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Four Steps for Becoming Familiar with Early Music Standards

Music has a profound impact on children's lives (Nichols & Honig 1997; Levinowitz 1999; Campbell 2000), yet it is often overlooked in early childhood classrooms. Children enjoy making and listening to music, and music experiences support learning in a number of domains.

Studies looking at the effects of a variety of early music instruction find that music supports children's language learning, reasoning skills, and academic performance. In the area of language learning, children who received music instruction showed significantly greater gains in oral language and reading scores and in the development of phoneme-segmentation fluency—the ability to separate words into the smallest units of sound (Fisher 2001; Gromko 2005).

Music instruction enhances children's spatial-temporal reasoning skills—skills that are crucial to learning math

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naeyc® 2, 3

and science (Grandin, Shaw, & Peterson 1998; Gromko & Poorman 1998; Rauscher 1999; Crncec, Wilson, & Prior 2006). For children who received formal music lessons, there was a positive long-lasting correlation with IQ and academic ability (Schellenberg 2006).

However, some early childhood teachers may not have sufficient music knowledge and the confidence needed to integrate music into the classroom curriculum (Brophy & Alleman 1991; Mason 1996; Kim & Choy 2005). Although many teachers use music to teach other subjects, such as social studies, literacy, and mathematics, music seldom receives the same level of attention as other subjects (Bresler 1995; Byo 2000). This article is designed for early childhood teachers who are not musically inclined or who have limited music knowledge. We suggest the following four steps for effectively implementing the National Standards for Music Education (MENC 1994a) in the early childhood curriculum:

1. **Read the music standards**
2. **Learn the music terminology related to the standards**
3. **Implement the music standards**
4. **Check the music standards**

Step 1: Read the music standards

To begin the four-step process, teachers need to read the Music Educators National Conference (MENC 1994a) standards for children. The MENC standards provide guidelines for understanding music skills and abilities for children within four content areas: singing and playing instruments, creating music, responding to music, and



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Peter and the Wolf, a children's story is spoken by a narrator and accompanied by an orchestra; the flute plays a bird while the clarinet imitates a cat. Children can explore the sounds made by different music instruments and play them to express feelings, moods, or stories.

Music elements and expression (in Achievement Standards 1a, 1b, 1d, 3b, and 4b): Elements such as beat, rhythm, dynamics, and melody help musical expression in various ways:

Beat and rhythm. Music has a steady pulse, called *beat*. *Rhythm* is a group of long and short sounds that go along with the beat. Listening to rhyming or predictable books, and joining in with repeated phrases, allows children to experience and express beats and rhythmic patterns. For example, children can experience the beat by clapping or walking

steadily to "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." When children sing the song, ask them to make the *star* sound longer, so they can feel that the rhythm of *little star* is different from *Twinkle, twinkle*.

Tempo and dynamics. *Tempo* is the fastness or slowness of music. *Dynamics* refers to the degree of loudness or quietness of music. Tempo and dynamics help express different energy or qualities. For example, quiet music in slow tempo can help children feel calm at nap time.

Pitch and melody. *Pitch* is highness or lowness of sound. *Melody* is a flow of pitches that go higher or lower, or remain the same while being accompanied by the rhythm. Chanting or singing involves pitch and melody. To make different pitches and play a melody, children need instruments that provide a variety of notes, such as a piano or xylophone; rhythm sticks or drums cannot produce pitch (Kim 2004) because they produce only one sound.

understanding music. Each content standard comprises a number of achievement standards (see "Summary of MENC Early Music Standards for 4-Year-Olds," p. 44, or visit www.menc.org/resources/view/the-school-music-program-a-new-vision). Children who achieve the skills related to a content area are able to demonstrate competency in specific musical abilities.

Step 2: Learn the music terminology related to the standards

Before implementing early childhood music standards, teachers need to understand the music-related terms or statements. The next paragraphs offer a brief review of some music terms. Classroom teachers can learn music terminology also by contacting a music specialist, taking part in music workshops, or going to a relevant Web site.

