

## **The Music-Movement Connection in Early Childhood**

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Music and movement have been shown, in several studies, to be important in children's lives. Music experiences can "shape later musical attitudes and abilities" (Isenberg and Jalongo, 1997, p. 128). The experiences have been shown to contribute to a child's "total development: psychomotor, cognitive, cultural, and aesthetic" (Isenberg and Jalongo, 1997, p. 131). It has long been a part of early childhood education. Renowned educators such as Jean Jacques Rousseau, Maria Montessori, Patty Smith Hill, John Dewey, Carl Orff, Zoltan Kodaly, and Shinichi Suzuki have used music in their early childhood classes (Isenberg and Jalongo, 1997; Fowlkes, 1984; Hewes, 1976).

It is not only music experiences, it is also movement experiences that these educators brought into the classroom. In fact, music and movement have been shown to be naturally connected. Jerome Bruner hypothesized three cognitive stages of musical development, the first of which "physical activity and music are intertwined" (Isenberg and Jalongo, 1997, p. 129). In early childhood education, there are examples of the development of the music-movement connection in children from birth to age eight.

Infants are sensitive to the dynamics (loudness or softness) of sounds. They respond to music through movement by their entire body. Infants sway, rock, bounce, and move to loud, active music. Infants are soothed by soft, rhythm sounds. Infants are also soothed by the human voice, especially the mother's voice (or primary caregiver's) (Isenberg and Jalongo, 1997). An infant who hears, early on, the same song over and over will later recognize and be soothed by that song. For example, Joe sang the alphabet song over and over while Alden was still in the womb. After Alden was born, the song soothed him when he was fussy or tired. When Alden started to sit and stand up, he naturally swayed and bounced to any music that he heard, from music on the radio to music on t.v. commercials.

Toddlers can listen to different music and respond more zealously to songs that are familiar to them. They try to match melodies and sing the familiar songs. The children move in response to the tempo (fastness or slowness of a song) and will dance on request. As they begin to show greater control over physical responses, they also begin to show greater control over their singing voices. Toddlers respond well to music activities that emphasize movement, both fine and gross motor (Isenberg and Jalongo, 1997). David is a two year old whose parents listened to a variety of music. David was able to dance on request. He rocked, swayed, and used his arms and legs. He had a great degree of control over his gross motor movements. After listening to a song several times over, David was able to jump in and sing certain phrases while he danced.

Three-year-olds have better voice control and are more coordinated. Three year olds recognize familiar songs and experiment with different types of movement, such as walking backwards, skipping, and hopping. They are intrigued with action songs, such as finger plays. Their movements, both fine and gross motor, are becoming more and more graceful (Isenberg and Jalongo, 1997). Allison, for example, is a three year old that loves finger plays and body plays. When her mother sang The Itsy Bitsy Spider, Allison tried to do the movements. After she mastered this fine motor skill, she was able to sing the words. It took several repetitions of the song, but eventually she was able to master both the music and movement.

Four-year-olds can understand "pitch (high/ low), duration (long/ short), tempo (fast/ slow)", and dynamic (loud/ soft) (Isenberg and Jalongo, 1997, p. 136). Children can sing recognized songs, as well as make up original songs spontaneously. This spontaneity does not only apply to music. It applies to movement as well. Four year olds spontaneously begin to dance with music. They can spontaneously switch from one type of movement to another such as hopping to skipping or walking to running (Isenberg and Jalongo, 1997). James is a normal four year old boy. He enjoys running, skipping, hopping, and every other type of movement. As he walks around the room cleaning up, he begins to hum a little song to himself. Soon, James begins to make up words to his song. As he makes up words, he begins to move in rhythm to his song. He quickly switches from walking to running to hopping to skipping.

Five-year-olds begin to understand rhythm. They can not only understand but also demonstrate pitch, melody, tempo, duration, and dynamic. They can move in rhythm in games and dances. Five year olds enjoy songs that are predictable (Isenberg and Jalongo, 1997). Jacob is an active five year old boy. He enjoys participating in musical movement games, such as Dilly Dilly. In this game, he is able to act out different types of movements and copy other's actions. Jacob can sing along with music. His favorite song is The Old Lady that Swallowed the Fly because it repeats the same verses over and over.

Six-, seven-, and eight-year-olds are able to "match" in both music and movements. Musically, children these ages can match pitches while singing in vocal ranges of eight to ten notes. Their singing voices are almost mature. Children can also match movements in beat of the music. They can begin to learn dances with the help of adults (Isenberg and Jalongo, 1997). Kristen is a seven year old that can keep beat by clapping or hitting a drum. When listening to music, Kristen can sing along, matching pitches. She is learning to do the Virginia Reel. She can also keep the beat while free dancing to music with strong rhythmic movement.

Music and movement are both important in the lives of children. Experiences have been shown to affect the development of the whole child. Early experiences have even been shown to affect abilities in the later years. Several prominent educators have used music and movement in the early childhood class. Music and movement naturally go together. From birth, children respond to music through music. The music-movement connection is a strong bond throughout early childhood.

#### References:

- Fowlkes, M.A. (1984). Gifts from Childhood's Godmother- Patty Smith Hill. *Childhood Education* 61 (1), 44-49.
- Hewes, D.W. (1976). Patty Smith Hill: Pioneer for Young Children. *Young Children*, 31 (4), 297-306.