

**Title:** The Music Education of Early Childhood Majors: All God's Critters Got a Place in the Choir

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**Source:** Fox, D. B. (1993, Spring). The music education of early childhood majors: All God's critters got a place in the choir. *The Quarterly*, 4(1), pp. 27-35. (Reprinted with permission in *Visions of Research in Music Education*, 16(4), Autumn, 2010). Retrieved from <http://www-usr.rider.edu/~vrme/>

*It is with pleasure that we inaugurate the reprint of the entire seven volumes of The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning. The journal began in 1990 as The Quarterly. In 1992, with volume 3, the name changed to The Quarterly Journal of Music Teaching and Learning and continued until 1997. The journal contained articles on issues that were timely when they appeared and are now important for their historical relevance. For many authors, it was their first major publication. Visions of Research in Music Education will publish facsimiles of each issue as it originally appeared. Each article will be a separate pdf file. Jason D. Vodicka has accepted my invitation to serve as guest editor for the reprint project and will compose a new editorial to introduce each volume. Chad Keilman is the production manager. I express deepest thanks to Richard Colwell for granting VRME permission to re-publish The Quarterly in online format. He has graciously prepared an introduction to the reprint series.*

# The Musical Education of Early Childhood Majors: All God's Critters Got A Place In The Choir

By Donna Brink Fox

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**T**he role of music in contributing to the general development of the young child has been described by many who write about pre-school education. An examination of books on early childhood curricula indicates that most authors include music as an essential element of young children's educational experience. The expressed values of musical experience include the enhancement of the capacity for self-expression, the promotion of the ability to listen intelligently, the development of social skills, and the introduction to cultural traditions (Greenberg, 1976, p. 7).

A recent content analysis of over 200 of these textbooks written between 1887 and 1982 found that 70 percent of the books mentioned "promotes self-expression and creative pleasure," and 67 percent included "fosters motor and rhythmic development" as reasons for teaching music to young children (Draper & Gayle, 1987, p. 197). Aronoff

(1988) comments from her experienced perspective that "traditionally, singing, pantomiming of the words, and rhythm bands (set

orchestrations or grand cacophonies!) have been included in daily preschool music activities. Capitalizing on rhythmic organization as an aid to memory, many teachers use songs to teach the word content—body parts, arithmetic, social studies, and language acquisition in general" (p. 18).

In spite of this apparent consensus, observation of the musical experiences actually being provided for young children reveals a great diversity of activities, goals, and quality of instruction. A major task of teaching music to young children should be to provide developmentally appropriate experiences closely related to activities in their world, giving them

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ample time and space to experiment with and explore all types of sounds—to listen to and interpret sounds with their bodies, voice, and instruments. Music time at school could occur whenever there is a chance for music to enhance learning. While it is important that music is a discipline in its own right, it is most meaningfully taught to young children

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as an integral part of all activities in the educational program. Many teachers, however, include music only as a large-group activity, during which all children participate in some prearranged musical experience directed by the teacher. In this setting, music often becomes an isolated event which takes place out of context with the rest of the classroom activities.

### **Who Should Teach Music to Young Children?**

In order to accomplish this integrated approach to music in the lives of young children, the question immediately arises: "Who will provide these experiences?" The answer must be the preschool teacher. A music specialist can have only infrequent contact with any particular group of children and can provide only a series of separated activities, relegating music to that isolated spot in the curriculum. A second problem concerning music educators is that few, if any, have training in music education for young children. Over 20 years ago, the Tanglewood Symposium made these recommendations about music education and young children:

Music has played a less significant role than it should in the lives of children, aged 3 through 8...We recommend that the MENC, recognizing the unrealized potentials of education in general and particularly of music in the lives of children from the ages of 3 to 8...apprize college and university music departments of the necessity to work closely with experts in early childhood education to prepare music education students to teach music to 3- to 8-year-old children. (Reilly, 1969, p. 41)

Unfortunately, these recommendations have largely gone unheeded. Most college and university schools of music have not only ignored "music in early childhood" topics for the music education major but have also not provided courses and preparation in music for the early childhood majors.

Given the renewed emphasis on early childhood music education, one of the important areas from MENC, however, it seems timely that we discuss the musical preparation of these teachers and care givers. We are now aware that the important years from birth to age 7 are being increasingly organized by

adults who are not themselves the parents of the children they care for. And if music is to be offered as part of the daily instructional program within schools, day-care centers, and home-based child care environments, the vast numbers of children involved make it clear that it cannot always be a music specialist who prepares for these experiences.

