

# The Music Shelf

By Emma Creed

Children have an innate desire to self direct just as much as they want to express themselves. I love to provide a space where that is possible. I have used the concept of the Music Shelf with colleagues in a Montessori environment with much success. I invite you to consider taking this concept, adapting it for use in your environment and create a Music Shelf in your classroom.

## **What is the Music Shelf?**

The Music Shelf is an area (shelf or shelf and table) in the classroom for music materials and any music activities you feel will work for your class.

On the Music Shelf you could have...

- an adequate and easily accessible sound system including CD Player, iPod, headphones, *CD Rack, CDs, batteries etc.*
- various instruments (this could be where they all live or you could have a selected few out for specific purposes and the others safely away in the storeroom). Have baskets, boxes or containers to help keep instruments tidy and specific areas where they live.
- any books relating to music. See your library.
- a timing device (stop watch or hour glass).
- sketch paper and crayons/coloured pencils

- a skipping rope, ball, clap sticks, scarves
- one or more Music Activity Cards for children to choose from.

Prelude: Introduce your class to the Music Shelf. Create and discuss some rules about using The Music Shelf and how it can work with your class. i.e. – respect the Music Shelf (all instruments and equipment, anyone working in the space, keep tidy, booking schedule), what the children's responsibilities are regarding shelf and activities etc.

I have had an agreement with my students in the past that all class/contract work must be complete to be able to choose a music activity. Irresponsible behaviour has sometimes resulted in the removal of right to participate in music activities for a period of time.

### **Music Activity Cards**

Music Activity Cards are cards with instructions/directions for a music activity for an individual, pair or small group that can sit on the shelf. Activities could take between 5 and 10 minutes and provide an opportunity for children to recharge their minds or bodies, challenge themselves, have some time to breathe and/or listen, reinforce classroom work or consolidate music skills. I chunk them into different categories, including Relaxation activities, Listening activities, Singing activities, Music Skills Practice activities, Research activities, Playing activities, Creating

activities, Clapping activities, Recording activities, Responding activities, Movement activities.

## **How it Works**

The music activities could be introduced in small group or whole class lesson and could be made available as chosen independent work for children to do in between other curriculum activities or at agreed times.

The children could negotiate/schedule/book a music break in their morning schedule/contract or weekly routine.

Resources could be rotated regularly as determined by the classroom teacher with reference to curriculum focus and children's interests and needs.

Children could chose different activities each time or perhaps they would prefer to master something. I liked to encourage the older children to record their music activities in a log (date, time, duration, what they did, a short reflection of what their experience of the activity and how it made them feel). Sometimes we even took a picture and added it to the log or a video to record the action (only if it was worth it!). These logs can be a great to add to portfolios.

Notes: Do not have too many cards out at once. Some children may need your guidance in choosing music activities.

## **Some Possible Music Activities to have on the Music Shelf:**

Here are a few ideas for you to consider.

### Creating Activity

- Create an instrument out of given materials.
- Create a specific instrument (ie, a nature mobile, a shaker etc).
- Write a 4 line poem about \_\_\_\_\_ (ie, silence, Spring).
- Create a body percussion pattern using specific rhythms.

### Creating / Listening Activity

- Draw a picture while listening to a piece of music (preferably without lyrics). Choose a composer related to your class area of study, ie, If you were studying anything to do with Italy, choose an Italian composer and a specific piece from that composer) – child listens to a piece of music and draws a picture in response to the music. Encourage them to fill the whole page.

### Clapping Activity

- Clapping Game – children practise in pairs a clapping game or a selection of clapping games.

### Skipping Activity

- Skipping (great for small group) - a small group of children (3-4) practice skipping songs and games

outside. Consider having a skipping song/game of the term.

### Listening Activity

- Children could listen to a specific piece of music and have specific questions to answer about their listening.

### Music Skills Practice Activity

- Keeping the beat – child could say well known rhyme or sing song and point to beat chart or keep the beat on a small drum. You could have various rhymes and songs to choose from or just focus on one.
- Tapping the rhythm – instead of keeping the beat, an activity could be to say the well known rhyme or sing the song and clap the rhythm or play the rhythm on a given non-tuned percussion instrument.
- Singing with words / inner hearing – child sing only the first word of the phrase or do not sing the first word of the phrase, whilst pointing to a beat chart.

### Movement Activity

- Practice a specific dance (one you have already introduced)
- Make up your own dance with scarves to a chosen piece of music (great in pairs)

### Playing Activity

- Practice the djembe (African Drum)
- Have a jam with another djembe player

## Recording / Responding

- Recording own/group singing / Responding – using technology. There is a free program on the web called Audacity, (see Resource List) – children can record themselves singing a given song and listen back – they could write about what it was like to listen back to their own voice.
- Lyric handwriting – child traces the letters of the rhyme or song (could also colour in the picture).

## Relaxation Activity

- 5 minute silence/rest – some children require a break from doing anything to recharge. Consider creating a space where children can come and sit or lay and just breathe and listen to the sounds around them.

## Researching Activity

- Research a specific composer, period of music, style, artist or instrument.

## Singing & Playing Activity

- Sing a known song and accompany self on instrument (ukulele, xylophone, guitar)

There are endless activities you could create. Have fun!