

# Creation Inspired by Music

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## Introduction

The present study reports on project-based research with the participation of students specialising in preschool teaching. It is important to emphasise that pre-service teachers should be exposed to tasks that aim to develop productive imagination and creativity during their preschool teacher training, as their future work is one of the most creative professions in education. Therefore, the “Play in the Arts” course allowed students to experience the expression of their own creative imagination through a multi-step project, resulting in different, unique products (drawings or painting, stories, scenes of the story in clay or other visual representations, photos of the clay scenes, short slideshows of the photos etc.). This paper aims to provide an account of the first phase of the project: the formation of students’ associations inspired by music. The subsequent phase shows and discusses the representation of the created internal images and verbal associations as external images.

## Theoretical background

The theoretical framework of the research is a broader view of process-based writing strategy based on cognitive psychology. Accordingly, the main products of the project are the stories written by the students and their creation (and further elaboration) is the result of a process. The basic principle of process-based writing is that, although it emphasises the concrete text creation phase, it leaves more room for the planning and revision segments.

One of the basic models of process-based writing is Flower and Hayes’ (1980) Recursive Model (Figure 1). This model divides the composing process into three parts: planning, translating, and reviewing. In the planning stage, the objectives are formulated, i.e. for whom and with what purpose (rhetorical purpose), what (product plan), and how (process plan) we want to write. During the planning stage, the writer can rely primarily on two areas: their own long-term memory and the task environment. From his long-term memory, they can draw on their prior knowledge of the subject, the characteristics of the recipients, and their previous writing strategies. The task environment helps them define the topic and provides them with a basis for collecting materials and organising

his sentences. The first draft of the text is prepared at the translating stage, and it can be subject to many changes during the reviewing stage when the writer can shape and develop the text making local or general changes either on their own initiative or as a response to the suggestion of an external source. The three other cognitive models of composing processes are summarised in a study by Magyar (2023). The common features of each of these models include a strong emphasis on the process of drafting with more scope for the planning stage and more opportunities for revision.

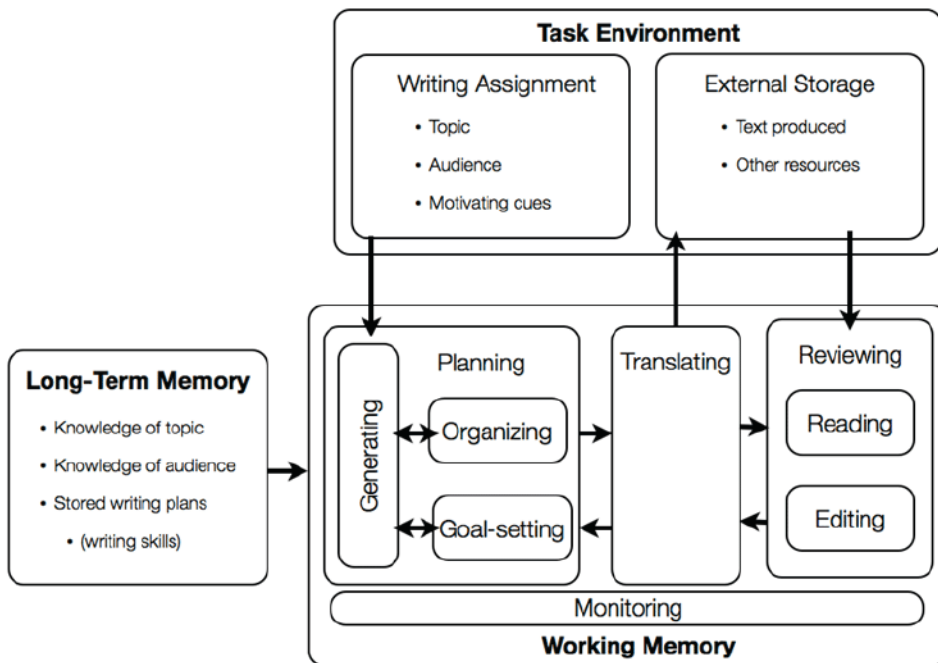


Figure 1  
Flower and Hayes' Recursive Model (1980, p. 370)

