

TERM PAPER

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Learning to read and play music facilitates attention (focused, sustained, selective, alternating and dual)

The increasing flow of information, specific human communication, development of various forms of mass culture, and growing pace of life lead to an increase in the volume of knowledge required by a modern person. The changes in society have an immense impact on the children's development by engaging them in the vortex of the turbulent life and putting forward new demands for the education system. The pre-school education is considered the first step in the lifelong learning of a person. An important prerequisite for the future academic success is the development of voluntary and deliberate attention in the preschool age. The school demands attention to the self-organization of children in terms of their ability to act without supervision and follow instructions in order to obtain the desired results.

Attention is an optimal organization of consciousness, which manifests in person's focus and concentration. It takes part in different cognitive processes. It is practically impossible to study the skill of attention in its pure form. However, attention is also independent of the cognitive processes. It may change irrespective of the processes and activities, in the regulation of which it is engaged.

Attention has its anatomical and physiological correlates (neurons novelty detectors, reticular formation, and dominant). It ensures control over any activity of a human being and provides a long-term focus on the same object or activity. Moreover, attention helps in achieving various goals. The current study aims to prove that learning to read and play music improves

attention.

Learning to play music contributes to the social adaptation, development of the creative personality, self-determination, and self-realization of a person. Achieving these learning goals requires a high level of intelligence and learning ability, as well as developed mental and cognitive processes in children. The issues concerning the study and methods of the attention activation have always attracted scientific interest. Jones (2006) claims that the most urgent problem is increasing the degree of attention to an individual, because it is the key to success of any venture. In this area, the tasks of the most productive usage of the knowledge and skills have been underlined. Most studies research special attention of children and its part in learning different subjects of the general education.

In teaching music, specific musical and performing arts need a constant concentration. Good results in the academic musical performance can be achieved with the ability to control attention. It is known that at the initial stage of education, any musician is shaping all the types of attention, including the focused, sustained, selective, alternating, and dual ones. In addition, the child employs the natural prerequisites for the development of attention required for a coherent and successful mastering of the subject.

Modern philosophical, psychological, and pedagogical literature offers sufficient knowledge on different features of individual attention and its manifestation in the person's activity. Certain aspects of the attention problems are considered in the works of such philosophers as Augustine, Descartes, Kant, Leibniz, Locke, and Plotinus. The scientists have associated attention with the mechanisms of consciousness operation, will, acquiring knowledge, and development of human abilities.

The main theoretical principles and concepts presented in the

psychological literature consider the essence, indicators, and parameters of attention. Janke (2012) claims that the performing musician directs and focuses his/her consciousness on finding a solution for various musical and performing tasks through enhanced intellectual, auditory, emotional, and sensual skills and volitional qualities. In addition, the scientist talks about the particular attention and its determination by the specifics of the musical performance. Close interrelationship of attention and formation of technical, musical, and creative skills is a comprehensive example of cooperation of different attention types in the process of solving the musical-performing tasks, including the basic training at an early stage of the visual, auditory, and volitional attention. The development of the child's attention is carried out in the pedagogical conditions, which stipulate the formation of learning motivation, activation of an ear for music, development of the strong personality traits and skills of an independent work.

In the study of this problem, Dunbar (2008) considers attention of the performing musician to have orientation and focus on solving different tasks through enhanced intellectual, auditory, emotional, and sensual skills, and strong personality traits. In the formation of technical skills, this interrelationship is a mental anticipation of the finger combinations or technical difficulties. Focusing on the right movements and feeling their accuracy and naturalness create an important ground for the development of musical performance art, as well as deliberately automated action. These skills are the foundation of the managed automatism. This fact proves that learning to play music helps in developing the focused and sustained attention in children.

In the musical creative work, the creation of interpretation and communication of the artistic intention focuses on the musical side of the studied technique that contributes to the improvement of both musical and

creative skills. This focus on the attention, optimal distribution, and degree of its manifestation in the performance of musical work is of great importance in shaping child's self-determination.

The integrated display of different types of attention relates to arbitrary or dual forms, including external and internal, auditory, intellectual, emotional, visual, strong-willed, self-directed, post-operative, and creative attention. Regarding the represented types of attention, the musicians are able to cover their entire professional and psychological state, and strive for the self-improvement and self-education (Jones, 2006).

Visual attention focuses on the musical scores. The development of the musician's visual attention in learning not only the music pieces but also the other elements of it. This practice helps improve the selective attention in children (Dunbar, 2008).

