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## **Enhancing Creativity through Musical Drama for Children with Special Needs (Down Syndrome) in Education of Disabled Children**

Children with special needs, especially those with disability in mental, physical or social/emotional interactions, are marginalized. Many people still view them as being troublesome, having learning difficulties, unproductive and burdensome to society. The objectives of the research are; to identify whether musical drama can control the coordination of mental function of children; to identify whether musical drama can improve communication ability and expression of children; to discern whether musical drama can help children work with people around them; to find out if musical dramas can develop a child's emotional and physical health; to find out if musical drama can improve children's creativity. The study employed a qualitative research approach. Data were collected through observation of the selected key informants who were teachers and principals as well as parents and children. The data obtained was then processed (reduced), the conclusion was drawn/verified through presentation of data (data display). Furthermore, the model obtained was implemented for musical performance, where the benefits of the show are: musical drama can improve language skills; musical dramas capable of developing memory and storage of information; develop communication skills and express themselves; helping children work together; assisting emotional and physical health; enhancing creativity.

**Keywords:** musical and theatrical classes, teaching children with Down syndrome, “The Sleeping Princess,” music education and performance.

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**ДЖУНИТА БАТУБАРА, СУМАТИ МАНИАМ**

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## **Развитие творческого потенциала детей с ограниченными возможностями (синдромом Дауна) в процессе музыкально-драматических занятий**

Дети с ограниченными возможностями, особенно инвалиды с умственными, физическими или социально-эмоциональными отклонениями, становятся маргиналами.



Многие люди по-прежнему считают их проблемными, трудными в обучении, непродуктивными и обременительными для общества. Исследование ставит перед собой цели: определить, может ли музыкальная драма воздействовать на умственные функции детей; установить, способна ли музыкальная драма улучшить коммуникации, склонность к самовыражению; выяснить, могут ли музыкальные драмы помочь детям в общении с окружающими; узнать, сумеют ли музыкальные драмы поддерживать эмоциональное и физическое здоровье детей, улучшить их творческий потенциал. Исследование опирается на перспективный подход. Были собраны данные наблюдений ключевых информантов, среди которых – учителя и директора школ, родители и дети. Эти данные обрабатывались, выводы проверялись. Кроме того, полученная модель апробировалась в ходе музыкального исполнения, при этом театральная постановка показала, что музыкальная драма способна: улучшить языковые навыки; развивать память и степень усвоения информации, навыки общения и самовыражения; помочь детям в общении, укреплении эмоционального и физического здоровья, творческого потенциала.

**Ключевые слова:** музыкально-театральные занятия, обучение детей с синдромом Дауна, «Спящая красавица», музыкальное образование и исполнительство.

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## Introduction

According to the results of the National Socioeconomic Survey (Susenas) in 2012, Indonesia's population with disabilities is 2.45 % [5, p. 14]. As the current population of the country has been recorded at 220 million, it follows that the number of people with disabilities reaches 7.8 million people. The North Sumatera province is one of the provinces where people with disabilities can be counted as 1.71 % of the population. The number of children with special needs in Indonesia is continuing to increase from year to year. PBB estimates that at least 10 percent of school-age children have special needs. In Indonesia, the number of school-age children, namely those who are 5–14 years old, amount to 42.8 million people. If follow the estimate is that there are an estimated 4.2 million Indonesian children with special needs [4].

People with disabilities are those who are impaired in their visually, audibly, or physically impaired, or with learning, mental functional, or chronic disabilities. For most families, the presence of family members with special needs often turns out to be calamitous and burdensome. Children with special needs are often considered incapable and unproductive in their work. This view is less likely to be accepted in the life of the community. Research proves otherwise, whereby many findings in the field of science and artwork are produced by people with special needs. Children with disabilities are in dire need of support from their families and communities, so that they could live better. Children with special needs have special characteristics which differentiate them from children in general, due to their limitations and/or disabilities (whether physical, mental, social or emotional), and at times they may

also possess some advantages or privileges. Communities are more familiar with the terms “children with disabilities” and “gifted children.” This study focuses on children with physical limitations, mental or social disorders.