Although we have also known for some time that it is these caregivers who provide the musical models for many young children, we know little of the specifics of the music programs within these early childhood settings. One of the original projects of the Early Childhood Special Interest Research Group (SRIG) was to determine the status of music in preschool programs around the country, and from 1980 to 1982 one of the task forces conducted a needs assessment of teachers responsible for music instruction in early childhood centers. McDonald presented a preliminary report at the SRIG meeting in Miami in 1980 and later reported more details of the responses, generally identifying a minimal level of musical content and curriculum in the preschool settings (McDonald, 1984). In a more recent study, a survey of licensed day-care centers in Ohio, Golden (1990) documented that classroom teachers were primarily responsible for conducting the music experiences in over 75 percent of the responding centers. These teachers determined the frequency of involvement, designed and organized the music activities, and offered instruction in the regular classroom (Golden, 1990, p. 15).

### **What Do Teachers Need to Know?**

Is it really possible that we can expect these teachers to teach music—but even more demanding, to teach musically? Can these teachers be adequately prepared to present appropriate musical experiences? Doreen Bridges, a distinguished music educator from Sydney, Australia, warns that "limited time allotment and inappropriate courses cannot give musically inexperienced teachers the skills and confidence necessary to implement effective musical activities for young children" (p. 44). What level of undergraduate education should include this preparation? Or,

from another perspective, will only bachelors-prepared teachers be included? Address questions whether we are ready to offer to nondegreed care givers the appropriate training, advice, and counsel as they design their music programs (1989, p. 23). What should the care giver be able to do in order to present musical activities in the classroom?

An effort was made in 1973 to develop a new professional category called the Child Development Associate (CDA) in order to assure the qualitative staffing of child care programs. The Office of Child Development (OCD) of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare initiated the idea in 1971 by funding a feasibility study for training persons to work with 3- to 5-year-olds. The same year, OCD formed a task force of experts in early childhood education and child development; they defined six competency areas considered basic for a CDA and necessary to a sound developmental program for young children. In the years since its inception, the number of CDAs has reached the thousands.

Music was included as one of the six areas of skills and knowledge in the initial guidelines. Figure 1 indicates the musical competency statements of the task force.

These early statements do not adequately indicate specific behaviors that will equip early childhood educators to conduct an effective music program. Nor are current publications much help in defining these. In the McDonald and Simon text (1989), brief suggestions for teacher training are included in numerous places in the book. The specific section that address the competencies of the teacher is listed under the social environment.

### How Can Research Inform Our Practice?

Few research studies have examined the issue of teacher training, competency, and role in working in music with preschoolers. Cassidy (1990) found that elementary education majors who were assigned to teach in a day-care center with children ages 4 to 6 were able to include more music in their

- 4.01 To be able to set up this interest center
- 4.02 Identify the various musical families
- 4.03 Be able to perform simple musical tunes on the flutophone and autoharp
- 4.04 Identify different learning outcomes from each learning activity in the music center

The concept of the music area will be defined by consultants:

#### A. Lectures

- 1. Explanations and examples of the musical families, e.g. woodwinds, string, percussion
- 2. Uses of the autoharp and flutophone
- 3. Uses of records and record player

BOOKS: (This was a current music series)

RECORDS: Hap Palmer's Series

#### B. Workshops

- 1. Making inexpensive instruments, e.g. drums—oatmeal box; banjo—box and rubber bands; maracas—a can and some beans

#### C. Field Trips

- 1. Broadway musical shows—New York City, NY
- 2. Art's Music Center—Montgomery, AL
- 3. Tuskegee Institute High School Band Room—Tuskegee Institute, AL

#### D. Setting Up the Music Interest Center

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From the Child Development Associate Set of Competencies for the Purpose of Upgrading the Quality of Child Care and Early Childhood Education. ERIC No. ED 078, 964

**Figure 1.** Original Competencies Proposed for Childhood Development Associates



teaching presentations and to structure lessons that actively engaged the children in musical behaviors: "[M]usic methods class should focus on developing repertoire and planning lessons that maximize student engagement in music" (p. 172). Another recent study by Flowers and Coddling (1990) that involved early childhood majors and the use of graduate music education students as mentors found that the nonmajors were able to improve their presentation skills and on-task time in teaching music lessons, as in the Cassidy report.

