

“Music Kitchen”, a sound environment encouraging “flow” in babies and toddlers – motivational aspect of listening to radiophonic plays for babies

People tend to think creating for babies is simple but this is actually very far from being true. In order to motivate babies to listen, we have to enter their world as well as understand and feel what they feel; only at that point we can derive from this in order to transform this “material” into an artistic creation. But even more difficult than capturing their attention, is maintaining it because babies and toddlers' attention span is very short and shifts very easily. Artists creating for babies have to possess and get in touch with their own, living inner child who is curious, playful, mischievous, spontaneous, authentic and open-minded.

In other words, creating a radio play for babies has its own, particular and complex challenges. We live in a world that is extremely visual, full of attractive, colourful stimuli and picturesque images, which poses a question - how do we compete with that using (only) sound stimuli? How do we create sound environments where babies are comfortable but at the same time elicit feelings of safety as well as evoke a desire in babies to explore new things by inviting them into this new world while also stimulating them to listen attentively?

One of the most effective ways to get babies to listen is to encourage the “flow”, which is defined as the optimal experience eliciting feelings of comfort, curiosity and interest in the listener. In other words, the author is only able to convey the flow to a baby, if they feel it themselves first while creating a piece because the flow is an emotional state, which is “contagious”.

Enthusiasm (or *flow*) is a state that comes naturally to children. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) claims that children are in this state of flow most of the time. Totally consumed by an activity, usually when playing a game, a child loses the sense of place and time, which is something that comes very naturally and spontaneously to a child .

The flow is this wholesome sensation people feel when they're completely preoccupied and internally motivated to carry out certain activities (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Avsec, 2011). It is a feeling of joy when carrying out particular activities (Privette, 1983). In this state of flow there's no room for fear from not succeeding, one feels in control regarding their actions and acts automatically and feels infallible (Musek, 2007). In the state of flow, people experience ultimate joy, creativity and complete inclusion in one's life. This kind of experience is also defined as the “optimal experience” (Csikszentmihalyi, Kolo and Baur, 2004).

The way a child experiences the world as well as artistic creativity, is open-minded, fluid, lively, playful – it's saturated with the flow. A child wonders with curiosity, plays, experiments, improvises and deploys all of the senses while doing it. When a child is in the state of flow, their attention is directed towards the activity they're carrying out, they're completely absorbed in listening for which they're internally motivated and enjoy doing it.

So, if we want to “infect” babies with the flow, we have to create appropriate conditions for that to happen. One of the key conditions to elicit the flow is finding the balance between deploying baby's existing skills and combine that with appropriate challenges. So, if we want to motivate the child to listen, we first have to consider what their skills are (psycho-motor, emotional, social, thinking). In other words, the sound material we use has to match the level of child's listening skills, and be emotionally attractive in terms of content that derives from the environment, which feels familiar to the child, it has to encourage social interaction and be appropriately structurally conceived according to the level of child's attention and cognitive capacities. All of this needs to be balanced with challenges that will evoke child's curiosity and lure the child into a new world of sounds. Csikszentmihalyi (2014) says that the most important factors, which influence child's experiencing of the flow are the following:

- children experience the flow when they engage in activities for which they're internally motivated.
- children most often experience the flow when they engage in activities that are important to them personally and which they can associate with their real life and actual experiences.
- diminishing the presence of obtrusive stimuli from the environment increases the probability that the child will experience the state of flow

Social interaction is also important for experiencing the flow. It helps if a child listens to a radio fairy tale together with their parent, and especially their primary caregiver. It also helps when active listening includes touching or movements while listening because to a child music and movement are inseparable. While listening to music, a child begins to move spontaneously and it's recommendable if parents support and encourage this. Listening becomes a type of social interaction between a parent and a child and it's definitely not passive listening, instead it's a social child-parent game encouraged by sound stimuli.

There's not a lot of research existing on the topic of associating the state of flow with music, in fact it's very rare. Lamont (2011) concluded that experiencing the flow during listening is connected to being absorbed into music and losing the sense of what else is happening around us. Participants in these experiments also reported that they experience the flow more intensely when they concentrate solely on music. Diaz (2011) concluded that when we engage our cognition too much while listening to music, this leads to diminishing the sense of flow, which is a more affectionate experience. In order to experience the flow undivided attention and immersion into music is necessary, whereby our analytical mind

needs to be silenced and one has to focus on one's wholesome, intuitive mind instead. Of course, it's not the same when we deal with musicians or non-musicians. Musicians experience the flow when engaging with a more complex music material, in these situations their concentration is optimal, which means that for musicians more demanding music stirs a more intense emotional response and induces a more focused attention (Ruth, Spangardt and Schramm, 2016). Bernardi, Bellemare-Pepin and Peretz (2018) also discovered that the flow while listening to music depends on the type of music one listens to.

So, when we apply research results about experiencing the flow to the process of listening in babies, we could say that it is extremely important to attract baby's attention with various sound stimuli. Babies are particularly fascinated when sound stimuli include contents taken from their close(st) environment and are familiar to them. Children also like surprises, for example when a particular sound seems mysterious and they start to wonder what will happen next or what a certain sound represents. The totality of the sound material also has to be a wholesome acoustic play that a child can experience with all of their senses and which intrigues a child in a way that they want to repeat particular sound elements in the same way we repeat stuff when learning a language. The sound material needs to be such that it actively encourages children to engage in interaction into which they enter together with their parent.

Music Kitchen by authors Tajda Lipicer and Alenja Pivko Knežević is an example of a particular sound environment that includes all the necessary elements to evoke the flow in babies. The balance between challenging a baby and taking baby's skills into account lies in the fact that this radio-phonetic play takes place in an environment that is very familiar to babies, namely the kitchen. Babies know these sounds very well, but are also having fun while identifying them. Tiny surprises included in these sounds attract extra attention with children. Moreover, various stimuli and sound innovations are also helpful because a baby can recognize these sounds and feels a sense of accomplishment. The content, which comes from baby's close(st) social environment, evokes the feelings of trust and babies feel a sense of pleasure.

Music Kitchen is a very thought-out example of a specific sound environment that is interesting for a baby and attractive to listen to. During creative process the authors took notice of key developmental characteristics pertaining to a wholesome development of babies and toddlers. Music Kitchen engages babies primarily on their emotional level, which is necessary in order to awaken their interest for listening. By applying intriguing sound stimuli as a sort of sound-guessing game, children are mentally stimulated. It also encourages the development of their motor reactions on a vocal as well as physical movement level. Last but not least, Music Kitchen introduces babies and toddlers to a process of social interaction with their primary caregiver during the listening process.

Creating radio-phonics for babies and toddlers is on one hand an ingenious, innovative approach to raising an audience of future attentive listeners of radio waves, and on the other it enriches baby's wholesome developmental process by applying various sound incentives.