

NEEDS OF GENERATION ALPHA AND ACTIVITIES OF SELF-ACTUALISATION THROUGH MUSIC IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Aleksandra Smolić Batelić¹⁷⁷, mag.mus, Učiteljski fakultet u Rijeci Sveučilišta u Rijeci,

Doc.dr.sc. Lucija Jančec¹⁷⁸, Učiteljski fakultet u Rijeci Sveučilišta u Rijeci,

Abstract: *A challenge for educational professionals is how to know and understand a child. Given that each generation has a set of characteristics that are inextricably linked to the time and prevailing culture in which it grows up, it is essential in early childhood and preschool education to address children's current needs in a timely manner. Today's children growing up in the 2010-2025 timeframe are referred to as the Alpha Generation. Theorists, together with practitioners of early childhood education, espouse a humanistic orientation to the preschool education curriculum that focuses on the image of the child and the attitudes and actions that arise from it. Although the National Curriculum for Early and Preschool Education in the Republic of Croatia integrates digital technologies as one of the key competencies for lifelong learning, there is still insufficient knowledge about the current generation of children and a discrepancy in the perception of the provision of more modern educational strategies. In accordance with these settings, musical activities that favor the use of digital music technology in work with children can also stimulate children's purposeful motivation and support their self-actualization. This paper problematizes the possibilities of self-actualization of children of the "Alpha generation," incorporating as a starting point the National Curriculum for Early Childhood and Preschool Education and its possibilities, Abraham Maslow's humanistic theory and the benefits of using digital music technology in work with preschool children.*

Keywords: *music, early childhood education, humanistic learning theory, self-actualisation, digital music technology*

Introduction

In the processes of reflection and pedagogical action in early childhood education (ECE), it is also necessary to take into account guiding elements such as current generational characteristics. Essential knowledge of the characteristics of current generations has an influence on the creation of effective educational programs at individual, national and global level, reviewing more adequate strategies for access to learning and teaching, content selection, planning learning outcomes and development-appropriate activities and other factors in order to better "keep up" with user needs. Jukić and Škojo (2021) point out that the entire education system is facing the challenge of adapting the way it communicates with Generation Alpha. It is also interesting to note that the study that Jukić and Škojo (2021) conducted with university pedagogists and ICT experts, there were disagreements in perceptions of the education of children of Generation Alpha, as well as a different views of the role of the education system. Regardless of the different attitudes of educators, the fact remains that children today actively engage with technology, and "Whatever level of the school system we look at, we can see that professionals working in education report the same problems everywhere. The lack of interest and motivation, the lack of perspectives and aims, inattentiveness, attention disorders, a fall in the

¹⁷⁷ smolic.batelic@ufri.uniri.hr

¹⁷⁸ lucija.jancec@ufri.uniri.hr

quality of communication and human relations, the low level of emotional intelligence, or the seemingly higher rate of learning- and conduct disorders make pedagogues think in every area.“ (Kövecses-Gósi, 2018, p. 205). “Keeping up“ with Generation Alpha and encouraging them on their path of self-actualization is primarily about understanding their "generational structure" and supporting the idea that adult educators should readily and carefully step out of the shoes of "traditionalism" in their own work. The National Curriculum for Early and Preschool Education of the Republic of Croatia (NKRPOO, 2015) includes Digital Competence as one of the key competences in a child's lifelong learning. Also, the design of the curriculum is based on a humanistic approach to the child's self-actualization, encouraging and supporting the development of all of a child's potentials (NKRPOO, 2015). Towards this goal, more modern pedagogical interventions in early and preschool education should be reflected in the field of music activities.