According to Montgomery (2003) and Mazur (2004), for children who experience specific emotional and intellectual disorders it is necessary to have a structured and sequential type of education. One example of the educational stage in question is learning from motion, icons, and symbols. “Be sure to use developmentally appropriate material, then develop a step by step plan. This may mean teaching sequentially, so the students first learn movement, then in Icon and last symbol” [9, p. 8]. In this research the aforementioned opinion is realized as a method of training children of SLB C1 with the aim that they could remember and perform every movement, and that every sentence they utter could be pronounced clearly. Other differing opinions have been expressed by Kirk (1970) and Efendi (2006), who provide descriptions of children in need of special services, namely: “...who deviates from the average a modification of school practices, or special educational services in order to develop to his maximum capacity...” [6, p. 188]. Although they have disorders associated with the workings of the nervous system in the brain, nonetheless, the evidence collected by music therapists show that they are still able to detect the music they study in school. De l’Etoile explains: “The findings of such research demonstrate how the central nervous system is involved in perceiving and understanding music, creating or producing music, as well as responding to music stimuli. The ability to perceive music and to engage in musical experiences is often still intact even when the central nervous system is damaged by injury or disease” [3, p. 80].

Specific information about children with the Down syndrome who study music is very limited. Much of the music therapy literature discusses Down syndrome in connection with other developmental defects (Boxill, 1985; Courtnage, Di Giacomo & Schmidt, 2000; Duffy & Fuller, 2000; Grant, 1989; Daudt, 2002 [2]). Although people with the Down syndrome share some of the symptoms of autism and other developmental defects, it also presents itself as unique in several other ways. For example, there are differences in emotional development, influence, and social behavior, as well as physical differences (Hodapp & Fidler, 1999; Lister, Leach & O’Neill, 1998; Vietze, 1985; Daudt, 2002 [2]). Some experts claim, that music has very broad health-promoting effects, including aspects of mental, physical, emotional and social therapy. Sheppard [11] suggests ten musical health benefits: (1) music can change the shape of the brain; (2) it can improve language skills; (3) it can develop mental function; (4) it can stimulate movement and develop physical coordination control capabilities; (5) it can develop memory and expand the information storage; (6) it can help understand mathematics and science; (7) it can develop communication skills and help children express themselves better; (8) it can help children work together; (9) it can assist emotional and physical health; (10) it can enhance creativity.

According to Choksy (1986) in Melyana [10] when the body moves, the sensation of motion is converted into feelings sent through the nervous system to the brain. The brain turns this information into knowledge. Then the brain, once again, sends the information to the body through the nervous system. This command involves such mental activities as attention, concentration, memory, strong



desire and motivation. The aforementioned explanation states that there exists a relationship between listening, mental, emotional and motional activity, when a person is listening and enjoying music, and all these are arranged in the brain. This is also concurred by Sheppard, who states that “music is not only processed by a single part of the brain” [11, p. 390]. Many researchers have found that music is processed by a large nerve network, where different regions of the brain work together to interpret such elements as melody, harmony and rhythm. Abriani [1] has researched the implications of singing activities on improving language skills for students with light and moderate disabilities. This author has undertaken a classroom action to improve the students' moderate *tunagrahita* speaking skills, whereby the student had difficulty in pronunciation (articulation) and lacked understanding of the meaning of a word. Melyana [10] has conducted research on the learning process of music for children with the Down syndrome in the “Dian Indonesia Music Park” (Jakarta). It is possible that through the activity of listening to music, moving to music and playing musical instruments, some children have developed themselves to a certain degree. *Given these two examples, the researcher applied the theory of Sheppard to children with the Down syndrome from YPAC with an IQ level of 42–66. The research has been carried out through the application of Sheppard's method by infusing creativity in musical learning for children with the Down syndrome in the aforementioned school.*

