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The Influences of Music on the Confidence and Sense of Belonging of Children

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the Faculty of the School of Music
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Music Education

by

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Abstract

Human emotion is greatly affected by music. Both listening to and creating music influence a person's emotions. Despite the research supporting this finding, there is a lack of research detailing how music influences the confidence and sense of belonging for the early childhood student. This issue is important because educators are concerned about the mental wellbeing of their students. The observation of how music effects the confidence and sense of belonging of a child may assist educators to improve the issue of mental health among the students in their schools. This qualitative case study, which takes place in South Africa, will seek to identify specific activities in the music education classroom that will promote a child's confidence and encourage a sense of belonging which may improve the child's overall mental wellbeing. One theme that has emerged through the exploration of a small body of existing literature is that music is a powerful tool that can be used to promote these qualities. Another theme includes the importance of opportunity and participation in music classes from a young age. Through this research, it was found that music plays a positive role in the development of a child's sense of belonging and self-confidence. The results from this study can be applied to psychological studies to better understand the effects of the various responses to music and how music can be used to give children confidence and provide them with a sense of belonging from a young age.

Keywords: music education, early childhood education, confidence, sense of belonging

Dedication

I dedicate my thesis to my incredible husband, Riaan, and our boys, Xander, Jaxon, and new baby brother on the way. My husband's support to make this whole endeavor possible was above and beyond what I ever could have asked for. His encouragement through every course and every page I wrote was unwavering and I am incredibly thankful for him in every way.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

Research reinforces the benefits music has on the state of one's health, both physically and mentally.¹ Educators have encountered an increased number of students who suffer from mental health disorders.² This study will investigate how a young child's confidence and sense of belonging is influenced by singing and participating in musical activities. By the age of three, children develop an understanding of feelings such as shame, compassion, and embarrassment.³ This indicates that from an early age, children develop sophisticated feelings and experiences that may stay with them for their entire lives. It is important to target early childhood education to investigate the way music may influence a child's confidence, sense of belonging, and overall mental health.

Background of Topic

In a study performed by researchers from Dortmund University in Germany, teachers expressed concern for the mental wellbeing of their students and they had a desire to support their students and promote positive experiences.⁴ There is a need to better understand the ways in

¹ Kimberly Diane Fraser and Fatima al Sayah, "Arts-based Methods in Health Research: A Systematic Review of the Literature," *Arts & Health: International Journal of Research, Policy & Practice*, 3, no. 2 (September 2011): 112.

² Leyre Zarobe and Hilary Bungay, "The Role of Arts Activities in Developing Resilience and Mental Wellbeing in Children and Young People: A Rapid Review of the Literature," *Perspectives in Public Health* 137, no. 6 (11, 2017): 346.

³ Ramona Thümmer, Eva-Maria Engel, and Janieta Bartz, "Strengthening Emotional Development and Emotion Regulation in Childhood-As a Key Task in Early Childhood Education," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19, no. 7 (March 2022): 3.

⁴ Wendy M. Reinke, Keith C. Herman, Rohini Puri, and Nidhi Goel, "Supporting Children's Mental Health in Schools: Teacher Perceptions of Needs, Roles, and Barriers," *School Psychology Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2011): 2.

which students can be supported and music may encourage students, especially if initiated before elementary school.

Jean Piaget details in his theory of cognitive development that within the four stages of development, specific skills are developed within each phase. In the sensorimotor stage, which is from birth to two years of age, children adapt to their environment.⁵ This stage is the foundation on which the subsequent stages are based. Before the age of two, children are aware of their surroundings, and they learn to respond appropriately. In the preoperational stage, which lasts until seven years of age, language, thinking, imagination, and problem solving continue to develop.⁶ The growth that occurs in this stage has significant implications on a child's understanding of social and emotional relationships.⁷ An analysis of Piaget's theory will reveal the ways in which music, specifically singing, may influence a child's confidence and sense of belonging.

Erik H. Erikson also had several significant theories that involved a child's development throughout his or her education. One theory details that the learning that takes place in a young student influences his or her perspective of both the world and him- or herself.⁸ Erikson indicates that this will influence the child's confidence.⁹ In his third psychosocial stage, Erikson explains that children between the ages of four and five develop interpersonal skills along with critical

⁵ Baken Lefa, "The Piaget Theory of Cognitive Development: An Educational Implications," *Educational Psychology* (September 2014): 4.

⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁷ Ibid., 6.

⁸ William R. Myers, "Teaching Elder: Erik H Erickson," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 18, no. 4 (October 2015): 10.

⁹ Ibid., 11.

thinking skills, specifically in response to the relationships at school.¹⁰ This may have a profound influence on a child's sense of confidence and belonging.

Music begins to influence an individual as early as in utero.¹¹ A baby growing in his or her mother's belly begins to respond to musical sounds as early as 18 weeks of gestation.¹² In a study exploring neonatal development, Joanne Loewy and Artur Jaschke concluded that "this period in the womb is considered to be a critical period for neurodevelopment."¹³ As administrators and educators look for ways to improve the mental wellbeing of students, music could assist in the implementation of programs or strategies to support a positive development of mental health through building one's confidence and a sense of belonging among children. By instilling well-developed and intentional programs from an early age, greater success is likely to be attained. This can be observed in several studies that focused on the development of babies and their exposure to music.

One study conducted by Loewy and Jaschke reported on babies born prematurely. The researchers share findings that support the ways in which music influences the individual. Music, especially familiar songs to which the mother exposed the child in the womb, has a positive implication on the baby's level of comfort. Familiar music provides the baby with more stable heart rate patterns and restful sleep.¹⁴ The authors noted that "early exposure to music can have

¹⁰ Bernardo J Carducci, "Erik H. Erikson," *The Wiley Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences, Models, and Theories* (2021): 47.

¹¹ Daniel J. Levitin, *This is Your Brain on Music*, (New York: Penguin Group), Inc, 2006, 107.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Joanne Loewy and Artur C. Jaschke, "Mechanisms of Timing, Timbre, Repertoire, and Entrainment in Neuroplasticity: Mutual Interplay in Neonatal Development," *Frontiers in Integrative Neuroscience*, 14, no 8. (March 2020): 4. doi:10.3389/fnint.2020.00008.

¹⁴ Loewy and Jaschke, "Mechanisms of Timing, 4.

strong influences on cognitive reserve and development later in childhood.”¹⁵ There may also be a link to how music benefits executive functioning which includes a child who can manage his or her emotions.¹⁶ A child who can manage his or her emotions may also demonstrate greater self-confidence.

Emotion effects how music may influence a child’s confidence and sense of belonging. Music can stimulate emotions by triggering specific feelings upon hearing certain melodies.¹⁷ These melodies that stimulate a child’s emotions influence how he or she may self-regulate based on thoughts, memories, images, and emotions, and it affects the cognitive process, decision-making, and interactions with others.¹⁸ Each of these qualities can directly influence one’s self-confidence.

Teachers should receive appropriate training to promote positive experiences in the music classroom from an early age. Children’s early experiences profoundly affect cognitive development and confidence as they grow. A negative experience can impact one’s future confidence.¹⁹ For example, a child who is told that he or she cannot sing by a teacher, parent, or other authority figure may believe that it is true well into his or her adult life.²⁰ This may affect a child’s willingness to participate in the collaborative music experience. Educators and caretakers

¹⁵ Loewy and Jaschke, “Mechanisms of Timing, 5.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Kimberly Sena Moore and Deanna Hanson-Abromeit, "Theory-Guided Therapeutic Function of Music to Facilitate Emotion Regulation Development in Preschool-Aged Children," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 9, (2015): 572.

¹⁸ Robert E. Dunn, “The Effect of Auditory, Visual or Kinesthetic Perceptual Strengths on Music Listening,” *Contributions to Music Education*, 35 (2008): 53.

¹⁹ Nicola Swain and Sally Bodkin-Allen, “Can’t Sing? Won’t Sing? Aotearoa/New Zealand, ‘Tone-Deaf’ Early Childhood Teachers’ Musical Beliefs,” *British Journal of Music Education* 31, no. 3 (November 2014): 255, <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/cant-sing-wont-aotearoa-new-zealand-tone-deaf/docview/1656297585/se-2>.

²⁰ Ibid.

maintain the ability to provide young children with positive experiences in music. Research demonstrates that children's social and cognitive skills may benefit.²¹

Problem Statement

In a study by Zarobe and Bungay that focused on the mental wellbeing of children, it was identified that educators and caretakers agree that there is a "growing concern for the mental wellbeing of children and young people."²² The existing research has addressed this issue in students in their teenage years and beyond, but there is a gap in existing literature regarding how music influences a child's confidence and sense of belonging in the early childhood years under the age of seven. This study will focus on children between the ages of three and seven.

Research has also addressed the ways in which music influences a child's cognitive development before the age of seven, but there is limited research that addresses a child's confidence and sense of belonging and how it is influenced by singing and making music.²³ Children that struggle to embrace a sense of belonging in a social group are often addressed after families and educators identified a concern and respond in an attempt to treat the issue.²⁴ These difficulties can be severe or result in chronic battles that last a lifetime.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine the ways in which singing and participation in various music making activities may influence a child's confidence and sense of

²¹ Jayne M Standley, Darcy Walworth, and Judy Nguyen, "Effect of Parent/Child Group Music Activities on Toddler Development: A Pilot Study," *Music Therapy Perspectives* 27, no. 1 (2009): 14, <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/effect-parent-child-group-music-activities-on/docview/199552307/se-2>.

²² Zarobe and Bungay, "The Role of Arts Activities," 346.

²³ Standley, "Effect of Parent/Child Group Music," 14.

²⁴ Ibid.

belonging. It will further investigate the ways in which a child's confidence and sense of belonging may be developed in the music classroom and experienced in other areas of their lives. The research method will be a case study investigating children between the ages of three and seven years and how these children are perceived by their teachers. To effectively address the issue of confidence and belonging in young children in the music classroom, the researcher intends to collect existing literature from several different sources to be discovered through the research process. This literature will include, but not be limited to, scholarly books, scholarly journals, relevant magazine articles, interviews, observations, and any other material that may be presented through the process. Upon examination of the current research, a greater understanding of how music and singing influence confidence and a sense of belonging among young children may be obtained.

In addition to the research, seven teachers from two private schools will provide feedback to the researcher. The teachers that will be interviewed will be from six early childhood and elementary school classrooms consisting of approximately twelve to twenty-two children in each class between the ages of three and seven. The children from one of the schools are international students representing thirty different countries living in South Africa. The second school is a local South African early childhood education center. The teachers of each of these classes will be interviewed in order to determine their use of singing in their daily lessons as well as their perception of how singing and other musical activities influences the children. There will be four teachers interviewed at the international school and three interviewed at the local early childhood education center. These observations and interviews will further assist the researcher in collecting helpful data to identify themes when analyzing the influence of singing and other musical activities on a child's confidence and sense of belonging.

Significance of the Study

This study is critical for analyzing and improving the overall confidence and sense of belonging of children and to set them up for success in their careers as lifelong learners. It may also protect them from potential pitfalls and challenges that may cause them difficulties in the future such as depression and anxiety. It is important that educators and administrators alongside parents and caregivers explore constructive ways to support the children in their lives to help them develop cognitively, socially, and emotionally. The singing that takes place in the classroom can provide students with positive experiences and encourage constructive emotions that will feed into their self-worth and give them a sense of belonging.²⁵ Through singing together and making music in an ensemble, the collaborative efforts and making of music has a powerful influence on children regarding their development, emotions, and social interaction.²⁶

As children engage in musical activities such as singing and playing instruments together, teamwork is encouraged. This sense of belonging will play a significant role in their early growth and confirm that they are important to the group. Another way in which music may influence children on different levels is the way the music they produce will stimulate their emotions that will influence their behavior.²⁷ In a study performed by Wendy Reinke at the University of Missouri, Reinke wrote that “the music classroom also provides an abundance of opportunities for addressing and enhancing self-esteem.”²⁸

²⁵Adena M. Klem & James P. Connell, “Relationships Matter: Linking Teacher Support to Student Engagement and Achievement,” *The Journal of School Health*. 74 (2004): 267.

²⁶ Fraser, “Arts-based methods in health research,” 138.

²⁷ Dunn, “The effect of auditory, visual or kinesthetic perceptual strengths on music listening,” 67.

²⁸ Reinke, et al., “Supporting Children’s Mental Health in Schools,” 8.

Reinke's study concluded that alternative interventions to promote a strong sense of confidence and belonging was a critical element in supporting students. Music is a platform in which activities can impact the mental health of the children in a positive way and therefore combat feelings of anxiety and depression. Educators need to be intentional regarding the activities they promote in their classrooms. Students that are motivated by interesting and alluring activities are students that engage with what they are doing and will leave the class in a positive manner.²⁹

In another study conducted by Klem and Connell which investigated the influence of teacher involvement on a student's success, it was found that social skills were improved when music was authentically integrated into a child's average school day.³⁰ These social skills will continue to promote self-confidence and those students will be less likely to experience the consequences that come from anxiety and depression. The authors write, "the inclusion of music instruction in students' school experience has the potential to impact their social development, emotional health, and overall sense of belonging at school."³¹

Research Questions

While there is substantial research into the subjects such as music therapy and the influences of music among teenagers and adults, the research is lacking for the early childhood age and the ways in which the participation in musical activities like singing and playing instruments influences a child's confidence and sense of belonging. It has been established that music influences emotions and provides numerous benefits in development, but the researcher

²⁹ Reinke, et al., "Supporting Children's Mental Health in Schools," 8.

³⁰ Klem & Connell, "Relationships Matter, 271.

³¹ Ibid.

intends to examine whether or not singing and playing instruments influences a child's mental wellbeing.

As an exploration into these ideas, this study will seek to answer the following questions:

Research Question One: How does participation or non-participation in making music through singing and playing instruments for children ages three to seven affect their confidence and sense of belonging?

Research Question Two: What are the perspectives of teachers of children ages three to seven pertaining to the effects of singing and playing instruments on confidence and sense of belonging?

Hypotheses

Research Question One may be answered with the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis One: Participation or non-participation through singing and playing instruments among children between the ages of three and seven may improve their confidence and sense of belonging.

The children may also be encouraged as they realize they are an important part of the ensemble, whether in a rehearsal or performance. Music can influence one's thoughts and emotions and this will, in turn, influence one's behavior.³² Through participation in music activities, like singing and playing instruments, the positive mental wellbeing among young children will be encouraged, especially when initiated from an early age.³³

Research Question Two may be answered with the following hypothesis:

³² Dunn, "The effect of auditory, visual or kinesthetic perceptual strengths on music listening," 67.

³³ Kate E. Williams, Donna Berthelsen, Jan M. Micholson, Sue Walker, and Viky Abad, "The Effectiveness of a Short-Term Group Music Therapy Intervention for Parents who have a Child with a Disability," *Journal of Music Therapy* 49, no. 1 (Spring, 2012): 25.

Hypothesis Two: The perspectives of teachers of children ages three to seven pertaining to the effects of singing on confidence and sense of belonging will be that singing positively influences a child's confidence and sense of belonging.

When children are encouraged to participate in singing activities in a music classroom, they will develop a greater sense of belonging and it will also strengthen their confidence in the way they interact with others. Music can provide experiences to help children learn more about their own developing identities.³⁴ This may lead to a greater sense of belonging.

Core Concepts

This study explores four core concepts including early childhood music education, making music, confidence, and belonging. Early childhood education refers to the education of children under the age of eight, according to UNICEF.³⁵ For this study, the children of focus will be between the ages of three and seven and their subject of education will be music. This will allow the researcher to focus her content on a specific activity, which will be making music through singing and playing instruments, with a specific age group.

The final two core concepts to be addressed in this research are confidence and a sense of belonging. The research that explores how music influences an individual's health is relatively recent and there are still gaps to be filled, including that of how confidence and a sense of belonging are affected by singing.³⁶ There is some evidence indicating that musical activities, such as singing, influence a child's development, but it is limited.

³⁴ Zarobe, "The Role of Arts Activities," 341.

³⁵ "Early Childhood Development Overview," October 12, 2022, <https://data.unicef.org/topic/early-childhood-development/overview/>

³⁶ Fraser, "Arts-Based Methods in Health Research," 113.

The ways in which music stimulates emotions and how that influences a child's confidence and sense of belonging are important core concepts to be developed.³⁷ Singing and playing instruments may be used in early childhood education as an effective tool to promote a positive sense of self-worth and belonging; important qualities in the development of a child's social skills.³⁸

Definition of Terms

- **Mental health**

- Mental health is defined by Merriam-Webster as “the condition of being sound mentally and emotionally that is characterized by the absence of mental illness and by adequate adjustment especially as reflected in feeling comfortable about oneself, positive feelings about others, and the ability to meet the demands of daily life.”³⁹

- **Self-confidence**

- Self-confidence is defined as “confidence in oneself and in one's powers and abilities.”⁴⁰

- **Belonging**

- Belonging is defined as a “close or intimate relationship.”⁴¹

³⁷ Moore, et al. "Theory-Guided Therapeutic Function of Music," 574.

