European Journal of Education Studies
ISSN: 2501 - 1111
ISSN-L: 2501 - 1111
Available on-line at: www.oapub.org/edu

DOI: 10.46827/ejes.v8i9.3917 Volume 8 | Issue 9 | 2021

CAN MUSIC BOOST SELF-CONFIDENCE AND ACCEPTABILITY? A LIVED EXPERIENCE

Muya Francis Kihoro[i]
School of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences,
South Eastern Kenya University,
Kenya

Abstract:
Music is beneficial to all people, even those living with challenges, and can boost their self-confidence and acceptability in society. Educators know that practice is one of the key psychological principles of learning and that repetition will lead to perfection in all areas, especially so in playing instruments. The following account is a personal intervention with a low-esteem, mentally challenged boy using music. The intervention was done at Limuru, a small town in Kiambu County, Kenya. It involved teaching the boy how to play the keyboard. The boy's self-confidence changed noticeably after he was accepted as an integral part of the worship group in his church. It is envisaged that sharing this experience can inform parents, guardians, social workers, teachers and other personnel who deal with struggling students, low esteem or mentally challenged individuals on the benefits of music intervention, even as it spurs interest in research on benefits of exposure to music.

Keywords: low esteem, mental challenge, music intervention, music, benefits of music, personality

1. Introduction

In the theory of multiple intelligences, Gardner (1983) posits that there are at least eight different types of "intelligences" associated with human beings, rather than just one single quotient. Here, intelligence is viewed as the capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural settings (Gardner & Hatch, 1989). These intelligences are Linguistic, Naturalistic, Logical-mathematical, Spatial-temporal, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, Bodily-kinesthetic and Musical intelligence. A few more have been added to this list, that is Emotional intelligence and Existential intelligence. No one area of intelligence is more important than the other. Each area is unique and plays an important role in one's life, sometimes contributing to cultural capital which leads to recognition and acceptability.

[i] Correspondence: email fmuya@seku.ac.ke, kihoromuya@hotmail.com

Musical intelligence, which this account is concerned with, involves the performance, composition, appreciation and use of musical elements of melody, rhythm and harmony. Individuals who possess it have a strong appreciation for music and are often good at musical composition, extemporization and performance (Sternberg, 2012). It requires practice to master, but fortunately, educators are aware that practice is one of the key principles of learning and that practice makes perfect. Many educators try to utilize multiple intelligences in their teaching philosophies and work to integrate Gardner's theory into the classroom or in the learning situation (Cerruti, 2013).

2. Literature Review

When it comes to music and the mind, music has absolutely astounding, powerful, and positive effects (Boxhill, 1985). This is expounded by Hetland (2000), who, in a meta-analysis of research findings, found a 'strong and reliable' relationship between music activities and brain functioning, and concluded that engagement in music, one way or another, leads to dramatic improvements in performance on spatial-temporal measures. This resonates well with observations by Kocabas and Oseke (2012) that music has positive contributions to the development of individuals in terms of feeling a sense of achievement, giving self-confidence, learning developmental skills, enhancing self-esteem and having relaxation. And indeed, Whitwell (1977) had drawn similar conclusions: that creative participation in music improves self-image and self-awareness. Music intervention has capacity to make positive changes in the psychological, physical, cognitive, or social functioning of individuals with mental or educational problems. It also influences certain aspects of the socio-behavioral side, and in consequence, integration into the collectivity is accomplished more easily (Voirel, 2017).

Research has shown that repetition and rehearsal enhance consolidation, a process by which memories are moved from temporary to permanent storage in the cortex (Richards, 2008). Fields (2005) observes that when an event is repeated sufficiently often, synapses and neurons fire repeatedly, indicating that this event is worth remembering. This seems to confirm one of the most fundamental principles of learning, which is the principle of repetition which dates back to approximately 4,400 B.C. At its onset, Aristotle observed that the more frequently things are experienced, the more likely they will be easily recalled (Weibel, 2011). This principle was expounded by Skinner and Guthrie and forms the core of Hull's theory of habit formation ($_sE_R = {}_sH_R \; X \; D$).

