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## THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SPECIAL MUSIC EDUCATOR IN AUSTRALIA

by

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*The special music educator is one concerned with the total development of the child in special education. By participating in musical activities, the child can acquire knowledge skills through the learning processes associated with music and develop a positive self-concept and personal value system within a social environment. The development of the author of this paper as a special music educator has occurred through fostering these qualities and by adapting her general training as a teacher and music educator to the field of special education.*

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As a music teacher in the area of special educator in Australia in the late 1970s, I experienced a sense of isolation. At that time in Australia there was a paucity of published research about the role of music in special education, as well as a lack of recognition of the field. Indeed, it was not until the early 1980s that an article in the Commonwealth Schools Discussion Papers (Weidenbach, 1981) first mentioned music in association with special education.

One could, however, identify with the Australian Music Therapy Association, which was founded in 1975. Through organizing degree courses, publishing bulletins and arranging meetings, the Association has helped to foster concern, interest, and appreciation of music therapy in Australia. This body defines music therapy as "the specific or controlled use of music to achieve therapeutic goals with children, adolescents, adults, and the aged who may have special needs because of social, emotional, intellectual, or physical problems" (Erdonmez & Cook, 1981, p. 13).

Although it is recognized that educational goals and therapy goals overlap and have common features, I have found it necessary for my practical work and research to distinguish between a music therapist and a music teacher in special education. Over the years, confusion has arisen over the definition of the role of music in special education and the role of music in music therapy. While attending the International Music Therapy Congress in Heidelberg, West Germany (May 1985), I learned that a general problem faced by music educators in the United States of America (USA) is one of distinguishing among the areas of music education. This is due

mainly to the varying goal orientations and definitions of music education. Three distinctions are made in the USA regarding approaches to music and the handicapped/disabled: (a) music therapy; (b) the teaching of a musical instrument or skill; and (c) music and special education that is concerned more with the learning processes.

Thompson (1982) quotes Forsythe and Jellison (1977) in distinguishing the primary goals of music therapy from the primary goals in special education: "The music educator's role in working with the handicapped is primarily to develop aesthetic potential (music behaviors), whereas the role of the music therapist is primarily to use music functionally to alter nonmusic behaviors in desirable ways" (Forsythe & Jellison, 1977, pp. 30-36).

I would add to this a concern for the total development of the child, which includes acquisition of knowledge skills (cognitive, psychomotor, and affective), social skills, and a personal value system. When one considers how even the role of music in general education is ambiguous and misused, it becomes all the more important to examine the educative role of music in special education. In relating to the theme of the Commission, "The Comprehensive Training and Development of the Music Therapist and the Special Music Educator", my own experience has been concerned with learning disabled children in the areas of general and special education. The lack of musical experiences by children in a Special Education Learning Center in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) initiated my move away from general teaching to the area of special education. I began to teach a program of music activities based on singing, the playing of musical instruments, listening, movement, and creativity for children aged 5-14 years in the Learning Center. A marked improvement in the total development of the children soon became evident. These children in the Learning Center had been identified as slow learners. The term "slow learner" encompasses a wide range of children with varying abilities in learning skills. Slow-learner children in their early years of schooling experience difficulties in reading readiness and language skills below the normally expected standard. An unwillingness or inability to conform to accepted behavioral patterns expected of their class or age group often is associated with these difficulties. Slow-learning children can be found in most schools. In Australia, nearly 2% of the nation's children are enrolled in special schools in classes for physically, emotionally, or intellectually disabled children. The "Survey of Special Education in Australia" (Andrews & Elkins, 1979), undertaken for the Schools Commission, also showed, however, that approximately 2% of all students in regular primary and secondary schools had handicapping

problems, 11%, learning difficulties, and 3.2%, behavioral problems. These students failed to respond to regular teaching strategies.

