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Progress of Young Children's Interactions with Musical Instruments through Free Play

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Abstract

In recent years, it has been revealed that young children accumulate experiences that are essential for human development through play. Given this theory, development of musical expression with instruments could also be cultivated through children's spontaneous play. However, kindergarten teachers usually teach children how to play instruments through goal-directed skills acquisition activities. Young children's ability to accumulate experiences essential for the development of musical expression through free play with instruments has not been adequately documented. In this study, the progress of young children's interactions with musical instruments during free play was observed to determine any development of musical expression through the spontaneous use of instruments as a result of free play. This longitudinal study involved 3-year-old children in public kindergarten classes who were exposed to musical instruments for the first time. In total, 33 observations were conducted during May 2014–March 2015. In the corner of a classroom, we created a musical instrument section consisting of several types of percussion instruments that the children could freely play with: two djembes, two cajóns, and two bongos. Video recordings and field notes were organized chronologically for analysis. When the children first saw and tried to understand the features the instruments, their interactions were exploratory in nature. After understanding the construction and structure of each instrument, they explored the possible use of the instruments as play tools in interactions with friends. As their relationships with the instruments deepened over time, their interests shifted from object exploration to sound exploration. They associated images with sounds and acquired skills in controlling sound generation. Having examined every aspect of the instruments, tried out the instruments, and accustomed themselves to the instruments, the children's consciousness appeared to gravitate toward a world generated by instruments. They seemed interested in having others watch their performance or in performing with others, which led to further musical expression through the sounds of the instruments. The results showed that the children explored the instruments during free play, and by exploring sounds and testing skills, they came to express their musically generated images with friends. This suggests that young children fully interact with musical instruments during free play and accumulate various experiences essential for the development of musical expression. The findings of this study contribute to deepening understanding about the development of musical expression through the manipulation of instruments and to providing a new view to introducing musical instruments to kindergarten children.