³⁸ "Singing and Healthy Children," *Voice of Chorus America*, 15.

³⁹ "Mental health," September 6, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mental%20health>.

⁴⁰ "Self-confidence," September 6, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/self-confidence>.

⁴¹ "Belonging," October 6, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/belonging>.

- **Emotion**

- Emotion is defined as “a conscious mental reaction (such as anger or fear) subjectively experienced as strong feeling usually directed toward a specific object and typically accompanied by physiological and behavioral changes in the body.”⁴²

- **Music Education**

- The National Association for Music Education (NAfME) has a definition of music education in the early years. They state:

by offering intentionally responsive, play-based, developmentally appropriate music engagement opportunities, adults honor young children’s agency for music making. Such opportunities must be integral in education settings serving young children, including home, home-based or center-based care and intervention programs, preschools, pre-kindergartens, and elementary schools.”⁴³

Chapter Summary

Singing does not require additional materials which makes it an accessible addition to any educational classroom. Music may be used to build confidence and belonging in students, even at a young age. Through the collaborative nature of making music, students may recognize their importance in the group which will build their confidence and sense of belonging. This will have a great impact on their social and emotional development.

Mental health and individual wellbeing are important issues, especially in schools. Music influences emotions and this makes it an effective tool to promote positive mental wellbeing for students of all ages. Educators and caregivers need to be aware of which activities will best

⁴² “Emotion,” October 6, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/emotion>.

⁴³ “Early Childhood Music Education,” September 6, 2022, <https://nafme.org/about/position-statements/early-childhood-music-education/>.

support their children. These activities need to be carefully designed and implemented to be effective. If they are exciting and engaging for the students, they will be more effective. Through the participation in these activities, children will be supported in the development of both their cognitive and social skills.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Between the ages of three and seven, children develop positive qualities that may support their mental health.⁴⁴ Research explores how music influences the confidence and sense of belonging of a young child. Collaborative experiences may influence the development of a child's sense of belonging and confidence. It may also be important to explore how music is used in different cultures and the ways in which different cultures with varying belief systems use music in traditional and contemporary approaches.

In a study conducted in Melbourne, Australia by Alison Giles-Kaye, et. al., it was found that it is necessary to address the mental health of students in schools.⁴⁵ Through the use of interviews and focus groups, the diverse group of researchers, which included educators, psychologists, a pediatrician, and an experienced qualitative researcher, gathered information about the way teachers perceived the state of their students' mental health. Giles-Kay and her team reported that if "left unaddressed, the early life experience of mental illness is associated with later recurrence, compromised social relationships, unemployment and general ill-health."⁴⁶ They also identified that prevention and early intervention is more effective than addressing mental health issues after they have emerged. Educators who were interviewed in this study reported emphatically that they believe it is important to support students regarding their mental health. School culture was identified as an important aspect of how educators could promote

⁴⁴ John J. Warrener, "Applying Learning Theory to Musical Development: Piaget and Beyond," *Music Educators Journal* 72, no. 3 (November 1985): 24.

⁴⁵ Alison Giles-Kaye, Jon Quach, Frank Oberklaid, Meredith O'Connor, Simone Darling, Georgia Dawson, and Ann-Siobhan Connolly, "Supporting Children's Mental Health in Primary Schools: A Qualitative exploration of Educator Perspectives," *The Australian Educational Researcher* (August 2022): 1.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 2.

positive mental health and teachers need to be aware of this need. Music has the potential to encourage a strong school culture and further contribute to a positive mental health among students.⁴⁷

A study from the University of Missouri by Wendy Reinke and her team reports that educators recognize the need to address the challenges of maintaining positive mental health practices in schools.⁴⁸ Through a series of surveys of educators across five school districts of differing populations, the research team gathered the necessary information regarding the mental health needs in each school and the practices that are already in place. She states that schools are an ideal setting in which the mental health of children can be assessed and supported. More than 90% of teachers reported that they had worked with students that demonstrated disruptive behaviors, problems with inattention, defiant behavior, or students who experienced family stressors such as divorce or death. When asked directly whether or not schools should be involved in supporting children with mental health needs, 89% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they should play a role.⁴⁹ The school psychologists and counselors are trained to manage students with mental health issues and teachers can also use the training they received to promote positive mental health among their students; music is one tool teachers can use to stimulate positive mental health.⁵⁰

A study conducted by Antje Bullack out of Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg identifies clear physiological and psychological benefits of choral singing and an increased sense

⁴⁷ Giles-Kaye, et al., “Supporting Children’s Mental Health in Primary Schools,” 2, 3, 4, 12.

⁴⁸ Reinke, et al., “Supporting Children’s Mental Health in Schools,” 4.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 3, 4, 10, 13.

⁵⁰ Antje Bullack, Caroline Gass, Urs Nater and Gunter Kreutz, “Psychobiological Effects of Choral Singing on Affective State, Social Connectedness, and Stress: Influences of Singing Activity and Time Course,” *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience*, (September 2018): 2.

of connectedness among the participants. In their study, the researchers tested participants weekly from two separate groups, a singing group and a non-singing group in which they were told not to participate in the singing activity, but to listen. Saliva samples were taken and tested to measure the physiological impact of singing on these individuals. Bullack and Ossietzky found that the physical act of singing was the factor that made a difference in the increased benefits of singing, more than passively listening to singing. This study also supports the relationship between social connection and mental health.⁵¹

In a study conducted at Aarhus University in Denmark, researchers Janne Brammer Damsgaard and Svend Brinkmann reported that there are positive mental and physical effects that emerge from singing. This is especially true in groups which also promote positive relationships among participants.⁵² Damsgaard and Brinkmann conducted open-ended interviews with six choir participants during which they were able to speak freely about their experience in the choir. The researchers write that there are four benefits identified as “clinical or therapeutic benefits, benefits related to group processes, benefits associated with choir/audience reciprocity and cognitive benefits.”⁵³ This study revealed that singing in a choir creates a community among its participants and provides individuals with the confidence to interact more freely with other participants. The act of singing created connections among participants. This study supports music as a way to positively influence social-emotional skills and open opportunities for connection among individuals.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Bullack, et al., “Psychobiological Effects of Choral Singing,” 2, 4, 7, 8.

⁵² Janne Brammer Damsgaard and Svend Brinkmann, “Me and Us: Cultivating Presence and Mental Health Through Choir Singing,” *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences* (March 2022): 1135.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 1135, 1136, 1137, 1138, 1140, 1141.

A study conducted by Zuzana Sláviková and Eva Králová from Prešov University similarly identified that physiological variations in an individual are influenced by one's emotions, which is impacted by singing. The researchers provided participants with questionnaires and free responses to gather evidence of their emotional responses to music. There were also physical tests that measured the participant's physiological variations which include accelerated heart rate and respiration, blood pressure, and others.⁵⁵ Sláviková and Králová also determined that singing yields positive mental and physical responses and promotes productivity. The act of singing initiates physiological responses that influence the emotions and mood of the singer. This study concluded that singing stabilizes an individual's emotions and encourages the connection of individuals within the ensemble.⁵⁶

These studies confirm the pioneering work of John A. Sloboda of Keele University in England.⁵⁷ In the 1990s, Sloboda found that music significantly influenced individuals and caused them to have a physical response to music. In a study conducted in 1991 at Keele University, Sloboda found that eighty percent of adults interviewed indicated that music influenced their emotions by causing a physical response like laughter or tears. Additional studies revealed similar statistics with participants often reporting that when they participate in making music, it elicits strong emotions and feelings.⁵⁸

In a study conducted by R. Thomas Boone and Joseph G. Cunningham from Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts, it was found that “between the ages of 4 and 5 years, children are able to physically express some emotions that they perceive through music, such as

⁵⁵ Zuzana Sláviková and Eva Králová, “Emotions in Music and their Impact on the Emotions of Percipients: Research on Human Voice and Singing,” *Review of Artistic Education* 21 (2021): 2, 3.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 4, 6, 10.

⁵⁷ Weinberger, “Music and The Brain,” 8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

happiness, sadness, anger, and fear.”⁵⁹ Expressive movement was another catalyst for the children to show different emotions.⁶⁰ It was observed that children in this age range were able to accurately display emotions such as happiness and sadness through music and movement. This indicates that they have a comfortable understanding of basic emotions and how they relate to music.⁶¹

When an individual examines the influences of music on the physiological aspects of an individual, it is important to explore the way music influences the brain. Neuroscientists have found that music engages a number of different areas of the brain. Imaging studies provide researchers with the ability to understand how music influences different parts of the brain and it is through these pictures that researchers can see specific areas of the brain react to music. Technological advances in magnetic resonance imaging, diffusion tensor imaging, and functional near infrared spectroscopy have also improved in the beginning of the 21st century and this advancement allows researchers to track brain activity more carefully.⁶²

Research conducted by Jakub Sawicki and Eckehard Schöll at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research in Germany indicated that different sound frequencies influence synchronization in the brain. This allows different areas in the brain to communicate with each other in order to carry out various functions. Sawicki and Schöll reported also that a certain degree of synchrony may be reached when the subject is listening to music. Though additional research is necessary to further examine the neurophysiological processes when an individual is

⁵⁹ José Salvador Blasco-Magraner, Gloria Bernabe-Valero, Pablo Marín-Liébana and Carmen Moret-Taty, “Effects of the Educational Use of Music on 3- to 12-Year-Old Children’s Emotional Development: A Systematic review,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18 (2021): 19.

⁶⁰ R. Thomas Boone and Joseph G. Cunningham, “Children’s Expression of Emotional Meaning in Music through Expressive Body Movement,” *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior* 25, (2001): 35.

⁶¹ Boone and Cunningham, “Children’s Expression of Emotional Meaning in Music, 35.

⁶² Weinberger, “Music and The Brain,” 2, 3.

exposed to or participating in creating music, there is strong evidence that demonstrates the impact different frequencies of sound have on neurological synchronization.⁶³

Music therapy is another area in which research has indicated clear connections between music and the brain. The research team of Haoran Ren at Fudan University and the Children's Hospital in Shanghai, China examined the benefits of music therapy on the brain. The team studied forty preterm infants at the university in which one randomly selected group received music therapy in the form of listening to Mozart's *Sonata for Two Pianos in D Major, K.448*, while in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) and the other was in a control group in which they did not receive music therapy. The team found that "preterm infants have the capability of processing musical features and prove the evidence of synchronous large-scale brain networks involved in musical perception."⁶⁴ The researchers also indicated that previous research further demonstrates the improvement of structural maturation and connection in the brain when music therapy is utilized. It was also reported that music increased network connections in the auditory and sensorimotor networks.⁶⁵

Neurologic Music Therapy (NMT) is another method of music therapy that is used among individuals that suffer from cognitive, sensory, and motor dysfunctions due to a neurological disease. Research gathered by Amy Clements-Cortés from the University of Windsor indicated that there are a number of benefits to NMT for those with neurological disorders including brain injury, Parkinson's multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer's, dementia, and

⁶³ Jakub Sawicki and Eckehard Schöll, "Influence of Sound on Empirical Brain Networks," *Frontiers in Applied Mathematics and Statistics*, 7, no. 1 (April 2021): 1, 7.

⁶⁴ Haoran Ren, Liangyan Zou, Laishuan Wang, Chunmei Lu, Yafei Yuan, Chenyun Dai, and Wei Chen, "Evaluation of the Short-Term Music Therapy on Brain Functions of Preterm Infants Using Functional Near-Infrared Spectroscopy," *Frontiers in Neurology*, 12 (September 2021): 9.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1, 3, 11.

several others. In sensorimotor training, music is used to encourage a physical response and promote an individual's ability to improve their posture, gait, and increase upper extremity movement. Speech and language training aims to use music as a way to communicate.⁶⁶

Clements-Cortés shares from her research that “singing ability is less impaired than speaking ability, phrases can be sung with speech-like intonation and inflection which helps to facilitate actual speech.”⁶⁷ These examples indicate the benefits of NMT, which is a scientific based model, and how it may promote healing and growth in participants.⁶⁸

Jean Piaget was the founder of developmental psychology which reveals how children grow. Piaget concluded that children learn through actively engaging in something, not as passive observers.⁶⁹ In Piaget's theory of the stages of cognitive development, he refers to the preoperational phase as the period in which a child learns to use his or her organized thought and skills.⁷⁰ This occurs between the ages of two to seven and is a critical time in a child's development.⁷¹ In John Warrener's research about the preoperations period, he indicates that children must engage in activity in order to grow as learners.⁷² He explains that a child's attention may be limited because he or she does not yet have the ability to focus on multiple

⁶⁶ Amy Clements-Cortés, “Neurologic Music Therapy: Music to Influence and Potentially Change the Brain,” *Canadian Music Educator*, 54, no. 1 (2012): 37.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 38.

⁶⁹ Cecilia Schmitt, “The Thought-Life of the Young Child: Jean Piaget and the Teaching of Music,” *Music Educators Journal* 58, no. 4 (December, 1971): 22, 24.

⁷⁰ Ronald L. Laresen and Charles G. Boody, “Some Implications for Music Education in the Work of Jean Piaget,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1971): 36.

⁷¹ Ibid., 34.

⁷² Warrener, “Applying Learning Theory to Musical Development,” 24.

layers that exist in more complex music, but this should not deter educators from using music as a teaching tool from a young age.⁷³

Jerome Bruner's theory that students build on previously acquired knowledge is an important aspect of learning, especially when it is applied to the development of children in Piaget's preoperational phase in which children are active participants. If children can have access to music learning from a young age, they will be involved in activities that will connect them to other children and their teachers. Furthermore, in line with Piaget's theory, providing children with freedom to explore rather than a rigid and overly structured lesson will benefit their development; music education aligns with this theory.⁷⁴

William Myers documents that Erik Erickson practiced his own theories in his teaching style, which was to engage with young students and provide the opportunity to be involved in their learning process.⁷⁵ Helen Hedges notes in her research that Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, was another important figure in researching how young children learn.⁷⁶ He believed learning should be practical and authentic with regard to the child's culture and community.⁷⁷ The philosopher John Dewey also had several important ideas about art and music in education. In his book *Art as Experience*, Dewey details his belief that art, which includes music, is closely connected to nature and specifically refers to rhythm and symmetry. Leonard Tan, a scholar who has researched Dewey extensively, writes that "for Dewey, nature begets art,

⁷³ Warrenner, "Applying Learning Theory to Musical Development," 24.

⁷⁴ Schmitt, "The Thought-Life," 24.

⁷⁵ Myers, "Teaching Elder," 251.

⁷⁶ Helen Hedges, "Contemporary Principles to Lead Understandings of Children's Learning: Synthesizing Vygotsky, Rogoff, Wells and Lindfors," *Early Child Development and Care* 121, nos. 7-8 (November 2020): 1056.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 1058.

and art begets civility.”⁷⁸ This theory suggests that music influences human development and behavior.⁷⁹

One’s culture will significantly influence him or her from a young age. It is an important characteristic to consider when one examines the research on how music influences confidence and sense of belonging. The world has become a more transient place in the last two decades and as different cultures are interacting more than ever, it is important to understand how one’s culture will influence his or her learning. In his research, Michael S. Rosenberg also noted “that cultural tendencies impact the way individual participate in learning and the lack of knowledge about students’ cultural backgrounds might lead to a misunderstanding of students’ responses or behaviors in the process of learning.”⁸⁰ Distinct cultures place a different level of importance on music. It is also used in different ways in the communities, churches, or other religious centers. These factors will influence children from a young age and may demonstrate how music builds confidence and a sense of belonging.

In South Africa, there are a vast number of different cultures and many of them place a high value on music.⁸¹ From the author Elijah Madiba’s experience growing up in the Limpopo province in South Africa, he often experienced traditional African music in his township of Namakgale. His family was also musical and understood the value of music. He explained, however, that there was a divide between some in the township with others. His family was a

⁷⁸ Leonard Tan, “Reading John Dewey’s *Art as Experience* for Music Education,” *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, 28, no. 2 (Spring 2020): 71.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 70, 71.

⁸⁰ Fanny M. Y. Chung, *Music and Play in Early Childhood Education: Teaching Music in Hong Kong, China and the World*, Singapore: Palgrave MacMillan, 2022, 10-11.

⁸¹ Elijah Madiba, “A Collaborative Approach to Revitalisation and the Repatriation of isiXhosa Music Recordings Archived at the International Library of African Music (ILAM) in South Africa,” *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 30, no. 1 (2021): 52.

Christian family who viewed much of the traditional Sotho music as music of the world and even demonic and he was taught not to appreciate it. This is true in several African communities as many of the traditional songs and dances are directed at deceased ancestors which does not align with the Christian faith.⁸² Nevertheless, whether the elders of the community are gathering together or with others of faith, music influences the community and brings people together.

