

Daily Listening in the Primary School Classroom

Action research: How can daily music listening in schools support the emotional well-being of children?

Luke De La Salle & Karen Scheaffer

Introduction

Evidence from research into the effect of music listening on well-being across the life-span suggests a positive relationship (Juslin, 2016). Yet limited academic research has been conducted specifically into primary schools, showing a clear gap worthy of exploration.

Aims and Objectives

Class teachers are advised to deliver a 'Daily Listening' session as a form of musical medicine for well-being to help regulate mood throughout the day. This is based on 3 key points:

- Since the Covid-19 pandemic, children have become increasingly anxious with the link between loneliness of home isolation and future mental health only just becoming evident (Loades et al., 2020).
- Listening to music has been found to have a positive impact on well-being, with research showing that it is often used for self-regulation of mood (Saarikallio, 2011).
- Children choose to listen to music outside of school for social and emotional regulation (Boal-Palheiros & Hargreaves, 2001; Kuntsche et al., 2016; Tarrant et al., 2000). This can and should be applied inside the classroom.

Method:

A pilot project was conducted across an Academy Trust of 4 primary schools in North London encouraging all class teachers to use music at least once a day to help regulate children's moods. The aim was to enable teachers to help children calm quicker or to be at a level for peak performance following a break from learning. Training on the positive uses of music was delivered to staff who then explored selecting and using music to best support the well-being of their students. Through action research, the methods have been adapted to promote best practice.

Challenges:

Listening to music has become something that seldom occurs outside of formal music lessons where children listen in order to develop cognitive function in the form of knowledge which can be formally assessed (Bundra, 1993).

A teacher's ability to facilitate an active listening session could be hindered by limited training, resources, and timetabling demands. Music listening with well-being objectives might also provide a challenge in terms of assessment and obtaining reliable data within an increasingly data-driven environment (Fautley, 2010).

Desired outcome:

Classes who frequently listen to music for pleasure whilst developing skills for children to interpret and self-regulate their emotions (Kratus, 1993).

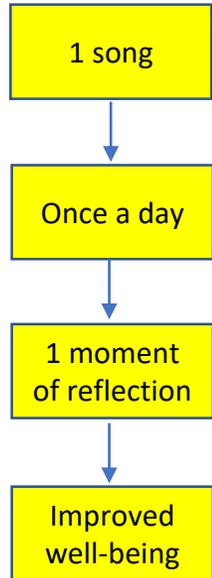
Observations from classroom action research

- Teachers have freedom to choose the music, although preferred, self-selected music has a greater impact on improving mood than music that is disliked (Wilkins et al., 2014).
- Classes who establish routine through regular timetabled listening, such as after breaks, waste less time preparing their students for learning.
- Listening needs to be active, not as background music in order for it to be most effective (Lee & Welch, 2017).
- Regular active listen enhances general focus and attention, but also attention to musical details and understanding.
- Teachers used 'habit stacking' to ensure they had a song prepared.
- A shared class 'anthem' that is regularly repeated, has created a sense of belonging, identity and mutual trust between students and teachers (Trevanthen, 2002).

Conclusion

Through a 'Daily Listening' session, teachers could facilitate a calming and reflective environment to allow children to focus on improving their emotional well-being by becoming more self-aware, happy and self-content.

Observations from this action research could act as a catalyst for discussions amongst stakeholders into changing pedagogical practices of primary schools, and possibly secondary schools in the future, to provide rich musical listening experiences to support the well-being of children.



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