

**African drumming as a medium to promote emotional  
and social well-being of children aged 7 to 12 in  
residential care**

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## Abstract

This research project investigated the potential of African drumming to enhance the emotional and social well-being of children in residential care. Sixteen children from the Epworth Children's Village in South Africa were purposively selected to participate in the study. The majority of participants had been exposed to some form of neglect and/or abuse and displayed high levels of anger, anxiety, depression and/or disruptive behaviour. Mixed in terms of gender and ethnicity, they fell within the middle childhood stage of development. The participants attended weekly sessions of African *djembe* drumming over a period of four months. Principles and practices of indigenous African music making formed the foundation of the drum circle facilitation approach used. Gestalt theory, as applied in Gestalt play therapy, provided the theoretical framework from which the therapeutic dimensions of African drumming were explored.

A mixed methods approach, using both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, was employed. For the quantitative component, participants completed the Beck Youth Inventories, measuring self-concept, anxiety, depression, anger and disruptive behaviour, before and after the project. Concerning the qualitative aspects, focused observations were conducted wherein all video-recorded workshops were regularly and systematically analysed to assess the children's emotional and social functioning. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted with relevant staff members and children, respectively, in an attempt to explore the value and feasibility of presenting such a programme within the residential care setting.

According to the Inventories' pre- and post-test results, the intervention did not appear to significantly impact upon the participants' self-concept or levels of depression, anger or disruptive behaviour. Anxiety, on the other hand, increased. Qualitative findings nevertheless suggest that the workshops substantially enhanced the children's emotional and social functioning, albeit only for the duration of the sessions. The workshops markedly improved participants' self-esteem and self-confidence, pro-social behaviour, enjoyment, concentration and manifestation of musical capacity (aspects which reflect Gestalt concepts of awareness, contact, self-regulation, self-expression and mastery). Reasons for the failure of these improvements to transfer to the children's everyday functioning may involve the severity of their socio-emotional difficulties as well as limitations within the drumming intervention itself.

**Keywords:** African drumming, Beck Youth Inventories for Children and Adolescents, drum circle facilitation, emotional well-being, Gestalt play therapy, Gestalt theory, middle childhood, residential care, self-concept, social well-being

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## **Dedications**

This thesis is dedicated to my father and mother, Shaun and René Flores, who planted within me a great love of music and then did everything in their power to let it grow and flourish. It is also dedicated to my sister, Chantelle Flores, who fully understands the profound mysteries and dynamic life forces inherent in all good music – rock on Chanty!

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*“Every living thing has its own rhythm, and everything is held together in a universal dance by some cosmic rhythm.”*

*Skeef, 1999:332*

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