When Madiba grew-up and moved away from Limpopo, he joined local choirs in the Eastern Cape and was immediately part of a community. This was another influence of music that he experienced. He also experienced music festivals, specifically the annual National Arts Festival held in Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape province. These festivals were not only opportunities for individuals to share their art, but they were also meant for artists to dialogue, interact, and connect to discuss the arts and music.⁸³ In his research, Madiba interacted with several local musicians in Grahamstown and reported that their music and art was often influenced by the traditional music to which they were exposed from an early age. There is a genuine connection when artists have the foundation of understanding the music of their culture and how that influences the music they produce as adults.⁸⁴

Music has also been at the center of communities and families in Northern Africa. Prior to 2011, traditional African music was commonly heard among community members and families. Specifically in the areas of Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Morocco, however, there has been significant political turmoil since 2011, and researcher Craig Robertson from Indiana University comments on the ways in which music in the home and community has also been impacted. In his research, he cites several studies that document the ways in which music

⁸² Madiba, "A Collaborative Approach," 53.

⁸³ Ibid., 56.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 60.

“triggers a neurological and physiological response that is assigned emotional meaning by filtering through memories and identity as well as the present context to affect one’s current beliefs about the world.”⁸⁵ This is why music is commonly used in social movements. Music unites the people and creates an identity for various groups of people.⁸⁶

Robertson details that historical events influence the types of music that are established in a country’s culture. In an area like North Africa, music has helped to manage personal, social, and cultural identities, and in times of conflict. This has been witnessed through the spontaneous signing in Tahrir Square in Cairo, for example. In Tunisia classical music has been a strong part of the country’s traditions for the last one hundred and fifty years as a result of the Italian immigrants that entered the country in the late 19th Century. Musical theater was popular in Egypt until the revolt in 1919 when musical theater became a medium by which Egyptians expressed social and political messages. Sayed Darwish was a famous musician during that time whose music incorporated techniques and references of musical theater that provided encouragement and confidence to those who desired independence in the aftermath of World War I.⁸⁷

In Morocco, the citizens experienced a rise in rap, hip hop, and heavy metal in the early 21st century. At the beginning of this century, there was a broader cultural shift underway that challenged the traditional music in the country. In Egypt, hip hop was used as a way to address social issues, but the government still reserved the right to censor material they deemed inappropriate. This did not stop artists from performing controversial material, however, as they

⁸⁵ Craig Robertson, “Whose Music, Whose Country? Music, Mobilization, and Social Change in North Africa,” *African Conflict & Peacebuilding Review*, 5, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 71.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 68, 70, 81.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 71, 72, 73.

found loopholes around the censorship. In both countries, hip hop united the youth culture and gave individuals a platform to express themselves.⁸⁸ In North Africa, it is clear to see how music has changed and influenced the communities there.

In the research conducted by Amanda Minks and Ana María Ochoa Gautier from the University of Oklahoma, the cultures in Latin America and the Caribbean were studied in relation to their use and value of music. They reported that folklore played a large role in the ways in which music was used across these regions. It was also observed that music provided opportunities for community collaboration in various performances. Specifically, Minks and Gautier found that music and singing encourages creativity in Guatemala.⁸⁹ The researchers also noted that traditional music was further influenced by those who colonized the territories in Latin America and the Caribbean.⁹⁰

In Fanny Chung's research of Eastern traditions and practices, she noted that "cultural tendencies impact the way individuals participate in learning."⁹¹ In a world that is becoming more mobile in which different cultures are interacting more than ever, it is important to understand how one's culture will influence their learning. In the traditional Chinese culture in Hong Kong, the belief system of Confucianism is a large part of traditional Chinese culture. Their belief system focuses on interpersonal harmony, acceptance of authority, and academic excellence. These beliefs do not encourage individualism or creativity, two important traits among artists, and Chung documents that "Asian students are often criticized for not thinking

⁸⁸ Robertson, "Whose Music, Whose Country?" 75, 78, 79

⁸⁹ Amanda Minks and Ana María Ochoa Gautier, "Music, Language, Aurality: Latin American and Caribbean Resoundings," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 50, no. 1 (2021) 24, 30, 31.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 33.

⁹¹ Chung, *Music and Play in Early Childhood Education*, 10.

deeply and being creative.”⁹² Despite these foundations, former Chinese societies place a significant value on music. Music, together with morals, law, and politics, were considered the most important social functions. An ancient Chinese saying states that the ideal state is achieved when there is “harmony between music and man.”⁹³ Both the old and new Chinese governments have upheld this belief and music education has influenced Chinese culture, social societies, and politics.⁹⁴

Rosanna Wong Yick-ming was the Executive Director of the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups and she reported in 2005 that Hong Kong was going through a period of educational reform. Where education used to put strong value on rote learning and vocational training in Hong Kong, it is now shifting to acknowledge the importance of a holistic education. Classrooms are becoming learning environments that inspire its students to be creative and explore what they are learning. Students are also encouraged to engage more creatively whether they are exploring a new skill or promoting a creative talent. Yick-ming believes the shift to a more holistic education in Hong Kong is because

we are living in an increasingly competitive world, in which the pressures on children to succeed are becoming greater by the day. Yet, at the same time, we also see that people who are multi-skilled, who are well versed in a variety of experiences, are the ones who do better, and accomplish more.”⁹⁵

Music, she continues, is an ideal medium in which students may grow to their capacity as well-rounded individuals.⁹⁶

⁹² Chung, *Music and Play*, 11.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11, 12.

⁹⁵ Rosanna Wong Yick-ming, “Music in Education is Education for Life,” *International Journal of Music Education*, 23, no. 2 (2005): 108.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 107, 108.

Social-emotional learning is an area in which researchers started to study in greater depth in the late 20th century. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is an organization that was established in 1994 and focuses on promoting Social-Emotional Learning (SEL).⁹⁷ The CASEL includes in their definition of SEL that individuals, both children and adults, gain the ability to understand and manage their emotions, express empathy, and influence relationships through the development of SEL.⁹⁸ Several unique studies compare music education with SEL and the findings indicate that music influences SEL in a positive way.

In a study conducted by Maura Assad Pimenta Neves and Vera Lúcia Trevisan de Souza, the researchers found that when music was introduced to a class, singing in particular, it provided students with positive feelings which resulted in a positive outlook in their class. Through this experience, there was a stronger connection created among participants. Singing has also been shown to improve social-emotional learning. In a study conducted by Biljana Jeremić, it was found that teachers who engaged in singing or modeling singing for their students created students with increased empathy and understanding of others. The researchers also noted that music was shown to promote emotional intelligence. This included emotional expression and regulation.⁹⁹

In a study conducted by Taryn Raschdorf, Brittany Nixon and Amie Searcy from Old Dominion University and Brigham Young University, the researchers explored the use of SEL in the general music classroom.¹⁰⁰ The authors write that “both music education and SEL education

⁹⁷ Taryn Raschdorf, Brittany Nixon May, Amie Searcy, “Integrating Social-Emotional Learning Into Our “New Normal” Teaching Elementary General Music,” *General Music Today*, 34, no. 2 (January 2021): 43.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁹⁹ Blasco-Magraner, “Effects of the Educational Use of Music,” 20, 21, 23.

¹⁰⁰ Raschdorf, et. al. “Integrating Social-Emotional Learning,” 43.

share complementary objectives, such as helping to develop self-awareness and social awareness, promoting responsible decision making skills, fostering self-management skills, and encouraging positive relationships skills.”¹⁰¹ It was also identified that one of the core elements of SEL is relationships. In the music classroom, educators develop social awareness and may increase empathy through the exploration of music from different cultures. This also encourages empathy among students and builds their connection to one another.¹⁰²

The research that explores children’s social-emotional development and the impact music has on this area in children has been informative regarding how music influences young children. Helene Boucher and her team from the University of Quebec found that music increases social interaction among young children beginning at the age of two.¹⁰³ The research team explored whether a young child’s participation in a general music program influenced his or her social-emotional development. Educators shared their observations and researchers interviewed the children involved in the study on three separate occasions. There was a clear increase of social interaction among the participating children and these children were able to understand and respond to their emotions better.¹⁰⁴ The authors stated that “joint music making encourages children to adopt social behaviors that would be useful in different social contexts.”¹⁰⁵ Through joint music making, children may have the ability to positively regulate their emotions.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ Raschdorf, et al. “Integrating Social-Emotional Learning,” 44.

¹⁰² Ibid., 45, 46.

¹⁰³ Helene Boucher, Aimee Gaudette-Leblanc, Julie Raymond, and Valerie Peters, “Musical Learning as a Contributing Factor in the Development of Socio-Emotional Competence in Children Aged 4 and 5: an Exploratory Study in a Naturalistic Context,” *Early Child Development and Care* 191, no. 12 (February 2021): 1933.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 1924, 1925, 1932.

¹⁰⁵ Boucher, et al., “Musical Learning,” 1923.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 1923.

Boucher's study from the University of Quebec also reported that their results were in line with other studies, such as one conducted by Tal-Chen Rabinowitch and Andrew N. Metzoff from the University of Washington. Rabinowitch and Metzoff "suggested that since most music is made of repetitive rhythmic patterns, with an underlying beat, voices and bodies usually synchronize to the underlying beat of the music."¹⁰⁷ In this study, young children of the age of four and five were observed creating music together and they developed a positive feeling toward sharing which gave them a greater sense of community.¹⁰⁸

Rabinowitch and Metzoff reported that joint music activities yielded several positive effects on how children interact socially. First, after a shared musical experience, children of ages four and five were more likely to interact socially compared with children who did not participate in a shared musical experience. Second, shared musical experiences were shown to encourage empathy among children and singing encouraged the children to feel included; this also contributed to sense of belonging. Their conclusions support other studies that similarly reported children who participated in a joint rhythmic activity tend to be more generous than those who did not participate in such an activity.¹⁰⁹ One example is from Ernst Fehr, Helen Bernhard, and Bettina Rockenbach out of the University of Zurich, Switzerland that joint rhythmic activities influenced the group of four year olds. Rabinowitch and Metzoff concluded that "working cooperatively to achieve a goal through coordinated action might be particularly enhanced by joint synchronous experience."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Boucher, et al., "Musical Learning," 1933.

¹⁰⁸ Tal-Chen Rabinowitch and Andrew Meltzoff, "Joint Rhythmic Movement Increases 4-year-old Children's Prosocial Sharing and Fairness Toward Peers," *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8 (June 2017): 1. Doi:103389/fpsyg.2017.01050.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 2, 7.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 8.

In research conducted by Edward Varner from Hershey, Pennsylvania, Varner found a significant number of connections between music and SEL. He noted five areas in which music and SEL complement each other. These areas include self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making skills, self-management skills, and positive relationship skills. Self-awareness refers to student agency and providing students with confidence to believe what they do matters.¹¹¹

Social awareness refers to the development of empathy, respect, and the ability to understand one's perspective. When Varner discusses responsible decision making, he highlights that this refers to goal setting and the ability of students to recognize and solve problems. He explains that music activities are often process based and require students to collaborate, think critically, and recognize that they are part of something bigger than themselves. Self-management refers to the managing of one's behavior and emotions.¹¹² Varner notes that "there are several singing practices that naturally fit well with the competency of self-management."¹¹³ The last area that Varner discussed regarding SEL and music education pertained to relationship skills. This includes character development and leadership responsibilities which are encouraged in a child's development. Performance related activities in a music classroom promote positive relationship building by providing opportunities for students to work together towards a common goal. Varner noted that there is great potential for music teachers to encourage SEL in their classroom through activities such as improvisation, group and ensemble singing or playing, and listening to and responding to different types of music.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Edward Varner, "General Music Learning Is Also Social Emotional Learning," *General Music Today* 22, no. 2 (2019), 74-76.

¹¹² Ibid., 74-76, 77.

¹¹³ Ibid., 77.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 74, 77.

Francisco Cuadrado documents a program initiated in Seville, Spain called “Music and Talent.” Cuadrado shares that this program “was developed with the purpose of designing and implementing a series of activities that use music and musical intelligence to develop different skills and abilities in children between three and nine years of age.”¹¹⁵ The ages were grouped into four categories, two early childhood (ages three to four and four to five), primary I (ages six to seven) and primary II (ages eight to nine). It was established as an extracurricular activity outside of school hours in which educators sought to promote, self-esteem, self-confidence, social and emotional relationships, and well-being, among others. There were also specific criteria set as a guide to encourage these outcomes. This criterion included the sense that children feel they are at play when experiencing the musical activities. Children were encouraged to lead as an active participant in the activities which included improvisation and connection to their personal life. Intrinsic motivation was also promoted among children because it allowed for freedom of choice that would ideally lead to conquering individual challenges and promote self-improvement. Cooperative activities rather than competitive activities were also used along with positive reinforcement whether it was in response to an activity at which the child achieved or failed.¹¹⁶

The findings of Cuadrado’s study indicated statistically significant results that supported the main objectives of the program. This includes “reinforcement of self-esteem, self-confidence, motivation, social and emotional relationships, and well-being” through musical activities.¹¹⁷ These results also reported that there was an increase of positive social interaction, greater self-

¹¹⁵ Francisco Cuadrado, “Music and Talent: An experimental project for personal development and well-being through music,” *International Journal of Music Education* 37, no. 1, (2018): 159-160.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 160-1.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 160.

reliance, and positive attitudes among the students in general for those who were part of a musical activity such as singing. Parents were also supportive and highly complementary of the program and noticed that their children were more confident, more communicative, and happier overall.¹¹⁸

In a study by Patrick E. Savage et. al, out of Keio University, Japan, Savage and his colleagues made the connection between music and social bonding. Music creates a significant bond between a child and his or her caregiver that may begin even before the child is born. Savage and his team also documented that children under the age of three are generally able to mimic songs and are also able to demonstrate a greater ability to produce lyrics in a song than in speaking full or even broken sentences. Music continues to influence bonding between individuals throughout various stages of life because it unifies emotions and perspectives of these individuals.¹¹⁹

In a study conducted by Shulamit Ritblatt, et. al. out of San Diego University, it was found that group music programs for children between the ages of three to five positively influenced the social skill of its participants.¹²⁰ Music and movement are activities that encourage engagement and joy from their participants and create a connection among individuals.¹²¹ In this study, Ritblatt and her colleagues examined four pre-schools in the

¹¹⁸ Cuadrado, "Music and Talent, 160.

¹¹⁹ Patrick E. Savage, Psyche Loui, Bronwyn Tarr, Adena Schachner, Luke Glowacki, Steven Mithen, and W. Tecumseh Fitch, "Music as A Coevolved System For Social Bonding," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 44, no. 1 (January 2021): 3-4. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X20000333>.

¹²⁰ Elisabeth Dumont, Elena V. Syurina, Frans J. M. Feron, and Susan van Hooren, "Music Interventions and Child Development: A Critical Review and Further Directions," *Frontiers in Psychology* 8, no. 1 (September 2017): 10.

¹²¹ Shulamit Ritblatt, Sascha Longstreth, Audrey Hokoda, Bobbi-Nicole Cannon, and Joanna Weston, "Can Music Enhance School-Readiness Socioemotional Skills," *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* 27, no. 1 (2013): 258.

southwest United States that were developed by early childhood experts to provide students with the readiness necessary for Kindergarten through a program that uses music as a focus in its curriculum. The curriculum includes social skills, language development, learning, and self-help skills. Parents and teachers then reported on their observations about the school readiness of the children when assessing the behaviors. It was found that a music centered program increased social cooperation, positive social interaction, and social independence.¹²² In another study conducted by Mitchell Robinson out of Reston, Virginia, Robinson reports that “music helps children’s socioemotional development in that music experiences and interactions with other children provide children who have difficulty initiating an interaction with another child the motivation and context for practice of this skill.”¹²³

Researchers from Phoenix, Arizona conducted a study in which they interviewed several non-musical professionals about their experiences with music education during their school years beginning with Kindergarten.¹²⁴ The participants “provided insights into their early music experience in K-12 schools and/or college as a positive influence in professional careers, and in lifelong endeavors.”¹²⁵ The findings indicated that music positively influenced the development of character traits such as persistence and focus, behavioral traits such as discipline, practice, and goal orientation and an individual’s passion. The positive experiences that the participants detailed supported the idea that music education from an early age will produce a number of benefits that will support the child’s growth into adulthood. These benefits include collaboration,

¹²² Ritblatt, et al, “Can Music Enhance School-Readiness,” 258-260, 264.

¹²³ Ibid., 259.

¹²⁴ Rita J. Hartman, Elizabeth Johnston, Jennifer N. Calito, and Liston W. Bailey, “Career Professionals’ Reflections on Early Exposure to Music Education: A Narrative Inquiry,” *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 39, no. 4 (July 2020): 388.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 398.

persistence, focus, discipline, and goal setting. It was also found that music education improved social and emotional growth and competency.¹²⁶

In a study conducted by Lisa Huisman Koops and Kimberly Tate from Case Western Reserve University, one finding indicated that music built relationships in the early childhood classroom. The teacher-student relationship, in particular, has been found to influence the children's behavior and their self-regulation in a positive way. There is substantial evidence that indicates "close, responsive, and warm teacher-child relationships yield positive outcomes for children"¹²⁷ and music supports these interactions. It was also noted that the use of music in the classroom and at home provided a wide range of benefits among young children including but not limited to social and emotional growth and self-regulation. These developmental skills are critical to the growth of children. The blending of teaching music and using music in other contexts within the classroom (for giving directions or nap time for example), also provided several opportunities to benefit the students.¹²⁸

In a study conducted by Margaret S. Barrett and her team at the University of Queensland, Australia, the use of music in the general classroom promoted positive social behavior and attitudes towards singing in general.¹²⁹ The most beneficial situation is to provide a designated music specialist for all students, but this is not always practical or affordable for the school or educational center. General classroom teachers can also have a significant influence on

¹²⁶ Hartman et al., "Career Professionals' Reflections on Early Exposure to Music Education," 388, 395, 397, 398.