It often happens that children with special needs, especially those with disabilities in their mental, physical or social/emotional interactions, find themselves marginalized. Many people still view them

as being troublesome, possessed of learning difficulties, unproductive and incriminating to society. This study was conducted on 12 children with the Down syndrome (with IQ's between 42–62) at the YPAC (Organization for Children with Disabilities–Medan-North Sumatra-Indonesia Foundation). This study intends to investigate and demonstrate, how music and drama, can develop the ability to control the coordination of mental functions and assist children to work together; it also aims to look at how musical plays may assist in maintaining the child's emotional and physical health and improve his or her creativity.

A qualitative research method was used to collect data. Data was collected by listening to and creating a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with 8 teachers and 2 principals, with the aim of getting accurate information about children trained in musical drama, then the Focus Group Discussion was also carried out on 2 administrative staff members with the aim of learning more about the administration and the facilities available at the YPAC School.

Data obtained from each public audience is then processed, verified, presented. The cases when data that has not been successfully collected were the result of the inability to carry out a Focus Group Discussion with the parents of the 12 children involved in musical drama, due to a lack of parental awareness to develop their children's abilities, and also due to the erroneous position that it is somehow shameful to involve children whose IQ is below the normal average (the Down syndrome) participate in such actions. Furthermore, the model obtained was implemented for musical performances, whereby a musical drama was tested and performed in schools with the title of “Putri Tidur” (“The Sleeping Princess”). The

health benefits of the musical drama result in greater abilities to improve language skills; musical dramas are capable of developing memory and information storage, as well as communication skills, so that children could express themselves better and work together; they help maintain emotional and physical health and enhance artistic creativity.

Children with disabilities still have potentials that can be developed, so this kind of artistic activities can be beneficial to their lives, as well as the lives of others. History has shown that there is a certain quantity of names of people with special needs who have contributed to the development of science and art. In the field of music, world class vocalist Andrea Bocelli and composer Hitoshi Oe have been able to win the hearts of their admirers all around the world despite their physical limitations. A good understanding of the characteristics of children with special needs and the role of music in the lives of human beings may present one solution for improving the quality of life for children with special needs.

This research was done with the idea of infusing creativity in the study of musical drama for children with the Down syndrome at the YPAC (Foundation for Disabled Children Development) in Medan. The YPAC is a non-profit foundation which works with special children in Medan and its surrounding areas. The YPAC in Medan was founded in 1964 by prof. Dr. H. R. Soeroso, Dr. B. Sitepu Pandebes, Col. Dr. Ibrahim Irsan, Dr. R. Soetjipto Gondo Amidjojo, and Dr. G. P. Pane (According to the brochure of the YPAC [13]). At that time the forerunner of the development of the YPAC in Medan opened physiotherapy service to children with disabilities in the Medan area and in 1971 received assistance in the form of a

donation of land area of 4,574 m. at No. 2 Adinegoro, Medan from the city's mayor Dr. Syurkani. The Medan Branch of the YPAC confirmed its establishment on February 5, 1972 through the decree of the Board of Foundation No. 19 / SK / PH / YPAC / 85. In accordance with Law Decree No. 16 of 2003 regarding the foundation, the Medan Branch of the YPAC changed its status to the YPAC in Medan based on the notarial deed of Henry Tjong, SH No. 31 dated February 18, 2004 (Brochure YPAC [Ibid.]). The YPAC slogan is "Disability Does Not Determine the Capabilities of Anyone." The YPAC Medan trainers are provided with comprehensive services in the institution, namely, the Child Rehabilitation Center (PRA) (according to the YPAC Brochure [Ibid.]).



