

Musical games as a thinking tool

Sue Southey



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Play, such as building, construction, visual arts, and role play, are the foundation of early childhood programs. We use these forms of play to capture children's curiosity, engender socialization, stimulate thinking skills and problem-solving, and provide a platform for children to express their creativity.

Music, however, is an under-utilized form of play in early childhood. It is commonly used for cultural awareness, aesthetic appreciation, and classroom management (transition games), but not necessarily to engage children's thinking and creativity.

Music, more than any other art form, is accessible to a wide range of ages and capabilities. It is not reliant on language or visual skills, but taps into auditory and kinaesthetic modes of learning. Music has the capacity to incorporate all children regardless of their special needs and capabilities, it is therefore ideal for engaging all children.

The challenge for early childhood professionals is to select musical experiences that allow children to use their own ideas to express their creativity, in the same way that we provide materials and scaffolding for children to engage in visual arts. Simple songs and rhymes can provide a structure for games that allow children to input their own ideas to create new responses.



The following activities are ones that illustrate the style of teaching to which I am referring. These musical activities are part of a PrePrep

programme in a community kindergarten. They will work equally as well with younger or older children in a variety of early childhood settings.

Aiken Drum

Aiken Drum

Traditional

There was a man lived in the moon, lived in the moon, lived in the moon, there was a man lived in the moon, and his name was Ai - ken

Chorus
Drum. And he played up - on his la - dle, his la - dle, his la - dle, he played up - on his la - dle, and his name was Ai - ken Drum.

This is a favourite PrePrep song; repeated many times, on each occasion creating a new representation of Aiken Drum. The humour of this song becomes more apparent to the children when visual props are used, in this case plastic food to create Aiken Drum. On each verse a child was chosen to select the next body part for us to sing about; "and his tummy/legs/head.. was made of pizza/bananas ...". The children enjoyed the silliness of this song as they created more and more ridiculous "Aiken Drums". In the future we will try substituting plastic shapes for food items. Older children could extend the creativity of this song by drawing the shapes as the song is sung. This simple structure allows children to input their ideas to create a new person each time, encouraging them to think, predict and experiment.

An ability to sing is useful, but not essential for music activities with children. Humpty Dumpty has a melody with large variations in pitch which makes it challenging for young children (and teachers) to sing.

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However, it works perfectly well as a rhyme. Rhymes allow children to experience beat, rhythm, rhyme and form and require no ability to sing on pitch!

Humpty Dumpty

Over a period of several weeks, the children had fun developing ideas around the Humpty Dumpty rhyme. Initially, we chanted the rhyme using egg shakers to keep the beat. The children suggested various body parts to become Humpty's wall, for example; heads, shoulders, backs, knees etc. The part the children enjoyed most was letting the eggs to fall to the ground on "had a great fall". I cued this with a cymbal crash, initially sounded by me, but later by individual children. At this stage we had created a simple game that was ready to be expanded and developed.



I made a wall using a strip of masking tape on the carpet. Small groups of children had turns at choosing ways to stand on the wall. The group said the rhyme as the children balanced and fell to the ground on the cymbal crash. Initially, they chose simple ways to stand (one foot, on their knees, backwards) but with experience chose complicated and



interesting positions (e.g. one foot and one elbow on the ground).

I added a further challenge by asking "If Humpty wanted to get to the other end of the wall, how could he move?" The rhyme then became "Humpty Dumpty moved on the wall..." Chaos ensued as children tried rolling, hopping, walking backwards, tiptoeing along the wall.

In this way a very simple and familiar rhyme became a platform for engaging children's thinking. It sustained the children's interest over several music sessions. It allowed them to feel the beat, experience the rhythm of the words, gain body and spatial awareness, listen for cues, work with others and most importantly, generate and try out ideas.

Baby O

Baby O

Traditional

A refrain
 What will we do with the ba-by o? What will we do with the ba-by o?

B verse
 Wrap him up in ca-li-co, if he won't go to slee-py o?
 Wrap him up in ca-li-co, wrap him up in ca-li-co,
 Wrap him up in ca-li-co, Give him a great big cud-dle-o.

Baby O is traditional song that I have adapted slightly to make it useable as a game. It has a simple refrain (chorus) that remains the same and a verse that is adapted to incorporate the children's ideas.

Initially, I taught it as a simple action song using Beanie Toys®, or beanbags as babies. When the children were familiar with the song I challenged them to think about new ways to get our babies to sleep. I encouraged the children to think about body parts that we could balance the babies on. We reworded the lyrics of the verse to suit the children's suggested actions, for example "Put him on our knee-ee-o". This song challenged the children to place their bodies in different ways so that they could balance their babies without falling. There were many and varied possibilities, often hilarious to watch, as the children tried them out.

Other possibilities ensued as the children investigated throwing and catching the babies, passing them on to a friend around the circle or tossing them from hand to hand.

Our next plan is to put the babies onto a parachute or Lycra, where the babies can be tossed, rocked, jiggled, waved up and down. The possibilities are restricted only by the children's imagination. In addition, because music is a creative art, reality does not need to interfere. Just because you would not really do this to babies, doesn't mean that you can't do it in a music session!

Therefore, music in the form of simple rhymes and songs, can provide games that engage children in thinking skills, co-operation and as a platform for ideas and creativity. An ability to sing is not essential, but an enthusiasm to experiment, think creatively and have fun are!