

MUSIC THERAPY

Effective, beneficial treatment for all children

By Jerry O'Leary, MA, MT-BC

What offers an effective means for our children to learn and grow? How can our children develop a better sense of focus and concentration? What type of intervention allows both young boys and girls the ability to improve their power to remember? What type of intervention is commonly used to help children learn the alphabet? How can all of our parental aspirations be achieved in a fun-filled, creative and non-intrusive manner?

The answer to these questions has been around for thousands of years. But only recently has this field been recognized and implemented in selected educational settings. The therapeutic use of music or Music Therapy, as it is commonly called, offers parents and children answers to many of the challenges of everyday life. According to the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA), "Music therapy is an established health and human service profession using music to improve our quality of life by optimizing health and wellness and addressing the needs of children and adults with disabilities and illnesses." I suggest that music therapy, while being an effective treatment for people suffering from disabilities and illnesses, can be beneficial to all people with or without disabilities and illnesses.

HOW CAN THAT BE?

Let us look at the intrinsic nature of music and its therapeutic application to get a better understanding of how it can be beneficial to people of all walks of life. Music therapy, utilized by a trained professional, can excite us, calm us, make us smile, make us cry, release our inner feelings and increase our learning potential. As a therapy, music stimulates our entire brain not just the creative or the analytic areas.

Just take a look back at helping your children learn their ABC's. By using a simple sing-song pattern, the letters of the alphabet are imprinted in a child's memory. This musical rote memory tool is effective in teaching children their addresses and phone numbers. It can ease the education process in learning how to count. Teaching song phrases to kids demonstrates grammar and sentence construction. It can be effective in teaching children historical events and stories. It conveys feelings, emotions and love.

My wife and I experienced this phenomenon with our five year old son as he grew from infancy to kindergarten. Singing simple musical phrases behind thoughts or ideas instilled the information that we have shared with him in his memory. A case in point occurred during Fire Safety Week 2001. To the tune BINGO, our son learned what to do in case of a fire or emergency. A simple melody communicated an important and possibly life saving message.

SPECIAL NEEDS KIDS

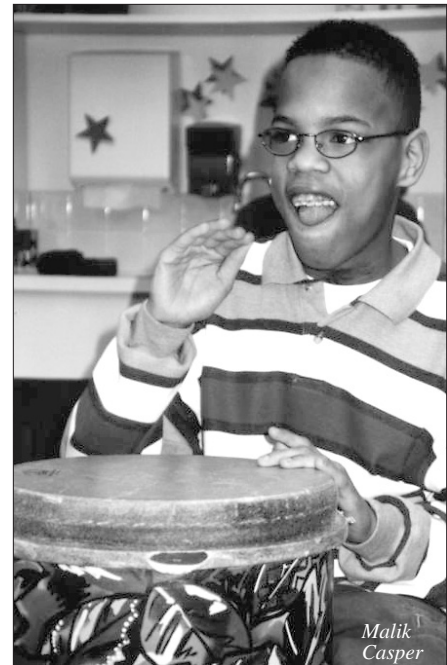
There are children that are challenged by physical, emotional, behavioral, cognitive and developmental issues. These children have demonstrated benefits from the inclusion of music therapy in their individual education plans. While directing the music therapy curriculum at the Archway Programs Lower School located in Atco, New Jersey, I had the opportunity to assist children through young adults confront serious impediments. The many faces of children dealing with autism, developmental disabilities, cerebral palsy, down syndrome and multiple sensory integration issues greeted me each and every morning. My task was to make the learning process fun and more meaningful through music therapy intervention. My friends at the Archway Programs grew to enjoy the music therapy experience, and I was able to offer special assistance as these kids matured and learned together. It was an experience I continue to remember fondly and the kids I will never forget.

ALL KID'S NEEDS ARE SPECIAL

All children are special and have their own set of special needs in the complex world in which we live today. We, as parents, want the best for our children. We need to recognize the value of music as a discipline and to be proactive in advocating music education and music therapy as a modality for all children.

For more information concerning music therapy, contact the American Music Therapy Association at (301) 589-3300 or www.musictherapy.org. For more information about Archway Programs, contact Ms. Sue Lafferty, Lower School Principal at 856-767-5757.

Jerry O'Leary, MA, MT-BC is a board certified music therapist practicing in the Delaware County, PA area. He recently formed a music therapy provider service known as MusicWorks. The purpose of MusicWorks is to address the needs of diversified populations in restoring, improving and maintaining a healthy and fulfilling lifestyle. For more information, please contact Jerry O'Leary at 610-449-9669 or email at gerald.oleary@gte.net. Visit www.MusicWorksWonders.com for more info.



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