

SOUNDING OUT BRAIN GYM: ENLIVENING YOUR PRACTICE WITH MUSIC

EVE KODIAK, M.M.

Music is our birthright. As babies and toddlers, we recognize and reproduce pitches and rhythms long before we are aware of words. Even before we're born, the rhythm of our mother's heartbeat infuses our growing senses. At birth, although our vision requires years of development to reach its full capacity, our hearing is physiologically complete.

Here in the United States, we have been moving from a culture of participation to a culture of performance. More and more, I find both adults and children who are afraid to sing or dance or touch musical instruments, believing these participatory activities to be the sole realms of the "talented" or the "experts." Many mothers don't sing to their babies because they "can't carry a tune." Teaching music over the past thirty years, I have noticed a gradual decrease in the number of children who actually know how to use their voices in song, to clap on the beat, or to walk in rhythm.

When we deprive ourselves of our own music, we are losing a potent educational force. Get a roomful of chaotic children clapping to the beat of a song and suddenly there is order, beauty, and learning. Specific problems of physical alignment can begin to dissolve when client and practitioner create vibrations through toning. Children who normally avoid being touched may beg for it when the touch is silly and fun and accompanied by a jazzy tune.

It is time to reclaim our birthright and bring music into our practices, classrooms, families, bodies, and lives.

MUSIC ACROSS THE MIDLINES

Coming to Educational Kinesiology as a musician, it has felt natural for me to combine these fields in my practice. Experiencing the synthesis of the two, I have come to believe that the three elements of music correspond to three axes of gross-motor movement: the midlines¹.

The front-to-back midline (imagine crossing it by rocking back and forth from heel to toe) corresponds to the Focus Dimension* of Edu-K, and to the element of rhythm in music.

The top-to-bottom midline (imagine crossing it by bending at the waist, touching hands to toes) corresponds to the Edu-K Centering Dimension, and the element of pitch in music.

The side-to-side midline (imagine crossing it by rocking from right foot to left) corresponds to the Laterality Dimension of Edu-K, and to the element of melody in music.

By synthesizing rhythm and pitch into melody, it is possible to access the dimensions of Focusing, Centering, and Laterality at new levels of complexity and integration.

¹ For more on this, see Movement Dynamics course manual.

RHYTHM: THE FOCUS DIMENSION

Our first rhythm is our mother's heartbeat, which surrounds us in utero from the moment of conception. It literally vibrates through our being for our first nine months of life. There is nothing more primal.

For thousands of years, working in fields, on boats, on construction sites, people have used songs and chants to focus their activities, enabling their body movements to flow

with timing and efficiency. Political demonstrations and marches use the beat of stamping feet and slogans repeated in unison to focus attention on a particular issue.

"Who Changed?" is a rhythm game that activates the Focus Dimension. I developed this version for use with young children and families, but it can be played by groups of any age.



Eve Kodiak

To play: Sit or stand in a circle, while one person begins tapping a rhythm somewhere on his body. Everyone follows suit. Anyone is allowed to change the tapping—change its speed, its direction, or the body parts involved. The group must notice when a change has occurred and adjust accordingly. This game is noncompetitive, its only "purpose" being the creation of a continuously changing texture. (It can also be played in pairs, with partners taking turns.)

Simply being carried by the rhythm creates a relaxed yet alive environment, in which noticing (comprehension) and adjusting (concentration) become natural. Eventually the group begins to feel itself as one organism in a continual process of transformation.

Rhymes have been effective mnemonic rhythmic devices for thousands of years. Children use them on the playground to organize their jump rope and clapping games. Why not use them for Brain Gym activities as well?

Rhythm and rhyme are helpful tools for practitioners and teachers. In the heat of a balance*, it is not uncommon to lose the route of a particular exercise. In a group, with everyone working at their own speed, the energy *can* become chaotic. Doing the exercise to a rhythm keeps one from "spacing out" and helps focus the energy on the work at hand.

Here are some examples of combining Brain Gym exercises with nursery rhymes:

Arm Activation involves raising the upper arm from the rib cage while the opposite hand isometrically presses it from four directions: front, back, outside, inside. (The order of directions I've given is for convenience only.)

