

THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN FAMILY AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Anthropological studies have shown that cultural histories are replete with abundant evidence on the indispensable role of music in the life of man. From the effective use of lullaby in the raising of children to the adaptation of music for educational purposes, music exists in many forms in the home. Music indeed begins in the home. Studies relating to music and family well being have shown that the bonds created in music-making and music-loving families, tend to be stronger than those found in non-music-making and non-music loving families. This study is an assessment of the specific role of music in the well being of families and child development and the strategies through which these roles could be enhanced.

Introduction

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). Walker (1998) believed it is '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). And Agu (2006) described it as 'an aesthetic art of combining or putting together sounds that are pleasant to the ear. It is a universal language of the soul; meaning it is a language understood by all and sundry; babies, children, adults irrespective of tribe, colour or race. It is a language

that appeals to all and it is as important as life. It is a gift from God through which we strive to express our joy for the things that are real to us, and our longings for the things that might be. Hence Esimone (2005) asserts:

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)

Music actually starts or begins from the home. A home is made up of a family. A family according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2000) is 'a group consisting of one or two parents, their children and close relations' (p.420). In other words, a family is a social group in the society that consists of one or two parents usually a man and a wife with their children and often times, with close relatives or distant friends, living together under the same roof and doing every thing together. These, make up a family which in actual fact is a home. A home is an environment offering happiness and security to its inhabitants. It is a place where something is discovered, founded, developed or promoted whether good or bad. It is the source of human character and development. Ekpo (2008) defined it thus:

The home is the child's world. It either mars the child's life or leads to success. It provides him with the necessary equipment to fit him for his proper place in the society and if guided properly, for its future career, the child is sure to be successful, but if the home fails in its duty, then the future of the child is damaged (p.28).

A good environment of joy and happiness is what creates a pleasant atmosphere in the home, and it is what makes a family different from a house. A musical family is a family where joy and happiness booms

and where the atmosphere brings and bonds the members together. Music is as important as life and a family that makes and enjoys music are found to be a happy family, which in turn leads to the all round development of the child in the family. To this Ekpo (2008) asserts:

There is no doubt that children are inclined to be more interested in music and possess more positive attitudes towards an appreciation for music when they are brought up in homes in which there is regular singing, in which various types and qualities of music are heard, performed, discussed and enjoyed, and most importantly, in which they are guided and encouraged to respond or participate (p.28).

Ekpo (2008) further said, 'the musical understanding, skills, attitudes and appreciation's possessed by parents or concerned adults have pronounced influence upon the musical interest and growth of the child' (p.28). Music is a necessity to life; hence it empowers and instils all the necessary qualities an individual needs to explore the world around him. When one is unhappy, frustrated, discouraged and downcast, music has always been the easy and best tonic suitable to bring comfort and joy back to the saddened heart hence it is therapeutic. When a child is crying out for food and the food is yet to be ready, a musical mother or parent or even sibling could only start singing and dancing for the child, obviously, the crying will give way for joy and dancing along by the child. Music goes beyond the ability of a toy in the life of a child. Of course, when a child or children are happy, the family is happy, hence music no doubt leads to all round development of the family and the children.

Music is an integral part of all activities. It is a basic life skill as it is with walking or talking. It has so much to do with man's emotions, moods, feelings, attitudes and opinions of life hence it is a powerful incentive to the intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual development of family and children. Looking at the intellectual aspect of children development, it is important to state categorically here

that music helps to solve problems that ordinary words and promises could not solve.

Intellectually, music is a way of learning, and a means through which children's memory could be developed. Music is an all important tool that is very relevant in the intellectual development of children. This is so because children love music and are inclined to musical nuances.

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 number, enumeration and timing (start the music: A report from the early childhood music summit.

www.menc.org/resources/view/start-the-music-a-report-form-the-early-childhood).

More so, the effect of music on the brain and thinking are demonstrable and research has shown that during an *electro - encephalo- gram* (EEG), music can change brain waves and make the brain more receptive to hearing. 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).

