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# Music-supported informal learning in primary education: A socio-pedagogical framework for communication and social inclusion

# Nieformalne uczenie się wspierane muzyką w edukacji wczesnoszkolnej: socjopedagogiczne ramy komunikacji i inkluzji społecznej

**Abstract**

This conceptual paper addresses a gap in research on semi-structured music-supported activities that can foster communication and social inclusion in primary education. It proposes Music-Supported Informal Learning (MSIL), integrating socio-cultural theory, experiential pedagogy, and social pedagogy. The framework comprises collaborative rhythm exercises, vocal expression, creative movement, and media-supported storytelling, using music as a mediator of interaction rather than an artistic end in itself. MSIL is distinguished from formal music education, music therapy, and unstructured play through semi-structured participation and subtle teacher facilitation. The paper defines five core principles and an operational matrix, remains conceptual and presents no empirical findings. It establishes a basis for future quasi-experimental and qualitative validation.

**Keywords:** communication, Music-Supported Informal Learning, primary education, social inclusion, social pedagogy

**Streszczenie**

Artykuł identyfikuje lukę w badaniach nad codziennymi, półstrukturalnymi działaniami muzycznymi wspierającymi komunikację i inkluzję w edukacji wczesnoszkolnej. Proponuje model *Music-Supported Informal Learning* (MSIL) łączący teorię społeczno-kulturową, pedagogikę doświadczenia i pedagogikę społeczną. Obejmuje on ćwiczenia rytmiczne, ekspresję wokalną, ruch twórczy oraz storytelling wspierany mediami, a muzykę traktuje jako środek interakcji, nie cel artystyczny. Różni się od formalnej edukacji muzycznej, muzykoterapii i niestrukturyzowanej zabawy poprzez półstrukturalny charakter oraz subtelną facylitację nauczyciela. Artykuł przedstawia pięć

zasad i matrycę operacyjną modelu, ma charakter koncepcyjny i nie zawiera wyników empirycznych. Stanowi podstawę przyszłej walidacji quasi-eksperymentalnej i jakościowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** edukacja wczesnoszkolna, inkluzja, komunikacja, pedagogika społeczna, uczenie nieformalne

## Introduction

Modern primary education operates within a rapidly evolving socio-cultural landscape characterized by intensive digitalization, changing patterns of child socialization, and heightened awareness of emotional well-being in classroom settings.[1] While digital platforms offer unprecedented access to information, educational researchers increasingly observe diminished opportunities for spontaneous, unmediated peer interaction among children.[2] Consequently, primary school educators face the persistent challenge of addressing communicative hesitation, social isolation, and fragmented peer dynamics within increasingly diverse student populations.

Traditional educational structures often rely on formal instructional methodologies to achieve academic and communicative milestones. However, rigid classroom environments may inadvertently heighten performance anxiety among children who struggle with verbal self-expression, language acquisition, or social adaptation. In response to these limitations, contemporary educational discourse has increasingly recognized the pedagogical value of informal, non-formal, and semi-structured learning spaces within the broader school ecosystem.[3]

Music, as an intrinsic human medium of expression and interaction, holds significant socio-pedagogical potential. Yet, within mainstream primary education, music is frequently relegated to either highly technical forms of music instruction or passive background entertainment. This conceptual paper addresses this critical gap in the literature by synthesizing perspectives from social pedagogy, informal learning theory, and communicative development. It introduces Music-Supported Informal Learning (MSIL) not as a system for formal technical musical training, but as a structured socio-pedagogical framework designed to enhance communicative confidence, active participation, and social inclusion among primary school students.[4]

[1] European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *Promoting diversity and inclusion in schools in Europe*, Luxembourg 2023, pp. 3–4, DOI: https://doi.org/10.2797/443509; M. Żylińska, *Neurodydaktyka. Nauczanie i uczenie się przyjazne mózgowi*, Toruń 2013, pp. 174–182, DOI: https://doi.org/10.12775/978-83-231-6058-8.

[2] G.J. J.Biesta, *Good Education in an Age of Measurement: Ethics, Politics, Democracy*, Boulder, CO 2015, pp. 1–4.