In a study of the effectiveness of preschool teachers with a limited musical background in teaching music, Young (1973, 1975) concluded that the teacher's musical knowledge had less affect on the children's improvement than teacher traits such as determination, industry, and willingness to take the initiative. Teachers who are relatively untrained and lack substantial musical ability can be taught how to conduct an effective music program with preschoolers and can produce significant improvement in the musical abilities of children. These findings are similar to those reported by Greenberg (1972, 1974), who found that preschool teachers who have limited musical background and apparently low effectiveness, but who are nonetheless conscientious and enthusiastic, can do as well in teaching music as teachers with a good musical background and high classroom performance. Both Young and Greenberg note that nonmusical factors can be as important as musical factors in the teacher's ability to foster musical growth in preschool children. In studies with Head Start teachers in Hawaii and Texas, a major emphasis of the music program was on a knowledge of the structure of music rather than training the musical skills of the preschool teacher (Steele & Pruitt, 1971). Cummings (1981) also found that teachers felt more successful with structured musical activities than with more improvisatory singing: "The more structured and familiar activities were rated higher than the less structured and less familiar activities...The children's response was a direct reflection of the leader's comfort" (pp. 118, 120).

Is the preschool teacher skilled enough to provide these musical models for children's

development? Aronoff (1988) describes her perception of most early childhood classroom music performances thus: "The appropriate tempo of the song is often ignored, the flow and accuracy of the melody is given short shrift. Unfortunately, this practice, more often than not, limits the experience of the child's physical as well as feelingful response to the music itself" (p. 18). Although Flowers and Coddling (1990) reported that teachers could learn the presentation skills to be successful in teaching young children, their performance skills provided a poor model for children to imitate:

In addition to "time spent in musical activity," work needs to be done to ensure that musicianship is at an acceptable level. It was observed that much of the unaccompanied singing performed by these undergraduate nonmusic majors was in an inappropriately low vocal range and that the key center sometimes shifted within a given song. Because most music activity in preschools is led by nonmusic specialists, strategies and resources for developing musical performance must be made available to preschool personnel (p. 14).

### **Organizing Instruction for Early Childhood Majors**

The literature clearly indicates that the music curriculum at the preschool level must be qualitatively different from the curriculum in the elementary music program. I have often described to my early childhood methods class (with just a hint of horror in my voice) how my first preschool teaching episode failed for this exact reason. I had arrived at the day-care center to present my concept-oriented music lesson, materials and strategies carefully sequenced on my lesson plan. But I couldn't even find a way to interest the children in what I had to present because I knew nothing about their world, environment, vocabulary, or learning styles.

Similarly, methods classes and workshops for teachers in each of these settings should be qualitatively different. While the content and structure of the courses for elementary education majors have been supported more broadly by publishers of textbooks for these courses, the guidelines for teacher preparation in music specifically for early childhood classrooms have been slower to emerge in print.

McDonald and Simons (1989) make these suggestions for early childhood educators:

What makes a good music teacher? Musical skills are necessary. Ability to sing tunefully and easily is a skill that can be acquired by most teachers. Instrumental skills, such as playing the piano, guitar, or autoharp, add to the effectiveness of music instruction. Teachers who like to dance or move to music and do it comfortably and with pleasure bring this security and pleasure to their students. An understanding of musical concepts and the

ability to discern the appropriate "teachable" element in a child's song, rhyme, or recorded composition make for effective teaching.... Given all these skills, however, the really effective early childhood music educator is the one who understands children as well as music (pp. 74-75).

In order to specify teaching skills for the educator, it becomes necessary to delineate the musical outcomes for the young child. A knowledge of what preschoolers can and should do musically will help determine what

**Listener:** An Awareness of How Sound is Heard

1. Perceives differences in sounds
2. Perceives multiple sounds
3. Perceives relationship of sounds to each other
4. Perceives sounds of various textures, timbres, densities, and intensities
5. Is receptive to music of other styles, other cultures, and other media from those most generally known

**Performer:** An Awareness of How Sound Is Made

1. Can perform a repertoire of songs appropriate for the preschool-age child with stable pitch, pleasing tone, and rhythmic accuracy
2. Engages in free and creative movement as well as more structured movement forms
3. Demonstrates proper playing techniques for classroom instruments
4. Provides an accompaniment for a rote song on a chording instrument

