

MUSIC EDUCATION IN A SMALL RURAL SCHOOL

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Abstract

The article deals with the issue of small rural schools and the possibilities of teaching music education in these schools. Small rural schools are schools with a small number of classes, where two or three school years are taught simultaneously in one classroom. Most of the time, these schools are established in small villages, at the primary school level. Teaching in small schools has its specificities, some of which can be seen as strengths and some as weaknesses in the teaching process.

Today, in many countries, more and more young families are moving to the countryside to raise their children closer to nature. It can therefore be expected that interest in setting up small rural schools will increase.

The article introduces the personal experience of the author of the thesis, who teaches all music education classes at a small rural school in the Czech Republic. We present here brief results of a research conducted in the form of a questionnaire among 34 teachers of small-class schools. The conclusions from her research are interpreted by the author of the thesis in such a way as to inspire other teachers of music education in small-class schools and possibly also teachers of full primary schools who are interested in the idea of pupils of different ages working together for a common musical outcome.

Keywords

Small rural school – music education – music activities – family environment – teaching methods – questionnaire

Introduction

In the past, small rural schools, schools with a small number of classes, were the most common form of school organization. Only due to significant urbanization and other social changes in the past decades have their numbers declined. Nevertheless, small-class schools remain an important phenomenon of the Czech education system and it is interesting to observe their weaknesses but also their considerable advantages and benefits for pupils.

There are quite a few publications in our literature analyzing the issue and importance of small schools, which does not correspond to the continuing interest of parents in these schools. Daniela Bubeníčková is herself a teacher at a small rural school and is the author of a successfully defended thesis on music education in a small rural school. We publish here the results of her research among teachers of small rural schools in terms of music education and also her personal experience of teaching in this type of school.

Small rural school – clarification of the concept

In the Czech Republic, the term small rural school (small class school) refers to a primary school focused on the education of pupils in the first grade, where pupils from two or three different grades are taught in one classroom. A small rural (small class) school educating pupils in the first stage of primary school may take the form of a one-class school (where children in Years 1 to 5 are taught together), or a two-class school (where two or three linked years are taught together) or a three-class school (where two years are taught together and one year is taught separately).

According to Act No 561/2004 Coll. on pre-school, primary, secondary, higher vocational and other education,¹ which governs both small schools and full schools, it is usual to divide the year groups into common classes using one of these options:

Option A

1st class – 1st and 2nd year

2nd class – 3rd and 4th year

3rd class – 5th grade

Option B

1st class – 1st and 3rd year

2nd class – 2nd, 4th and 5th grade

Option C

1st class – 1st and 4th grade

2nd class – 2nd and 3rd grade

3rd class – 4th and 5th grade

The number of pupils in linked classes is also set by decree:²

- A school consisting of one first-grade class has at least 10 pupils per class.
- A school consisting of two first-grade classes has at least 12 pupils on average per class.
- A school consisting of three classes of first grade has at least 14 pupils on average per class.
- A school consisting of four or more classes in the first stage has at least 15 pupils on average per class.

The grading of classes shall be determined by the school management according to various factors. In particular, the number of children in a given grade and the number of teachers available to the school play a role.

Combined classes in one grade, i.e. small schools, are established in our country mainly in small villages so that children of younger school age do not have to commute to schools

¹ § 2 odst. 1 Zákona č. 561/2004 Sb. Školský zákon – znění od 01.02.2022 [§ 2 (1) of Act No. 561/2004 Coll., the School Act – amended from 01.02.2022].

² § 4 vyhlášky č. 48/2005 Sb.

in larger towns. At present, small-class schools account for almost 40 % of the total number of primary schools, and about half of these schools report being catchment schools for one to five villages. They are subject to the same laws and have the same learning outcomes as full schools.³ The founder of a small school may be the municipality in which the school is located, a registered church, or a legal or natural person.

