

MUSIC: AN INCENTIVE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Very few things in life inspire much joy and excitement than the miracle of a newborn baby. Whether that child fulfils his or her potentials in life, is largely dependent on the family, community and the society into which that child is born, hence the early years of life is very crucial. When children are given the right attention from the start of their lives, from their family and the society, and especially with music, their general development in all areas: especially intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual are obviously enhanced. This study examines the motivation that the use of music in raising children gives in their intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual development.

INTRODUCTION

Music is as important as life, and it is a natural and essential part of young children's growth and development. Anyone who has worked with young children knows that children love music and can engage in musical activities on many levels. Early interaction with music positively affects the quality of children's lives. "From birth, music is an intuitive form of communication between mother and baby" (Papousek 1996), and with time, between growing children and caregiver(s). Also, from more than a decade, it has been apparent that from infancy, human beings are quite simply hardwired for musical experience, implying that children are born with the innate ability to respond to music and to develop intellectually, emotionally, morally and spiritually.

Music Education

Music is defined by Blacking (1973) as a "humanly organised sound" (p.57). Elliot (1995) defined it as a 'diverse human practice of constructing aural temporal patterns for primary values of enjoyment, self growth and self knowledge" (p.128) and Walker (1998) believed it to be "a living analogue of human knowing, feeling, sensibility, emotions, intellectual modus operandi and all other life – giving forces which affect human behaviour and knowing" (p.57). Music is a language given to us by God; through it we strive to express our joy for things that are real to us, and our longings for the things that might be. Hence Esimone (2009) asserted that

Many things tend to influence life and reveal clear changes in character, and music is so effective and very prominent at such. It goes beyond organised sounds that please the ear to penetrating the innermost being of man, to cause a conspicuous change in the attitudes of man. (p. 1)

On the other hand, Education is defined as “a multi-faceted concept which here simply refers to learning or intellectual attainment” (Mbanugo 1999). Akinbote (2006) said, “it is a process by which the community seeks to open its life to all the individuals within it to enable them take their part in it” (p. 8). Akende (2002) asserted that “it is the cornerstone of any nation that contributes to its development” (p. 26). Akumah (2004) opined that, “it is the process of discipline through training and study in the acquisition of skills and knowledge” (p. 202). He further defined it distinctly as: “The process of development which consists of the passage of a human being from infancy to maturity, the process whereby he gradually adapts himself in various ways to his physical, social and spiritual environment (p. 203). Adeogun (2006) on the other hand asserted “education empowers human beings, so that they can actualise their potentials and tendencies satisfactorily, and as members of society, they can interact with their environment richly: (p. 152).

Music is a necessity to life; hence all the definitions above point to the fact that it empowers and instils all the necessary qualities a child or any individual needs to explore the world around him. And if this is a fact, it means its involvement with education is inseparable.

Music education no doubt contributes in no small way to the general development of children. It is the best way enduring attitudes regarding the joy of music making and sharing are developed. However, this can only be achieved through effective teaching and learning with meaningful and educative songs, which could and should include nursery rhymes and lullabies which children can easily imbibe and understand; adopting the use of audio-visual learning aids and appropriate teaching methodology specifically meant for children such as the play-way and child centred (allowing children contribute in the teaching and learning activity) methods of teaching; hence in their early childhood. Early childhood spans from infancy to the age of five (5) or eight (8) to some people. Music no doubt is the most simple, easy and best way to inculcate all good knowledge into children hence it leads to their all round development.

Intellectual Development

Every full-fledged man or woman was once a little child and had to go through a lot of experiences and influences to become what he is today. Whether this child was privileged to have a music family or not, he had the opportunity to hear music being made even as a child; and as a result, could say a lot of things he learnt, which to a greater extent had helped shape his live even as an adult.

Hence:

Music making is a basic life skill as it is with walking and talking. It has so much to do with man’s emotions, moods, feelings, attitudes and opinions hence; it is desirable for children to be exposed to, trained and enculturated with music for its own sake. In

other words, it is a birthright for all people irrespective of age, to be able to sing in tune and march to a beat (Levinowitz) <http://www.musictogether.com/Import>.

