

Critical thinking on music in child education

[Life](#), [Childhood](#)



INTRODUCTION

In the article “ Music for their Minds,” Shore and Strasser (2006) offer the primary point that music should be incorporated into early childhood education, with several supporting points to back up this assertion. In this paper, we will examine those points, reflect on their validity, and hear perspectives from other authorities in the realm of childhood education. Shore’s and Strasser’s suggestion is completely sound; the integration of music (particularly complex music) into the education of young children helps their cognitive abilities and their aptitude at mathematics and music.

MUSIC FOR THEIR MINDS

“ Music helps young children synthesize experiences and improve academic performance in language and math.” (p. 62) This is the primary point raised by Shore and Strausser in their article – the senses are an important tool for communication in children, particularly as they have not developed language skills yet. As a result, the use of music – something relying on rhythm and tone, something that children can pick up on easily – is a great way to introduce them to simple communication of mood and idea, as well as form.

The authors assert that “ hearing is the first sense to develop.” (p. 62) As a result, it is the first and most vital sense to concentrate on when educating a child, as it is the primary conduit for a lot of simple ideas, such as time, rhythm, and language. The best thing that adults can do to spearhead the education of their children is to bring music into the conversation with them constantly. (p. 63) They have to foster communication through rhythm and

expressive movement before they even know what music is - this prepares them for these simple concepts.

When it comes time to introduce them to actual music, it is best to give them as much complexity as possible in their music choices. Complex music introduced to young children allows their language abilities to become more sophisticated. (p. 64) Studies have shown that there are variables in music complexity that help improve cognitive abilities and concentration. Baroque music is offered as a prime example of complex music that will not confuse the child with lyrics they do not understand, but still provide the complexity that causes their brain to make the connections between notes. "The more complex language a baby experiences in its environment, the more sophisticated language skills the child usually develops," asserts the authors, noting that complexity within the music gets the child's brain more accustomed to complex ideas, making them more equipped to handle them earlier in life.

The same can be said for mathematics - incorporating music with mathematic activities encourages higher level cognitive functioning. (p. 65) Rhythm is a vital mathematic concept, and songs with a great deal of repetition and interactivity, such as rounds of songs like "Row, Row, Row your Boat, teach this concept to children effectively.

Music in early childhood programs promotes community and encourages a positive learning environment. (p. 65) In addition to the intelligence and cognitive abilities of children being enhanced by the presence of music, the communal experience of music in a classroom will help create enjoyable

activities that help bring about friendship and joy within the class environment. This creates a much more nurturing environment for the children, and it will establish routines and help the kids to bond with their respective classmates.

EXAMINING THE MAIN POINTS

Each of these points carry their own validity – they work well in theory, but do they work in practice? The authors of this article offer their own ideas for a music curriculum to be incorporated into the classroom, but they take the form of simple suggestions that would be difficult to implement in detail. As a result, an individual music education program would have to be incorporated. However, that may be the point; as every classroom is different, educators have to bring these ideas to life in their own unique ways. What will work for one classroom or group of children might not work with another – one group of songs could be received less positively than another depending on the temperament of the children. Also, the activities that are available and feasible depend greatly on factors such as classroom size, specific grade, and subject. Music activities for a math class should not be used for language lessons.

While the authors stress the importance of introducing Mozart and other examples of complex music into the classroom, there is also room for simpler songs, by their own admission. The more complex songs work well as background music during another activity, but the activities should not center on them – for lessons where the children actually interact with the music, it is vital that simpler songs are utilized, such as “ Row, Row, Row

your Boat” or “ Rain, Rain Go Away” when teaching rhythm and tone.

Striving to make a rhythm lesson to a Bach symphony would only result in confusion and frustration among the students, and it could shut them off to learning. With this in mind, it is best to start out with simpler songs and use the complex music subconsciously. Mozart works best with children when it is in the background; their minds can develop subconsciously while they focus on their task.