From the history of small rural schools in the Czech Republic

Elementary education in the historical Czech lands was organized as a small class from its very beginnings. According to many historical sources, there were around 60 or more pupils of different ages in one classroom, but the level of teaching corresponded to this. Among the first schools were church and parish schools, which focused not only on writing, reading, and arithmetic. They provided pupils with a musical education for the practical needs of performing musicians during worship, and talented children received an education that often enabled them to pursue careers in adulthood.⁴

In 1774, Maria Theresa established compulsory schooling for the first time in this country, and according to a reform proposal by the educator and abbot Johann Ignaz Felbiger, three types of schools continued to be established: trivial, main and normal. Even at that time, these were mostly small schools, none of which had as many classes as there were grades. There were as many as 80 children to one teacher in one classroom. Only after the number of pupils exceeded 100 were additional classes opened.

The term *small class school* was first mentioned in 1869 in the New Reich School Law, which introduced some progressive organizational and educational elements into the school system.⁵ At that time, and for a long time afterward, we can say until the period after 1945, the small-class form of education applied not only to the first grade but also to the second grade of primary (general) schools.

In 1922, the so-called Small Schools Act was issued, which, among other things, set the maximum number of pupils in each class at sixty. Due to the large number of children after the First World War, 80 % of education in the Czech lands was small-class education.⁶ Special curricula were issued for these schools with a somewhat reduced teaching content. Because of the narrowing of the scope of the curriculum, the small-class school was considered to provide a lower-quality education. Despite the democratic efforts of the reformist pedagogue Václav Příhoda, it was not possible to ensure that all children from villages were transported to the township schools and the problem remained unresolved.

In the 1950s to 1970s, with the changed political situation in our country, small classes were abolished and the state supported the establishment of complete schools. After 1989, municipalities could also become school founders. *Between 1990 and 1996, 308 new*

³ Trnková, Kateřina, Dana Knotová and Lucie Škarková. *Málotřídní školy v České republice: malotřídky* [Small schools in the Czech Republic: *malotřídky*]. Brno: Paido, 2010, chapter 2.3.

⁴ Vomáčka, Jiří. *Málotřídní školy. Nástin pedagogické problematiky* [Small class schools. Outline of pedagogical issues]. Liberec: Technická univerzita. Fakulta pedagogická, 1995.

⁵ Gregor, Vladimír a Tibor Sedlický. *Dějiny hudební výchovy v českých zemích a na Slovensku* [History of Music Education in the Czech Lands and Slovakia]. 2nd edition. Praha: Editio Supraphon, 1990, p. 41.

⁶ Kasper, Tomáš and Dana Kasperová. *Dějiny pedagogiky* [History of pedagogy]. Praha: Grada Publishing, 2008, p. 198-199.

*primary schools were established, of which 257 were small.*⁷ Municipalities wanted to provide basic facilities for their residents, and this included transport access to primary schools.

Specificity of teaching in a small class school

The main characteristic of a small classroom is that it is attended by a small number of pupils and taught by a small number of teachers (usually three or four). The advantage of a school in a small village is therefore good social visibility, but at the same time, there may be pressures on parents or teachers, who usually do not have the anonymity in a village as they do in large cities.

The second distinctive feature of small schools is the status of **the pupil**. The authors of all the available studies agree that a child in a small-class school usually feels like an extended family: pupils know each other well and have regular contact with their classmates' siblings and parents. This can be exploited by the teacher in and out of class in the way that older pupils can help younger pupils with explanations and homework, and are natural role models for the younger pupils. Both younger and older pupils learn to work together on a common task.

In terms of **methods and organizational forms** of work, the alternation of direct and indirect teaching is the most typical feature of the small class. For example, the teacher introduces a discussion circle, a song, or a motivational game at the beginning of the lesson. Afterward, one group of pupils is given an independent work assignment to review and practice the material from previous lessons. During the independent work of one group, the teacher focuses on the other group. Then the activities of the two groups alternate. This alternation of activities can take place twice in one lesson.

A **teacher** in a small rural school must be a very good organizer of classroom activities. He or she has a good knowledge of the abilities of individual pupils and can adapt the assignments to their level. For pupils to work faster, the teacher should have extra work ready. For more gifted pupils, it is advisable to have more difficult tasks prepared, using the pupil's thinking and creative potential. The role of the teacher is demanding and very responsible in a small school.

