

Authors' Notes: The Neuroscience of Teaching Good Behavior Through Musikgarten

Authors' Notes: Please teach my child to move with rhythm and grace.

March, 2011
Volume 1, Number 4

Welcome to the 4th issue of *Authors' Notes* from Musikgarten!

Musikgarten's *Authors' Notes* deal with behaviors that are taught effectively through music.

Issue #1 explored the way music helps teach our children the skill of delayed gratification.

Issue # 2 explored using music to teach children to relax and to be calm.

Issue #3 explored inner speech and how it affects a child's ability to control impulses.

In this issue we will delve into a topic, the importance of which is largely understated:

THE ABILITY TO MOVE WITH RHYTHM AND GRACE

While we all would love our children to be graceful, why is it so important? And what does "moving with rhythm" have to do with anything other than music?

According to neuroscience educator, Dr Dee J. Coulter, says,
"Rhythm may be the most important gift you can give your child."

Dr. Coulter goes on to say:

*The highest level of brain functioning occurs in the frontal lobes. This region of the brain has its major growth spurt from birth to age 6, and it must have rhythm to stimulate this growth...This powerful region is being groomed to become the executive headquarters for all complex thinking as the child matures and it **needs rhythmic experiences to grow properly.***

Just about everything we do in Musikgarten classes has a rhythmic element to it, but we pay special attention to steady beat during our bouncing, rocking, and patting activities.

Whether we are bouncing children on our legs while singing *The Little Rider* or sitting with children on our laps or across from us and rocking back and forth to *German Lullaby*, we are providing the very kind of rhythmic experience that Dr Coulter states is vital to the growth and networking of the frontal lobes of the brain.

As the children progress to *Cycle of Seasons* class, these activities will evolve from simple steady beat activities such as bouncing to more complex locomotor activities such as walking, running, and skipping, linking the movement with the vocabulary that names it ever more securely. Because the vocabulary/movement is embedded in well-loved songs and games, the children learn these patterns in the deepest way - with their bodies and through their emotions. Their learning is reinforced when we ask them to suggest the next movement to be woven into the activity.

Sensory-motor integration is a term you will often hear when talking about a child's readiness for school. It lays the foundation for overall coordination, and leads to success in all areas including sports, the arts, and academics. In this instance, we are talking about the successful integration of:

- **movement**, which we began exploring in Family Music for Toddlers
- **listening** to the rhythm of the movement, introduced to toddlers and continuing through Cycle of Seasons
- the **language** attached to each movement

This integration cultivates what we call *grace* or *motor flow*. The preparation begins in Family Music for Toddlers and continues into the Cycle of Seasons. As you progress through the levels of Musikgarten you will delight in watching your child move ever more appropriately and beautifully.

Concerning **grace or motor flow**, Coulter says:

*No wonder music and movement training is now being sought out as therapy for young children with disorders ranging from ADD and ADHD, developmental delays, cerebral palsy and other motor issues, to autistic spectrum issues. Researchers have also found that children who can follow the beat in music and clap or move to it are **much more likely to become good readers!***

Musikgarten takes every opportunity to engage children of all ages in rhythm and steady beat activities in every class. Whether we are bouncing and rocking in *Family Music for Babies* and *Family Music for Toddlers*, to playing drums in *Cycle of Seasons* we are feeding their need for rhythm. In doing so, we are:

- helping the children evolve from moving reflexively - or acting without thinking - to developing the thought progression of **1) conceptualizing, 2) planning**, and then **3) taking action**
- promoting the growth of the frontal lobes of the brain

And because everything we do is in the context of music, we are also nurturing their ability to move with grace.

So as the end of this school year draws near, be sure to find out the next step for your child in the Musikgarten sequence. The beauty of Musikgarten is the well-planned, stepwise progression to comprehensive musicianship and music literacy, while capitalizing on music's gifts for optimizing child development. Such a wonderful opportunity should not be missed!

Oberman, Lindsay M., Pineda, J. A., and Ramachandran, V.S. 2007. The human mirror neuron system: A link between action observation and social skills, *Social, Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience Journal*, March 2007: 2 (1): 62-66.

Blakeslee, S., In a Host of Ailments, Seeing a Brain Out of Rhythm, in *New York Times*, Dec. 2, 2008

Szabo, L. Study Suggests Babies Get the Beat at Birth, in *USA Today*, Jan. 27, 2009