

MUSICAL STRUCTURES IN SPONTANEOUS SONGS OF CHILDREN AGED TWO TO THREE YEARS

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Background

Following the studies on spontaneous singing by Sundin and by Pond (some of the earliest), many other researchers studied this behaviour paying attention to various aspects: contexts, functions, originality, modalities etc. Since all these studies were carried out with children educated „normally“, we wondered what would happen in the case of children musically accompanied since prenatal life.

Aims

In order to answer this question, we decided to pursue a longitudinal research project spanning from the 6th month of prenatal life until the 6th year. The main goal of our **inCanto** Research Project is therefore to verify the musical abilities (to sing in tune, to invent songs etc.) developed by children exposed to an appropriate musical environment during the above mentioned period and if these skills are attained earlier than within the general population. The present study deals with the melodic and rhythmic structures used by children in spontaneous songs.

Method

We organised a weekly course of music for 119 mothers-to-be and for their children after birth, principally based on singing, listening, playing percussion instruments and moving. The mothers were requested to sing and listen to music daily

at home, to complete and return daily diaries and to give us the recordings of children's vocal production. In the stage presented here we analysed the melodic and rhythmic structures of the spontaneous songs produced at the age 2-3 years.

Results

We classified the songs produced by 25 children as 'imitative' (repetition with invented words) or 'original'. The latter category included monologues and proper songs. In the imitative songs children showed a surprising ability to respect rhythm and melody, while in the original production, the rhythm and melody were more amorphous in monologues and more structured in songs; rhythm tended to be better structured than melody.

Conclusions

The results reveal that before 3 years of age, if the family environment is strongly supportive of the activity of singing right from the beginning of life, the physiological, perceptual and cognitive mechanisms can be ready for the use of certain musical structures in invented songs.