



HITTING THE RIGHT NOTE

The importance of music in early childhood development

It's fairly obvious that children adore music – whether they are singing their favourite songs, banging on pots, or dancing up a storm with their friends.

But did you know that music has a positive effect on their brains? A study out of the Brain and Creativity Institute (BCI) in California showed that exposure to music and music instruction accelerates the brain development of young children in the areas responsible for language development, sound, reading and speech.

At Family Day, we know how important music is to children's growth, and we work hard to integrate music into our various programs (see *Making Music @ Family Day* on page 2).

"Music can happen at any time of the day – while getting ready to go outside, during rest time, while on a walk – whenever the spirit hits you," says Shelagh Karstoff, Family Day Program Manager. And with the HighScope approach utilized in our centres, music gets incorporated via a variety of methods.

"HighScope is an approach to educating young children which concentrates on active participatory learning," says Jill Javelosa-Alvarez, a Family Day Early Literacy Specialist. "Children naturally enjoy moving and making sounds, and thus music and movement are an integral part of the curriculum as a tool for engagement and learning."



MOTOR CONTROL

To better understand the effect of music in early childhood development, Carnegie Hall commissioned a research paper from Dr. Dennie Palmer Wolf. Her paper, "Why Making Music Matters," uncovered several reasons why music leads to healthy development and successful futures for children.

One of these reasons is developing fine and gross motor control. Palmer says making music – especially if it includes tapping, clapping, bouncing, and

dancing – can develop fine and large motor skills.

"Even simple games, songs, and back-and-forth play build brain and body coordination," says Palmer. "If older children play an instrument, these kinds of growth continue."

COGNITIVE SKILLS

In a paper called "Beyond Twinkle, Twinkle," Claire Lerner and Rebecca Parlakian point out music also allows children to practice patterns, math concepts and symbolic thinking skills.

These include: counting (many songs introduce numbers and counting); memory (providing consistent experiences helps children remember), and observation of differences (through music, children become aware of differences in pitch, tone and volume).

DEVELOPING LANGUAGE

Music also helps to develop language. We are all wired to be sensitive to sound patterns, and this sensitivity allows music to

nurture communication and imagination in young children.

Lerner and Parlakian say music activates literacy and language learning in ways that include: spoken language (assisting children in practicing language and deciphering meaning); dual language learning (helping to foster children's home languages); and receptive language (aiding children with words they understand but may be unable to say).

... continued on page 2

Hitting the Right Note

continued from page 1

MANAGING FEELINGS

Childhood is a time when we learn how to express and manage our feelings. Through music, children can invent games, songs, and stories that help them connect their feelings. In addition, music enables children's ability to regulate their emotions.

Music can also help reduce stress in children. Vinita Kar, Centre Supervisor at Flemingdon Park, says "music has a very calming effect on some of our children. When they are showing anxiety they can often be calmed by different types of music."

SENSE OF BELONGING

Music can help create community and a sense of belonging. Palmer notes that in their earliest years, children learn the languages and accents they hear at

home. "They absorb the songs and stories of their community, and along with them, beliefs and values," she says. In a child care setting, with the help of educators, music can combine their first language with those of their peers.

"Children who have English as a second language learn through music because it is fun, and it allows for expression without stress, says Karstoff. "It can allow children to express themselves in ways they may not otherwise be able."

HAVING FUN

So, it seems music has a variety of cognitive benefits for children – everything from nurturing creativity to helping them decipher language.

But much can also be said for the pure joy and happiness music provides. Whether it is singing during circle time or playing musical chairs, most children simply enjoy the feeling music gives them. As musician Marilyn Manson once said: "Music is the strongest form of magic."

Message from Joan Arruda, CEO



I recently participated in a professional learning opportunity that focused on outdoor learning. Together with 50 Family Day staff, I spent a wonderful day at Albion Hills taking part in sessions that taught us how to better engage children with nature.

The activities were led by Diane Kashin, along with Ian Faulds and Tanya Murray, who connected research to early childhood practice and the benefits of playing and learning outside. The positive and simple activities all demonstrated how we can build on our outdoor programming skills.

Children are keen observers of the natural world. We, as educators, need only take them to a park, go for a walk, and play games that engage their senses through sight, sound and smell and touch. The children will make the observations about what they see and hear; we just need to observe and listen.

Family Day will continue to build upon our knowledge and experience in this area of curriculum to ensure our programs offer a wide range of learning opportunities – during all seasons, both inside and outdoors.



On an end note, I'd like to thank all of our staff, sponsors and partners for their support of our sixth annual Bowling for Family Day. Your great support toward this event allows us to pursue special projects and offer support to children in need.

MAKING MUSIC @ FAMILY DAY

We make music in a variety of ways in our child care centres, home programs and Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs). Here's a look at what's going on:

Singing Songs

Songs and song circles are used in all programs with children of all ages on a daily basis.

Musical Games

Music is integrated into all kinds of games in the programs. Vinita Kar, Centre Supervisor at Flemingdon Park, says music is incorporated into a variety of games such as freeze dance and musical chairs.

Instruments

Many centres and home programs use musical instruments in their programming to introduce children to various sounds and types of music.

Twinkle Toes

Developed by Jill Javelosa-Alvarez, this program is used in our OEYCs for children and their families to explore different ways of moving and trying on different roles.

Dance Parties

Many centres and home programs hold dance parties for the children to get them up and moving.