[3] L. Green, *Music, Informal Learning and the School: A New Classroom Pedagogy*, Aldershot 2008, pp. 23–28, DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315248523; K. Illeris, *How We Learn: Learning and Non-Learning in School and Beyond*, London 2007, pp. 75–95, DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203958544.

[4] S. Hallam, *The power of music: Its impact on the intellectual, social and personal development of children and young people*, "International Journal of Music Education" 2010, No. 3, pp. 275–278,

## Theoretical background and critical literature eeview

The conceptualization of Music-Supported Informal Learning is grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework incorporating socio-cultural theory, experiential learning, and contemporary social pedagogy.

## Synthesis and critical analysis of foundational theories

Lev S. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory posits that cognitive and communicative development is fundamentally mediated through social interaction and cultural tools. In the context of primary education, shared creative activity serves as a mediator, allowing children to negotiate meaning and practice collaborative interaction. Complementing this, John Dewey's experiential education underscores active engagement and reflective experience, while Lucy Green and Knud Illeris emphasize learner autonomy and informal peer learning in music.[5]

However, a critical comparison of these foundational frameworks reveals significant conceptual tensions.

Green's Informal Learning vs. Institutional Structure: While Green advocates for implicit, unguided peer imitation in popular music contexts, mainstream primary education requires structured developmental goals. Purely unguided informal learning often risks reinforcing pre-existing peer hierarchies or marginalizing less socially confident students.

Vygotsky's Scaffolding vs. Peer Autonomy: Vygotskian frameworks rely heavily on "more knowledgeable others" (teachers or advanced peers), which can unintentionally recreate performance pressure and anxiety during creative tasks.

Illeris's Incentive Dimension vs. Institutional Constraints: Illeris notes that learning fails when emotional incentives are disconnected from institutional tasks. Formal music education often prioritizes aesthetic technicality over emotional safety, discouraging reticent learners.

MSIL addresses these theoretical gaps by proposing a semi-structured, socio-pedagogical middle ground. It incorporates Green's emphasis on playfulness and

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761410370658; C. Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*, Hanover, NH 1998, pp. 8–13.

[5] L. S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, Cambridge, MA 1978, pp. 52–57; J. Dewey, *Experience and Education*, New York 1938, pp. 25–31; L. Green, *Music, Informal Learning and the School: A New Classroom Pedagogy*, Aldershot 2008, pp. 180–186, DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315248523; K. Illeris, *How We Learn: Learning and Non-Learning in School and Beyond*, London 2007, pp. 84–98, DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203958544.

informal interaction, but embeds subtle teacher facilitation to maintain emotional safety, thereby transforming informal creative activities into accessible spaces for social inclusion.

## Social pedagogy, inclusive education, and contemporary empirical insights

Social pedagogy historically emphasizes the holistic well-being of the individual within their social environment, focusing on community cohesion and the mitigation of social inequalities. Contemporary scholarship frames the primary school as a living social micro-system where relational dynamics directly shape child development.[6]

Empirical studies in primary music education and social inclusion provide compelling insights into non-formal creative modalities.

Prosocial Behaviour and Communicative Ease: Research in developmental psychology indicates that joint music-making and movement synchrony can promote cooperative and helpful pro-social behaviour among young children.[7]

Inclusive Policy Guidelines: European policy benchmarks emphasize that multi-sensory and non-formal activities serve as vital bridges for children experiencing language hesitation or social adjustment challenges.[8]

Despite these advancements, existing literature tends to treat musical activities either as clinical interventions or as formal artistic curriculum subjects. There remains a paucity of theoretical models explaining how semi-structured, informal music-supported activities function as everyday socio-pedagogical mechanisms in primary schools. The MSIL framework bridges this gap.

## The MSIL socio-pedagogical framework

The proposed Music-Supported Informal Learning (MSIL) framework systematically connects structural inputs, socio-pedagogical mediating processes, and developmental outcomes.

