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DEVELOPING A SENSE OF RHYTHM IN YOUNG CHILDREN

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This article presents a comprehensive theoretical and methodological analysis of the development of a sense of rhythm in young children as a key component of their musical, motor, and psychophysical development. The relevance of this issue is substantiated in the context of modern preschool education, which is oriented toward the holistic development of the child, the integration of sensory, motor, and emotional processes, and the early identification and support of natural abilities.

The article explores scientific approaches to understanding rhythm as a universal form of organizing time and movement, which underlies musical language and simultaneously performs a regulatory function in the development of a child's behavior, motor skills, and emotional sphere. Based on an analysis of the works of domestic and foreign scholars (L. Vygotsky, N. Vetlugina, E. Jaques-Dalcroze, K. Orff, and others), it has been demonstrated that at an early age, a sense of rhythm is predominantly of a sensorimotor nature and is formed through movement, imitation, play, and emotional responses to musical stimuli.

Particular attention is paid to a comparative analysis of the music and rhythm education systems of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze and Carl Orff, with an emphasis on the benefits of implementing the Orff approach in working with young children. The pedagogical potential of K. Orff's methodology is explored, which is based on the unity of word, music, and movement, the use of «body percussion», elementary music-making, and creative improvisation as natural forms of mastering rhythmic structures.

Systematizes the age-specific features of rhythmic development in children during the first three years of life and identifies effective pedagogical methods and techniques for developing a sense of rhythm, including music-movement games, rhythmic exercises with objects, vocal-rhythmic activities, and playful improvisations. It is concluded that systematic, pedagogically organized musical-rhythmic activities contribute to the development of motor skills, speech, attention, and emotional regulation in young children, laying the foundation for their further learning and creative development.

Keywords: *preschool education, sense of rhythm, young children, musical-rhythmic development, game-based methods.*

Problem statement. The development of a sense of rhythm in early childhood is one of the pressing issues in contemporary preschool pedagogy and music education. Rhythm, as a fundamental element of musical language, plays a crucial role in the development of motor coordination, speech,

emotional functioning, and cognitive processes in children. In early childhood, rhythmic perception is formed through the close interaction of auditory, motor, and sensory experiences, which determines its significant influence on the overall psychological development of the child.

Scientific studies conducted by Lev Vygotsky (*Dytyna... yak zorianyi svit i nasha planeta...*, 2022), Nina Vetlugina (Vetlugina, 1978) and others demonstrate that rhythmic activities activate different areas of the brain, promote the integration of sensory signals, and facilitate the formation of interhemispheric connections. In early childhood educational practice, rhythm functions not only as a musical phenomenon but also as a universal regulator of behavior and motor activity. Therefore, the problem of developing a sense of rhythm requires scientific interpretation and methodological generalization.

The purpose of the article is to summarize the theoretical foundations of the development of a sense of rhythm in early childhood and to analyze effective pedagogical strategies for musical-rhythmic education.

Purpose of the article. The purpose of the article is to generalize the theoretical foundations of the formation of a sense of rhythm in early childhood and to analyze effective pedagogical strategies for musical-rhythmic education.

Materials and methods. The methodological basis of the study includes the principles of the cultural-historical theory of personality development, the activity approach and the ideas of sensorimotor integration.

The following research methods were employed:

- theoretical analysis of psychological-pedagogical and music-methodological literature;
- generalization of domestic and international pedagogical experience in musical-rhythmic education of young children;
- comparative analysis of the concepts of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze and Carl Orff;
- systematization of pedagogical methods and techniques for developing rhythmic skills.

The research materials included scholarly works on music education theory, results of empirical observations of musical-motor activities of young children, and methodological recommendations for organizing musical-rhythmic classes in preschool education institutions.