**Composer/Improvisor:** An Awareness of How Sound Is Arranged

1. Experiments with simple improvisation on a chosen instrument and in physical movement
2. Is capable of writing in simple form musical ideas that can be fully notated by a music specialist
3. Encourages children in their creative efforts in sound exploration and structuring
4. Maintains a climate for creativity in the classroom where each child's contribution is accepted with interest and respect

**Facilitator:** An Awareness of the Application of Skills and Knowledge to Musical Encounters in the Classroom

1. Acquires a familiarity with available song collections and recorded material for preschool age children
2. Uses appropriate methods and techniques in presenting new songs
  - a. by voice
  - b. by recording
3. Encourages and allows time for children to explore the appropriate uses and diverse methods of playing classroom instruments
4. Provides opportunities for group musical experiences when appropriate
5. Structures music "lessons" of appropriate length for preschool children
6. Provides opportunities for individual participation in musical experiences when appropriate
7. Includes music of a variety of styles and cultures

**Figure 2.** Musical Roles of the Early Childhood Educator. Categories derived from MENC *Teacher Education in Music* (1972) and *Virginia Curriculum Guide*

**Table 1.** Attitudes About Music and Music Teaching

Statement	Mean Rating (1-5)	
	Early Ch. Ed. Majors	Mus. Ed. Majors
Music is a necessary part of my life	4.29	5.00
I enjoy singing along with radio/TV	4.49	4.50
I enjoy singing	4.07	4.00
Sing in front of children	2.83	4.80
Teaching a new song is	2.74	3.65
My attitude toward music is	4.50	5.00
Rate private lessons	3.41	4.50
Rate school music	3.71	4.33
Attitude toward music teacher	3.73	4.08

(Taken from Hair and Smith, 1990, p. 25)

skills and knowledge an early childhood educator should possess in order to facilitate the musical development of young learners. The Music Educators National Conference has listed, in the document entitled *School Music Program Description and Standards*, a number of appropriate musical behaviors as a starting point of reference (see Figure 2). For my own work in organizing the preparation of early childhood majors, I identified the desired behaviors for children in the areas of singing, listening, playing, and movement, which I then used as a guideline for skill development on the part of the teachers.

### Attitudes About Teaching Music

Beyond the skills and knowledge, however, it is often accepted that the teacher's interest in music and feelings of confidence with music will affect the issue of whether or not music is a natural part of the preschool classroom (Austin, 1974). Andress (1986) cautions music educators who might be presenting workshops to preschool teachers:

The classroom teacher has long suspected that many of the activities presented in early childhood workshops don't work. The games were fun for adults, but when used in the classroom proved bewildering to children either due to complicated instructions, social implication of the play, or wordiness of the songs. The greater sorrow is that dedicated classroom teachers often blamed their own musical inadequacies for the lack of success (1986, p. 37).

What do we know about preschool teacher's attitudes about music and about teaching music? How confident do they feel about presenting lessons? A recent study by Hair and Smith (1990) surveyed early childhood education majors and music education majors and reported that "all students involved in this study had strong positive attitudes toward music, enjoyed singing along with songs on the radio and television, and acknowledged the importance of music in their lives. Music students were only slightly more positive in their ratings than education majors" (p. 25). (See Table 1 for a portion of the responses from this report). The early childhood majors responding to these statements expressed the greatest concern about their skills in singing in front of children and in teaching a new song.

### Developing the Musical Dispositions of Early Childhood Majors

Dispositions are developed through the modeling of behavior from important others and practicing the behaviors actually of interest. It is important for young children that they have teachers who can be musical models for the growth of children's interest in and commitment to music. A teacher who displays these musical behaviors will be able to create in young children the disposition to be skillful music makers, to be attentive listeners, and to be expressive movers.

What are some of the musical roles that

## LISTENING

### Pitch:

1. Hear that sounds are relatively high or low
2. Hear that tones in a melody move up or down or repeat
3. Hear that a melody may be accompanied

### Duration:

4. Hear that sounds or silences are relatively long or short
5. Aurally identify beat, metrical accent, and rhythm pattern
6. Become aware that silence is an important part of the organization of sounds

### Volume:

7. Hear that sounds are relatively loud or soft
8. Hear that changes in dynamics may occur quickly or slowly

### Timbre:

9. Control individual instruments to produce loud and soft sounds
10. Develop skills in playing gradually louder or softer when creating own music or performing accompaniments

### Expressive Controls:

11. Develop the ability to hear and identify music that moves relatively fast or slow
12. Develop the ability to hear tones that are smooth and connected (legato) versus detached and separated (staccato)

