Towards a model of playful music learning for primary classrooms: recommendations based on a review of literature

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Abstract

Playful practices have been linked to increased motivation, engagement, learning and skill development. However, limited research has explored what playful music learning might look like for primary schools, and how teachers might incorporate a range of playful music practices within their classrooms. Our conceptual model for playful music learning amalgamates and builds upon previous philosophy, theory and research in the education and music education spheres. In doing so, it extends musical play across a continuum of ownership as has been proposed by Zosh et al. (2017) in the realm of playful learning more generally. Playful elements associated with the work of music education pedagogues Kodály and Kokas and other researchers in the field are outlined. Examples of musical games-play and guided musical play for primary classrooms are illustrated, and some recommendations are provided to support teachers in facilitating increasingly playful music learning.

Keywords: Playful; ownership; music education; Kodály; Kokas

Introduction

A conception of play as an inherent part of the learning process is rooted in the constructivist theories of Vygotsky (1896–1934) and Bruner (1915–2016) who believed in the power of both child-led and adult-scaffolded play to facilitate learning and bolster child development (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1983; Frost et al., 2012). In early childhood education contexts in particular, it is widely accepted that play presents the ideal and most natural context for young children's learning and development, both musical (Nieuwmeijer, 2013) and otherwise (Froebel, 1967; Vygotsky, 1967; Moyles, 2010; Trawick-Smith, 2012). However, a growing body of literature suggests greater openness to channelling play within a range of educational practices and across age and class levels (see Edwards, 2017; Mardell et al., 2019; Allee-Herndon & Roberts, 2021; Parker et al., 2022).

Despite increased reference to playful practices within educational spheres, practical realisations of play-based learning can vary (Martlew et al., 2011; Pyle & Danniels, 2017) and become less and less evident as pupils move past the earliest stages of their education (Whitebread & Jameson, 2010; Gray & Ryan, 2016). To address this, commentators have suggested that there is a need for increased understanding as to what playful pedagogy might look like in practice, and how curricula and attitudes might need to change to allow for playful practices (Gray & Ryan, 2016; Mardell et al., 2019).

Marsh & Dieckmann (2017) have suggested that 'several major approaches to primary school music pedagogy are based on the desire to emulate aspects of children's play' (p. 712). The present article proposes a unique model for conceptualising playful music learning for teachers. This model draws upon the work of Kodály (1882–1967) and Kokas (1929–2010) whose work contains

playful elements that resonate with literature in the broader field of play-based learning. Weaving together a number of related practices, the article provides an overview of key aspects of the model and outlines means by which teachers can conceptualise, scaffold and guide a range of playful music learning experiences in their primary school classrooms – facilitating increased child ownership in music learning.

The article commences with an introduction that draws attention to a continuum of play in the educational sphere and speaks to the role of adult scaffolding in contributing meaningfully to children's playful learning. Following this is an overview of playful music learning and the proposed conceptual model. Drawing specifically from playful features of the pedagogical theories of Kodály and Kokas for context, illustration and substantiation, the remainder of the article conceptualises and elaborates on examples of playful music learning. Reference is made both to original sources and scholarship from contemporary music educators, many of whom continue to interpret and build upon the original approaches of these music pedagogues. The article concludes with a summary and recommendations for facilitating playful music learning in primary school contexts.

A continuum of play in the educational sphere

Within much of the literature on children's play, emphasis is placed on the role and importance of freedom as a key concept. In this regard, truly free play is perceived as exhibiting high levels of autonomy, resulting in scholars questioning the extent to which play is compatible with the more formal educational sphere (Pyle & Danniels, 2017). However, instead of insisting that key elements associated with truly free play must be maintained, researchers have explored ways in which play itself might be conceptualised and defined in more formal learning contexts (Hall & Abbott, 1991). Conceptualising play along a continuum based on the degree of ownership associated with different learning activities allows the recognition of a broader, more diverse set of practices to support children's learning and development (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Zosh et al., 2017; Zosh et al., 2018). For example, both predominantly child-led and adult-guided forms of play, with increased scaffolding, including socio-dramatic play, have been identified as important for supporting children's creativity, persistence and completion of challenges (Robson & Rowe, 2012).

