

Abstract

Creativity and the creative process can be fostered by many different factors. Based on previously conducted research, it is possible that improvisational practice can enhance performance on tests of divergent thinking. The aim of this study was to compare the effect of playing a musical instrument on divergent thinking in two groups of participants: improvising players and note players.

As part of the research, I administered cognition tests (Trail Making Test and verbal fluency test) and the divergent thinking test (Alternative Uses Task, AUT) to the two groups of participants. The AUT was re-administered immediately following a 20-minute period of playing a musical instrument. I hypothesized that musical improvisation would lead to improved performance on the AUT test, with this improvement being statistically significantly greater than that of the note-playing group.

Statistical analysis did not show an effect of playing a musical instrument on performance on the AUT test in either group of players. There was neither improvement nor deterioration in performance after playing a musical instrument in either group. There was a significant between-group difference in performance in the elaboration of answers within the AUT administered after playing a musical instrument. The number of hours of music practice per week was negatively correlated with performance on the AUT after playing. Participants who reported that they usually practiced the instrument on their own in order to improve had significantly worse performance in the AUT administered after playing compared to those who did not report this type of practice.

Key words: creativity; divergent thinking; improvisation; music production; Alternative Uses Task AUT