

Provisional Results from a Study into the Developmental Aspects of Movement Representation of Musical Activities of Preschool Children in a Dutch Music Educational Setting.

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Background

Musical activities, sometimes called musical games or activity games, constitute the heart of a preschool music education lesson in the Dutch approach. These activities consist out of a song plus movement. Often musical equipment is added or a toy.

The present study takes an in-depth look at the role of movement in these musical activities and focuses on representation of musical elements through movement. The impact of movement on musical learning can be extensive and this research project has among its aims the issue of raising more awareness for the conscious use of movement in Preschool Music Education (PME). The present study has taken the Dutch Preschool Music educational setting as a context for the investigation, a real world setting opposed to a laboratory setting, because here young children have their educational encounters with music. The educational aim is to further musical learning and to support music education practice.

The premise of the current study is that movement should be considered an important form of kinaesthetic representation through which preschool children come to understand and learn different aspects of music: movement as a tool to understand, store and retrieve music from memory.

Aim

The aim is to investigate the development of movement representation of musical elements which are embodied by musical activities, to observe and understand within an interpretive paradigm how musical movement responses will change and progress within a music education setting. A preliminary study resulted in the identification of conditions for the bringing about of movement responses within the PME setting, kinaesthetic reference, processing modes and movement and activity types. The main study incorporated the results of the preliminary study in order to investigate the qualitative and quantitative changes in the children's movement responses as well as the contextual effects on these changes inside and outside the PME environment.

Method

Data for the main study were gathered through naturalistic observation and triangulation of data gathering. Four PME courses of eight lessons and one course of four lessons were observed. Movement responses were captured using two digital video cameras for each lesson. The teachers (three in total) had prescribed sets of activities, but were free to conduct their lessons as they would do normally so that they provided a typical example of a PME course. The participating parents were asked to keep a weekly music diary in which they could write down personal observations of their child outside the PME setting.

Results

The study is conceived as a real world research project within an interpretative paradigm. Nevertheless in the real world it appeared that an ideal educational situation versus a real educational situation influenced the construction of the study.

Researching early childhood music education would typically start with the creation of a real world ideal situation. Based on the method of Music on the Lap – the Dutch preschool music education method – for the main study three age groups were planned 18 – 24 months 25 – 30 months and 30 – 36 months. This proved to be not possible:

- when announcing a preschool music course one has to wait for which parents and how many parents will register
- groups will be formed according to the number of registered parents and the ages of their children
- groups will also be formed according to cost-effectiveness

This resulted in a total of 5 groups in two different age categories.

18 – 24 months and 25 to 36 months. However there are ‘cross-overs’ in all the groups to both sites: children outside the boundaries of the target age groups and age categories for the lesson groups. The total number of participating children was thirty.

When looking at the development of movement representation in a PME course it is possible to distinguish two pathways:

- the actual movement responses themselves
- the environment in which the movement events take place

Therefore the PME environment can be looked upon as a kind of macro and a micro environment, in which the macro environment sets the conditions for the bringing about of the movement responses of the children. In the micro environment the movement responses of the children in an activity take place and here the music educational process develops on a more personal level.

At first glance a whole range of items and issues appear to influence the movement responses of the children. The point is: in order to benefit from movement the children should somehow be motivated to start moving – without movement, no representation. If we hold on to the PME goals of furthering musical development, then a lesson and the movements used within it should represent a process in which the children will arrive at musical experiences.

This process then is the vital element in early childhood music lessons. Also the process is subject to many elements which might disrupt or enhance it. So far it was seen that none of these elements stand alone: they also influence each other on different levels. Among these elements are:

- * teacher experience – it became clear that a certain amount of experience is necessary to let the children arrive at meaningful musical movement experiences;
- * parents participation – parents can act as an example and therefore motivation for the child to participate;
- * the child’s general previous experiences in the week – illness, a tooth coming through, accidents even fires in the house can throw the child of balance and inhibit its emotional wellbeing to participate freely.

The collaboration between the researcher and the principal early childhood music teacher participating in this investigation, appeared to be of central importance. Through discussions and interviews before and during the data collection the researcher and teacher were able to implement necessary adaptations concerning amongst others, the offering, aims and equipment of the activities in order to enhance the data collection process.

The researcher performed a case study while the participating teacher was clearly involved in formative action research. During and after a lesson she made continuous decisions about the lesson's process and the progress of the activities. In order to let the children arrive at musical experiences this process is highly necessary to motivate the children to move. After the lesson the teacher evaluated the lesson and from the conclusions the lesson for the next week would be constructed. This internal process was of great benefit to the external research process: the case study. Because the researcher was also a participant teacher of two other groups, small experiments could be conducted regarding the offering of different activities and the use of material in different activities.

During a lesson often musical equipment or toys are used to support an activity. The influence of material, at this point in the analysing process, presented itself in two ways:

- the kind of material used with an activity
- the handling of the material during an activity

For example the activity *Plitse Pletse Plater*. A timings activity, secondary aim: sense of beat. Material: a sheet (water) or a small plastic buckets, and plastic ducks. The aim is to have the duck 'on shore' so next to the sheet. on the last note. During the song the children can tap along with their duck on the beat of the song on the sheet.

PLITSE PLETSE PLATER

Mona Pollentier

(spreektekst Annie Langelaar)

The musical score is written on a single staff in treble clef, with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. Below the staff, the lyrics are written in Dutch. The first line of lyrics is: "Plit - se plet - se pla - ter, 't eend - je zwemt in 't wa - ter,". The second line of lyrics is: "spreken: plit - se plet - se plant, 't eend - je op de rand." The score ends with a double bar line.



(Lyrics: Plitse pletse plater, duck swims in the water, plitse pletse plant, duck goes on the side)

During the data collection process we found that for the youngest children it might be emotionally safer to have a bucket and a duck instead of the sheet on the ground and a duck. This way they can stay with the parent or carer (on the lap if necessary) and do not have to go 'out there' to tap with the duck on a sheet. This way they can tap with the duck on the bottom of the bucket and the timings moment will be on the edge of the bucket. There responses seemed to increase with the buckets.

Holding a duck, to get a firm grip on the plastic animal is not as easy as it seems. To be in time for the moment of timing often it was seen that the children were too late because they were busy getting a good grip on the duck. Now the ducks have a good size for a child's hand, but the material is a bit slippery. Nevertheless the ducks are highly attractive and present an excellent motivation to participate. It does however give a delayed response concerning timing. Often it is seen that during the course the children get a better grip on the material because they have been able to explore it during the course and consequently they get a firmer grip.

As this is a research project in progress more conclusions will follow.