

The Listening Program®

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Statement of the Problem

Many people have problems with cognitive, emotional and social skills. Advocates of this program also recommend it for children with autism spectrum disorder, dyslexia, learning disabilities and AD/HD.

Proposed Solution/ Intervention

Use of The Listening Program® is claimed to result in a wide range of effects, including improvements in reading, communication, learning, memory, balance, co-ordination, sensory processing, creativity and intuition. The intervention is implemented by having people listen to modified classical music recorded on a CD or iPod through headphones for 15 minutes once or twice a day for 5 days per week. The program is provided at different levels, each level purportedly having different effects.

The theoretical rationale – how does it work?

It is claimed that the effects are achieved through the exercise that the music provides to the brain, and specifically to the auditory processing system. It is also claimed to regulate the middle ear muscles. Proponents claim that remediation of distorted auditory perception caused by illness, injury, or developmental disability brings about the wide range of improvements. The theoretical rationale is based on theories that particular sound frequencies affect particular brain functions, and that listening to sounds delivered to the ear by both air and bone conduction is beneficial.

What does the research say? What is the evidence for its efficacy?

The evidence base for the efficacy of this program is very slight and is composed largely of unpublished pilot studies purporting to offer evidence of efficacy. There is only one study published in a refereed journal. The researchers claimed an improvement in language and functional behaviour and reduced sensory sensitivity for *one* 5-year-old boy with pervasive developmental disorder. Improvements due to concurrent speech therapy and school attendance could not be excluded. There are no research studies published in refereed journals documenting effects on older children and adults, or on academic skills such as reading.

Conclusions

As for other interventions for children based on listening to music, there is little evidence to support the claims made. Similar interventions have been shown to be ineffective (the Mozart effect) or the research does not meet scientific standards that would allow for claims of effectiveness (auditory integration therapies). Such programs should be able to offer empirical research evidence for efficacy considerably in excess of a single case study.

Alternative Options

Instructional programs based on accepted scientific research and designed specifically to address a problematic issue are far more likely to be effective than generic remedies.

The MUSEC verdict
Not recommended

Key references may be found at:
http://www.musec.mq.edu.au/co_brief.aspx

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