When seen through the lens of the Cognitive Information Processing (CIP), rehearsal increases the length of stay in Short Term Memory (STS) and gives coding and other storage processes time to operate. It is generally agreed that any kind of operation on information is a form of rehearsal (Muya, 2016). Effective practice or drill must be mindful and deliberate, revisiting material with variation of time, context, purpose and perspective. Incidental learning is as a result of repeated, periodic presentation thus organizing the learned material through repeated exposure. What follows is a narrative of a lived experience by the author.

3. Intervention

3.1 Background

The author is a trained music teacher and has taught at preschool level as a generalist teacher, through primary school to secondary school, where he taught music for more than eighteen years. The author trains keyboard playing in a small private facility in Limuru town, Kiambu county, Kenya.

The subject of the lived experience is a boy named Jim (not his real name). Jim is approximately 18 years old and mentally challenged from birth. Jim is rather big in size and quite strong physically. His speech is partially impaired, and it is hard to know exactly what he is saying. To most questions, the answers are in monosyllables. His performance through primary school was dismal, and he never sat for the final standardized examination offered to all students upon completing primary school in Kenya (KCPE). The general public usually responds to these types of individuals by avoiding them, and generally ignoring them. In adverse situations, such individuals are ridiculed and stigmatized. Younger children shy away from them, and age mates do not accept them. They end up living in a world of their own. Jim was no exception. By the time of this narrative, Jim used to accompany his parents to their place of work, which was a business premise specializing in the sale of plumbing equipment. Jim would then sit around and help with minor chores as dictated by customer needs. So, Jim grew up within this kind of setting, and secretly nurtured his interests.

An interview revealed that his parents had tried interventions since childhood, but they were probably suffering from denial, and therefore intervened rather late. The general environmental setting is rather rural, and the parents had not achieved very high academically. In this setting, they may not have known where to take Jim during his formative years, or even how to intervene. Jim was introduced to the author by his mother. Jim's mother had detected that the boy was very interested in music and was willing to have him trained at keyboard playing, if only to keep him busy. Jim had shown this interest in church, but every time he approached the instrumentalist at the church, he was rebuffed and pushed away. The congregation at the church generally discouraged him, and this made him angry, reticent and uncooperative. At the time of the first meeting with Jim, the author was with a visiting teacher who worked with the mentally challenged. He did a diagnosis and declared Jim to be mildly retarded and a slow learner.

3.2 Methodology

The first task in the intervention was to develop a rapport with Jim. The author spent several sessions with the boy, and tried singing along with the boy, who knew a number of common hymn tunes. Although the boy could not vocalize properly, one could tell the tunes he was singing. The boy had a distorted aural sense and could not read well either, so the author had to device means of communicating with the subject. On the positive side, the boy had a very good sense of hearing. By patting him on the back and giving the thumbs up sign, the boy caught onto the rapport. Soon, he was smiling broadly every time he was given the thumbs up sign, after singing or clapping in time with the song.

The second task was to introduce Jim to the keyboard and exercise the fingers. At first, Jim would just play anything a random, the way he had observed the keyboard being played. The author had to restrain him and order the process of learning. After several sessions, the author introduced the first five finger position, playing CDEFG up and down with the right hand and replicating the same with the left hand. After about two weeks of continued practice, Jim could play fluently, each hand separately, and with some difficulty both hands, first in similar motion and later in contrary motion. When he started the finger exercises, Jim was very animated, especially when reinforced for his efforts. By and by, his confidence grew. His whole demeanour took on a fresh vibrant look. He started walking confidently, humming the hymns under his breath. He began a slow but progressive transformation.