The narrow theoretical background of the research is provided by theories of creative writing applications. In Balogh's formulation (2010), creativity is the ability to solve problems in an original, inventive way, which goes hand in hand with a high level of independence and productive thinking. Creative texting is when the text creates something new based on the learners' subjectivity as the learner restructures his or her own existing knowledge to create something new (Meisinger, 2000). In the process of writing, the learner's free associations, emerging experiences, feelings, impressions, and personality come to the fore (Kisné Bernhardt, 2011). Dobozi (2003) believes that a pedagogical approach

should be promoted, which emphasises learner activities, builds on students' creativity, bases the acquisition of knowledge on the act of thinking, doing, discovering and problem-solving, and sees the development of the personality as its main goal. If, for example, an essay assignment has an interesting topic, it requires creativity and independent opinion-forming whether in Hungarian or in a foreign language, and it has a motivating effect (Magnuczné, 2003; Szasz-kó (2019). Haase (2017) emphasizes that learning should not only take place through the reception of existing text products, but rather through the creation of texts, i.e. the principle of 'learning by doing' (Haase, 2017, p. 159) should be more widely applied in education. Takács (2018) has a similar opinion, and he concludes that creative writing also develops problem-solving skills since every creative exercise can be seen as a problem, the solution of which involves the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

Benő (2012) based on Böttcher (1999) summarises the methods of creative writing in six groups: 1) associative methods, 2) language games, 3) writing according to prescriptions, patterns and rules, 4) writing related to literary texts, 5) writing on the influence of external stimuli and 6) working with creative texts. The present research context introduces associative methods and writing on external stimuli. The two subgroups of associative methods are meditative methods and playful-experimental methods. In the meditative procedure, pupils take a fantasy journey with the help of the teacher who asks them to close their eyes and imagine what they hear. After the meditation, the students write down their impressions. Among the playful-experimental techniques, Benő (2012) mentions two types of brainstorming, clustering and mind-mapping, as well as automatic writing, call-word writing and acrostic writing. Regarding external stimulus writing, the stimulus can be text, music, or image. The writers create their own story based on the feelings and fantasies they experience as a result of the impulse.

## **Empirical research**

### ***Method***

The study was conducted in March-April 2023 in the framework of the course "Play in the Arts" among full-time (N=7) and part-time (N=25) first-year students specialising in preschool teaching. The research was conducted using quantitative and qualitative methods. As a quantitative instrument, a written questionnaire was used to ask the participants about their experiences during the project, their opinions on the different parts of the tasks, their attitude to-

wards them, and the usefulness and the impact of the tasks. As a qualitative method, the products produced during each sub-task (associations with musical effects, drawings or paintings along the associations; story-telling using the associations and the picture; making the scenes of the story out of clay; photos of the scenes; short film made from the photos) will be analysed. What follows is the presentation of the results of the first phase of the project, the formation of associations through music, and the representation of the resulting internal images and verbal associations as external images.

### *Associations to music*

In the introductory phase of the project, I asked the students to make associations to music. Prokofiev's symphonic story "Peter and the Wolf" (1936) served as an external stimulus. The students were not familiar with the piece, the title and the composer remained unknown throughout the whole exercise, and I did not want to influence them by revealing this information. I considered the symphonic tale "Peter and the Wolf" to be appropriate for the task because of its genre and also because the characters are symbolized by the sound of an instrument (the little bird is the flute, the duck is the oboe, the cat is the clarinet, the grandfather is the bassoon, the wolf is the three horns, Peter is the string quartet, and the hunters are the drums and trumpet), so I thought it would be an excellent way of matching the images.

The first phase of the project consisted of four subtasks, all based on music. For the first listening session, I used the meditative method, and I asked the listeners to close their eyes, to surrender to the music, to listen only to the music, and to let the music touch them. At this stage, silence and active, inward-focused attention played a big role. In the second listening session, the meditation continued, but with the formation of associations. I asked the participants to listen to the emotions, thoughts, and impressions that the music evoked, to the memories it might bring back, or to the story threads that the different melodies might create in their minds. At this stage, the role of imagination was predominant, and the formation of internal images may have been influenced by previous memories and experiences. When they listened to the music for the third time, I asked the listeners to write down in words the most important feelings, impressions and thoughts, i.e. to write down their associations and to try to form a story in their minds based on these associations. The task of the last listening session was to try to visualise (draw or paint) the most characteristic moment of the story they were trying to form in their minds (an example of such a drawing is shown in Picture 1).



