



A Blend of Culture, Music and Physical Endurance: A Narrative Review of the 24 Seasons Drums in Promoting Physical Literacy

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Abstract

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Physical literacy can be defined as having an individual's mind and body in a state of harmony. Previous studies introduced circus arts and actor training as a way to encourage physical literacy. The present paper aimed to introduce new ways and possibilities in endorsing the promotion of physical literacy, through the extensive use of 24 Season Drums. The study would further explore how 24 Season Drums, a musical performance originated from Malaysia, can enhance one's physical embodiment development. The manuscript also covers the method of training carried out in Universities Sains Malaysia Kubang Kerian (Health Campus). The literature search was performed using databases from PubMed and Google Scholar search engine using specific keywords, ranging from January 2000 to June 2021. We hope that this paper could pave ways for more future studies on the effects of 24 Season Drums training in terms of an individual's physical and musical literacy.

Introduction

Dressed in a dark blue Chinese traditional kung-fu costume with a striking gold colored headscarf, a troupe of 24 Season drummers, held a pair of wooden sticks and flexed their muscles on stage, striking at the drums with vigour and enthusiasm. The 24 Season Drums or better known as Er Shi Si Jie Ling Gu in Mandarin Romanization (二十四节令鼓), is a musical performance that was originated from a local school in Malaysia (Mei et al 2015). Along with musical activities like Chinese Orchestra,

Marching Brass Bands, Choir Singing and Symphony Orchestra, the 24 Season Drums was introduced as one of the extra-curricular activities carried out in the primary, secondary and even tertiary schools in Malaysia. It has laid its seed in spearheading education among the Chinese community (Cheung, 2004). Musical training can be a crucial component in developing an individual holistically. The Chinese community in Malaysia thrives on educating positive values of Chinese traditions to

the next generations by adopting musical training into their schooling lives.

Physical literacy describes the involvement of a person's body and mind, conforming into a harmonious state (Edwards et al., 2017). The term can be frequently seen in the field of sports, education and health (Whitehead, 1990). An Australian framework has identified four domains, namely physical, psychological, social and cognitive domains and 30 elements in relation to developing one's physical literacy (Green et al., 2018). The manuscript would further explore how 24 Season Drums, a musical performance originated from Malaysia, can enhance one's physical embodiment development. Conversely, it could provide new lenses of exploration for researchers to synergise the component of physical activity and education through the extensive use of this art.

Problem Statement

24 Season Drums has been a musical performance that is gaining international recognition and acceptance around the globe (Mei et al., 2015). Despite the growing reception and popularity of 24 seasons drum worldwide, there is still a lack of study to promote the introduction and integration of the practices. Drumming is equivalent to performing a strenuous physical activity and is comparable to playing in an intense sports competition (Henderson, 1993). However, most of the studies to date revolves around Western percussion music. Physical literacy has drawn attention by the community in the field of sports, education and health. A few studies relate the extensive usage of performance art in promoting physical literacy among individuals from various age groups. Little is known for the possible correlation of 24 Season Drums in promoting physical literacy.

Methods

This narrative review focuses on studies related to the field of sports and music. Targeted searches for literature reviews were conducted through databases from Google Scholar and PubMed search engine using specific keywords listed below, ranging from January 2000 to June 2021. Keywords used for the search includes: physical literacy, exercise, physical activity, and drumming. The narrative review writings follow the six elements listed in the Scale for the Assessment of Narrative Review Articles

(SANRA) to produce a quality and critical appraisal writing.

Background

The earliest drum ensemble was formed by two talented Malaysians, Mr Tan Hooi Song, a cultural activist, and Mr Tan Chai Puan, a musician in 1988. Together, they had a dream to preserve and promote Chinese culture, the duo established a team consisting of nine drummers as an exceptional performance at the opening ceremony of the 9th National Dance Festival in Malaysia (Leonghoe, 2009). The ground-breaking performance from the combination of the nine drums gained attention and recognition by the audience. The performance was further refined and began to incorporate elements like poetry and choreographic dance moves into its presentation. Today, there are over 6000 groups with an accumulation of more than 25,000 drummers in Malaysia (Loh, 2018). Its growth and popularity did not stop there. More than 300 troops of professional drummers from all over the world will meet and compete against each other bi-annually at the International Drum Festivals (Loh, 2018).

