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<https://doi.org/10.35765/hw.2025.2472.14>

Data zgłoszenia: 29.04.2025

Data akceptacji: 29.10.2025

Data publikacji: 31.12.2025

From Perception to Audiation. Theoretical and Practical Contexts in Music Education

Od percepcji do audiacji. Teoretyczne i praktyczne konteksty w edukacji muzycznej

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: The article is an attempt to show the process, indicated in the title, that plays a crucial role in learners' development: introducing individuals and social groups to the world of music and drawing value from engagement with it.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: The central research question is how musical perception brings learners closer to audiation. The study is based on an in-depth analysis of the literature, which serves to identify themes that illuminate both the theoretical and practical dimensions of this issue from the perspective of music education.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: The discussion begins with an outline of the praxis-aesthetic model, which remains dominant in contemporary music education. This introduction provides the basis for examining selected aspects of music reception and for clarifying the practical applications of musical perception and audiation.

RESEARCH RESULTS: Active engagement with music in educational settings shapes learners' preferences and promotes readiness for perception, as well as for the ideas that music conveys. It evokes emotions and subjective experiences, while also supporting practice through immersion in the structure of a musical work, grasping the composer's language, and understanding the intentions of the performer. Auditory perception is necessary for audiation, understood as musical thinking, which allows listeners to grasp the meaning of the musical language. A listener who can recognize, assimilate, and imitate physically present sounds is prepared to develop auditional skills, that is, the ability to assign meaning to them.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPLICABLE VALUE OF RESEARCH: Introducing learners to the world of music requires consideration of both the values inherent in music

Suggested citation: Kołodziejski, M., & Kisiel, M. (2025). From Perception to Audiation. Theoretical and Practical Contexts in Music Education. *Horizons of Education*, 24(72), 133–142. <https://doi.org/10.35765/hw.2025.2472.13>

itself and learners' readiness to learn about its diverse expressions. The praxis-aesthetic perspective adopted here provides a scaffold for teachers and learners to deepen their reflections on the theoretical and practical contexts of musical perception and audiation.

→ **KEYWORDS:** MUSICAL PERCEPTION, AUDIATION, THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONTEXTS, MUSIC EDUCATION, LEARNERS

STRESZCZENIE

CEL NAUKOWY: Artykuł stanowi próbę ukazania zasygnalizowanego w tytule istotnego, z punktu rozwoju uczących się, procesu wprowadzania jednostki i grup społecznych w świat muzyki i odbioru wartości płynących z kontaktu z nią.

PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE: Główna problematyka artykułu wyraża się w pytaniu, jak percepceja muzyki zbliża uczących się do audiacji. Metoda badawcza w aspekcie pogłębionej analizy literatury źródłowej prowadzi do prezentacji wątków ukazujących teoretyczne i praktyczne konteksty zarysowanego tematu z punktu widzenia edukacji muzycznej.

PROCES WYWODU: Artykuł inicjuje rozważania ukazujące model praktyjalno-estetyczny, dominujący we współczesnej edukacji muzycznej. Te wstępne spostrzeżenia posłużyły do odsłonięcia i opisania wybranych aspektów odbioru muzyki oraz przybliżenie aplikacyjnych kontekstów percepji i audiacji muzycznej.

WYNKI ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ: Aktywne doświadczanie muzyki w aspekcie edukacyjnym determinuje preferencje muzyczne oraz sprzyja tworzeniu gotowości do jej percepji i wyobrażeń, jakie ona ze sobą niesie, uwalniając emocje i subiektywne odczucia. Pozwala także na sprawcze działanie oparte na praktycznym zagłębieniu się w konstrukcję utworu muzycznego, rozumieniu języka, którym posługuje się kompozytor, oraz odczytanie intencji wykonawczych i interpretatorskich. Percepceja słuchowa jest niezbędna do audiacji rozumianej jako myślenie muzyczne, prowadząc do pojmowania znaczenia języka muzyki. Odbiorca, który potrafi rozpoznać, przyswoić i naśladować dźwięki istniejące fizycznie, jest gotowy dla nauki audiacji, czyli rozumienia ich znaczenia.