The third task was still on the keyboard. The author started by labelling the notes on the keyboard by their letter names. But Jim could not follow this consistently. When told to play note G for example, he would just play any note randomly. Fortunately, Jim could recognize colours very well. Subsequently, the author used the colour code approach, using primary and secondary colours, and the boy could now play the required colour with little effort. The author marked out one octave in the scale of C starting with middle C with the colours. The cues used then would be Red, Green, Yellow, Orange etc.. and Jim would then play these notes. This was applied to his left hand, but this time using finger numbers. When told to play One, he would play with his thumb, and so on up to the little finger as number five. With continued practice, he became much more fluent. This was anchored on Ausubel's theory of meaningful learning, which relies heavily on repetition as transfer can only be facilitated through repetition, and discriminability of new materials is enhanced through repetition. Consolidation of previously learned material is achieved through confirmation, correction, clarification, differential practice and review in the course of repeated exposure with feedback to the learning material (Ausubel, 1978). One particular attribute stood out in Jim. He could practice for a very long time. Even though Nzioki (1990) observes that music has unique qualities which allows for repetition without getting bored, Jim's case was exceptional. Jim improved his coordination exponentially, and before long he attained tactile memory, where he could play the notes without looking at them.

The fourth task was playing chords. Still based on the colour coding, the author trained Jim in playing the triad in root position based on any colour. This was followed by playing the Bass note with his left hand and then playing the corresponding triad in root position with his left hand. Note G would be coupled with GBD in the right hand, C with CEG and F with FAC in that order. This took quite a bit of time, but with practice Jim eventually got it. The author then introduced the metronome on the keyboard to bring in a sense of rhythm, later upgrading to the pre-recorded rhythms in the keyboard. Starting at a very slow tempo of approximately 40 per minute, the author gradually increased tempo to approximately 120 to the minute. Jim followed faithfully, growing more confident each day. Before long, the chordal pattern I, IV, I, V was introduced, and Jim took to this like a duck takes to water. Subsequently, Jim learned other chordal

patterns based on major chords, e.g. I, IV, V, I. He could now arppegiate the chords, and produce a regular rhythmic flow with the chordal patterns.

The fifth major task was playing chordal accompaniment to the hymn tunes. The author created the melodies for the popular tunes using Noteworthy Composer and saved them in a flash disc, ensuring each could play continuously for at least ten minutes. The hymns included Rock of Ages Cleft for Me, Amazing Grace, Blessed Assurance, what a Friend We Have in Jesus, Nearer My God to Thee, Pass Me Not oh Gentle Saviour, The Great Physician and other common and popular hymn tunes. These melodies were loaded to the USB in the keyboard, and while they were playing, Jim played the accompaniment. This was the climax of Jim's learning. You could see joy reflected on his face as he now hummed along and accompanied the melodies, albeit with a few rhythmical errors here and there. At this point in time, Jim requested to have his mother come over to watch him play. The mother obligingly came over and was overjoyed at the accomplishment. Together, they sang along with the recorded hymn tunes the whole afternoon while Jim excitedly accompanied them. By and by, he started extemporizing, and you could clearly discern the syncopations and anticipations. On his own, he broke up the chords into arpeggios as he played along.

The sixth task was training in tonality. The author confesses this was the hardest part of the intervention. Originally, Jim could happily play accompaniment in one key, while the recordings were in a discordant key and sing in a totally different key from the recordings, and enjoy the ensuing cacophony. To get him from that took a long time. It involved recording a fragment of melody, which he was aurally good at, and requesting him to try to find the tonality, the home chord for the melody. He did this through the transpose button on the keyboard, and would press the arrows up and down until he hit on the tonality of the melody. Another melody would then be recorded for him in a different key, and he would repeat the process, listening keenly with his head bent as if to bring the ear nearer to the speaker. True to the observation by Weibel (2011), schemas are created, developed, tuned, and restructured through repeated experience and there is increased precision of schema through experience.

