

THE APPLICATION OF BODY MOVEMENT AS A TEACHING TOOL IN CHILDREN'S GROUP SINGING LESSONS

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The purpose of this research was to investigate the use of body movements as a teaching tool in the Malaysian primary school's children group singing lessons. This study used a qualitative methodology. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six music teachers. Data was analysed using a theme-based analysis of the narratives. The findings demonstrated that body movements helped the children to improve their vocal techniques and achieve a more successful sound in group singing. Music teachers also stated that emphasis on body movement activities in the class helped children to be more involved in singing. Such movements require to be encouraged to improve the quality of music learning. Training programmes for music teachers also require to incorporate body movements as a teaching tool for effective group singing.

KEYWORDS: Body-Movement, Teaching Tool, Children, Singing, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Movement is a non-verbal medium to develop or reinforce conceptual knowledge, skill or understanding. Movement training helps increase the ability to synchronize steady beat, which is fundamental for better music performance. According to Abril (2011), the discussion and use of movements are most prevalent in preschool and primary school levels. With the assistance

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of well-developed music teaching theories published in the last century, there is a growing awareness of applying movement in primary music education setting.

Singing is an activity that calls for bodily engagement and physical coordination of the body parts. According to Apfelstadt (1988), singing is the most predominant activity in a primary school music class. It is also the most accessible way to involve children in music-making (Lamont, Daubney & Spruce, 2012) and it is the core activity used for sequential and developmental music teaching (De Vries, 2015). Newell (2013), pointed out that conventional approaches of teaching singing to preschool and elementary-aged children include "rote procedures, immersion, whole-part-whole, phrase coupling, and sing-along" (p. 6).

Movement is generally considered integral to an excellent general music program (Connors, 1995) and it is widely used in choral practice with significantly positive effects in learning both vocal and musical concepts in the choral rehearsal (Wis, 1999; Bailey, 2007; Chagnon, 2001). However, little is known about music teachers' deliberate incorporation of movements, specifically body-movements, into their teaching of choral singing.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the primary school music class, singing is the most predominant activity (Apfelstadt, 1988; Brooks, 1993). It is the most accessible way to involve children in music-making (Lamont, Daubney & Spruce, 2012) and is the core activity used for sequential and developmental music teaching (De Vries, 2015). However, there are a few issues that can be observed in a primary school music class. For music teachers, insufficient pre-service training or lack of experience in music impedes the delivery of musical knowledge (Jeanneret & Stevens-Ballenger, 2013; Russell-Bowei 2009). Subsequently, it affects teaching confidence among teachers (Lamont, Daubney & Spruce, 2012). Time constraints and the subject not being prioritized are also observed to be added challenges (De Vries, 2015; Russell-Bowei, 2009; Hardcastle, 2009).

According to Jeanneret (1997), instead of appointing specialists, generalists are often responsible for teaching music classes, even though music specialists are on board. The gap between a teacher's personal training and pedagogical approach in leading singing activity exists. According to Liao (2016), teachers who lead choral practice usually employ pedagogical approaches based on their private vocal training or how they were taught in teacher's college. It is suggested that effective teaching tools tailored to training children's group singing must be developed.

American music learning theorist, Gordon, emphasized the importance of audiation in music training. Audiation is the ability to hear the musical elements without sound, and rhythm as a musical element is best learned kinaesthetically, through movement (Gordon, 2007). His use of movements is based on the theory by Hungarian dance artist and theorist, Rudolph von Laban. Laban's movement theory combines four elements---weight, flow, space and time (Abril, 2011; Cottin, n.d.). In Gordon's approach, four elements have been identified as teaching tools to help students understand and internalise tempo, meter and rhythm, establish melodic perception and musical expression (Abril, 2011; Newell, 2013). Swiss music educator Emile Jacque-Dalcroze looked at how musical expression can be ignited by fluid body movement (Seitz, 2005) besides natural body movements such as walking and breathing that initiates a rhythmic response (Seitz, 2005). In his teaching, musicianship is developed by internalising the sound through muscle and nerves and externalising through body movement (Abril, 2011).