WNIOSKI, REKOMENDACJE I APLIKACYJNE ZNACZENIE WPŁYWU BADAŃ: Wprowadzanie uczących się w świat muzyki wymaga uwzględnienia zarówno wartości tkwiących w samej muzyce, jak również skłonności uczących się do działania i poznania różnych jej przejawów. Przyjęte stanowisko praktyjalno-estetyczne będzie dla nauczających i uczących się wyznacznikiem do dalszych rozważań na temat kontekstów teoretyczno-praktycznych zjawiska percepji i audiacji muzycznej.

→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** PERCEPCJA MUZYCZNA, AUDIACJA, KONTEKSTY TEORETYCZNO-PRAKTYCZNE, EDUKACJA MUZYCZNA, UCZĄCY SIĘ

Introduction

The dynamics of contemporary social change shape how people behave towards themselves, others, and the surrounding world. Music occupies a particularly important place in this landscape of interaction and participation. It fills the individual's acoustic space, acting as a medium of information and values, a source of emotions and imagination, a vehicle of creativity and agency, and a form of support in processes of education, upbringing, and therapy. Among young people in particular, reception of music is now almost universal, largely owing to the growth of digital technologies, the Internet, and social media. With virtually unlimited access to vast repertoires and diverse forms of performance, music is often consumed in a utilitarian way. Listened to casually, it becomes something quickly absorbed but just as easily forgotten.

Musical preferences, shaped by family, peers, and media environments, are dominated by popular genres; yet they are also frequently marked by the pursuit of an individual path, as young learners explore alternative sounds and styles. This invites closer reflection on the perception and audiation of music from both theoretical and practical perspectives, with particular attention to demonstrating their role in building awareness of the structured nature of sound, as embodied in a wide range of musical works, and in cultivating sound habits of listening and engagement. The phenomenon discussed in this article directly concerns education, which, by virtue of its reach and the age and developmental capacities of learners, adopts a practical and value-oriented model in responsibly introducing successive generations into the world of music.

The Praxial-Aesthetic Model in Contemporary Music Education

Today, a wide range of well-established conceptual categories circulate within existing paradigms, informed by systemic and axiological criteria used to analyze the identity of music education as a discipline (Michalski, 2012, pp. 68–75). A fresh look at both the subject matter and the theoretical field of this didactic domain creates space for developing new paradigms that capture more accurately the realities of musical practice. In our research on music education, we have based our analysis on the praxial-aesthetic paradigm, which provides a framework for our discussion of musical perception and audiation.

David J. Elliott (1995) argues that music education is inherently practical and must take account of its diverse contexts. From his "praxial" standpoint, music represents a broad spectrum of human activity, with musicians expressing themselves through genres, styles, and traditions. The role of music education, therefore, is to enable learners to experience these diverse musical realities and to develop their musicality. Elliott views musical practice as a vital component of a child's personal growth. Bennett Reimer (1989, pp. 22–28), in turn, conceptualizes the aesthetic experience as an individual, subjective stream of consciousness evoked by a musical work. For Reimer, musical understanding is primarily an inner process, centered on perceiving the aesthetic

qualities embodied in the work. He considers its social, practical, and ethical dimensions to be secondary or extrinsic to music itself.

Małgorzata Suświłło (2021) and Maria B. Spychiger (1997) move towards combining these two theories, recognising the educational value of both aesthetic and pragmatic approaches. In this way, they align with the constructivist current in pedagogy, still promoted – though with limited success – in Polish education by Dorota Klus-Stańska (2009). Introducing learners to the world of music requires attention both to the values inherent in music itself and to the learners' inclination to act, create, and explore its many manifestations. The praxial-aesthetic orientation, therefore, provides a point of reference for our ongoing discussion and helps to situate musical perception and audiation in their broader theoretical and practical contexts.

Selected Aspects of Experiencing Music

Music is one of the fine arts that has accompanied humanity since the earliest times. It affects the human psyche through sound structures organized in time, and the resulting vibrations are sometimes experienced physically by certain individuals. These structures consist of acoustic waves with deliberately chosen frequencies and amplitudes, along with the silences that fall between them. Together, they create an impression of transience, imaginative abstraction, expressive force, and subjective meaning.

The richness of music arises from the interaction of its elements: melody, rhythm, dynamics, tempo and agogics, meter, harmony, timbre, form, articulation, and the sound-producing medium, whether electronic, natural, or non-articulated. Music is at once an expression of human creativity and a cultural practice. It accompanies daily life – play, rest, work, and ritual – serving both practical and symbolic functions. It also operates as a form of communication and a marker of collective identity.

On an individual level, music unites body and mind. It generates tension and release, coordinates movement, regulates physiological functions, and provides a channel for emotional expression. It can energize, soothe, or calm the listener (Sacks, 2011). Music also opens a non-material dimension, as it can ignite imagination and become a component of creative activity. Listening and performing are therefore more than artistic fulfilment for the composer, performer, or audience: music can stimulate new neural connections, sustain cognitive capacities, and preserve vivid memories (Sherman & Plies, 2024).

Music transcends time, place, and culture. Today we encounter it in diverse forms: classical, popular, film, folk, dance, and youth music. Each possesses distinctive qualities that shape genres, performance styles, associations, and transgressions. Above all, music plays a vital role in cultivating aesthetic sensibility, emotional life, and human attitudes, especially among the young (Scruton, 2024).

The Reception of Music

The experience of music is made possible by the human auditory system, its functioning, and the medium through which sound is conveyed – whether in the acoustics of a concert hall or via mechanical or digital audio and video playback. The context of listening also matters: individually (in an intimate setting), in pairs or small groups, or collectively. Engagement can be deepened by the presence of a speaker or lecturer, as well as by additional stimuli such as architecture, interior design, accompanying artworks, visual effects, electronic enhancements, or lighting. Listening to music, and later reflecting on it, also requires the analytical and synthetic flexibility of thought, particularly spatial reasoning, and, of course, imagination.

Listening to music is both an incidental and an intentional process. It is important to distinguish between hearing music – a passive reception of sound, with the ability to register its direction, intensity, and timbre – and listening to music, which entails conscious choice and focused attention. Leonard B. Meyer (1956, p. 43) observed that listening involves the build-up of tension, which arises from the listener's anticipation of particular experiences. Such anticipation may stem from the performance itself, the interpretation, or the ebb and flow of tensions and resolutions embedded in the music.

Listening is also often discussed alongside the notions of *reception* and *perception*. Reception may be understood as the general encounter with music (Szpunar, 2017). Aaron Copland (1998, p. 441) pointed to its “technical” dimension, which allows listeners to step outside the routines of daily life – sometimes simply to “daydream” through music – without performing detailed analysis. Klaus E. Behne (1990, p. 127), in his typology of listeners, identified several categories: the motor listener (who moves unconsciously to music), the compensatory listener (who uses music to dispel negative memories), the vegetative listener (who focuses on bodily responses to sound), the diffuse listener (for whom music becomes unobtrusive background), the emotional listener (seeking feelings and sensations), the sentimental listener (who daydreams and recalls past experiences), the associative listener (who invents narratives or imagery inspired by music), and the distanced listener (who analytically follows musical structures, melody, rhythm, performance, and technique).

Perception, by contrast, is a more complex cognitive process linked to the recognition of musical phenomena. It entails the analysis and synthesis of musical material, the formation of both musical and extra-musical associations, aesthetic evaluation, and emotional response. Theodor Adorno (1968) argued that genuine music listening is this kind of deep, analysis-based engagement. According to Zofia Burowska (1980, p. 21), perception begins with the mind's readiness to compare pre-existing patterns and stereotypes already ingrained in the listener's imagination with those emerging during actual listening. The effectiveness of such mental operations depends on how strongly these patterns are encoded in auditory memory. As Burowska emphasizes, perception is a skill that develops with experience; hence the importance of listening to a wide range of works in varied and compelling performances.