Figure 1. Image of the YPAC Building Medan 2015

The categories of children in YPAC are SLB-C, namely, *Tunagrahita* (divided in two, namely, C and C1) and SLB-D, or *Tuna Daksa*. The children of SLB-C are divided according to ability, based on the levels of school children in general, such as kindergarten (TK) TK LB, LB Primary School (SD LB), LB Junior High School (SMP LB), High School LB (SMA LB). The same holds true for the SLB-D (According to the Brochure of the YPAC

[Ibid.]). According to Abdurrakhman and Sudjadi (1996: 20) in Istiqomah (2017), the *Tunagrahita* is a state of mental retardation. Mental retardation is a condition existing in children before the age of 18, characterized by weak intelligence (usually the IQ scores of such children are below 70) and difficulties in adapting to everyday life. The main characteristic of mental retardation is expressed by a weak intellectual function. In addition to low intelligence, children ailing with mental retardation also face difficulty to adjust and develop. Before a formal test is done to assess intelligence, a person is considered mentally retarded when he is unable to master a skill appropriate for his age and has difficulties in taking care of himself.

Based on the results of the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with some of the teachers at the YPAC, it has been determined that *Tunagrahita* is divided into two parts, namely, SLB-C and SLB C1. SLB C comprises children who have the abilities of being educated, or children with mild mental retardation (IQ 70–50), SLB-C1 comprises children who are capable of being trained, or, to be precise, children with moderate mental retardation, who can be trained to take care of themselves, defend themselves, eat, drink, and bathe. At a later stage, they can also be trained to work to earn their own living (IQ below 50).

Based on the conducted FGD, it can be seen that lessons in artistic subjects are always intertwined with extracurricular activities. Usually these activities are tailored to the abilities and talents of children who learn. But in recent years, lessons in artistic subjects have been replaced by scout activity due to lack of teachers to teach the artistic disciplines. The teachers who work at the YPAC are qualified in the natural sciences and psychology. Thereby, lessons in artistic disciplines have always

been taught with aid from other sources in accordance with the existing artistic equipment in the YPAC. Due to this, the researchers have confronted with obstacles to perform musical drama due to the lack of facilities supporting the implementation of exercises in musical drama. The researchers conducted a selected number of children of the SLB-C and the SLB C1 groups, explaining that it would make it easier for the system of musical drama exercises where a number of classroom teachers from the Children with Special Needs (ABK) were selected to participate in the musical drama training.

Through the data provided by the researchers to conduct the musical drama training for SLB-C and SLB-C1 students, eleven (11) children were identified to be involved in the musical drama training, who are: Erica Darianty / female (8), Ali Jupri / male (12), Ahmad Chairal / male (13), Wan Imam Sakir / male (19), Michael / male (21), Marisa / female (20), Rani Agustina / female (15), Feni Indah / female (22), Elvita Rizkyla / female (30), Fitriani Lubis / female (20) and Wahyu Hidayat / male (16). The mental retardation (IQ) of the eleven children is rated between 45–58. Below is a picture of the children involved in musical drama training:



Figure 2. Teachers, children and researchers with a few percussion instruments and pianos

Artistic activities are often conducted by teachers at the YPAC especially for children of the SLB-C1 level, but teaching musical activities, such as introduction to rhythm with the use of percussion instruments, including the triangle, the pianika, the tambourine and the maracas, with “Putri Tidur” script material and “Bangun Tidur” song, have never been done at the YPAC, Medan. As has been previously explained, the artistic disciplines are always taught as extracurricular activities, and if there is singing to be learnt in the classroom, it is part of the teacher’s effort to carry out teaching activities and ensure that the learning atmosphere is not tedious.

### Methodology

This work applies qualitative research, with a view to investigate and understand the characteristics of phenomena of alternative leadership which occur in Medan, and the reasons why, and how alternative leadership works. The researchers demonstrate themselves as instruments, as well as data gatherers. The instruments used are interview guides, stationery, research logbooks, tape recorders, and digital cameras, which serve as supporting the tasks of a researcher.

The indispensable data used in this research are provided by the social situations related to alternative leadership in Medan City, by means of understanding three elements of it, which are: the place, the actors, and the activities, which interact synergistically.

