

A Study of Young Children's Behavior in Music Center

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Summary

From the educational tendency, teaching is no longer a mean of transmitting knowledge, but induces students to construct knowledge. Young children's music learning should not be limited in a circle time which a highly constructed curriculum is taught. Therefore, a music center is needed for young children to freely explore music media and music elements. Research findings refer that young children can develop music ability through free play in music center, but no further literature documents how the process is. This research focuses on the process of developing music behavior, and peer interaction to facilitate music learning in music center.

To examine the young children's music behavior and peers interaction in music center, a method of qualitative case study is engaged to investigate the phenomenon and context. The research setting, a public kindergarten, is located in southern Taiwan. There are 4 classes in this kindergarten. One of the four classes was chosen for the research observation. There are 30 students that are 16 boys and 14 girls, and aged 4-5 in this research class. In this classroom, 5 learning centers were designed and set. They are science center, reading center, dramatic play center, block center as well as music center. In the music center, there are 2 castanets, 1 guiro, 3 tone blocks, 1 maracas, 2 sets of lummi sticks, 1 tambourine, 1 set of cymbals, 1 gong, 2 wrist jingle bells, 2 sets of small brass bells, 2 sets of triangles, 1 electronic piano, a set of melodic bells, and a set of resonator bells. Pencils and paper sheets are also included for children to write down their music.

Data were collected through observation and interviews over a period of 32 weeks

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between September 2006 and June 2007. Spring break disrupted the research for one month. During research time, a visit per week was taken to the class for about 40 min. For the intention of observing the young children's play in music center, the researcher and the assistant remained unobtrusive to the degree possible in the classroom. While observing, researcher took field notes and an assistant helped to record on videotape. After each observation, the field notes were rechecked with the videotape to complete the observation. The observation was typed and dated for the later analysis. In order to well understand and explain young children's activities, occasionally informal interviews were taken during their break. Furthermore, young children's music creation on sheets was photographed, and together with research's reflexive analytic notes both were dated and numbered. The data was analyzed through the process of constant comparison that includes unitizing, categorizing, and filling in patterns.

Young children's behavior in the music center includes dramatic play as well as musical play, instrumental playing, making musical notation, body movement, and singing. In dramatic play, the instruments were used as various house wares or food, like bells as salt cans, cymbals as dishes, and a pair of cymbals as hamburger. During dramatic play, a story scene was created.

Because of the physical environment mainly arranged by instruments, instrumental playing including individual instrumental playing and ensembles is the major behavior in the music center. In the individual instrumental playing, there are four developmental phases. They are exploration, improvisation, mastery, and re-exploration. In the phase of exploration, the time period of playing each instrument is comparatively short, and physical movement occurs before inner sound image. Furthermore, the sound production in this phase is not in rhythmic pattern or melodic pattern. In the phase of improvisation, the time period of playing each instrument is getting longer than the phase of exploration and physical movement gradually corresponds with inner sound image. Clear rhythmic and melodic fragments appear. In the phase of mastery, learned tunes are played on melodic instruments or rhythmic accompaniments are created for learned songs, and free improvisations are longer than the phase of improvisation. Finally, in the phase of re-exploration, it only occurs on the electronic piano. The various fingerings are re-explored after exploring the tunes.

In addition to individual instrumental playing, there are three types of ensembles found

in the music center. Those are alternating pulses, accompanying the learned melodies, and alternating ostinatos. In the ensemble of alternating pulses, each child rotates to play various pulses rather than rhythmic patterns, but different tone colors are created. The ensemble of accompanying the learned melodies is mostly seen in the music center. Each child takes his own instrument to play with learned songs. Usually, one of the ensemble members plays the tune on electronic piano, and the others sing and play instruments with the tune. They usually play either the rhythm or the beat of the played melody. The ensemble of alternating ostinatos is only seen once, and it corresponds with the rhythmic patterns taught in class. According to the comparison between data analysis and classroom music teaching, young children's behavior in the music center can be categorized into self-constructed behavior and classroom extended behavior.

The collected music notations in the music center can be categorized into three types. The first type is a mixture of self-invention and symbolic notations used in music class. The second type is using the Arabic numbers labeled on melodic bells to notate. The third type is using English letters, C, D, E, F, G, A, B, labeled on resonator bells to notate, and occasionally the letters have been translate into Arabic numbers, but following the alphabetical order, 1 means A rather than C.

As the body movement occurs, children spontaneously dance corresponding with the heard music or shake their bodies while they play their instruments. Usually, the body movement occurs in a short period of time, and in the improvising style.

Singing is heard only in the context of play or induced by the heard music, and they are all learned songs. No spontaneous song is heard in this research.

Young children's peer interaction to facilitate learning includes using physical environment to stimulate learning, imitation, peers teaching and modeling, and collaboration. Since young children can construct music ability through free play and peer interaction in music center, music teaching should be balanced between circle time and free play. Furthermore, young children educators should notice the importance for peer learning and open every possibility for young children to learn through social interaction.

Keywords: spontaneous music behavior, music center, music behavior, sound exploration, music education