¹²⁷ Lisa Huisman Koops and Kimberly Tate, "A Framework for Considering Teacher-Child Musical Interactions in the Early Childhood Classroom," *Early Child Development and Care*, 191, no. 12 (2021): 1958

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1956-58, 1966.

¹²⁹ Margaret S. Barrett, Katie Zhukov, Joanne E. Brown, and Graham F. Welch, "Evaluating the Impact of a Generalist Teacher-led Music Program on Early Childhood School Children's Singing Skills and Attitudes to Music," *Psychology of Music* 48, no. 1 (2018): 121.

their students when they have been mentored and taught to use music in their classroom. These benefits are in line with previously mentioned studies which include social, emotional, and intellectual benefits. Lastly, it was observed in this study that the children's singing ability improved as their attitude toward music improved.¹³⁰

At the beginning of the 21st Century, conductor Daniel Barenboim believed in education through music. Building on this philosophy, he and Edward Said established the Barenboim-Said Foundation with the intent to integrate music into society, beginning in Spain. Additionally, several music education programs were established in Berlin, Palestine, and Andalusia.¹³¹ Barenboim and Said believed that "through the comprehension of music we can understand ourselves, the world, humanity and society."¹³²

In a study conducted by Joseph Thapa (Barenboim-Said Foundation) and José A. Rodríguez-Quiles (the University of Granada, Spain) based on Barenboim's philosophy, they reviewed the Educación Musical Infantil (EMI) and reported on its progress over the last decade.¹³³ The EMI project was founded by the Barenboim-Said Foundation and consists of twenty-three preschools in Andalusia attended by children between the ages of three and five. At the preschool, children receive daily music classes of thirty minutes every Monday to Thursday which are incorporated in their regular curriculum. The music classes take place in groups and are taught by music education professionals from the Barenboim-Said Foundation. The activities are interactive and require children to be active participants. They focus on learning to

¹³⁰ "Evaluating the Impact of a Generalist Teacher-led Music Program, 132.

¹³¹ Joseph Thapa and José A. Rodríguez-Quiles, "Evaluation of the Early Childhood Music Education Project's Influence on the Development of 3- to 5-year-old Children in Andalusia, Spain," *British Journal of Music Education*, 40 (2023): 96.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid., 97.

appreciate, create, and interpret music using the Orff process and instruments and Dalcroze techniques.¹³⁴ It was found through this study that music can significantly enhance non-musical activities. As educators purposefully design musical activities in their classroom, they support further development of social, emotional, and intellectual development among young children.¹³⁵

In a study from the University of Turku in Finland, Inkeri Ruokonen, Mari Tervaniemi and Jyrki Reunamo examined early childhood education and care (ECEC) among toddlers between the ages of one to three and the ways in which music education influences their development and activities in Finland.¹³⁶ As part of the national curriculum, “diverse forms of expression” is one of the four main areas of focus in early childhood education. Through this area of focus, music provides children with opportunities to think creatively, express themselves in unique ways both emotionally and through play. While the goal of the Finnish ECEC music education is to promote positive experiences with music among young children, the authors observed that it also produces joy and self-confidence among its participants. In this study, children were able to express their emotions freely and the wellbeing of the community was positive. The connection between music education and emotional development is also an area of note according to the researchers. It was also observed that in the classes with a greater emphasis on music, children were happier and “music was associated with positive feelings promoting children’s learning and wellbeing.”¹³⁷ Additional research Ruokonen and her team mention

¹³⁴ Thapa and Rodríguez-Quiles, “Evaluation of the Early Childhood Music Education,” 97.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 106.

¹³⁶ Inkeri Ruokonen, Mari Tervaniemi, and Jyrki Reunamo, “The Significance of Music in Early Childhood Education and Care of Toddlers of Finland: An Extensive Observational Study,” *Music Education Research*, 23 no. 5 (2021): 634.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 635-6, 642.

indicate music education positively influences attention skills and it also “develops creativity, emotional skills and social behavior.”¹³⁸

In a study conducted by Sally Savage, Kate E. Williams, Lorna Berry, and Julia Oreopoulos out of the School of Early Childhood and Inclusive Education at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, the federally funded *Sing & Grow* program was observed and analyzed.¹³⁹ Music is recognized as an activity that positively influences child development in a variety of ways including connectedness, confidence, and social emotional learning. The *Sing & Grow* program focuses on children between the ages of birth and five together with their families. These families may have challenges that prevent parents from bonding and creating a safe environment for their children. These challenges include things like families living in low socio-economic areas, families that have a child with a disability or families that struggle with mental health, domestic violence, or social isolation.¹⁴⁰ Savage and her team report that “*Sing & Grow* aims to reduce the impact of adversity and improve children’s developmental trajectories.”¹⁴¹ The program uses music to build confidence and connections with other community members. Savage and her team also note that “several studies with sample sizes ranging from 201 to 850 families have variously reported significant pre- to post-intervention improvements in parent-reported self-efficacy and mental health, parenting approaches, home learning engagement, and child communication and social play skills, along with therapist

¹³⁸ Ruokonen, et al., “The Significance of Music in Early Childhood Education,” 637.

¹³⁹ Sally Savage, Kate E. Williams, Lorna Berry, and Julia Oreopoulos, “Parental Perceptions of the Sing & Grow Programme: Group Music Therapy Building Knowledge, Confidence, and Social Support,” *Journal of Family Studies* 28, no. 3 (2022): 1007.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 1006-1007.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 1007.

observed parent and child behaviors.”¹⁴² Savage and her team found that the *Sing & Grow* program used music activities that positively influenced the confidence and connectedness among the parents and children involved.¹⁴³

In a study conducted by Margaret S. Barrett, Libby Maree Flynn, and Graham F. Welch out of the School of Music at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, children between the ages of fifteen months and five years were observed in the Early Childhood Education Centre.¹⁴⁴ The programs at the Centre maintain a focus on the use of music in classes because of the benefits that accompany activities that include music. The Centre not only uses music in the classrooms, but they also employ outside music specialists to provide weekly Kodaly-based music classes at no extra cost to the families. Some of the extra-curricular activities available to the children for an extra fee include piano, dance, and movement.¹⁴⁵ Barrett and her team reported that of the five educators involved in the study, they all agreed and “provided numerous examples of how they had observed music assist children in their wider development, including literacy, numeracy, mood regulation, motor coordination, self-esteem and identity and social skills.”¹⁴⁶ Children were also observed to have spontaneously incorporated music into their free play time.¹⁴⁷ Savage and her team found clear evidence that the use of music in these early childhood classrooms was beneficial to the overall development of the participants. The support received from the families also indicated that the use of music at the Centre was important. In

¹⁴² Savage, et al., “Parental Perceptions of the Sing & Grow Programme,” 1007.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 1011.

¹⁴⁴ Margaret S. Barrett, Libby Maree Flynn, and Graham F. Welch, “Music Value and Participation: An Australian Case Study of Music Provision and Support in Early Childhood Education,” *Research Studies in Music Education*, 40, no. 2 (2018): 229-230.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 227, 231.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 232.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 235.

conclusion, “research suggests that systematic engagement in music can play a significant role in social inclusion across the lifespan, including in childhood,” especially due to the powerful impact music has on a child’s emotional development.¹⁴⁸

In a study conducted by Anna L. Kirby, Mariam Dahbi, Sarah Surrain, Meredith L. Rowe, and Gigi Luk of the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University, the Children’s Learning Institute at the University of Texas Health Science Center and the Department of Education and Counselling Psychology at McGill University, the researchers studied the use of music in preschool classrooms.¹⁴⁹ They examined the impact it has on social and emotional development. The researchers were specifically interested in how music was used in early childhood classrooms, how the teachers felt about music and using it in classroom management and lessons, as well as the challenges that early childhood educators face. Through the use of focus groups and online surveys, the researchers were able to collect data to answer their questions.¹⁵⁰

The first of the three themes that emerged from the team’s data indicated that teachers used music during transition times in addition to classroom management. The examples the teachers in the focus groups mentioned were activities such as crossing the street and cleaning up. They also commented that music helped to manage the behavior of the children as well as redirecting them to the activity or lesson.¹⁵¹ A second theme that emerged was that teachers viewed music to be engaging and supportive of diverse student groups, especially those who fall into the category of dual language learners (DLL). The teachers noticed also that the use of

¹⁴⁸ Barrett, et al., “Music Value and Participation,” 235, 238, 239.

¹⁴⁹ Anna L. Kirby, Mariam Dahbi, Sarah Surrain, Meredith L. Rowe, and Gigi Luk, “Music Uses in Preschool Classrooms in the U.S.: A Multiple-Methods Study,” *Early Childhood Education Journal* 51 (2023): 515.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 518.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 518, 520

music would unify the students despite their diverse backgrounds. The third and final theme that emerged was that teachers did not have diverse resources, especially those that are teaching in languages other than English, readily available to them.¹⁵²

Overall, the researchers conclude that most early childhood education educators already use music in their classrooms, but more than 90% of the teachers involved in this study indicated that they wanted to use it more. The biggest challenge the teachers identified was acquiring appropriate resources for their students. These resources include convenient devices to play music (specifically upgrading from CD's, for example) and provides access to music in other languages and lessons on how to teach those songs. Aligning with existing research, Kirby and her team found that music used in early childhood classroom supported children's development in various ways.¹⁵³

In a study conducted by Kimberly Sena Moore of the University of Miami and Deanna Hanson-Abromeit of the University of Kansas, the use of music in early childhood education and the way it relates to emotion regulation (ER) was explored.¹⁵⁴ Through the use of Musical Contour Regulation Facilitation (MCRF) intervention, the researchers observed the development of children in early childhood education settings.¹⁵⁵ They were particularly interested in learning about the educator's perceptions of the influence of the MCRF intervention on preschoolers and its relationship to ER. It was determined through questionnaires and interviews with the teachers and parents that there was a "strong belief in the importance of music for preschoolers and its

¹⁵² Kirby, et al., "Music Uses in Preschool Classrooms," 520-521

¹⁵³ Ibid., 526-527.

¹⁵⁴ Kimberly Sena Moore and Deanna Hanson-Abromeit, "Feasibility of the Musical Contour Regulation Facilitation (MCRF) Intervention for Preschooler Emotion Regulation Development: A Mixed Methods Study," *Journal of Music Therapy* 55, no. 4 (2018): 409.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 412.

ability to facilitate development in general as well as in more specific, skill-based ways (such as through improving emotion, cognitive, and social skills).”¹⁵⁶ The researchers found that the teachers also observed improved emotion regulation skills and peer interactions. Further analysis indicated that the MCRF was a positive influence on improving emotional regulation. There was also a connection observed between music, creativity, and ER which supports existing research that the overall development of a child is impacted by music development within music therapy sessions.¹⁵⁷

In a study conducted by Eleanor D. Brown and Kacey L. Sax from West Chester University of Pennsylvania, the team observes the use of music and the arts in the curriculum at Settlement Music School’s Kaleidoscope Preschool Arts Enrichment Program in which they specifically support at-risk children.¹⁵⁸ Kaleidoscope uses music, dance, and visual arts every day as part of their standard curriculum. The researchers highlight differential emotions theory (DET) because they believe there is a connection to a child’s behavior and development. Positive emotions, such as interest and happiness lead to engagement and skill development and pride leads to self-confidence.¹⁵⁹ The researchers Brown and Sax also noted that “young children’s ability to adaptively utilize their emotions hinges on effective regulation, which involves the flexible control of internal experience as well as outward expression of emotion.”¹⁶⁰ Including

¹⁵⁶ Moore and Hanson-Abromeit, “Feasibility of the Musical Contour Regulation Facilitation (MCRF) Intervention,” 433.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 413-414, 433-434.

¹⁵⁸ Eleanor D. Brown and Kacey L. Sax, “Arts Enrichment and Preschool Emotions for Low-Income Children at Risk,” *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 28 (2013): 337.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 337, 339.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 338.

the arts in early childhood education may be a positive way to connect children of diverse backgrounds in order to create belonging, contentment, and pride.¹⁶¹

The arts have also been recognized to improve emotional understanding and regulation among children. Brown and Sax report that “through the emotion training interwoven in arts education, children may build healthy connections between emotions, cognitions, and actions, and acquire tools for learning in emotionally challenging situations.”¹⁶² These are important qualities in a child’s development. The results that the researchers observed of students who were involved in art-integrated programs at Kaleidoscope indicated that children showed greater signs of happiness, pride, and general positive emotion. The researchers also included that their results may reveal gaps some children may experience in cognitive development, language development, and between school and home. When the researchers compared the emotional regulation of students at the beginning of the year with their emotional regulation at the end of the year, it was evident that the students in Kaleidoscope showed increased growth in emotional regulation. These experiences may also allow children to develop the ability to understand how events influence feelings which could lead to the practice of new strategies for better emotion regulation.¹⁶³

From the Royal College of Music in London, Jessica Pitt examined how speech and language therapy can be used in conjunction with musical activities led by trained professionals.¹⁶⁴ The Speech and Language Therapy Music (SALTMusic) program provided

¹⁶¹ Brown and Sax, “Arts Enrichment and Preschool Emotions,” 338.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 342-343.

¹⁶⁴ Jessica Pitt, “Communicating through Music Play: Combining Speech and Language Therapy Practices with Those of Early Childhood Music Education – the SALTMusic Approach,” *Music Education Research* 22, no. 1 (2020): 68.

children in an early childhood center with another opportunity to communicate beyond simply using words, which were often difficult to develop for this group of children. This minimized the pressure felt among families, as well as the children, who did not have the language for communication using words. The researcher, Pitt “by focusing on other modes of communication, children can be seen as competent with a varied interaction palette.”¹⁶⁵ There is a known relationship in the brain between music and speech which has also been found to aid in phonological development. This is why nursery rhymes are frequently used in early childhood education environments because, as researcher Pitt shares, “music can positively influence perception, understanding and imitation of the sounds within speech.”¹⁶⁶ The researcher also described how singing and dancing give children a greater understanding of identity and a sense of belonging.¹⁶⁷

In this study, Pitt highlights the importance of learning through play and how group musical activities align with this notion due to the improvisation and flexible nature of the activities. Through the observation of the SALTMusic Program, data was collected through a variety of methods including evaluations, film and audio data, focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires. Through the analysis of this data, Pitt found that it showed that the use of music in educational setting influenced a child’s health and well-being. By focusing on the process rather than the product of speech, children led in improvisatory musical activities were allowed to communicate in a unique way which gave them greater confidence. The children led and

¹⁶⁵ Pitt, “Communicating through Music Play,” 70.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 71.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 71.

participated more easily because they were allowed to explore and interact more freely with each other.¹⁶⁸

Music is for everyone. A vast number of experts throughout time and across the globe would agree with this statement. Howard Gardner describes music intelligence as something that is found in every person and it is a skill to be developed.¹⁶⁹ Music is a way for individuals to communicate and connect with one another and often carries a deep cultural history. By placing students at the center of teaching and learning and through the use of music education programs, teachers may be successful in motivating and giving their students the opportunity to develop in constructive ways.¹⁷⁰ This progress is included through a child's growth in mental health and social and emotional needs.¹⁷¹ There is a vast amount of research that indicates the importance of music education from an early age and the way it influences children's development.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Pitt, "Communicating through Music Play," 72-73, 78-79.

¹⁶⁹ Alexandra-Ioana Homone, "Musical Education Aspects in the Contemporary School Based on the Theory of Multiple Intelligence," *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brasov* 13(62), no. 2 (2020): 93.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 97, 101.

¹⁷¹ Reinke, et al., "Supporting Children's Mental Health in Schools," 4.

¹⁷² Barrett, et. al., "Music Value and Participation," 227

Chapter 3

Introduction

This qualitative case study examined the confidence and sense of belonging in early childhood education which are contributors to the child's development, particularly in the field of mental health. Through the examination of the uses of music in the early childhood classroom and the ways in which children respond, the researcher can provide insight into the possible benefits of using music regularly to improve the growth and development of a child. The purpose of this study was to discover possible benefits that music may have on the confidence and sense of belonging of children in early childhood education.

Design

This qualitative case study examined the distinct ways in which music was used in the early childhood classroom using existing research, interviews of the study participants, and interpreting their observations. John and David Creswell define qualitative research as the exploration of social issues through observation and open-ended questions directed to the participants.¹⁷³ They further describe a case study as a study “in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case.”¹⁷⁴ A qualitative case study was the most appropriate method for this research because it allowed the researcher to understand the uses of music in classrooms through open ended interview questions by which the participants could give organic and genuine responses to provide the researcher with the detail necessary for her study. It also provided the researcher with the opportunity to gather the necessary data to extensively explore a

¹⁷³ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 5th Edition, Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2018, 4.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 14.

small population of participants. Through this research, she was also able to identify themes and patterns in the observations of her subjects.

The purpose of the study was to determine the ways in which music influences the confidence and sense of belonging among children in the early childhood classroom. The study used open-ended interview questions for the participants to answer according to their observations in their early childhood classroom. The use of open-ended questions was to provide the researcher with comprehensive detail from the observations of the participants in order to fully interpret the data.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

The following research questions and hypotheses were used to guide the researcher's study:

RQ 1: How does participation or non-participation in making music through singing and playing instruments for children ages three to seven affect their confidence and sense of belonging?

H1: Participation or non-participation through singing and playing instruments among children between the ages of three and seven may improve their confidence and sense of belonging.

RQ2: What are the perspectives of teachers of children ages three to seven pertaining to the effects of singing and playing instruments on confidence and sense of belonging?

H2: The perspectives of teachers of children ages three to seven pertaining to the effects of singing on confidence and sense of belonging will be that singing positively influences a child's confidence and sense of belonging.

Participants

The participants for this study included seven early childhood education teachers from two private schools in Pretoria, South Africa. Each teacher was a general classroom teacher without prior musical training. All the teachers were South African, they had their teaching licenses, and had been in their positions for a various length of time (see table below).

Table A

	Current School	Years Teaching	Level of Education	Years at Current Position
Teacher A	Nursery School	23	Bachelor of Arts	8
Teacher B	Nursery School	18	Bachelor of Education	13
Teacher C	Nursery School	8	Bachelor of Arts and Honors Degree*	8
Teacher D	International School	16	Bachelor of Education	15
Teacher E	International School	5	Bachelor of Arts, Honors Degree* and Post Graduate Certificate in Education	5
Teacher F	International School	31	Bachelor of Education in Early Year Education	1
Teacher G	International School	5	Bachelor of Education in Foundations Phase,** Honors*	1

			Degree, and Certification in Learning Support	
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*In South Africa, an Honors Degree is equivalent to the first two years towards a Master's Degree

**Foundations Phase in South Africa is Early Childhood through Grade 3

The participants were approved with permission from their administration, and they participated voluntarily. Four of the teachers were at a private international school and three of the teachers were at a local nursery school. Both groups of teachers follow a detailed curriculum with standards and benchmarks on which they regularly assess and report.

Setting

There were two schools involved in this study. They were both located in Pretoria, South Africa which recorded a population of 2.8 million people in 2023. Appropriately nicknamed the “rainbow nation,” South Africa is an extremely diverse nation. There are twelve national languages among the various cultures which include Zulu, Xhosa, Pedi, Tswana, Ndebele, Sotho, Swazi, Venda, Tsonga, English, Afrikaans, and sign language. Additional cultures that are prevalent in South Africa are Indian and Muslim.¹⁷⁵

One school from the study is a private international school that caters to the international community; this includes primarily children of diplomats, businesspersons, and employees at other non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The student population is diverse with approximately thirty different nationalities represented among the children that attend the school. The students range in age from four to fourteen, Early Childhood (EC) to Grade 8 according to

¹⁷⁵ “Defining Culture, Heritage and Identity,” <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/defining-culture-heritage-and-identity>., accessed September 30, 2023.

the American educational system. There are approximately 270 students at the school. The numbers provided are approximate because students are frequently arriving and departing from the school at different times in the school year based on the orders or postings their parents receive. The school year begins in August and ends in June.

The second school that was involved in this study was a local South African nursery school. The students are mainly South African, though still a diverse community. There are 186 students currently enrolled in 2023 and there are seven different nationalities among the children. The children at this school range in age from three months to seven years. In the South African educational system, children at the age of seven are considered to be in Reception. The school year in local South African schools begins in January and ends in December.

The interviews took place in private spaces on location at each of the schools. At the international school, this was in the teacher's classroom outside of school hours to avoid interruptions from students or other faculty. At the nursery school, the interviews took place in a closed assembly hall in which the participant and researcher had privacy and were not interrupted. Interviews were recorded for accuracy of reporting data with the participant's permission. The teachers chose to remain anonymous.

Procedures

The researcher began by contacting the principals of the schools targeted to participate in her study to receive their permission to request the assistance of faculty members. The researcher also explained her study and the reasons she needed to interview teachers. Upon receiving permission, the researcher applied to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University to ensure ethical standards were met. It was also a requirement because there would be audio

recordings of human subjects. After the IRB reviewed the study, however, it was deemed exempt from further review due to the nature of the study.

The researcher then began interviews with four teachers at the international school and three of the teachers at the nursery school. The administrator at the international school gave the researcher permission to solicit any of the teachers that taught the age of students she was researching. There are four teachers at the international school that fit that criteria and all four happily agreed to participate. At the nursery school, the administrator gave the researcher permission to approach three specific teachers to interview. Upon approaching those three pre-selected teachers, each one of them also willingly agreed to participate in the study.

The next step of the researcher's procedure involved carrying out the interviews. The researcher set up times to interview each teacher individually, and the teachers were all given the interview questions ahead of time. At the international school, the interviews took place on three separate days with the four teachers in private, uninterrupted locations. At the nursery school, the interviews took place on three separate days with each teacher individually, and also in a private, uninterrupted location. The interviews were recorded with permission. At a later stage, the researcher transcribed each interview and began to identify themes from the interviews to include in her data analysis.

Instrumentation

The researcher developed a list of open-ended questions to ask in an interview of the participants of the study. The questions used in the interview can be found in Appendix A. After the interview, the researcher also collected educational and teaching experience of the teachers.

Data Analysis

The researcher's data collection consisted of interviews of teachers that work with children between the ages of three and seven as well as a comprehensive literature review. The literature review consisted of peer-reviewed journal and magazine articles as well as relevant books and other sources of literature that address the mental health of children and how it is influenced by music.

In the data analysis stage, the researcher reviewed the transcribed interviews to identify comments made or issues identified by the teachers that may be relevant to her study. She further designated the various comments with specific codes that demonstrated overlap with comments made by different teachers. These codes were categorized into broader groupings to aid in the organization of the data. The researcher followed a similar method when she analyzed the data collected from the literature review.

From the categories, the researcher began to identify themes that emerged from the data gathered in the open-ended interviews and the literature review. These themes were used in further analysis of the data collected from the interviews and literature review. The codes and themes were documented by the researcher on an Excel spreadsheet.

Chapter 4

Introduction

There is increasing evidence that music influences a student's mental health from an early age. This study aimed to examine the ways in which music influences mental health, specifically, a child's self-confidence and sense of belonging within a class setting. Mental health is a significant concern among educators, and it is important to examine the ways in which students can be encouraged and stimulated in their early education to promote a healthier habits in their later years of education.¹⁷⁶ At an early age, Warrener documents that a child's early developmental years may greatly impact his or her mental health as an adolescent and young adult.¹⁷⁷ The mental health of students is an issue that needs attention.¹⁷⁸ It is important for educators to understand the benefits and have the skills necessary to promote the improvement of the mental health among school-aged children.

This chapter presents the results of the study and identifies key themes that emerged from the literature review and interview process.

Restatement of the Purpose

This study explored the benefits of music on a child's self-confidence and sense of belonging in early childhood education. The researcher gathered evidence from literature and through the personal experiences and observations of teachers in the early childhood classroom. The following research questions were designed to guide this study:

¹⁷⁶ Giles-Kaye, et al., "Supporting Children's Mental Health," 1.

¹⁷⁷ Warrener, "Applying Learning Theory," 24.

¹⁷⁸ Giles-Kaye, et al., "Supporting Children's Mental Health," 2.

Research Question One: How does participation or non-participation in making music through singing and playing instruments for children ages three to seven affect their confidence and sense of belonging?

Research Question Two: What are the perspectives of teachers of children ages three to seven pertaining to the effects of singing and playing instruments on confidence and sense of belonging?

Summary of Study Location

The researcher conducted her study at two local schools in Pretoria, South Africa. One school is a private international school and the other is a private local nursery school. The international school is an American school and follows an American curriculum and standards. Their daily schedule consists of reading, writing, math, social studies, science, and specials which are Spanish, Physical Education, Music, and Art. The specials are additional classes with different teachers that the students attend as part of their weekly schedule. The student population is diverse, representing thirty different nationalities on the campus. Class sizes are capped at eighteen.

The private local nursery school caters primarily to the South African population, though there are several children with dual nationalities that attend. The school is divided into different sections based on the age of the children. These sections are *babies* (ages three months to one year), *potty-trainers* (ages one to three), *juniors* (ages three to five), and *seniors* (ages five to six). It is a dual-language, Christian school in which Afrikaans and English are the primary languages spoken and their curriculum is Christ-centered. Class sizes are capped at twenty-two. The daily schedule for the children between the ages of three and six is consistent. The children begin with breakfast followed by a “theme discussion” in which they learn about a specific

theme for the week (i.e. animals, planets, manners, etc.). During this morning time, there is also a bible story that is studied and the children may participate in a music and movement activity. After free play and snack, there is time for an art activity, story time, a perception activity, or free play inside. The rest of the day after nap time is free in that there are no formal story or learning times, it is generally indoor and outdoor play.

Summary of Study Participants

The participants included seven teachers from two private schools in Pretoria, South Africa. These teachers have been trained as classroom general education teachers with no additional musical training. Though all enjoy music and some are extremely passionate about music. See Table A for additional details.

Results

Interview Findings

The teachers that were interviewed provided the researcher with observations and insight to the way their students interacted during musical activities and how and when music was used in the classroom.

Teacher A

Teacher A was one of the teachers from the private nursery school who taught a class of three-year-olds. She shared that she used music several times a day for different purposes including, but not limited to, learning activities, playing activities, movement activities, and nap time. She shared that music always got the attention of her students, whether they were using it for a class activity or as background music; she always got a positive and excited response from her students who energetically participated.

In the realm of learning, Teacher A frequently used songs to help teach or reinforce lessons. For example, when teaching parts of the body, the song that she used helped her students identify the parts of the body. The song she mentioned started out with “I put my hands upon my head, and my shoulders, and my arms, etc.” She intentionally used this to also teach gross motor skills. She believed this gave her children confidence in learning new words or parts of the body.

Teacher A commented also that she often used music to teach vocabulary and language development. Her three-year-olds were at an age in which they were building their vocabulary and learning to speak in sentences, rather than words or phrases. Teacher A shared that she believed songs gave her children the ability to learn longer phrases and sentences to encourage that developmental process and increase their confidence in communication. Teacher A also shared the benefit of learning songs in other languages. For example, at the time of the interview, she was teaching her class “La Cucuracha.” While she did not have any Spanish-speaking students in her class, one of her students spoke Portuguese and Teacher A commented that this shy child’s face brightened when she heard a language that was similar to her mother tongue.

Teacher A was also motivated to use music frequently in the classroom because she desired to instil a love of music from an early age. She shared, “We can introduce music, of many genres, to children at this age and help them really love music!”¹⁷⁹ She also believed that she could do so much more with music and incorporating rhythm into lessons. For example, in her class with 3-year-olds, she used it to help teach counting, but with older children, she believed there could be many ways in which music might be used to help teach; one example she cited was math.

¹⁷⁹ Teacher A, Interview by Author, Pretoria, South Africa, September 13, 2023.

Teacher A also shared that she used music in the background during creative activities in addition to the musical activities. When children were working on an art project, for example, she put on soft music to help them focus. She also observed the way background music helped launch their imagination and creativity in class. For this reason, she loved to use music in the mornings when the children were working on a creative project. Sometimes the children sang along, but not necessarily with the correct words or even words at all. She believed this showed their interest in music and helped to bring the class together and create a stronger community. She also used quiet classical music during their nap time as it soothed them and helped them relax during.

Teacher A shared that she frequently used music to help her children get their energy out. First thing in the mornings, after breakfast, they had their theme discussion and Bible time. During this forty-five-minute period, the young children often got restless, and Teacher A used music to give them a break and get their energy out when she saw they needed to stretch. There are several songs that she used in her theme discussions that fulfil the same purpose of helping the children get their energy out with the added benefit of supplementing the lesson. She observed that the children in her class loved to participate in a musical activity where they also needed to imitate animals. The children found it engaging and actively participated.

Teacher A also shared that they loved hearing songs with which they were familiar. One example was when they sang a song in the classroom that they knew from singing at home. Another example she provided was when there were songs they sang with actions. A song in which the children needed to hide at a specific point in the song, but they always ran to hide before that lyric came up. From Teacher A's observations, she observed that the familiarity of the song drew them to the music and activity that they participated in together and it gave them a

sense of belonging. She also shared that “the more they sing the same songs, the more confidence they have.”¹⁸⁰ It is for this reason that she shared the theme songs and bible songs weekly with the parents. “So, when you put [the song] on, they immediately have a reaction-I know this song! For their self-image, I think it’s wonderful. It really boosts their self-image.”¹⁸¹

Teacher A shared how music related to the mood swings of her young children. Often when parents drop their children off in the morning, they might share that they had a rough start to the day and their child is unhappy for any number of reasons. Teacher A found that music helps to release tension and help shift the children’s mood to engage in class activities that use music. For some children it takes several minutes, but for others, she noticed that it was almost immediate.

Teacher A spoke of the role cultural diversity played in her classroom. In South Africa, there are a great number of cultures, which is evident from the eleven national languages spoken with additional dialects. In her class, Teacher A had only a few children that were English speakers only and naturally, they responded best to the songs they sang in English. At the time of the interview, which was late in their school year even when she used songs in Afrikaans in her lessons or activities, the non-Afrikaans speakers felt comfortable to get involved and be a part of the group. Several of them had been at the nursery school long enough to become bilingual which also encouraged greater participation. Teacher A shared, “The way they respond to each other through music builds their community and bonding in the classroom.”¹⁸²

The nursery school frequently has children that join the class mid-year, and the transition is difficult for some of the children. Teacher A shared a story about one girl who was having a

¹⁸⁰ Teacher A, Interview, September 13, 2023.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

difficult time adjusting to spending a whole day at nursery school and she was frequently in the teacher's lap or hanging around her legs. She noticed, however, that when there was a song that the children were singing, she was increasingly focused on the song and forgot that she was sad about being away from her mom. Slowly, she was beginning to engage in the musical activities. Teacher A said, "Music is something we can use because it is such a versatile language."¹⁸³

When the researcher asked Teacher A in the interview to speak specifically about what she noticed about the children's sense of belonging when she used music for activities in her classroom, she shared that in her observations, music brought her class together. She commented also that it encouraged their confidence. Some children at the age of three are very shy and they do not always feel comfortable participating on their own. Teacher A shared that in her classroom, when there was music playing to accompany an activity, those shy students participated more comfortably. This was true because they were more focused on the music and the movements than how they were feeling; they forgot about being shy and they participated more freely.

When she used music in her classroom, Teacher A estimated that about ninety percent of the time she got a positive response from her class. In her interview, Teacher A ended by sharing how much music means to her and how it influenced her mood and her day in general. She estimated that music would have a similar impact on the children in her class and encourage a positive and creative experiences for them.

¹⁸³ Teacher A, Interview, September 13, 2023.

Teacher B

Teacher B was one of the teachers from the private nursery school who taught a class of five- and six-year-olds. She used music frequently in class, especially with young children. She was proud to share that she has an extensive collection of music for a variety of different activities and she used them regularly with her students.

Teacher B used music every day in a variety of different ways. At the start of the day, she used music during their class worship time and in their week's theme discussion. She chose a song of the week that supported the theme of the week, and the children practiced it each day. She also used music when she saw that her students were getting restless and needed to release some of their energy. For this situation, she had several different exercise songs that she rotated to help her students get out their energy. She has learned over her years of teaching that she needs to be very intentional when she uses music during the student's table work or artwork. Certain songs, especially those with lyrics, distract the students from their assigned task and it would take away from their learning experience. It might also excite them and cause them to become loud which distracted themselves and others. She found that classical music worked well to accompany her students during their table work as it helped to keep their focus on their work.

When Teacher B assessed her students, she found that using music helped keep them focused. The assessments consisted of both written work and one-on-one conversations between the student and the teacher. The quiet music in the background worked as a signal to the students working that they must also remain quiet and attentive to their work.

When the researcher asked Teacher B what genres of music she used most often, she shared that she used as much variety as she could. She shared that when she was a child roughly 35 years ago, there was a collection of about one hundred standard songs that every child

learned, and it was part of their culture. Now, years later, she commented on the incredible exposure children have to music and it was difficult to keep up. In her class worship time, for example, she shared that she used a mix of modern and older worship songs. The same was true for the movement or dance music she used when she wanted to help her students release their energy. She commented, “there are standard songs that work well, tried and true, but it’s also important to bring in new material.”¹⁸⁴

Teacher B believed it is important to use music with which her students would connect. She learned early in the school year what types of music her students liked and she tried to incorporate that style of music in her lessons or break time. Her class connects well with rap, and she tried to use some rap music. She would use rap music especially during worship time, when she could branch out and use different styles of music. She observed that when she used music with which her students connected, it made an enormous difference in their behavior and level of participation. She reported that “it brings out the shy kids who don’t particularly like to be in the spotlight. As soon as they hear something they know and are familiar with, they engage more. Their whole face lights up when I play a song that they can sing along with.”¹⁸⁵

Teacher B shared that she specifically chose music that would engage her students and encourage them to interact. For example, she had a bank of several movement songs that worked well to help get her students moving around after they had been sitting at their tables doing their morning lessons. In certain situations such as rest time she used music that was soft and appropriate for sleeping. She shared that she generally used instrumental worship music.

