The Applicability and Effects of Body Percussion: 
Opinions of Music Students in Osijek, Croatia

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ABSTRACT

Body percussion has developed from music therapy and it is a low-requirement activity that can be practiced in various settings, as it is believed that it encourages physical, mental and social development. Based on the idea that body percussion can be a useful music activity outside music therapy sessions, we conducted a survey on the applicability and effects of body percussion among first and second year music students on Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek, Croatia.

KEYWORDS

Body percussion; music teaching; specialized music education; concentration; rhythm

INTRODUCTION

Body percussion is a music activity that uses one’s body and voice to produce various sounds. Although the thesis that human voice was the first music instrument is somewhat disputed in the last few years (e.g. De Souza, 2014), it is true that humans always had their body at disposal and we can assume that they used it to create music as well. Various handclapping and other body percussion games can be found in traditions all over the world and they have, as Romero-Naranjo and Romero-Naranjo point out “undergone clear evolution depending on the sociocultural context around them. This evolution, and the inherent changes involved, especially affect the literary content and rhythm of songs, the content of lyrics, and the psychomotor movements involved when performing them, due to change in urban music (2013: 207).

Although there are papers that show the therapeutic benefits of body percussion on persons with neurodegenerative diseases (Romero-Naranjo, 2014), learning disorders, diseases of the spinal cord, cranial neuropathies and trauma, and the treatment of
addictive behavior (Romero-Naranjo, Jauset-Berrocal, Romero-Naranjo & Liendo-Cardenas, 2014), most research is concerned with various applications of body percussion in education. It is already widely used in Finland (Ahokas, 2015) and in Germany (Dahmen, 1997). There is some evidence that it helps students with Special Educational Needs (Kivijärvi, Sutela & Ahokas, 2017) and dyslexia (Crespo Colomino & Romero-Naranjo, 2014). Some papers explore the possibilities of implementing body percussion in everyday teaching to enhance cognitive, visual-spatial and psychomotor developments of students (e.g. Carretero-Martinez, Romero-Naranjo, Pons-Terrés & Crespo Colomino, 2014; Popović, Popović & Bogut, 2018), or to contribute to Socioemotional Learning (Moral-Bofil, Romero-Naranjo, Albiar-Aliaga & Cid-Lamas, 2015). Although body percussion is primarily linked to development of rhythm, some methods of it are also used to develop specific music abilities connected to melody and harmony (Cozzutti, Blessano, Romero-Naranjo, 2014). Body percussion can also be used in teaching various non-music content (Popović, Popović & Bogut, 2017). Body percussion is interesting to the scholars outside these frames – e.g. in various neurological and also acoustic researches. A very comprehensive review of the current research of body percussion can be found in Romero-Naranjo’s paper titled Science & art of body percussion: a review (2013).

When reviewing the literature on the subject, we noticed that there is a lot of interest in finding the benefits of body percussion in general education, but not many in finding the benefits of including it in specialized music education. Thus, the aim of our research was to explore the potential of using body percussion in specialized music education.

**METHOD AND COURSE OF RESEARCH**

As research method, we used a survey. Our target group were first and second year undergraduate students of music theory and composition and guitar and tamburitza at The Department for New Music on Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek, Croatia. We chose this group of students because they are future music professionals, and a few of them are going to work in education, so it is interesting to examine their thoughts of body percussion as an activity in music education. On February 26, 2019, within regular classes, we conducted two 1.5-hour body percussion workshops where we presented the students with the theoretical settings of body percussion as a music therapy activity, and the possible applications in teaching, followed by a practical demonstration of the activity in which everybody participated. In the practical demonstration of the activity, we introduced the students to body percussion accompaniment to Ravel’s *Bolero*, a three part rhythm based on traditional African *fanga* (https://www.bodypercussionclassroom.com/fanga-rhythm.html) and another
three part rhythm that had a place for improvisation and an irregular beat (https://www.bodypercussionclassroom.com/another-three-part-rhythm.html). We also introduced students to an African traditional handclapping game Kokoleoko. After the workshop, we e-mailed the questionnaire about the workshop to the students via GoogleForms and collected the answers for the following week.