Playful learning experiences with adult scaffolding

Incorporating increasingly scaffolded (and often playful) learning experiences as part of more informal approaches to learning has long been advocated by theorists both in general education contexts (Bruce, 2015) and in the field of music education (e.g. Kodály, 1974). In recent years, an example of game learning has emerged called gamification (or game-based learning), which proffers teachers the opportunity to develop games aligned with curricular content as a means of scaffolding students' learning. Here, emphasis is placed on the use of games and game-based elements such as competition and problem-solving to provide motivation and to achieve specific learning objectives (Kapp, 2012; Alsawaier, 2018). Whilst often viewed as connected to the digital sphere, recently, Foroutan and Taghizadeh (2022) have drawn attention to the capacity for gamification to scaffold and support students' literacy learning that involves playing games with a pedagogical focus within both digital and non-digital realms.

DiSalvo (2015) notes that generic use of game-based elements to engage learners has been criticised in the literature as 'usually a bad idea' (p. 1). However, they also argue that it can open doors for pupils to engage in the learning process who would otherwise avoid doing so for social reasons. Moreover, DiSalvo (2015) suggests that the use of educational games can motivate disaffected learners through employing a lens of competitiveness. With this in mind, while pedagogical games and gamification require a degree of adult direction and scaffolding, which can disrupt the sense of freedom in children's play, a key benefit is thought to reside in the

opportunities they create to encourage and enthuse players who otherwise might not be motivated to participate in more formal learning activities (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Walsh, 2017).

Although there is increased openness to adult scaffolding and guidance to aid children's learning, an understanding of the different forms of playful learning, and the attendant balance of ownership are required to best support pupils' learning (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Mardell et al., 2019). Zosh et al. (2017) present a framework of playful learning across a continuum of ownership between entirely free play on one end, with complete freedom on the part of the child, and completely adult-directed, non-play-based work on the other. This framework is useful for navigating the nuances of playful learning within the pedagogical and contextual realities of the primary school. In particular, it offers an insight into how playful learning can exist across a continuum of ownership between child and adult, with games play and guided play associated with increasing degrees of child ownership.

Playful music learning

There has been a relative paucity of research conducted on playful music learning (Sarrazin, 2016). However, the research which does exist – similar to the literature pertaining to play more generally – has mainly explored and outlined the benefits and practices of musical play that is predominantly child-led (see Marsh, 2006; Marsh & Young, 2006; Shehan Campbell, 2010; Harwood & Marsh, 2012; Sarrazin, 2016). Within such free and child-led musical play, children's ownership and freedom of expression are viewed as integral, as they can 'control' and manipulate music (Marsh, 2006, p. 23). With the locus of control and ownership becoming more frequently discussed within music education research, music learning has been portrayed as existing across 'mixed polarities' depending on who leads the learning, where it happens, with whom, and for what purposes (Folkestad, 2006; Wright, 2016, pp. 211–212). Moreover, Wright (2016) suggests that educators should strive to be cognisant of these polarities and adopt appropriate teaching methods and approaches according to the learning needs of the students.

In the conceptual model we have created, playful music learning is conceptualised as existing along a continuum of ownership from free musical play (see Marsh, 2006; Marsh & Young, 2006; Shehan Campbell, 2010; Harwood & Marsh, 2012; Sarrazin, 2016) to musical games-play (see Figure 1).

Shown to the right in this model, practices in formal education contexts predicated upon complete adult ownership of learning tasks without playful engagement may be classified as non-playful music instruction. Conversely, shown to the left in this model, where children have entire ownership of their musical play, as often noted in more informal learning contexts, they may be seen as engaging in free musical play. In keeping with the goals of the article, we focus attention on outlining categorisations of playful music learning with potential to become part of music learning and teaching within primary schools. Thus, the remainder of the text relates to our conceptualisation of Playful Music Learning in (a) Musical Games-Play – encompassing both Pedagogical Singing Games and Musical Gamification (predominantly inspired by Kodály Music Education (Kodály, 1974; Vajda, 2008; Geoghegan & Nemes, 2014; Houlahan & Tacka, 2015)), and (b) Guided Musical Play – encompassing Dramatic, Kinaesthetic Musical Play and Constructive Musical Play (predominantly inspired by the Kokas pedagogy (Kokas, 1999; Vass, 2011; Kokas, 2013; Tiszai, 2018; Vass, 2019; Székely, 2021)).