Is Drumming Physically Exhausting?

To perform in the 24 Season Drum team, one needs to have a high level of strength, agility, and stamina (Mei et al., 2015). Aside from executing the fast-paced choreographed movements and difficult virtuosic technique and skills sets in a drum play, a 24 Season drummer needs to maintain a fixed position for a great amount of time. These are not seen in most Western percussion teams, where they are seemingly playing and practicing in seemingly sedentary (sitting on a chair) characteristics. Even though some Western percussionists need to be played while standing (timpani, marimba, conga, xylophone, and marching band drum), the Western percussionists in this context will encompass instruments that require one to sit while coordinating the limbs to produce sound. For instance, the standard modern drum kit used in the pop/rock band consists of a bass drum, a snare drum, a hi-hat, two or more toms, and cymbals.

In University Sains Malaysia Kubang Kerian, the 24 Season drummers are required to maintain a position known as 扎马步 (Zha ma bu) or also known as the horse stance, taking its name from the position assumed when one is riding on a

horse. It is also called as kiba-dachi (騎馬立ち) in Kanji, and juchum seogi (주춤 서기) or annun seogi in Korean (Akman, 2018). One needs to keep the distance between both feet at shoulder-width apart, have their feet pointed forward, thighs parallel to the ground, and the back straighten up. Flexing the knee and hip while maintaining a straight back is a tough task. For beginners, it is common to have symptoms like muscle ache and muscular cramps at the thigh areas, typically the quadriceps (Mathews et al., 2016). It is a must for drummers to maintain this position throughout a drum play that lasts for approximately 15 minutes. This is not inclusive of a 2-3 hour of daily practice. The stance can also be seen in Traditional Chinese Martial Arts, typically Tai Chi, Qi Gong, Southern Shaolin fists, and Northern Chinese fists style (Akman, 2018 & Mathews et al., 2016).

A complete drum play is a combination of different playstyles forming into a complete set of song. The basics of the playstyles stem from three basic sound notations (Cheung, 2004). Drummers are trained to hit the surface of the drum at three different levels and positions, producing sounds at different intensities. The first one known as xiao lei (小雷) produces the most subtle sound among the three. It requires one to focus on moving the wrist instead of the whole arm to produce sound at the lowest intensity. Zhong lei (中雷) involves actions by flexing one's arm at the chest level, producing a sound of moderate intensity. Da lei (大雷), which is the toughest among all, requires one to position the drum stick at the eye level in order to produce a high intensity sound, which if executed correctly resembles the thundering roar of a storm. Drummers were trained through an intensive course for months to execute the drum play perfectly, beginning with the three basic sound notations. The continuous practice offers a platform for the drummers to tone and bulk up their biceps, triceps, forearm (flexor carpi radialis, flexor carpi ulnaris), and the shoulder. Furthermore, a complete drum play with drummers standing in a static position will be dull and boring. Recent performance involves the addition of complex choreograph that involves shouting to portray the vigour and intensity of the show, jumping up and down in a coordinated action, and improvising basic music notations with movements. These are both tiring and exhaustive for a drummer to execute it to

perfection. Besides, one needs to arrange and carry the drum set on their shoulder before and after practice. Thus, further enhancing their physique and strength. Last but not least, the training and practice of the drum play require a team effort. Members are often subjected to reprimands and punishments in order to push them for further improvements. They would be asked to carry out sit-ups, push-ups, and star jumps. These were executed synchronously as a team. To further enhance their stamina, members would also be asked to practice a myriad of intensive physical activities like 400m runs for a total of eight laps and running up and down of a flight of stairs synchronously prior to the actual drum practices. The members were told to wait for those who were left behind, inculcating a sense of togetherness and unity among the members.

Whitehead (1990) suggested that physical education tends to see the body as a separate entity from other facets of a person. She said that we exist through our interaction with the environment and our surroundings. Furthermore, she rejects the monism approach and conventional physical education whereby the individual is perceived as a summation of different parts that can be improved by assembling specific parts. She augments the need to understand our surroundings and the existential experience of life. It is only through engaging the participants emotionally and intellectually can they be led through a rewarding encounter of physical involvement. She emphasizes that physical education can only be achieved when individuals integrate their body and mind with their surroundings.

