

# Sounds on the Playground

It's 10:30 AM, playground time! The great outdoor adventure begins at the FPG Family and Child Care Program. As the classroom door opens, a group of children filled with excitement come running to the giant green fence where mysterious sounds and shadows are moving. By peeking through the fence, the young detectives uncover the mystery that there will be a music center, called the Music Hut, and it is being built. The anticipation and speculation about the Music Hut grows over the next few months until the final grand opening. The children and teachers are invited to explore the new equipment with a special introduction by the music therapist who uses the puppet Babette, songs, and musical games. Under the huge green canopy the children find a Chinese wind gong, six drums in different sizes, a cymbal, a mini cabasa, three sound tubes made of PVC pipes of different lengths, one marching drum, and an ocean drum. All instruments are donated from West Music and local musicians.

The Music Hut was designed by an architect at UNC and built by employees of the campus carpentry shop. The instruments are located on a 10'x 8' long hardwood deck and are wheelchair accessible.

Wooden beams, steel arches and plexiglas walls are used to attach the instruments, and the result is both functional and visually pleasing. Design and construction meet the guidelines of playground safety regulations. (See more photos of the FPG Music Hut, at [www.fpg.unc.edu/~atn](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~atn)).

The Music Hut is integrated in the Sound Path that structures the playground through six musical stations via a path looping around the playground. The Sound Path was originally designed to support the independent locomotion and development of a child with visual impairments. With the addition of the Music Hut, the daily playground adventure is further enhanced and expanded with more opportunities for making music.

## Opportunities for all

The child care schedule involves large blocks of time in outdoor play. To ensure the time spent on playgrounds promotes the development of all children, adaptations and support may be needed for children with special needs. Creating a more accessible and meaningful playground through musical equipment supports children's needs for developmental stimulation, especially of children with disabili-



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The canvas over the Music Hut is the umbrella when we pretend that it rains. Another child would imitate the rain sounds by playing the cymbal with her finger tips.

When children cooperate to move the ocean drum, they hear the sounds of breaking waves.



ties. The Music Hut is designed to provide opportunities to socialize, develop sensory-motor and cognitive skills, support self-expression and communication skills, create games, and benefit from the enjoyment of music. The instruments are easy to play and provide high motivation for all children to engage and interact with peers. Music crosses cultural lines and facilitates non-verbal communication, and children from different backgrounds and language skills can participate. Both typically developing children and children with disabilities can create, enjoy, and learn as they engage with the instruments and each other at the Music Hut.

### Meaningful moments

- ▶ Keegan runs across the playground and hits the gong, just like he saw it in an Asian movie.
- ▶ Tierney sits under the cymbal and shouts, “Want to see my umbrella?” and listens to Annie play the rain tropes.
- ▶ Sloan shows her talent as a singer. She pretends that her drum stick is a microphone and sings, in a soulful voice, pop songs she heard on the radio. Her classmates are the band and they join in with the instruments.
- ▶ Max shouts excitedly, “Cool! This is like an aquarium,” while lying under the ocean drum watching the beads flowing from one side to the other.
- ▶ Conner imitates Petra’s rhythm on the marching drum and gives her a big smile when she repeats it for him.
- ▶ Sarah plays the gong with the big boys and joins in the song “If you’re happy and you know it play the gong.”
- ▶ Ali hits the drum and sings with dedication, “Row, row, row, the boat gently down the stream. Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, life is like ice cream.”
- ▶ Brandon stands on the xylophone and moves rhythmically to Petra’s drumming and sings, “yah yah, ba ba, bo bo.” It doesn’t take a minute until others run over and join in the hip sounds.
- ▶ Max says, “My favorite instrument is the cymbal, because you can play very loud.”
- ▶ DeMarcus runs straight to the Music Hut and plays the drums intensely, an activity he requested from his teachers the whole morning when in the classroom.

