

Making a space for music in the environment creative music making: a project to stimulate singing

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Find a space for music in your early childhood setting, engage children and enrich their play. Develop skills that enable you to personalise songs, capture a moment and respond to children's immediate experiences. Tap into your own creativity in easy and accessible ways.

Berenice Nyland in her article *The Powerful Language of Music*, claims that music is a fundamental human activity and part of our heritage (Nyland, 2007). She argues that music is one of the ways in which humans make sense of the world and communicate what they know. Whilst increasing pressure in school settings towards observable achievements in literacy and numeracy seem to be putting the creative arts under threat, music is still an important part of the kindergarten experience. PrePrep musical experiences however, are often dominated by teacher-led music sessions. These offer positive and creative experiences for children through

singing and movement but these experiences are not usually initiated or owned by children. The challenge therefore is to engage children in more spontaneous music making in play contexts.

Barrett, drawing on evidence from longitudinal ethnographic studies of young children's musical thinking, claims that children's invented songs are the foundation of creative thought and activity in music (Barrett, 2006). With this in mind I planned to create opportunities for children to sing known and invented songs within play contexts within our kindergarten programme. Discussion with parents indicates that many children sing spontaneously as they play at home. This echoes my experience as a parent. I noticed that my son as a young child would often hum tunelessly as he tuned out of 'the real world' and engaged in play. This kind of singing seems to occur when children are absorbed in play, often alone and in relatively quiet surroundings. Whilst children at kindergarten are likely to be totally engaged in play, they are unlikely to experience solitude or quiet! So the challenge is to encourage spontaneous



singing and music making in everyday play events despite noise and proximity of other children. Studies on infants and toddlers indicate the importance of singing as a communicative tool for parents and children (Trevarthen, cited in Barrett,

2009). To take advantage of music as communication, our kindergarten children needed a musical partner to communicate with, so we introduced a 'music loving' bear named 'Patch'. This term Patch has become part of our PrePrep family. Initially Patch was installed on a quiet mat outdoors with both pitched and un-pitched (percussion) instruments. The children used pentatonic chime bars (five notes that can be played tunefully together) to create songs for Patch. Whilst this engaged the children in creative music making, very few children could both sing and play at the same time, so singing was not a feature of this experience. Over subsequent weeks we added picture books based on songs and nursery rhymes. Many of these picture books are designed for toddlers. However, they make excellent texts for PrePrep children who can 'read'

familiar songs and sing them competently. The children brought other nursery rhyme books from home so that during the term we accumulated a library of 'singing' books. This prompted a small group of children to create their own 'singing' book based on one of the group's favourite songs *Five Little Monkeys (Rhythms of the Rainforest, Southey & Kriedemann, 2010)*. Patch has been treated to many renditions of this song!

As Patch became a favourite friend at PrePrep the children began to create buildings and homes for him in block area, adding furniture constructed at collage. This became a recurrent theme in block area, reusing the furniture, cars, ladders and signs created for previous 'Patch' buildings. The children often added musical instruments for Patch, building cupboards and shelves to store these items. Whilst the building itself does not stimulate musical behaviours, it



This article relates to *Early Years Learning Framework*

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators – Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media

This is evident, for example, when children:

- use language and engage in play to imagine and create roles, scripts and ideas
- share the stories and symbols of their own culture and re-enact well-known stories
- use the creative arts such as drawing, painting, sculpture, drama, dance, movement, music and storytelling to express ideas and make meaning

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does encourage the children to interact with the musical artefacts that are associated with Patch: song books and musical instruments. By encouraging interactions with Patch, the children are gaining a sense that music

is part of what we do at PrePrep, not just in group sessions but also in play contexts. Some children, particularly more confident girls are now creating their own (very long) songs that they sing to each other and the group. Children are singing on the swings, and during transition periods whilst they wait for other children to join the group. Children, including boys are choosing to sing 'books' to Patch in moments when they are not engaged in digging, climbing and adventures outdoors. So the introduction of Patch to our classroom has stimulated spontaneous singing in some children. However, other children's participation in spontaneous singing is only as an audience. Further observation and investigation is needed to establish what would stimulate more of these children to engage in singing as a form of creative expression.

References

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