The questionnaire was composed of closed type questions, with an optional open comment section at the end. With the first question, we examined the familiarity of the students with the activity, and the rest were aiming at the students’ self-assessment regarding the effects the workshop had on their concentration and sense of rhythm and whether it actually felt like group music making. We also asked students for their opinion whether this kind of activity would be useful to include in their regular tuition, and whether regular practice of such activities would improve their musical abilities. In the last section of the questionnaire, we asked students for their opinion on the applicability of this activity outside music therapy, with music amateurs and professionals and in their specific future occupations (the translated version of the questionnaire is in the Appendix). In answering these questions, students used rating scales based on the Likert-type scale.

Out of 25 students that took part in the workshops, a total of 19 submitted their answers, which makes 76% of the target group, and we can consider the results representational.

**RESULTS**

Most of the students (42.1%) encountered the activity for the first time, a little over one third of the students already met this kind of activity during their schooling, and a few of them heard of it before, but didn’t know exactly what it was (15.8%), or knew about what it was but never participated in such activities before (10.5%) (Chart 1.).

![Chart 1. Student previous acquaintance with body percussion](image-url)
When self-assessing the influence on concentration, a vast majority of students strongly agreed or mostly agreed that body percussion had positively influenced their concentration (78.9%). A little over one tenth of the students had no opinion (10.5%), and only two students mostly (5.3%) and strongly (5.3%) disagreed (Chart 2.).

Chart 2. The influence of body percussion on concentration

When self-assessing the influence on the sense of rhythm, a vast majority of students strongly agreed or mostly agreed that body percussion positively influenced their sense of rhythm (73.6%). A little over one fifth had no opinion (15.8%), and only two students mostly disagreed (10.5%) (Chart 3.).

Chart 3. The influence of body percussion on the sense of rhythm

The majority of students strongly agreed that they experienced body percussion activity as a form of group music making (57.9%). Additional 26.3% of students mostly
agreed with that. Two students had no opinion (10.5%) and one student mostly disagreed (5.3%) (Chart 4.).

**Chart 4. Experience of body percussion as a form of group music making**

A total of 73.7% of students strongly (37.4%) and mostly (47.4%) agreed that it would be useful to include such activities in their regular tuition. There were 15.8% indifferent and only two students who mostly (5.3%) and strongly (5.3%) disagreed with that (Chart 5.).

**Chart 5. The applicability of body percussion in the education of musicians**

The majority of students (57.9%) thought that regular practice of such activities would improve their musical abilities. One fifth of the students were indecisive (21.1%) and one tenth strongly agreed (10.5%) and mostly disagreed (10.5%) with this statement (Chart 6.).
Chart 6. The influence of body percussion on general music abilities

Students are fairly indecisive when it comes to their opinion on whether body percussion should be used exclusively in music therapy for people with disabilities. Most of them (31.6%) neither agree nor disagree, a little over one quarter mostly disagree (26.3%), and additional 21.1.% strongly disagree with that statement, and one tenth of them strongly (10.5%) and mostly (10.5%) agree (Chart 7.).

Chart 7. The applicability of body percussion outside of music therapy

Most of the students are indecisive on whether is body percussion redundant for music professionals (47.4%), but one quarter of students mostly disagree (26.3%), and additional 21.1.% strongly disagree with that statement. One student (5.3%) strongly agrees with that statement (Chart 8.).
Body percussion is useful for people who are not musicians - for music professionals it is redundant
19 responses

Chart 8. The applicability of body percussion on music professionals

On the other hand, the majority of students strongly agree that body percussion is a useful musical activity both for amateurs and for professionals (68.4%). Another 15.8% of students mostly agree with this statement, while 10.5% neither agree nor disagree, and 5.3% mostly disagree (Chart 9.).