Playful music learning and Kodály music education

Elements of playful music learning associated with Kodály's humanistic music education philosophy relate to the scaffolding and structuring of children's musical literacy, and enjoyment in their learning, which has inspired and informed our conceptualisation of musical games-play.
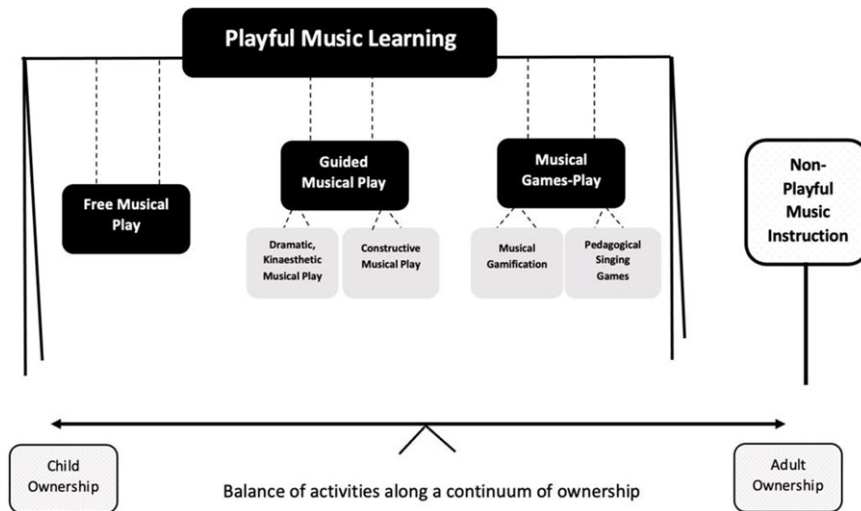
Figure 1. Playful music learning.

Kodály (1974, p. 120) asserted that educators should teach music and singing in schools 'in such a way that is not a torture but a joy for the pupils' and deemed it essential that teachers facilitate music lessons in ways that excite, motivate and encourage children to look forward to their next lesson. He suggested that the use of tonic solfa could provide a 'basis for musical thinking in a playful way' (Kodály, 1974, p. 221), and emphasised the value of traditional singing games associated with folk songs for children's learning (Kodály, 1974). His belief that folk songs were best suited to children's holistic needs, and of comparative quality to the finest art music, led Kodály and those who adopted his approach to use folk song material as key foci for building understanding of musical elements, concepts and rhythmic and melodic motives (Kokas, 1969). He believed that teachers should sequentially present activities related to repertoire being studied as a means of enabling students to experience and discover the musical concepts (Houlahan & Tacka, 2015). Whilst he acknowledged that pupils experience more joy from activities where they have increased personal ownership, Kodály (1974) believed there was a need for educators to sequence and scaffold pupils' musical development in the same way one would language literacy and development.

As well as being associated with supporting children's musical development, Kodály's approach has also been suggested to provide 'positive outcomes outside music' (deVries, 2001, p. 25) contributing to children's broader learning, growth and development (Goopy, 2013). Critiques of Kodály music education tend to relate to emphasis on singing, use of folk songs that may be irrelevant to children's lived experiences (deVries, 2000, 2001) and the degree of structure and implied teacher direction, which can see educators prioritising literacy and skill development over and above meaningful engagement and involvement (DeVries, 2001; Gault, 2016). Notably, Swanwick (2005, p. 13) has observed that traditional theories of music education, such as the Kodály approach, must be coupled with 'active music-making' and/or 'music-taking relating to experience outside of school' to be truly successful.

Musical games-play

Singing games (Houlahan & Tacka, 2015) and other music games are viewed as important means of actively engaging, supporting and scaffolding pupils' music learning and development in line with Kodály music education (see Vajda, 2008; Brumfield, 2014; Houlahan & Tacka, 2015; Goeghegan, 2017). With this in mind, we conceptualise use of musical games-play inspired by Kodály music

education in use of pedagogical singing games, and other non-singing-based musical games (musical gamification). These are described in some detail in the following paragraphs.

Pedagogical singing games

Singing games comprise song-based activities wherein participants move and/or complete actions (Sarrazin, 2016). Kodály (1974, pp. 46–47) viewed traditional singing games, 'as a much more ancient and at the same time, more complex phenomenon than a simple song', thus, recognising their potential for musical learning. From a contemporary perspective, singing games are deemed representative of an important form of musical play for children, even without pedagogical focus (Marsh & Young, 2006).