[6] T. Pilch, *Grupa rówieśnicza jako środowisko wychowawcze* [in:] *Pedagogika społeczna: człowiek w zmieniającym się świecie*, eds. T. Pilch, I. Lepalczyk, Warszawa 2003, pp. 174–186; H. Radlińska, *Pedagogika społeczna*, Wrocław 1961, pp. 17–35; J. Smyła, *Organizowanie indywidualizacji kształcenia w klasie wielokulturowej* [in:] *Nauczyciel wobec wyzwań nowoczesności. Kierunki, koncepcje i dylematy*, eds. J. Szempruch, A. Ratajek, J. Smyła, Wrocław–Kielce 2018, pp. 111–124.

[7] S. Kirschner, M. Tomasello, *Joint music making promotes pro-social behavior in 4-year-old children*, "Evolution and Human Behavior" 2010, No. 5, pp. 354–364, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2010.04.004.

[8] European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *Promoting diversity*…, pp. 69–74.

## Structural overview

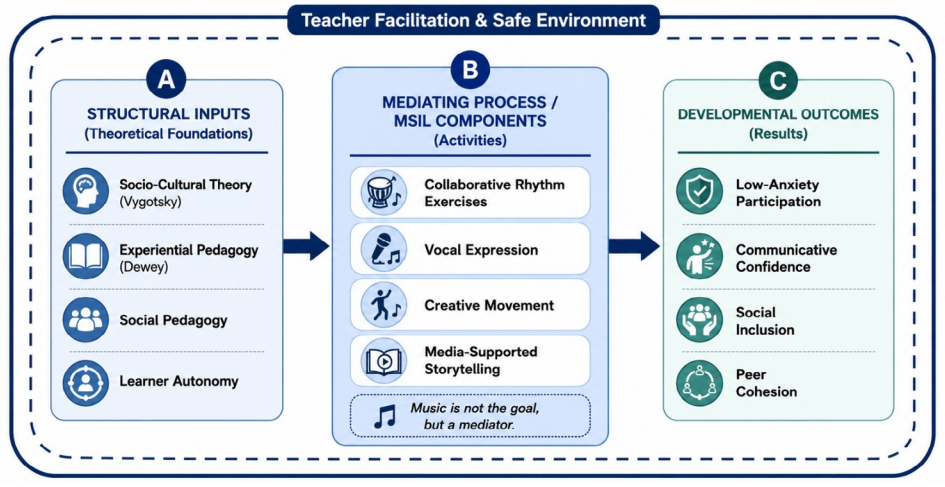


**Figure 1. Structural diagram of the MSIL socio-pedagogical framework**

Source: Author's own elaboration.

## Theoretical novelty: delineating MSIL from neighbouring paradigms

To establish the distinct conceptual identity of MSIL, it is essential to delineate it from formal music education, music therapy, and unstructured play.

MSIL vs. Formal Music Education: Formal music education prioritizes aesthetic precision, notation literacy, and technical performance skills. In contrast, MSIL treats music as a secondary mediator for primary socio-communicative development; musical accuracy is subordinate to peer interaction and communicative expression.[9]

MSIL vs. Music Therapy: Music therapy represents a clinical application of music, whereas MSIL is a pedagogical framework designed for general primary school settings, facilitated by generalist educators to enhance everyday classroom climate and peer inclusion.[10]

MSIL vs. Unstructured Informal Play: While unstructured play relies entirely on spontaneous peer dynamics (which can inadvertently lead to exclusion), MSIL provides a semi-structured socio-pedagogical framework where subtle teacher facilitation ensures equitable participation.

[9] L. Green, *Music, Informal Learning*…, p. 10.
[10] S. Hallam, *The power of music*…, pp. 275–278.

## Core principles of the MSIL framework

Low-Anxiety Participation: Activities are explicitly non-evaluative and non-competitive. Mistakes are conceptualized as creative variations, eliminating performance anxiety and encouraging participation from reticent learners.

Collective Creativity: Engagement is built upon group synchrony and shared artistic exploration rather than individual solo performance, reinforcing a sense of collective cohesion.

