

The School Music Program: A New Vision PreK Standards, and What They Mean to Music Educators

PREKINDERGARTEN (AGE 2-4)

The years before children enter kindergarten are critical for their musical development. Young children need a rich musical environment in which to grow. The increasing number of day-care centers, nursery schools, and early-intervention programs for children with disabilities and children at risk suggests that information should be available about the musical needs of infants and young children and that standards for music should be established for these learning environments as well as for K-12 settings.

The standards outlined in this section reflect the following beliefs concerning the musical learning of young children:

1. All children have musical potential
2. Children bring their own unique interests and abilities to the music learning environment
3. Very young children are capable of developing critical thinking skills through musical ideas
4. Children come to early-childhood music experiences from diverse backgrounds
5. Children should experience exemplary musical sounds, activities, and materials
6. Children should not be encumbered with the need to meet performance goals
7. Children's play is their work
8. Children learn best in pleasant physical and social environments
9. Diverse learning environments are needed to serve the developmental needs of many individual children
10. Children need effective adult models

Curriculum Guidelines

A music curriculum for young children should include many opportunities to explore sound through singing, moving, listening, and playing instruments, as well as introductory experiences with verbalization and visualization of musical ideas. The music literature included in the curriculum should be of high quality and lasting value, including traditional children's songs, folk songs, classical music, and music from a variety of cultures, styles, and time periods².

Play is the primary vehicle for young children's growth, and developmentally appropriate early music experiences should occur in child-initiated, child-directed, teacher-supported play environments. In the prekindergarten, the teacher's role is to create a musically stimulating environment and then to facilitate children's engagement with music materials and activities by asking questions or making suggestions that stimulate children's thinking and further exploration.

Children also need group music time to experience the important social and musical aspects of sharing music and making music together. Ideally this should be delivered by either early-childhood arts specialists employed as staff members in child-care centers and preschools or by visiting music specialists with training in child development to provide musicality and creativity and to serve as models and consultants for the child-care staff.

Effective music teaching in the prekindergarten should:

1. support the child's total development—physical, emotional, social, and cognitive
2. recognize the wide range of normal development in prekindergartners and the need to differentiate their instruction
3. facilitate learning through active interaction with adults and other children as well as with music materials

4. consist of learning activities and materials that are real, concrete, and relevant to the lives of young children
5. provide opportunities for children to choose from among a variety of music activities, materials, and equipment of varying degrees of difficulty
6. allow children time to explore music through active involvement

Assessment

The assessment of prekindergarten children provides special challenges. A substantial body of music education research has determined that young children know and understand much more about music than they can verbalize. Also, young children have not yet developed the ability to respond in a paper-and-pencil testing format. Another factor that affects their assessment is the very wide range of individual developmental differences displayed by young children.

Because of these characteristics, methods of assessment that are most appropriate to assess young children's music knowledge, skills, and attitudes include: (1) checklists or anecdotal reports completed by teachers, parents, or aides to record and describe verbal and nonverbal behavior; (2) systematic observation documenting such behavior as time on task, number of instances of an event or behavior, and participation tendencies over time; and (3) rating scales to provide data related to quality of responses, such as degrees of accuracy, originality, or involvement. Finished products and correct solutions are not the only criteria for judging whether learning has occurred. Audiotaping and videotaping are recommended methods of gathering samples of children's musical behavior for assessment and of examining growth and development over time. In order to develop a profile of each child's musical responses, representative samples of assessment materials should be placed in a music portfolio that is maintained for each child, beginning with the child's entrance into an educational/child-care setting and culminating with entrance into kindergarten.

Music Experiences for Infants and Toddlers

Infants and very young children experience music by hearing it, by feeling it, and by experimenting with pitch and timbre in their vocalizations. Children should experience music daily while receiving caring, physical contact. Adults can encourage the musical development of infants by:

1. singing and chanting to them, using songs and rhymes representing a variety of meters and tonalities
2. imitating the sounds infants make
3. exposing them to a wide variety of vocal, body, instrumental, and environmental sounds
4. providing exposure to selected live and recorded music
5. rocking, patting, touching, and moving with the children to the beat, rhythm patterns, and melodic direction of music they hear
6. providing safe toys that make musical sounds the children can control
7. talking about music and its relationship to expression and feeling

Musical Experiences for Two-, Three-, and Four-Year-Old Children

Two-, three-, and four-year-old children need an environment that includes a variety of sound sources, selected recorded music, and opportunities for free improvised singing and the building of a repertoire of songs. An exploratory approach, using a wide range of appropriate materials, provides a rich base from which conceptual understanding can evolve in later years. A variety of individual musical experiences is important for children at this age, with little emphasis on activities that require children to perform together as a unit. As a result of their experiences with music, four-year-olds should initiate both independent and collaborative play with musical materials, and they should demonstrate curiosity about music.

Terms identified by an asterisk (*) are explained in the glossary. The standards in this section are intended for age 4. The skills of young children develop along a continuum, and developmentally appropriate activities should be used at earlier levels. Age 5 is included in the K-4 section.

1. Content Standard: Singing and playing instruments

Achievement Standard:

Children

- a. use their voices expressively as they speak, chant, and sing
- b. sing a variety of simple songs in various keys, meters, and *genres,³ 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. Content Standard: Creating music

Achievement Standard:

Children

- 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. Content Standard: Responding to music

Achievement Standard:

Children

- a. identify the sources of a wide variety of sounds⁴
- 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. Content Standard: Understanding music

Achievement Standard:

Children

- 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 usage⁵
- c. demonstrate an awareness of music as a part of daily life

Notes:

1. "MENC Position Statement on Early Childhood Education," MENC Soundpost 8, no.2 (Winter 1992): 21-22.
2. "MENC Position Statement on Early Childhood Education," 21.
3. E.g., folk songs, ethnic songs, singing games
4. E.g., crying baby, piano, guitar, car horn, bursting balloon
5. E.g., changes in rhythm, dynamics, tempo