Let the Music Play!
Tapping into Children’s Playfulness

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Children’s Informal Music Play = how children make music while playing

Typically characterized by the following:
• aural/oral & holistic learning processes
• movement & dance
• creative expression
• learner agency (Harwood & Marsh, 2012)

If the adage, “children’s play is their work,” is true, then we can provide effective music learning experiences by incorporating qualities of music play in our classes.

Pizza, Pizza

Source: name game from the children at FocusHOPE Daycare Center, Detroit
Grades: K-5
TEKS: 3A, 3C, 5A, 6D
Activity:
• Speak chant for students, modeling movements.
• Invite students to come up with their own dance move to “boogie.”
• Have students practice dance moves all together.
• Invite individual students to take a turn in the middle. Invite other students to chant with you and do the remaining moves.

Transcribed by Kastner, 2009
Aural/Oral & Holistic Learning Processes

In their play, children learn songs primarily by listening to and performing a whole song or chant multiple times. In music classrooms, research has found that children learn to perform notes & rhythms more accurately through immersion. Through holistic immersion, children can not only absorb notes and rhythms, but also lyrics, style, and expression.

Strategies:
Use songs and chants in multiple classes, but alternate tonal or rhythm objectives:
- Find macrobeat & microbeat
- Find tonic
- Echo tonal patterns, both individually and in groups
- Echo rhythm patterns, both individually and in groups

Change the “action” of the activity over time:
- Turn it into a story or game
- Add a prop or visuals
- Add movements
- Add instruments

Rain on the Green Grass

Rain on the green grass, rain on the tree, rain on the roof-top, but not on me!

Duck Chant

Source: traditional/Julie Derges Kastner
Grades: K-1st
TEKS: 3A, 3B, 3C, 5A, 5B, 6D
Activity:
- Sing “Rain on the Green Grass” with children, using scarves as “umbrellas.”
- After the song has ended, chant “Duck Chant” while stomping to the beat.
- “Splash” rhythm patterns (with neutral or rhythm syllables) at individual students and invite them to echo the pattern and “splash” you back.

1 Campbell, 2010; Davis, 2014; Green, 2008; Harwood, 1998; Marsh, 1999
2 Klinger, Campbell, & Goolsby, 1998
High, High Hill

Source: traditional, found in *Jump Right In: The Music Curriculum, Teacher’s Edition, Book 1*
Grades: 1st-2nd
TEKS: 3A, 3B, 3C, 3D, 5A, 5B

Activity:
• Sing the song as children walk in a circle. At the end of the song, the children stop walking. Whoever is on the “hill” gets to echo a tonal pattern.

Movement & Dance

When children make music on their own, they almost always include movement or dance. It helps them to find the “groove” or the “feel” of the music. Their movement can take a variety of forms, such as hand clapping, full choreography, moving to the beat, or moving expressively.

Strategies:
• Practice personal space
• Set clear expectations
• Practice with hands before using whole bodies
• Show “committed” model

Finding My Personal Space

Julie Derges Kastner ©2015
I’m Gonna Put on My Walkin’ Shoes

Source: unknown
Grades: K-1
TEKS: 3A, 3B, 3C, 3E, 5A, 6C, 6D
Activity:
• Sing the song for the children, walking your fingers
• Sing again as you all walk around the room.
• Invite the children to suggest shoes that will make us move in other ways, like “jumping shoes” or “tiptoe shoes.”

Source: traditional English song

Round and Round

Source: traditional English song
Grades: 4th-5th  
TEKS: 3A, 3B, 3C, 3E, 3F, 5C, 6D  
Activity:  
- In previous music classes, teach song by rote and practice in canon.  
- In the next class, invite students to describe the mood of the song and determine the number of phrases.  
- Allow students to form three groups. Assign each group one of the phrases.  
- Ask each group to create movements to accompany their phrase and to express the mood.  
- Have each group perform and teach their movements to the other groups.  
- Perform in unison, and then in canon.  

Creative Expression  

In their musical play, children enjoy mixing, mashing up, and improvising their own songs and chants.  

Strategies  
- Start in early grades, but in small ways  
- Develop understandings of same vs. different patterns  
- Incorporate individual responses  
- Create an environment in which it is safe to make mistakes  
- Provide a safety pattern if students cannot think of something to create  

My Mother, Your Mother  

\[ \frac{4}{4} \]  
\[ \text{My mother your mother lives across the way,} \]  
\[ \text{Ev'ry night they have a chat and this is what they say:} \]  

Source: traditional children’s chant  
Grades: K-2nd  
TEKS: 6B, 6C, 4A, 3A  
Activity:  
- Speak chant for students.  
- Echo patterns using rhythm syllables  
- Perform 2 patterns for students and have them identify as same or different  
- Students create a pattern that’s different from yours  

Different: ![Different Hands](hand1.png)  
Same: ![Same Hands](hand2.png)
Three Little Muffins

There were three lit-tle mu-fins in the bak-er-y shop, You know the kind with the hon-ey and the
nuts on top, A - long came a child with a pen-ny
to pay, who took one mu-fin and ran a-way.

Source: unknown
Grades: K-2
TEKS: 3D, 4A, 4C, 6B
Activity:
• Perform chant as A section, then improvise rhythms for B section. Students listen during A then create movements during B.
• In future classes, invite students to make up their own parts during the B section. Give them a safety pattern if they can’t think of anything.
• Chant the A section, then toss a toy to individuals during the B section who indicate that they want a turn to improvise.

Student Agency

When children engage in music play, they are able to exert agency—or control—over their music-making. They have agency to make decisions about what music they perform, who they perform with, and how they want to perform it.

Strategies

• Ask questions more often, especially those that encourage higher-level thinking
• Incorporate student choice (i.e., in repertoire, instruments, expression, groups)
• Allow opportunities for students to work with a partner and in groups
• Teach students how to critique their own performance
• Choose songs that are relevant to students’ lives outside of school

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4 Green, 2008; Harwood, 1998; Koops, 2006
Happy
Source: Pharrell Williams from the Despicable Me 2 Soundtrack
Grades: 3rd-5th
TEKS: 3A, 3B, 3E, 4A, 4C, 6A
Activity:
• Ask students to form a group of 4-5 people.
• Ask each group to create an 8-beat ostinato to accompany the song. Remind students they should work together, listen to each other's ideas, and help everyone perform it. Inform students that if their group finishes early, they can create “Minion moves.”
• Invite groups to perform their ostinato for the class with the recording.

Tips!
• Find out what your students like
• Welcome new ideas
• Mutual trust
• Loosen up on the reins
• Have fun!

References: