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Rhythm & Timing Important Keys to Learning

by Stanley I. Greenspan, M.D.

What do we mean by *rhythmicity* and *timing*? Basically, this is any type of activity requiring that children coordinate sound and vibration with movement. Unfortunately, until now, we haven't appreciated how important this skill is.

When we look at the origins of the capacity for rhythmicity and timing, we see that it goes back to infancy and even the prenatal period, when babies move in rhythm with their mothers' voices. Even new babies have this wonderful capacity to be in harmony with their caregivers' vocalisms and movements.

Therefore, we see that for children, the first relationship—and the first sense of love—uses rhythmic interactions to establish pleasure and connectedness. This ability for mutual rhythmicity keeps developing throughout childhood and into the adult years. All warm relationships have, as their foundation, this nice rhythmic quality, although most of us are not aware of it.

All the time teachers are truly relating to preschool- and kindergarten-age children, they're in rhythm and in tune with them. We notice this sense of connectedness just as we do when we feel connected to our spouse or our own children. Feeling in tune with another person facilitates all



types of communication and learning, including language.

One study shows that this capacity for harmonious, rhythmic interaction can be correlated with cognitive capacity. In infancy and the preschool years, children who get into these harmonious back-and-forth rhythms with their caregivers as part of a joyful relationship have a distinct head start. Other children, who have a harder time with it, need a little more practice.

A new technology called the Interactive Metronome® enables children, as well as adults, to practice rhythmicity and timing and improve these vital skills. This computerized version of a metronome provides feedback indicating how close to the beat someone is when rhythmically moving her hands. We've found that, given the opportunity for such practice, a group of children who've had attentional problems were able to improve their attention spans and their academic skills.

We now know that rhythmicity is an important ability and one that we can

Resources

Interactivemetronome.com

A computer-based training program developed to measure and systematically improve coordination, attention and timing in children and adults.

Building Healthy Minds by

Stanley Greenspan, M.D.
(Perseus Press, 2000; \$18)

enhance. In addition to using the computerized metronome, we can also support rhythmicity by providing opportunities for children to participate in various types of rhythmic activities in the classroom. Examples include moving in rhythm to music, playing drums to music, and singing together.

It's important to keep in mind that you don't have to be constantly thinking about whether you are in rhythm or harmony with a child or small group of children. If you are feeling very engaged and con-

nected, it is happening automatically, as a product of that engagement. It's similar to speaking to a group and seeing people's heads nodding in rhythm with your voice—indicating that they understand the meaning and spirit of what you are saying. Seeing that, you experience an almost enraptured connection with your audience.

This is the kind of connection we want to achieve with children, ideally building on the basic foundation established in infancy. Some children can improve their rhythmicity by doing lots of rhythmic activities such as those mentioned above. Others can enhance it by working with the Interactive Metronome. Many schools now utilize the Interactive Metronome, and there will soon be a home unit available, as well. For more information, log onto interactivemetronome.com. ECT

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