Edwin E. Gordon (1997, p. 27), in his account of musical acculturation, places listening at the very start of a child's development in speech and song. Scholars highlight the significance of family musical culture (how music is practiced and valued at home), parents' interaction with children (musical play, making music together), and the deliberate selection of sound stimuli, particularly those coming from media, live performances, broadcasts, or informal gatherings.

Anna Chęcka-Gotkowicz (2010, pp. 25–35), asking whether we truly know how to listen, notes a contemporary paradox: we often hear music without actually listening to it. Edwin E. Gordon (1999) likewise maintains that people can both listen and audiate simultaneously. Audiation, sometimes misleadingly described as "inner hearing," is both a theoretical construct and a multi-stage creative process through which sound becomes music and acquires meaning (Kołodziejski, 2022, p. 278). It is thus closely tied to rational listening and musical understanding, which, as Gordon (1999, p. 75) observes, "does not require the simultaneous physical presence of sound." Audiation occurs not only in listening but also in recall, performance, reading and writing music, and in relation to imagined sounds, particularly in composition and improvisation.

As Mieczysław Wallis (1968, pp. 306–311) reminds us, musicality, conceived as a responsiveness to sound capable of stirring emotion, is a prerequisite for being a true music lover. To listen to music is, in essence, to remain open to otherness, to accept the invitation extended by composer and performer. Yet the fullness of musical perception requires more than sensitivity; it rests equally on ability, knowledge, aesthetic refinement, intelligence, and interest in music. Audiation, in this sense, is best understood as a fusion of abilities, experience, and skills. As Kołodziejski (2022, p. 278) argues, "the possession of highly refined listening capacities – gained through the internalisation of musical motifs (patterns) at first imposed externally but eventually owned as one's own, and retained in long-term memory – is a crucial factor determining success in a wide range of musical practices."

The Applied Context of Musical Perception and Audiation

In contemporary music education, considerable emphasis is placed on introducing students to the world of music through exposure to high-quality works and on cultivating the habit of attentive listening. For a student who learns to listen with focus and interest, music becomes a source of rich and rewarding aesthetic experience. Yet to achieve this, the child must follow a path that involves developing concentration and learning to listen closely to the musical output of teachers, peers, and their own performances (Kisiel, 2013, p. 170).

At the earliest stages, listening to music is often accompanied by play, during which curiosity, the appeal of sound material, creativity, and inspiration provide satisfaction and positive emotions. Over time, this develops into a deeper engagement with the different layers of a musical work: its sound, form, expression, and performance. The next step

is understanding the language of music, learning its elements, and acquiring the ability to articulate thoughts about music. At this stage, children must develop the capacity to understand and feel music as well as accumulate and expand their musical experiences.

It is crucial that this process begins early, in the family setting, and continues through daycare, preschool, and elementary school. Teachers, in turn, should be both prepared and motivated to introduce children to the world of music and its values while respecting established pedagogical principles (Sacher, 2004, p. 23). Zofia Burowska (1980, p. 21) draws attention to the wide range of circumstances in which children experience music: varied contexts, sources, media, and acoustic conditions. As a result, listening often takes the form of spontaneous contact with music. The listener's mindset, capacity for concentration, memory, imagination, and prior experiences all play a vital role in this process.

Maria Przychodzińska (1990, p. 13) distinguishes two dimensions of musical experience. The first is "breadth," or contact with a wide variety of music capable of evoking diverse responses. The second is "depth," which involves closer engagement with individual works in terms of composer, performer, interpretation, musical language, atmosphere, and characteristic features. Helena Danel-Bobrzyk (Danel-Bobrzyk et al., 1996, pp. 5–6) also links children's engagement with music to exposure to diverse experiences: differences in performance, sound, emotional expression, genre, and style. She stresses the importance of developing listening skills, which requires both assigning specific tasks and encouraging children to approach musical works with openness to their own personal responses.