¹⁸⁴ Teacher B, Interview by Author, Pretoria, South Africa, September 15, 2023.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

Teacher B reported that her class genuinely loved music, and they enjoyed the activities she did with music. In the mornings, students would often request specific favorites. Her current class had a strong sense of rhythm. Culturally, there are more African children in her class and in their homes and community, music, rhythm, and dance are a stronger influence because they are valued in the African community. Her African students are Venda, Sotho, and Xhosa mostly, and while they did not share much of their traditional music from home, they were some of the stronger leaders in her class. Teacher B shared that if they lived in a more rural village rather than a large city like Pretoria, there would be an even stronger cultural influence.

Teacher B commented that she noticed a difference in her student's behavior when she used music in an activity. One example she gave was the song called "Shake Your Sillies Out." This was a song that frequently got her children in a good mood. She would also adapt the song when she saw it was appropriate. If she noticed a child that was sad or angry, they would "shake your sadness out", or "shake your anger out," whatever emotion fit the situation. This often encouraged the children to lighten up and let go of their anger or sadness. "Music is a powerful influence in that way," Teacher B observed.¹⁸⁶

Teacher B shared that she clearly observed a change in behavior in her students when she used music. She reported that they immediately felt like a part of the class, and they were excited to participate. When they learned a new song, they had a sense of pride in their accomplishment. She also noticed that if she used the appropriate genre of music, she could encourage certain behaviors. For example, if her class was rowdy, she could use calming music to bring their energy levels down. Alternatively, if she wanted to give her students a break and release some energy, she would choose an upbeat song, often with movement to allow them to let loose.

¹⁸⁶ Teacher B, Interview, September 15, 2023.

When the researcher asked Teacher B specifically about what she observed in her children's level of confidence when she used music in her classroom, she shared that music generally gave her students a great sense of self-confidence. She referenced the shy children in her class because group music activities allowed them to participate without being in the spotlight. "It's amazing for those children and to see how they change once the music starts. Music brings people together and I've noticed that in my class as well."¹⁸⁷ She recognized that several of her children were too shy to raise their hand to answer a question in class, but she saw a distinct change in those children's confidence when she used music. She referenced a time when she used songs that had multiple parts. One song she described had two parts; one group of students would sing the first part and then the other group of students would sing something else and not necessarily at the same time. This also helped to build their confidence because they were still singing in a group, but the groups were smaller, and the second group was watching when it was not their turn to sing, and vice-versa. Learning new songs in class is also an opportunity for all the children to teach the songs to their family at home. They could even perform the song which would give them a boost in confidence in a setting in which they were likely to be more comfortable.

Teacher B shared at the end of her interview how music encouraged her student's sense of belonging in the class. When a child requested a song to sing or listen to, he or she was affirmed when the other children joined in excitedly. That child then felt special and his or her self-esteem increased. Teacher B said, "when the children join together in excitement about a song, it brings the class together, regardless of their age, race, or creed."¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Teacher B, Interview, September 15, 2023.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

Teacher C

Teacher C was one of the teachers from the private nursery school who taught a class of five- and six-year-olds. She used music in her class every day for several different purposes. Each week, she chose a Christian song that she incorporated into the class bible or worship time. She also chose a song to supplement the theme discussion for the week. These songs were repeated over the course of the week and the children could confidently sing them by the end of the week or often sooner. It was the teacher's impression that her students did not get exposed to a lot of different types of music at home and most of the songs they knew, they learned at the nursery school.

At the nursery school, the whole of the senior's side of the school gathered in the school hall for worship on Fridays. In this setting, the same five or six songs were cycled through, and the children would get to know those songs well and could confidently sing them. Teacher C also said she (and other teachers) used music frequently in the afternoons during outdoor playtime. The music was played from a speaker for both the older students in the seniors and juniors side, but also on the babies and potty-trainers side to which the children could sing and dance. She used music in her classroom with her students, but there were other opportunities in which larger groups of students in the school could also experience music together.

In addition to bible time and theme discussion, Teacher C used music frequently for transitions from one activity to the next. The class started with bible time and then she used a song to help them move around before they started with their theme discussion. Teacher C also had several songs that she used for free dance time, and her students enjoyed the freedom to move and dance to the music creatively. They often danced with their friends when the music was playing, which Teacher C noticed brought her students together in a positive way.

Teacher C also used music in the background while children were doing another activity or during transitions. She had to be very selective regarding the types of music she played for her students while they were working because she had the experience in which her students got louder and off task if a certain song was playing in the background. After their morning routine with bible time and theme discussion they used a song to encourage the children to tidy up. Sometimes she would ask them to lie on their backs before the next activity to quiet them down and prepare them for their next activity.

Teacher C varied the genre of music that she used in her class for a couple of different reasons. First, she wanted to expose her students to different types of music and second, she aimed to choose the most appropriate genre for an activity. Teacher C commented, “with the range of music available at anyone’s fingertips these days, there is much to choose from!”¹⁸⁹ She used apps like Spotify to search for music and created useful playlists for different activities, themes, or worship times.

Teacher C shared that she occasionally used unpitched percussion instruments that were available to all the teachers who could sign them out. There were not enough instruments to distribute to each class, but for special occasions or specific lessons, teachers could use the communal instruments. These instruments included shakers, rhythm sticks, tambourines, and triangles. The children especially loved when they used the instruments as it did not happen often, and it was something in which they could actively participate.

When the researcher asked how the children responded when the teacher put on music for an activity, Teacher C commented that she had only a few students that were simply not interested in participating. They stood to the side with their arms crossed and refused to

¹⁸⁹ Teacher C, Interview by Author, Pretoria, South Africa, September 18, 2023.

participate. This was unusual, she commented, and she did not know why those children chose not to take part in the musical activities. She also noticed that her class at the time of the interview, in general, responded well to fast music that had a strong beat.

Teacher C shared a story about a girl in her class who was having difficulty learning English and did not speak unless necessary. She sometimes repeated the same sentence continually, as though she was practicing, but she seldom engaged in conversation with friends or teachers. Teacher C noticed, however, that she energetically participated in the musical activities and enjoyed those experiences. She had seen this happen with other students in previous years as well, especially when the children's mother tongue was not English or Afrikaans, which were the two primary languages spoken at the nursery school.

There was another girl in Teacher C's class who would occasionally become angry. When she got in that mood, she refused to take part in any of the class activities. When a music activity was presented, however, she slowly stood, and eventually engaged with the rest of the class. Teacher C was careful to give her plenty of space to make it her choice to participate, which she always did.

When asked about the behavior of her class during a musical activity, Teacher C observed that there were several different ways in which her students responded. There was one group that followed the teacher's movements and words, whether that was the purpose of the song or not. There was another group, usually made up of boys, who jumped around and sometimes followed the teacher's movements. There was another group of girls who often did their own movements and they only sometimes followed the teacher.

Teacher C also observed that students who struggled with language development and participating in class verbally did not have issues participating in the music and dancing

activities. The children may not have been singing the exact words of the song, but they were part of the class and they enjoyed themselves. Another student was a native French speaker and when she learned a song in Afrikaans, she modified the words slightly to adjust to the language with which she was most familiar.

When asked to describe her student's level of confidence when she used music in the classroom, Teacher C shared that she noticed most of her students were encouraged by the music and felt confident to participate. She shared an example of one girl in her class who had just one friend and when that friend was absent, she would not play with other children or take part in most class activities. She was also not confident enough to raise her hand to participate in class. When Teacher C began an activity with music, however, the girl loved to participate and often stood in front of the mirror and watched herself dance. This was something Teacher C believed more children could benefit from and thought that having a horizontally long mirror for more children to use would encourage their confidence.

When Teacher C was asked to comment on what she noticed regarding her student's sense of belonging when participating in music activities, she shared that she believed music created a stronger sense of belonging among her students. She also commented that when she gave her students instruments, she noticed an increase in several student's connection to the music and to each other. In those activities, they saw how they needed to work together to make beautiful music together. She also commented that for those students who did not speak very much, whether they were shy or still learning their language, by playing instruments, singing, or dancing along with the music, "they can still contribute and be a part of the class."¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Teacher C, Interview, September 18, 2023.

Teacher D

Teacher D was one of the teachers from the private international school who taught a class of five year olds. She shared that they used music quite often in her class throughout the school day and the students enjoyed it very much. They started their day with circle time during which she frequently incorporated a song depending on what they are discussing that day. One example she shared was the song she used for calendar time. There were additional morning songs that she cycled through, so they did not always use the same song every day. She also shared that they used music for “brain breaks.” This was a time in between classwork in which Teacher D gave students the opportunity to move around and release some energy before they moved onto the next task. In general, when she wanted to help her students release their energy, she used fast, upbeat music, and when she wanted to quiet or settle down the students, she used calm, classical music.

In addition to morning routines and “brain breaks,” Teacher D used music during transition times. When it was time to clean up, she used a song to help encourage her students to join in and remain on task. If they were transitioning to a quiet activity, she used calming music to prepare them for something quiet. In the transition times, using music helped the children anticipate the activity coming up next and what was expected of them and their behavior. There were certain times that Teacher D used music in the background during another activity, but she was very selective. She shared that it was mostly during reading and writing times that she played quiet music in the background. She noticed that this helped them to stay quiet and on task.

For the activities in which music was playing in the background, Teacher D used mostly quiet classical music. She did not always use pre-recorded music, however. Several of the songs they sang in class were not accompanied by a recording and they sang from memory. When they heard songs or were singing songs with which they were more familiar, they immediately joined in and encouraged others to do so as well. Teacher D observed that it was a true time of bonding and collaboration among her students; “it builds community at times, especially when they all know the songs, they’ll start singing together and dancing together. And it’s more spontaneous at this age, that they join in, sing along, dance, and just get each other to join in.”¹⁹¹

Teacher D commented that her student’s behavior changed noticeably in music activities. She shared one example of a student who initially found the music activities to be daunting and was reluctant to participate. Several other students in the class encouraged him to join in. He realized he was not going to be judged, but that the music and dancing was a way for the children to unwind and have fun. Teacher D shared that “he eventually became that child who would ask, ‘Can we do this song or that dance, etc.’ And that was nice to see how music made him part of the group that he had kind of isolated himself from.”¹⁹²

When Teacher D was asked what she observed regarding her student’s self-confidence during activities that incorporated music, she noticed it generally had a positive effect. She noticed that the quieter students who were not as comfortable answering questions and participating in class activities, were often the first students to join in the activity, sometimes with the wildest dance moves. She believed this was their chance to shine since they were not as confident in other areas.

¹⁹¹ Teacher D, Interview by Author, Pretoria, South Africa, September 15, 2023.

¹⁹² Ibid.

Teacher D commented on her observations about her student's sense of belonging in relation to music activities. She shared that music "definitely brings them together."¹⁹³ Every year, there was a different song that was trending and that was the one they wanted to listen to all the time. She saw how that one song brought the class together. They also loved making connections between songs they had heard in different contexts. For example, they got very excited when they learned a familiar song in music class or heard a song they knew that was playing in the background during their physical education lesson. Teacher D commented that it showed how influential music was for them and that there are many ways in which it influenced even children as young as five years old.

Overall, Teacher D observed that music had a significant impact on her students. They loved using music in the classroom and one of their favorite "specials" was music class. "Music is such a big part of their lives that whenever you put music on, you can see their energy rise and they're having fun."¹⁹⁴

Teacher E

Teacher E was one of the teachers from the private international school who taught a class of four year olds. She shared that she used music every day in her class, though not frequently. She used it for certain activities, but it was not something that was a priority for her. She shared that she used music for "brain breaks" to help her students get energy out in between activities and this music was generally fast and upbeat. She also used music for specific activities and for transition times. Regardless of the activity, she noticed that her students enjoyed the activities they did with music.

¹⁹³ Teacher D, Interview, September 15, 2023.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

One of the activities for which Teacher E used music was during writing time. She used quiet and calming music as the students worked. She observed that this helped them to focus. She also used music in the mornings before their morning meeting time. This music was generally happy music, but not too exciting as it was meant to help them prepare for the day. During this time, they would come in from morning recess and begin to settle down and get ready for their morning meeting time.

Teacher E used a variety of genres of music depending on the activity. She used the same playlist of quiet music during writing activities which she found on YouTube by searching “Calm Classroom Music.” For brain breaks, she used dance music from “Just Dance Kids” which is a YouTube channel that plays familiar songs with kids modeling dance moves that the students may choose to copy or not; Teacher E noticed that generally the students liked to follow the children in the video. The songs from “Just Dance Kids” are well-known pop songs that are either current or classics, but generally upbeat. Teacher E commented that she noticed this musical activity brought out the shy kids in her class and they were encouraged to participate. She believed they were more likely to participate because there was a combination of knowing the song and being able to follow a leader.

Teacher E observed that her students became excited when it was time to take a brain break. Between the fun music and the dancing, their level of participation was high. When they heard the quiet calming music, she noticed that it helped them to understand that it was time to focus on the task in front of them. The music worked as a trigger to help them understand what was expected of them in the next activity. She also observed that when she did not play music during writing time, the children were more easily distracted. When she used the music, they

could concentrate longer and they recognized that if the music was playing they needed to be writing.

When the researcher asked Teacher E about her student's level of confidence with activities that involved music, she said overall she noticed a difference. There was one child that was seldom interested in participating in class activities and even those that included music. Teacher E observed that after the first several weeks of school, he started to participate in more of the musical activities which increased his confidence to participate in other activities. There were certain songs that he enjoyed because he was familiar with them, which resulted in his participation.

Teacher E shared that she observed several ways in which music brought her class together and created community. One example was during the celebration of a South African national holiday, Heritage Day, in which the history and heritage of South Africa was celebrated. During this celebration, African music was shared in class and even though very few of her students were native South Africans, Teacher E saw how the music brought the class together. They enjoyed celebrating their host country together through music.

Teacher F

Teacher F was one of the teachers from the private international school who taught a class of six-year-olds. She shared that she used music every day for various purposes. There were some songs that she used repeatedly and others that were new, but she observed that her students enjoyed any music.

Teacher F started her day with circle time in which she often began with a "Hello" song in which the children learn to say hello in several different languages. As an international school with a diverse community, there are many different languages spoken at home. Teacher F

noticed the way a student would light up when they heard their native language. This experience, she commented, “certainly gave the children a sense of pride and belonging.”¹⁹⁵

Teacher F also used music during “brain breaks,” transitions from one activity to another, and during writing time. For the “brain breaks,” she sometimes played fast and active songs for the children and other times more calming music, depending on what the children needed in that moment. She observed that her children noticed when she moved to her computer to put on the music for their “brain break” and they immediately asked for this song, or that song. Even only after a few weeks into the school year they were familiar with several of the songs and were confident to make their requests. In the transition times, she had a similar philosophy; if the children needed calming before their next activity, she played appropriate music. The same was true if she wanted to energize them for the next activity. When Teacher F used music in the background of an activity, it was usually during writing time or an art activity. She used mostly classical music, or music without words because she did not want to distract the students from their work. When it was on quietly in the background, it helped them to focus. She did not use the same songs every time, but she used Google or YouTube to find “calming music for children.” Teacher F shared that she used several different genres of music, always dependent on the activity. For quiet transitions, she used quiet classical music. When she wanted her students to get some energy out, she used lively pop music and encouraged big movements.

Teacher F noticed that her students enjoyed the activities she did with music. When she used a song for the first time, she saw the children were not as confident to sing and dance along if they did not already know it, but after a few times of hearing it, they quickly gained more

¹⁹⁵ Teacher F, Interview by Author, Pretoria, South Africa, September 20, 2023.

confidence in their movements and participated more actively. When she put on the quiet classical music for other activities, she did not announce that she was starting the music, but it provided a non-verbal cue for the children to calm down and begin the next task. She also enjoyed using music during writing time because it helped give her students ideas of what to write.

Teacher F noticed that music has a clear impact on her children's behavior, especially when they had been sitting for a long period of time. "Music is a fantastic tool to give them a break before they move into something else that might also be difficult for them,"¹⁹⁶ Teacher F reported. She has also noticed that a familiar song triggered excitement and they were more likely to dance and sing together; "it's a unique energy that I think only comes out when we play those songs they know."¹⁹⁷

Overall, Teacher F observed that her students enjoyed the activities they did with music. She admitted that even with herself, the right song would put her in a good mood and help her through her day, especially the tough ones. She also observed that music increased her student's confidence. She shared that she noticed the biggest difference at the beginning of the year. She had several shy students that hesitated to participate in other class activities, but when she put upbeat music on for their "brain breaks," those students surprised her with some of the most crazy and fun movements. She also noticed the opposite. For example, there are several boys in her class that are quite confident on the soccer field and leaders in the class, but when she put music on for them to move and dance to, she noticed they were awkward and did not participate as actively as they did in other areas. As she became aware of this, she started to cycle in one or

¹⁹⁶ Teacher F, Interview, September 20, 2023.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

two soccer themed songs from time to time and she noticed that they were much more engaged and participated actively.