### Structure:

13. Develop the ability to hear that music is organized by contrast and repetition

## SINGING

### Pitch:

1. Able to sing in response to short melodic dictation
2. Exhibits understanding of melodic movement by singing simple tonal patterns

### Duration:

3. Increase in ability to control and sustain vocal sounds
4. Demonstrate understanding of rhythm patterns through vocal performance (rhythmic speech)

### Volume:

5. Increase ability to control and utilize dynamics for expressive vocal purposes

### Timbre:

6. Uses voice with varying timbres to express contrasts in moods of songs

### Expressive Controls:

7. Develop the ability to sing music that is relatively fast or slow

### Structure:

8. Identify and sing patterns and phrases that are alike or different

## PLAYING

### Pitch:

1. Grow in ability to use individual instruments to produce high and low sounds

### Duration:

2. Produce a variety of short/long sounds on the same instrument

### Volume:

3. Control individual instruments to produce loud and soft sounds
4. Respond appropriately with dynamic changes which reflect the intent of the music
5. Be able to produce a variety of loud and soft body sounds

### Timbre:

6. Produce a variety of sounds on the same instrument
7. Select an appropriate timbre when playing

### Expressive Controls:

8. Be able to play music that moves relatively fast or slow

### Structure:

9. Demonstrate increasing ability to play simple phrases and patterns (rhythmic and melodic)

## MOVING

### Pitch:

1. Use movement to illustrate high and low
2. Use large body movements to illustrate upward and downward direction of pitch
3. Use hand movements to demonstrate pitch awareness when singing

### Duration:

4. Respond with appropriate quality and movement to long/short sounds

### Volume:

5. Become aware that the body can produce a variety of loud and soft sounds

### Timbre:

6. Respond to timbre of sound with appropriate quality of movement

### Expressive Controls:

7. Be able to move to music that is fast and slow
8. Learn to control stopping and starting movements

### Structure:

9. Respond through movement to the overall character or mood of the composition
10. Use appropriate movement to demonstrate repetition and contrast

**Figure 3.** Musical Behaviors Proposed for Early Childhood Majors

teachers might play in early childhood classrooms? This listing is adapted from the 1972 edition of *Teacher Education in Music* from MENC (see Figure 3 for detailed listing):

- As a listener, the teacher has an awareness of how sound is heard;
- as a performer, an awareness of how sound is made;
- as a composer/improviser, an awareness of how sound is arranged; and
- as a facilitator, an awareness of the application of skills and knowledge to musical encounters in the classroom.

These areas can be used in organizing instructional courses and/or workshop sessions for early childhood educators and caregivers. Teachers need to gain facility in producing and expressing sounds as well as facility in presenting musical material to children.

Early childhood educators can provide musical experiences that are developmentally appropriate for preschool children if the teachers have a basic understanding of the structure of music, a variety of experiences in musical performance, and a knowledge of materials and repertoire suitable for the musical development of the children. The two necessary ingredients for musical development described by Zimmerman (1971) are first, the child with the potential to respond, and second, the opportunity to hear music and participate in musical activities.

It should be our responsibility as college instructors to apply the same model in the preparation of these teachers. We have the first component, preservice teachers with the potential to respond, and we must provide the second: the opportunity for these teachers to hear music and to participate directly in musical activities. Whether or not young teachers make the decision to provide musical opportunities for the children in their classrooms may be a direct result of their positive experiences with music in our classes, where they have had the chance to be active learners, to learn from others, and to celebrate the differences they brought to the experience. Each early childhood educator is different, and comes to us with 20 or more years of personal attitudes and feelings about music—positive, negative, or somewhere in between—but the atmosphere in the methods class can do much to redirect

the focus into positive channels for the good of the children with whom the teachers will interact.

All God's critters got a place in the choir,  
Some sing low, some sing higher,  
Some sing out loud on the telephone wire,  
And some just clap their hands, or paws,  
Or anything they got now.


—Bill Staines

This delightful folk song, "All God's Critters Got a Place in the Choir," describes the wonderful musical results that occur when each participant's contribution is valued as a part of the musical community. This same attitude should be dominant in our teacher preparation courses for early childhood majors. If our students can learn to value their own musical roles in working with young children, and if we can learn to value the musical contribution they are making to these youngest members of society, the potential for enriching the musical lives of America's children is unlimited.

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