

# 14. MUSIC

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## ***Children at Play: Music in the Classroom***

People in all times, all places, and all cultures have made music. For example, the cultures of Eastern Europe have given the world some of the greatest musicians of all times: Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky, and Stravinsky (Russia); Liszt and Bartók (Hungary); Smetana and Dvorák (the Czech Republic); Mahler (Moravia); and Chopin (Poland) to name only a few. Music is a universal means of communication.

Music has always been used to soothe, comfort, entertain, and enlighten children. Children are natural music makers. Two Eastern European musicians, Carl Orff and Zoltan Kodaly, gave considerable thought to the place of music in child development. Orff formulated some basic principles about music in childhood. He believed that speech, movement, play, and song are one. He urged that the natural speech and movement of children be used as springboards for musical experiences, and that children be active participants in music making. He even believed that the natural chants of childhood were the building block for all melody. Kodaly used Orff's theories to build a system for teaching older children musical symbols and, ultimately, musical notation and sight reading. The thinking of these two composers has influenced the way in which music is used in early childhood education worldwide.

## ***Impact on Developmental Areas***

### ***Emotional Development***

Music is a rich resource for fostering the development of children. Its most obvious role is in emotional development. Parents use lullabies to comfort their children, and children who have been sung to sleep will sing to their dolls. Comforting music need not even be a song. Mothers of all times and all places have hummed to their babies in a repeated falling two-note sing-song. Every culture has simple songs of celebration and love that children can learn and that can help them express their feelings. Marches can help children express pride. Songs of anger and sorrow may help children understand and cope with these more difficult feelings. Since music is such a strong vehicle of emotion for

adults, listening to music with children and talking about the feelings it evokes can be a way of fostering communication about our emotional life. Children are natural dancers and do not need to be taught formal “steps.” If given the chance to respond to joyous music, they will invent their own dances to express exuberance and joy.

### **Social Development**

Music is a powerful tool for fostering social development. A group of children can share in singing or dancing and have a marvelous time together, without having to wait their turn or share scarce equipment. Children can also engage in call-and-response songs, practicing turn-taking by waiting for their chance to respond. (There are, for example, many versions of a song that asks each child to answer to his or her name by singing, “Here I am,” or simple words to that effect.) Children who are reserved and reluctant to speak up in a group activity will often join in a song or dance. Many children’s songs have accompanying gestures. These songs, where all children do the same thing at the same time, are a particularly effective way of involving children who otherwise might just watch.



## ***Language Development***

Music can also enhance language development. All spoken language is both rhythmic and melodic. Children naturally play with words in rhythmic and melodic ways. A teacher can use this natural play to help children pay attention to the sound of language. For example, she may help children learn the names of their classmates by clapping the rhythm of each child's name and using its repetition as the basis for a dance. Music can help children expand the complexity of their language. Melody aids memory; therefore, a child may remember phrases from a song that are slightly more complex than his natural speech and use them later in talking. Music can increase vocabulary. There are many songs of labeling and listing that can introduce children to new words. Children may want to make up their own songs, using known or invented melodies to tell their own stories or express their personal feelings.

## ***Intellectual Development***

Music can be used to enhance the development of concepts in children. Ideas of "same" and "different" can be introduced through changes in the volume or pitch of music. Every culture has counting songs for children. When coupled with gestures, especially those that involve the whole body, counting songs provide kinesthetic meaning to the exercise. Songs that recite the letters of the alphabet, however, probably do not help in concept development except to help a child remember a particular sequence.

## ***Motor Development***

Motor skills are enhanced through the use of music. Finger plays encourage the child to move each of the fingers independently in response to a certain song, and thereby increase eye-hand coordination. Simple homemade instruments increase fine-motor skills, both in the making and in the playing. Spontaneous dancing and movement to music encourage the development of coordination. Although dances of the child's own invention have the most to offer for their development, it may be appropriate to teach a few simple steps of folk dances that children can perform as a group.

Children can also be encouraged toward self-help skills through music. Songs about bathing are particularly effective, but there can be songs about dressing, eating, and cleaning up as well.

The potential of music for early childhood development cannot be complete without a discussion of the science of sound. Children can witness the vibration

of a wire or rubber band as they hear the tone that it makes when plucked. They can stop the sound by stilling the vibration. Although young children will not grasp the abstract concepts involved, they can gain intuitive understanding from demonstrations of the differences in tone and pitch from different sources of sound. Some examples are air blown over bottles with various levels of liquid in them, vibration of strings of various length and textures, and the quality of sound from various drums and rattles.

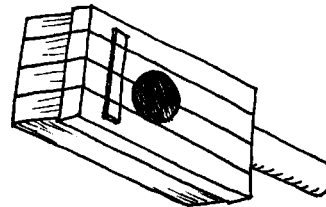
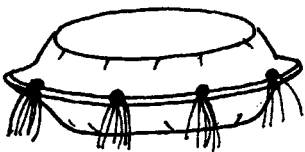
## Integrating Music into the Classroom Schedule

If it is not possible to have a music activity center, music can be integrated in many activities throughout the classroom and the day. A word of caution about background music. When music is used, it generally should be the primary focus for the children. Background music, which may be pleasing to adults, may be distracting to children.