Physical Literacy

“It is perhaps hard for those concerned with improving aspects of our physical attributes to accept that their ultimate goal is to enable pupils to disregard the complexities of bodily control and coordination in the pursuance of a close and articulate liaison with the world. The real value of the capacities of our embodied dimension is not realised in isolation from our surroundings but an intimate relationship with them” (Whitehead, 1900).

Subsequently, Cairney et al. (2019) further elaborated Whitehead's point of views by suggesting the involvement and intersection of a variety of approaches and theories (Cairney et al., 2019). Besides, Deci and Ryan (2008) adopted

the motivational regulation in the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and suggested that motivation is when an individual perceives values in the task and thus gaining rewards or enjoyment from the activity without an external inducement. This is in line with the Dynamic Systems Theory (DST), which states the need for integrating different sub-systems between the “learner, task and environment” to generate the most efficient physical movement for each task (Thelen, 1989). As such, it is clear that the development of physical literacy cannot depend solely on physical education and sports itself, but on activities that pushes and harnesses the extent of a person’s capabilities and experiences through the engagement of our physical embodiment. For this purpose, it provides the possibility and realisation of arts (24 Seasons Drums) in the promotion of physical literacy.

Promoting Physical Literacy through Arts and Performance

Recognizing physical education as a relevant and well-established predicament in promoting physical activity, researchers are wary that it may produce different results to specific athletes and thus adversely sway their interest and participation (Barnett et al., 2020). As such, researchers are increasingly intrigued and fascinated in search for a more comprehensive and creative way of delivery.

One of these relatively recent alternatives is the teaching of circus art. Circus arts instruction was introduced as an alternative intervention to new physical education workshops in Montreal, Canada (Kriellaars et al., 2019). Circus art training is a mixture of creative artistic expression, group-based movements and the fusion of multiple disciplines: manipulation, aerials, acrobatics, equilibrium and clowning (Kriellaars et al., 2019). Similar to any other expressive arts performance, movements of the individual involved in circus art is commonly used to convey a state of feelings, express emotions and narrate a story. It is not sufficient for a child to only know how to juggle but do not know how to use juggling as a form of expression. This is in line with the performance of 24 Season Drums, whereby the drummers will need to show the “content” to the audience through the usage of their choreography and musical expression. Moreover, learning to perform in front of the crowd is essentially different from playing sports in front of others. The audience or crowd in a sports event is not a

pertinent part of the process, but rather a by-product. An athlete does not need to “impress” the crowd. Barnett et al. (2020) implied that preparing for a particular target audience may somehow influence one's development in physical literacy positively; driving them to prepare themselves better in order to experience the interaction they needed from the crowd. Thereupon, circus arts instruction is intentionally good for the development of physical literacy. Physical practice is a vital aspect of actor training. An actor needs to repetitively practice with a firm intention of expanding the inner world of performers (Dennis, 2013). This practice encourages the simultaneous perception of sensory stimuli, physical endurance, technique and stamina, as well as creativity, linguistic and abstract thinking (Dennis, 2018).

According to Barnett et al. (2020), an actor's preparation, shares several elements while varying and focused on various sources. These activities are comprehensive and are based on kinaesthetic, linguistic and creative processes. Actors are trained daily to develop their knowledge, flexible mastery and technical competence. This is in essence and similar to how a drummer’s effort in their daily practice to master their instrument. These activities may require a certain extent amount of physical movements to deliver the content and performance to the audience. Thus, we believe that 24 Season Drums can be introduced as an alternative approach in promoting physical literacy.

Conclusion

The paper aims to propose a relatively new idea of using 24 Season Drums training as an approach to promote physical literacy. The evidence and studies presented above supports the development of one's physical literacy through the extensive use of this art. The training of 24 Season Drums encompasses a great range of development in the physical, cognitive, social and psychological domains, in which these domains remain absent from the existing physical literacy literature. Furthermore, the details of the 24 Season Drums training carried out in University Sains Malaysia have been recorded and discussed. The correlation between drumming and physical activity is also brought up with relevant evidence. In conclusion, the paper highlights the needs of involving

performance-based arts for the development and exploration of physical literacy. We hope this paper can attract more scope of future collaborations between experts from different disciplines to construct an ideal and holistic approach in developing a well-rounded individual.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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