### Making friends

Based on the child’s interest, teachers and therapist use the motivational factor of the Music Hut to implement specific IEP goals in the context of the daily playground routine. At the FPG Family and Child Care Program it is common practice to implement special interventions in the context of ongoing activities and routines to minimize the stigma and isolation of the child with special needs, and to take advantage of naturally occurring learning opportunities.

A music therapy intervention was conducted for four children with autism spectrum disorder. Children with autism have a delay in understanding social relationships, which results in a lack of cooperative play and peer interaction. A goal of intervention was to increase the frequency of their interactions with peers and to engage in meaningful play on the playground. The goals were embedded in songs composed by the music therapist for the intervention and sung by the teachers and peers using the instruments in the Music Hut. For instance children practiced taking turns by handing over a drumstick to a peer to play the drums or by learning acceptable touches—holding hands, tickling, hugging, or patting.

Carmen, a typically developing five-year-old girl, shows Ben, diagnosed with autism, how to sign (using American Sign Language), “You and I, we make music” and guides him to the cymbal. By imitating her, Ben gets an understanding of the concept of “you, I and we,” as well as how to play the cymbal. He sings with a big smile on his face, “play the cymbal.” Both end the song by signing, “I liked making music with you.”

Justin and Phillip, both diagnosed with autism, hold hands and run across the playground. Destination: Music Hut. Both are playing the gong enthusiastically and singing, “I want to play the gong with you.” Justin wants to know if this song is called “Phillip’s Groove” and jumps joyfully up and down when his teacher verifies it. Next, Phillip initiates dancing and sings, “I want to dance with you, I want to dance with you.” He takes Justin’s hand and spins around with him. His eyes are sparkling and Justin says, “This is my favorite part.” When leaving the Music Hut, the friends give each other a big hug, sign thank you, and wave good-bye.

The natural interest children have in music, the freedom inherent in outdoor play, and the engagement that comes from being creative have established the Music Hut as an environment for learning, excitement, meaningful play, and, last but not least, joy and fun. We hope to continue integrating and expanding the wonderful opportunities afforded by the Music Hut to engage children, families and others in a variety of both therapeutic and creative activities. **ATN!**



Feeling the music is especially important for some children with special needs. Vibrating instruments, such as the gong, let them enjoy music through another sense.

### Want to know more?

Music therapy is an established health profession that uses music to address physical, psychological, cognitive, behavioral and/or social functioning. A music therapist uses music as a tool to reach non-musical goals such as developing self-awareness, confidence, coping skills, social behavior, perception, relaxation, orientation, concentration, emotional expression, self-esteem, communication, integration, and creativity.

### Research on Music Therapy

- ▶ Aldridge, D. (1996). *Music Therapy Research and Practice in Medicine: From out of the silence*. London, England; Bristol, PA: Jessica Kinsley Publisher.
- ▶ Kern, P. & Wolery, M. (2001). Participation of a preschooler with visual impairments on the playground: Effects of musical adaptations and staff development. *Journal of Music Therapy*, 38, pp. 149-164
- ▶ Warwick, A. (1995). Music therapy in the education service: Research with autistic children and their mothers. In T. Wigram & B. Saperston & R. West (Ed.), *The Art & Science of Music Therapy*, pp. 209-225. Chur, Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers.

### Making a Music Hut

- ▶ Ask your local music store, musicians or band leaders for used drums, cymbals and small percussion instruments. Attach them with nylon ropes to wooden posts. Use wooden dowels as drum sticks.
- ▶ Find materials in the hardware store that sound good, such as copper or PVC pipes of different lengths. Attach them to the trunk of a tree. Different lengths create different sounds. Use a strong string to suspend the pipes between two metal braces. Screw the braces into a tree trunk. Strike the pipes with a dowel.
- ▶ Bend metal rods to triangles and hang them from the branches of a tree. Different sizes produce different sounds. The wind will activate them, but a metal mallet attached to the triangles will allow children to ring the triangles, too
- ▶ Get three galvanized pails of different sizes. Turn them over and attach them with a rope between wooden posts. This instrument can be activated by pounding on the pail bottoms with hands or dowels.