Alternating attention in the musical performance is defined as the concentration on music, some fragments or elements while playing or listening to music. The essence of alternating attention is the ability to not only listen but also *hear*. Attention determines the ability to focus on a precise, rhythmic, and musical performance of the studied works. Alternating skills are formed based on the development of musical hearing and attention activation during the performance of the music piece (Dunbar, 2008).

However, music is not the only way to improve the attention skills in children. Reading is another helpful tool, which forms self-consciences, ability to focus, and communication skills. In the current era of the rapid development of multimedia, the role of visual perception in the information processing is very important, and reading assists a lot.

Reading begins with the visual perception of the letters, syllables, and words.

Correct reading depends on the level of visual perception. Scientists distinguish the following levels: the perception of the letter symbolism, the process of identification based on a comparison with the available memory standards, and sequential scanning of the information image.

The child learns visual functioning that develops to reading skills in the preschool period, but this process is spontaneous and unorganized. The child learns to see in a similar to learning to walk and talk way. While acquiring perceptual experience, a child develops individual methods of analyzing the visual information, which form the basis of establishing links between the real objects and their graphical representations.

Reading plays a crucial role in the formation and moral education of a person and enrichment of human knowledge in general (Wandell, Dougherty, Ben-Shachar, Deutsch, & Tsang, 2008). By reading, the semantic perception, attention, memory, thinking, and imagination of the child develop. Children that experience difficulties with reading fall behind in their intellectual and social development as compared to their peers. Moreover, they usually have difficulties with communication.

The reading skills disorders are closely associated with the problems of speech and writing. Children from different social strata face difficulties with reading. For example, very often, the problem makes parents take additional effort to help their child enter a prestigious college. On the one hand, the continuous development of science and technology requires people to increase training. Therefore, the early education is not an attempt to deprive the child of a joyful childhood, but a necessary step for the development in the world, which is dominated by the high technology and vast amount of information. On the other hand, an increasing number of the so-called pathogenic factors lead to the birth of weak and sick children who need gentle, compensatory, and remedial education (Wandell et al.,

2008).

Reading helps in developing a child's ability to concentrate and manage the problems with communication. Janke (2012) believes that specific reading disorders occur in the development process; however, not every child suffers from them. Therefore, it is important to pay more attention to the issue. According to the author, reading disorders in children can be caused by both general underdevelopment of reading and specific reading delay. General underdevelopment of reading is often associated with a clear neurological disease and various other deviations in the development, such as problems with the coordination of movements, perception, productive abilities, and speech. In the case of a specific reading latency or word blindness, the child has much more underdeveloped reading skills than one would expect based on the age and intelligence level (4-8% of children).

The experts have not come to an agreement on what is the cause of the inability of the child to master the reading skills, despite adequate level of intellectual and language development, absence of any visual and auditory disorders, and optimal learning environment (Wandell et al., 2008). Possibly, the genetically transmitted prerequisites interfere with the reading skills. It has been suggested that the specific reading delay may be caused by some damage to the healthy process of growth and maturation of certain areas in the cerebral cortex. The researchers note that most often, it occurs in the left-handed dyslexic children and so-called *hidden lefties* (such children write with the right hand while their right hemisphere is dominant, unlike in the *true* right-handers). These children experience difficulties in spatial orientation (confuse right and left, can read words and whole lines backward).

According to Janke (2012), the skill of reading help the child understand the world around and develop creative thinking and imagination. The child can

form both sustained and dual types of attention through reading, because of the specific brain activity during the process. The forecast of further development for such children is more favorable, since timely and focused assistance is more successful. However, it is crucial to detect the problem as early as possible. According to the specialists, children of ten years old with a delay in reading are likely to have problems with the further development of attention and personal skills.

All the researchers are paying much attention to the problems of development of the attention skills in children. The paper had proved the hypothesis that learning to play music and to read helps in improving the attention, developing communication skills, and increasing self-esteem of the child. Moreover, playing music and reading are important for different types of attention, such as selective and alternating attention when playing music, dual and sustained attention when reading, and focus on the activity when performing activities. A child's brain is a very specific organ that changes and develops under proper conditions. With the timely and professional help of adults, every child can manage the problems of bad communicational skills and self-identification.

Appendix

The articles for the research were searched via the Internet, using the keywords for the study: *attention*, *child*, *reading*, and *music*. The search returned several articles and books. The most interesting, relevant, and valuable ones were chosen. All the cited articles are the primary sources, in which the authors described their own studies and analysis.