**Co-Constructing Music in a Reggio-Inspired Preschool**

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Teachers employing the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education emphasize co-constructivism; they view children as being partners in learning. Additionally, they promote the idea that children express their thinking and learning using the hundred languages (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2011), such as painting, drawing, music, and dance. Although Reggio teachers emphasize the hundred languages, there has been limited research on musicking in Reggio-inspired settings. The purpose of this research was to understand the process of co-constructing music in a Reggio-inspired preschool. One question guided this study: In this preschool, what processes do children use to make their music learning visible and audible?

From September 16 to December 16, 2014, I visited Project P.L.A.Y. School--a play- and relationship-based, Reggio-inspired preschool--once weekly for one and a half hours during the children’s free play time. During my visits, I acted as a musical play partner with the children, following the children’s leads. Data emerged from child and adult musickers as musical interactions. I documented interactions using audiovisual recording, photographs, and a researcher’s journal. I interpreted the data using qualitative strategies, searching for salient themes in the documentation and coding my journals to assist in the search. I employed narrative tenets to present the research, restorying experiences into vignettes and using photographs and notation to support the themes.

I found that children made their music learning audible and visible by engaging in seven music processes, as described on the back page. These processes did not emerge in a vacuum, but emerged as part of larger social processes, such as discussion and social play.

The co-constructed musicking that emerged at Project P.L.A.Y. School was social and creative. Both adult and child co-musickers developed musical skills and musical meaning through listening and responding to one another. The social aspect of the musicking provided a unique opportunity for music educators to extend and enhance children’s musicking. Through creative engagement in music, children and adults refined musical skills and knowledge. Co-constructed musicking may have given participants tools to act as independent and thoughtful musicians.

Due to the rich musicking that emerged in this environment, I have three recommendations for early childhood music educators. First, I recommend dedicating time to musical play and exploration. Second, I recommend designing musical play environments for young children that emphasize accessibility, creativity, interaction, and agency. Third, I recommend becoming musical play partners with young children. Future researchers may consider studying co-constructed musicking in other settings.

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**THE SEVEN EMERGING PROCESSES:**

1. **Vocal Exploration.** Children explored the many sounds their voices could make while engaging in imaginative play, animating toys, and moving their bodies.
2. **Singing.** Children sang familiar and invented songs with others and independently. They sang to accompany their play, and they sang as play.
3. **Instrument Exploration**. Children explored instruments alone and with others. They explored ways to manipulate timbre, and used instruments to accompany singing, dancing, and “shows”.
4. **Expressive Movement.** Children moved expressively to recorded and live music, often with sensitivity, capturing musical elements through their movements.
5. **Notation Exploration.** Children used found notation and created original notation to represent songs. As children interacted with notation, they began to develop an understanding of symbolic representation of music.
6. **Musical Conversations.** Adults and children engaged in back-and-forth musical dialogues, listening and responding to one another’s musical phrases.
7. **Staging Shows.** Children often staged shows for each other and themselves. As they presented shows, they explored different ways of being musical, taking on roles such as performer, dancer, director, judge, audience member, usher, and lighting technician.

**TEACHING APPLICATIONS**

Based on the rich musicking that emerged in the environment of Project P.L.A.Y. School, I recommend that music teachers consider:

* Providing time for musical play and exploration in their classroom. Through musical play, children may expand their musical knowledge, practice musical skills, and enhance creativity.
* Becoming a musical play partner with their students. Through intentional, playful musical interactions, teachers can scaffold children’s music learning while learning more about children’s musical interests, knowledge, and development.
* Providing opportunities for children to make musical choices. Providing opportunities for children to have ownership over their musicking may increase their engagement and interest levels, and encourage active music making.
* Designing musicking spaces that allow for choice, accessibility, agency, and interaction.
* Sharing the music that emerges in their classrooms with parents, classroom teachers, the community, and students! Documenting and sharing musicking may increase awareness of children’s musicianship and extend children’s musicking.

**REFERENCE**

Edwards, C, Gandini, L, & Forman, G. (Eds.). (2011). The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia experience in transformation (3rd ed.). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.