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LET’S MAKE MUSIC IN PRESCHOOL!

Heidi Paul

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RESEARCH ON THE VALUE OF THE INDOOR-OUTDOOR MUSIC CENTER “LET’S MAKE MUSIC!”

WHY DEVELOP A MUSIC CENTER?


We all sing with the children at various times and transitions of the school day, clap and snap rhythms and understand the value of these basic music elements. Building on these valuable practices and teaching music for the sake of music, however, develops a whole new range of skills and has positive educational ramifications in other academic areas.

WHAT RESEARCH SAYS

Research shows that developing music skills and an appreciation for music at this age helps boost a child’s academic achievements in later school years. It helps with math, science and language concepts, even helping develop positive social-emotional skills. Interaction in the music center enhances children’s development.

“The arts are as important as the sciences: they are time-honored ways of learning, knowing, and expressing” (Hetland and Winner, 2001, p. 5). Music is an important entity in itself, but sadly it is the fine arts that are cut first when budgets are tight. Which leads one to justify its importance by the positive influence it has in the “more important” academic areas.

Research shows that children who have had music education in the early childhood years have done better academically in later school years in the areas of math, science and language. Music also helps them develop positive social-emotional skills.

**Math**

Music is organized mathematically. The beats are grouped together in equal measures, developing a set pattern that can be repeated. You can have a 4/4 beat where you keep counting to four or a 3/4 beat – a waltz – where you keep counting to three, and so on.
One on one correspondence: if a child moves to or plays an instrument to the beat of music, or follows notes, he is practicing one-on-one correspondence.

Seriation

When singing songs like “Head, shoulders, knees and toes”, or “Five green and speckled frogs”, the children are practicing seriation skills.

Spatial-temporal intelligence

Music helps to visualize and mentally manipulate spatial patterns. Researchers did an experiment with a group of early childhood children. They assigned some to computer lessons, some to piano lessons, some singing lessons, and the rest had no lessons. They learned that the children receiving piano lessons showed a 34% increase in special-temporal intelligence while the rest showed no change at all! (Shaw, 2003).

Science

Music enhances observation skills as well as the ability to concentrate and focus on a task, all skills that are necessary for science.

Language

Music is a form of communication. Listening to music, singing and playing instruments, following the cue of the conductor or the song and listening for differences in sounds helps develop listening skills. Vocabulary, fluency of speech, pronunciation and enunciation are also enhanced.

Social Emotional

Children learn that to make beautiful music together requires teamwork and the ability to work together. You need to follow the music, the rhythm, the beat or the conductor’s lead. Music is therapeutic and can change one’s mood positively. Playing instruments and making music is fun either as an individual or a communal activity.

INTRODUCTION TO THE INDOOR-OUTDOOR MUSIC CENTER “LET’S MAKE MUSIC!”

Our preschool needed a music center but didn’t have the space for one inside, so I decided to create a mobile indoor-outdoor music center from scratch that can be wheeled in and out easily to protect the instruments from the weather.

Families of the preschoolers were invited to donate items like pots, pans, tin cans, pipes, lids and so forth and to help in the construction of the big pieces, and the response was overwhelming! I was able to procure two old TV carts, a big wooden room divider, a double-sided whiteboard and a writing corral, all already on wheels, from the school district’s storage facility, and the district’s head of music provided me with CDs, a variety of small instruments and books. All of this helped tremendously in the development and construction of the new music center.
This was the proposed site for the new indoor-outdoor music center. It’s an open area on concrete right outside the room in which the center would be stored and easily wheeled out during outdoor time.

The preschoolers’ families, the school district board members, and local media were invited to the ribbon cutting. It was held indoors as we had frightful November weather outside, and because it was fully mobile, it could quite easily be moved to wherever we wanted it!
Here is the “Let’s Make Music” center in action: from left to right: the pot-and-pan drums, the white board music writing station, oversized chimes, the music writing corral, the big wooden sound station and the orchestra pit.

The writing corral was enclosed and turned into a music writing activity center.

One activity is to sort different notes on class pebbles into their different buckets.
The second activity is to copy the phrase using the pebble notes in the basket.

The children love “writing music”.

The music writing corral.
Another fun writing activity is to use magnetized notes (lids sprayed black) and place them on a staff stuck on a white board to “write” their own music.

The children can then choose an instrument and “read and play” the music they’d written.

The big wooden room divider was converted into a sound station. Children experimented with different sounds the different items made.
Written music is available for children to “read and play” music.

My husband helped me construct a “flip-flop panflute”. An old flip-flop is used to whack the top of the pipes to make a winded popping sound.
The pots-and-pans drum station is especially popular with the boys.

The chimes (wooden, metal and tin cans) provide an interesting source of sounds.
Children can choose instruments from two baskets attached to the wooden divider.

The most popular part of the music center is the “orchestra pit”. The orchestra pit simply is a number of upturned logs for seating. Children choose an instrument, come to sit on one of the logs and follow the conductor’s lead to play their instruments.

CONCLUSION
At this new music center, apart from just having fun banging on pots and pans, the children learn many things about music: they have the opportunity to discern between different types of sounds, that some have resonance and others are dull, that some instruments make a deeper sound than others, that some go “up” and some go “down”; they learn that just like you write letters to form words and sentences, you write music so you can read it and play it with instruments. They can practice writing their own music and play it and also learn about the different notes. They learn that it takes teamwork to make music together and they practice this in the “orchestra pit”, playing their instruments led by the “conductor”.

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REFERENCES