Music instruments and other sound sources (in Achievement Standards 1c, 2b, 2c, 3a, and 3b, p. 44). Each music instrument has its own unique sound, called *timbre*, which creates different feelings or moods. Composers often use different instruments to set a certain mood or to capture certain characteristics, such as in different animals. For example, in Sergei Prokofiev's composition,

Children who achieve the skills related to a content area are able to demonstrate competency in specific musical abilities.

Summary of MENC Early Music Standards for 4-Year-Olds

Content Standard	Achievement Standard for Children
1. Singing and playing instruments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Use their voices expressively as they speak, chant, and sing. b. Sing a variety of simple songs in various keys, meters, and genres, alone and with a group, becoming increasingly accurate in rhythm and pitch. c. Experiment with a variety of instruments and other sound sources. d. Play simple melodies and accompaniments on instruments.
2. Creating music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Improvise songs to accompany their play activities. b. Improvise instrumental accompaniments to songs, recorded selections, stories, and poems. c. Create short pieces of music using voices, instruments, and other sound sources. d. Invent and use original graphic or symbolic systems to represent vocal and instrumental sounds and musical ideas.
3. Responding to music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identify the sources of a wide variety of sounds. b. Respond through movement to music of various tempos, meters, dynamics, modes, genres, and styles to express what they hear and feel in works of music. c. Participate freely in music activities.
4. Understanding music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Use their own vocabulary and standard music vocabulary to describe voices, instruments, music notation, and music of various genres, styles, and periods from diverse cultures. b. Sing, play instruments, move, or verbalize to demonstrate awareness of the elements of music and changes in their usage. c. Demonstrate an awareness of music as a part of daily life.

From *The School Music Program: A New Vision. The K-12 National Standards, PreK Standards, and What They Mean to Music Educators*. © 1994 by Music Educators National Conference (MENC), Reston, Virginia. Used by permission.

Music symbols and awareness (in Achievement Standards 2d and 4a). *Music symbols*, much like letters in print, help record or represent music. For example, music notes represent how high and long a certain sound is to be played. Other symbols such as *f* (*forte*, for loud) or *p* (*piano*, for soft) give an idea of how loudly a part of the music is to be played. Children can use vocabulary or symbols to express their feelings or awareness of music. For children younger than 4, icons can replace musical symbols. For example, use a card showing a roaring lion to represent *forte* and a rabbit picture to represent the quiet sound for *piano*. Children can select a card to respond to the loud or soft sound they hear.

Many online music education sites offer a glossary of musical terms. Among them are MENC's www.menc.org/

resources/view/performance-standards-for-music-glossary and a classical music site for children, www.classicsforkids.com/teachers/training/terms_index.asp.

Step 3: Implement the music standards

In step 3, early childhood teachers implement music standards through classroom experiences and activities. For example, during choice time a teacher can engage small groups of children with music activities such as singing or playing instruments or by reading a story and using accompanying musical sounds. Music standards also can be implemented through children's interaction with manipulative materials. MENC offers suggestions for some activities

for infants through age 5 (www.menc.org/v/general_music/early-childhood-recognizing-nurturing-music-behaviors).

The following examples illustrate how classroom teachers can also implement music standards through variations of typical early childhood activities.

Exploring sounds of different instruments

While reading aloud, accompany the story with sounds of musical instruments. Different sounds can illustrate words such as *bang* or *ticktock*, represent characters such as different animals, or create images such as the wind blowing. For example, in reading *Where the Wild Things Are*, by Maurice Sendak, or *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, by Paul Galdone, children can respond with instruments.

Example A:

From *Where the Wild Things Are*

They roared their terrible roars [*bang on a drum*]
and gnashed their terrible teeth [*scrape on a guiro*]
and rolled their terrible eyes [*shake bells*]
and showed their terrible claws [*clang cymbals*] . . .

From *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*

First the youngest Billy Goat Gruff decided
to cross the bridge.

TRIP, TRAP, TRIP, TRAP! [*bang on a ticktock block,*
a wood instrument that makes two sounds similar to the tick
and tock of a clock] went the bridge.

“WHO’S THAT TRIPPING OVER MY BRIDGE?”
roared the Troll [*shake tambourine or bang on a drum*].

