

MUSICAL INTERACTION AND LIFELONG LEARNING: INTEGRATIVE AND HOLISTIC MUSICAL ACTIVITIES INCREASE THE WELL-BEING OF OLDER PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

The article concerns the effects of the Virkistysverso holistic and integrative music programme for older people in Finland. The purpose of the programme was to increase the well-being of elderly people and to develop a new means of access to 'lifelong learning' for older people in residential care. The approach was to motivate older people towards music, to attain a holistic and identifying experience through the music, and to enjoy it.

The research task was to determine whether integrative and holistic musical activities have any significant connection to the daily mood and social activity of older people. Nurses were asked to describe the behaviour and verbalisation of the participants. Altogether 205 elderly persons (aged 75 to 95 year) in senior citizen's homes and hospitals all over the Finland participated in the study. In each facility half of the subjects participated in music groups and half formed the control group. The nurses' descriptions concerning the participants' behaviour were analysed.

The measures used were Likert-based evaluation scores of older people's skills, activity levels, mood and memory. Evaluations based on daily observation were made by the nurses caring for participants. The development of the participant's abilities and activity levels was examined on the basis of the discrepancy scores of the pre-test and post-test measurements. The significance of the difference in mean points was assessed by t-test. The results show significant differences between the music and control groups' scores for memory skills, perception skills, mood and social behavior. According to the results, integrative musical activities seem to be very meaningful with respect to the holistic well-being of the elderly. Clearly, lifelong learning takes place in seniors' residences. We need to develop cultural co-operation between nurses and music pedagogues and use creative thinking in hospitals to increase meaningful interaction with seniors and their nurses particularly through holistic music activities.

Keywords: *lifelong learning, holistic musical activities, older people*

INTRODUCTION AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Public discussion in Finland surrounding older people's care and well-being has recently been very active. The legislation on municipal services for the elderly was renewed in May 2011, and equal care for every person has been continuously discussed and is hopefully hopefully progressing. The concept of well-being is broad, and well-being itself is a very subjective experience. Among other things it relates to lifelong learning and the possibility of expressing oneself in artistic ways. This article concentrates on the behavioural aspects of well-being in the elderly, especially their mood and activity with communicating and musical experience; also physical and mental independence in everyday life has also been evaluated through the observation and writings of the nurses.

The purpose of the research is to study the relation between holistic musical activity provided by the Finnish *Virkistysverso* programme (2007) and the well-being of elderly people in old people's homes and day centres in Finland. The research task was first to determine whether integrative musical activity that had been arranged for the elderly persons had an effect on their daily welfare, and mood and activity compared to those not participating in musical activity but at the same institution. Secondly, the task was to analyse and describe the written observations of the seniors' nurses on the behaviour of the elderly people under their care in daily situations, in order to determine which kind factors seemed to be associated with this type of music activity. Altogether 205 elderly people participated in the study in different regions of Finland.

Aging is often accompanied by various mental and physical problems in health and cognitive functioning. The feeling of powerlessness in the elderly is often a subjective experience caused by mental and physical stress; in addition the loss of economic security and greater dependency on others as well as society's many negative attitudes towards old age influence the well-being of older people (Bowling etc., 2003).

According James and Gabe (1996, 43) health is increasingly being linked with feeling and looking good, and true wellbeing is seen as resting on the idea of a balance or harmony between body, soul, mind and emotion as well as satisfactory relationships with other people and society as a whole. Feeling good is associated with to personal health and looking good is associated with social health and well-being. Thus a strong connection exists between health and well-being. Health is well-being on three levels: physical, mental and social.

In Finland, the concept of welfare has been firmly brought to the fore by Hyypä and Liikanen (2005) among others, whose idea of health is more culturally based than that of earlier researchers. The social dimensions of health and welfare as well as cultural and geographic differences with respect to health remain problematic. Increasing the role of citizens has been mentioned as a central concept, and means utilising citizens' own resources in the area of health and welfare. Partnership refers to activating members of as many communities as possible towards increasing their own well-being (Hyypä & Liikanen 2005, 34). Liikanen (2003, 11) discusses the social context of the integration of art and cultural activities into social and health care. She argues that if awareness of other people's professions and opportunities to interact could be raised, culture and the arts could be a natural part of social and health care. This would involve professions in both healthcare and the arts as well as co-operation between these professions, between academic disciplines and between different generations. A greater understanding of the professions and more opportunities to interact would result.