In closing, Teacher F and the researcher spoke about how music influenced her student's sense of belonging. She shared, "I think they are drawn in with songs that are familiar that we've learned in our class, and it definitely builds that sense of community of our grade 1 class."¹⁹⁸ She also shared a story about an activity her class was doing about family traditions and each student had the opportunity to share. One of the quiet girls in her class from Czechia surprised her as she very confidently sang a traditional song in her native Czech language. Teacher F noticed how the rest of the class was completely engaged, listening to their classmate, even though they did not understand a single word. "It definitely does build that sense of community."¹⁹⁹

Teacher F also made an effort to create a sense of belonging among her students in the way she celebrated birthdays. When it was one of her student's birthdays, she would try to find the birthday song (or another celebratory song) from their native culture to share. Many of the songs were repetitive and easy to learn and she observed that the rest of the class quickly joined in when they learned enough of the words to sing along, even if they were not exactly the correct words. She commented that this type of activity brought the students together and made their community stronger.

Teacher G

Teacher G was one of the teachers from the private international school who taught a class of six-year-olds. She observed generally positive responses from her students when they participated in activities with music and she used music as a way to build community in her

¹⁹⁸ Teacher F, Interview, September 20, 2023.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

class. She shared that she used music several times a day for various activities. She started the day with a morning circle time, and she often incorporated a song, but not always. Teacher G noticed that when she included a song in their morning circle time, her students were more interactive with the subsequent activities.

The activities for which Teacher G used music included “brain breaks,” writing time, transitions, and whenever she saw they need to get up and move around. This was a time in which students could sing along or just dance if they preferred. It helped Teacher G’s students get their energy out and then be ready for the next activity. During writing activities, Teacher G put on “Chilled Children’s Music,” from a search on YouTube. The results that came up were often different varieties of quiet classical music. She did not always play the same playlist but recognized those that work better than others. Using quiet classical music in the background of writing activities worked well because it helped the students remain focused and kept their noise level down. The rule in the class was that if the student was louder than the music, then they needed to quiet down. In transition times, the choice of music Teacher G used depended heavily on what activity was coming up next. If they needed to get energy out to be ready for another focused activity, then upbeat, pop music was played. If they were shifting from a busy activity to a quiet activity, calm music was used.

When Teacher G used specific styles of music for a purpose, she noticed that it was generally successful. For example, when children were encouraged to quiet down with calming music, they did, and when they needed to get energy out, upbeat pop music worked well. Teacher G commented on the ways in which her student’s behavior changed when they were doing an activity with music. In her observations, the boys were shy because they got embarrassed around their friends and were reluctant to dance or move around to the music. She

could tell, however, that they wanted to participate, and she noticed that they would try to find a quiet place where they participated without anyone watching. If a well-known song to them was played, however, they got excited and joined in without concern.

Teacher G also found the use of quiet, calming music to be effective when trying to refocus her students and prepare them for the next activity. When there was not music playing, the students were more likely to talk during their task and their volume rose as they heard the table next to them talk louder. Teacher G described it as a kind of competition to talk louder than the others. The noise level increased significantly, and it was sometimes difficult to bring them back to focus. When there was music playing, however, they tried to keep their noise volume down and remain quieter than the music. She believed the music made a big difference.

Teacher G observed that her students greatly enjoyed the activities they did with music.

Teacher G shared her thoughts:

Yes, for sure, these kids love music! It's something different from what we're doing in class. Especially at this school, where it's very academic driven, where there needs to be a certain amount of reading, a certain amount of writing, a certain amount of maths, that when they get the chance to let loose for a second, it makes a world of a difference for them, and they love it!²⁰⁰

There were occasions in which the students experienced a long session of math or writing, and music helped to bring their energy levels back up to give them a chance to stretch and then continue with their work.

When the researcher asked Teacher G if she noticed whether music influenced her student's confidence, she commented that for some it helped, but for others, she did not notice a change. She found that the confident kids got more confident, and the shy kids would sometimes

²⁰⁰ Teacher G, Interview by Author, Pretoria, South Africa, September 27, 2023.

be encouraged to participate, but others would still stand in the back and watch. Teacher G shared, “you can see that they are very influenced by what other people think, it’s sad, but it’s also good to know who needs a little extra boost in confidence, as well.”²⁰¹

When Teacher G commented on her student’s sense of belonging when they participated in music activities, she said she saw a clear change in their interaction and the way in which students collaborated. It also showed the teacher who the friendship groups were and who felt comfortable singing and dancing with whom. She also observed that her students were able to often get their friend’s attention and say things like, “check this out,” or “watch this!” These types of interactions, in her opinion, demonstrated a developing comradery and it supported the child’s sense of belonging. An example Teacher G shared demonstrated another way in which some of the songs gave each child a sense of belonging. For example, if she played a song they all knew, the energy rose and the kids all got very excited. Similarly, when they had a “brain break” activity in which there was a challenge accompanying the music, they often worked together to complete the challenge. “So, it [the music] does, actually, make quite a big difference.”²⁰²

Conclusion

Through the research and interviews, several sub-themes were identified and categorized into four main themes. Teachers indicated that mental health was a concern among their students and it was also documented that there are clear physiological and psychological benefits of music. Together, these two sub-themes create the first main theme: Music promotes positive mental health. The second group of sub-themes identified are that musical activities create a

²⁰¹ Teacher G, Interview, September 27, 2023.

²⁰² Ibid.

sense of belonging and build community and that children enjoy musical activities. These sub-themes support the second main theme: Music creates community and belonging. The next group of sub-themes identified are that children can recognize emotion from music, music influences the development and behavior in children, teachers use music to promote development among their students, music engages the brain, singing improves social-emotional development, and music therapy influences the brain. These sub-themes support the third main theme: Music influences development. The final grouping of sub-themes includes that culture plays a role in learning, music boosts self-image and confidence, and lastly, children learn by doing. These sub-themes support the fourth and final main theme: Music influences confidence. A chart of these themes and sub-themes can be found in Appendix B.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Overview

This study explored the influence of music on children in early education, specifically with regard to their sense of belonging and level of confidence. This final chapter provides a summary of the study, the purpose, and the procedures. It also includes a summary of the findings and prior research. This chapter will also discuss the significance of the findings, as well as the limitations of the study and recommendations for future study.

Summary of Study

This study examined how, if at all, music influences a child's sense of belonging and self-confidence. The researcher utilized a qualitative case study to better determine the ways in which music influences children and whether his or her sense of belonging and confidence are impacted. Through the research of existing literature and interviews of seven teachers at two local South African schools, the researcher was able to gather consequential data to better understand the influences of music on children in a classroom setting. This study can assist educators and administrators in programing meaningful lessons to promote the healthy development of the children in their care. The researcher was guided by two research questions. The first focused on how participation in musical activities, such as singing or playing instruments, affects children between the ages of three and seven. The second intended to gather the perspectives of teachers of children between the ages of three and seven pertaining to the effects of singing and playing instruments on confidence and sense of belonging.

Summary of Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the ways in which music may influence a child's sense of belonging or self-confidence. The researcher aimed to explore the ways in which teachers currently use music in their classrooms and their observations of the students, focusing mainly on how music influenced their sense of belonging and self-confidence. Through existing research, it was possible to gain a better understanding of how music has influenced mental health and child development. With this information, it may be possible to plan lessons to provide young children with the physical, emotional, and psychological support they need as they develop.

Summary of Procedure

The researcher contacted early childhood education teachers from two local schools in Pretoria, South Africa to request their assistance in her research by interview. Three teachers from a local nursery school agreed to participate in the interview and four teachers from a private international school also agreed to participate in the interview for a total of seven teachers. These teachers were approached because of the age of students they taught. Every teacher that was asked willingly accepted the invitation to participate in the study. Approval from the IRB was not necessary due to the study's exemption.

The researcher scheduled the interviews with each teacher individually and in a private space where they were not interrupted. The interviews were recorded with permission from the teachers and the recording was reviewed and organized by the researcher. Common sub-themes and themes were identified and analyzed. These themes were compared to the themes found from the research presented in existing literature.

Summary and Discussion of Findings and Prior Research

This qualitative case study aimed to gather data to determine how music influenced a child's sense of belonging and self-confidence between the ages of three and seven. There were several themes that emerged from the existing literature and the interviews that took place.

First Theme: Music Promotes Positive Mental Health

The first theme indicated that music promotes positive mental health. Teachers believe that schools could play a valuable role in promoting positive mental health among students.²⁰³ When one considers that children spend much of their time in school and often have more contact hours with their teachers than their parents, it is a critical opportunity to consider. Prevention is perhaps the best way to combat the issues in mental health that students face during their schooling and music can be a way in which this can occur. In Giles-Kaye's study, her team determined that prevention and early intervention were critical to promote positive mental health in the long term and yielded better outcomes than treating a student with mental health challenges after they are presented.²⁰⁴

There was some evidence found from the interviews that indicated music promotes mental health because of the psychological benefits that music offers. Teacher A gave the example that she found music to help relieve tension and relax children. She also observed that students who may have arrived at the nursery school in a bad mood will have a change in attitude during music activities. Teacher B observed that music uplifted her students. She also reported that she noticed the way music could (and would) alter a child's mood for the better.

²⁰³ Reinke, et al., "Supporting Children's Mental Health in Schools.," 4.

²⁰⁴ Giles-Kaye, et al., "Supporting Children's Mental Health in Primary Schools," 2.

In her interview, Teacher C also identified the use of music to improve the mood of her students. Teacher D shared that she noticed how her students would have fun when participating in musical activities which influences their mood and general outlook. Teacher E commented that her students also enjoyed the activities they did with music and that enjoyment also gave the students a positive outlook. Teacher F made a similar observation that music naturally puts an individual in a good mood. Many of the teachers used music to provide children with an outlet to release energy or movement activities to bring up energy levels; Teacher G was among the teachers that used music in this way. These observations further support Sloboda's research that there is a natural and physical response to music which will influence one's mood.²⁰⁵ From this research, music clearly influences individuals positively which positively impacts his or her mental health.

Second Theme: Music Creates Community and Belonging

A second theme that emerged from this study was that music creates community and encourages a sense of belonging among young children. Bullack and her team confirm this in their study in which participants in choir groups felt more connected to fellow choir members.²⁰⁶ In Schmitt's research, she determined that if children participate in learning music from a young age, it teaches them to connect to one another and teachers not only in musical activities, but in other activities as well.²⁰⁷ By engaging in musical activities from a young age, children can learn to make connections naturally with others and express themselves in ways that will benefit them as they develop. In Minks and Cautier's research from Latin America, music played a significant

²⁰⁵ Weinberger, "Music and the Brain," 8.

²⁰⁶ Bullack, et al., "Psychobiological Effects of Choral Singing," 2.

²⁰⁷ Schmitt, "The Thought-Life," 24.

role in community collaboration.²⁰⁸ A strong community may also provide individuals with a greater sense of belonging and purpose among their peers.

Boucher found that as early as the age of two, children's social interaction increases due to music; this includes listening and dancing to music and participating activities with music.²⁰⁹ In Rabinowitch and Meltzoff's study, they learned that a shared musical experience promoted social interaction among children between the ages of four and five.²¹⁰ In Ritblatt's study, it was found that when movement accompanied music activities, children were encouraged to engage and they felt joy in their participation. This also created a connection among the children that participated.²¹¹ These studies demonstrate the importance of exposing children to music from a young age to promote social interaction and a sense of belonging.

In Varner's research, he indicates that "general music activities often require collaboration, self-regulation, empathy for others, critical thinking, and often ask students to be part of something larger than themselves as they work to create with peers who are also part of the process."²¹² By gaining an awareness of others and the world around them, children can benefit from participation in musical activities to encourage their sense of belonging. This can prevent mental health issues as a teenager or adult. Cuadrado's research supports Varner's; he concluded that through musical activities, there was a greater depth of social interaction that can create connections between students.²¹³

²⁰⁸ Minks and Gautier, "Music, Language, Aurality," 30.

²⁰⁹ Boucher, et al., 1924.

²¹⁰ Rabinowitch and Meltzoff, "Joint Rhythmic Movement," 7.

²¹¹ Ritblatt, et al., "Can Music Enhance School-Readiness," 258.

²¹² Varner, "General Music Learning," 76.

²¹³ Cuadrado, "Music and Talent," 160.

Additional research from Savage and his team further confirmed the benefits of music to create significant bonds between a child and his or her caregiver which begins even before the child is born.²¹⁴ Dumont and her team found that musical activities positively influenced the social skills of children between the ages of four and five.²¹⁵ Koops and Tate also found similar results from their studies of the use of music in early childhood classrooms. Through music, relationships are built among the students.²¹⁶ Barrett and her team found that singing in the general classroom contributed to positive social interactions among the children.²¹⁷

Kirby's research team identified a unique finding when music was used in the classrooms. They found that participation in musical activities united groups of students despite diversity.²¹⁸ This study supports the information the researcher received through the interviews of the teachers at the schools in South Africa. South Africa, also known as the "rainbow nation," is a dynamically diverse country. Understanding the way music unites children will provide more opportunities in which individuals with vast differences can be united. These experiences will support the development of communities and encourage each child's sense of belonging. The teachers interviewed, both at the nursery school and the international school, all taught groups of children with diverse backgrounds. Each teacher commented that when they used music, they observed that it brought their students together as one community.

Teacher A observed that her class was significantly diverse and consisted of children from different cultures and backgrounds. Some even spoke different languages. The children

²¹⁴ Savage, et al., 4.

²¹⁵ Dumont, et al., 10.

²¹⁶ Koops and Tate, "A Framework for Considering Teacher-Child Musical Interactions," 1958.

²¹⁷ Barrett, et al., "Evaluating the Impact of a Generalist-Led Music Program," 121.

²¹⁸ Kirby, et al., "Music Uses in Preschool Classrooms," 515.

actively participated in activities with music regardless of the language. She noticed that it helped to build community and belonging among her students. Teacher A also commented that when she used music in the classroom, it provided a universal language to which all students could connect regardless of their background. This contributed positively to their sense of belonging. Teacher A commented that her shy students were often more comfortable participating in musical activities than in regular class activities because they felt more like they were part of the group.²¹⁹

Teacher B shared similar observations in her classroom; music was a positive influence on a child's sense of belonging. She often used music to which her students could connect. One individual song would not impact every child every time, but she was intentional about which songs she used in her classes and ensured there was a variety. She noticed that when she used music in activities, she was more likely to get a positive response from her shy children. The music encouraged students to interact which increased their sense of belonging. Her student's behavior also improved when she used music in her classroom and she shared that she believed "Music brings people together, and I've noticed that in my class as well."²²⁰ Teacher B indicated that music encouraged a sense of belonging when she gave her students the opportunity to choose. This opportunity also promoted student agency and provided students with a sense of pride and individuality.²²¹

Teacher C shared that at the private nursery school, they often have assemblies in which the older students at the school join and sing songs together such as their school song and some

²¹⁹ Teacher A, Interview, September 13, 2023.

²²⁰ Teacher B, Interview, September 15, 2023.

²²¹ Ibid.

traditional worship songs. She observed that this builds community and helps the children to feel like they belong. In her classroom, she observed her students dancing and moving along to the music and these activities built a greater sense of community. In her closing, Teacher C shared that she believed music was a strong contributor to giving children a sense of belonging.²²²

Teacher D also shared several experiences in which she observed how music contributes to a child's sense of belonging. The students in her class frequently connected personally with a particular song that was used in class. When several students identified similar connections to a song, those students found a connection to each other.²²³ Teacher E observed that in musical activities, student participation was high and the children engaged with each other, bringing them closer together. She believed music helped to create community among her class.²²⁴

Teacher F used the different languages of the students in her class. Her students quickly connected to the activity or lesson when they heard their native language. She believed it “gave the children a sense of pride and belonging.”²²⁵ She often used songs that her students were familiar with because she found that helped to build community. Teacher F admitted that she intentionally promoted the building of community in her classroom and that music was one of the principal ways in which she accomplished that task.²²⁶

Teacher G shared several examples of the ways in which music promoted a child's sense of belonging in the classroom. She reiterated that it was something that the children enjoyed

²²² Teacher C, Interview, September 18, 2023.

²²³ Teacher D, Interview, September 15, 2023.

²²⁴ Teacher E, Interview, September 27, 2023.

²²⁵ Teacher F, Interview, September 20, 2023.