The utilisation of singing games towards pedagogical aims involves adult input over and above what would be associated with singing games in children's free musical play (Marsh & Young, 2006; Roberts, 2018). This has led some commentators to suggest that use of singing games in educational contexts can detract from their value in terms of the degree of ownership children possess in the activity (Marsh, 2006). However, teachers can engage in playful music activities together with children.

Pedagogical singing games can be used within a range of classroom formations from pairs to group work or within a circle, and can be useful in challenging pupils and teaching music in line with Kodály's music educational philosophy (Geoghegan & Nemes, 2014). Despite their apparent simplicity, singing games can lead to development of a range of complex musical skills such as rhythmic, aural, intonation, memory and overall musical thinking (Vajda, 2008). Singing games also present opportunities for enjoyment, engagement (Roberts, 2015), eagerness for repetition and an opportunity for pupils to develop holistically in terms of 'social, emotional, and kinaesthetic skills and abilities' (Houlahan & Tacka, 2015, p. 120).

In primary schools, this can manifest as clapping games, chasing games and circle games grounded upon well-known songs and involving movement or passing objects to a steady beat. With documented prioritisation of song-singing in music education (Henegan, 2001; Inspectorate, 2002; Irish National Teachers Organisation, 2009; Welch et al., 2009), this fits naturally with many classroom teachers' general practices. In the wake of school protocols for COVID-19, resulting in less attention being afforded to this area in recent years (Morin & Mahmud, 2021), it is possible that incorporating singing games in schools could support the reprioritisation of this important area for music education.

Byrne (2023) has provided an overview of how primary teachers might extend their practices of song-singing by encouraging children to engage in playful music learning through pedagogical singing games. This illustrated how a range of passing games, clapping/movement games and games based on song texts can be applied to well-known traditional songs as a means of actively engaging learners in playful music learning in their classrooms (Byrne, 2023).

Musical gamification

We conceptualise musical gamification as a type of musical games-play connected to non-singing-related musical games. Such games, like those associated with the Kodály method, can involve experiential learning, movement and scaffolding towards enhanced musical understanding by 'reinforc[ing] musical concepts and skills' (Brumfield, 2014, p. 37).

Recent research by Szirányi (2018) has explored the benefits of integrating movement into more structured forms of music education as a means of enhancing pupils' experiences and learning in primary schools. This can involve the use of games such as the conductor game (where pupils sit in a circle and follow a conductor who makes a range of actions whilst keeping a steady beat), representing rhythms through acting out the role of different note values, and other rhythm games to support and scaffold pupils' musical development (Szirányi, 2018).

Further games that can be explored include those outlined by Wicks (2006) for the Kodály Music Education Institute of Australia such as 'Freeze'. Wicks (2006) suggests that before commencing this game, children hear a rhythmic or melodic pattern (the signal). This may correspond to classroom learning and involve rhythmic or solfa syllable, which can be written on the board or memorised. Children then move around while teacher sings or plays music and once they hear the signal being performed, children freeze and only begin moving again the next time they hear it (Wicks, 2006).

Importantly, musical gamification can be used to encourage pupils to demonstrate and develop their understanding of musical elements through fun, repetitive, meaningful and enjoyable activities, rather than simply repeating after the teacher. Here, the teacher adopts increasingly facilitative roles and cultivates a positive learning environment. This means that they can be afforded increased ownership of the learning in question.

Limitations of musical games-play

Much of the alignment between Kodály music education and playful learning exists within scaffolded, teacher-directed, structured musical games-play as outlined above. This involves scaffolded, teacher-directed pedagogical singing games and musical gamification that often foreground fun, conceptual and music literacy skill development. Niland (2009, p. 19) has suggested that the Kodály approach strives 'to use play within a teacher-led curriculum', and in her work pertaining to early years music education, she has argued that it is not necessarily sufficient to meet children's needs in the broadest sense. Such a perspective alludes to a need for cognisance on the part of educators as to the ownership of different activities within the music classroom (Wright, 2016; Roberts, 2018). Moreover, it suggests that emphasis should also be placed on affording pupils positive opportunities to engage meaningfully in increasingly child-led music-making activities (deVries, 2001; Wright, 2016). Described below with reference to elements that align with playful music learning, the Kokas pedagogy strives for increased child ownership and informs our conceptualisation of guided musical play.