Music also helps in mathematical skill development in children. Maxim (1989) observed 'singing games such as counting rope jumps could help a small child to understand how to count' (p.289). Moreover, the acquisition of reading and writing is made easy and simple with music. Music stimulates the mind; and it is the best way to gain

knowledge and confidence in oral language and writing hence it's a natural way for children to experience rich language in a pleasurable way.

Emotionally, music is the most effective way children bond with their family members, specifically those that make music for them. Ekpo (2008) holds:

The child takes his model of everything from the home. Anything he sees the mother, the nurse, the sisters, the brothers, the father and other close members of the family do, the same thing he copies (p.28).

A music making family either by singing and dancing or consistently listening to music on CDs or Videos, will always be friendly to family members and sundry, because music makes one happy. Also children who sing with other children at school or in any recreational environment are found to have a wonderful feeling of belonging to a group and at the same time have their emotions enhanced. Children from singing homes are happy children. No wonder Plato as quoted by Abeles, Hoffer and Klotman (1984) said:

Music is one of the inspirational form of art, its power is contained in its ability to by-pass reason and penetrate 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; impacting grace and making the soul of him that is rightly educated graceful (p.4)

Nye and Nye (1992) on the other hand noted; 'man has utilised music all through history to comment upon his experiences' (p.542), and families and children do this naturally and easily in the normal process of development. 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. When children are

brought up in homes that appreciate and make music, they learn to do things with little or no fear of threat. Hence, the easiest way to gain expression and self confidence is through music. To this, Onyiuke (2006) pointed out:

Through music, children can be led progressively to find more meaning in life about them, when they are guided in the effective use of their senses of hearing, seeing and feeling as tools for exploring their surrounding environment (p.59).

Music is one of the ways for children to remember stories and learn about the world around them. And using music as a stimulus can affect one's emotions and make information easier to remember and this is more in children. Music creates an environment conducive for learning for children especially. It can reduce stress, calm the children down, increase their interest in what they are learning and set the stage for listening and learning together with other children.

Socially, music strengthens family bonds with children. This is seen in their ability to form attachments to their family members and people other than their parents. They learn to share and cooperate with those around them. Play well with others and show more self-control hence singing and playing together deals with the 'ego' in them. As part of their social interaction, playing and singing together as children helps them deal with the ups and downs faced with playing and interacting with fellow children. Music can be used in the classroom to teach and support the development of social skills between children. When they play and sing together, it helps them to relate to have a sense of belonging within that group (Page 1995).

Singing and playing together with other children irrespective of their background or short comings both at home, social environment and schools where they find themselves, helps them grow with the attitude of love that rob off on themselves rather than

discrimination, disrespect and taking people for granted. This social character has its root in the family.

Morally and spiritually, music making in the family helps in the moral and spiritual development of the members of the family. We realise that the child in the family is not isolated from school and society because, what the child learns from the home helps him to contribute meaningfully to the up-keep of society. Hence music helps a lot in emphasising good moral behaviour.

Onyiuke (2006) noted:

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 family and school, the child learns songs that teach morals like songs that emphasize on respect for elders, dignity or 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 insured. Hence Onyiuke (2006) asserts 'songs and the accompanying moral lessons are hardly forgotten by the children' (p.59). And this can really be started and maintained from the home that appreciates singing and making music daily. Music gets children in tuned with God early in their life. It introduces them to their maker and makes them have the fear of God in their hearts as they grow up; because daily songs about God, His commands and ways are sung in the family daily, either in the family devotions in the morning or in the evening devotions before bedtime. From childhood days, children from singing families hear songs on how to pray, and praying before eating, sleeping and so on, and when in school, such songs are emphasised the more; it goes a long way to

instil knowledge about God in them. Most times, teaching of religion in some schools poses controversy and sectarianism, but music transcends these barriers and goes to the very heart. 'Great music is that which penetrates the ear with facility and leaves the memory with difficulty. Magical music never leaves the memory. A song will outlive all sermons in the memory of the hearers and makers' (Leader and Hynie 1958).

From all the above areas of development through music, it is very clear that music plays much role in the family and child development. Hence when the children are developing in their intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual life, especially through music, the entire family is also developing and are very happy and are encouraged more in their music making, which in turn leads to the general development of the entire family.

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