Why Are Children Playing?
For the young child, play and work involve the same actions: interacting with people, manipulating objects, and making discoveries that help make sense of the world. Learning happens naturally through play. Play is the work of children. For school success, children must develop physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and creatively. Play is a crucial part of this development of the whole child.

What Are Music & Movement Activities?
Young children are active, creative, and spontaneous. They need to sing, to listen to music, to make satisfying sounds with simple musical instruments, and to use their bodies in rhythmic response to music. Song, dance, and musical instruments bring joy to children’s play. The music and movement area in the classroom contains tapes, CD’s, equipment for listening to music, rhythm instruments, and a variety of props such as scarves to encourage movement and creative dance.

What Are Children Learning?
Young children enjoy music and movement activities and often use them to express feelings and emotions, relieving stress and increasing self-esteem. Listening and moving to the beat of a lively CD is a positive way for active young children to release energy and work out frustrations. Swaying gently to soft sounds can help calm busy children and transition them to quieter activities.

Growth taking place in the music and movement center includes social development. Dancing and singing together help children form bonds and build friendships. Young children playing musical games and engaging in movement activities learn to take turns and to cooperate with each other.

Physical (large and fine motor) development is enhanced with music and movement activities. When children spin, balance, skip, jump, hop, and dance, they are exercising and gaining control of large muscles. When they sing and do fingerplays, they are learning to control hand and finger muscles. Using musical instruments increases the coordination of large and small arm and hand muscles.

Listening skills, auditory discrimination, and concentration are all promoted through music and movement. With play that involves activity CD’s, songs, and musical games, young children practice listening, paying attention, and following directions.
Music helps children develop memory as well as language and literacy skills. Young children who love word play are intrigued by the rhythm and rhyme of song lyrics. Children will naturally memorize favorite songs. Literacy skills expand effortlessly when children change words or make up new verses for familiar songs.

Multicultural awareness and acceptance of other people are encouraged when music from many cultures is shared with young children. They learn to appreciate the sounds of other ethnic groups and to understand that, just like them, children everywhere enjoy songs and musical games.

Music is a fun tool to use for integrated curriculum topics. Songs about animals, transportation, and other themes reinforce the learning that is happening in other centers. Singing about colors, numbers, and shapes helps build basic concepts informally.

What Can You Do to Encourage Children’s Learning?

- Provide children with a music center indoors that has enough room to sing, dance, and move freely without interfering with others. An area that may function both as an indoor active play space and as a circle time area is often chosen. A good floor covering is a short-napped carpet that provides a comfortable place for sitting and that can also be used for dance and movement activities.

- Equip the music and movement center with a CD and/or cassette player. Have available CD’s or cassettes of all kinds of music – classical, folk, country, blues, activity songs for children, music from other lands, etc. Make sure these include music that uses a variety of instruments and has differing tempos. Choose music for children selectively. Music made especially for children should be just as pleasant and enjoyable to listen to as music for adults.

- Providing instruments for children to play allows hands-on creative musical explorations. Choose those that are safe and appropriate for the age of the children using them. Include instruments that make a variety of sounds and that use different movements. Instruments should be sturdily constructed to stand up to the active play of young children. Most instruments will be rhythm or percussion instruments since these are the easiest for young children to use. It is best to avoid those that require blowing or mouthing for sanitation reasons. Scarves, hats, parachutes, bean bags, and other movement accessories add to the fun and increase the variety of experiences possible.

- Sharing music with young children should be a relaxed fun time. Music time in toddler and preschool classrooms is a musical experience rather than music education. Allowing young children to feel free to express themselves through music and movement without fear of failure helps to develop positive self-concepts.

- Introduce musical activities that are appropriate for the age of the children. Young toddlers like moving to the beat of music as they “dance.” Join in the fun, and they may try to copy your movements. Older toddlers and young preschool age children enjoy simple musical group games like “Ring-around-the-Rosie.” Older young children may be ready for more involved activities like “The Hokey Pokey.” These types of
experiences enhance physical coordination and social cooperation while they give practice with sequence and following directions.

- Use songs and movement activities as fun informal learning tools. Traditional children’s fingerplay songs like “Three Little Ducks” reinforce math and number concepts. Favorites like “The Wheels on the Bus” expand descriptive vocabularies. Moving like animals, snowflakes, or falling leaves to music increases scientific observational skills and knowledge of the natural world.

- Singing stimulates language and literacy growth. Sharing activities that involve clapping or using rhythm instruments as children sing their names or other words helps children hear syllables and understand the structure of words. When they sing, children gain knowledge of syntax as they experience the patterns of phrases and sentences in songs.

- As with any activity, remember to follow the lead of the children. When they tire or interest drops, it is time to stop. If enjoyment is high, it may be appropriate to extend the music play longer.

- Musical activities need not always be teacher directed. Make instruments and movement props like scarves available to give children the opportunity to enjoy music independently. Teach children to be considerate of others. Help them learn to use the instruments in a designated space and in a way that won’t interfere with others.

- Soft music played at meal and nap times may help calm children. Use background music judiciously, however. Music that is played constantly can become overly stimulating. The noise level may rise as everyone tries to be heard over the music.

- By providing positive musical experiences, adults help young children develop motor skills and cognitive knowledge. Appropriate music and movement experiences can enhance language skills, social interactions, and self-esteem in children.

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