In the past, musical experiences for the children in the Learning Center had been mostly negative or nonexistent. The once-a-week singing time with the mainstream children in the school had been a frustrating exercise for the younger Learning Center children. Most of the children had not been involved in an integrated approach with the other classes and often could not sing the notes or say the words of the songs. The older children in the Learning Center had no music timetable because of their behavioral problems. The music program initiated with these children (Bygrave, 1984), aimed at developing and extending their auditory, discriminatory, visual and sensory-motor skills, and general learning processes of perception, differentiation, and conceptualization through positive musical experiences. The children particularly enjoyed a musical activity that incorporated language, mathematical, social, and multisensory skills, which developed around the playing of chime bars. They liked to work in groups and, as they developed skills to conceptualize about rhythm and beat (for example, understanding the concept of 2/4, 3/4, 4/4 time), they would compose rhythm patterns on paper, using chord combinations such as C E G on the chime bars. This activity often became a class effort with groups of children contributing to the composition of a tune on the blackboard. Eventually, children wrote their own words to their tunes and even dramatized their songs to perform before other classes, incorporating other instruments such as triangles, drums, tambourines, recorders, and so forth, for special effects.

In order to further extend and strengthen my knowledge in the field of special education, I began to teach music in a Special School in the ACT to children who were mildly to profoundly handicapped and ranged in age from 3 to 16 years. I used a similar program to the one developed for the children in the Learning Center, but with appropriate adaptations and extensions to compensate for the more varying intellectual and physical disabilities. For example, the following activities evolved around the playing of musical instruments: A universal interest in bell ringing developed amongst most of the children in the school. I had two sets of tuned handbells--16 in all, ranging from middle C to C above middle C (an octave). These were introduced to the preschool children, together with other percussion instruments--tambourines, drums, cymbals, triangles, wood-drums, and tone blocks, which were given to, or chosen by, individual children. Two songs initially were used and introduced over a period of time, using tunes from Hoshizaki (1983, pp. 106-107), with words adapted to the various instruments. For example, "I can play the bell (drum, triangle, etc.)." When the children heard the name of their instrument sung,

they played or were helped to play the instrument. For the severely disabled and physically weak children, bells sewn onto velcro straps were used and attached to their limbs to be shaken gently by an assistant. These activities gradually expanded until individual children felt sufficiently confident to respond to a sung request to ring their bell or play their percussion instrument. Eventually, all the percussion instruments and bells could be played together to the tune "We can play the . . . hear it . . .", which developed until most children were able to play rhythmically together for several repetitive bars. The children enjoyed this immensely and one saw eyes moving--in otherwise immovable or uncontrolled bodies--to follow the sounds.

Ringling instruments were then clumped together, for example, bells, triangles, chime-bars, and played to the tune "Jingle, jingle..." Similarly, banging instruments were also clumped and played to "Boom, boom . . ." (Hoshizaki, 1983, p. 107). The playing of the tunes was alternated after that between the 'ringers' and the 'bangers,' each following on his or her tune after the other tune had been played. Once again, an improvement in the total development of the children was clearly evident.

Concurrently, I was studying for a master's degree in education, with the focus on music and special education. This culminated in the writing of a thesis entitled "Music as a Cognitive Developing Activity: Implications for Learning and for the Learning Disabled Child" (Bygrave, 1985). In the thesis, various cognitive learning theories were examined for the purpose of considering music as an activity for developing cognitive processes. The theories of Piaget, the Neo-Piagetians (Case, Pascaul-Leone, Biggs, and Collis), Bruner, Ausubel, Vygotsky, Luria, and Leont'ev were discussed in relation to music and cognition. A theoretical framework incorporating Vygotsky's developmental hierarchy, Luria's brain functional system, and Leont'ev's theory of activity was developed to demonstrate how knowledge could be processed through music activity. I feel this framework could provide a means of investigation into the learning capacities and learning potential of children in special education. An attempt to implement the theoretical model designed in my master's thesis will be undertaken shortly in a study I am commencing for the PhD degree.

In order to substantiate my personal observations of the development of children in special education through various musical activities, and to justify the inclusion of music in a special education curriculum, I have identified music with some of the major approaches to learning disabilities in the field of special education. These serve to illustrate how music can fit comfortably alongside many special education programs. By discussing the

perceptual-motor, multisensory, language-development-related, developmental, and behavioral approaches in special education, it can be shown how music can be linked to these as a learning skill, for use in a learning sequence, as a possible means for assessment, for developmental awareness, and in association with behavioral modification.

The following overview briefly refers to some of the musical activities associated with these approaches:

#### Perceptual-Motor Approach

Through music this offers unlimited possibilities in awareness, selection, and reorganization of sound-based stimuli. The aural, visual, tactile, and kinesthetic senses can be utilized in a variety of nonverbal ways for the explanation and experience of using sound. For example, a simple musical activity involving hand/eye/ear coordination can involve the children's playing tuned handbells, chime bars, and tone blocks to a known tune.