Seitz (2005) pointed out that the Dalcroze approach revolves around motor sensory in relation to musical consciousness. Consciousness is the awareness of tone and rhythm. When body movement and musical aesthetic that emerge from musical consciousness are intertwined, artistic emotion and mental imagery can be cultivated. The nature of fluidity in movements, which is successive, has a strong association with musical elements. As Dalcroze said "No physical movement has any virtue in itself. Expression by gesture depends on a succession of movements and constant care for their harmonic, dynamic, and static rhythm" (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1967, p.127).

Dalcroze's approach subsequently influenced Carl Orff and Zoltan Kodaly (Newell, 2013, Seitz, 2005). In the Orff method, there is a close relationship between music and movement. Children are encouraged to move expressively, creatively and freely with the music, or move in a structural and planned manner (Chosky, Abramson, Gillespie, Woods, and York, 2000). The core ideology is for children to experience music with enjoyment and to make them motivated in active participation. Such musical experience should precede an understanding of musical elements and notation. Hungarian music educator Zoltan Kodaly believes that the human voice is an instrument that everybody is born with. Singing is a profound method of musical expression, and this ability should be established before instrumental training (Organization of American Kodaly Educators, n.d.). Movement is an important component in his teaching, aiming to achieve better singing (Chosky, 1981; Johnston, 1986). As a teaching tool, the Kodaly method applies movements such as walking, running, marching and clapping to reinforce students' rhythmic sense (Newell, 2013). His hand sign system served as visual and kinaesthetic aid to reinforce

learners' perception of intervallic relationships (Chosky et al., 2000; Chosky, 1999) and through the kinaesthetic sensation to enhance tonal memory (Kolodziejcki, Králová, & Hudáková, 2014).

Each pedagogical approach may have variants from one to another, but their respective training can be affiliated to three categories defined by Haga (2008). Movement can be defined as; (1) body movement such as walking and jumping, (2) a gesture that holds a meaning without verbal communication, or (3) a chunk of physical activity that has a clear beginning and end. Abril (2011) also categorises movement in two categories: (1) locomotor: one needs to move in space, such as walking. (2) non-locomotor: one stays in a spot, such as clapping. Similar to the Orff approach, where children can move creatively or structurally, Kerchner (2014) suggested the succession of movements could be teacher-generated or learner-generated, as long as they can enhance intonation, rhythmic, dynamic, or other musical understanding.

In line with Laban's movement theory of time, space, weight and flow, the use of hand gesture implies the height of pitch, the extent of range and the force of precise movement which implies the dynamic level, direction of hands and arms pointing out, which exhibit the musical direction or melodic contour. According to Abril (2011):

The pitch is a metaphorical object, and it suggests space, movement, and time. Terms such as up, down, higher, lower, step, and leap are used refer to both the relative position of pitch and specific movements of the body. While movements of the body are concrete and provide visual and kinaesthetic cues, pitch is abstract and has less obvious bearing on the terms used to describe its movement-except maybe in standard notation. Given this semantic relationship, movement might be used as a means for developing an understanding of pitch concepts. (p.112)

As a learning tool, movement is used to store muscular memory related to music perceptions. In the end, the movement is an internalization process that enables learners to achieve their musical means without actually making movements (Kolodziejcki et al., 2014).

Besides serving as a learning aid, movement can be a motivator for children. Dalcroze claimed that movement-oriented teaching is suitable for children in a group teaching setting "as the child feels himself delivered from all physical embarrassment...acquired by the practice of combining his efforts with those of the rest of the class...he will conceive a profound joy of an elevated character" (1967, p.98). An "activity-based" curriculum can develop children's kinaesthetic physical skills and give them contentment, creating a pleasant atmosphere in the class environment (Kolodziejcki et al., 2014).

