

The Article has been published with permission by The Times Educational Supplement and may not be reproduced in any way.

The Times Educational Supplement

October 19, 2007

By: Emma Seith

Music to his ears - and theirs

Classical music is being used to help primary pupils with language and communication problems. Emma Seith reports on the American import.

James is in Primary 1. A cheeky grin is a permanent fixture on his face, he is clearly bright and is keen to chat, but his speech is extremely difficult to understand.

Before James came to Mayfield Primary in Midlothian and started attending its specialist speech, language and communication unit, he had never listened to classical music - his dad likes "normal" music, he explained. But the music is good, he said; it makes him work. And, eventually, it should also improve his communication skills.

Staff at Mayfield's specialist unit have found a daily dose of carefully modified classical music helps children with language problems process information and communicate. Now the specially designed American programme they use - The **Listening Programme** - is being rolled out across Midlothian to help children with a wide range of needs.

TLP is described as a "music-based auditory stimulation method" or sound therapy. Users work their way through a series of CDs, listening to music by composers such as Mozart, Haydn and Vivaldi, which has been altered so that the sounds "exercise" the different functions of the auditory processing system.

Pupils at the unit have been using TLP for at least 15 minutes every day since 2006. As a result, staff claimed, there have been improvements in the children's schoolwork, their social skills and even their balance. In particular, they said, their concentration has improved significantly.

"One thing it improves very quickly is the children's levels of concentration," said Susie Smith, a teacher in the unit. "If they can concentrate better, they are going to get more out of every situation, be it in class, in conversation at home, or in speech and language therapy.

"I couldn't say TLP is a panacea. It's difficult to say if it's the intensive teaching in the unit, the therapy or the TLP that's responsible. But it is another tool in the kit and it complements everything else the children are doing here."

Alison Campbell is principal teacher of the unit. She agreed it was difficult to tell which intervention was working for the children, but is confident TLP makes a very significant

difference for at least some youngsters: "It seems that TLP opens up the pathways to make learning easier," she said.

Parents are also enthusiastic. Wendy Brooks's son Ethan has Asperger's Syndrome. He attended the unit for a year when he was six and was one of the first children to use The **Listening Programme** at Mayfield. "From very early on, the difference in Ethan's abilities and behaviour was apparent," she said.

"He began to focus and concentrate on things more, his mood was calmer. If he was to become upset or frustrated over things, he was able to calm down and be talked round much more easily and more quickly than before."

The 10 children currently in the unit all have different problems. Some struggle with articulation; they know what they want to say but cannot express themselves. "They don't have the grammar or sentence structure to be able to communicate properly," said Ms Smith. Others will struggle to find certain words. "It's like having the word on the tip of your tongue, but this happens to these children umpteen times a day."

These difficulties can make life hugely frustrating for the children and some will lash out. Thus, the moment of calm that TLP provides can be beneficial in itself, said Ms Campbell. "Sitting listening for 15 minutes is something they don't normally do," she explained. "For some children who are unsettled, it can be settling."

The makers of the programme claim this brand of therapy can help those with dyslexia, learning disabilities, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, and autism. Roz Hunter, education officer for Midlothian, agreed that it had the potential to help all kinds of children - from those with challenging behaviour to those with dyslexia. So the authority has paid for staff from 14 primaries to be trained and plans eventually to make the programme available in every primary in Midlothian.

"It's fantastic to have a really practical tool like this that schools can actually make use of," she said. "Often new approaches can be difficult to implement but this is both do-able and effective."

Ms Smith first heard of The **Listening Programme** when it was mentioned in passing during a CPD session: "The more I researched TLP, the more I realised this was what our children needed."

Now the unit has moved on to the latest TLP technique: bone conduction. New headsets, with a speaker in the headband which causes the body to vibrate to the music, were recently purchased for under £ 3,000.

According to TLP, bone conduction is "more intensive than air conduction alone". Ms Smith said: "This is the next level of technology, so the children can make even more progress."

Susie Smith can be contacted at: susie@soundlearningsystems.co.uk