Supporting the development of musicality in small kindergartens

A small class school may also include a kindergarten. Kindergartens provide preschool education and have a long tradition in the Czech Republic as a complement to family education. They have a strong social care and socialization function, helping to balance differences between children in their social and cultural habits. The concept of preschool education in our country is guided by the Framework Curriculum for Pre-School Education, in which music education is an important area of education and is given appropriate importance for the comprehensive development of the child's personality. Small kindergartens, like full kindergartens, have as one of their aims to encourage the development of children's musicality and

⁷ Průcha, Jan. *Pedagogická encyklopedie* [Pedagogical Encyclopedia]. Praha: Portál, 2009, p. 304.

to arouse their interest in music in one of its areas, through vocal and singing, instrumental, musical movement, and listening activities.

Small kindergartens often organize public musical performances in their communities, especially Christmas programs and other cultural programs for parents of children and the general public, with whom these performances are very popular and receive well-deserved recognition. Children sing, accompany themselves on simple musical instruments, dance, etc. Small village kindergartens thus play an important role in the musical development of preschool children, similar to full kindergartens in towns, and are an important precursor to a child's entry into a small primary school.

Teaching music education in a small rural school

The teaching of all subjects in small rural schools is governed by the Framework Curriculum for Primary Education, based on which each school develops its own School Curriculum, which replaces the former curriculum for individual subjects. The objectives and outcomes of this curriculum are the same for both small and full schools. With the more difficult organization of teaching in the context of combined year groups, the quality of teaching depends mainly on the pedagogical qualities of the teachers of small-class schools.

Music education in small schools is part of the Arts and Culture curriculum area. This area includes the educational disciplines of Music Education and Art Education. The Arts and Culture area is intended to enable pupils to learn about the world and human culture in its historical development and as part of the everyday life of individuals in society, other than in a rational way. At Key Stage 1 of primary education, pupils are introduced to the means of musical expression and folk art and learn to work creatively with them. They learn the laws of musical creation on selected works of art and folk art and develop their sensitivity. The starting point of music education is the musical activities of the pupils and the teacher.

General recommendations for teaching music education in small rural schools and the author's suggestions for their implementation

The content of the subject of music education is governed by general music didactic principles. The curriculum⁸ is divided into four areas of activities, namely vocal, listening, instrumental and musical movement activities. Each of the activities has its own specificities and requires very good organizational skills of the teacher, cooperation and mutual respect of the pupils.

The vocal activities at the first stage of primary school are focused on working with the voice, cultivating singing and speaking and developing and consolidating correct singing habits. Vocal activities are regularly implemented in every lesson. As a rule, the above-mentioned system is also used, whereby older pupils teach the younger ones, for example,

⁸ *Rámcový vzdělávací program pro základní vzdělávání* [Framework curriculum for primary education; online]. Praha: MŠMT, 2021. Accessible from: <https://www.msmt.cz/file/56005/> [cit. 21.09.2022].

repeating a familiar song with them, practicing the rhythm of a song declaimed in rhythmic syllables, or pointing out incorrect breathing, vocal or articulation habits to their younger classmates and correcting their performance. The teacher varies the difficulty of each song so that each year group develops its skills and does not stagnate at a certain level.

Since correct breathing, singing and articulation habits must be consolidated and improved continuously during the school year (with one music lesson per week there is little room for reliable consolidation of habits), and because there is no significant difference between the level of singing skills of younger and older pupils, it is possible to work with a whole mixed group of both years at once and only require the older pupils to have more conscious control over their singing skills.

Since the beginning of schooling, the teacher of a small school has the opportunity to include many breathing, voice and articulation exercises in other lessons, for example, Czech language or primary school, as part of cross-curricular relations. Thanks to the playful approach, pupils will not even know that they are improving their musical skills, which in turn facilitates their musical expression. As an example of the use of articulation exercises in 1st and 2nd-grade Czech language lessons, we can mention the song *Holka modrooká*. Although the lesson aims to distinguish vowels from consonants, pupils can sing a folk song and change all the vowels in it to just one designated vowel. They will create a kind of linguistic puzzle requiring a greater degree of concentration: for example, the well-known articulation game *„Helke medreeke“*. Thanks to the playful concept of the Czech language, articulation skills are improved and two subjects are linked functionally. The appropriate incorporation of various musical exercises or singing songs into other subjects also has other positive effects on the teaching process, bringing in elements of relaxation or, on the contrary, encouraging pupils' concentration, making the teaching more varied, calming dramatic situations, etc.

