We are the music makers,
And we are the dreamers of dreams . . .

*Arthur O’Shaughnessy, (1881)*
It was time for the annual holiday program. Because I had a background in music, my principal appointed me chair of the program committee. I was excited! This was my first year teaching, my first class of 5-year-olds, and the principal wanted me to be in charge of the program. I decided that our whole K–3 school would perform The Nutcracker Suite, complete with costumes, music, props, and all the embellishments. I was eager to impress the parents and the other teachers, so I decided to teach my kindergarten girls the ballet “The Waltz of the Flowers,” and my kindergarten boys “The Dance of the Toy Soldiers.” For weeks I taught these children perfect steps, perfect timing, turn right, stand still, curtsy, and step and turn. At first my kindergartners seemed to enjoy it, but as the days and weeks went on, they started resisting going to practice or would actually beg not to have to do “the program” again. On several occasions, some complained of being tired, while others had great difficulty with self-control... disrupting, acting inappropriately, hitting, and being generally unhappy; however, we did make it to the big night. The parents loved the performance. We all congratulated ourselves on a wonderful program. I remember talking with a first-grade teacher about how much the children loved it and what a good time they had. The truth is that the children were exhausted. They were fidgety and irritable, tired and pouty. Some even fell asleep before the program ended.

After a long weekend, the children returned to school and seemed to be the happy, well-adjusted children they had been before I had this brilliant idea of producing The Nutcracker. Young children, as we all know, are so resilient. In the weeks that followed, they didn’t want me to play any music during center time. I would put on a Hap Palmer album, and they would argue about the right and wrong way to “get up in the morning.” Why would kindergartners turn against the sacred Hap Palmer? I tried playing more of their favorites, Prokofiev’s Peter and the Wolf and Debussy’s La Mer and, of course, the music from The Nutcracker. My children didn’t want to hear the music from the ballet; they didn’t want me to play any music at all. Just the mention of the words dance or costume or program would change the mood of our whole classroom environment. Although it took some time—several weeks as I remember—my children finally came back to music. By early spring they were again requesting their favorite music and especially enjoyed listening to the “Spring” movement from Vivaldi’s Four Seasons (Edwards & Nabors, 1993, p. 78).

When thinking about how to begin this chapter, the story you just read seemed most appropriate. These events actually took place in a kindergarten classroom. This was obviously a performance-based experience, or product-oriented approach, to music in early childhood.

These little children had been forced to perform (under the name of “music” and, more specifically, “dance”) in ways that were totally inappropriate for children their age. Not only were these children involved in inappropriate practice, but teacher-centered ideas had been imposed on these children, forcing them to become waltzing flowers and toy soldiers without regard as to how they might interpret or create their own ideas, thoughts, images, or forms of expression.

How do you feel about expressing your ideas through music, creative movement, or dance? Are you musical? Do you enjoy singing “Happy Birthday” to loved ones or dancing with friends when the music is so good you just can’t sit still? Have you ever noticed yourself tapping your foot in rhythm with a great band or standing to applaud for an encore at the end of a beautifully orchestrated symphony? Most of us probably have some of these musical competencies, while others have a deeper connection with music either as consumers or performers. Whatever our current level of musical
involvement, any effort we make toward increasing our musical abilities and talents certainly falls under the broad definition of being creative.

In her classic and memorable words, Chenfeld defines a creative teacher as “a person who is open, flexible, willing to try new things and risk their failing, honest, responsive to people and situations, and welcoming of new experiences” (1978, p. 39). Most of us who have chosen teaching as a profession are willing to venture into new and different situations. In this case, the adventure involves exploring music. After all, musical happenings occur spontaneously as we hum a familiar melody or sing along with a favorite recording artist.

However, if you are saying to yourself, “I really can’t sing,” don’t worry. A beautiful singing voice is not a requirement for bringing meaningful musical experiences to young children. You can recite or chant fingerplays and action songs. The rhythm is more interesting to children than the melody. You can use recordings, simple instruments such as an autoharp or melody bells, or the talents of a musical volunteer. If your body just doesn’t feel rhythm in movement or dance, begin slowly by experimenting with the different types of movement presented in this book, and open yourself to the possibility of discovering something new about yourself and your musical creativity. Your children will respond to you, their teacher, and your enthusiasm, interest, and spontaneity. If you trust yourself enough to try, your children and their responses will help build your confidence.

Now let’s take a look at how children respond to music and movement. More specifically, how do young children enjoy music and movement?

MUSIC AND MOVEMENT: ENJOYMENT AND VALUE FOR CHILDREN

Young children are action oriented. Not only are singing, moving, and dancing fun, but they also provide young children opportunities to listen, respond, imitate, and use their voices, fingers, hands, arms, and bodies in ways that are creative and uniquely theirs.