According to previous studies (e.g. Sherratt, Thornton, & Hatton 2004; Hays & Minichiello 2005; Ledger & Baker, 2007; Schlaug, Norton, Marchina, Zipse & Wan 2010) , listening to music, music and therapy help promote the use of preserved skills and abilities, increase subjective well-being, and assist in aid the management of behavioural problems and in dementia treatment.

In a qualitative research project which analysed participants' views on taking part in community-based singing groups for **older people**, seventeen individuals aged 60 or older from six singing clubs were interviewed and a number of benefits were identified. These included better mental health; increased social interaction, well-being, enjoyment of life; improvements in physical health, cognitive stimulation and learning; and improved memory skills (Skingley & Bungay 2010).

Hyyppä et al. (2006) showed that among Finland Swedes leisure activities significantly promoted men's health and welfare. According to Hyyppä and Mäki (2003) exposure to cultural hobbies and music are important for the health and welfare of individuals. In a Swedish questionnaire survey of 65-75 -year -olds a positive association was found between musical activities and feelings of satisfaction and psychological well-being (Laukka, 2010). Listening to music was observed to induce pleasure, a positive mood and relaxation. In Hays & Minichiello's (2005) group interview study older people's musical activities were positively associated with a favourable mood and good self-esteem as well as personal initiative. The results of these studies show how music contributes to positive ageing by helping elderly people to maintain higher self-esteem, feel more independent and competent, and avoid feelings of isolation or loneliness. In most of these studies the results were significant or at least showed a positive connection between music and daily well-being. The studies highlight the need for further research and a better understanding of how music can facilitate and sustain older people's well-being.

Other environmental determinants of well-being in the elderly have been studied and positive results have emerged e.g. Schmitt et.al. (2010) found that the Adult Day Health Center Participation programme improved the quality of elderly people's lives and their well-being. So participation in social activities seems to be important for well-being of the older people. In addition Shapira, Barak & Gal (2007) have shown how internet use seems to contribute to older adults' well-being and sense of empowerment by enhancing their interpersonal interactions, promoting their cognitive functioning and contributing to their sense of control and independence. Participants in the study reported positive feelings while surfing the Web, including its music and sound environments.

In the *Virkistysverso* activities social contacts between children and older people were arranged whenever possible. Goldman & Goldman (1981) looked at how children in Australia, England, North America and Sweden viewed old age in terms of a specific age, what happens to elderly people, and what were the causes of old age. They found that the children developed a realistic understanding of old age by the time they were 9 years old, and that Swedish children had more realistic views earlier. Most of the characteristics of children attributed to old people categorized in terms of physical, psychological, social-economic and sexual were negative, and related to a biologically-based decline model.

In Finland, older people are often left alone in senior citizens' residences, hospitals, or their own homes, without social contact or activities. Laine (2005) states that problems in senior citizens' homes are not solved only by increasing the number of staff, discussing the quality

of care, or monitoring productivity figures. A more holistic, diverse evaluation is needed of how practices might influence factors in the environment to increase senior's well-being and quality of life. We are being asked to develop new activities and good practices that promote the well-being of older people support the settings and care cultures for the elderly, as well as to develop the common social activities between different generations so that the young might learn more realistic views of senior citizens.

STUDY DESIGN

Research problems

The purpose of the research was first to learn whether integrative and holistic musical activities have any significant connection to the daily mood and social activity of older people. The other aim was to determine through the nurses' observational notes which factors in the *Virkistysverso* activity had an impact on the lives of the older people in the study. For this purpose the nurses were asked to describe the moods behaviour and verbalisation of the participants in freely written notes.

Participants and the programme

Altogether 205 older people (aged 75 - 95 years) in hospitals and senior's residences across Finland participated in the study. In each facility half of the participants formed a test group (the music group) and half a control group. The nurses descriptions concerning the test groups' behaviour were analysed. The test groups together comprised a total of 104 older people of those 31 were men and 73 women, and who participated weekly in integrative musical activities. The control group consisted of 35 men and 66 women. Altogether 161 participants were living in senior citizen's homes, 32 in hospitals and 12 were being treated in a senior's day care. The groups were formed randomly but for ethical reasons the subjects were asked if they were willing to participate in music activities once a week. Only a few refused, and many of those who were selected for the control group expressed an interest in participating. It was therefore decided that the latter would be able to partake in the same kind of musical activities after the research. Diagnostic information on the individuals was not available, but in the qualitative material of the evaluations it could be seen that some of the participants in both groups were suffering from some form a dementia or other disease.