Listening activities are connected with the perception and understanding of music samples from compositions of important composers or even from the field of popular music. Pupils learn about the basic qualities of tones, musical forms, musical styles and genres, they learn to understand the means of musical expression and to understand their meaning and function in a musical message. In a small school, it is challenging to differentiate listening activities for each year group, but it is possible, for example, to work with one listening piece and for each year group to observe different phenomena at the level of their listening experience and skills, which the teacher then analyses with each group separately. The teacher also requires the older pupils to know the music-theoretical concepts discussed. It is therefore important to analyze a piece of music or a sample of it gradually, from the younger grades and their level of perception and discussion of the piece to the older grades, whose pupils can complement, clarify and extend the answers of their younger classmates by adding their own emotional and aesthetic experience of the music. In this way, younger pupils learn from their older classmates, not only knowledge but also a way of expressing themselves about music.

Instrumental activities at the 1st level of primary school are realized as playing simple musical instruments mostly from Orff's instrumentarium, recorders, and keyboards. Pupils play motifs, themes, and simple compositions on them, most often playing simple instrumental accompaniments to folk and artificial songs. Instrumental activities are a very suitable means of developing children's musical creativity in the form of rhythmization, melodization of pop songs and nursery rhymes, improvisation in pentatonic space, creation of overtures, etc.

In a small school, the division into different grades gives the possibility of using group work and giving each group a specific instrument, appropriate to their musical level, on which the pupils create the given tasks. The groups then come together to play and sing together, using rhythmic polyphony or vocal polyphony as appropriate. Thus, working in a music education class can resemble working in a choir or instrumental group, an orchestra, where there are also advanced members and each year there are younger members who are still learning the repertoire. Some of the older students may like to try their conducting skills and lead the class „orchestra“. Again, preparation for a music lesson is demanding, and the teacher must think carefully about the selection of material and the procedure for rotating activities and groups of pupils to avoid downtime or chaos in completing tasks.

However, some small rural schools are struggling with poor facilities, not only in music education. This is an excellent way to link in with work activities; in our experience, making musical instruments is one of the most popular activities. If the school has enough musical instruments, this is a great advantage and we can use the instruments during other daily activities. Orff instruments or plastic trumpet boomwhackers are some of the most popular and commonly used. Teachers can also write their own songbooks for boomwhackers according to the colors of the trumpets or use the songbooks already created by other teachers on websites that share materials for teachers. They also find their use in various running exercises in physical education, e.g. squats to the sound of woodblocks, „rolling barrels“ to the sound of a cymbal, etc.

Due to the number of pupils, small schools invite, for example, guitarists or drumming groups to perform music every year, which always prepares an attractive program for young and old children. Each pupil plays his or her drum and learns about the different rhythms and possibilities of playing the instrument. Discussions of this type are popular and inspiring for the pupils.

It is the variety of activities and the skills that the pupils improve that are regularly demonstrated at Christmas parties, fairs, and other performances organized for the public. These are the basis of cultural events in the village. It has been shown that it is through involvement in social life that pupils form a relationship not only with the school but also with the place where they live and help to improve the overall reputation of the village among the surrounding villages for years to come.⁹

Music and movement activities are among the most popular activities for pupils of younger school age and can be included in music lessons, physical education, outdoor activities or some other subjects. We count among them, for example, movement reactions to music and its movement expression while working with a listening composition, as well as timing, movement accompaniment to music, dance games with singing, simple folk dances, movement improvisation to music, etc.

There are no significant differences between children of similar age in their musical and motor skills; on the contrary, all children enjoy spontaneous and organized movement to music. It can be said that combining music and movement activities in classes with different age compositions of pupils is not a problem. Again, it is possible to make very good use of the mutual cooperation of groups of pupils of different ages, where one group improvises

⁹ Hargreaves, L., Kvalsund, R., Galton, M. (2009). Reviews of research on rural schools and their communities in British and Nordic countries: Analytical perspectives and cultural meaning. *ELSEVIER: International Journal of Educational Research* [online]. Accessible from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0883035509000135> [cit. 2023-03-04].

a musical instrument and the other group improvises a dance performance. The groups then take turns.

