

The Stringed Instrument Project

A Project by 3- through 5-Year-Old Children
at St. Ambrose University Children's Campus, Davenport, Iowa
Length of Project: 8 weeks
Teachers: Stacie DeVries & Karen Blend

Phase One

Beginning the Project

After two children spontaneously created a guitar, the teachers brought in a small guitar, ukulele, and autoharp to investigate. The children continually returned to the instruments to explore the sounds, hold them in various ways, and notice the similarities and differences through observation. A parent visited to share his guitar. He encouraged children to participate by singing and strumming his guitar. After his visit, children began sketching the guitar and noticing the parts. Others constructed guitars out of wood, nails, and wire. Questions began to emerge: What are the parts? How do the buttons make it louder/softer? What do the buttons on the guitar do? To introduce another stringed instrument, a student employee brought her cello. The children immediately thought it was a violin or guitar! After hearing the cello, some noticed the difference in sound. Other questions emerged: What is rosin? What does it mean to pluck? What are the hand strings called where you put your fingers?

Phase Two

Developing the Project

We visited Galvin Fine Arts Center and met with the band director. Children asked their questions about the guitar and cello and were introduced to a new stringed instrument—the bass. Children made comments and asked several spontaneous questions about the bass. Answers to questions were recorded on clipboards. Some children chose to sketch, while others explored the instruments by touching them.

Back in the classroom, we created a web about what the children knew. New construction materials were provided, and children created guitars from rubber bands, Styrofoam, tubes, and lids. Some children painted representations of guitars and made sketches of the cello and bass.

Phase Three

Concluding the Project

We documented the project with photographs and sketches. Children selected a piece of documentation to share during open house. They shared information about the photograph or sketch pertaining to the stringed instrument and prepared it for display. After open house, a display was created outside our classroom door. A child helped dictate the sign, "It's about guitars, cellos, and bass." If onlookers had questions, they were encouraged to come into our classroom and ask the stringed instrument experts! The children strengthened their mathematical skills by comparing sounds and sizes. All children used their senses to explore. The dispositions to be curious and to persevere were nurtured and strengthened.

Comments

Throughout the project, the children were engrossed in their exploration and representation of instruments. The guitar was the instrument of choice for most children. Phase 1 was longer than usual, but we had our best representations during this phase using a variety of materials. Phase 2 came and went quickly! Representation was difficult during this phase, maybe because children were tired of representing the same thing. Phase 3 really encouraged each child to reflect on his learning. Next time, I intend to think more about the difference between Phase 1 and Phase 2. I will also try to encourage more collaborative representations.

