

The Role of Music in Early Childhood Development

Presentation Speaker: Arturo de la Mora

Opening

Hello, good afternoon... welco—

Ohhh... I'm sorry... is this an English-speaking conference? 😊

My apologies.

As you may have already noticed, English is not my first language.

But here I am, and I'll do my very best to present today using my finest Shakespearean English.

After such a pompous introduction...

My name is Arturo.

I'm a human being trying to decipher the meaning of life.

And today, I'd like to discuss the vital role music plays in human development.

Let me start with a question.

Mozart and the Prepared Environment

How many of you know Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart?

Here are some key points about his life:

- By 5 years old, he composed his first piece
- By 6, he was performing for royal courts in Vienna and Prague
- By 7, he was touring Munich, Paris, London, and other major cities
- By 8, he wrote an entire symphony

So here's the real question:

What happened between ages 2 and 5?

Yes, he had a gift—without question.

But more importantly... he had something even greater.

A prepared environment.

So my first question for you is:

How well prepared is your environment for a child to discover their gift?

Ice Breaker

Let's have a little fun.

This is going to be an interactive session, so be ready.

Are you ready?

Come on... are you really ready?

I want you to give me one single clap—but only on my cue.

(Big pause)

On 3...

2...

1...

Clap!



Okay... that may have been a disaster—or maybe not.

But we just learned something very important:

Precise instructions matter.

Let's try again.

This time, I'll count from 3 to 0, and when we reach zero, we all clap.

Okidoki?

3...

2...

1...

0... Clap!

How do you feel?

Do you feel that small but powerful satisfaction of completing a simple task?

That feeling—that quiet inner joy—is one of the greatest discoveries of María Montessori: the deep satisfaction that comes from purposeful activity.

And this... is just the beginning.

Sound Before Music

Let me ask you another question:

What is the most ancient sound a human being has ever perceived?

(Let the audience answer)

Now let's listen to this.

(Play heartbeat sound)

Yes—the heartbeat.

The heartbeat is likely one of the very first sounds we perceive as human beings, along with the echoes of our mother's voice and the voices of those closest to us.

And that heartbeat...

is the foundation of rhythm.

(Play hand drum briefly)

The Origin of Music

Every culture in the world began music by imitating the heartbeat—using stones, sticks, and pieces of wood.

Later came drums—always echoing that ancient rhythm.

Then came the voice—the sound tied to emotion, memory, and connection.

And suddenly... music is born.

Drums.

Voices.

Nature.

Humans listened to birds singing...

to the strange sound of a toad looking for a mate...

And did what humans do best:

we imitated.

We learn by observing,

then by doing,

and we master through repetition.

Another powerful Montessori truth.

Personal Connection to Music

Now let me ask you something personal:

Can you think of a song you loved when you were a child?

I remember visiting my uncle with my mom.

Every time we went, he would play one or two records from a Reader's Digest collection called

"The Most Beautiful Music of the World."

Twelve vinyl records.

Music from all over the world.

And a booklet with stories about every composer.

By the time I was eight years old, I carried a treasure in my mind—
far beyond the radio hits of the moment.

That experience shaped who I am today.

I can do many things...

but my deepest passions are music and education.

And I am deeply grateful for the environment that allowed me to become who I am.

Just to clarify—this is not about listening only to classical music.

It's about opening the entire world of musical possibilities for children
to enrich their musical culture.

Back to Mozart... and Montessori

So let's go back to Mozart.

What truly made the difference in his life?

His parents.

Leopold Mozart was intentional about music education.

And Wolfgang's mother, Anna Maria, was equally intentional.

That intention... matters.

In Montessori education, we talk about prepared environments—not just for learning, but for life.

We prepare the way for future composers, artists, professionals, and—most importantly—human beings who love what they do.

When someone asks me what Montessori is,
I always give the short answer:
“Learning how to learn—and loving it.”

Just think about that.

Why Is Music So Important?

So you may ask:

Why music?