Playful music learning and the Kokas Pedagogy

Klára Kokas was a psychologist, musician and music educator. A student of Kodály's early in her career, much of Kokas's background in music education was grounded upon his 'principles and concepts' (Houlahan, 2000, p. 46). While she was an advocate of the traditional Kodály approach, Kokas's teaching experiences – particularly with children with additional needs, and who came from diverse and challenging socioeconomic backgrounds – led her to reassess its rigidity and consider other elements that could be included to enhance children's experience of learning music.

Although there have been increasing numbers of researchers exploring the merits of the Kokas pedagogy in recent years (Vass, 2011; Tiszai, 2016; Vass & Deszpot, 2017; Vass, 2019; Székely, 2021), her approach to music education still remains relatively unknown within the broader field. A list of features associated with the Kokas pedagogy may be deemed to include the following non-exhaustive list (see Table 1).

Playful elements associated with the Kokas pedagogy relate to provision of inclusive, child-centred, relational, joyful and creative learning experiences with free and improvised movement to facilitate a growing ownership of, and closeness to music (Kokas, 2013).

Seeking to replace '*teacher-centred* with *child-centred* music education' [emphasis in the original] (Kokas, 1999, p. 45), her work sought to create an environment free of 'adult superiority' (p. 17) where all could blossom and enjoy the spirit of shared creativity (Kokas, 2013). Representing an important step towards increasingly agentic and child-centred practices, her method involves teachers 'forbid[ding] little and try[ing] to make learning a joy', allowing pupils to shape their learning in music lessons (Kokas, 1999, p. 13). Kokas (1999, p. 35) hoped to increase levels of autonomy and ownership on the part of her pupils, and believed the role of the teacher

Table 1. Features Associated with the Kokas Pedagogy (see Kokas, 1999; Hawbaker, 2000; Kokas, 2013; Luca, 2018; Székely, 2021)

Cultivating a joyful, child-centred environment for pupils' holistic development
Movement and creative response to music
Supporting and guiding pupils in music listening and a range of different responses
Freedom, improvisation and creativity
Singing
Western classical art music and folk music
Interpersonal relationships
Playful interactions striving for pupil ownership and autonomy

could be likened to that of 'an excellent conductor' in a position to guide, help, support and ask 'stimulating questions'. However, it has been argued that the increased freedom and requisite positive relationship between teacher and children can be difficult to make concrete, conceptualise and teach (Székely, 2021).

The Kokas pedagogy involves movement and play as a means of bringing people closer to experiences of flow and creative presence in music (Vass, 2019). Encouraging teachers to adopt a flexible framework for their lessons, Kokas's pedagogy connects to increasingly guided musical play for supporting pupils' music listening and response to instrumental music. Such response can involve pupils 'acting out [. . .] movement composition[s . . . ,] setting improvisational dance and motion to music [and] visualisation: drawing the story' (Székely, 2021, p. 3) in a way which strives to facilitate a 'deep musical understanding' and joyful appreciation of music (Tiszai, 2018, p. 86).

There has, as of yet, been limited research into applications of the Kokas pedagogy within primary schools. Literature that describes applications of the Kokas approach indicates scope for developing and demonstrating increasingly complex musical understandings through movement than would be possible through oral and written expression (Tiszai, 2018). Additionally, the Kokas pedagogy has been said to facilitate increasingly sensory, embodied and holistic musical engagement, support motivation and belonging and develop rhythmic sense and creative improvisation (see Deszpot, 2013; Kokas, 2013; Tiszai, 2018; Vass, 2019).

Guided musical play

Guided and facilitated by teachers, improvised, free, dramatic, artistic and creative movement, response and music-making are viewed as important means of developing children's musical understanding in line with Kokas's pedagogy (see Kokas, 1999, 2013; Deszpot, 2013; Tiszai, 2018; Székely, 2021). With this in mind, we conceptualise guided musical play inspired by Kokas's pedagogy as involving Dramatic, Kinaesthetic Musical Play and Constructive Musical Play. Whilst still involving a degree of guidance and scaffolding on the part of the teacher, this is notably less than what was associated with the musical games-play discussed previously. Indeed, increased emphasis is placed on children's musical and creative freedom and ownership in striving towards the development of an increasingly holistic, creative and embodied music education. These two forms of musical play are described in some detail in the following paragraphs.

