

MUSIC FOR THE HANDICAPPED

There was a time when mentally and physically handicapped children were kept in the family 'closet' as discreet sources of embarrassment. They did little more than grow up to be mentally and physically handicapped adults.

Today, thanks to Public Law 94-142 and some concerned music educators like Dr. Arthur Harvey, associate professor of music, exceptional children are singing some new songs.

Literally.

Harvey, who was recently selected as the leader for one of five teams in the United States that will develop model in-service programs for music educators working with handicapped learners, is deeply involved in several areas where music is used with handicapped persons.

"Music, because it is so powerful, can cause major changes in behavior," Harvey said, "and it provides an alternative method of communicating, a non-verbal method. This is crucial because many handicapped can't verbalize their thoughts or feelings."

Music has always had a powerful physical and psychological effect on people. It increases metabolism, increases or decreases muscular energy, affects the pulse and blood pressure, among other bodily functions, according to Harvey.

Until recently, this effect had not been interpreted in cognitive terms. However, because of greater study of the brain and its dual role in the learning process, this situation is changing.

Recent studies indicate that the two hemispheres of the brain control two different types of processing of stimuli. "We've known that learning with music was different than without music for exceptional children, but until recently we hadn't had a rationale for it," Harvey said.

By Ron G. Wolfe

Research indicates that the left hemisphere of the brain processes principally verbal information by a stimulus/response model where learning is sequential, logical and associational as described by the behaviorists.

Researchers point out that most conventional education has been devoted to the skills controlled by the left hemisphere of the brain.

However, the right hemisphere of the brain has been found to process principally non-verbal stimuli in their totality; it is responsible for our musical perceptions, artistic endeavors, body image and similar characteristics. Its mode of functioning is that described by the Gestalt psychologists.

In essence, the left hemisphere of the brain tends to be analytical; the right hemisphere more artistic and perceptual. "The dichotomy of the human brain that God made amazes me," Harvey said.

Harvey relates and applies this research to present-day educational problems. "Many exceptional children don't score well on traditional tests because they're directed to left brain kind of skills, the type schools principally emphasize," he said, "the handicapped often respond more readily to right brain kinds of activities like pictures and music."

"This hemispheric brain research may help us to understand why students can do some things through music that they cannot do otherwise in school. I have taught handicapped children to sing the alphabet or things they couldn't learn verbally," he explained.

"It has been found that even children with speech or language disabilities, some of whom cannot speak even a single sentence, may sing the line of a familiar song."

And, there may be a transfer of learning styles from one brain hemisphere to the other. This, in essence, explains the great value of music and the arts in general in developing the cognitive skills of the handicapped.

With the research growing, the commitment to special students through the arts has gained some added breadth and intensity.

Harvey has been presenting the model MENC in-service program on individualized education and music at various music workshops throughout the country. The model program consists primarily of a three-hour workshop presentation of multi-media, lecture and music-for-handicapped-learners-simulation experiences.

Although he is involved in the MENC/IEP workshops, Harvey has conducted a variety of other workshops dealing with music for the special learner throughout the country. One workshop this past March was conducted for the University of Wisconsin by telephone while the Harveys were vacationing in Florida. From there, he talked directly to stations in the Wisconsin Educational Telephone Network (ETN) throughout the state for two hours. "In response to lecturing, those registered for the course asked questions directly to me," he said, "it was a really unique kind of situation for me."

Harvey has conducted workshops throughout the country, as well as extensively throughout the state of Kentucky.