Music can help establish the comfortable routine of the daily schedule. Songs can be learned or invented to help children through the day. There can be greeting songs when children arrive. Songs also are an excellent activity at group times. Songs can be used as a guide for transition from one activity to the next or as a "holding" activity while waiting for lunch or toileting. Songs are a wonderful way to soothe children during their rest time. As children leave school, a familiar song of parting is a fitting way to close the day.

When designing the art and science areas of the classroom, consider the possibilities for music activities. Many art and science materials have music-making potential. For example:

- **Rattles** Empty plastic containers with lids; aluminum soda cans; boxes that contain rice, dried beans, or buttons; natural rattles, such as seeds and gourds

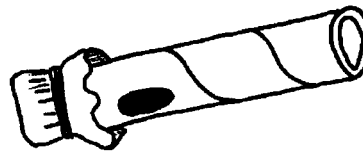


- **Plucked instruments** Rubber bands, boxes, tubes, wire

- **Percussion instruments** Blocks, sand paper, anything that clangs



- **Wind instruments** Plastic bottles, tubes, pipes



If commercially made instruments are used, it is probably wise to store them in a closed cabinet and make them available only at specific times. The sound of rhythm instruments is likely to distract children from other activities, so you may want to offer instruments only when music is the focal point for the entire group. Carefully supervise children when they are using adult instruments.

Every culture has folk instruments that are easy to make, inexpensive, and easily used by children. You may want to add local versions of kazoos, mouth harps, whistles, and rattles to the classroom rhythm instrument collection. In each case, be sure to check the instrument with child safety in mind. Is it free of sharp edges? Does it pose any danger of choking? Is it made from nontoxic materials?

To help children appreciate the different sounds and possibilities for each instrument, introduce them to only one type at a time. Let each child experiment with the newly introduced instrument. Rhythm instruments can be used spontaneously, with children making music as they wish. They can be used to reproduce a rhythmic pattern established by a child or the teacher. They also can be used to accompany the rhythm of a song or dance.

### ***The Teaching Team's Role***

Teachers should sing! A teacher of young children does not need to worry about perfect pitch or operatic tone; children will enjoy all lively and warm-hearted efforts. Singing is a wonderful activity for speeding work, expressing feeling, and telling stories. Teachers can model this for children by singing their way through the day, using songs of greeting, transition, work songs, story songs, lullabies, and good-bye songs.

If a teacher is able to play an instrument, this is another way she can provide musical leadership. In classrooms where record players and tape recorders are available, commercially prepared children's songs can be used; however, they should not substitute for teachers and children joining together in song.

Teachers can also follow the children's lead in musical experiences. Use tapes or records of folk and classical music to encourage children to invent dances. Young children also enjoy creating their own dances to popular music. Generally, children respond enthusiastically to music with a good beat and interesting melodies and harmonies.

Once the idea of creating musical instruments is introduced, children may discover the possibilities of making music with objects designed for other uses,

such as the pots and pans in the cooking area. Although teachers may want to redirect this activity if it interferes with other activities going on at the time, they can also call attention to the musicality of items in the classroom.

## **Activities and Projects**

### **Making and Using Rattles**

Making musical rattles is a worthwhile and fun activity for a large or small group of children. The materials required are simple: empty, clean aluminum soda cans (at least one per child); several handfuls each of dried beans, rice, sand, or pebbles; and masking tape.

The teaching objectives or rationale for this activity are many. The children can:

- Make rattles for each child to use in musical activities.
- Practice fine-motor skills by putting small objects into small holes (for example, beans into a soda-can hole.)
- Increase short-term memory by practicing repetition of a rhythmic sequence.
- Practice matching sounds by finding which rattles sound alike.
- Experience the music of other cultures.

### **Making the Rattles**

Set out one can for each child (or two, if you have enough). Put the filler materials (beans, rice, sand, or pebbles) in trays or bowls in the middle of the table so that each child has access to each. If you want the children to make pairs of matching rattles, you may want to limit each table to only one kind of filler. (For example, all the children at one table will make only bean rattles while those at another table will make pebble rattles.) If the children are very young or have difficulty sharing materials, you may want to have one container of filler for each child. In this case, divide the filler materials into individual portions ahead of time.

Show the children how to put one object (a bean or pebble) into the opening of the can, and then shake it to demonstrate the sound. Ask them to do the same.

They will have fun shaking the cans as they go along and listening to how the sound changes as the can gets fuller. When the can is full enough to make a satisfying rattle, help the children tape the top closed. You may want to cut the tape in advance so that children do not have to wait for you to cut it. Younger children may need your help with taping.

### ***Using the Rattles***

- Have each child take a turn establishing a rhythm, which the group then follows. To start, you might use the rhythm of each child's name.
- Establish various rhythms for the children to follow.
- Sing a song, using the rattles to keep time.
- Have a parade using the rattles to establish the beat of a march.
- If you have made pairs of rattles, mix them up and ask the children to rematch the pairs.
- Play music on a record or tape and use the rattles to keep time.