Front : *Mary, Mary, quite contrary,*

Back: *How does your garden grow?*

Outside: *With silver bells and cockleshells*

Inside: *And pretty maids all in a row.*

Repeat with the opposite arm.

If you wish to spend more time on each arm, just hold each direction for two lines instead of one. You may also choose a rhyme with longer lines.

Here's a good rhyme to use in conjunction with the Footflex. Move the toe from "flex" position to "point" position with each line of the poem. (Don't forget to do both legs!)

*One, two, buckle my shoe,
Three, four, shut the door,
Five, six, pick up sticks,
Seven, eight, lay them straight,
Nine, ten, begin again.*

Be creative. Invent your own combinations!

PITCH: THE CENTERING DIMENSION

What happens when we sing or speak? We use our bodies (especially from our heads down to our diaphragms) as chambers to amplify vibrations. As we vocalize higher and lower pitches, vibrations travel up and down our bodies.

Pitch activates the Centering Dimension, and "The Siren" is a wonderful and simple game for centering through sound. To play: The group stands in a circle and chooses a player to be the "conductor." As the conductor reaches her arms up above her head, her voice slides up. As she moves her arms down, her voice slides down as well. The group, as "orchestra," mirrors her. She can change her speed and

*GET A ROOMFUL OF CHAOTIC
CHILDREN CLAPPING TO THE
BEAT OF A SONG AND
SUDDENLY THERE IS ORDER,
BEAUTY, AND LEARNING.*

direction at will, playfully teasing the expectations of the group. No particular scales are used; the idea is to hit all the spaces "between" the notes!

The Centering Dimension is activated on at least four levels:

- (1) visually (by watching the moving arms);
- (2) aurally (by hearing the sliding pitch, both from the others and from within);
- (3) on the gross-motor level (by moving one's arms along with the conductor);
- (4) through feeling vibrations moving up and down the body, as the pitch rises and falls.

Edu-K practitioners will be interested to note that Edu-K dimensions beyond the basic three are also activated here. Because sounding in this way encourages diaphragmatic breathing, the Breathing Dimension can be activated. This dimension is key in creating one's sense of personal power. The Motivation Dimension, which regulates attitude, is activated by the arms constantly sweeping up and down the central meridian. (The central meridian is a fundamental energy pathway of the body, running up to the lower lip from the place where the legs divide.)

It is both an empowering and a motivating experience for the group to see and hear a "composition" being created on the spot.

This game can also be played by two partners, who take

turns being the "conductor" and the "orchestra."

Many Brain Gym exercises can be enhanced through active sounding. The Owl and the Elephant already have the animal sounds built in. Sounding releases tension in the throat, as well as encouraging diaphragmatic breathing.

A more complex release can be felt when the pitch follows the trajectory of the movement. When the head drops in the Owl, drop the pitch of your "hoooo." While doing the Elephant, let your voice rise and fall with your arm as it traces the Lazy 8 pattern. The low sounds will vibrate down through your diaphragm and the high sounds will swoop up into your head, engaging the extremes of the Centering Dimension.

Sounding can be added to any of the Brain Gym activities. Follow the up-and-down pattern of Lazy 8s with your rising and falling voice. Vocalize your exhalation with a long, low "ooooohhhh" during the Grounder. Alternate between high and low pitches with the Footflex. Vocalize on different vowels during your exhalations when Belly Breathing. The possibilities are endless.

MELODY: THE LATERALITY DIMENSION

When we *focus* on certain elements of rhythm and pitch, and *organize* them into a phrase, we *integrate* them as melody. Unlike a simple rhythmic beat or a pitch, a melody makes meaning through time. It begins somewhere, has a direction, and moves toward a resting place; it presents a thought.

Melody activates the Laterality Dimension.

Many children's singing games are exercises in laterality through music. One of the most familiar is "The Eentsy Beentsy Spider." It is basically the Brain Gym exercise the Double Doodle, choreographed to a song and story.

The eentsy, beentsy spider crept up the water spout

(Touch thumb to opposite index finger, and "swing" thumbs and index fingers "up the water spout.")

Down came the rain, and washed the spider out!

(Flutter fingers, "raining" hands down on either side of your body; on "and," quickly bring hands to center; on "washed," wipe hands laterally outward, away from your body.)