The alteration of the activities helps students to focus and release tension, to

channel the excessive energy in young children or initiate their energy (Evans, 2016; Liao, 2016; Nafisi, 2014).

On movement serving as a learning motivator, Merwe's (2015) study found that joyful experience was reported besides the benefits of social integration, bodily experience, effective understanding of music and cultivation of musical expression. Participants who received movement incorporated music instruction were reported to have a positive attitude in any grade level (Abril, 2011). There are positive findings in rhythm and beat training by applying movement activity.

In the study by Habron, two-thirds of the participants reported that the Dalcroze method sped up their learning process. Rose (1995) conducted a study using Eurhythmics in cultivating beat competency in kindergarten, first grade, and second-grade students. It was observed that Eurhythmics was favoured. In a study by Rohwer (1998), sixth-grade students in control and treatment (movement-based) groups underwent ten weeks of instrumental training. The students who received movement training were better at synchronizing beat.

On the improvement of vocal production, Crumpler (1982) investigated 76 first grade students who took part in twelve 30-minute lessons. A textbook that contains no movement-related instruction was used. The experimental group that participated in Dalcroze Eurhythmics activities showed a significant difference in pre-test and post-test. In a longitudinal study by Gruhn (2002), significant interaction between movement and voice production was found in the experimental group, showing that movement correlated to intonation and pitch accuracy.

In Liao and Davidson's (2007) study, the use of gestures can correct vocal pitch fault, create a musical expression, and help better concentration in supporting and sustaining a singing voice. As movement is metaphorical to the dynamism and can reflect the articulation, past researches had indicated that the movement plays an important role in cultivating music expressiveness besides enhancing rhythm competency and vocal production (Davidson, 2012; Ebie, 2004; Campell, 1998; Changnon, 2001). According to Maes and Leman (2013), expressive body-movement that is coined with music can affect children's perception of musical expression. Their finding proves that there is a strong relationship between movement and musical expression. Holistic effects were reported in a number of studies.

Chagnon (2001) discovered that when choral conductors employed movements into a choir's singing practice, singers generally learned more quickly, improved in singing techniques and had better musical expression.

Newell (2013) indicated that the incorporation of movements improves vocal techniques such as breathing regulation, singing posture, tone quality and projection, and intonation. Movement helps singers internalize rhythm and tempo, and control musical articulation, diction and phrasing more appropriately.

MALAYSIAN PRIMARY MUSIC EDUCATION

In Malaysia, the music education curriculum, also known as 'Integrated Primary School Curriculum' (Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah, KBSR, 1983) has been enacted since 1983 and was fully implemented in all primary and secondary schools in 1988 (Nor, 2011). The general music class in primary schools is compulsory and non-examination based, encompassing students from the age of 7 to 12. The Malaysian Ministry of Education standardises curriculum design, textbooks and teaching materials.

Based on the requirement of the integrated curriculum for primary schools in music education, students learn the basic theoretical musical knowledge and musical concepts; establish their ability to sing and play musical instruments. According to the Philosophy of National Education and the 'Standard Curriculum for World Music for Primary School' (Kurikulum Standard Sekolah Rendah, KSSR, 2010), the curriculum aims to arouse the aesthetic sense and creative expression, and to provide students the opportunities to appreciate and experience music of different genres that highlight and reflect Malaysia's multi-ethnic cultures.

To further reinforce the agenda, three modules have been implemented to comply with the Musical Experience Module, the Music Production Module and the Music Appreciation Module (Mubin MD Nor, 2011; Wong, Pan & Shahanum, 2015; Wong & Chiu, 2017).

This Malaysian music education curriculum is designed with a focus on cognitive development and students' skills in music. One of the modules in this curriculum consists of a blending of experiences that includes singing, movement and playing musical instruments (Wong, Pan & Shahanum, 2016). This particular module pertains to the use of movement in primary schools' music classrooms.