The *trip-trap* footfalls of the first, second, and third Billy Goats Gruff can be played by the same instrument in dif-



ferent sizes. For example, small, medium, and large wood blocks make light, medium, and heavy sounds.

Copy sounds of various instruments to a cassette, CD, or MP3 player to put in the library center or music area. When children get to know the sounds, they can tell a familiar story with musical accompaniment or create their own stories to play along with the instruments.

Making rhythmic patterns

While playing with manipulative materials such as blocks or plastic cubes, children often spontaneously compose various patterns. To help children find connections between visual patterns and musical rhythm, teachers can provide materials and talk with children about what they are doing and hearing. Guiding children through hands-on manipulative experimentation is one way to teach about reading and understanding music notes. For example, use Lego blocks in different colors and sizes to represent different values of music notes.

Example B:

Making a Rhythm Train

In this activity, a blue Lego block equals a whole note, a red block represents a half note, a yellow block is a quarter note, and a white block is an eighth note. Children can arrange the blocks in different combinations, creating a



Drum

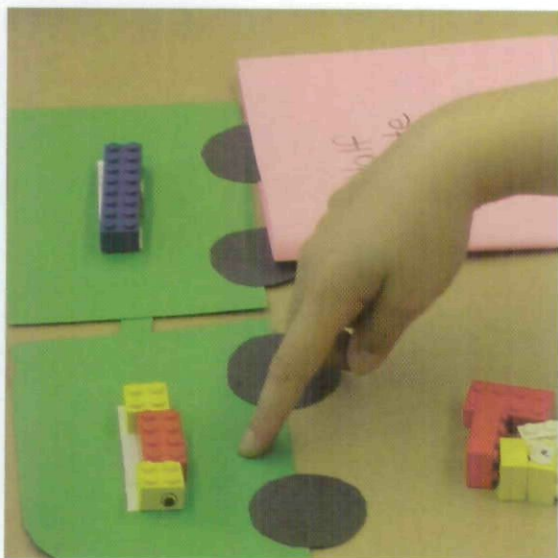
Cymbals



Bells

Guiro

Guiding children through hands-on manipulative experimentation is one way to teach about reading and understanding music notes.



structure that represents meter and measures. For example, in a pattern of yellow, red, yellow, and blue blocks, the teacher can help the child sing, “La [$\frac{1}{4}$ note], la-a [$\frac{1}{2}$ note], la [$\frac{1}{4}$ note], la-a-a-a [whole note].” Children can play their pattern creations on various instruments.

Playing melodies

A xylophone or similar kind of instrument, such as a keyboard, is a must-have in an early childhood classroom (MENC 1994b). Children can use pitched instruments to explore different pitches and create melodies.

Example C: Melody Bracelet

One activity that helps children create *melodic motives*, a phrase or tune you begin with to create music, is making melody bracelets. Children can arrange beads or other objects in colors matching those on a xylophone-type instrument. Children can play the melody they made using the colors, numbers, or letters on the instrument to share how they feel or see what it sounds like. Encourage them to put lyrics to the melody.

Children can use pitched instruments to explore different pitches and create melodies.



Step 4: Check the music standards

The final step in the four-step process is making and using a checklist to see if the selected activities satisfy the music standards. If they do not fully meet the music standards, plan additional music activities.

Conclusion

The four-step process outlined here can help all teachers incorporate music standards into the curriculum to offer children valuable musical experiences. Children need to experience music through singing, playing, creating, responding, and understanding. Through musical activities children learn to express joy and excitement and find out about the world that exists beyond their classroom doors. It is an early childhood teacher’s challenge to create a musically stimulating classroom environment and to foster children’s engagement and enjoyment with music materials and activities.

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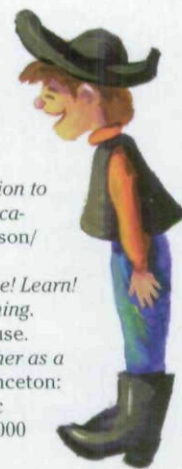
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(cont'd on p. 48)

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