Results of research on the current state of teaching and teachers' attitudes towards the subject of music education in small rural schools¹⁰

In the Czech Republic, very few methodological materials and publications reflecting the current situation in teaching in small schools have been published. D. Bubeníčková conducted a questionnaire survey among teachers of small-class schools as part of her master's thesis, some of the results of which are briefly presented here. Daniela Bubeníčková was guided by a similar intention when designing her research among teachers of small-class schools – to examine the current reality of music education teaching in schools of this type.

Her research aimed to find out and describe:

- the attitudes of teachers at small class schools towards the development of lesson – preparation and their experiences in this area;
- the best methods and practices in teaching music education in a small classroom school;
- the organization of teaching time to take account of the individual needs of pupils.

The research sample **consisted of 34 teachers** of music education at rural schools in the Czech Republic. In the absence of an available database of small-class schools, the graduate student herself compiled a contact directory of targeted respondents. Of the 180 people contacted by e-mail, 34 teachers responded to the survey.

A **questionnaire method** was used for the research, which in a way respects the time commitment of the small class teacher and allows for a look back at the information provided. The questionnaire was formulated with both open and closed questions. The questions were also aimed at further characterization of the respondents to give the author an insight into the length of teaching experience of the teacher. Several hypotheses were established.

Hypotheses

1. Teachers of small schools do not systematically prepare for music education lessons, rather they improvise in the lessons, implementing activities that will interest the students the most.
2. Music education is a subject suitable for teaching several grades in one teaching unit.
3. Teachers have an overview of which pupils are involved in music in their free time.

¹⁰ The research, the results of which are presented here, was part of the work: Bubeníčková, Daniela. *Hudební výchova na malotřídní škole* [Music education at a small rural school]. Master thesis. Plzeň: Západočeská univerzita v Plzni, Fakulta pedagogická, Katedra hudební výchovy a kultury, 2023. Supervisor doc. PaedDr. Marie Slavíková, CSc.

4. In music education lessons, collaborative work predominates and the difficulty of activities is rarely adjusted for each year group.
5. There is no time for individual teaching in the music class.
6. In the lesson, teachers focus mainly on singing activities; instrumental, movement, and listening activities are neglected.
7. Some teachers teach music education but do not play any classical instrument.

Interpretation of research results

The author evaluated the relevant questions and summarized the findings to draw conclusions related to the hypotheses formulated above. A brief summary of the results of the questionnaire in the main points and topic areas covered is presented here. The questionnaire contained a total of 25 questions.¹¹

The period of experience of the small class teachers who participated in the research is 70 % more than five years. Experience is one of the factors that influence the level of music education and a small classroom collective of children favors teachers with experience. Therefore, the result shows that music education is mostly taught by experienced teachers and they are not discouraged by the mixed collective of children, on the contrary, they consider it a challenge. 15 % of the teachers have more than one year of experience with the small class collective. These are recent graduates of pedagogical faculties.

A total of 76 % of teachers regularly **prepare for lessons**, at least in the main points. They think about the motivation and the form of teaching while taking into account the current level of pupils' knowledge and skills. Completely improvised lessons are almost non-existent in small classrooms, and even 12 % of teachers prepare detailed lessons with specific objectives, motivation and practice tasks. From the overall result, it can be more accurately determined that newly graduated teachers in most cases prepare each lesson in detail. Only about 9 % of the teachers are not prepared for music education, they are confident about their status, experience, and stock of various exercises for developing musical skills in small-class children. More than 50 % of the teachers modify individual exercises and activities to develop the skills of each grade separately. 42 % of the teachers try to modify some activities to the required level, but they also state that there are activities where this cannot be applied due to the time required, the complexity of organizing some activities, and keeping the attention of all children in the lesson.

The family environment and its good familiarity with the teacher, as well as the parents' trust in the personality of a well-known teacher, is one of the advantages of small schools. Teachers know their pupils and are better able to diagnose their abilities and possibilities for development. 97 % of teachers confirmed that they have an overview of pupils' further musical education outside the school environment. Learning to play an instrument and choral singing is the most common extra-curricular musical activity undertaken by children. A large percentage of teachers are familiar with the children's parents and have more discussions with them about the child's individual aptitudes and the realistic options for their further musical education.