In today's Malaysian music education curriculum, the acceptance of singing and movement as a teaching tool has evolved and is generally considered to be the integral components of the primary school's general music programme. As stated by Abdullah (1990), in the Malaysian primary school music class, the teaching approach in group singing could be summarized in three formats: (1) Patterning method: the teacher would sing a phrase then

students repeat (2) Whole method: the teacher would sing or play the song, and the students would sing-along for several times with growing familiarity, and (3) Action Songs: the song, usually reflects the students' ethnic culture, requiring students to engage in action, namely walking, running or playing games (Abril, 2011).

Based on the literature review, it is indicated that body-movement as teaching tool encourages positive learning outcomes. As singing is the primary part of general music class instruction, it is imperative and beneficial for teachers to explore the possibilities of movement training to improve students' vocal ability and motivate learning. The current study is to investigate teacher's perceptions of body-movement based singing instruction in the Malaysian primary music classroom.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of body-movement as a teaching tool in young children singing groups, as well as to identify the appropriate body-movement approaches and activities that music teachers use while teaching group singing at the primary school level.

The specific research questions are:

- 1) What are the perceptions of music teachers regarding the use of body-movement as a teaching tool in the teaching of children group singing lesson?
- 2) What body-movement approaches and activities are appropriate for teaching children group singing?

For clarity, the operational definition of the term was employed:

Body Movement: Movements include swinging or spreading of the arms, walking or jumping or clapping hands which do not denote to choreography or any movements that would be presented in a performance or concert set.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach as the primary data collection method, specifically the semi-structured interviews. Data were collected through one-on-one interviews with six music teachers. Each interview ranged between 30-40 minutes and allowed informal flexibility while still following the pre-prepared questions set by the authors. For example, "What do you understand about the term body-movement in the singing context?", "What are the common movements used in the group singing class?" "Why do you

think body-movement is important as a teaching tool in group singing class?", "Have you had any training in using body-movement in teaching group singing class?" All the interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which is for researchers to discover the meanings of the experiences conveyed by the participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). IPA is a thematically generated narrative that is directly quoted from interviewees for enhancing discussion. In the current study, all the data were coded, categorized and further analysed to illustrate the two significant themes in this study.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

As a result of the data analysis, two emergent themes were drawn from the interview data: (1) the music teachers' perceptions of using body-movement in teaching children group singing and (2) the appropriate body-movement approaches and activities for teaching children group singing carried out by the music teachers.

Theme One: Perceptions of Music Teachers

In general, music teachers showed strong preferences in applying body-movement when instructing young children in choral rehearsal. These are set out below with illustrative quotes from the interviews.

It makes me feel more involved and efficient in the music-making process when we have the movements. (Teacher B)

The students come to me and say "Oh, we enjoyed the singing class, we loved it". (Teacher E)

The attitude of students is very positive and encourages me to use it more. (Teacher D)

Music teachers also pointed out that the use of body-movement has an impact on sustaining the young children's active involvement in the choral rehearsal process. Teachers indicated that the involvement of body-movement in teaching the young children choral singing is very effective to increase students' energy levels and is also a way to keep them "on task" and intensely involved in the learning process.

Most students loved movement; if a class were reticent to move, body movement would be introduced gradually. (Teacher F)

I can keep my students engaged with two hours stretches in singing rehearsal with no problem by simply changing pacing, walking around and some other movements. (Teacher A)

Body movement exercises in the choral rehearsal is keeping my students attentive and alert, and also gets their bodies always in the ready position to sing, I love it! (Teacher C)

Besides that, activities which involved the body-movement during rehearsal could sometimes be perceived by the students as a waste of time if they were not clear about the purpose of body-movement activities and felt that those moves had little to no effect to the sound of the choir.

It is so important to understand the objective and meaning of movement exercises used in the choral rehearsal. It helps students to visualize what is going on when they sing. (Teacher D)

I found out that if my students are using movements that engage many parts of the body, it helps in overall intonation and sound of their singing. (Teacher B)

In addition to that, music teachers reflected on the importance of recognizing students' input when creating the movements that were used in the rehearsals. This recognition not only motivated the students but helped them feel connected to the choir and to the music, which was seen effective for choir members.

