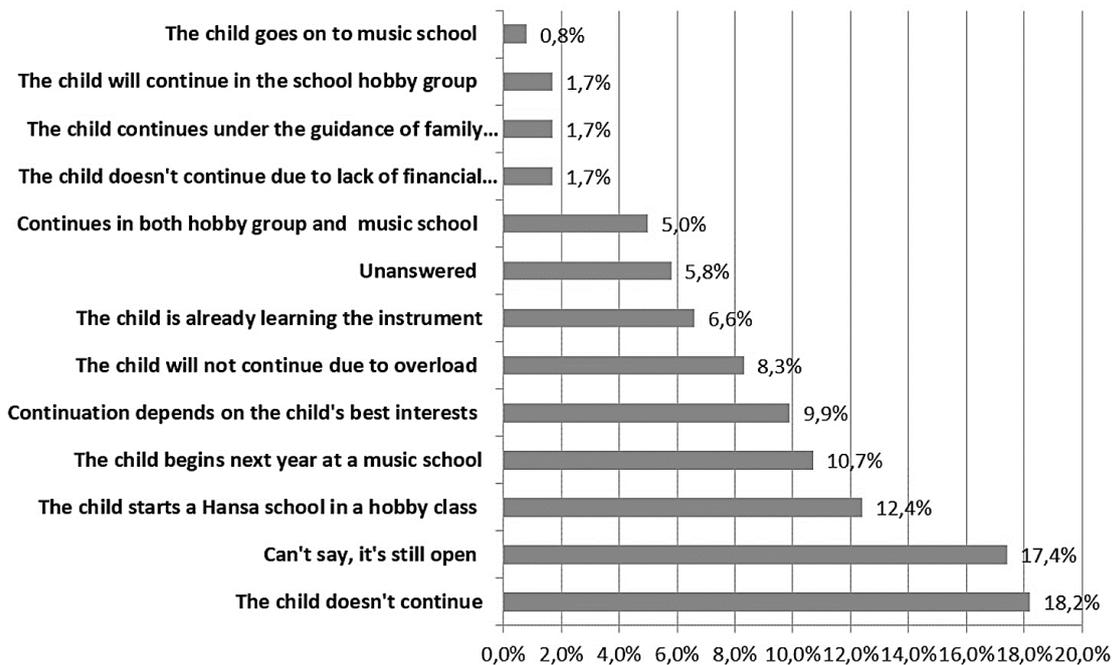


Figure 2. The distribution of parents' answers to the question "What options do you see for continuing with a musical instrument?" (N=121)

The study has revealed that when parents had an opportunity to add something (the last question), 36 (30%) of them praised the project, highlighted the benefits of the

project and stressed the need for it. Nearly a third of parents thanked teachers and schools in general and in particular. Only three parents highlighted the shortcomings and emphasized the need for better information about the concerts; In general, the parents wanted to attend concerts, but the concerts took place in the morning on working days. The three parents (P1.9; P1.19, P1.59) wanted to know if the child had any prerequisites for playing the music instrument in the future.

C. The feedback from the teachers on the joint project

The following questions were asked to the teachers (N=13):

- 1) *How important do you consider the cooperation between the general education school and the music school?*
- 2) *How do you evaluate the effectiveness of the group lesson form in instrumental learning in this collaborative project?*
- 3) *How do you evaluate the impact of the joint project as a whole?*
- 4) *How do you see the project's impact on the child's development of new knowledge (cognitive level)?*
- 5) *development of emotions (affective level)?*
- 6) *development of the child's manual activity (psychomotor level)?*
- 7) *Which were the good aspects of the joint project?*
- 8) *Which were the bottlenecks of the joint project?*
- 9) *Do you think it is necessary to continue the joint project?*
- 10) *Would you like to comment? Do you want to add something or comment?*

First general data: eight teachers from comprehensive schools and five teachers from music school answered the questionnaire. There were 11 female and 2 male teachers. Five teachers were 55 years or older, three were 45–54 years old. Five teachers have master's degree (or equal to master degree), four teachers had secondary-vocational.

The answers to the first question „*How important do you consider the cooperation between the general education school and the music school*” were as follows: 11 teachers responded that they considered cooperation or joint project to be very necessary, one teacher – as quite necessary and one did not consider it necessary.

There were very different answers to the question “*How do you evaluate the effectiveness of the group lesson form in instrumental learning in this joint project?*” Five teachers found the results very good. Opinions differed on the size of the group. One teacher stated that six children in the group were the right size; another stated that five students in the group was the maximum and the third thought that one-to-one teaching would still be most effective. In a group lesson all of the students should be actively involved.

To the question „*How do you evaluate the impact of the joint project as a whole*” the following teachers' viewpoints were highlighted:

- „*Children gained new knowledge/project providing new knowledge and developing children*” – four teachers (T2, T4, T7, MT2/10);
- „*The project was rated very successful, very good*” – three teachers (T1, T3, T5);
- „*A positive evaluation of the project*” – two teachers (T6, T8);
- „*A positive experience for children*” – one teacher (MT4/12);

- „Gratitude from children“ – one (MT1/9);
- „Good project“ – one teacher (MT3/11);
- „Can't say“ – one teacher (MT5/13).

The following three questions dealt with teachers' assessments of the impact of the joint project on the child's development of new knowledge (cognitive level), child's emotional development (affective level), and manual activity/development (psychomotor level).

Answering the question „How do you see the project's impact on the child's development of new knowledge (cognitive level)?“ the teachers highlighted:

- „Getting new knowledge – six (T1, T3, T8, MT1/9, MT2/10, MT4/12);
- „Developing a child“ – four (T2, T5, T7, MT2/10);
- „Having a great positive impact“ – three (T1, T4, T6);
- „Getting more music students“ – two (MT1/9, MT3/11);
- „Helping with school music lesson“ – one (T3);
- unanswered – one (MT5/13).