Embodied Communication: Rhythmic movement and physical gesture precede or accompany verbal articulation, providing alternative, pre-verbal channels of peer connection.

Inclusive Interaction: Tasks are structured to ensure equal access and participation regardless of students' prior musical training, linguistic background, or neurodevelopmental profile.

Reflective Facilitation: The educator acts not as an authoritative instructor, but as a socio-pedagogical facilitator who creates safe boundaries, monitors group dynamics, and subtly guides peer interactions.

## Operational matrix of MSIL components

Table 1 outlines the structural components of MSIL, detailing their specific socio-pedagogical functions and expected developmental outcomes within primary education.

**Table 1. Operational matrix of MSIL framework components**

| MSIL component | Core activity focus | Socio-pedagogical function | Expected developmental outcome |
|---|---|---|---|
| Collaborative Rhythm | Pulse games, body percussion, group drumming | Fosters interpersonal synchrony and active listening | Enhanced non-verbal coordination and peer attunement |
| Vocal Play & Expression | Sound exploration, chanting, vocal improvisation | Reduces vocal inhibition and speech anxiety | Increased verbal confidence and expressive freedom |
| Creative Movement | Rhythmic movement, spatial group games | Facilitates bodily self-expression and cooperative space sharing | Improved social bonding and physical peer integration |
| Media-Supported Storytelling | Digital audio tools, music-assisted narratives | Integrates creative technology with narrative expression | Strengthened communicative participation and digital literacy |

Source: Author's own elaboration.

## Discussion and pedagogical implications

### Practical Implementation in School Ecosystems

The integration of MSIL into primary school ecosystems offers versatile, pragmatic pathways for fostering inclusive educational environments. Educators can deploy short, semi-structured MSIL modules during classroom transitions, morning assemblies, after-school creative clubs, or integrated arts sessions. Because MSIL prioritizes process over product, it avoids the temporal and financial burdens associated with formal musical productions, rendering it highly adaptable for diverse institutional settings.

### Institutional Climate, Teacher Agency, and Facilitation

The successful implementation of MSIL relies heavily on teacher agency, professional confidence, and a supportive institutional school climate. Primary school educators do not require advanced technical musical mastery to facilitate MSIL effectively; rather, they require socio-pedagogical competence, openness to creative play, and institutional encouragement. School leadership plays a critical role by legitimizing informal learning spaces and fostering a school culture that values social inclusion alongside academic achievement.[11]

### Limitations of the Framework

Lack of Direct Empirical Validation: While grounded in robust contemporary literature, the MSIL model requires rigorous empirical testing across diverse classroom settings.

Contextual and Developmental Variability: The operational efficacy of MSIL may vary according to age subgroups (e.g., early primary vs. upper primary), class sizes, and cultural background factors.

Institutional Resistance: Standardized curriculum demands and high-stakes testing cultures may present institutional barriers to allocating time for informal learning activities.

### Directions for Future Research

Quasi-Experimental Longitudinal Studies: Implementing pre-test/post-test designs comparing primary cohorts exposed to MSIL intervention modules against control groups undergoing standard formal curricula.

Qualitative Case Studies: Conducting in-depth observational and interview-based studies to explore teachers' lived experiences, implementation barriers, and socio-pedagogical decision-making.

Assessment Scale Development: Designing and validating specialized observational rubrics to measure subtle shifts in communicative confidence, non-verbal peer interaction, and classroom social inclusion over time.

[11] J. Smyła, *Organizowanie indywidualizacji*…, pp. 111–124.

## Conclusion

This paper has introduced Music-Supported Informal Learning (MSIL) as an integrative socio-pedagogical framework designed to address contemporary communicative and inclusive needs in primary education. By synthesizing socio-cultural learning theories, experiential pedagogy, and contemporary social pedagogy, the framework demonstrates how semi-structured, creative musical interactions can serve as effective socio-pedagogical mediators for peer integration, communicative confidence, and active social participation. While theoretical in nature, the MSIL framework provides a structured foundation for future empirical research and offers practical guidance for educators seeking to build more communicative, empathetic, and inclusive primary school communities.

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