#### Multisensory Approach

This stimulates simultaneously the eye, ear, tactile, and motor senses, with the major difference lying in the method of teaching; for example, one word learned as a total pattern, or as one sound and one letter at a time. A musical activity to illustrate the total word, or total phrase, concept can be the notating of a well-known tune on several flash cards. Each flash card can denote a bar; several flash cards joined together form a musical phrase. Each bar can be played as a whole, or a series of flash cards played as a phrase by children on musical instruments. To illustrate the one sound/one letter note concept, one flash card can be selected and each note associated with its sound on a musical instrument.

#### Language-Development-Related Approach

Language skills such as the extension of vocabulary, vocal fluidity, and improved enunciation, can be fostered through songs and rhythmic speech activities. Various rhythmic music-language activities can be designed, such as: speaking a child's name, clapping the rhythm of the name, writing the pattern of the rhythm, using tone with the pattern of the rhythm, extending the rhythm, and so forth.

#### Developmental Approach

Piaget's developmental theory has provided some of the philosophical foundations for "Developmental Music Therapy", a

model that incorporates music therapy into a developmental therapy curriculum devised by Wood (cited in Graham, 1975, p. 112). Zimmerman (1984) also has discussed how Piaget's theory can relate to, and influence, music curriculum. In Australia, Piaget's theory has been associated with various music programs in general education, such as Kodály-based approaches. In the USA, similar programs also have been adapted for use with learning disabled children (Bacon, 1981).

### Behavioral Approach

In Desmond Lee's translation (1974) of *The Republic*, we read that Plato regarded music as an essential component in his curriculum. Music was considered to be a medium through which the child, from infancy, could be conditioned to have worthwhile values. For example, the Dorian mode and the Phrygian mode were chosen for their suitability in representing "in sound, courage and moderation in good fortune or in bad" (p. 159), and rhythms selected were suited to encourage a life of courage and discipline. The moral qualities of music also have been recognized by the 19th century Methodist Revival in Britain, by the British Education system, and by the Communist countries of Russia, Hungary, and China, all of which have utilized music for moral and/or political purposes. The positive use of music can be identified also as a moralistic force in Australia. Stevens (1981) writes: "The introduction of school music could be of great value as a humanizing and civilizing influence upon society in general and upon children in particular" (p. 67).

Music often has been used in negative ways with children in special education. For example, "no music," for these children because of their deviant behavior, or "no music" if there is deviant behavior; integration with general education school children for structured singing sessions, or restricted music sessions that allow little or no opportunity for creativeness of self-expression. Gaining positive musical experiences while participating in a musical activity depends very much on positive social interactions with the teacher. Recently in England, I was teaching the well-known song "Sing a Rainbow" using Australasian signing, for communication with the deaf, to a class of 11 learning disabled children with IQs around 60 or 70. Learning the signs for "Sing a Rainbow" proceeded with much fun, colored scarves, movement, and enthusiastic singing. Many teachers came and went throughout the session, which continued for about 30 minutes with varying participation from all members of the group. Towards the end of the session the classroom teacher arrived. Immediately, four boys sat down, one or two children looked undecided, and a few continued working obliviously for a few minutes before realizing the teacher had

arrived. Sensing a change in atmosphere, I quickly brought the session to a close. What had happened in a few minutes to a group of children who had been engaged in a musical activity with obvious enjoyment? Clearly, in the experience I have just described, the interaction between the classroom teacher and his children was negative. As a music teacher, I believe positive social interactions are a necessity for any understanding and learning to take place. Negative social interactions are especially disadvantageous to the child in special education who experiences difficulties in communication and has a low self-concept.

In Australia, as far as I am aware, most music programs or activities take place at the discretion of the individual school or the individual teacher associated with special education. Music is not a compulsory subject. My own training and development as a special music educator have arisen from adapting my education and music degrees, and utilizing my experiences as a teacher, to help meet the specific needs and abilities of the child in special education. In this paper, I have identified some of the means by which positive interactions in musical activities can be developed in special education. On such a basis, the importance of music in the total development of the child can be justified, making it worthy of inclusion in any special education curriculum.

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