¹¹ The form of the questionnaire for teachers of small schools is included in the appendices of D. Bubeníčková's thesis.

Facilities and equipment for music education are not commonplace in 87 % and are characterized as inadequate with the need to improvise and adapt facilities for teaching. In the already limited classroom space, teachers themselves have to create a ‚music corner‘, including the aids and musical instruments used in teaching. Of course, there are also advantages to using this in cross-curricular relationships in other lessons, such as work or art, where pupils are motivated to make simple-sounding instruments themselves.

The teacher’s playing of the instrument is an irreplaceable advantage of the course and the effectiveness of the lesson. The teacher’s instrumental playing inspires and motivates the pupils to get acquainted with different instruments and their peculiarities. More than half of the small class teachers actively play at least one or more musical instruments, most often piano, guitar, flute, and occasionally a teacher who plays ukulele or violin. Of the 34 teachers in the questionnaire, the following number of small school teachers are proficient or satisfactory on an instrument:

- Piano, keyboard instrument 18/34
- Guitar 16/34
- Recorder 14/34
- Ukulele 3/34
- Violin 1/34

Representation of individual musical activities in the lesson structure

Among the teachers interviewed, the predominant statement was that each of the four types of musical activities occupies a certain part of the lesson. In terms of time representation, **singing and musical movement activities** dominate the lessons. These are very well combined with other subjects (Czech language, foreign languages, elementary school, science, home economics, etc.) in a small school and can be naturally divided among the grades without limiting another group of pupils to work as teachers in small schools. These two activities also have their primary position in the subject of music education itself, being more or less the most important component of lessons aimed at preparing public singing performances and dramatic scenes.

For 93 % of teachers, voice and singing activities, including the singing of multi-part songs, dominate music education lessons.

57 % of teachers put musical movement activities second and 48 % of teachers prefer instrumental activities in addition to singing.

85 % of teachers in small schools consider music and movement activities to be one of the most motivating activities that can be successfully implemented in other lessons. Instrumental activities came third in terms of time, followed by listening activities. Although the importance of the social function of the small school is emphasized, with the representation of singing and music and movement activities being particularly associated with it, the author believes that instrumental activities could be included more often. Instrumental activities develop musical sensitivity and, in a way, also help to prepare pupils for conscious listening to music, as they enable children to be directly acquainted with the means of musical expression and their function in a song or musical composition.

Singing activities in small schools are most often developed by singing folk songs, songs composed by composers especially for children, and popular songs. The objectives of voice and vocal education are fulfilled by a system of breathing, vocal and articulation exercises. Teachers report good experience in performing spoken and sung tongue twisters and voice games. Most teachers use some form of singing at the beginning of the lesson or before singing activities. The author of the thesis adds her own experience and belief that pupils need to be led to feel and experience music with their whole body, not just when singing. Any exercise with pupils can then be conceived and performed playfully, involving movement. Another motivating factor for pupils is the use of humor and exaggeration, which helps to remove shyness and helps to psychologically balance the age differences between pupils in the class.

Listening activities are carried out by small class teachers mainly in separate groups according to year groups, with predefined tasks to be worked out by each group. A detailed analysis of the composition in terms of the musical means of expression used and their function in the composition is challenging with a small class group, both from an organizational and psychological point of view, i.e. keeping the attention of all the children. Perhaps for this reason it is understandable that only 35 % of teachers include listening activities in lessons regularly, 15 % rarely.

The author of the thesis considers the appropriate approach to be one in which the teacher can work with one listening piece with both grades at the same time but analyses the piece first only in terms of the overall mood of the piece, whether it corresponds to the theme set by the composer, and limits further analysis to simple tasks, e.g. to identify the musical instruments that the pupils identified while listening, or to determine what task the composer assigned them in the musical message. In addition, younger pupils can independently perform a simpler task, e.g. painting one of the musical instruments or searching for them in the worksheet. Deeper structural and semantic analysis can then be continued by the teacher with the older year group.

