

Using Music to Support Children’s Executive Function at Large Group Time

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Large-Group Time: A Summary

Large-group time is an adult-initiated activity during which all children and adults participate in singing, movement experiences, or reenacting stories. Children and adults take turns being the leader and follower, listener and speaker, and teacher and learner.

What is Large-Group Time

- Active learning in a communal setting
- All children and adults together
- Planned movement and music experiences
- Shared control between adults and children

Why is Large-Group Time Important

- Provides a repertoire of common experiences.
- Builds classroom community as children and adults learn and grow together through shared common experiences
- Helps children understand what it means to be a member of a group
- Provides opportunities for children to take child-sized leadership roles
- Develops executive function and self-regulation skills

What do Children do at Large-Group Time

- Actively participate
- Make choices about how to use materials, move their bodies, and use their voices
- Talk and think about their ideas and actions
- Be leaders and followers, and listeners and speakers
- Practice executive functions skills

Basics of Large-Group Time

- Occurs daily for 10-15 minutes
- Meet in a consistent large space location (Note: if a specific activity requires additional room or space to accommodate for movement, the group meets at the consistent location and then moves together as a group to the planned location)
- All children and adults meet together
- Takes place at the same time each day in the daily routine
- Adults prepare a lesson on the LGT planning form based on children’s interests, curriculum content, and the five types of large-group time activities
- Adults follow the LGT format: beginning, middle, and end

Sharing Control with Children

- Plan ways to build in choices for children.
 - Ask for children’s ideas and clarify their actions.
 - Let children be leaders or followers.
- Take cues from children and copy/imitate their actions. Following children’s lead gives them opportunities to express their own ideas.
- Participate with children as partners. As partners, adults can share in children’s interests, delights, and creativity.

Overview of Executive Function and Self-Regulation

Executive Function – refers to a group of skills that helps us to focus on multiple streams of information at the same time, monitor errors, make decisions in light of available information, revise plans as necessary, and resist the urge to let frustration lead to hasty actions.

Regulation-related skills – broader set of skills encompassing multiple skills (simple and complex) across the emotional and cognitive domains in order to achieve goals, complete tasks, or control and direct behavior. (Self-control, emotion regulation, executive functions, problem solving, delay of gratification, and grit).

Components of Executive Function

1. Working Memory—ability to hold and manipulate information over short periods of time. Essential feature is holding information in mind and actively using it to guide thinking and behavior. Draws on past learning or experiences to apply to the situation at hand or to project into the future.
2. Inhibition—skill we use to master and filter our thoughts and impulses so we can resist temptation, distractions, and habits and to pause and think before we act. Being intentional in how we regulate our behaviors.
3. Cognitive Flexibility—capacity to nimbly switch gears and adjust to changed demands, priorities, or perspectives. “Thinking outside the box.”

(Center on the Developing Child Harvard University – www.developingchild.harvard.edu)

Strategies for Supporting Children’s Executive Function and Self-Regulation at Large-Group Time

- Participate at children's level
- Copy and imitate children's movements
- Acknowledge and label movements
- Ask for children's ideas
- Let children be leaders
- Connect movements to music
- Model self-talk

Self-talk:

- Internal voice which helps us regulate our responses
- Develops externally first
- Is highest during pretend play
- Has been shown to be predictive of executive function

For the following strategies, children must have lots of prior experiences with the activity before the activity can be done in the opposite way.

- Plan activities that require children to stop, think, then act (e.g., have children move slow to fast music and fast to slow music).
- Plan activities having children stop and start the movements of their bodies.
- Do movements with children without words. Then let children be the leaders.
- Plan activities that build on children's movements
- Plan activities where children do the opposite (loud and soft music, listen to different refrains, listen for specific instruments (e.g., play loud music for children to move like they hear the music, then play quiet music for children to move like they hear the music, then do the opposite).

Add variety to ordinary songs and finger plays by changing:

- **Voice Quality:** Sing with a high voice, then with a low voice. Ask children how a song might sound if they sang it with a “mouse voice” a “monster voice” or a “sleepy” voice. Ask children for other ideas.
- **Volume:** Sing songs loudly then softly or whisper. Ask children for their ideas.
- **Speed (tempo):** Sing a song very slowly, then repeat it, singing it a little faster each time.
- **Words or Actions:** Create a new version of a favorite song by changing key words or actions.

For Example:

- Change the words of Wheels on the Bus to Wings on the Airplane. Ask children to name other vehicles to sing about.
- Instead of singing Old MacDonald had a Farm, sing, Old MacDonald had a Jungle, or Old MacDonald had a Zoo.

Scaffolding Executive Function and Self-Regulation During Large-Group

Think about your children and classroom. Write down one idea for your children's favorite games, songs, finger plays, nursery rhymes, and movement and music activities. Think about how you can incorporate "stop, think, and act" to help children develop executive function and self-regulation. Remember to keep children's developmental levels and active learning in mind!

Games:

Songs:

Finger Plays:

Nursery Rhymes:

Movement and Music activities:

Implementation Plan

What key points do you want to remember about executive function as it relates to movement and music with your preschoolers at LGT?

How do you think your children will react to the executive function movements and actions?

How can you incorporate more choice and let children be leaders?