Results and discussion. Formation of the sense of rhythm in early childhood: theoretical and methodological foundations. The problem of forming a sense of rhythm in early childhood is one of the key issues in the system of music education, since rhythm acts as a fundamental element of musical language and determines the quality of a child's further musical, motor, and speech development. Rhythmic perception develops through the interaction of auditory, motor, and emotional experiences of the child. Rhythm, as a stable musical characteristic, forms the ability to organize movements, speech, and emotional reactions. In early childhood, rhythm performs not only an aesthetic function, but also develops the ability for sensorimotor coordination, auditory sensitivity, the ability to anticipate and recognize repetitive structures, and emotionally expressive responsiveness. Researchers note that early rhythm formation contributes to the development of motor skills – coordination of arms and legs, balance, precision of movements; speech development – awareness of speech rhythm and intonational sensitivity; and emotional regulation – through musical improvisation, children express feelings and emotions. The organic connection between music and movement ensures *повноцінне* musical-rhythmic education of children (Hazina, 2015). Scientific studies indicate that rhythmic actions stimulate several areas of the brain. When a child taps a rhythm, listens to a particular pattern, or imitates rhythm, they are not merely playing – they are participating in a complex process involving timing, memory, attention, and coordination. Rhythm helps strengthen the connections between the left and right hemispheres of the brain. These connections are critically important for effective information processing, integration of sensory signals, and the development of balanced motor skills.

In pedagogical practice concerning early childhood education, it is important to consider children's natural sensory sensitivity, their need for movement and imitation, as well as their ability to intuitively respond to tempo, dynamics, and the emotional character of music. Scientific approaches developed by L. Venger, N. Vetlugina, and others emphasize the necessity of purposeful work on the development of rhythmic hearing and motor correspondence to rhythmic musical structures. Psychological and pedagogical studies by S. Rubinstein, L. Vygotskyi confirm that systematic rhythmic exercises in early childhood provide the basis for further musical and intellectual development.

In musical art, rhythm holds special significance. Physiologist V. Bekhterev, while conducting experiments, concluded that musical rhythm is capable of influencing the nervous system and establishing balance within it. For example, the slow tempo and rhythm of a musical piece can calm overly excited children, whereas a lively and fast rhythm activates the activity of slow and lethargic children.

Among the systems and concepts of musical-rhythmic activity developed in the twentieth century, the following are particularly noteworthy: the system of musical-rhythmic education by the Swiss educator and composer Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865–1950), and the system of unity of word-music-movement created by the German educator and composer Carl Orff (1895–1982).

Swiss educator Émile Jaques-Dalcroze considered rhythm to be the leading educational factor, as well as the temporal and accentual element of all expressive means of musical language. In his opinion, the synthesis of rhythm with all other means of musical expression, together with the structure and form of a musical composition, provides the system with integrity and a comprehensive influence on personality development.

In work with children, an elementary level of instruction was primarily used, with dominant forms including rhythmic gymnastics and musical-plastic improvisation. Rhythmic gymnastics is a combination of music and the plasticity of gestures or, as Émile Jaques-Dalcroze himself described it, the “transformation of sounds into human movements,” which presupposes deep emotional experience and understanding of the beauty and laws of music.

The idea of the creative development of personality proposed by É.-J. Dalcroze was later advanced in the system “Sounding Gestures” by the outstanding German composer and educator Carl Orff. Considering the role of movement in Orff’s concept, it is necessary to emphasize its leading role in the development of the sense of rhythm. The sense of rhythm, which has a motor basis, is always accompanied by motor reactions.

“Sounding Gestures” constitute a rhythmic play of the whole body, involving playing on body surfaces: patting thighs, chest tapping, clapping, stomping, and finger snapping. According to Orff’s methodology, clapping is the simplest type of movement. While performing it, the child’s breathing should remain calm, and the clap should be elastic. Clapping is best practiced while standing; the arms should remain relaxed, and the clap itself should be light.

The methodological components of Carl Orff’s music-pedagogical system include the unity of word-music-movement, creativity as a teaching method, elementary music-making using musical instruments, and reliance on pentatonic modes and simple rhythmic patterns. The Orff method is considered one of the most effective approaches for developing natural rhythmicity (Stashevskaya, 2009).