Music, no doubt is a great and important factor in the academic development of children. One wonders at the miracle of what mere singing could do even in making children who literarily would not want to read and write some English words, solve little mathematical problems, and even socialise with fellow children. You see them carry out such activities with ease simply because music was involved. It is then not a surprise why music is the backbone of life; hence it soothes our emotions, helps us cope with hardship and can be a prime factor to a healthy life. Music is more powerful than mere words and has helped solve problems ordinarily words or flogging could not solve in children.

Education always changes behaviour which is the end result of what was learnt. And music is not left out as an incentive in intellectual upbringing of children.

Music expands memory and assists in developing crucial language skills. It exerts a multiplier effect on reasoning skills, especially on spatial reasoning – an effect that has been demonstrated experimentally. Music also reinforces such logical and perceptual ideas as beginning and ending, cause and effect, sequence and balance, harmony and dissonance, as well as arithmetic concepts such as numbers, enumeration and timing (Start the music: A report from the early childhood music summit. www.menc.org/resources/view/start-the-music-a-report-from-the-early-childhood)

Moreso, the effect of music on the brain and thinking are demonstrable and research has shown that during an electroencephalogram (EEG), music can change brain waves and make the brain more receptive to learning. Music connects the functions of the right and left hemispheres of the brain so that they work together and makes learning quick and easy. Brain function is increased when listening to music and studies have shown that music promotes more complex thinking. It can make connections between emotions, thinking and learning (Davies 2000). How important therefore it is for children to be introduced to music as early as pre-school age.

Music has also been proven to help in the development of mathematical skills in children; as Maxim (1989) noted “singing games such as counting rope jumps could help a small child to understand how to count” (p. 289). More so:

There is a causal link between music and spatial intelligence by which one can visualise various elements that should go together, it is critical to the sort of thinking necessary for everything, from solving advanced mathematics problems to being able to pack a book-bag with everything that is required for the day; from writing materials, text books and snacks for the day (Teacher Education www.classicsforkids.com/teachers/education/benefits.asap).

The Teacher Eduation above further observed:

Early musical training helps develop brain areas involved in language and reasoning. It is thought that brain development continues for many years after birth. Recent studies have clearly indicated that musical training physically develops the part of the left side of the brain known to be involved with processing language and can actually wire the brain's circuits in specific ways. Linking familiar songs to new information can also help imprint information on young minds.

This is a fact. The researcher could still remember a lot of information and memories of things taught through music, even as a child. Music makes an indelible mark in our memories and faster in children because their brain is tender and can take in things easily if well applied.

Also, in the acquisition of reading and writing in early childhood, music is another outlet to stimulate the mind; for that's the only better way to gain knowledge and confidence in oral language and writing. Oral language is an interactive and social process and music is a natural way for children to experience rich language in a pleasurable way. Children have a lot of energy, and learning movements with dances to songs always help to release some of these energies. The use of music for reading instruction allows children to easily recall new vocabulary, facts, numbers and conventions of print. For example, in learning ABC's, the alphabets could be sung and danced to, making its learning more pleasurable, very simple, easy and sweet for the children. The same thing is applicable to the counting of numbers (1, 2, 3 etc.); as well as in knowing the parts of the body, their names and where they are located.

More so, it has been observed that success in school and society is dependent on diverse abilities, and studies have shown that some measures of children's intelligence are indeed increased with music instruction. Noting that it is not just that mere listening to music probably once in a while will make one smarter, rather a rich environment makes the difference. www.childrenmusicworkshop.co/advocact/benefits.html).

Moreover, Deborah Torres Patel (internet source) on 'Top 20 Reasons Why Children Should Study Music' observed that:

The brain develops at a rapid rate between birth and three years and it is an essential window for the development of neurons. Therefore encouraging musical exploration is an easy way to promote intellectual development. Before the age of three, toy instruments can be an excellent introduction to the real thing and group musical play classes can prepare a child for later study. Singing at any age is highly beneficial; linguistic and musical awareness can begin as early as the fifth month of pregnancy when foetal brain and ear are wide.