Active listening to music has become very popular among educators. This technique combines listening with a range of participatory activities: rhythmic games, chant, playing instruments, movement-based storytelling, elements of drama or pantomime, and even assuming the role of conductor or performer. Following Batia Strauss's strategy, children discover different aspects of a musical work. By engaging in play or practicing a selected piece, they become familiar with it almost incidentally (see Tarczyński, 2000; Żyłka, 2001).

Elżbieta Frolowicz (2008, p. 8), a key advocate of this method, envisions the student not only as a thoughtful listener, but also as an active participant in diverse forms of musical activity. This view resonates with Urszula Śłyk's (Kisiel & Śłyk, 2022, p. 173) concept of multisensory engagement, which underscores the coexistence of music with other art forms: visual art, drama, literature, movement, and technology. These strands interweave in the child's creative and re-creative activity. Listening to others and to oneself in structured situations brings latent potential to the surface, fosters imagination and creativity, develops problem-solving and improvisational skills, and cultivates original thinking. At the same time, it strengthens social bonds, cooperation, and communication.

Within the praxial-aesthetic model, one also finds an influential concept of listening borrowed from Eastern pedagogical traditions and rooted in Dmitri Kabalevsky's program (cited in Nikolai & Kisiel, 2004, pp. 3–8). This approach calls for a gradual reduction of teacher intervention, since children must, above all, be taught to love music by being exposed to a wealth of inspiring compositions. An essential part of this process is showing children what march, song, and dance mean in music, and later encouraging

them to perceive these qualities – march-like, song-like, and dance-like – across different artistic forms. The ultimate aim is to help learners discover their own path to experiencing music in its many creative expressions.

Audiation is a distinctive form of musical thinking. It allows for the effortless recall of music in one's mind and, more importantly, for the ability to imagine it with a profound grasp of its structure, even in the absence of physical sound. Edwin Elias Gordon compared audiation to the mental hearing and processing of music that is not, or could not be, physically present (Zwolińska, 2011, p. 120).

Gordon identified six stages of audiation, which occur both cyclically and sequentially, flowing smoothly from one to the next. These stages can be observed while listening to music: sounds are first heard, retained, and organized into tonal and rhythmic patterns with specific tonal centers and macrobeats; tonality and meter then provide the basis for these audiated patterns; the organized patterns are stored in auditional memory; stored patterns are compared with others, including new ones, in terms of similarities, differences, and relationships; and, finally, patterns are anticipated and audiated in both familiar and unfamiliar music (Kołodziejski & Trzos, 2013, p. 168).

Gordon did not equate listening perception with audiation, though he regarded perception as essential to the process. In his view, individuals must first be able to absorb physically present sounds before they can learn to audiate. For this reason, learners should begin by imitating, before developing auditional abilities. If imitation, based on recognition, may be likened to copying, then audiation is more akin to visualization.

Differences between audiation and mechanical memorization can be illustrated with a simple example of musical performance. When playing an instrument or singing, performers inevitably encounter slips and mistakes. A musician who can audiate can easily correct the error or hesitation and continue smoothly without interrupting the performance. By contrast, those relying on mechanical memorization are more likely to stop, attempting to recall the notation, fingering, or muscle movement, or else restart the piece from the beginning.

Depending on the learner's stage of education, this process may involve acculturation, imitation, and assimilation, each providing a pathway toward higher levels of musical awareness. The earliest phase, known as preparatory audiation, the foundation of music learning, functions as a transitional stage leading to true audiation. Progression to the next level depends on the learner's musical maturity, which is linked not only to the development of tonal and rhythmic skills but also to musical engagement, as well as emotional and physical growth.

Conclusions

Our analysis shows that musical perceptual skills bring learners closer to achieving successive stages of audiation. The range and quality of musical stimuli, together with the breadth of musical experiences, strongly influence individual differences. It is also important to note

the variation in how perceptual and auditional skills are acquired by students in specialist music schools compared to those in general education. In this context, the praxial-aesthetic orientation provides both teachers and learners with a point of reference for further inquiry into the theoretical and practical dimensions of musical perception and audiation.

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Source of funding
Lack of funding sources.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).