In Carl Orff’s “body percussion” technique, four main types of “sounding gestures” are traditionally used:

- Clapping – which may vary: cupped-hand claps create a hollow sound because of the empty space formed between the palms; flat-palm claps performed on different parts of the hand or fingers produce different sounds. Claps may be performed in front of the body, above the head, behind the back, or to the sides. Children should learn to perform this sounding gesture freely in various ways.

- Stomping – may be performed with one foot or alternating feet, in place or while moving forward. A useful exercise for mastering this gesture is partial squatting with feet together, emphasizing the moment of straightening the legs. In addition to full-foot stomping, toe or heel strikes may also be used. Stomping can be performed standing or sitting on the floor.

- Finger snapping – some children master this gesture quickly, while others require more time to coordinate their fingers and apply sufficient force. It is important that children snap their fingers freely and without tension. Depending on the tempo, snapping may be accompanied by auxiliary arm movements and performed simultaneously with both hands or alternately with the right and left hands.

- Body slapping – should be light and elastic. This creates a new sound coloration that can be used independently or alternated with stomping and snapping. This movement can be performed both standing and sitting (Zavalko, & Fir, 2013).

In the context of implementing Carl Orff’s methodology in modern preschool institutions, particular relevance is attached to the purposeful formation of the sense of rhythm as a fundamental component of the psychophysical and speech development of young children. Rhythm constitutes the basis for movement coordination, breathing regulation, speech development, and the formation of voluntary attention; therefore, its development should be regarded as a priority pedagogical task. The

Orff approach, which combines rhythmic movements, speech formulas, clapping, stepping, and elementary music-making, ensures natural and unobtrusive acquisition of rhythmic structures through play. Such activities contribute to the synchronization of motor and speech actions, the development of tempo and meter perception, and create a foundation for further musical, speech, and cognitive development (Popovska, Yakymenko, & Berezhenna, 2022).

Analysis of scientific sources demonstrates that the sense of rhythm in early childhood has a predominantly sensorimotor nature and develops through movement, imitation, and emotional responses to music. In children under three years of age, rhythm is perceived as an emotionally colored structure that evokes natural motor reactions such as clapping, stomping, and swaying.

Age-related peculiarities of rhythmic development manifest gradually. During infancy, a child emotionally responds to music, prefers rhythmic lullabies, distinguishes between sharp and smooth tempos, performs chaotic movements in response to sounds, and reacts to accents with gestures and facial expressions. Rhythmic activity at this stage is involuntary and depends on emotional reactions to sound.

In the second year of life, children develop the ability to imitate rhythmic movements demonstrated by adults and distinguish contrasts such as “fast-slow” and “loud-quiet.” Toddlers can already acquire elementary relationships between music and movement: they attempt to walk and dance to musical accompaniment, although these movements are still poorly coordinated. The program of musical-rhythmic education for children of the second year of life includes the following tasks: mastering some basic movements to music – walking, running, and performing simple game actions (“the bird flew in,” “the bird flew away,” “fingers are dancing,” “fingers are hiding,” etc.); repeating dance movements demonstrated by the educator (stomping, clapping with varying intensity, rotating wrists, lightly bending the knees while standing, swaying from one foot to another, and performing simple dance movements); distinguishing contrasts such as “fast-slow” and “loud-quiet.” Rhythm at this age becomes a motor-emotional action. The sense of rhythm acquires a more conscious character, and movements become purposeful.

During the third year of life, rhythmic actions become more voluntary; children begin to coordinate movements with musical accompaniment and reproduce elementary rhythmic patterns. In early childhood, rhythm is perceived mainly through auditory and tactile channels. Research conducted by L. Vygotskyi and O. Zaporozhets proves that sensorimotor integration forms the basis of a child’s rhythmic response: children experience rhythm bodily – through steps, hand movements, and striking instruments.

According to Li Jiabao (2023), a lecturer at the Pedagogical University in China, the ability to perceive rhythm at an early stage is limited to simple metric-rhythmic structures due to the gradual maturation of the auditory system. Only with age does the range of rhythmic patterns that children are able to recognize and reproduce increase (Li, 2023).