Characteristics of the Alpha generation

The term “Generation Alpha” is a popular and already globally accepted name that has been adopted from the field of marketing and is widely used in scientific circles, even though, according to Nagy and Kölcsey (2017), there is no scientific evidence for its naming and definition. Generation Alpha, “*digital natives*” (Bennet, 2013 according to Tootel et al., 2014, Ramadlani and Wibisono, 2017), or “*homo tabletus*” (Stefanov et al., 2018 according to Apaydin and Kaya, 2020), is used to refer to persons born from year 2010 to 2025, that is, to the generation that follows after Generation Z (Tootell et al., 2014; Ramadlani and Wibisono, 2017; Kövecses-Gósi, 2018; Apaydin and Kaya, 2020, etc.). Thus, McCrindle and Fell (2020) predict that Generation Alpha will be followed by Generation Beta (2025 to 2039) and Generation Gamma and Generation Delta. The term originates from McCrindle's national survey conducted in Australia, describing a generation addicted to screens and a touchscreen world (Nagy and Kölcsey, 2017; Carvalho et al., 2022). That is, “the concept of Generation Alpha refers to children and pre-adolescents living in a society permeated by actions intermediated by digital information and communication technologies” (Carvalho et al., 2022, p. 62). They are credited with having a high and experienced level of knowledge of technology from early childhood including laptops, mobile phones, gadgets and other technological devices that are full of audio and visual stimuli (Sari Augustina et al., 2020). Although this popularized term and topic captures the increasing attention of marketers, journalists, and scientists, there are a very limited number of scientifically relevant papers that reliably explore the comprehensive characteristics of this generation. There are also doubts about the generalization, relevance, and reliability of scientific findings in classifying the Alpha generation. References to scientific papers also cite popular sources, such as Berkowitz (2016), Carter (2016) and Silverman (2021). Nagy and Kölcsey (2017) also discuss this issue, emphasizing that “... people try to reach generational characteristics and attributes without a large amount of data” (2017, p. 113). Apaydin and Kaya (2020) conducted a study examining educators in Antalya with the aim of identifying the characteristics of Generation Alpha children. The results showed the following positive characteristics: they are more emotional, more aware and more confident about personal characteristics, able to more quickly access larger amounts of knowledge due to excessive dependence on technology which makes them freer and more creative, they learn faster and process visual and dynamic information more swiftly, etc. Negative characteristics include negative forms of behaviour such as a limited respect for private space but also limitations in social communication, they are more angry and grumpy, more inclined towards individual work rather than teamwork, prefer leadership to cooperation, are freer from imposed rules and run away from responsibility.

Self-actualisation in the process of upbringing and education in ECE

However, when we talk about early childhood education, one of the basic characteristics of this period is the natural motivation and interest of the child in learning about the environment in which he is and the activities that enable him to learn (Vujičić, 2005), thus indirectly reaching towards the level Maslow would describe as self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). The child learns by doing, as Piaget, Vigotsky, Bruner have convinced us with in numerous empirical researches in their works, therefore curricula with humanistic development orientation integrate these determinants into their basic settings

(Vujičić, 2005). A quality kindergarten curriculum has an integrated and developmental nature, as well as a humanistic and co-constructivist orientation. Creating a quality curriculum of an educational institution means creating appropriate organizational conditions based on a modern understanding of the child, i.e. understanding the child as a whole being, as an explorer and active creator of knowledge, as a social entity with specific needs, rights and culture, as an active citizen of the community and as a creative being with specific creative and expressive potentials. These complex settings, which imply a new image of the child, generate the need to provide opportunities for children's self-development, progress and success, in accordance with their needs and visibly different, more modern styles of non-formal spontaneous learning. These origins can be found in the National Curriculum of Early and Preschool Education in the Republic of Croatia (NKRPOO, 2015) and its understanding the child's learning as a result of his active and engaged participation in various activities: "Children learn through play and research and other activities that they find purposeful, that is, through direct experiences with a variety of learning resources. In doing so, they engage in a variety of interactions with other children and the adults who support them. The self-organization, research and discovery potential of children's activities is strengthened, and those forms of educator's support are provided that engage children's thinking capacities and encourage them to reflect on their own experiences. Such an understanding of learning finds its theoretical basis in the theory of constructivism and socioconstructivism and the importance of encouraging the development of children's metacognitive abilities" (p. 16). Theorists, together with practitioners, nurture a key feature of the kindergarten curriculum, which refers to the realization of the image of the child, the attitudes and actions that arise from it, and this feature is – humanistic. This umbrella document in Croatia describes the curriculum of early and preschool education aimed at developing the autonomy and emancipation of children in the process of education. In doing so, the self-initiated and self-organized activities of children, encouraged and supported by the educator, are especially valued, and in which, if necessary, they are directly involved. The design of the curriculum, which is based on the child's self-actualization, starts from the child and encourages the development of its potentials, not its obedience, conformism and receptivity. Children are encouraged to think independently and critically, and their perspectives are accepted. Their identity and self-esteem are especially strengthened and are continuously trained for self-assessment, provided with the experience of taking responsibility and practicing responsible behaviour. This is operationalized by education for a democratic way of life, and the whole environment of the kindergarten in which freedom, responsibility, tolerance, honesty and justice dominate. This requires a non-authoritarian and democratic structure of the kindergarten, i.e. the creation of a social environment in which the child is understood and respected. This is mostly reflected in the sensitivity of educators to the different needs of children (emotional and other) and their appropriate and timely response to them, which we can connect with Maslow's (1943) descriptions of universal human needs. This refers the multitude of everyday interactions of children with adults from which children can read that adults care about them, love them, understand and respect them, and that kindergarten is a place of comfort, satisfaction, belonging and quality relationships. Maslow (1943) says that these needs are universal to all people and that people are typically motivated for them. He makes a distinction in the way that the first four needs are defined as deficiency or lower needs, and the latter four as being or higher needs. People need to satisfy their lower deficiency needs before moving on to their higher growth needs, although he admitted that there were exceptions. The highest level are esteem needs include the need for recognition, attention, fame, competence, mastery, and self-confidence. It is through musical activity that the child is able to feel its competence, get the attention of the environment, enjoy music both independently and in group performances, and often a number of effects of music are associated with positive experiences in early childhood.