This data has been collected by listening and observing information in depth through public informal hearings involving key informants starting from the urban village, sub-district and city level. This means that the first round of public hearings invites community leaders

from the village level. The second round of public hearings invites community leaders from the sub-district level. And the third round invites Medan city level community leaders. Although this is the case, it has not closed down the possibility of researchers setting other key informants to gather completer data, better known as *snowball sampling* [12]. Furthermore, the credibility of data obtained by the method of triangulation may be verified by checking the data to the same source with different techniques. This includes the data obtained by interviews and then checked by means of observation.

The data obtained from each public hearing is subsequently collected. First, it is (a) processed (reduced) by summarizing, choosing the essentials, focusing on the things that matter and searching for themes and patterns. Thereby, the reduced data would give a clearer picture and make it easier for researchers to carry out further data collection and to seek it out when necessary (b). The Conclusory Drawing/Verification is meant to draw initial conclusions and still to be transient, and this would change, if no strong evidence is found to support the next stage of data collection (c). The presentation of the data provides brief descriptions of charts, relationships between categories, flowcharts, etc. However, if the conclusions raised in the early stages are supported by valid and consistent evidence, when researchers return to the field to collect data, the conclusion put forward may be seen as credible. Miles and Huberman (in Sugiyono [12]) assert that most frequently used in the presentation of data in qualitative research is data involving narrative text. Whenever it is possible, the presentation of data may also be done by means of graphs, matrices, networks, and charts. Then the results of



the qualitative data processing above are validated through conducting Focus Group Discussion (FGD) by inviting various elements of society, such as political figures, religious leaders, universities, government officials, and representatives of other mass organizations. Thereby, the conclusion of qualitative research may be able to answer the formulation of the problem formulated from the beginning.

## Results and Discussions

Based on observation, the average number of children who participated in the musical drama training had a weak concentration level, which only lasted for about 15 to 20 minutes. As such, the researchers' training for musical drama was limited to 30 minutes, having been conducted 3 times a week. Under the circumstances, the researchers and some of the teachers involved in the musical drama training have always been present in the hall to assist students in the training process. Observations have been done regarding the interactions of the students in classes with their teachers, to see their ability to gauge the characters they will be acting in the musical drama.

Students are trained to play pianika instruments, with the aid of which they are trained to recognize and hear melodies of *do*, *re* and *mi*. Researchers have conducted the training of three students namely, Elvita Rizkyla, Erica and Nuriayanti. Of the three students who were able to learn the material, Erica was the most accomplished, while Elvita was less able to remember and do it. Nuriayanti attended the training process for the performance only once; this student cannot get herself involved, since her parent does not allow her to participate in the performance. Observe the figure with photograph below.

Trained to play melody of 3 melodies (do, re, mi)



Figure 3. Three students trained to play Pianika instrument

The benefit of the practice of working with this pianika that the children can memorize three notes, *do*, *re*, and *mi* and sing them to the words “*hom* with the tone *do*, *pim* with tone *re*, *pa* with tone *mi*.” Erica demonstrates a very good interest, and it can be noticed from the very first instance that Erica is less able to recite and remember *do*, *re* and *mi* by themselves, or with the words “*hom-pim-pa*.” After 12 days of practice, Erica was able to remember and sing them. It can be deduced that Erica has actually made use of the pianika to improve her communication abilities and express herself. As such, the second objective

Trained to do rhythm with tambourine and 3 steps



Figure 4. Children trained to play Rhythm on a Tambourine with 3 steps

has been achieved through the efforts of Erica. Unfortunately, Nuriayanti and Elvita Rizkyla were unable to achieve the expected level although, they were able to attain some form of learning.

