



# Using National and State Standards to Evaluate Preschool Music Curricula

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## Introduction

Planned, teacher-led music experiences in the preschool classroom increase:

- Language and literacy outcomes (Jordan-DeCarbo & Galliford, 2011; Lorenzo et al., 2014; Runfola et al., 2012)
- Pro-social behavior (Kirschner & Tomasello, 2010; Trainor & Cirelli, 2015)
- Gross motor development (Derri et al., 2001)

Professional organizations, learning guidelines, and curricula support the use of music in preschool.

## Research Questions

There is a lack of consensus and guidance regarding what constitutes best practice for age-appropriate music-making in classrooms.

Further, little is know about how commercially-available early childhood music curricula, a common resource for early childhood teachers (PCERC, 2008) align with best practice.

1. What is best practice for music-making in early childhood settings according to professional organizations, learning standards, and frequently used curricula?
2. How do commercially available preschool music curricula align with best practice?

## Method

Best practice was identified via a conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) of:

- Multiple preservice textbooks
- Professional organization publications (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2017; National Association for Music Education, 2014)
- Learning Guidelines (Head Start, 2010; Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines, 2013)
- Common preschool curricula (Creative Curriculum, 2011; HighScope, 2012)

Data were classified in a flexible coding frame that emerged from the data and summarized into nine best practice standards presented in the first row of the table (Schreier, 2012).

|  | Singing Often | Songs are pitched correctly for children’s voices | Songs and activities reflect cultural diversity | Songs and activities offer a variety of music | Instruction encourages musical description | Dancing and moving to music | Variety of instruments | Movement and dance | Participatory music |
|--|---------------|---|---|---|--|-----------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| <b>KinderMusik: Laugh &amp; Learn</b>                    | ✓             | ✓ <sup>1</sup>                                    | ✓   | ✓   | ✓  | ✓                           | ✓                      | ✓                  | ✓                   |
| <b>Music Together</b>                                    | ✓             | ✓ <sup>1</sup>                                    | ✓   | ✓   | ✓  | ✓                           | ✓                      | ✓                  | ✓                   |
| <b>The Musical Child’s Sing &amp; Play 1</b>             | ✓             |   | ✓   | ✓   | ✓  | ✓                           | ✓                      | ✓                  | ✓                   |
| <b>Do Re Me and Maria’s: World Music and Rhythm Talk</b> | ✓             |   | ✓   | ✓   |  | ✓ <sup>2</sup>              | ✓                      | ✓                  | ✓                   |
| <b>The Tuneables: I Love Music!</b>                      | ✓             | ✓   |   | ✓ <sup>3</sup>                                | ✓  | ✓                           | ✓                      |                    | ✓                   |
| <b>Preschool Prodigies’: PSP Playground</b>              | ✓             |   |   |   |  |                             |                        |                    | ✓                   |

- 1 However, male vocalists sang an octave below range  
2 However, there were very few movement activities  
3 However, all the songs were based on Western Classical tradition modalities

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## Method (cont.)

Six commercially available music curricula were chosen because they required no training for teachers and provided audio resources. These curricula were coded based on the best practice standards. The results are shown in the table.

## Discussion

Not all curricula align with best practice, with two adhering to the most standards. The other four curricula share similar limitations:

- Many songs are pitched too low for young voices
- Many songs are sung by male vocalists an octave below where the children should sing
- Not enough variety of songs, instruments or movements

### Implications

- These findings help inform curricula purchasing decisions as teachers and administrators cannot always perform their own product evaluation.
- This work has identified a need for curricula better aligned with the standards such that they can support teachers in age-appropriate music-making

**Future Directions:** More research is needed to understand what resources can effectively support teachers in meeting best-practices for music-making in early childhood.

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