The *Virkistysverso* holistic musical activity programme (2007) took 20 hours to complete, and was conducted weekly sessions for 5 months. This multisensory and integrative programme involves singing, storytelling, music listening, playing instruments, musical movement, and looking at art. The purpose of the programme was to involve older people in in music, in order to achieve a holistic, self-affirming and enjoyable musical experience.

Table 1 presents the demographic background variables of the groups and the pre-evaluation t-test results which show the differences between the groups before the programme.

Table 1. Demographic background variables of the groups

Gender	Music group	Control group	Total
Female	73	66	139
Male	31	35	66

Total	104	101	205
Age	Music group	Control group	Total
75– 80	11	11	22
81– 89	78	78	156
90– 95	15	12	27
Total	104	101	205
Environment	Music group	Control group	Total
Senior citizens' home	82	79	161
Hospital	16	16	32
Day care department	6	6	12
Total	104	101	205

The pre-evaluation chi-square test showed no significant connections between the demographic factors of the music and control groups: gender: $\chi^2 = 0.35$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.553$; age: $\chi^2 = 0.294$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.865$; environment: $\chi^2 = 0.012$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.994$. In addition chi-square test found no relationship between the other demographic factors, for example between gender and age ($\chi^2 = 2.59$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.274$) or age and environment ($\chi^2 = 5.12$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.275$). A slight difference between environment and gender was found concerning gender and day care departments: 7 males vs. 5 females ($\chi^2 = 4.83$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.089$). The pre-evaluation t-test results showed that the music group was significantly more enthusiastic in singing ($p = 0.001$), giving their perceptions ($p = 0.030$) and making suggestions for enhancing the atmosphere ($p = 0.020$). No significant differences were found in the other evaluation sections of the pre-evaluation: memory, $p = 0.330$; communication $p = 0.280$ and mood, $p = 0.460$).

Methods

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. The research methods included Likert-based evaluation scores of the older people's skills and levels of communication and memory. Their mood was also evaluated. The evaluation was done by the nurses who took care of the participants. The development of the abilities and activity levels of the older people was examined on the basis of the discrepancy between the pre-evaluation and post-evaluation measurements. The significance of the difference in mean points and discrepancy points was assessed with t-tests. As well, the notes of the nurses qualitatively analysed according to grounded theory framework (Strauss & Corbin 1998).

The evaluations were carried out before and after the *Virkistysverso* programme, in which the older people's nurses (28) evaluated their daily activities. The development of the participants' abilities and activity levels of the older people was examined on the basis of the discrepancy scores of the pre-and postevaluation. The significance of the difference in mean points was assessed by t-test and the development with discrepancy (post-pre) points by t-test.

RESULTS

Table 2 presents the differences between the groups following the programme according to the t-test post-pre-evaluation discrepancy in points.

The t-test results of the discrepancy in points (post-pre-evaluation) showed significant differences between the music and control groups (see Table 2).

Table 2. The differences in discrepancy points between groups (t-test)

Group	M	SD	N	t	df	p
Speaking activity						
Music group	0.22	0.76	104	3.33	203	0.001
Control group	-0.17	- 0.91	101			
Contacting other elderly people						
Music group	0.11	0.10	104	1.88	203	0.061
Control group	-0.16	- 0.11	101			
Singing activity						
Music group	0.17	1.27	104	3.04	203	0.003
Control group	-0.34	1.13	101			
Memory						
Music group	0.22	0.76	104	3.33	203	0.001
Control group	-0.17	- 0.91	101			
Mood						
Music group	0.29	0.87	104	3.34	202.3	0.001
Control group	-0.09	0.77	101			

The notes (104) of the nurses (28) describing the elderly people who took part in the musical activity were used as the qualitative material. According to Mulhall (2003) and Keightley & Mitchell (2004), although nurses rely heavily on observation during clinical work, it is not a method that finds widespread appeal in their research as well, grounded analysis is not often used. Silverman (1993) stresses, that we should “use our eyes as well as our ears during observational work”. The way people move, dress, interact and use space is very much a part of how particular social settings are constructed, and observation is the key method for collecting data about such matters.