### ***Science and Music Using Bottles of Water***

Science and music activities can be combined. For example, one such activity gives the children an intuitive experience of the relationship between length and pitch in a vibrating column of air and provides practice in pouring.

Have these materials available:

- Heavy, glass bottles (preferably one for each child)
- Water
- Water containers
- Metal spoons or forks

### ***Preparing the Bottles***

Place a bottle and a fork or spoon at each child's place. A water table is an ideal spot for this activity. Set the bottles up in the empty water table, and you won't have to worry about spills. (You may also want to do this activity outdoors.) If you do this activity indoors, spread newspaper on the floor and have sponges or rags available for spills. Trays with low sides, like cookie sheets, may also be

used to contain spills. Depending on the children's social skills, you may want to have a cup or pitcher of water for each child or have one pitcher for every three children, to encourage sharing and taking turns.

### ***Using the Bottles***

Begin by tapping on an empty bottle to demonstrate the sound. Next, blow across the top of the bottle. Ask the children to experiment by tapping and blowing across their bottles. Now, add a little water to your bottle and repeat the sound-making activities. Let the children add water to their bottles. Once they get the idea that the sound changes, they will want to experiment by adding water and pouring it out. Ask them to describe what happens. Reproduce the note by singing it and have them do the same. You may want to talk about "lower" and "higher" notes.

Younger children can tap their bottles in rhythmic patterns that you demonstrate, or they can create their own patterns, or even tap an accompaniment to a song.

With your help, older children may be able to arrange bottles in an order that roughly represents a scale. They may need your help in making the necessary discriminations, telling you which bottles are higher and which are lower, and whether water must be added or poured out to get the notes. You may be able to play a simple tune for them, either by tapping or by blowing, or both!

### ***A Visit to a Pipe Organ***

Some towns and cities have old churches with wonderful pipe organs. Pipe organs are fascinating creations for people of all ages, but especially for young children. On such a visit, children have the experience of seeing, hearing, and playing a magnificent musical instrument.

If you can locate a church with a pipe organ in your community, contact the organist (probably through the priest or pastor), and ask if you can arrange for a class visit. You will need to explain that you are not asking for a concert, but for a tour of the organ. Explain that the children will want to see and touch the parts of the organ, and be certain that she is agreeable to that. Explain that they probably will not be interested in hearing long pieces, but that they might enjoy a short tune, especially variations on a tune that they know. (Many organists can take a simple tune and improvise variations on the spot.) Ask how many children you can bring at one time. You may need to divide your group and go on more than one day. Find out how you get into the building, who will greet

you, how you get to the organ loft, and where the children can sit or stand during the demonstrations.

The bottle activity described above would be a good preparation for the children, since the sound of an organ depends on variations in the length of columns of air. Children will not understand the abstract physics of the relationship between the bottle activity and the organ, but they will get the idea of a connection between air, pipes (bottles), and sound.

It is important to prepare for the trip. At least a week in advance, get written permission from each child's parent(s), and ask for family volunteers to accompany you on the trip. Parents help by shepherding small groups of children, and by participating in the activities when you arrive at the organ. A few days in advance, explain the trip to the children. Tell them where you are going, how you will get there, how long it will take, and what they will see and hear. If there are pictures of the church and the organ, show these to the children. If you have recordings of organ music, play them for the children. Allow them to draw, paint, or dance while the music is playing to express the feelings the music arouses in them.

### ***The Trip***

When you arrive, ask the organist to show the children the keyboard and foot pedals. Ask him to demonstrate each one, and, if possible, let the children try themselves. Also ask him to demonstrate the different "voices" of the various stops on the organ. He may be able to play a simple tune that the children know in several different voices. He may let the children pull the stops. A very old organ may have mechanical bellows. Ask the organist to demonstrate how this works. Ask him to remove some of the smaller pipes (they can be easily lifted out) and to blow on them to demonstrate their different sounds. (Children should not blow on the pipes, since they may contain lead.) Relate this to the children's experiences with the bottles.

Ask the organist if you can visit the organ case. This is where the big pipes are housed. (If the organ is large, your whole class may be able to fit inside the case!) Many old organ cases are works of art.

Before you leave, the organist may play a short piece, perhaps, (as was suggested above) one that contains a tune the children know. If you have recording equipment, record this "performance," along with a greeting from the organist.

### ***After the Trip***

When you return to the classroom, have the children share their impressions and feelings. Write these down on a sheet of large chart paper as "experience stories," to be read again and again to remind the class of the trip. Have the children make drawings of the organ. If you were able to make a recording or have recordings of organ music, play them, again allowing the children to draw, paint, or dance to the music.

### ***Summary***

Music is one of the richest resources for teaching young children. It is a natural part of their play and provides many positive and nurturing interactions with adults. Music does not require expensive and technologically advanced equipment; the most valuable instrument for early childhood education is the human voice. There are intimate connections between music, emotions, and language. Music should be an integral part of every day in the early childhood classroom.