Music Circle

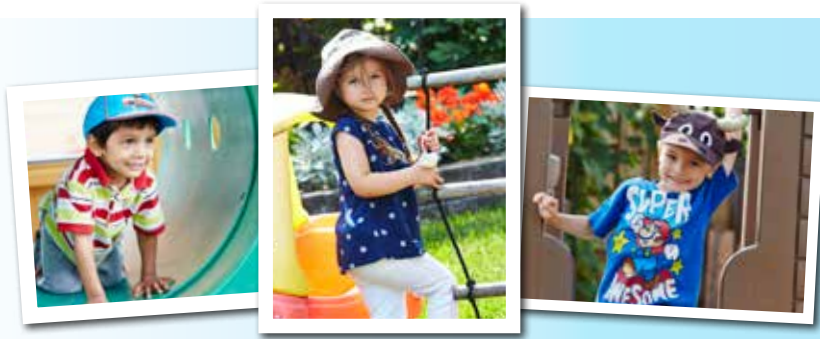
Vilma Raymundo, the Early Years Supervisor at the Don Valley East OEYC, says this 20-minute music and movement time (with shakers, drums, bells, etc.) gets everyone singing, rhyming, chanting, moving and dancing.

DEAM (Drop Everything and Move)

Lesley Pettigrew, Centre Supervisor at the Thornhill OEYC, says she uses DEAM in her programs to get children more physically active.

Parent/Child Mother Goose

This registered parenting program at Family Day OEYCs teaches parents a repertoire of rhymes and songs, and helps strengthen their bond with their children.



How to get kids outside

Unlike previous generations, childhood memories today are mostly made indoors – away from nature, and dominated by screen time.

Yet, when we live without “Vitamin N” (the “N” is for nature) and experience nature-deficit disorder we don’t live well. Here are some proven tricks that will get them outside and playing:

- 1** Tell them it is okay to get wet, dirty, and messy.
- 2** Organize an outdoor play date. Take your children and a few of their friends to a park, creek, or lake. Watch them cooperate and interact with each other and the natural environment.
- 3** Allow your children to incorporate natural resources into play equipment. Examples might include tree stumps to jump from, or boulders to climb onto.
- 4** Set a timer for a maximum amount of screen time. Have your children spend less time watching TV or using the computer.
- 5** Tell your children to go outside in the backyard and play. Give them balls, sidewalk chalk, buckets, and let them get creative. If you’re nervous about it, check on them every 10 minutes or, better yet, get out there with them.
- 6** Plant a garden or flowers with your child.
- 7** Explore nature with your children far from your home. Include outside time in nature on your next holiday.
- 8** Give your children rope and an old sheet and help them to build a fort.

9 Park a few minutes from school and walk with your children. Point out the colours of the natural world and watch them play with sticks, rocks, and leaves along the way.

10 Go for regular walks, runs, or bike rides in natural settings as a family.

11 Have a picnic dinner at a playground or park.

12 Gradually increase the level of independence your child has outdoors. Start with going up and down the street, around the block, and progress to the nearby playground.

13 Organize a play group that meets after school for snack and playtime. Meet other children and parents at a field near your child’s school and bring a soccer ball.

14 Create an outdoor scavenger hunt where your children collect items from nature.

15 Give your children a jar and have them catch bugs.

16 Make mud pies at the beach or in a sandbox.

17 Go geocaching.

18 Each weekend, explore new areas of your town or city as family. Make it your mission to visit as many different parks and playgrounds and find your favourites.

If you’re not already exposing your children to nature, put these practical ideas to use. Experiencing nature helps us live well – and every bit of exposure helps.

Article by Trina Sporer. Reprinted, in part, by permission from Active for Life (activeforlife.com).



FIVE PROGRAMS TESTING STORYPARK

Family Day is excited to announce that it has started testing Storypark (www.storypark.com) in five of its programs.

Storypark is an easy-to-use, online tool that helps parents, families and educators work together to record, share and extend children’s learning. It will allow centre staff to capture children’s development by posting photos, videos, stories, notes and comments.

The following programs are testing the tool: Philip Pocock, Hickory Wood, Thornhill, Markville and Divine Infant. The second phase will be rolled out to five more programs in the fall, five in the winter, and 10 by spring 2018.



PLEASE COMPLETE OUR PARENT SURVEY

This year, you will be able to complete the Family Day Parent Survey online. Emails will be sent to all parents on June 5 and you will have until June 16 to fill out the survey. Your feedback is really important to us; it will help us serve you better, drive innovation within the agency, and provide your child with the very best care available.



SEND THE KIDS TO CAMP

With summer just around the corner, it’s time to register for Family Day camp. To register your child for an enriching summer at one of our extended-day or school-age camp programs, visit www.familydaycare.com. Spots are available on a first-come, first-served basis, so register early!

That's just how we roll!

More than 200 Family Day staff, parents and agency partners took part in our sixth annual Bowling for Family Day fundraiser on April 22. And they helped to raise almost \$20,000 (and counting).

Held at Markham Bowl and Brunswick Zone Mississauga, guests were treated to great music, terrific prizes and delicious pizza – and they got to show off

their fancy footwork in the bowling lanes.

Thank you to our generous sponsors, the two bowling alleys, and all of our terrific volunteers. Your support allows us to pursue special projects and offer support to children and their families.

Photos: Kevin Cabral, Ashley Phirtieraj and Janine Druery



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For countless families, Family Day is the only way!