



Child Development: Music Connections in the Brain

“The goal is not to make the child a professional musician . . . What is perhaps even more important is that children will be prepared to feel comfortable with music, when both listening and performing, as they pursue their normal daily lives and enjoy life to the fullest.” – Edwin E. Gordon

- Newborn children have “critical periods” of brain growth and neural connection between birth and age 6.
- As a child learns and grows connections are made in the brain in response to their sensory experiences.
- This includes music!
 - Children develop preferences for different keys, tonalities, textures, and styles of sound
 - Children internalize and develop innate understanding of musical conventions
 - Children develop skills to *audiate* (think musically)
- Think about musical brain development similarly to language and speech

ACCULTURATION: BIRTH to AGE 2- 4: Engages with little consciousness of the environment

1. **Absorption** – Child hears and aurally collects the sounds of music in the environment
2. **Random Response** – Child moves and babbles in response to, but without relation to, the sounds of music in the environment
3. **Purposeful Response** – Tries to relate movement and babble to the sounds of music in the environment

IMITATION: AGE 2-4 to AGE 3-5 Engages with conscious thought focused primarily on the environment

4. **Shedding Egocentricity** – Child recognizes that movement and babbling do not match the sounds of music in the environment.
5. **Breaking the Code** – Child imitates with some precision the sounds of music in the environment, specifically tonal patterns and rhythm patterns

ASSIMILATION: AGE 3-5 to AGE 4-6

6. **Introspection** – Child recognizes the lack of coordination between singing and breathing and between chanting and muscular movement
7. **Coordination** – Child coordinates singing and chanting with breathing and moving

(Chart by Edwin E. Gordon)