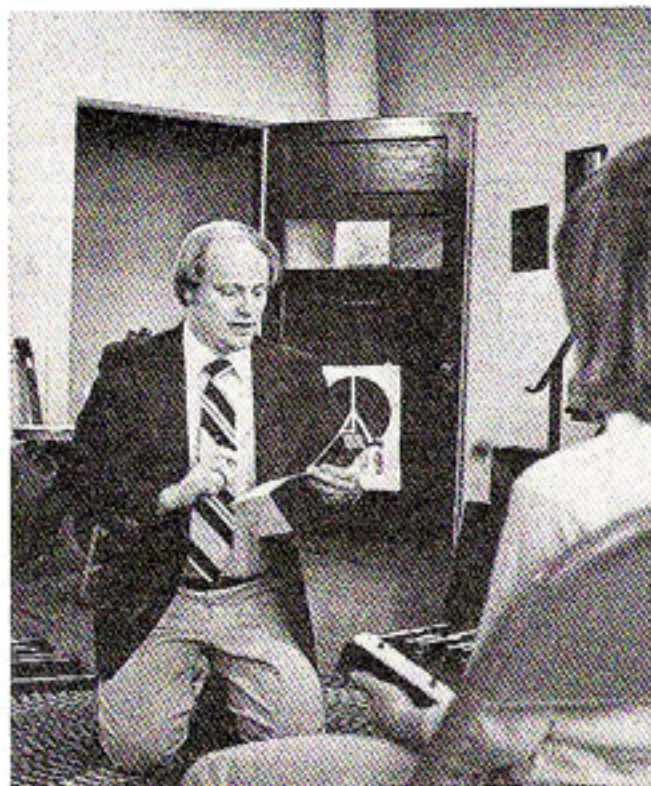
EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY ALUMNUS

Such a commitment from music educators to handicapped learners is relatively new, but will continue to mushroom because of the legislation which requires school systems to provide an appropriate public education for handicapped students.

"It was during the early 60's that Wichita State University offered the first degree program in America for music in special education," Harvey said, "and although we don't offer a program here, we do offer two courses related to the subject. In fact we were among the first six institutions in America to have courses in music in special education."

In addition to teaching music to regular students, Harvey has been working with exceptional students for some 20 years, including gifted as well as the handicapped.

Harvey himself, a gifted student who finished high



Dr. Arthur Harvey

school at 15 and is the father of gifted children, has studied and worked with gifted students during his 20-year teaching career.

He sees comparable challenges with the handicapped that he has encountered with gifted children. "With the gifted, you have to encourage self-initiated support learning. With the handicapped, teaching is much more carefully structured," he said.

In addition to his work with the handicapped and gifted, Harvey has also taken his music education program to extended care geriatric patients in Berea. "Music as therapy with the aging is another interest of mine," he says. Again he has found that music is the key to awakening the spirit.

In his work this year at Berea Hospital, Harvey has found that the aged respond to his work.

"They had one lady who wasn't interested in

anything," he smiled, "but after I started going over there, she would ask the nurses every day, 'Is Dr. Harvey coming today?' It was the one thing in life that motivated her."

In addition, Harvey is Minister of Music at the First United Methodist Church in Richmond where he is organist and directs four choirs, including one for children from 4-8 years of age. "Those little cherubs really rejuvenate me," he said.

"I have to keep growing myself," he continued, "that's why I keep involved with church choirs and geriatric patients in addition to the handicapped. Plus, what I learn working with one group helps me understand and deal with the others."

As therapy, Harvey is convinced that music is a key which unlocks doors that would otherwise remain closed to the handicapped. "Music helps patients relinquish usual controls and enter more fully into the inner world and outer world of experiences," he says, "and music is the most functional of the arts for a non-musician to use because of pre-recorded music like records and cassettes."

But, although he uses music principally he makes it plain that he uses other art forms in his teaching because "some kids don't find sound as interesting as movement. Others like visual stimuli."

Harvey is the only one in the music department deeply involved in music education for the handicapped, but his expertise is being combined with faculty in other departments. With Dr. Dorothy Harkins in physical education and Dr. Karen Greenough in special education, he is working on future projects and proposals to continue the progress that has been made.

Although he maintains a hectic schedule, Harvey has no regrets about his work, much of which he does without pay. "I get a great deal of meaning and pleasure out of this, along with everything else I do here," he said.

The Arthur Harvey story has been told slowly through skillful workshops that have opened valuable worlds for those who work with the handicapped. "I don't advertise; the requests just come in," he said. "I already have six requests for the fall."

In addition to his interest and promotion of Individualized Education Programs and other workshops, Harvey serves as director of Project Discovery, a Kentucky National Committee on Arts for the Handicapped (NCAH) special project, and is state chairman for Kentucky Arts for the Handicapped.

His is a world where music has taken on an added dimension which educators haven't always recognized. "There is a great deal more to be done," he says.

Public Law 94-142 was passed to provide a free appropriate public education for all handicapped children. However, without the compassion and concern of the Arthur Harveys, it would remain a law without force or results.

The handicapped are, indeed, coming out of the closet.

Thanks to this peculiar combination of law and love, they're now free in more ways than one. □□□