Dramatic, Kinaesthetic musical play

Dramatic, kinaesthetic musical play, in this model, is defined as a playful response to music whereby children respond to music with some form of artistic movement, dance and/ or dramatic or make-believe play. Aligned with the Kokas pedagogy, this form of guided musical play involves pupil movement in response to musical material where they are encouraged to 'act out different things' (Kokas, 1999, p. 19) and/or engage through 'completely unrestricted, free movements that facilitate emotional responses to music' (Deszpot, 2013, p. 9). Whilst aligned with and inspired by

The door behind us is the entrance to a place of refuge. We've left the town behind and arrived in this peaceful citadel raised up around herself by Klári in her world which most miraculously fuses order and freedom.[...] *Klári is already seated in the middle of the floor on the carpet* [...]. *And then we'll play.* [...] *We'll have a game of make-believe: lifted up by the sound of music, we are out at sea lying on our backs with eyes closed, in complete silence. We feel how we are surrounded by the enormous mass of water. How have we gotten here? By what means have we traveled? (sic) Are we a huge coral reef or an enormous octopus?* [...]*There are thousands of possibilities but overwhelmed by the effect of music I eventually find the small sea creature I am right now. How peaceful it is to get lost in the image, to get lost in the music – Bach or Mozart, Beethoven or Bartók.* [...] *And now we stir, stand up or sit up, or simply move while lying on our backs. We dance – our arms, heads, legs lifting and swaying to the music. The first hesitant motions- shaped by the recurrent phrases of the music – assuming meaningful direction. And now the music starts all over again, and according to what's come up in us, we play at being starfish, fish, water. The game has a magic effect. Slowly, pairs and groups form groups, which are already playing and dancing together in blissful abandonment.* [...] *Then Klári asks: "Who would like to show us what he or she has invented?" There is always someone who would – often enough, several of them* [...] *Klári thanks the children for the present they have given us. Would they perhaps tell us what their dance was about? If they would, we all listen to the story with great attention.*[...]*They trust each other...*

Figure 2. Illustrating the Kokas Pedagogy in context.

the work of Kokas, this definition speaks in part to work of other music education scholars (see Littleton, 1998; Niland, 2009).

When responding, through dramatic, kinaesthetic musical play in keeping with the Kokas pedagogy, pupils are encouraged to embody the music 'discover[ing] musical values with their own bodies' (Deszpot, 2013, p. 9). The vignette in Figure 2 below provides a first-hand account of this pedagogy by a participant (Beöthy, 1999, pp. 7–9) who reflected on her experience with her own child and a range of other parents and children, in context. The account contextualises key elements of the approach outlined previously and gives an insight into means by which the Kokas (Referred to by the pet name, Klári) sought to encourage players to be transformed through music and to allow music to take them to new places.

As revealed in the excerpt in Figure 2, response to music based on Kokas's philosophy of music education may involve kinaesthetic movements such as dance and dramatic role-play. Children are encouraged to share and discuss their responses with others as part of a positive learning environment where each contribution is seen as a gift for the rest of the group.

Resonating with work by Bresler (1995), here music might be integrated with drama, dance, and even art in a way that affords children increased agency and freedom in their learning. Similar open-ended and integrated activities that tend to be found within young children's classrooms, offer increased scope for holistic development as children 'experience and express themselves in a variety of modes' (Bresler, 1995, p. 7). A similar conceptualisation of musical play linking with other subject areas has been noted in previous work in this space focusing on early years contexts (see Niland, 2009).

Constructive musical play

Constructive musical play, in this model, is defined as playful musical exploration extending into 'creative [musical] improvisation and composition' (Niland, 2009, p. 18). Aligning with Littleton's (1998) conceptualisation of constructive musical play, this definition is seen to align with important creative and improvisational aspects of Kokas's pedagogy.

Like Kodály, Kokas (1999) also emphasised singing in the classroom, which would manifest as part of creative circle games, greetings and parting songs for her pupils. These activities involved exploratory and constructive musical play in that pupils were encouraged to creatively modify and 'rephrase the texts to make them more intimate, to make them address participants personally' (Kokas, 1999, p. 19). Here, children can be guided in improvisation based on musical elements and underlying (usually pentatonic) folk songs. This might involve attempts to 'change pitch, in an adventurous spirit . . . play with rhythm . . . express emotions . . . [and] find out new tempo and dynamic variations' (Kokas, 1999, p. 19). This playful, creative and personal manipulation of music is above and beyond the levels of freedom one would associate with the Kodály method, which uses songs to deal with specific melodic or rhythmic elements sequentially. Here, although the song remains important to the music education process, teachers encourage children to make it their own and develop their own versions of the song.

