

MUSIC, WELLBEING & LEARNING OUTCOMES

Since ancient times the power of music to heal and promote wellbeing has been well recognised. Australia's Aborigines have understood the "energy" and "vibrational" nature of matter for ever: "singing" at sacred sites has been shown to energise the crystals within the rock. Many Aborigines refer to sacred sites as "tuning" sites where their ceremonies, dances and singing retune the energy field.

The ancient Greeks played specific tunes over the wounds of soldiers to promote healing. In India specific sounds are still used today to promote health and cure illness.

The Royal Childrens Hospital Melbourne now produces its own "healing" and "calming" music that is played to children before, during and after surgery. Children recover faster and need less pain medication particularly if undergoing painful procedures (eg changing burn dressings).

Recent neuroscience research helps us understand just how much music can aid wellbeing and learning. When we hear music, quite different areas of the brain are activated: stroke patients can learn to sing but they may be unable to speak. Stutterers can stop stuttering by teaching rhythm and singing then slowing to normal speech. Overseas, second languages are taught much more easily through singing which is particularly helpful in learning correct articulation. Children who learn music, especially keyboard are better at maths

But perhaps most important of all, singing promotes natural endorphin production: these are natural opiates the body produces to give feelings of pleasure, even euphoria.

Hearing, playing music and singing can literally become addictive. We can become addicted to behaviour that promotes the production of these opiates, particularly as they act on the whole mindbody not just the brain. Churches, cults and political leaders have used this phenomenon extremely well to keep the followers following!

In schools singing and music as an integral part of the program during the day (eg school assembly, walking into school, intervals through the day, lunchtime) can make children literally "addicted" to school.

A whole school singing session at the beginning of each day relaxes tired stressed children and gives a strong feeling of belonging they won't want to miss. Especially with songs where everybody must play their part and be present.

Music and singing can be used to learn maths (tables), sounds, reading, oracy, routines, procedures, blending of new words etc.

The impact is even stronger if there are hand and body actions included.

If we want children to come to school and continue to come, then learning should be a joyful, happy experience. Not necessarily easy but rewarding because the challenges are within reach and the effort gives a feeling of achievement.

Music helps this happen in profound emotional and neurophysiological ways.

That is why private schools spend so much money on music programs!

PROPOSAL

What is needed is a package of materials that enables teachers (even if they are tone deaf and unable to even play the spoons) to conduct music and singing programs in the schools.

(In the remote situation rhythm sticks, boomerangs, flour drums, gum leaves all make instant instruments that don't need maintenance).

“The Song Room” is one charity that may be worth approaching to create such a program.

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