²²⁶ Ibid.

doing which brought them together. She also shared how one friend would get the attention of another friend and show off a new movement. She commented that this interaction had the potential to connect the students together and further promote a sense of belonging when the first student was affirmed in his or her movement. Teacher G believed these interactions built a special comradery among the children.²²⁷

Third Theme: Music Influences Development

A third theme that emerged from the data collected was that music influences development. This includes physical, psychological, and social-emotional development. As children develop, they learn important skills to manage themselves which will benefit them as lifelong skills such as gross motor development and emotional regulation. Music can aid in this process. Neuroscientists have found that music engages the brain in several different ways, through listening, participating, and creating.²²⁸ John Dewey believed that music influenced both development and behavior.²²⁹

Emotion from music may also be detected from a young age. Boone and Cunningham's study found that children between the ages of four and five were able to respond to the emotions that they sensed in music.²³⁰ Singing also promotes healthy social-emotional development. In the study conducted by Jeremić, children demonstrated a greater sense of empathy for others when their teachers used music in their classroom.²³¹ Raschdorf and her team found that music education promoted development through increased social awareness, self-management, and

²²⁷ Teacher G, Interview, September 27, 2023.

²²⁸ Weinberger, "Music and the Brain," 3.

²²⁹ Tan, "Reading John Dewey's *Art as Experience*," 71.

²³⁰ Blasco-Magraner, et al., "Effects of the Educational Use of Music," 19.

²³¹ Ibid., 23.

promoting positive relationship skills.²³² Varner identified similar findings in his research.²³³

These skills that children can develop from a young age with the help of music education can promote healthy development among the children who take part in musical activities.

Through Cuadrado's experience with the *Music and Talent* program in Seville, Spain, it was found that children who participated in musical activities developed a greater self-esteem, increased self-confidence, stronger motivation, better social and emotional relationships, and overall improved wellbeing.²³⁴ These are all qualities that will encourage one's confidence and sense of belonging, and support his or her mental health. Thapa and Rodríguez-Quiles confirm Cuadrado's findings. They found that music significantly enhanced non-musical activities and educators who use music purposefully in their classrooms support social, emotional, and intellectual development among their young students.²³⁵ Savage and her team found that musical activities in a classroom setting will positively influence child development.²³⁶ Barrett and her team determined that music enhances children's development intellectually, socially, and emotionally.²³⁷ They indicated that the impact music has on the emotional development of a child is significant in promoting healthy relationships.²³⁸

In Moore's study on emotion regulation, the researchers, educators, and parents all agreed that music was an important tool to promote development in children. Areas such as

²³² Raschdorf, et al., "Integrating Social-Emotional Learning," 44.

²³³ Varner, "General Music Learning," 76.

²³⁴ Cuadrado, "Music and Talent," 160.

²³⁵ Cuadrado, "Music and Talent," 160.

²³⁶ Savate, et al., "Parental Perceptions of the *Sing & Grow* Programme," 1007.

²³⁷ Barrett, et al., "Music Value and Participation," 235.

²³⁸ Ibid., 239.

emotional skills, cognitive skills, and social skills were identified as the most positively influenced.²³⁹ In Brown and Sax's study of the Kaleidoscope Preschool Arts Enrichment Program, music, dance, and visual arts were part of the preschooler's daily curriculum and the researchers determined that there was a clear connection to the development of the children's behavior. Brown and Sax also recognized that the use of music may give children the tools needed in development to support their mental health.²⁴⁰ In Pitt's research, she noted that nursery rhymes are frequently used to aid in the development of language, especially among those who struggle.²⁴¹

In the interview with Teacher A, she believed music promoted development in several unique ways. First, the songs she used in her classes were intentionally chosen to reinforce a lesson. Second, as her students were three years old, they were in the stage of language development. Music encouraged vocabulary development and speaking in full sentences which increased in length as the year progressed. Teacher A admitted that this was due in part to their increased exposure to the language, but she also believed that using songs with longer phrases impacted their sentence structure and it gave them the skills to be able to construct longer sentences. Third, she believed using music with movement promoted gross motor development, especially for her three year old students.²⁴²

²³⁹ Moore and Hanson-Abromeit, "Feasibility of the Musical Contour Regulation Facilitation (MCRF) Intervention," 433.

²⁴⁰ Moore and Hanson-Abromeit, "Feasibility of the Musical Contour Regulation Facilitation (MCRF) Intervention," 433.

²⁴¹ Pitt, "Communicating through Music Play," 70.

²⁴² Teacher A, Interview, September 13, 2023.

Teacher C noted the benefits music had on speech development. She shared an example of one student who had difficulty learning English and was reluctant to speak. When she included singing in her class, this student participated and attempted to sing the correct words. Teacher C commented that this was not the first experience she had in which singing aided a child's development of speech. Due to the diversity of the school, teachers frequently had non-English or non-Afrikaans teachers in their classes and Teacher C commented that singing facilitated the development of language for those students.²⁴³

Fourth Theme: Music Influences Confidence

The fourth and final theme that emerged from the data collected was that music influences confidence in children. Individuals gain confidence through positive experiences and participation in activities to learn and develop new skills. Developmental psychology founder Jean Piaget believed that children learned best through actively engaging in an activity rather than solely as an observer.²⁴⁴ This provides children with experiences that will build their confidence as they learn and gain familiarity with something new. Psychological development expert Erik Erickson believed that students should be involved in their learning process. He was so confident in this belief that he incorporated it into his own teaching practices. When individuals have the experience of actively participating in their learning, they will not only have a better understanding of what they are learning, but it will also build their confidence.²⁴⁵

Culture has also been found to influence the way individuals learn. This may contribute to their confidence. A student's behavior may vary based on their experiences at home,

²⁴³ Teacher C, Interview, September 18, 2023.

²⁴⁴ Schmitt, "The Thought-Life of the Young Child," 24.

²⁴⁵ Myers, "Teacher Elder," 251.

particularly when children are exposed to music in their communities.²⁴⁶ In South Africa, researcher Elijah Madiba grew up with significant exposure to music in both his family and community. These experiences led him to develop a deeper understanding of music. He further noted that musicians he studied were often influenced by their cultural upbringing and traditional music to which they were exposed from an early age.²⁴⁷

In the interviews of the teachers at both the nursery school and international school, the teachers provided significant evidence indicating that music promotes a student's confidence. Teacher A noted that through her student's participation in musical activities, their confidence in communication increased. As they became more comfortable participating in activities, their confidence rose in other areas in the classroom. Teacher A shared an example of a girl in her class who joined the school mid-year. This is often difficult for students because they struggle to connect with the children in the class who have previously formed friend groups. Teacher A shared that when she used music in an activity, this student showed less dependence on her teacher or teaching assistant and her participation increased. Teacher A concluded that music helped her forget that she was a new student and that gave her an increased level of confidence in the class.²⁴⁸

When Teacher B shared her observations of how music influenced the confidence of her students, she shared that the activities she presented with music gave her shy students an opportunity to grow in confidence. She had several children in her class who were too shy to raise their hand to participate in class because they did not feel comfortable being the center of

²⁴⁶ Chung, *Music and Play in Early Childhood Education*,” 11.

²⁴⁷ Robertson, “Whose Music, Whose Country?” 71

²⁴⁸ Teacher A, Interview, September 13, 2023.

attention. In the music activities, however, all the children participated together which allowed her shy students to participate equally without the rest of the class watching them. This demonstrated one way in which music promotes a child's confidence.²⁴⁹

Teacher B shared another example of how music increased her student's confidence. Some of the songs she used in her class had two parts in which one groups sang one part and then the second group sang another part, but not necessarily at the same time. In these situations, one group was watching the other group sing which could be daunting to shy students. Teacher B observed that her shy students still participated because they were in group singing which allowed them to feel more comfortable to participate because they were not in the spotlight. This increased their level of confidence as they participated.²⁵⁰

Teacher C believed music played a role in developing her children's confidence. She shared about one girl who had only one best friend in the class. When that best friend was absent, the girl would easily withdraw from the lessons and struggle to participate. When there was a musical activity presented, however, she would readily participate. She often stood in front of the mirror in the classroom to watch herself dance with the music. The music gave her the confidence to join in with the class activity.²⁵¹

Teacher D observed that music had an overall positive impact on the children in her class. Like Teacher B, Teacher D also saw that her shy students would frequently participate more actively in the musical activities than in some of the other class activities. Teacher D added that

²⁴⁹ Teacher B, Interview, September 15, 2023.

²⁵⁰ Teacher B, Interview, September 15, 2023.

²⁵¹ Teacher C, Interview, September 18, 2023.

these shy students were sometimes some of her best participators with the most enthusiastic movements because the music gave them a greater confidence where in other areas, they were not as confident.²⁵²

Teacher E agreed that music influenced student's confidence in her class. She described a student who occasionally participated in class activities and when he did, it was often a struggle for him. As the school year progressed, the teacher noticed that his participation in the musical activities increased as he developed a greater confidence in her class. She also noticed that this transferred into other more academic class activities in which he displayed a greater level of confidence because of his growth in confidence during the musical activities.²⁵³

Teacher F shared that she believed through the repetition of a musical activity or song, children would gain confidence which led to a greater level of participation. Teacher F often noticed in her class that when she taught a new song, there was hesitancy from her students and very few of them felt confident to sing out. As they practiced, however, they participated more actively and their confidence grew quickly. This confidence transferred to other areas in her class, as well.²⁵⁴

Teacher F also noticed that music helped to give her shy students a great level of confidence. Like Teacher D, Teacher F also found that it was sometimes her most shy students who participated with some of the most exciting movements. She also shared, however, that music did not always increase a student's confidence. Teacher F commented that she had a group

²⁵² Teacher D, Interview, September 15, 2023.

²⁵³ Teacher E, Interview, September 27, 2023.

²⁵⁴ Teacher F, Interview, September 20, 2023.

of athletic boys in her class that were less confident with the musical activities. The type of song made a significant difference with those boys. If it was a sports related song, those boys would actively participate.²⁵⁵

Teacher G commented that students at the age of six were already concerned with what other students thought of them. This impacted their confidence greatly. She noticed that musical activities did give her shy students some confidence to participate more freely, but the musical activities also gave the more confident children an increased confidence to participate. Overall, she believed that music was a useful tool to promote confidence, even if it only helped minimally.²⁵⁶

Limitations

This study held a few potential limitations. First, the study was limited to a small sample of teachers that were interviewed from two schools. Both schools were private which indicated that families had to pay tuition for their children. This means the students who attended these schools were likely to be part of a higher socio-economical group. While the nursery school had a scholarship program to include a greater socio-economic diversity of students at their school, it represented only a small population at the school. Interviewing more teachers from a broader field of schools would have been a positive addition.

A second limitation was that the children were not observed or interviewed by the researcher directly and her data relied on teacher observations. While this was helpful information to determine the role of music in developing a child's sense of belonging and

²⁵⁵ Teacher F, Interview, September 20, 2023.

²⁵⁶ Teacher G, Interview, September 27, 2023.

confidence, it was not comprehensive. Additional interviews of the children may have provided helpful data to answer the research questions.

One final limitation of this study was that it included observations from a relatively short period of time. It is difficult to deduce what the long-term effects of music education may be when observed at an early age. Observations of a group of children over several years could reveal the long-term benefits of music education in the development of mental health.

Recommendations for Future Study

In future research, it is recommended that a greater sample of teachers are interviewed from a wider variety of schools. It is also recommended that classes may be observed directly by the researcher and that she may interview the students. A third recommendation is that the researcher could examine the use of music education in the ages of older students to determine how music influences mental health. Lastly, it is also recommended that the researcher create a longitudinal study in which she can observe the same group of students over several years to better understand the ways in which music may influence the development of one's mental health. It will be beneficial to determine whether a sense of belonging or strong self-confidence will improve one's mental health in his or her teen years and into adulthood.

Implications for Future Practice

Despite the limitations, there were several important points that were identified from the research that indicated music education builds a child's sense of belonging and increases his or her self-confidence. With this information, schools should promote music education in the early childhood classroom to establish a firm foundation of these two concepts. These programs may build a stronger community and allow children to feel that they belong to a greater population.

This may also increase their level of engagement in the class across several activities and not just music.

This study indicated that music in the early childhood classroom influenced a child's self-confidence. The development of a child's confidence will give him or her the courage to participate more actively and believe that his or her opinions are of value to the class. It may lead to improved performance as the child ages which will continue to build his or her self-confidence.

Conclusion

Through this qualitative case study, the research investigated how music may influence a child's sense of belonging and self-confidence. Results showed that music played a positive role in giving children a sense of belonging in their classes and it encouraged an individual's confidence.

The researcher found that music promoted positive development of mental health when used in the early childhood classroom. Teachers recognized the importance of addressing the issues surrounding mental health and a school setting is an ideal location to accomplish this task.²⁵⁷ Supporting this research, the majority of the teachers that were interviewed by the researcher shared practical experiences of the different ways in which music promoted positive mental health.

The researcher also found that music does create community and encourages a child's sense of belonging. Existing research indicated that when an individual participates in a musical

²⁵⁷ Giles-Kaye, et. al., "Supporting Children's Mental Health in Primary Schools," 2.

activity in a group setting, the participants have a greater bond.²⁵⁸ Additional research indicated that music was able to unite an exceptionally diverse group of students because it was something they worked on together.²⁵⁹ The teachers that were interviewed in South Africa provided substantial evidence through their observations that the use of music in their classrooms brought the children together, created a positive community, and gave the children a stronger sense of belonging.

Music influences development physically, psychologically, socially, and emotionally. Existing research demonstrated that by using music in the general classroom, it supports the social, emotional, and intellectual development of the students.²⁶⁰ Additional research indicated that general classroom teachers benefitted from additional coaching on how to incorporate music intentionally and effectively into their lessons.²⁶¹ Many of the teachers interviewed shared that they purposefully used specific songs to aid in the development of their students. This included the physical development through gross motor skills, coordination, and speech development, psychological development through positive experiences, and social and emotional development through the promotion of healthy relationships.

Lastly, the researcher found that through existing research and the interviews she conducted, music was found to influence a child's self-confidence. Piaget understood that children learn best by participating in the learning rather than as passive listeners. With a better understanding, children will have an increased self-confidence.²⁶² The teachers who were

²⁵⁸ Bullack, et. al., "Psychobiological Effects of Choral Singing," 2.

²⁵⁹ Kirby, et. al., "Music Uses in Preschool Classrooms," 515.

²⁶⁰ Cuadrado, "Music and Talent," 160.

²⁶¹ Barrett et al., "Evaluating the Impact of a Generalist Teacher-Led Music Program," 121.

²⁶² Schmitt, "The Thought-Life of the Young Child," 24.

interviewed also agreed that music had a positive influence on a child's self-confidence. They provided several examples in which this theme manifested in their classes.

In conclusion, music has been found to have several distinct benefits when used in the early childhood education classroom. Teachers and researchers agree that music promotes a sense of belonging among children and aids in the development of their self-confidence. There is substantial evidence to indicate that educators and administrators should be intentional in their programming. They should strive to include musical activities and music education in their curriculum to promote the positive development of mental health by encouraging a greater sense of belonging and building a child's self-confidence.

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- Teacher D, Interview by Author, Pretoria, South Africa, September 15, 2023.
- Teacher E, Interview by Author, Pretoria, South Africa, September 27, 2023.
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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. How often do you use music in your classroom? Everyday? Several times a day?
2. In what ways do you use music in your classroom? For activity transition? For learning? For play?
3. Do you use music in the background while children are busy with another activity?
4. What genres or types of music do you use mostly with your students? And for which activities?
5. How do the children respond when you play or turn on music for an activity or other purpose?
6. Do you notice any difference in behavior in the students when you use music in an activity versus not using music in an activity?
7. Do the children seem to enjoy activities that you do with music? If so, how can you tell?
8. How do the children's behaviors change when you use music in the classroom?
9. What do you notice about the children's confidence when you use music for activities in your classroom?
10. What do you notice about the children's sense of belonging when you use music for activities in your classroom?

Appendix B

Themes and Sub-Themes

Themes	Sub-Themes
Music promotes positive mental health	Mental health among students is a concern.
	Physiological and psychological benefits of music.
Music creates community and belonging	Musical activities create a sense of belonging and build community.
	Children enjoy musical activities.
Music influences development	Children can recognize emotion from music.
	Music influences development and behavior.
	Teachers use Music for development.
	Music engages the brain.
	Singing improves social-emotional development.
	Music therapy influences the brain.
Music influences confidence	Culture plays a role in learning.
	Music boosts self-image and confidence.
	Children learn by doing.

Appendix C: Thesis Defense Approval

Doctor of Worship Studies or Doctor of Music Education

Doctoral Thesis Defense Decision

The thesis Advisor and Reader have rendered the following decision concerning the defense for



Melinda Sue Mertz

on the Thesis

The Influences of Music on the Confidence and Sense of Belonging of Children

as submitted on November 20, 2023

- X **Full approval to proceed with no proposal revisions.**
The document should be prepared for submission to the Jerry Falwell Library.
- Provisional approval pending cited revisions.**
The student must resubmit the project with cited revisions according to the established timeline.
- Redirection of project.**
The student is being redirected to take MUSC/WRSP 889 again, as minor revisions will not meet the expectations for the research project.

Kathryn Wert		11/28/2023
Print Name of Advisor	Signature	Date
Cassandra Hibbard		11/30/2023
Print Name of Reader	Signature	Date

Appendix D: IRB Exemption Letter