

Laughter Percussion in Educational Practice: A Six-Week Participatory Arts Intervention at CAPS Kurrawang Primary School, Western Australia

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Abstract: Participatory arts interventions are increasingly recognised as effective tools for enhancing emotional wellbeing, student engagement, and collaborative learning within educational environments. Rhythm-based activities and laughter-based therapeutic approaches have each demonstrated positive psychological and social outcomes. However, limited research has explored the integration of rhythmic percussion and structured laughter within a single educational methodology.

This study examines the implementation of Laughter Percussion, a participatory arts practice developed by Professor Idi (Ras) Banamungu, within a primary school environment. The research was conducted at CAPS Kurrawang Primary School in Western Australia over a six-week period. Sessions were delivered once per week, with five classes participating each week in 45-minute Laughter Percussion workshops.

Using observational qualitative research methods, the study examined student engagement, social interaction, rhythmic participation, and emotional response during the sessions. Findings suggest that Laughter Percussion contributed to increased classroom engagement, improved collaborative behaviour, and enhanced emotional expression among students.

The results indicate that rhythm-based laughter practices may provide an innovative interdisciplinary approach for supporting emotional wellbeing and participatory learning within educational contexts.

Keywords: Laughter Percussion, Participatory Arts, Music Therapy, Educational Psychology, Creative Learning, Student Engagement, Community Arts.

1. INTRODUCTION

Educational environments increasingly recognise the importance of creative arts in supporting emotional wellbeing, collaborative learning, and student engagement. Traditional classroom instruction often emphasises cognitive learning, yet growing research suggests that creative participation and emotional expression play critical roles in effective education.

Music education has long been recognised for its ability to support cognitive development and emotional regulation. Rhythm-based activities encourage coordination, concentration, and collaborative participation. Similarly, laughter has been shown to stimulate positive emotional responses and reduce stress within social environments.

Despite these findings, few educational programs have explored the integration of rhythm and laughter as a structured pedagogical method.

Laughter Percussion, developed by Professor Idi (Ras) Banamungu, combines percussion rhythms with structured laughter exercises to create an interactive participatory arts experience.

This study explores the implementation of Laughter Percussion within a school environment and examines its impact on student engagement and classroom interaction.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Participatory Arts in Education

Participatory arts approaches emphasise active engagement rather than passive observation. Students are encouraged to contribute creatively to the learning process, which can increase motivation and collaboration.

MacDonald, Kreutz, and Mitchell (2012) highlight the role of music participation in supporting social interaction and emotional wellbeing. Similarly, Sawyer (2007) argues that collaborative creativity enhances learning outcomes by encouraging group interaction.

Rhythm and Neurological Engagement

Research in music therapy demonstrates that rhythmic stimulation activates brain regions responsible for coordination, timing, and emotional processing (Thaut & Hoemberg, 2014).

Rhythmic repetition supports concentration and behavioural regulation, particularly among younger learners.

Laughter and Psychological Wellbeing

Laughter has been widely studied for its physiological and emotional benefits. Provine (2000) describes laughter as a universal human behaviour that strengthens social bonds and reduces stress.

Dunbar (2012) suggests that shared laughter contributes to group cohesion and interpersonal connection.

The integration of rhythm and laughter therefore offers promising possibilities for participatory learning environments.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative observational research design to examine the effects of Laughter Percussion sessions within a primary school environment.

Research Location

The research was conducted at:

CAPS Kurrawang Primary School

Western Australia

Duration of Study

The study took place over six weeks.

Sessions were conducted once per week every Friday.

Session Structure

Each week included:

5 classes

45 minutes per class

Total sessions delivered:

30 Laughter Percussion classes

Facilitator

All sessions were facilitated by Professor Idi (Ras) Banamungu.

A classroom teacher, Katie Axcell, assisted in supporting students during the sessions.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through:

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1. observational notes
2. behavioural observations
3. student participation levels
4. group interaction patterns

Observations focused on:

student engagement

rhythm participation

cooperation between students

emotional expression

Because the study focused on participatory arts practice, qualitative observation provided valuable insights into student behaviour and interaction.

Program Structure

Each 45-minute session followed a structured format:

Warm-Up (5–10 minutes)

Students participated in body percussion exercises including clapping and tapping.

Rhythm Exercises (15 minutes)

Students learned simple rhythmic patterns using percussion instruments and body rhythm.

Laughter Activation (10 minutes)

Students practiced rhythmic laughter patterns such as:

Ha-Ha-Ha

Ho-Ho-Ho

These were combined with percussion rhythms.

Group Rhythm Circle (10 minutes)

Students performed collaborative rhythm patterns as a group.

Reflection and Closing (5 minutes)

Students shared feedback about their experience.

4. FINDINGS

Observations from the six-week program indicated several notable outcomes.

Increased Student Engagement

Students showed high levels of participation during rhythm exercises.

Even students who were initially quiet gradually became more confident in participating.

Improved Social Interaction

Group rhythm activities encouraged cooperation among students.

Students often supported peers in maintaining rhythmic patterns.

Emotional Expression

Laughter exercises created a positive emotional atmosphere.

Students frequently responded with spontaneous laughter and enthusiasm.

Focus and Attention

Rhythmic repetition appeared to help students maintain concentration during the sessions.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings from this study support previous research suggesting that rhythm-based activities can enhance engagement and emotional expression.

The integration of laughter within rhythmic participation appears to strengthen social interaction and create a supportive learning environment.

Laughter Percussion therefore represents a potential interdisciplinary approach combining elements of:

music education

participatory arts

emotional wellbeing practices

Within educational environments, such practices may contribute to positive classroom culture and collaborative learning.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations.

First, the research was conducted within a single school environment.

Second, the six-week duration limits the ability to examine long-term outcomes.

Future research may expand the methodology to include multiple schools and longer intervention periods.

Future Research

Future studies may explore the application of Laughter Percussion in:

1. disability support programs
2. mental health programs
3. aged care settings
4. community wellbeing initiatives
5. team-building programs

Such research could provide deeper insights into the therapeutic potential of rhythmic laughter practices.

6. CONCLUSION

The six-week Laughter Percussion program conducted at CAPS Kurrawang Primary School demonstrates the potential of rhythm-based participatory arts in educational environments.

By integrating percussion rhythms with structured laughter exercises, the methodology encourages emotional expression, collaborative creativity, and student engagement.

The findings suggest that Laughter Percussion may provide an innovative interdisciplinary approach for promoting wellbeing and participatory learning within schools and community programs.

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