It is particularly important to encourage my students to give input when creating movements in the rehearsals. I encourage them to show each other what are the movements that are created by them in the rehearsal. They always do the good job! (Teacher G)

My students always discuss what body movement works and what does not work in the rehearsal. (Teacher C)

My students are encouraged to think critically and analytically about the movement used in relation to the music. (Teacher E)

It is very important to keep all students interested and not get too involved with one student as this can de-motivate the rest of the group. (Teacher F)

Theme Two: The Appropriate Body Movement Approaches and Activities

The application of appropriate body-movement approaches and activities in the choral rehearsal has yielded enthusiastic support from the music teachers and students in this study. Many music teachers indicated that successful music teachers had a rationale for employing a body-movement based choral approach.

In this study, some of the ways in which body movement can be incorporated in the choral rehearsal as a teaching technique included two qualities: 1) swinging or spreading of the arms – demonstrating an

understanding of various dimensions of musical concepts such as melody, phrasing, dynamics, expression and 2) Walking or jumping, clapping hands – responding to music with improvisatory movement and demonstrating an understanding of musical concepts such as long/short and fast/slow.

My students remember how they were supposed to perform with the help of my body movement. If they ran out of breath towards the end of the phrase, I moved with my arms so that they remembered! (Teacher A)

Moving really helps my students keep a beat, even if it's just clapping their hands or stomping my foot. (Teacher C)

I raise or lower my hand to map the rise and fall of the melody to show whether their voices should sound higher or lower; they are doing it perfectly! (Teacher F)

I jump or walk, to indicate whether the duration of a pitch and syllable should go longer or shorter. The students are finding it interesting and fun filled! (Teacher B)

My students swing their arms forward and backwards in keeping with the movement of the phrase. It works! (Teacher D)

I enjoy using movement such as walking, swinging arms and others with our songs! I definitely feel it helps my students and myself, especially for pitch and rhythm! (Teacher E)

All in all, the music teachers believed that the use of a multi sensory approach as a teaching technique in which students hear, see and give bodily response to is one of the most tangible activities in the choral rehearsal. Music teachers also indicated that effective use of body-movement is part of the process of creating better choral music which seems significant. The body-movement activities help the students sing more accurately in many areas such as pitch, phrasing, dynamics, and rhythm. Body movements also further enhance their musicality and expressiveness during choral singing.

CONCLUSIONS

General music education curriculum in Malaysian primary schools consists of a blend of musical experiences that includes singing, creating, playing musical instruments and moving. The acceptance of body movement as a teaching tool for young children is now generally considered an essential component of the choral music program. Based on the obtained results of this study, it is suggested that attention to body movement approach plays an important role in developing musical understanding in choral music with young children. In general, music teachers expressed positive attitudes toward body movement in the young children's choir. Simple forms of body-movement i.e. particularly common ones like 'spreading or swinging of arms' were widely accepted as a

useful tool in teaching the young children group singing.

The music teachers expressed their interest in seeking movement training and suggested that movement training should be included as a part of the pre-service and in-service teacher training programme. They also recommended that the music education series books and supplemental materials should include many suggestions for the music teachers regarding the inclusion of body movement activities into the general music classes and also choral music classes.

More research is necessary to determine the pedagogical value of using body movement in assisting teachers in teaching young children's choir. Such research will help to guide the music teachers in creating lessons and rehearsals tailored to the students' needs and tastes and further provide musically productive and enjoyable rehearsal experiences. Also, it will help to guide the development of pre-service and in-service music teachers' training to enhance professional understandings and musical skills, particularly on the application on the body-movement in teaching young children's choir. In addition, this research adds to the body of knowledge based on learning in the choral literature context which would benefit music teachers in Malaysia through understanding the status quo of the use of body movement as a teaching tool in children group singing lessons.

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