

The Role of Music in Education

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Building Baby's Brain: The Role of Music

Does Music Make Us Smarter?

Not exactly Music seems to prime our brains for certain kinds of thinking After listening to classical music, adults can do certain spatial tasks more quickly, such as putting together a jigsaw puzzle.

Why does this happen? The classical music pathways in our brain are similar to the pathways we use for spatial reasoning. When we listen to classical music, the spatial pathways are 'turned on' and ready to be used.

This priming makes it easier to work a puzzle quickly. But the effect lasts only a short time. Our improved spatial skills fade about an hour after we stop listening to the music.

Learning to play an instrument can have longer-lasting effects on spatial reasoning however. In several studies children who took piano lessons for six months improved their ability to work puzzles and solve other spatial tasks by as much as 30 percent.

Why does playing an instrument make such a difference? Researchers believe that musical training creates new pathways in the brain.

Why Classical Music?

The music most people call "classical"—works by composers such as Bach, Beethoven, or Mozart—is different from music such as rock and country. Classical has a more complex musical structure. Babies as young as 3 months can pick out that structure and even recognize classical music selections they have heard before.

Research shows the complexity of classical music is what primes the brain to solve spatial problems more quickly. So listening to classical music may have different effects on the brain than listening to other types of music.

This doesn't mean that other types of music aren't good. Listening to any kind of music helps build music-related pathways in the brain. And music can have positive effects on our moods that may make learning easier.

What Can You Do?

Parents and Child care providers can help nurture children's love of music beginning in infancy.

Here are some ideas:

- **Play music your baby.** Expose your baby to many different musical selections of

various styles. If you play an instrument, practice when your baby is nearby. But keep the volume moderate. Loud music can damage a baby's hearing.

- **Sign to your baby.** It doesn't matter how well you sign! Hearing your voice helps your baby begin to learn language. Babies love the patterns and rhythms of songs. And even young babies can recognize specific melodies once they've heard them.
- **Sign with your child.** As children grow, they enjoy singing with you. And setting words to music actually helps the brain learn more quickly and retain them longer. That's why we remember the lyrics of songs as children even if we haven't heard them in years.
- **Start music lessons early.** If you want your child to learn an instrument, you don't need to wait until elementary school to begin lessons. Young children's developing brains are equipped to learn music. Most four- and five-year-olds enjoy making music and can learn the basics of some instruments. And starting

lessons early helps children early helps children build a lifelong love of music.

- ***Encourage your child's to teach music.*** Singing helps stimulate the brain, at least briefly. Over time, music education as a part of school can help build skills such as coordination and creativity. And learning music helps your become a well rounded person.

Music belongs with the three R's as a model for the educated person. Indeed, studies show that children who study also do better in other subjects than children who are not getting a music education. Neuro-psychologists do not know why musically trained kids do better on academic tests yet they do. But perhaps more importantly. Music a special and beautiful element to a child's life, and it enriches that life permanently. Music is the gift of a lifetime.

Gradually, school districts throughout the United States are realizing the value of music as a major part of the curriculum. But it has not always been that way. Indeed, for many decades musical education in public schools was ignored. In some, it still is. Music education was seen as a frill, not worthy of much attention. Schools dropped their bands of orchestras and even eliminated classroom singing. A renowned composer, Ned Rorem, once said that "In the old days, whether kids hated music or not, there it was. Now, it is not even three to hate." That comment reminded me of a story I heard about Burt Bacharach, the great composer and pianist. Burt, the story, was compelled by his mom to take piano lessons and to practice, practice, practice, often against his wishes." wishes. "Being t that keyboard when the other kids were having fun. But later, I was so grateful that my mother pressured me to practice. It obviously created a life with that I would otherwise have never." Let's it for fascist moms. Look what Burt gave to the world.

Thanks to Bacharach and other like him there is a changing attitude toward music education. More and more schools are revving up their music and arts programs. Indeed, the arts are even moving into other subjects, For example, at Timberlake Middle

School in Colorado Springs. You'll find social studies teacher Leslie Brinkley using art in her classes. Kids learn about the Middle Ages by drawing their own medieval kingdoms. And in Dave Marshall's science classes, students have used cookies, pizza and hair gel to craft 3-D models of a cell. I learned that in a Gazette article (September 30, 2000) by Nancy Mitchell. Nancy pointed out that the infusion of arts cuts across all subject; and that was the basis for Timberlake being named a National School of Distinction by The Kennedy Center. I have not beard of a similar program using music in non-music classes, but it is conceivable.