In young children, rhythmicity develops through activities naturally inherent to infants and toddlers: movement, play, imitation, emotional response to music, and improvisation. During this period, active maturation of sensory systems occurs, and primary connections between auditory and motor centers of the brain are formed, creating optimal prerequisites for the development of musical-rhythmic abilities. In the first three years of life, the functioning of the nervous system and the development of motor and sensory abilities create optimal conditions for the formation of rhythmic skills. Therefore, pedagogically organized music education is a necessary condition for the holistic development of the child.

However, the effectiveness of this process depends on pedagogically organized activities. Systematic, scientifically grounded methods of music education ensure the progressive development of musical hearing, tempo-rhythmic reactions, and motor coordination, which subsequently contribute to the formation of musical-creative and intellectual abilities.

Rhythm is a universal form of organizing movement and time. It is inherent in biological, natural, and social processes and is therefore assimilated by children from the first months of life. Psychophysicologists note that musical rhythm activates the nervous system and promotes the development of motor skills and emotional regulation.

Neurophysiological studies by foreign scientists indicate that:

- rhythmic impulses activate the cerebral cortex;
- auditory signals are automatically associated with motor reactions;

– rhythmic exercises stimulate the maturation of prefrontal areas responsible for volitional behavior and planning.

Rhythm carries a significant emotional load. Young children are capable of distinguishing the character of music through rhythmic indicators such as speed, repetition, and dynamics. This is confirmed by studies conducted by S. Naumenko (2017) and N. Vetlugina (1978), who emphasize that emotionally colored rhythmic structures stimulate expressive movements and activate emotional responses.

The first rhythmic ability is the perception of pulse – regular strong and weak beats. Children express this through clapping, walking, and stomping, which are natural forms of rhythmic reactions.

The perception of long and short sounds develops through repeated listening and motor imitation. Li Jiabao emphasizes the importance of tactile contact with instruments (striking, shaking), which contributes to better awareness of temporal intervals.

Rhythm is perceived by children as a combination of tempo, repetition, accents, and emotional coloration. The comprehensive formation of these components ensures the development of rhythmic feeling as an integrated musical ability.

Play is the leading activity in early childhood; therefore, it is a natural means of rhythm development. Effective forms include rhythmic imitation games (“repeat after me”), duration cards (a long sound – a wide movement; a short sound – a quick push), musical instruments (bells, drums, maracas) as means of marking rhythmic structures, and musical stories and “theatricalization” of rhythm. The *уроки* form promotes activity, attention, and coordination, significantly accelerating rhythmic development.

Movement is the primary conductor of rhythm. Psychologists such as O. Leontiev and O. Zaporozhets emphasized that movements help children “live through” rhythmic structures.

Effective methods at this age include imitation of animal movements according to the tempo and character of music, simple dance as a means of reproducing musical phrasing, and combining movement with instrumental actions, which activates sensorimotor integration. Vocal activity helps children feel pulse through verbal and musical text, understand durations through syllabic accentuation, and convey emotions through dynamics and timbre.

The musical-rhythmic repertoire includes active games, circle dances, and simple dances. As a rule, the works used in this group convey images of birds and animals: “Little Bunny, Little Bunny,” a Ukrainian folk nursery rhyme; games such as “Little Mice,” music by M. Zhylynskyi, “Bunnies and the Fox,” music by H. Finarovskiy; and the circle dance “Gray Little Cat,” a Ukrainian folk song. Contrasting two-part musical works are also used, where, for example, during the first section children move their hands or clap, and during the second section they spin or jump cheerfully. Examples include “Move-Rest,” music by Ya. Stepovyi, and “Knocker,” Ukrainian folk music arranged by M. Metlov. The musical-rhythmic repertoire for this age group is characterized predominantly by cheerful, dance-like music, and less frequently by calm, lyrical compositions (Vyshpynska, 2020).