*Picture 1*  
*Visual association with music (S5)*

In the following, I will present the verbal versions of the associations collected while listening to music and the analysis of the pictures made on the basis of these associations.

The participants' associations were shaped by the ripples, timbre, and rhythm of the music. Among the linguistic associations were emotions, moods, impressions, story sprouts, possible locations, characters, events, actions and movements of the characters, and fantasy imagery. The respondents fully agree that their emotions varied during the listening process: positive emotions were often interrupted and replaced by negative ones, while the mood was sometimes cheerful and light-hearted, other times serious and ominous. The emotions and moods expressed by the participants are illustrated in Table 1.

Emotions		Moods	
positive	Negative	positive	negative
happiness, cheerfulness fluency peace forgiveness calmness love hope freedom carelessness joy Liberation pride solace	sense of danger repentance anger, rage, poison disappoint- ment Discourage- ment Threat fear, excite- ment fright, dread despair uncertainty sadness worry solitude	pleasant cheerful positive Inspiring harmony easy player cloudless, calm dissolved, re- laxed festive majestic elevated friendly	ominous Mysterious serious bad mournful distracted panic tense Chambers harsh no hunch melancholic unpleasant dramatic, tragic

Table 1  
Participants' motions and moods evoked by music

The light, cheerful, high-pitched, snare rhythmic music created a feeling of happiness, cheerfulness, relaxation, carefree liberation, which was accompanied by a serene, relaxed, pleasant mood. When the sound became stronger, deeper and the tempo increased, negative emotions (feelings of danger, fear, terror, despair, anger, rage, venom) were triggered in the listeners. All this was coupled with a negative (ominous, gloomy, harsh, even dramatic or tragic) mood. The slowing down of the tempo and the prolonged high notes reinforced the lyrical, melancholic, even mournful mood with a sense of sadness. The sound of the trumpet and the drum roll evoked an elevated mood of solemnity and exaltation combined with a sense of pride.

In addition to emotions and moods, the listeners also associated storylines and plot elements while listening to the music. The rhythmic and tonal world of the music evoked, for example, actions (what the character might be doing), events (what is happening) and forms of movement. Among these, the summary of the associations most frequently written by the listeners can be seen in Table 2. It was attempted to group the associations according to whether they are supposed to be associated with a positive or negative emotional or mood element; where this was not clear, an ambivalent category was added since the

action (e.g. pondering) can carry a positive or negative connotation. Music with a pleasant, soft, serene tone was associated with positive images (dreaming, blossoming, playing, gathering, pecking, grazing, etc.). They also associated the rhythm of the music and its changes with experiences of movement. The supple, dynamic, pulsating rhythm easily evoked images of hurrying, leaping, swimming, or even flying. The harsh, sombre sound, while accelerating in rhythm, was associated with, for example, running away, falling, or drifting. The slower, more “husky” rhythm was associated with a sense of mystery, evoking associations of prowling, sneaking, somersaulting, stealth, and it was linked to actions of limping, hiding, lurking, sneaking, but it could also evoke associations of wandering and getting lost.

Actions, events			Forms of movement		
positive	negative	ambivalent	positive	negative	ambivalent
dreaming forgive blossoms plays grazing chirp glorifies reveals gathers tweets eat shares	explains influence wither struggles, fights, clashes duels, hiding flattens, at- tacks lurks limps in the wrong he’s a trickster gets lost scared, crying hides, disap- pears ventures forth	go to hunting warns talks prying watch searching contem- plates thinks glances intrudes looks around wonders gets to know asks	rush dance skipping jumping marching roaming walking swimming flying	roaming drift fall herding sneaking somersault stealth escape slowing footsteps stopping flapping	ride chasing gradua- tion hurry running flapping winding down stum- bling gait

Table 2  
*Actions, events and movements triggered by music*

Almost without exception, the dominant settings of the stories that emerged from the associations formed in the mind were inspired by nature (Table 3), namely the time of awakening nature, in Spring. The two most typical areas in the associations are the forest and the field. The dark, rugged, unfamiliar, dangerous nature of the former contrasts with the sunny, cheerful, lively, colourful,

flowery spring meadow or clearing in the middle of the forest, which invites free play and togetherness (Picture 2).