Herbert Kupferberg, writing in the February 28, 1999 issue of parade Magazine, said " I got my initial indication of an improvement is U.S. musical education firsthand, when my granddaughter. Aged 8 arrived home from school with the announcement that she was being given 'a flute you can blow into from the end.' Herb notes that the instrument was a recorder, an ancient musical pipe often used to introduce children to reading notes and making pleasurable sounds-in other words, the art of making music. You may have been present at one of the Black Rose Acoustic Society (BRAS) open stage at which a recorder was played. Local music teacher Beezy. Taylor (see advertisement, page 2) is among those who have played recorder on the BRAS stage everyone's delight.

Music course may not turn students into musicians but chemistry classes don't necessarily make them chemists either. I agree with Mr. Kupferberg when he says that " music and the arts are worth knowing for their own sake..... Trigonometry is for a term, music is for a lifetime." I pointed out earlier the research that shows kids who study music do well in other subjects. That doesn't mean that of your child takes up to banjo, he or she will get straight A's. That probably would not happen even if he or she took up guitar. Nevertheless, students with four or more years of study in the arts outsoared students with six months of less of arts instruction. They outscored by a combined total of 82 points on the verbal and mathematics portion

of the scholastic Attitude Tests. So reports. The Educational Testing Service, Princeton N.J. You can teach music simply because it is music. But if you can show a correlation with the SAT scores, schools boards will sit up and take notice.

Joan Schmidt, director of the National Schools Boards Association, says that "Music has a tremendous value as an academic discipline. It contributes to the understanding of other subjects. There is a big difference between learning about something and doing it. With music, you do both. That is why the Black Rose Acoustic Society has a *Primary* focus on music education. The BRAS music scholarship program (see article, page 12) is a manifestation of this organization's commitment to music. Another such manifestation is the ongoing music courses sponsored by BRAS. But let's not be too serious about music education's role. Reflections about music can be. Yes. But they are funny too. Kupferberg. In his *Parade* article, said "I was delighted.... To hear my granddaughter play 'Hot Cross Buns' on her recorder. So far, it's the only thing she knows, but a Beethoven symphony couldn't have thrilled me more. And if it helps with her spelling, so much the better." Hmmm, I wonder if that terrific music teacher Beezy Taylor knows "Hot Cross Buns?"

The role of Music in the Education of Special Learners

The Music Education of Special Learners

Preparing teachers to effectively teach special learners includes the development not only of teaching skills but of attitudes as well. Some teachers will need to come to grips with personal feelings and expectations regarding handicapped individuals. All will need to understand the implications of certain disabling conditions for music learning. Music teachers who intend to achieve music goals in their work with special learners must acquire special teaching techniques and develop skills in selecting and adapting appropriate resource materials.

Music is a multisensory experience. Listening, seeing moving, and feeling are all important in the music education curriculum,

making music a natural discipline through which to develop sensory perception and psychomotor skills. Music education, in addition to being a valuable content area of the curriculum in its own right, can also be aid in developing basic skills in all children. children actually learn to learn through music activities, since music helps develop skills that are necessary for cognitive, affective, and psychomotor functioning unutilized in all areas of the school curriculum. Unlike activities dependent on verbal interaction, music rarely fails to communicate with every child. In addition, because of the flexibility and vast resources available in music, a single activity can include children of widely differing abilities. Thus music enables every intellect to be challenged, no matter how inhibited. Music provides an alternative means through which children who are unable or unwilling to speak can express feelings and ideas.

Music educators for special learners should not attempt to replace other teaching methods in developing basic learning skills, but music should supplement them by providing different medium through which they can be reinforced and refined.

Special Education Music

The primary purpose of music education program for handicapped children (as for all children) is to coactively involve the child in meaningful music experience that will develop music concepts and skills appropriate to individual functioning level.

A special education music teacher must be prepared to be member of a multidisciplinary team of professionals who coordinate their individual efforts with each child. Such a team might include the school psychologist, psychiatrist resource, classroom teacher, nurse health officer, social worker, speech therapist, and any other school staff member directly concerned with the development of children communications among team must be consultations, with problems and progress discussed freely? All must appreciate each other's expertise in his or her respective field when decisions are made concerning a child.

Labeling has created stigmas and

stereotypes that do a great disservice to individuals with disabilities. A disability of an impairment is not necessarily a handicap. Most offend, society determines what is a handicap by the way it accepts or rejects certain disabilities and impairments. As educators, we must strive to educate not only those individuals handicapped by society's attitudes, but society itself.