In work with second-year children, an important task is the development of initial manifestations of rhythmicity and the acquisition of elementary game and dance movements. For this purpose, children’s attention is drawn to the fact that one should play and dance to music and stop moving when the music ends. While developing elementary rhythmicity, the educator asks children to walk together “as a flock” to the music, clap their hands, or shake rattles. To activate children and stimulate their interest in movement to music, various play techniques and surprise moments are widely used in early childhood groups, usually involving toys. For example, a teddy bear “visits” the children, “watches” how they move, and “dances” with and for them. The methodology for teaching games, dances, and exercises to second-year children includes imitation of adult demonstrations and joint activities with adults. When teaching a dance, the educator performs it once or twice and invites willing children to dance together, encouraging the most active children to move independently (Matviienko (Ed.), 2017, p. 81). For example, in the game “Hide-and-Seek,” when the calm first section of the music is played, the educator says: “The children are hiding, sitting very quietly, I cannot find them” (while the children sit on chairs). When the lively second section begins, the educator “finds” the children and invites them: “Come dance with me!” while dancing together with them. The music teacher accompanies the demonstration with short explanations, encourages children by praising successful actions, and helps those who find it difficult to perform movements without demonstration (Lisovska, 2022, p. 144). In

basic movements, game actions with objects are used: children wave flags to music, march with them, shake rattles, hide and find them, and dance with colorful scarves (Naumenko, 2017, pp. 156-157).

During the third year of life, due to general physical development, children's movements to music become more confident, though still insufficiently coordinated. Children's emotional responses to music are expressed through facial expressions and gestures. Their movements are not yet entirely precise and are often inconsistent with the music. While reproducing the general character of movement (running or walking), children still cannot start and stop movements simultaneously with the music or clearly mark the metric pulse of walking and running. According to the curriculum, the educator should teach children coordinated movements to music, movement corresponding to the clearly expressed character of a musical work, rhythmic movement with objects (shaking rattles and bells, striking tambourines), and changing movements according to the two-part structure of a piece, as well as responding to the beginning, ending, and dynamic contrasts (loud-quiet).

The musical-rhythmic repertoire is based on games, circle dances, and simple dances. The repertoire also includes game exercises in which adults teach children basic movements, such as "Let's Jump Cheerfully," music by O. Gnesina, "Walking and Running," music by O. Tilicheieva, "Cheerful March," music by I. Kyshko, and "We Are Walking," music by R. Rustamov. In games, children reproduce images of birds and animals through musical-rhythmic movements, such as "Catch the Bunny," music by O. Tilicheieva, and "The Hen," music by F. Kolessa.

The games and dances introduced to children include skills such as moving in a circle while holding hands and dancing in pairs. Musical games help children master imaginative and imitative movements while conveying musical-game images ("bunnies," "bear cubs," "birds," etc.). Educators should draw children's attention to the fact that one type of music invites dancing, while another encourages walking, allowing children to distinguish these independently (for example, when a march and a dance are performed, children should independently change the character of their movements). Dance movements in this group also become more complex: children should be able to clap hands and stomp feet simultaneously, sway from one foot to another, and perform half-squats. Responding to dance-like music, children learn to clap hands, wave arms, dance lightly, and emotionally respond to the educator's play actions (Naumenko, 2017, pp. 144-158).

Practice demonstrates that integrated lessons combining rhythmic exercises with speech development, fine motor skills, and sensory perception are particularly effective. To form a stable sense of rhythm, the following are important: regularity and systematic organization of classes short but frequent exercises; a positive emotional atmosphere – praise and support for the child's initiative; and integration into everyday activities – for example, rhythmic movements during cleaning or singing during walks.

The effectiveness of rhythm formation is ensured through integrated pedagogical methods. The main methods of developing the sense of rhythm in early childhood include musical-movement games, rhythmic exercises with objects (drums, spoons, bells), song-rhythmic exercises involving repetition of rhythmic phrases and simple melodies, and play improvisations in which children create their own rhythmic sequences using movements and sounds. The playful form of activities promotes activity, emotional involvement, and the development of a stable interest in musical activity.