In his timeless book, *Teaching the Child Under Six* (1981), Hymes writes about the “style and swing” of the young child in one of the clearest, most articulate descriptions ever written. Hymes must know more about the qualities of young children than most people in our profession. He reminds us of the following ways in which young children “flow” differently from their older brothers and sisters:

- Young children are not good sitters.
- Young children are not good at keeping quiet.
- Young children are shy.
- Young children are highly egocentric.
- Young children want to feel proud, big, and important.
- Young children have their private dream world.
- Young children are very tender.
- Young children are beginners.
- Young children are hungry for stimulation.
- Young children are earthy, practical, concrete-minded.
- Young children are acquiescent.
- Young children are illiterate. (pp. 38–46)

Hymes also says that our capacity and willingness to live with these qualities makes the crucial difference between a good classroom (and teacher) and one that does not fit the age or provide child-appropriate experiences for young children.
How does Hymes’s description of the style and swing of young children apply to music and movement? The answer lies in our approach and our attitude toward developing musical experiences for children who are action oriented. They need room to move both indoors in the classroom and outside in the play yard. Dancing, rhythmic movement, and action songs all provide ample opportunity for action. A former graduate student coined a phrase that seems especially appropriate here: “Sitting still and being quiet is not a marketable skill” (R. W. Cain, personal communication, 1984). Since young children are not good at being quiet, they need the freedom to make a joyful noise by singing, playing instruments, and making up sing-songs and chants as they play and work.

Shy children should be given opportunities to play with musical ideas in small groups. Hymes calls these groups “safe personal clusters.” When you see or hear shy children gingerly exploring the properties of a triangle and mallet or singing quietly to themselves during center time, remember that they are tentative in their efforts and may not yet be ready to join the whole-class activities.

The egocentric nature of young children will show in their excitement when they stop you in the middle of an activity and say, “Watch me do the little rabbit song all by myself,” “I can move just like a butterfly,” or “I went to the circus, and they had a band that played clown music.” They begin their sentences with I, and the sensitive teacher takes time to listen to the musical news children bring to the classroom.

The main purpose of including music and movement in the classroom is enjoyment. Through music and movement, young children express themselves, explore space, develop language and communication skills, increase sensory awareness, and express themselves through rhythm, gesture, time, and space.

Four Important Reasons for Including Music in the Classroom

Van der Linde (1999) outlines six reasons why the importance of music and movement activities should not be underestimated. Among these are four that are particularly relevant here:

1. Mental capacity and intellect. There is a connection between music and the development of mathematical thinking. Mathematical concepts are developed as children sing counting songs.
2. Mastery of the physical self. Children develop coordination, which aids muscular development. They begin to understand what they can do with their bodies as they run, balance, stretch, crawl, and skip.
3. Development of the affective aspect. Through music and movement, children learn acceptable outlets to express feelings and relieve tension. Music may also convey a specific mood through which children reveal their feelings and emotions.
4. Development of creativity. Music can create an imaginary world that stimulates a child’s creativity. A box can become a drum, a stick can be transformed into a horn, or a broom can become a dance partner. Children make up songs or give new words to old songs for pure enjoyment (pp. 2–5).

It is sometimes all too easy to miss the opportunity to expand on the music and movement experiences of a child’s budding musical awareness. The imaginary world, the dream world, is a private place where children can sort out ideas before actually implementing those ideas. They can imagine how a butterfly moves from flower to flower before re-creating their own interpretation of pretending to fly like a butterfly. Teachers
Keep a camera loaded with film so you can capture a creative moment in progress.

must encourage imagery and fantasy throughout music and movement activities. They are natural resources that children bring with them to the classroom, which encourage the development of musical processes that are foundational to future thinking and perceptual organization. Tender children who are just beginning to discover their ability to soar like an eagle, dance with the flowers, sing for the pure joy of hearing their own voices, or pretend to gallop swiftly like a pony look to their teacher to provide a safe place where they can explore all the possibilities their bodies, minds, and voices hold for musical and bodily-kinesthetic development.

Young children love to repeat things. They want to “sing it again!” and “move like a zigzag!” They are hungry for ideas that tap into their curiosity of how the Eensy-Weensy Spider goes up the water-spout; they want to move and dance when the spirit strikes them. They need teachers who will design a variety of rich musical experiences to help them test out things for themselves. We can play a recording by Hap Palmer or Raffi, but we must give children permission to test out their own ways of interpreting what they hear in ways that are right and personal to them.

A good classroom is geared to music. A sensitive teacher celebrates the clumsy and often awkward beginnings children make in their attempts to move rhythmically. When we care about the whole child we honor all aspects of their musical expression. An awareness of the values of musical encounters provides the wise teacher with many choices and worthwhile possibilities for immersing children in a rich variety of songs, fingerplays, and other musical experiences.