The nurses were asked to freely describe about each old person they took care of. Only the notes concerning music group members after the Virkistysverso activity were analysed because the aim was to determine the meanings of the holistic music activity in the daily life of the participants. Through these observations despite being the nurses’ subjective notes, we could gain more information about the influence of the music activity on the environment and culture in the senior citizen’s homes and hospitals, we could fashion a more holistic picture of

the factors at play by capturing the process and context of interactions between individuals and groups. Although the nurses were asked to write only about their observations of the old people's welfare and daily behaviour most also recorded their thoughts about caring and nursing.

When analysing the notes we as researchers were free neither from the influence of previous research nor from our earlier quantitative analysis of the data: However we endeavoured to enter analyse the descriptions as openly as possible to gain new insights and via cycles of readings and data analysis progressively focus on core areas.

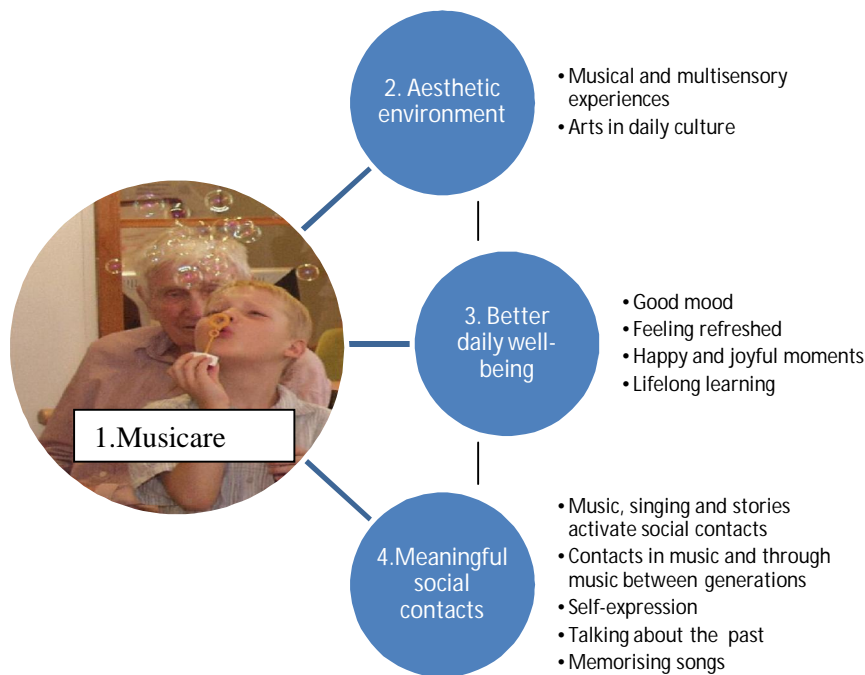


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the factors of Musicare culture

Figure 1 illustrates the categories that were generated from the data and how they link together to form a model to explain the different aspects of core category musicare culture, which may be connected to the *Virkistysverso* music activity and through it influence old people's daily well-being. Musicare culture means music and care combined together in the daily activity in senior citizen's homes.

Explanations of categories

Core category one

The core category was *musicare culture*. The central phenomenon that emerged from this data was a change in how the quality of old people's daily care and treatment was conceived. Although the category derives mainly from the reflective parts of the nurses' notes it was for us the most important, with the other factors seen as aspects or elements of it. The following excerpts provide further illustration: *He started to sing this old song which I remembered my mother had sung and suddenly we sung it together while I was helping him in the shower. The singing has started after going to Virkistysverso sessions and in my opinion he was looking happier when singing and telling those old stories to me. He was the active partner, contacting me, which I thought should have been my duty in this profession up until now more or less silent care.(W31). She is always willing to participate in this musical activity*

and hopes that it continues (W6). She is now taking care of her daily hygiene better than before and is again interested in her own well-being (W83).