4. Results and Discussion

By and by, Jim got better with repeated practice, until, at last the melodies were withdrawn and Jim started accompanying live singing. The mother was overjoyed, and she came over to practice with Jim for a performance in church. She sang "Amazing grace" while Jim accompanied her using block chords in the key of C, which is the only key he could comfortably play in. They later performed the hymn in their church, and were given a standing ovation. This boosted Jims' confidence immeasurably.

Undeniably, the power of combined interest and practice can transform individuals. Jim's lived experience attests to this. Overy (2003) had confirmed that music can benefit all individuals, including those with dyslexia. Jim graduated to playing keyboard at his church, starting with the Sunday school then to the main service. Eventually, he became an integral part of the worship team in his church, playing the

keyboard. Due to the role, he plays in church, he became very a responsible person, arriving at church way ahead of the others to connect the amplifier, the speakers and the keyboard. The congregation accepted him, and children flock around him after service to watch him play. When the Sunday school children and the worship team require to practice, they ask for Jim. He now walks around with a confidence one would have thought impossible. He dresses smartly, and even plays keyboard at other social functions outside the church. He is now very self-assured and has a purpose in life. The transformation and acceptability is almost complete.

5. Conclusion

This lived experience demonstrates that music has power to change an individual. Through compensation, the personality, even of challenged children can be transformed. In Jim's case, music intervention led to increased self-confidence and acceptability by members of his church. There are many individuals in our society who have some hidden talents, which need to be identified early enough and nurtured to maturity.

6. Recommendations

For parents, guardians, teachers and social workers who deal with children who may have challenges, explore their potential and have that nurtured early enough. Repeated practice, in all fields can do wonders to cognitive processing.

Disclosure

The author requested for permission from Jim's parents to publish this account, and it was subsequently granted.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

About the Author

The author holds a PhD in curriculum studies and is a lecturer in the Department of Educational Administration and Planning, in the School of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences at South Eastern Kenya University, Kitui, Kenya. His research interests are music as a tool in teaching and learning.

References

Ausubel, D. P. (1978). In defense of advance organizer, a reply to critics, Retrieved from ERIC.

Boxhill, E. H. (1985). Music Therapy for the Developmentally Disabled, Rockville, MD: Aspen Pblication, 1985

Cerruti C. (2013). Building a functional multiple intelligences theory to advance educational neuroscience. *Front Psychol.* 4:950. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00950

Fields, R. D. (2005). Making memories stick, *Scientific American,* February, 75-81

Gardner, H. (1983). *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, New York: Basic Books.

Gardner, H., & Hatch, T. (1989). Multiple intelligences go to school: Educational implications of the theory of multiple intelligences. *Educational Researcher*, *18*(8), 4-9.

Hetland, L. (2000). Listening to music enhances spatial-temporal reasoning: Evidence for the "Mozart-Effect." *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 34, 105-148.

Kocabas E. O., & Ozeke S. (2012). Using music and musical activities in special education: developments in Turkey. *International online journal of primary education,* 2012, vol 1, issue 1p 86-92

Muya, F. K. (2016). Levels of teacher self-efficacy and use of music activities among preschool children in Nairobi and Kiambu counties, Kenya. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Kenyatta University.

Nzioki, S. (1990). *Music time.* Nairobi, East African Publishers

Overy, K. (2003). Dyslexia and music: From timing deficits to musical intervention. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences,* 999, 497-505.

Richards, R. (2008). *Memory Strategies for Students: The Value of Strategies.* Exclusive LD online.

Sternberg R. J. (2012). Intelligence. *Dialogues Clin Neurosci.*14(1):19-27.

Viorel A. (2017). Music Therapy for children with intellectual disabilities, *Science, Education and Innovation in the Arts*, 101-108

Weibel, C. (2011). *Principles of learning: 7 principles to guide personalized, student-centered learning in technology-enhanced, blended learning environment.* Retrieved January 28, 2015 from http://principlesoflearning.wordpress.com

Whitwell, D. (1977). *Music learning through performance*. Texas: Texas Music Educators Association.