

**FAQs from the Music Mini-Series:  
When Everybody Sings, Everybody Learns!**

I wanted to revisit a couple of questions that came up during our fast-paced webinars that I feel might benefit many of you. If you've exhausted your options and tried these trouble-shooting tips, feel free to contact me and we'll brainstorm other possibilities together!

**Q: How can I get all the children to participate more fully in music and movement activities?**

**A:** As mentioned in the webinar, keep **realistic expectations** regarding the circle time activities and the amount of time you'll spend doing them (5-15 mins), then **make your expectations for participation - and fun - clear from the start!** In the same way that you share your expectations for other activities or times of day, make sure children know that you expect that music and movement time will be so much fun that *they will all want to join in!* And then **make it that much fun!**

DO

DON'T

<p><b>MODEL</b> enthusiasm! Participate fully along with the children.</p>	<p>Put on a video and watch from the back of the room, talk with colleagues, or work on other tasks during music/movement times.</p>
<p>Explain to the children <i>why singing and moving are important</i> parts of each day: Having fun and playing actually help us learn! When we sing and move, our brains spring into action and start building little memories of what we do, and that helps us remember. Crossing the midline is also an important tool to help both sides of our brain learn.</p>	<p>Assume children know the reason they are expected to do any activity.</p>
<p>Let parents know of the value of music and movement as a learning opportunity so they see the importance of their child's participation. They can also model!</p>	<p>Treat music and movement as "fluff" or "just for fun"--it is fun! But it adds a great deal of cognitive, emotional, social and physical value that can't be underestimated.</p>
<p>Keep Circle/Group time at a length appropriate for the age/attention of your children (5-15 min for 3s-5s).  "Double the age + 2" is a good rule of thumb: 2 ½ - 3 yrs: 7 - 8 mins</p>	<p>Note that it is no longer considered developmentally appropriate to review the traditional calendar daily in PreK-K. This practice elongates the group time and can create less participation in - or time for -</p>

<p>3 - 3 ½ yrs: 8 - 9 mins  3 ½ - 4 yrs: 9 - 10 mins  4 - 5 yrs: 10 -12 mins  5 - 6 yrs: 12 -14 mins</p>	<p>movement/music, which actually add more learning value. To learn more about rethinking calendar time, <a href="#">check out this article</a>. For a good alternative, see these two blogs about using a <a href="#">Linear Calendar</a> as a <a href="#">meaningful alternative</a>.</p>
<p>Encourage and comment positively on active participation. A little “You’ve got great moves, Juan!” can go a long way toward engaging those who are less active.</p>	<p>Punish or call out students for lack of participation or bribe/threaten them to participate - the long-term impact will be negative!</p>
<p>Enable children to choose/lead alone or paired with a less-engaged buddy.</p>	<p>Only select students who are “behaving perfectly” -- allow a little wiggle room to choose students who demonstrate behaviors that are “close enough” so that they may become more effectively engaged.</p>
<p>Observe your students’ behavior and adjust plans accordingly.  If children are restless, stop what you’re doing and create a mental “change of state” (position) -- get up and wiggle, dance, stretch, etc. Then finish what was interrupted.  If things continue to spiral, cut it short and try again later, or tomorrow. Better to end early than to end on a sour note!</p>	<p>Stay glued to your lesson plan no matter what. Flexibility helps!</p>
<p>Establish Circle Time expectations (adapt these to your own circumstances, of course)...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The best ways to show each other that you are ready for fun include... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Being seated (legs crossed, or on their “spot”, etc), hands in your own laps/space, ready for fingerplays!</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Use random unrelated or negative consequences for lack of participation. Try to use natural or logical consequences when possible.  Ex: Child sits way behind the rest of the group, but wants a turn to use the puppet.  A natural consequence is that only the children who are part of the circle have access to the puppet.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Watching the leader (it may be a student, other adult, or teacher) so you may follow along.</li> <li>● Listening so you'll know what to do.</li> <li>● Taking turns. Raise your hand to let us know when you would like a turn to respond.</li> <li>● Using kind words that <i>you</i> would like to hear.</li> </ul>	
<p>Entice participation by opening with novel tools/props like bubbles, bubble machine, props, hats, puppets, books, songs, fingerplays, dances, etc.</p>	<p>Require/force children to stay in the group.</p>
<p>Intersperse the more enthusiastic participants throughout the group/circle to elicit their assistance in spreading the joy!</p>	<p>Allow all the less-engaged children to move to the back.</p>
<p>Mix old favorites with new songs/FP/movements</p>	<p>Only play the favorites--they can learn to enjoy new material if it is mixed in with some surefire hits!</p>
<p>Encourage children to participate "as best as you can"--to whatever capacity they each have.</p>	<p>Leave out children who want to participate but are not sure how or cannot physically use materials as presented. Adapt materials as needed.</p>
<p>Assume a child wants to participate, but doesn't quite know how. Language, processing, even poor body image can all contribute to a child's attitude toward participation in music &amp; movement.</p>	<p>Behavior is communication! Don't ignore disruptive behaviors or those that remove a child from participating. Search for the underlying cause (not the "symptom"--inappropriate behavior) and address it in a positive way.</p>

