

The impact of music on children's education and development

Property of the Dhow Countries Music Academy

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It is often claimed that music is good for children. Aside from the obvious fact that listening and playing music may be enjoyable, there are several other advantages related to investing in children's music education.

It is argued that music education will increase children's chances of being successful in society and in life. This is because studying music may help develop a series of basic life skills, such as teamwork, appreciation of different cultures, communication and self expression, increased self confidence. These will all have a positive impact in a person's life. ¹ Furthermore, music will develop creativity, which is often essential in the workplace and could impact the chances of a country's economic development. ²

However, these are not the only skills that a child will develop through the study of music and there have been various researches into how music is beneficial to children's intellectual development and learning abilities. Moreover, music is often integrated into other subjects' learning programs and it has been shown that it effectively helps the brain to function more efficiently.

Music as a catalyst of intellectual development

Several studies have been conducted in order to find out whether music education helps a child develop skills that are transferable to other activities. In particular, studies have analyzed the link between studying music and improvement in abilities such as spatial reasoning, mathematical skills and reading readiness.³ One research has also shown the link between studying music and improved IQ test results, which is attributed to the fact that music lessons involve the development of skills such as attention, perseverance, reading, memorization.⁴

Harvard's Project Zero has contributed to this analysis by collecting information from 188 researches on the topic. The main conclusion is that there is considerable evidence showing that music, as well as drama, are linked to improved cognitive skills. ⁵ Also, the Arts Education partnership (AED) reviewed past research in order to identify studies proving the link between music education and student learning outcomes. The conclusion of AED is that music education improves students' learning skills, such as memory and thinking; it facilitates academic achievement, through improved verbal and mathematical skills; and it develops creative capacities, which include perseverance and attentiveness.⁶

Recently, a preliminary study has aimed to show the link between music education during childhood and increased mind sharpness throughout life. The initial results show that the age of acquisition is critical for music education to have a long term effect. ⁷ Even though more research would be needed on this topic, this study is further evidence that music education may be a very important factor in a child's development.

¹ National Association for Music Education: 'Facts and insights on the benefits of music study' (webpage)

² Education Commission of the States: 'How Creativity, Education and the Arts shape a Modern Economy' (2005)

³ Frances H. Rauscher for ERIC Clearinghouse on Early Education and Parenting: 'Can Music Instruction Affect Children's Cognitive Development?'

⁴ E. Glenn Schellenberg, University of Toronto: 'Music Lessons Enhance IQ' (2004)

⁵ Maryann Harman for Early Childhood News: 'Music and Movement – Instrumental in Language Development' (date not available)

⁶ Arts Education Partnership: 'Music Matters: How Music Education Helps Students Learn, Achieve, and Succeed' (2011)

⁷ ScienceDaily: 'Childhood Music Lessons May Provide Lifelong Boost in Brain Functioning' (2011)

Generally, music is thought to impact on the following academic and life skills: ⁸

- Language and reasoning abilities
- Spatial intelligence
- Self confidence
- Self expression
- Coordination
- Teamwork
- Problem solving and creative thinking
- Communication
- Conceptualization
- Interest and understanding of other cultures
- Perseverance and understanding of the need of a sustained effort to reach good results

Music as a learning tool

Research shows why learning is sometimes easier through songs: one side of the brain processes the words, while the other processes the music, and turning on the whole brain improves information retention. Also, by compressing several pieces of information into one item such as a song, the brain is able to receive and process more.

“Human beings learn 10 percent of what they read, 20 percent of what they hear, 30 percent of what they see, 50 percent of what they see and hear, 70 percent of what is discussed, 80 percent of what is experienced and 95% of what you actively teach (Hannaford, 1995)”; hence activating several senses and increasing children’s involvement in lessons increases the chances of a more efficient learning process. ⁹

Other uses of music

Nowadays the use of music has also been applied to other fields. For example, it is often used in psychological therapy. ¹⁰

Moreover it has proved to be an effective way of addressing problems such as the one of street children. For instance, NGOs such as the India based *Music Basti*¹¹ effectively use music to work with disadvantaged youth in order to enhance personal development as well as community development.

The DCMA and Children’s Music Education

To conclusion, music seems to be beneficial in several aspects of children’s development, it improves the effectiveness of the learning process of other subjects, and its education helps develop academic abilities - as well as other general skills - that are transferable to other areas of life.

DCMA places a strong emphasis on children’s music education and aims at reaching children in both Unguja and Pemba through its Children’s Program as well as its Village Program. The DCMA has also published a children’s Swahili songbook which we aim to distribute to schools throughout the island as a mean of preserving Swahili cultural Heritage as well as a classroom learning aid.

⁸ Music Conservatory of Texas: ‘12 Important Skills your child learns by studying music’ (webpage)
AND Children’s Music Workshop: ‘12 Benefits of Music Education’ (webpage)

⁹ Maryann Harman for Early Childhood News: ‘Music and Movement – Instrumental in Language Development’ (date not available)

¹⁰ Therapy document

¹¹ Music Basti <http://www.musicbasti.org/>

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