Boom, bang, boom

In the second instalment of a two-part series on pattern, **Nicole Weinstein** looks at language, movement and sound – and suggests some resources for assisting exploration and learning.

**Pattern surrounds us, and the human mind actively seeks it out to help us make sense of the world.** Pattern is central to mathematics, nature and our understanding of time; it is evident in our behaviour and the built environment (see more information column). And it is central to movement and language.

Children pick up on the rhythmic patterns of their mother’s speech when they are in the womb. Practitioners can foster children’s interest in sound and movement patterns long before the child is old enough to communicate verbally by highlighting patterns in stories, in music and verse and through the rhythms of speech during conversations.

Hearing and sound are vital in a child’s development. The ear of the foetus is fully formed by five months, allowing him to hear the sound of the mother’s voice. Children are innately musical and, as Charles Darwin said, our ancestors probably sang before they spoke. This is true for babies today.

Marjorie Ouvry, consultant in early years education with a specialism in music and outdoor play, says, ‘Music trains the ear to pattern. Music and movement are the precursors to language, and language is the precursor to literacy and numeracy. Therefore, it is essential that children have an understanding of the patterning in sound and gesture, and in music and movement, before they are taught to read formally.’

**MUSIC**

Practitioners should start by listening out for the patterns that young children make when holding a rattle or a shaker. Ms Ouvry says, ‘By recognising and respecting the sounds that they are making, we can extend their music-making.

‘Pattern-making in music is when elements of the music are rhythmically repeated in different ways – fast and slow, high and low, harsh and soft, and rhythmic and pulse. Understanding these structural devices, which make up the composition of music, will help the practitioner to understand children’s attempts to make patterns in music.’

For example, a child may have a shaker in his hand, making what appears to be random sounds. But on careful listening, elements of the music may be recognised, such as ‘loud, loud, loud’, ‘fast, fast, fast’ and ‘slow, slow, slow’.

Practitioners could copy these sounds with a shaker, as it will validate the child’s explorations. With older children, it is useful to look out for their sound patterns while they are playing at the sand pit or in the home corner.

Ms Ouvry explains, ‘Older children will sing at the drop of a hat. They love to make up their own songs. They love patterning through songs and rhymes and they respond in joy when the patterns change and then resolve. Rhymes like Polly Put the Kettle On and The Grand Old Duke of York are wonderful practice for phonics and patterning.

‘But practitioners can encourage them further by understanding the structure of lullabies and nursery rhymes and making up their own words to these rhymes based on the children’s names or the situations they are in. The patterns then become more memorable.’

**Musical instruments**

Here are some musical instruments to include in your collection.

- Sets of claves and beaters are great for group music pattern-making activities. They are also great to explore beats and patterns in...
**Case Study: Alfreton Nursery School**

Children at Alfreton Nursery School in Derbyshire can’t wait for Roly Poly Fridays each week, where a small group listen to nursery rhymes and move their bodies accordingly. Nursery nurse Jane Blant says, ‘These sessions are not only aimed at promoting the use of core muscles, which helps with brain development, but they are also an early introduction into physical moving patterns.

‘We cover three key movements – rolling, balancing and crawling – using traditional nursery rhymes to encourage them, in a fun way, to do the actions. For example, if we are looking at balance we will sing I'm a Little Teapot; for rolling, the children lie on the mat and we sing and do the actions to There Were Three in the Bed. It’s a 15-minute session, which is simple yet effective. The staff are excellent at improvising and changing the words to songs and rhymes, which makes the session so much fun – and the children are unaware how much they are learning.’