Other commentators have provided similar examples of musical play in young children's active and playful responses to songs related to their interests (see Niland, 2009). Recalling suggestions by Zosh et al. (2017) in the broader education sphere, Niland (2009) has suggested that the repetition of songs and improvisations is integral for supporting young pupils' development of understanding related to musical elements of tempo, pulse, rhythm, structure and pitch.

Recommendations for playful music learning in primary schools

Whilst teachers play important roles in scaffolding, guiding and supporting children's engagement, they should see themselves as facilitators and co-participants as opposed to owners of the learning experiences. In doing so, teachers can scaffold and support children's critical thinking and academic music learning through active, discovery-based experiences (Houlahan & Tacka, 2015) such as those associated with Pedagogical Singing Games and Musical Gamification for their primary school classrooms.

For playful music learning to be successful in primary schools, teachers need to afford pupils increased agency and control of their learning. This is particularly notable when children are engaging in guided musical play. Stepping aside from increasingly teacher-led practices towards increasingly playful music learning has been shown to require a shift in mindset for some primary school teachers (Byrne, Murphy, Ward & McCabe, 2024).

It is essential that educators strive towards increased child freedom and ownership within playful music learning experiences. This aligns with current research indicating a need for increased focus 'on free music making, understood as allowing a greater space for children's musical exploration' (Larsson & Georgii-Hemming, 2019, p. 62). Striving to cultivate a classroom culture where teachers are open to and respectful of children's responses and creations, and making mistakes, is part of the fun of learning (Byrne et al., 2024). This speaks to Kokas's (2013, p. 38) assertion that 'There is no such thing as a 'mistake'. What could it be? The others would celebrate her for what she came up with'.

In line with the broader literature, we suggest a need for musical experiences across the broad continuum of ownership for children and advocate an associated balance between musical games play and guided musical play to support learning in primary classrooms. In this way, children of all ages may be afforded the opportunity to participate playfully, actively and creatively, and with increased ownership and agency in music education within their classrooms.

Summary

The range of playful approaches to music education outlined within this article illuminates a representation of playful music learning across a continuum of ownership for primary schools, building on the work of Zosh et al. (2017) for the music education sphere. We have expanded upon conceptualisations of musical play outlined in much of the extant literature, classified within our model as *free musical play*. Our broader conceptualisation provides insights into how playful music learning can infuse the everyday experience of children in primary schools and increase pupils' ownership of their learning. In particular, *musical games-play* represents a means of developing children's musical knowledge and understanding in increasingly playful, fun and scaffolded classroom activities that strive to cultivate an environment where music is a 'joy for the pupils' (Kodály, 1974, p. 120). Teachers can scaffold and support children's critical thinking and academic music learning through active, discovery-based experiences (Houlahan & Tacka, 2015) such as those associated with *pedagogical singing games* and *musical gamification* for their primary school classrooms.

Involving increased child ownership, coupled with a degree of adult guidance and scaffolding, *guided musical play* in the classroom builds predominantly on the work of Kokas (1999, 2013) in placing the child at the centre of the music-making experience and honing in on exploration, creation, improvisation and embodied response to music. Examples of guided musical play include both *dramatic, kinaesthetic musical play* and *constructive musical play,* which provide opportunities for increasingly creative, responsive and agentic music learning.

Conclusion

This article has provided and illustrated an original model for conceptualising playful music learning along a continuum of ownership that has been developed through engagement with the literature pertaining to play, playful pedagogy, music education and education. It has highlighted playful elements that can be associated with Kodály's philosophy of music education and Kokas's pedagogy. These resonate with contemporary literature in the education sphere and inform the conceptualisations of musical games-play (incorporating pedagogical singing games and musical gamification) and guided musical play (incorporating dramatic, kinaesthetic musical play and constructive musical play), respectively. Illustrations of these forms of playful music learning demonstrate how teachers might conceptualise, scaffold and guide primary school children's music learning in increasingly playful ways. This is seen to offer potential to engage children in increasingly joyful, embodied, creative, holistic and meaningful music learning experiences along a continuum of ownership across the primary school.

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