Teachers' views on the question „How do you see the project's impact on the child's development of emotions (affective level)?“ were as follows:

- „Naming affective states“ – seven (T2, T4, T6, T8, MT1/9, MT2/10; MT4/12);
- „Lots of positive emotions“ – two (T1, T3);
- „A child with special educational needs (attention disorder) attended the lesson, joint concerts, making music together“ – two (T2, T5).

Teachers emphasize the following values: calmness, joy, curiosity, loss of fear for not knowing, enthusiasm, constructive motivation. The elementary school teachers considered the size of the group well suited to the child's emotional development.

Answering the question „How do you see the project's impact on the child's development of the child's manual activity (psychomotor level)?“, the teachers emphasized the increase in manual dexterity on the psychomotor level. The teachers described how the child progressed on a psychomotor level. Seven teachers (T1, T2, T3, MT1/9, MT2/10, MT3/11, MT4/12) pointed out that the project considerably developed motor skills. Because playing a musical instrument requires a great deal of coordination: „The child must move one hand one way and the other hand the other (accordion, Estonian zither)“ (T3, MT2, MT3, MT4). Improved dexterity, sense of rhythm. The teachers pointed out, that the child's confidence in himself grew (T5). Two teachers (T2, T6) responded that the impact was great. According to one teacher, „...the impact of the joint project was individual, but some children had noticeable progress“ (T7). One teacher stated that „...it is difficult to say how measurable this effect is, but in spring I feel the project has definitely had a positive“ (T8). Only one teacher answered „I can't say“ (MT5/13).

The results of this study show that progress was made in the development of the children at all three levels according to the classical distribution of personality structure, i.e. cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains.

For the questions „*Which were the good aspects of the joint project?*“ and „*Which were the bottlenecks of the joint project?*“ were a series of multiple choice questions that asked teachers to indicate which of the following options were appropriate for them.

The following points were listed as good aspects of the joint project: cyclicity, periodicity (2), joint concerts (4), studying different musical instruments (4), creating interest in music (5); widening/broadening the horizon of the child (4), increase of social skills (4), eliminateing fear (2), working with parents/increased cooperation with parents (4), developing and producing a positive emotion (2), moving away from routine (1).

The next question was „*Which were the bottlenecks of the joint project?*“ Six teachers found no bottlenecks; two music teachers stated that the group was too large, which led to discipline issues; two teachers did not answer this question; one teacher stated as bottleneck the need for an assistant teacher; one teacher found the project was too short for authentic children, and one more teacher found children too young.

The distribution of teachers' answers to the question „*Do you think it is necessary to continue the joint project?*“: „*Yes, sure/certainly*“ – 12 teachers answered like that. One teacher answered: „*The class leader can answer this question*“. Seven teachers did not want to add anything or comment, five teachers responded with thanks. One teacher answered, that there was a need for training to conduct a group lesson: „*In the case of children with behavioral disorders, the teacher could have some course or training on how to conduct a group lesson with them*“ (MT2/10).

The results of the survey show that the project should be continued. This is confirmed by 12 teachers, also acknowledged by the children and their parents. The study has revealed that when parents had an opportunity to add something – 30% of them praised the project, highlighted the benefits of the project and stressed the need for it. Nearly a third of parents thanked teachers and schools in general and in particular. From the point of view of the music schools, it is necessary to continue the project too, because this will make it clearer to the whole society that music education and music school are necessary.

Discussion and Conclusions

The results of the surveys showed that opinions on the project's outcomes were convincingly positive. The results based on the opinions of the parents show that the emotional attitude of the children was strongly positive. The results of the surveys showed that both parents and children were very positive about the project. The studies provided evidence that the parents' support and attitude to the project were very positive even if the child did not want to continue studying the musical instrument for various reasons. A really amazing was the fact of positive evaluation of the project from the parents' perspective. The children were very fond of musical instrument lessons. Parents rejoiced at the joy and enthusiasm of their children that the project gave them. The study has revealed that only three parents highlighted the shortcomings and emphasized the need for better information about the concerts. Particularly enthusiastic were the teachers of the comprehensive schools. Music teachers were also positive and supportive, but there was an opinion/view that individual learning is more effective. Lennon (2013) has stated that group teaching is a subject which frequently

brings out the best and worst of attitudes among instrumental teachers. The class music teacher's aims are different – they don't have to produce competent instrumentalists who can pass grade exams. The response of one teacher highlighted the need for (teacher) training to conduct a group lesson, as this is a key point for the project's success, especially if cooperation is to be extended to other schools in the future.

The results of this study show that progress was made in the development of children at all three levels according to the classical distribution of personality structure, i.e. cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. The teachers emphasized the increase in manual dexterity on the psychomotor level. Based on the specificity of each musical instrument, the children gained new knowledge, developed their creativity, sense of rhythm, coordination, emotion, sociality. Group instrumental lessons offered a very social learning environment to the children. The pupils learned to play instruments and listen to each other at the same time, shared the gained knowledge, helped each other and increased their community spirit. The children also learned to take responsibility, improved their ability and courage to perform. The child's confidence in him/herself grew. As Conaghan (2014, 2019) has underlined, all general education students must have equal opportunities to study the instrument.

The research data suggested that the impact of a new approach on teaching and learning music was distinguishable: the good impact of the joint project on child's development and learning ability was clearly perceived. Moreover, the joint project certainly increased the cohesion of the society/the cohesiveness of the community, as all 1st grade students in the general education school had equal and free access to various musical instruments.

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Received 26.02.2020

Accepted 05.04.2020