Another thing these music-related activities can do is create better relationships between the children and allow them to unite as a classroom. In this respect, the authors are very correct – however, educators must be mindful to not go too far with the music, as this references the earlier point that activities that are too complex will make them averse to learning. The authors provide a list of singing development stages which is extremely accurate and should be followed by educators – it includes what kind of singing should be encouraged and practiced for each age group, as it is what they can handle. (p. 65) Taking their development too far too fast can result in losing their attention and their enthusiasm.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PERSPECTIVES

Shore and Strasser’s idea that music is an integral part of early education is not new by any means; educators have been discussing how best to use music to improve the cognitive abilities of children for decades. Yim and Ebbeck (2009) support the authors’ point that these musical activities should take place in groups, as children learn more, become more involved, and enjoy themselves immensely during group musical activities. (p. 103) Simons

(2001) also denotes the universality of music permitting children to become more acquainted with the environment, and thus understanding it more readily. (p. 142)

One aspect of music in early childhood education that is glossed over somewhat by Shore and Strasser is the linking of music to play. It is implied, and activities are suggested, but there is no real discussion as to why making a game out of music is so helpful to children. Lewis, Mansfield and Baudains (2010) help to demonstrate how play and positive interactivity can help students learn more effectively in other contexts, such as conservation and nature awareness. (p. 95) Van der Linde (1999) posits that “ play and music are related activities and are important for the child’s development to a well-rounded adult.” It helps to create intrinsic motivation for the child to learn, as learning becomes fun due to the incorporation of music and play into the activity, turning school into a fun game that they are invested in. (p. 611) Especially as studies are indicating that play is becoming scarcer in early childhood education, it must be reintegrated into classroom activities, along with music. (Nicolopoulou 2010, p. 1)

Some suggestions to maximize play within musical activities include incorporating movement and taking the children outside in order to remove inhibitions and shyness about dancing or moving to a rhythm. (“ Move and Make Music,” 2003) Changing up the game allows the children to have fun and avoid establishing a routine with the games. (“ Around We Go,” 2003) The visual arts can be more deeply incorporated into the musical activities as well - adding painting to the music creates more tangible kinesthetic

responses to stimuli, and gives children a fun way to interact with the music. ("Free-Form Musical Art," 2002)

There is plenty of evidence to support Shore and Strasser's claim that music in early childhood education promotes literacy and advanced language skills. Wiggins (2007) discusses the parallels between learning how to read words and reading music - they both require visual sequential memory and language reception. (p. 55) She also stresses the importance of energy and play within musical activities for language learning, as repeated phrases will help to bring about recall of material, important aspects of literacy.

The use of music could be a breath of fresh air in an increasingly struggling child education program. Children with learning difficulties or who are having a hard time in school need more interdisciplinary practices in order to succeed. Educators are attempting to use problem-solving techniques such as response to intervention in order to address these issues and come up with solutions. (Jackson et al. 2009, p. 424) Issues such as child abuse and neglect vex early childhood student teachers, as they do not have comprehensive solutions to handle and protect these children, providing a safe environment where they can feel free to express themselves. (Farrell and Walsh 2010, p. 53) The use of music in these troubled classrooms can go a long way towards providing interactivity and positive environments for children struggling both at home and in school.

There are some environments in which music education of this type may not be so beneficial; multiage groupings in early childhood education, while a prevalent phenomenon, also cluster together students of different age

groups, which presents a unique problem for music-related education.

(Edwards, Blaise and Hammer 2009, p. 55) Given the simple play-and-music activities that have been posited thus far, disparities can occur between the activity level of students of different ages. The older students can feel bored and condescended to when simpler music and games are played, especially as their cognitive abilities would not need to be developed as thoroughly.

Interactive technology is one way in which to implement these very simple musical games in the classroom. Already, New Zealand schools are using interactive whiteboards to teach visual arts and creativity in new and innovative ways to their schoolchildren; there is certainly room in these new technologies to provide visual aids to music (denoting when the rhythm is in a song), as well as other methods to bring children into the game when using music to teach. (Terreni 2010, p. 90) Parette, Quesenberry and Blum (2009) have indicated significant problems in the implementation of twenty-first century technology, as the education environment has not caught up with the home environment that is already significantly wired. (p. 335) However, if items such as interactive whiteboards and other applications can be used to deliver these games, then educators would have even more tools at their disposal.

CONCLUSION

Shore and Strasser's article carries a very comprehensive, detailed outlook at the importance of music in early childhood education. It provides very good, solid points about what exactly music does for children, and there are a plethora of suggestions and tips that educators can use to apply these

principles to their existing curriculum. The use of music in the classroom will help provide more comprehensive sensory stimulation to children, and expose them to abstract ideas of form, function and rhythm before they can be verbally communicated. This places them a step ahead of the game, as they will be aware of the concepts before they can express them.

With the help of other educators and experts in the field, the importance of music in education can be stressed, and new techniques can be developed (some using today's modern technology) to create innovative ways to bring the complexity of music into the world of the classroom.

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