Body percussion is a useful musical activity both for amateurs and for professionals
19 responses

Chart 9. The applicability of body percussion on both music amateurs and professionals

Most of the students (36.8%) are indecisive on whether the activity of body percussion is applicable in their future occupation, but a total of 52.6% of students strongly (26.3%) and mostly (26.3%) agree that it is applicable, while only one student mostly disagrees (5.3%) and another one strongly disagrees (5.3%).
Chart 10. The applicability of body percussion in students’ future occupations

Students were not motivated to give long and elaborate comments on the activity they had just undergone; there were only four comments, which were very short, but all of them were positive:

1. “Excellent and fun. Returning to childhood.”
2. “Interesting”
3. “Nice!”
4. “It was interesting”

DISCUSSION

We expected to have a positive feedback on the activity, because of the assertiveness of the authors of the workshop. We tried to neutralize that effect by the subsequent sending of the survey; we did not make them fill out the questionnaire in front of us. Nevertheless, students had a more-or-less uniform positive opinion on body percussion.

When we look at the individual responses of the students, we can notice that the negative feedback that we presented above came from two students, who generally expressed negative feedback on every aspect of the activity. Interestingly, the one who expressed most negative feedback did not have previous experience with body percussion. This person strongly disagrees that body percussion positively influenced their concentration, that it would be useful to include it in regular tuition, and that it is applicable in their future occupation, and strongly agrees that it is useful for people who are not musicians while redundant for music professionals. Also, the person
mostly disagrees with the statements that regular practice of such activities would improve their musical abilities and that body percussion is useful exclusively as a form of music therapy and should only be applied to working with people with disabilities, but he is indecisive about other statements. The second mostly negative feedback came from a person who had already met this kind of activity during their schooling. This person mostly disagrees with most of the statements: that body percussion activity positively influenced their concentration, sense of rhythm, that they experienced the body percussion activity as a form of group music making, that it would be useful to include such activities in regular tuition, that regular practice of such activities would improve their musical abilities, that it is useful for people who are not musicians and redundant for music professionals, that it is an useful musical activity for both amateurs and professionals and that it is applicable in their future occupation. The only statement where this examinee was indecisive was the one that claimed that body percussion is useful exclusively as a form of music therapy and should be applied to working with people with disabilities.

We were somewhat surprised with the generally very positive opinion on the instant influence of body percussion on the students’ own abilities: their concentration, sense of rhythm and music abilities in general. That is because we assumed that these students, who have already been through many years of specialized music education, wouldn’t think that these activities (that were a general presentation of the activity, and not very specialized or elaborate) helped them improve. On the other hand, expectedly, they reported a feeling of group music making.

Following this positive feedback on their personal experience of the workshop, it was logical and expected that students generally agreed that it would be useful to include such activities in regular tuition. We think that they had no prevailing attitude about the place of body percussion outside music therapy, because they have very little touch points or knowledge about music therapy in general.

The prevailing indecisiveness when discussing on whether body percussion is useful for people who are not musicians and not for music professionals, could have roots in their own indecisiveness on whether they consider themselves music amateurs or professionals – they are on their way to become music professionals, but they are not quite there yet. This explanation can be backed up by the results from the following question – most students strongly agree that body percussion is a useful musical activity both for amateurs and for professionals which is contradiction a little bit with the answers to the previous question. However, if we interpret the indecisiveness of the first statement on not knowing who can exactly be considered a music professional, then the strong support of the second statement isn’t contradictory.
CONCLUSIONS

This research is a contribution on exploring the effects of body percussion in education, with special reference to its applicability in specialized music education. In it, we measured the opinion on the applicability and effects of body percussion on future music professionals: students of first and second year of music theory and composition and guitar and tamburitza at The Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek, Croatia. Although their future primary occupation isn’t general music pedagogy, most of the students find body percussion applicable in their future occupation. In addition, most of them feel that such activities help their music abilities and have a positive attitude towards introducing body percussion activities in their regular tuition.

These findings point to the need to modernize our approach to specialized music education in Croatia, and to pursue the idea of including body percussion courses in institutions of higher music education in Croatia.

LITERATURE CITED


APPENDIX