Pedagogical interventions in the field of music activities in ECE

Every child needs to be in active contact with the art of music. In the field of ECE, this is achieved through musical activities that should be in the service of the development of the child's full potential and well-being. Maslow (1968; 1971) also spoke about the role and connection of music with the theory of needs, claiming that "...music is an arena that provides the experience of heightened self-actualization, music is perceived as one of the easiest ways to achieve self-actualization of those

experienced by an individual through musical activities“ (Lowis, 2002 according to Annammal Piragasam et al., 2013, p. 125). Educators, as implementers of musical activities, should develop children's creative abilities through their own work, encourage their musical and creative experiences and enrich their experiences stimulated by music. These rather demanding undertakings in this area also impose questions about more successful strategies of pedagogical activity. In line with the definitions and characteristics of Generation Alpha, the quality provision of educational segments to this generation certainly requires the timely intervention of not only pedagogical practice, but also prompt scientific interest, especially in relation to music activities and music technology in early and preschool age. Dongauser et al. (2020) point out that, in spite of the numerous papers dealing with computer music technology in pedagogical practice, there is no identified research aimed at studying creative musical exercises of preschool children using digital music technologies that also pay attention to productive forms of musical activities. Half a decade ago, the NKRPOO (2015) included digital competencies as a key to lifelong learning, while the realization of values includes creativity that should be nurtured, encouraged and developed in the educational process with more original approaches to solving various problems. According to forecasts, Generation Alpha should last until 2025, followed by the previously mentioned Generation Beta (McCrinkle and Fell, 2020), which envisages coexistence with artificial intelligence and different directions of the educational context aimed at developing entrepreneurship and life skills. Therefore, the following questions need to be answered; will we continue to “catch the strings” retroactively, or will we actively and conscientiously anticipate and intervene in a timely manner in creating more appropriate and modern pedagogical educational solutions? At the same time, how to appropriately and purposefully set up music technology as part of musical activities with Alpha children in order to provide opportunities for their self-realization?

Modern approaches and incentives with digital music technology

In the music education of preschool children, the use of music and digital technologies reflects the development of children's creative abilities, increases motivation, optimizes the learning process and education of preschool children, provides more accessible material conditions for learning, and satisfies children's need for cognitive activity (Dongauser et al., 2020). Nardo (2008) points out that computers do not replace valuable activities in early childhood that are commonly used such as all forms of music (books and storytelling, art, movement and dance, etc.), but can have a positive effect as long as the child can connect its virtual experience with the real world (Panagiotakou and Pangea 2010). Dongauser et al. (2020) emphasize that the use of digital music technology should take place in special conditions, purposefully constructed and systematically applied. There are also examples of research in which digital music technology can be actively incorporated into the educational process in early and preschool age, especially in music activities. For example, the *Child Orchestra* programme: this programme is based on new paradigms that suggest active interaction among children through play. In that programme, a model of an interactive musical playground in a kindergarten was created to promote active listening to music. This was realized by integrating the concept of active listening and musical variability in an interactive system that generates polyphonic music in a way that it is manipulated in real time. The system allowed children and educators to directly control one voice in a composition, by individually improvising their own melody within the intended musical work. It is also expedient that in this conducted longitudinal case study, educators, children and musicians were involved in the creation and modification of the prototype. (Core et al., 2017). Avanzini et al. (2019) focused on the potential of a low-budget 3D printing device in the context of learning and teaching about music in preschool education. They suggested didactic activities with children, such as creating 3D objects of instruments and their sub-parts, alternative forms of musical notation and design and production of sound objects. Preka and Rangoussi (2019) conducted a study focusing on Quick Response (QR) codes, as part of augmented reality, with the aim of teaching music in kindergartens. Shaped by the name of the game "Treasure Hunt", children were encouraged to collaboratively develop strategies by solving problem situations by solving appropriate music tests and puzzles on a digital platform, using QR codes. More systematic research in this area can also be found in the Holistic Music Educational Approach for Young Children (HMEAYC), whose work is based on the creation of music education systems. They also focus on children with disabilities, and use modern computer technology to combine the work experts and music therapists in creating a music curriculum