Out came the sun, and dried up all the rain

(Palms up, bring hands up to touch in a circle above your head.)

And the eentsy, beentsy spider crept up the spout again.

(Quickly bring arms down, bring thumb to opposite index finger, and "swing" up once again.)

This is a wonderful way to get the attention of young children. Even when they only watch, they seem to experience the calming effect of those Double Doodles, as the spider continues on its circular journey.

"Conducting" is a more abstract game to achieve similar results. Simply sing or hum a tune, and move your arms in the Double Doodle pattern of your choice.

When a song has words, the tendency is to listen to the language rather than to experience the flow. Therefore, it is usually best to "doodle" to humming, or to nonsense syllables ("doo doo" works very well!). (CONTINUED ON PAGE 12)

SOUNDING OUT BRAIN GYM

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7)

Core activation (taught in Total Core Repatterning) is another Brain Gym activity that can be enhanced with music. Core activation involves moving all possible combinations of hips and torso forward and backward, singly and in pairs. It can be performed in two ways. In the active version, the client (or student, or child) is directed to move his or her own torso. In the passive version, the client's shoulders and hips are pushed and pulled by the facilitator.

A tune can organize the experience into a satisfying pattern of expectation and fulfillment. This is particularly true of the passive version, since both client and practitioner can feel exactly when each push and pull will come. If the same tune is used many times, it begins to be associated with the experience of core activation. Simply by hearing that tune, the body may be automatically reminded to align itself.

Children, in particular, love to be pushed and pulled along to music. One tune can be used for active times; a quiet one can serve to soothe at bedtime.

Because there are thirty-two different motions in core activation (count them!), most four-line songs will work well. (Please note: The activation points break down into groups of eight (single shoulder and hips), twelve (doubles, same direction), and twelve (doubles, with a twist). So don't be confused if you have to switch from one group of twelve to another mid-stanza. It all works out in the end.)

Here's a good song for the lively times. (The bold syllables are the activation points.)

Gonna Jump Down	(Single Activation Points)
Gonna jump down, turn around,	Right shoulder push / RS pull
Pick a bale o' cotton	Left shoulder push / LS pull
Gonna jump down, turn around,	Right hip push/ RH pull
Pick a bale a day.	Left hip push / LH pull

	(Double Points, Same Direction)
Gonna jump down, turn around,	2 shoulders push / 2 S pull
Pick a bale o' cotton	2 hips push / 2H pull
Gonna jump down, turn around,	Right S & H push / RS & H pull
Pick a bale a day.	Left S & H push/LS & H pull
Oh, Lordy	RS & LH push / RS & LH pull
Pick a bale o' cotton	LS & RH push/LS & RH pull
	(Double Points, Twist)
Oh, Lordy	RS push, LS pull/RS pull, LS push
Pick a bale a day.	RH push, LH pull / RH pull, LH push
Oh, Lordy	RS push, RH pull / RS pull, RH push
Pick a bale o' cotton	LS push, LH pull / LS pull, LH push
Oh, Lordy	RS push, LH pull / RS pull, LH push
Pick a bale a day.	LS push, RH pull / LS pull, RH push

I've given you the pattern I use for core activation points, but any pattern can work.

If you choose to spend more time on each activation point, just do one per line and sing the song through twice. (Or add individual names: "Jimmy and Eve gonna pick a bale o' cotton . . .")

"Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" works well at bedtime, even though the lines and the core activation patterns don't come out even. You can just keep singing until the song is done, while you hold the Positive Points (lightly touch the child in the middle of the forehead with your fingers). I know parents who do this every night. It calms the children for sleep.

READY, STEADY, Go!

Any practitioner, teacher, parent, or student can enjoy music with Brain Gym. Honor your own comfort level, but be bold. "Energy follows intention." Remember that any sound you make participates in the music of the spheres! Your confidence will come—and, with it, some wonderful results.

Eve Kodiak, M.M., is a Brain Gym Consultant living in New Hampshire. She works with individuals and groups of all ages, combining her Edu-K practice with her background in music, and craniosacral therapy. She holds degrees from Harvard University and the New England Conservatory of Music, and is currently being educated by her young son. ▲