

The Musical Instrument Project

A Project by 3-, 4-, and 5-Year-Old Children
at Illinois Valley Community College, Oglesby, Illinois

Length of Project: 10 weeks Teachers: Marilyn Worsley, Jan Kirkham, and Practicum Students

Phase One

Beginning the Project

Earlier, we had observed many of the children playing toy brooms as guitars and kitchen pans as drums. But before jumping into a project on musical instruments, many questions had to be answered in the minds of the teachers. For example, would this topic be enjoyable to the student teachers as well as the children? Would there be plenty of opportunities for the children to investigate and represent? With these questions answered in our minds, we set out to explore instruments. We began by webbing what the children already knew and focusing on our own classroom instruments.

Phase Two

Developing the Project

We gradually introduced many types of instruments into the classroom for hands-on manipulation, observation, and representation. Several experts played their instruments and answered questions. Over time, the children's interest narrowed to guitars. More guest experts visited with different types and styles of guitars. We were fortunate to have a guitar repair shop and museum in the area that we could visit. While there, the children were able to investigate primitive guitars, open guitars, and instruments related to guitars.

After this visit, several children were no longer satisfied with sharing the one classroom guitar or using pretend guitars. They wanted their own "real" guitars to play. One child, who had recently seen a program on guitar making on television, stated that he knew how to make one. We documented his steps as he planned and constructed his first guitar. However, he was not satisfied with his first model. He had glued the strings to the guitar, and he explained that "If the strings can't move back and forth, the guitar can't make any sound." More materials were added to the classroom project area, and the children built many guitars with free-moving strings.

Phase Three

Concluding the Project

To culminate the project, the children decided to display their guitars in the main lobby of the college. We used a digital camera to photograph each child with his or her guitar and then created a mini-display that included the photograph and narrative about the guitar by each child. These mini-displays were placed alongside the guitars. The insights the children displayed through their narratives were even more spectacular than their handmade guitars!

Comments

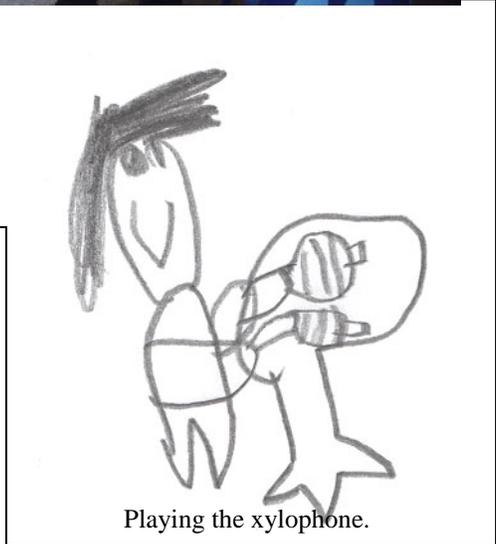
The knowledge and skills the children gained from this project were astounding—from the simple idea of which way to turn a screw to the idea that vibrations cause an instrument to make its sound. The project helped others learn about children. For example, after a field trip, a band director was amazed that young children could draw with such detail. Children began using this tool at home. One child even kept a clipboard with her while watching television, in case she saw something she wanted to remember. I believe this project had a huge impact on many people.



Sheet music.



Dancing to saxophone music.



Playing the xylophone.