**Q: Some of my colleagues/teachers think music and movement time is when they put on a YouTube video and let the children sing and dance along while they sit in the back of the room. How do I get my colleagues/teachers to participate with the children?**

**A:** My answers to this somewhat depend on whether you are a director/principal/coach or leader observing teachers, or a teacher observing colleagues. A leader has the capacity to do more to encourage systemic change through their own modeling, and through various forms of staff development.

The most important way to engage a teacher in this discussion is by knowing their teaching style and personality well enough to make it a personal conversation - including positives about their teaching style - and not what could come across as an admonishment or judgment. As with all delicate topics and teachable moments, building a *relationship* with the person should come first!

### **If you are a teacher or leader:**

- Assume the best intention from your staff/colleague--just as you would want them to do with you. Approach the subject as someone who is open to learning more from your colleague. There may be reasons they are not actively participating in music and movement with their children that you do not know or had not considered. Many adults have been told by someone important in their life that they “can’t sing” or “can’t carry a tune in a bucket.” [This is quite damaging and can have lifelong impact](#)--and not singing with children may be the manifestation of this humiliation.
- [Share this article](#) about the value and purpose of singing with young children even if you are not a “musician” yourself!
- Emphasize that singing with children is play--just like any other play experience -- not a performance!
- Share that just as with any other subject matter, your role as the teacher is always to model the behavior you expect to see from students. You wouldn’t tell a young child they’re “bad at math” or a “terrible speller” regardless of their skill level. Likewise, you wouldn’t tell a child they “can’t sing”--and you don’t have to accept that for yourself, either. If you model that singing can be for the joy of making music alone or with others--not a performance, there is no pressure for perfection!

### **If you are a director/leader:**

- Consider selecting a specific teaching strategy, task or activity that is done by all teachers (assessing children’s work, toileting/hand washing, asking leading questions, setting up science centers, etc) and providing monthly opportunities for teachers to observe one another engaging in that task/skill/activity. Have a group meeting in which teachers share their own struggles and successes, and observers share their

observations, and what they would take away for their own classrooms. In this situation, select “music and movement time” as your area of focus for one month. This provides a great opportunity to discuss the ups and downs of music and movement times in a supportive session in which you can collectively address the concern.

- Ask small teams of teachers to collaborate to create “Top Tips” for various challenges common to early childhood teaching (i.e., Getting everyone dressed for outdoors before playtime is over; When a child hits; When a parent is angry, etc). “Include How to Model Developmentally Appropriate Engagement in Music and Movement If You Think You Can’t Sing” as one of the challenges. Make these Top Tip sheets available to all staff and incoming staff. These could also easily be adapted for parents’ use and shared with families in monthly letters, on a website, or as flyers readily available to parents.

### **If you are a colleague:**

- Start with an observation: “I loved the Lindsay Munroe songs you were playing for your class yesterday. I noticed that when you have music you use a lot of recorded stuff. Do you find it easier to use that instead of leading the singing yourself?” This should elicit more information about what is behind that action without sounding negative or accusatory. Depending on their response, you might share what you’ve found to be most successful for your students, e.g., “I’ve found that when I just relax and have fun with them, they don’t even notice if I have a good singing voice!”

or

“Children at this age don’t even have the auditory development to discern a “good” voice or a “great” voice from an opera singer, so they can’t even tell if I’m a great singer or not. What I see them respond to is the way I “sell” the song -- how much enthusiasm I have when I sing with them, my facial expressions, and the lilt in my voice. That’s what it’s really about for them, I think.”