*Picture 2*  
*Visual association with music (S7)*

The other characteristic setting is the proximity of a waterfront, lake, river or stream, or perhaps a waterfall. The stories imagined in the near-water setting also have the opposite setting, such as a reedbed, which is a place to hide and sneak around, a forest, or a cave in a mountain, which is also frightening because of its unknown and darkness. The man-made, artificial environment is also present in many stories. Classic and folktale motifs are evoked in images of a girl (see Picture 1), a boy, or even brothers and sisters leaving the safety of their home for the unknown, typically the forest where danger is present (see Pictures 1 –2). Some listeners associated the contrast between the big city and nature while listening to music, but there were also typical fairy-tale settings (e.g. palace, castle garden), which could not be missing the cursed princess.



Characters			Locations, landscapes	
animals	human beings	plants	natural	artificial
wolf, fox forest animals deer, rabbit hedgehog sow, mouse butterfly, thrush small birds ants, crickets, bees ducks, cats squirrel, bear	girl boy father princess	fa leaf cherry blossom	forest, path forest clearing green park, field spring meadow, bush stream, river water, waterfall lakeside, reed- bed mountain, cave	castle castle garden house cottage dark street

*Table 3*  
*The characters and locations imagined by the music*

In terms of the characters, the sound of the music reminded the audience predominantly of animals (see Table 3). On the one hand, there are the strong animals, such as the cat, the fox, the wolf, the bear or the deer; on the other hand, there are the weaker, vulnerable, cute little creatures, such as the deer, the rabbit, the sow, the mouse, the hedgehog, the duck, the ant, or the cricket (see Pictures 1 and 4). In most cases, the sound of the flute was associated with birds, sometimes butterflies. Some participants also made associations with the relationship of plants to each other and to people, which led to the story of the unfolding leaf talking to the cherry blossom, in which a little girl later takes part.



*Picture 3*  
*Visual association with music (S9)*

There are also several associations with the image of a girl lost in the forest, either alone on her quest or with the help of cute little animals (see Picture 1) and the pair of lost brothers (reminiscent of Hansel and Gretel, Benedek, 2016) (Picture 3).



Picture 4

*Visual association with music (S25)*

It was pointed out before that the sound and rhythm of the music influenced the participants to create their own fictional stories in their minds. Their existing knowledge affected, for example, their expectations of the story. That is, the narrative starts from a harmonious, idyllic structure, then complications occur followed by the unfolding of the plot with various twists and turns, difficult situations, action scenes until it reaches a climax where everything seems to be lost and then resolved; finally, the story comes to rest, and harmony and order are restored. The ebb and flow of the music was a good starting point, and the soft, idyllic, harmonious melodies were occasionally interrupted by a more sombre sound that suggested turmoil, action, and confrontation. The ebb and flow and the contrasting emotions and moods are illustrated by the previously detailed associations of imagery that the listeners listed. The contrasts are manifested not only in the emotions and moods, but also in the imagined locations,

characters, forms of movement and natural images, and phenomena. The initial sunshine is often followed by overcast skies, then a storm with thunder and lightning, and finally, it becomes calm again. The emotional and mood swings and the struggle of opposing forces are also strikingly reflected in the drawings made by the students (Pictures 1–4).

## Summary

This study aimed to present and discuss the first phase of a project-based investigation among pre-service preschool teachers during their first year of training. The project itself is multi-staged, broadly based on the views of problem-based learning and process-based writing, with a narrower theoretical base in creative writing techniques. In the introductory part of the research, associative writing techniques and storytelling on external stimuli were piloted with the participants. Based on the results, it can be said that the techniques presented can be good practices for developing productive imagination. Creation activities inspired by music can have a developmental impact on personal, social and professional competences. It is planned to further analyse the participants' creations, their written feedback and the creative process.

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## Abstract

This study reveals the preliminary results of a project involving pre-service preschool teachers (N=32). This investigation is relevant since it is crucial that students must benefit from tasks aimed at developing productive imagination during their preschool teacher training, as their future job is one of the professions that requires the most creativity within pedagogy. Accordingly, in the framework of the “Play in the Arts” course, the participants could experience the manifestation of their own creative imagination through a multi-step project. As a result, various unique products (drawings or paintings; stories; scenes of the stories visualised in plasticine; photos of scenes; photo slides etc.) were

created. The results are related to the first phase of the project: creating associations inspired by music, then representing the created internal images and verbal associations as external images.