<http://ezinearticles.com/Top-20-Reasons-Why-Children-Should-Study-Music&id=151408>

From all the above, it is very clear that music stimulates and increases intellectual ability in children. Hence, the importance of using music to teach them all things, starting from their homes to their schools cannot be overemphasised.

Emotional Development

Emotionally, music has been shown to provide emotional stability to children. A singing caregiver or a singing parent will always turn into a good friend of a child and will always have that child clinging to her just to have the caregiver or parent singing for him. Such acts have been found to help children bond. Making music with other children either in the kindergarten or crèches as the case might be or in any recreational environment (parks) or even at home with neighbours' children; gives children a wonderful feeling of belonging to a group and it helps to enhance their emotions.

Most children who have difficulty joining in activities with others because they are shy or have special needs, have always been seen feeling very free and participating once there is a music activity and this has often helped them make friends and bond with their friends as well. There is nothing that makes children experience much pleasure and joy than listening to, making, moving to and participating in music. Whether they are singing along with a CD, playing a rhythmic pattern with any object of their choice, singing along someone or even skipping to music in their environment, they seem to thoroughly enjoy participating in the music making.

There is no doubt that a child introduced to music in early childhood might be found to be a happy child later in life. It is amazing seeing babies or toddlers who by mere listening to music make them stop crying if they are crying, make them happy if they are sad, and make them obedient if they are stubborn. Music indeed is very powerful. No wonder Plato as quoted by Abeles, Hoffer and Klotman (1984) said:

Music is one of the most inspirational forms of arts; its power is contained in its ability to by-pass reason and penetrates into the soul and the subconscious, manipulating one's feelings. It is a potent instrument than any other because rhythm and harmony find their way into the inward places of the soul of which they mightily fasten: imparting grace and making the soul of him that is rightly educated graceful (p. 4).

Music indeed is very powerful and simple to learn especially with children, because it has to do with their emotions. A child will always want to start dancing at any melody he or she hears; even when the child is crying, a melody makes the child stop crying and start dancing because, the song touched the child's emotions. To this Blacking (1973) opines:

Music is a deliberate presentation of opportunities for listening, creative singing, rhythmic responses and playing instruments. Through these activities, the child experiences pleasure, joy and creative expression. He or she develops listening skills and auditory discrimination. They also gain in psychophysical development, artistic use of the body as well as an increase in the range and flexibility of the voice (p.12).

To grow emotionally and socially, children need to feel worthy and confident. Freedom to experiment and to respond in creative ways to music can produce these feelings. Music properly taught can provide opportunity for children to learn appropriate ways of relating with others. It can provide ways of doing things with little or no fear of threat. Hence the

easiest way to gain self expression and self confidence is through music. When this is started during the early years of life, it becomes a normal lifestyle later in life; hence the best time therefore to introduce music in life is in the early childhood.

More so, learning to sing is a great skill for children to imbibe. When children are made to learn and sing songs together as a group, it brings joy and happiness to them; and singing in a group also helps them to get use to one another, make friends among themselves and have a sense of belonging. All these in turn help them in their emotional development. Some times, they misunderstand themselves, fight, quarrel and reconcile even though in a group. It is no deal; it is all part of growing up. As they see themselves from time to time, sing and play together, they get to understand the importance of appreciating one another, accepting one another and obviously loving one another, through these, their emotions which often times are sad, happy, hate, love and so on are developed and kept under control. From all the above it is clear that music serves as an incentive to the emotional development of children.

Moral and Spiritual Development

The Holy Book says ‘Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it’ (Prov. 22:6). Moral and Spiritual upbringing of children have always been best achieved; most of the time, through the use of songs. To this Onyiuke (2006) says:

From the childhood stage of development, the child learns to develop his moral attributes in order to live harmoniously with his fellow men. In the school, the child learns songs that teach morals like songs that emphasise on respect for elders, dignity of labour, kindness to all, hard work, cleanliness and many others. Here learning comes naturally and does not need to be memorised with stress (p. 59).