Because:

- It allows us to connect with our inner self
- Because we love rhythm
- Because it allows us to express emotion
- And because song lyrics, rhythms, and sounds stay with us—sometimes for a lifetime

The Heart of This Conference

Now let's get to the heart of why we're here today.

When we hear the word music, we often think of art, fun, concerts—or even chaos. But music is much more than that.

Music is a powerful developmental catalyst, especially during the early years of life.

For children in the first plane of development, particularly between the ages of 2 and 5, music provides a unique pathway for:

- Cognitive growth

- Emotional development
- Social connection

Let's explore how rhythm, movement, and language through music support holistic development—especially within Montessori environments.

Neurological Foundations

One of the most remarkable aspects of music is that it reaches multiple areas of the brain at the same time.

Music strengthens neural connections that support:

- Language acquisition
- Memory
- Executive function

Exposure to rhythm enhances temporal processing, which is directly linked to early literacy and numeracy.

When movement is paired with music, it stimulates the motor cortex, improving:

- Coordination
- Balance
- Fine motor control

Emotional and Social Growth

Musical experiences help children develop:

- Emotional regulation
- Empathy
- Self-expression

Group singing and rhythmic play encourage:

- Collaboration

- Patience
- Social bonding

Cognitive and Linguistic Benefits

Song lyrics introduce:

- New vocabulary
- Syntax
- Conceptual understanding

And because music is repetitive and joyful,
it supports memory consolidation
and comprehension of abstract ideas.

Music and Montessori: A Natural Alignment

Music integrates beautifully with Montessori principles:

- Sensory exploration
- Independence
- Self-directed learning

Activities such as:

- Rhythmic clapping
- Movement games
- Lyrical storytelling

nurture concentration, creativity, and joy in discovery.

Real Instruments vs Toy Instruments

A child can discover a love for an instrument
by being exposed to different sounds

and having the opportunity to explore them
in a relaxed, playful way.

When children are free to listen, touch,
and experiment with instruments,
they begin to notice which ones feel exciting and meaningful.

Observing others play music,
hearing live performances,
and using simple, child-sized instruments
can spark curiosity and joy.

Over time, the instrument a child naturally returns to—
the one they enjoy playing and feel proud of—
often becomes the instrument they truly love.

Before we close, there is one very important point
I would like to emphasize.

In early childhood, we should avoid using **toy instruments**.

Toy instruments often produce out-of-tune sounds.
They may look cute, but the notes are inaccurate.

During this very sensitive period of development,
whatever the child hears
becomes part of their inner musical reference.

At this stage of life,
children are not just playing with sound—
they are absorbing it.

Their ears are being trained.

If we offer distorted or untuned sounds,
we unintentionally teach the ear
to accept imprecision.

But if we offer real instruments—even simple ones—
real drums, real bells, real string instruments,
we are offering truth, beauty, and accuracy.

This is deeply Montessori.

We don't give children toy tools in practical life—
we give them real tools, sized for their hands.

The same principle applies to music:

- Real instruments communicate respect
- Real instruments educate the ear
- Real instruments honor the child's sensitive period for sound

Whatever they listen to now...
will stay with them for life.

Closing

By intentionally weaving music into daily classroom practice,
Montessori educators can harness its neurological
and developmental power.

Music helps children build strong foundations—
not only for learning, but for life.

And when we prepare the environment with intention,
we are not just teaching children...
we are helping them discover who they are meant to become.

Thank you.

Q&A

Post-Closing Announcement (After Applause)

Before you go, just a quick note.

I've recently published two new albums
created specifically for the Montessori environment.

These albums are designed to support
concentration, movement, rhythm,
and emotional balance in the classroom.

I'm making them available for free
to any Montessori teacher or Montessori school.

I'll be happy to talk more about these albums
at the exhibit hall,
and I can also share ideas and strategies
on how we can better support
our Montessori Environment Music initiative together.

Please feel free to stop by—
I'd love to connect with you.