Instrumental activities are regularly implemented by the teachers interviewed in most lessons. Even though the lessons are noisier, the teachers meet their objectives and are able to meet the expectations of the pupils. Pupils are very interested in playing instruments. Only 2 teachers out of 34 respondents said that they do not use musical instruments at all, due to indiscipline and chaos during the lessons. The author recommends dividing pupils into groups of children playing the same instruments, with one of the groups always playing the role of conductor or leader. Collective playing of an instrument can only be realized once the pupils have acquired the elementary skills and the basics of playing technique, and have a unified experience of a common meter and tempo, responding to the instructions of the teacher or the children's conductor.

For instrumental activities, the optimal way is to allow each individual to play an instrument, which can be facilitated by making their own sounding instruments. Of course, if the school has enough e.g. Orff or ethnic instruments suitable for children, the work is all the easier. The most popular instruments are handmade instruments made from bottles, and glasses, filled with rice, stones and other small materials, as well as spoons and plastic bags. The children's orchestra has a very distant resemblance to the real one, but it is their own creations that motivate pupils to continue working in music education and lead them to be creative and inventive. Again, the cooperation of younger pupils with older ones is well applied.

Musical movement activities

In these activities, the following forms are most frequently used by the teachers interviewed:

- Body play – 91 % of teachers.
- Rhythmic exercises combined with movement – 85 % of teachers.
- Dance and movement games – 70 % of teachers.

Among other activities, the following are represented to a large extent: pupils expressing the mood of music through movement, dramatization of a song, and pantomime.

Individual care, working with one pupil is quite challenging in a small class setting, yet given the small group of children in some schools it can be applied. Three-quarters of teachers surveyed have combined more than two-year groups into one lesson, and 18 % of teachers have the advantage of separate music lessons. In specific activities, it was found that 25 teachers out of a sample of 34 teachers implement singing activities in groups, 15 teachers work with pupils in groups, but 9 teachers have no problem working individually with children when necessary. This fact is surprising, but it confirms that even pupils from small schools with smaller classes can be given individual attention if necessary. If the number of pupils in one teaching unit is more than 15, group work is recommended.

Possibilities for the organization of teaching

The option of teaching in ‚runs‘, where everyone learns everything regardless of year, is preferred by 27 % of teachers. A majority of teachers opt for the second option, where one activity is practiced together, then the teacher works with each group separately and grades the level of difficulty for the pupils.

The consideration of small schools is not specified in the curriculum documents; 18 % of teachers confirm this lack. This topic is rather speculative, both in terms of the diversity of Czech education and the specific form of small-class schools. Every music teacher should have the opportunity to participate in the development of a School Curriculum that suits the current conditions of the school. 20 % of teachers did not have the opportunity to participate in the development of the School Curriculum in their school, but almost 50 % of teachers implemented their proposals in the school curriculum.

Conclusions from the research

Through the research investigation, we found that most teachers pay considerable attention to lesson preparation and attach great importance to it, even in cases where they are already experienced teachers. They try to adjust the intensity of the activities to meet the outcomes of all grades according to the national curriculum.

The assumption of a large role in the family environment in small schools is confirmed. Most teachers pride themselves on positive relationships with their pupils and are happy to give them more attention in music education.

In addition to carrying out the usual vocal, singing, instrumental, and movement activities, teachers include, for example, games and songs on request to stimulate the pupils' intrinsic motivation. Filling the lesson mainly with vocal activities has proved to be appropriate; teachers recommend supplementing vocal activities with playing musical instruments, body play, dancing, and listening to familiar songs. At the same time, they mention the fact that they do not strictly follow the School Curriculum, but they adapt the lessons so that the pupils and the teacher enjoy them.

Teachers consider the advantage of a small classroom school to be its interconnectedness with other subjects, so most teachers recommend the possibility of transferring music education activities within the framework of intersubject relations to the Czech language, primary school, as well as physical education and art education, for example in the form of relaxation exercises.

It has been confirmed that the appropriate form of the teaching unit is most often in a group or group setting. Where possible, some activities are adapted by the teachers for each year group according to the objectives set. Teachers also recommended activities that are popular among the students and can be shared between grades and during the music education lesson. These include: group singing (canons), playing musical instruments, creating accompaniments to songs, body play, movement games, dancing, musical perception of different genres, sharing feelings and ideas, using cross-curricular relationships, karaoke, combining all activities and dividing them between grades, or using computer-based learning programs.

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