Core category two

The aesthetic environment is one aspect of musicare culture. This category refers to having aesthetic experiences in particular settings or by themselves. The following excerpts provide further illustration: *She enjoys going to Virkistysverso sessions and always wants her hair to be combed in a certain way. Today she asked if I could find more beautiful curtains for our room and bring some blue flowers and her old painting to. This is new for her, usually we have discussed medicines etc. (W 92); He really likes to participate in the musical sessions and today I was with him there. Music really seems to be meaningful for the participants and the whole room was full of singing voices and music from their youth (W 73).*

Core category three

Better daily well-being is the second aspect of musicare culture. It is connected with the descriptions of mood, positive attitude, feeling refreshed, happy and joyful moments, learning new. The following excerpts provide further illustration: *She is waiting for the musical activity and talks often about what she wants to sing next time (W 65); Every time she comes there she is looking happy even if there are tears in her eyes, then I know she has remembered something meaningful to her from the past that the music brought to mind... he is always more calm after music sessions and he remembers the words of the songs but nothing else (W 58); She likes participating the Virkistysverso, she has become more caring of herself and more independent in washing and dressing, she is more positive nowadays (W5). Remembering the past means somehow learning again for the future (W95). She said that today she learned a new song (W21). He explained a song and how he told his grandchild about Olavi Virta (Finnish singer), and he learned how to listen to his music from You Tube which was available on his phone (W100).*

Core category four

The meaningful social contacts factor was the most often described in the notes, but related to the other factors as well. This category also encompasses well-being, so all categories thus appear to be interrelated. Music activated the older persons socially by singing, playing, dancing as well as talking together with the nurses or with the visiting children. The following excerpts provide further illustration: *His condition is on the same level but he is more active in social contacts with the others (W42); She smiled and was seemingly happy when the children visited here and they sang together (W87); She has memory problems but during the singing she was one of the participants in the "choir" and so a member of a group, and during those moments she looked happy. This had meaning for her. The next day she could not remember it (W 13); He enjoys talking with the other men and they talk about the old days and the war (W29); last week after the Virkistysverso she suddenly wanted to sing a song and play the piano but we didn't have one, so she just sang "Jo Karjalan kunnaila", it was a beautiful performance and we heard that she had been a music teacher. The next day she couldn't remember it. (W101).*

The results for the music group participants were significantly more positive compared to the control group. Those elderly people who took part in the musical activity were found to be socially more active, and their memory skills and mood were significantly better than those in

the control group. The relation between holistic musical activity and the well-being of older people seems to hinge on developing a new care culture, where the arts and aesthetic issues are actively present in the culture of senior citizens' homes and where older people's own activeness as well as interaction between generations is encouraged. In bringing this kind of musical interaction into the every day life of senior citizen's homes, staff combines care with music, which is a platform for self-expression, discussions and meaningful emotional moments. Music seems to function as an empathetic friend, and should be an essential part of the caring environment of every elderly person.

CONCLUSIONS

The current view of old people's care and treatment is based mainly on the traditional medical treatment model and culture. *Virkestysverso* music programme was a holistic activity usable also for children's and elderly people's common groups. It focused on multisensory artistic experiences integrating storytelling, movements and looking at art pictures with music with singing and listening. According to the results, it is obvious that this kind of broader, integrative artistic and musical activity increases older peoples' well-being and it is one possibility to maintain the idea of lifelong learning.

The *Virkestysverso* programme emphasis on the importance of human interaction in musical activities and subjective well-being of the individual. Holistic musical activity can be seen as a potentially important element in the lives of every senior citizen. Through it a better daily well-being can be made possible, through among other things, more meaningful social contacts and simply having more to discuss. Multisensory artistic activities also create richer and more stimulating aesthetic environment. However many problems and challenges must be dealt with in developing a new culture of care that include aesthetic experiences and promotes lifelong learning and social contacts between generations. New cooperation between the professionals in health care and cultural services is needed and must be developed. Sufficient nursing staff with a new attitude towards musical interaction are also required. It is essential to allocate time for free and relaxed multisensory musical and artistic periods instead of viewing music as displacing "more important" routine work. Musical moments are needed each day within the nursing regimen. Moreover such a positive attitude would be advantageous when focusing on resources and time management.

Music or other artistic activities should be provided to elderly people as enjoyment and refreshment or as a relaxation technique if they are willing to accept it. The selection of music and other arts should be based on their preferences. Information about the research results and the possibilities of music should be given to elderly people themselves and their relatives so that they can understand how effectively music works and they should be encouraged to focus their attention on listening to the music, singing and even dancing to maximize its benefits. Every human being need aesthetic experiences and an opportunity for self-expression in artistic ways, from childhood to old age and everyone needs time, peace and personal attention when ageing and becoming ill. The *Virkestysverso* music programme clearly demonstrate its significant benefits in this regard.

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