Moral education is of great importance in the life of every individual, and if the society will be good, safe and prosperous, then the moral development of her citizens must be ensured. And this can only be started and maintained from early childhood through music. Onyiuke (2006) further notes “other values are taught to children through songs, and the songs and the accompanying moral lessons are hardly forgotten by the child” (p. 59).

Music gets children in tune with God early in their life; it introduces them to their maker early enough and makes them have the fear of God in their hearts as they grow up. Coles (1990), in his 30 years dedication in researching on children’s spirituality across the United States and the world, met with hundreds of children whose spirituality were developed at home, churches, synagogues and mosques. He discovered that children are drawn to soul searching through songs, even though religion is not part of their lives. He interacted with students and engaged them in meaningful conversations and emotional debates about spirituality from which he quoted what one inner city child said about his connection to God through singing in church.

...I was singing in church last Sunday and I taugth that God must be enjoying us, because we were hitting all the notes right! Then when we were through and were just sitting there ... I was thinking that God put me here so I could sing like I just did ... I’ll wait to see what He thinks I should do when I’m older ... (p. 136).

Music no doubt connects us to God. It is often surprising, even as adults, how when our hearts are over burdened and we start singing, and discover before long, that the entire burden in the heart has been lifted. Most adults could tell how by just singing praises to God, they have ended up praying and talking to God about their problems, how at the end of that prayer, what peace they felt because they knew right there and then, God heard them. If this could happen to the adults, little children benefit more. A little child that is crying, tensed up and unhappy gets over all that just by mere listening to songs. Often times joining in the singing and dancing to its rhythm, when that child has done that for few minutes, the crying and tension will all vanish away. And the child will turn into the opposite of what it was like before then. Most of the times when teachers or parents need to teach children to pray, do things right and love God, music is always the easiest and simplest way. Just bring songs that talk on those issues and teach the child, you will get the shock of your life because that child will come reminding you of the practical section of what you taught the child through songs. This is because adults easily forget things because of much thought on their minds, but the child has nothing bothering him or her, so remembering what he or she learnt is like a blink of the eye. And they practice it to the later given a faithful environment. This undoubtedly tells us how powerful music could be.

Music obviously connects us to God. Coles (1990) observes that “educational spirituality is how we connect with one another, move in and out of one another’s lives, teach and heal and affirm one another, across space and time”...(p. 335). As we get closer to one another, God can never be farther from us.

Sacred and inspirational music instils a positive musical outlook for life. The teaching of morale and spiritual values can be accomplished through singing, playing and listening to great sacred music. The teaching of religion in the schools poses controversy and sectarianism most of the time, but music transcends these barriers and goes to the very heart hence “great music is that which penetrates the ear with facility and leaves the memory with difficulty. Inspirational music never leaves the memory, and a song will outlive all sermons in the memory” (Leader and Hynie 1958).

Summary and Conclusion

This paper has examined how music serves as an incentive in early childhood education. It explored how music could affect the intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual life of the children. Music education is very important and without controversy, it is necessary for the entire education of the pre-school children. Lehman (2006) says that “research has suggested that music instruction can have a positive effect on the functioning of the brain in young children and can offer other far-reaching educational and developmental benefits.” These results deserve our attention, but the most basic reason for bringing in music is that music is intrinsically worthwhile. It is valuable in itself and it is important. And Piaget (2006) says that “recent research has proved that music affects the body. It appears to massage organs, entrain biorhythms, alter hormone levels, reduce stress and increase learning.” Music carries with it more than just feelings; it can be a powerful vehicle for information.

When children are exposed to all of these revealed benefits early in their lives, the results no doubt will be enormous and our society will be filled with people of high moral values, who are versatile in every aspect of life. This paper will end with the quotation below:

Music gives a soul to the universe,
Wings to the mind,
Flight to the imagination...
And life to everything.
...Plato.

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