Figure 4 presents a representation of how the students were trained to use the tambourine to understand rhythm. In this form of activity, the students play the tambourine, while walking three steps, which is part of the musical drama. In this experiment it can be noted that Rani has been successful at following the rhythm and playing the tambourine while walking (3 steps). As for Feni, she was able to play the tambourine, but her rhythm and stride were not coordinated. Marisa, was unable to perform at all without any guidance. As such, it became evident that Marisa needed to be fully guided by a teacher. This activity is able to demonstrate that musical drama can control the coordination of children’s mental function.

the krincingan while moving three steps forth. Ali Jupri and Tarmisi were unable to perform, due to their obesity and lack of concentration. They could not remember the steps, and needed to be fully guided by the teacher.

Trained to pronounce the word hom pim pa



Figure 6. Trained to Pronounce the Word “Hom Pim Pa”

Figure 6 shows the training done to teach the children to pronounce *hom*, *pim* and *pa*, which were the words used in the musical drama to awaken the princess. This exercise was conducted to find out whether musical dramas could develop a child’s emotional and physical health. Fitriani, Erica and Rani were successful in performing this exercise well. Tarmisi needed to be fully guided by the teacher, as he found it difficult to focus, and his physical attribute slowed down his progress especially during movements. Tarmisi had to be awakened by the teacher constantly and motivated to participate in this exercise.

Trained to do Rhythm with krincingan and 3 steps



Figure 5. Trained to do Rhythm with *Krincingan* and 3 Steps

The figure above (Figure 5) shows how the children were trained to play the *Krincingan* with rhythm while walking. This exercise was conducted to gauge the children’s emotional and physical health. In can be concluded that Fitriani, who has been selected to play the character of the fairy godmother, was able to play

The Figure 7 shows the steps taken by the researcher and the teachers to teach the children involved in the drama “Putri Tidur” to walk three steps. The children were able to walk as they had been instructed. They all worked together successfully. It can be noted that the teachers needed a tremendous



Figure 7. Teaching 3 Steps

amount of patience, as well as the force to instill discipline, in order to ensure that the children followed orders. This exercise helped discern the objective that musical drama can help children work with people around them and also improve their creativity.

### Conclusion

The conclusion in this qualitative study is that a new discovery has been made of something, which has previously been unknown. Such a discovery can be manifested by a concise description of an object, knowledge of which was previously very vague. It was demonstrated how the children were unable to recall the lessons they had learnt, and how time was needed for repetitions for them to memorize them by means of singing and bodily movements. The students were bored and sleepy. They needed constant motivation to enable them to concentrate. As such, activities such as self-expressing drawing, playing musical instruments in an ensemble and singing were encouraged. The students worked together to move their bodies, to control their emotions and to showcase symbols and icons in the musical drama, “Putri Tidur” The students with IQ levels of 42–

58 were able to act out the first segment, whereas the students with IQ levels of 66 were unable to follow through, due to their lack of motivation or encouragement from their parents in assuring them that they would pull through. Observe the figure below.



Figure 8. The pupils of C1 performing in the musical drama “Putri Tidur”

Through rhyming patterns taught with repetitions of the words *hom-pim-pa*, as well as playing three notes, the students have been able to remember to perform the necessary actions with the use of the musical instruments of their choice. At the end, the researchers have concluded that by means of stimulation and persistent support and encouragement, children with disabilities of the C1 category are able to perform in musical dramas, although initially they are believed to be unable to do so. The children’s talents are heartening, inasmuch that they were given roles suited for their personality. For example, Michael, who loves sweeping, was given the role of a jungle keeper. Much patience is needed, along with a comprehensive teaching technique, to train these children, which in its turn will assist them in articulating and enhancing their body movement. They learn to work together and take turns. The outmost achievement of this study,

is teaching the children to control their emotions and respond meaningfully in a constricted time period of just 15 minutes of attention span.

As such, the following objectives:

1) to identify, whether musical drama can control the coordination of mental function of children;

2) to identify, whether musical drama can improve children's communication ability and self-expression;

3) to discern, whether musical drama can help children work with people around them;

4) to discover, whether musical dramas can develop children's emotional and physical health;

5) to find out whether musical drama can improve children's creativity,

– have been achieved during the training and during the presentation of the musical drama "Putri Tidur."

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