The formation of the sense of rhythm in early childhood is an important component of holistic development. An effective pedagogical strategy includes combining musical-movement, vocal, and play practices in a structured and emotionally supportive environment. Systematic work with rhythm contributes to the development of motor, speech, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills, creating a solid foundation for further learning and creativity.

The obtained generalizations confirm that systematic musical-rhythmic activity positively influences the development of motor skills, speech, attention, and emotional regulation in young children.

Conclusions. The analysis of theoretical and scientific sources confirms that the development of a sense of rhythm in early childhood is a fundamental component of children's psychophysical, speech, and emotional development. Rhythm acts as a universal mechanism for organizing motor, auditory, and emotional activity, ensuring the integration of sensory and motor processes and contributing to the development of voluntary behavior.

It has been proven that in early childhood, rhythm is primarily sensorimotor in nature and develops through movement, imitation, play, and emotional responses to music. Systematic musical-

rhythmic activities enhance interhemispheric connections and support the development of motor skills, speech, attention, and emotional regulation.

The Orff methodology holds particular pedagogical value due to its integration of speech, music, and movement, as well as its use of body percussion and creative improvisation. This approach provides natural, playful, and emotionally rich acquisition of rhythmic structures, fully corresponding to the developmental capabilities of young children.

The effectiveness of rhythm development largely depends on a well-organized pedagogical environment, systematic instruction, a positive emotional atmosphere, and the integration of rhythmic activities into daily routines.

Thus, the purposeful implementation of musical-rhythmic methodologies in preschool education should be considered an essential condition for the holistic development of young children and their preparation for further learning and creative self-realization.

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ФОРМУВАННЯ ПОЧУТТЯ РИТМУ В ДІТЕЙ РАНЬОГО ВІКУ

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У статті здійснено комплексний теоретико-методичний аналіз проблеми формування почуття ритму в дітей раннього віку як важливої складової їхнього музичного, моторного та психофізичного розвитку. Обґрунтовано актуальність означеної проблематики в контексті сучасної дошкільної освіти, що зорієнтована на цілісний розвиток дитини, інтеграцію сенсорних, рухових і емоційних процесів та раннє виявлення й підтримку природних здібностей.

У дослідженні розкрито наукові підходи до розуміння ритму як універсальної форми організації часу й руху, що лежить в основі музичної мови та водночас виконує регулятивну функцію у розвитку поведінки, моторики й емоційної сфери дитини. На основі аналізу праць вітчизняних і зарубіжних учених (Л. Виготський, Н. Ветлугіна, Е. Жак-Далькроз, К. Орф та ін.) доведено, що у ранньому віці почуття ритму має переважно сенсомоторну природу й формується через рух, наслідування, гру та емоційне реагування на музичні стимули.

Особливу увагу приділено порівняльному аналізу систем музично-ритмічного виховання Е. Жака-Далькроза та Карла Орфа, з акцентом на доцільності впровадження орф-підходу в роботі з дітьми раннього віку. Розкрито педагогічний потенціал методики К. Орфа, що базується на єдності слова, музики й руху, використанні «звучних жестів» (body percussion), елементарного музикування та творчої імпровізації як природних форм засвоєння ритмічних структур.

Систематизовано вікові особливості розвитку ритмічності у дітей перших трьох років життя, визначено ефективні педагогічні методи й прийоми формування почуття ритму, зокрема музично-рухові ігри, ритмічні вправи з предметами, вокально-ритмічні та ігрові імпровізації. Зроблено висновок, що систематична, педагогічно організована музично-ритмічна діяльність сприяє розвитку моторики, мовлення, уваги та емоційної регуляції дітей раннього віку, створюючи підґрунтя для їхнього подальшого навчання й творчого розвитку.

Ключові слова: дошкільна освіта, почуття ритму, діти раннього віку, музично-ритмічний розвиток, ігрові методи.

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