model for early and preschool children (Lee et al., 2021). Actively guiding digital music technology in the educational process can enhance the motivating factor to encourage learning, act on the more attractive development of their diverse musical, creative and improvisational skills, all in accordance with their generational styles and characteristics of knowledge acquisition.

Conclusion

How to understand a child without getting to know it? It is necessary to take into account the universal characteristics of the child, its natural instinct for doing, learning by doing, but also the peculiarities of the time in which the child grows up. New generations demand a new view of the everyday life of a child in kindergarten, and this element has been the focus of this work. The effort to theoretically determine the children of "Generation Alpha" in the context of an open, flexible, humanistically oriented kindergarten curriculum as it exists in the Republic of Croatia, was actualized by practical examples of digital music technologies, which continue to instruct us to question educational practices. More than half a century ago, Maslow did the same, stating that "...the goal of education - the human goal, the humanistic goal, the goal so far as human beings are concerned - is ultimately the "self-actualization" of the person..." (Maslow, 1968, p. 74), in which a person becomes a complete human being, and music and effective education in music and art in general, is essentially far closer to the basic curriculum guided by intrinsic education. Furthermore, Maslow (1968) points out that music is an experiential field that enables intrinsic learning and teaching and is, as such, close to the psychological and biological core and identity of man.

Therefore, children of Generation Alpha should also have educational support in creating a stimulating educational environment that strives for the goal of their self-actualization. In accordance with their visibly different characteristics and learning styles, it is necessary to bridge the traditional gap and embrace the understanding that they need to be motivated by appropriate and active implementation of digital music technology in everyday educational work. In line with the creation of such opportunities, supported by their musical experiences from the challenging and stimulating environment in which they grow up and the styles of their acquisition of knowledge, opinion will change and strive to reconsider more modern approaches to music pedagogy in accordance with generational needs and characteristics. These changes will no longer be introduced in the form of a curriculum, but will contribute to a more comprehensive, primarily practical understanding and action of educators on how and what to strive to in order to allow for the self-actualization of the children under their care.

References:

1. Agustina, L., Fitriani, A. & Supratiwi, M. (2020). Relaxation in Children: Method to Reduce the Negative Effects of Using Gadgets on the Alpha Generation. *Jurnal Psikologi Talenta*, 5 (2), 112-120.
2. Annammal, G., Majid, R. & Jelas, Z. (2013). Music Appreciation and Self-actualization of Gifted Students. *Procedia- Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 90, 112-120.
3. Apaydin, Ç., & Kaya, F. (2020). An analysis of the preschool teachers' views on Alpha generation. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 6, 123-141.
4. Avanzini, F. & Ludovico, L. (2019). 3D printing in preschool music education: Opportunities and challenges. *Qwerty - Open and Interdisciplinary Journal of Technology, Culture and Education*, 14 (1), 71-92.
5. Carvalho, R., Monteiro, C. & Martins, M. (2022). Challenges for university teacher education in Brazil posed by the Alpha Generation. *Research in Education and Learning Innovation Archives*, 28, 61-76.
6. Core, C., Conci, A., De Angeli, A., Masu, R. & Morreale, F. (2017). Designing a Musical Playground in the Kindergarten. *Electronic Visualisation and the Arts* (EVA 2017), 1-12.
7. Dongauser, E.V., Nezhinskaya, T.A. & Glazyrina, E.Y. (2020). Development of Creative Abilities of Preschool Children Using Musical Digital Technologies. In A. D. Nazarov (Ed.)

- Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference Digitalization of Education: History, Trends and Prospects* (pp. 187-191). Atlantis Press. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200509.034>
8. Jukić, R. & Škojo, T. (2021) The Educational Needs of the Alpha Generation. *44th International Convention on Information, Communication and Electronic Technology MIPRO*, 564-569. DOI [10.23919/MIPRO52101.2021.9597106](https://doi.org/10.23919/MIPRO52101.2021.9597106)
 9. Kövecses Gösi, V. (2018). Cooperative Learning in VR Environment. *Acta Polytechnica Hungarica*, 15, 205-224.
 10. Lee, L. & Ying Sing, L. (2021). Training Effects and Intelligent Evaluated Pattern of the Holistic Music Educational Approach for Children with Developmental Delay. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(19), 1-12.
 11. Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370-396.
 12. Maslow, A. H. (1968). Music Education and Peak Experience. *Music Educators Journal*, 54(6), 72-75+163-164+167-169+171
 13. McCrindle, M. & Fell, A. (2020, February 12). *Understanding Generation Alpha*. <https://mccrindle.com.au/insights/blog/gen-alpha-defined/>
 14. Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i sporta (2015). Nacionalni kurikulum za rani i predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje. *Narodne novine*, 5/15.
 15. Nagy, Adam & Kölcsey, Attila. (2017). Generation Alpha: Marketing or Science. *Acta Technologica Dubnicae*. 7. 10.1515/atd-2017-0007.
 16. Ramadlani, A. K., & Wibisono, M. (2017). Visual Literacy and character education for Alpha Generation. *Proceedings International Seminar on Language, Education, and Culture ISoLEC* (pp. 1–7). Indonésia. Retrieved from http://sastra.um.ac.id/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/01-07-Abdul-Khaliq-Ramadlani-Marko-Wibisono_LAYOUTED.pdf
 17. Tootell, H., Freeman, M., & Freeman, A. (2014). Generation Alpha at the intersection of technology, play and motivation. *Proceedings of the International Conference on System Sciences, Estados Unidos da América* (pp. 82–90). <https://doi.org/10.1109/HICSS.2014.19>
 18. Preka, G. & Rangoussi, M. (2019). Augmented Reality and QR Codes for Teaching Music to Preschoolers and Kindergarteners. *Educational Intervention and Evaluation*, 113-123.
 19. Vujičić, L. (2005). Dijete u kretanju – upoznati i razumjeti. U: M. Kunstek (ur.), *Dijete u kretanju*. Zagreb: Gradski ured za obrazovanje i sport, 34-42.

POTREBE GENERACIJE ALFA I AKTIVNOSTI SAMOAKTUALIZACIJE KROZ GLAZBU U USTANOVAMA ZA RANI ODGOJ I OBRAZOVANJE

Sažetak: Izazov pred svakim profesionalcem koji se bavi odgojem i obrazovanjem je kako upoznati i razumjeti dijete. S obzirom da svaka generacija ima niz obilježja koja su neodvojiva od vremena i dominantne kulture u kojoj odrastaju, imperativ u odgoju i obrazovanju rane i predškolske dobi seže i u sfere pravovremenog reagiranja na trenutne generacijske potrebe djece. Današnju djecu, koja odrastaju u periodu od 2010-2025. godine naziva se Alpha generacijom. Teoretičari, zajedno s praktičarima u ranom i predškolskom odgoju i obrazovanju, njeguju humanističku orijentaciju kurikulumu vrtića, a odnosi se na sliku o djetetu, stavove i postupke koji iz istoga proizlaze. Premda Nacionalni kurikulum za rani i predškolske odgoj i obrazovanje u Republici Hrvatskoj integrira digitalne tehnologije kao jednu od ključnih kompetencija za cjeloživotno učenje, postoji i dalje nedovoljno poznavanje generacijskog „sklopa“ današnje djece i nesklad u percepcijama pružanja suvremenijih odgojno-obrazovnih strategija. U skladu s tim postavkama, pravac pri svrsishodnijoj motivaciji djece i potpora njihovom samoostvarenju mogu polučiti i glazbene aktivnosti koje pogoduju primjeni digitalne glazbene tehnologije u radu s djecom. Rad problematizira mogućnosti samoostvarenja djece „Alpha generacije“, a kao ishodište obuhvaća Nacionalni kurikulum za rani i predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje i njegove mogućnosti, humanističko-razvojnu teoriju Abrahama Maslowa te pogodnosti primjene digitalne glazbene tehnologije u radu s djecom predškolske dobi.

Ključne riječi: glazba, rani i predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje, humanističko-razvojna teorija, samoostvarenje, digitalna glazbena tehnologija