Throughout the years educators have accepted the labels and classifications of exceptional children given them by other professionals. The medical profession most often labels by etiology, or the cause of the disability. The psychology profession most often labels by the dysfunction itself. Although these may be meaningful to those professionals, they do not provide much insight that will enhance the educational management of children and, therefore, are not helpful to educators. As a result, teaching is often designed to fit labels rather than individuals what teacher need to know in order to deal more effectively with all children is a profile of both strengths and weaknesses in specific skill areas. IQ scores alone do not provide functional data in this regard; an inventory of basic skill development, on the other hand, will give both the classroom teacher and the music teacher something more concrete on which to base goals for individuals. The Individualized Education Program (IEP), when made available to all teachers, has the potential to coordinate the various curriculum areas in planning goals for special learners.

Specific learning skills are generally grouped into categories such as gross motor, language, auditory, and visual. All learning skills can be dealt with in any music situation, but some are nearly always inherent in every music activity. These fall into the perceptual motor classification, since most music experience involve sensory perception (e.e, listening, seeing, feeling) combined with motor acts (i.e singing, playing, moving).

Even today, there are those who are unaware that children with cognitive and physical impairments can, with effective teaching,

learn music concepts and skills, and that music program for them need not be relegated to a merely to a merely recreational or entertainment level. Of course, there have always been dedicated and imaginative music teachers who were unwilling to compromise their professional goals fortunately. These individuals accepted the challenge to teach the deaf to sing and to play instruments, the retarded to learn fundamental music skills, and individuals lacking functional hands and fingers to play instruments. Those music educators, who can be found in countries around the world, have led the way in applying special education research to music teaching and have been responsible for this new aspect of music education.

Education for All Handicapped Children Act. (P.L. 94-142)- Implications for Music Education

" It is the purpose of the Act assure that all handicapped children have available to them, within the time periods specified in section 612 (2) (B), a appropriate public education which emphasizes special education and reeled services designed to meet their unique needed, to assure that the rights of handicapped children and their parents of guardians are protected, to assist. States and localities to provide for the education of all handicapped children, and to assess and assure the effectiveness of efforts to educate handicapped children." (P.L. 94-142)

It should be emphasized, however, that social attitudes can only be enhanced if the handicapped child can function successfully in an inclusion setting. If not, other children inevitably develop negative, or at best patronizing, attitudes to word that individual and all the handicapped in general.

When compared with children in " isolated environments," the children who have been successfully included have shown better social and academic adjustment. School records indicate that normally intelligent hearing-impaired children improved skills in both speaking and understanding language, attributed presumably to day-to-day contact with hearing peers; the sight impaired have shown increased mobility and independence,

and children with chronic health and crippling conditions seem to be more tolerant of their limitations and more willing to try alternative. Also, when inclusion begins at the preprimary level, there is a far better chance for both normal and handicapped children to adjust socially to each other.

No responsible advocate of inclusion ever suggested " wholesale" inclusion of special children. Not every child is able to function in an inclusion situation at any given time. Each child should be evaluated on individual merits as a candidate for inclusion in every aspect of school life, and this evaluation should be continues, even placement. Inclusion should not be an all-or nothing approach. If curriculum areas are selected at the academic and social levels of the child, there is a reasonable chance for success. For the more severely impaired, inclusion may need be limited to the social aspects of school life until enough skills are mastered to enable success in the curriculum.

The Inclusion of a Child in Music

To consider a handicapped child for successful placement into a regular general or instrumental music class, one must be cognizant of the individual's mental age, motor development, abstracting abilities, attention span, and social development, as well as the level of certain academic skills such as reading and computation. Music education programs designed for the majority make heavy demands on perceptual motor skills, integration and synthesis,

symbolization and abstraction, and physical energy. Since the majority of handicapped children are characteristically lacking in many of these skills, particularly in the formative years music teachers will need to be very aware of individual learning styles and needs in order to plan for their successful participation. The versatility of music activities and the multiple general education benefits that accrue from music education experience, tend to make the general music class an attractive curriculum area for inclusion.

In addition to their involvement in multidisciplinary team approaches to identifying and planning programs for special learners, music teachers are recognizing the benefits of more direct contact with the parents of their pupils. Many parents report noticing their youngster's positive responses to music at an early age, and they are extremely supportive of music education programs. Special education music teachers can counsel parents as to musical toys, records, and activities that can be useful in the home. When professionals show a sincere interest in helping parents understand and cope with their child's differences, parents can be powerful allies after that. It should be a good sign of holistic and spiritual society which make noble sensible man power for Nation.

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