

Diana R. Dansereau

Editor of *International
Journal of Music in
Early Childhood*

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Diana R. Dansereau, Ph.D., is associate professor of music and chair of music education at Boston University. She is dedicated to enriching the musical lives of young children. Her research interests include music learning in early childhood; implementing innovative musical experiences in early childhood and elementary settings; working with pre- and in-service music teachers to critically analyse research and practice; serving professional organizations whose missions pertain to advancing children's music learning; and evaluating arts organizations' and schools' music programmes for children.

Can you tell us a little about your academic and professional background and what first drew you to music in early childhood?

When I was in my first semester as an undergraduate at the Eastman School of Music (Rochester, NY), I had declared music education as a major. This was mostly due to the fact that I knew I wanted a career in music, but not as a performer. About three or four weeks into that semester, I attended an introductory orienting seminar for music education majors. Dr Donna Brink Fox (who is an early childhood music scholar) began her lecture by asking us to remember our earliest musical memories. She spoke about commonalities between the memories that those in the room shared and I immediately became intrigued by the idea that one's earliest musical experiences could profoundly shape the remainder of one's musical life. Since that moment, my academic work, teaching and professional service have been focused on studying and improving the musical lives of young children – with the goal of deepening our collective understanding of the roots of human musicianship.

Why do you think music is such an important part of early childhood development?

Music is an innate way of knowing and expressing one's humanity. This is apparent when we notice that infants can communicate musically prior to verbally. Such communication – when noticed, valued and supported by an adult or other child – is a profound way for those who care for the infant to know them and for the infant to begin shaping their world. As children grow, music becomes a multimodal playground wherein children combine moving, singing, listening, improvising, sound-making and other musical behaviours to play and express themselves. This has positive impacts on children's artistic capabilities, with some evidence indicating that early childhood may be an optimal or critical period for musical development and that the effects of music education are never greater than during this early stage of life.

In recent years, have you noticed any emerging themes or trends in research surrounding music in early childhood?

Over the past several years, scholars in early childhood music have drawn heavily on work in related fields – particularly childhood studies, but also ethnomusicology, anthropology and sociology – to describe and advance a progressive and humane notion of what it means to interact with young children musically. In many ways, I believe that the field of early childhood music can serve as a model for the larger field of music education as it seeks to understand what it looks like when adults centre learners' musicianship, cultures and agency and when they engage as caring, coequal co-learners.

How has the field evolved since the journal was first established?

The field of early childhood music has always been a broad and varied landscape. There are so many who are concerned with music in early childhood – children, parents, teachers, therapists, scholars, anthropologists, psychologists, etc. – and music making in early childhood takes place in many varied settings – the home, communities, playgrounds, schools, etc. – and for so many purposes.

This is why the cover of the journal consists of a collage of pictures rather than a singular image of early childhood music. Understandably, this broad and varied landscape can also feel disparate and disconnected. Since *IJMEC* began – and I would like to think, partly due to *IJMEC* – the field feels more cohesive. For the first time, the field has a dedicated international research journal that provides a central location for editors, reviewers and authors from all over the world to engage with one another. Various early childhood organizations have shared their conference proceedings in *IJMEC*, which has opened up content and ideas to those who would not have experienced it otherwise. There is a good deal of work to be done to professionalize the field and support and those who work in it, but I believe the field now has channels to better share work and practices and to advocate for progress.

The journal brings together researchers and practitioners from around the world. Why is international collaboration so important in this field?

International collaboration is key because childhood is contextually and culturally based, and so is music in childhood. Without understanding the many ways that children are musical, we risk believing that there is a singular way. This restricts children, but it also limits the understanding and potential of adults.

How do cultural differences shape approaches to music education and musical engagement in early childhood?

This is a huge question that deserves a lengthy and more nuanced response, but I will offer one important role culture plays: cultural differences shape adults' perceptions of their own musicianship as well as their perceptions of the musicianship of children; these perceptions, in turn, shape musical engagement. For example, in the United States (where I live and work), the culture has shifted over time from one wherein all individuals engage in music making, to one where musicality is generally believed to be possessed by only a small portion of the population. That portion is understood to 'be musical' and will engage in music making, and the remainder will not.

This cultural belief can shape the degree to which individuals engage in musical parenting, for example, and whether they will musically play with children in a creative and meaningful way, or if they will instead seek 'experts' to musically engage with children instead. This orientation is very different than orientations in other parts of the world, and without knowledge of this actuality, we risk normalizing our cultural beliefs in an unquestioned manner – sometimes to the detriment of children.

What role can music play in supporting communication, wellbeing and social connection for young children?

Musical engagement has been shown to positively impact young children's social/emotional development, executive function, self-regulation and language acquisition – all of which can enhance communication, wellbeing and social connection. Additionally, early childhood music education can aid in the development of the singing voice, the acquisition of culturally specific tonality, rhythmic entrainment and tonal and rhythm audiation skills, which can support communication, wellbeing and social connection through music.

What are some of the biggest challenges currently facing educators, researchers and practitioners working in early childhood music?

I shared my thoughts regarding challenges facing the field in a recent [IJMEC](#) editorial (19:1&2). Essentially, because early childhood music is a broad and varied landscape, it is quite inconsistent in terms of the music education preparation of teachers. Such diversity of professionals may bring richness to the field, but it may also further fragment the community and slow progress in practice and research. In my editorial, I called for a collaboration in defining the early childhood music profession and using the [National Association for the Education of Young Children's \(US\) Power to the Profession](#) movement as a model in establishing recommendations for educator roles/responsibilities, aligning preparation and pathways and addressing issues related to compensation. In addition, I suggested that advocating for teaching licenses to be inclusive of children younger than kindergarten; offering more dedicated coursework in teacher education programmes; working to strengthen professional organizations related to early childhood music education and encouraging their collaboration in advocacy efforts; ensuring that music has a key place in standards and curricula; and producing more research, research-to-practice literature and critical analyses of research and practice would help advance the field and those who work in it.

How do you balance academic rigour with making research accessible and useful for educators and practitioners?

The journal has a long history of publishing the work of both researchers and practitioners and representing both perspectives. We publish research reports, consistent with what readers would expect from an international, peer-reviewed research journal, but we also publish critical literature reviews which are helpful to both researchers and practitioners, as well as book/media reviews. Most notably, we publish best-practice reports (designated as Spotlight on Practice articles), which are grounded in literature but have important implications for and descriptions of practice. We also feature interest articles that are manuscripts underpinned by research that explore theories or issues facing the field. I should also note that the editorial board is largely comprised of researchers who are also active practitioners, or who are active in collaborating with practitioners – so any divide between the two is perhaps less striking in our field.

What advice would you give to early career researchers interested in publishing in the *International Journal of Music in Early Childhood*?

I first want to say that the journal welcomes authors from all stages of their careers and we foster a supportive and collaborative review process. So, early career researchers are most welcome to submit their work! Submitting a book/media review is one way to gain experience without having to craft a full-length article. We have featured book/media reviews by early career authors as well as graduate students.

For those who would like to submit a full-length piece, but may not be conducting research yet, the critical literature reviews and Spotlight on Practice articles are good avenues.

Looking ahead, what areas of research or discussion would you like to see explored further in the journal?

It would be interesting to see more examples of cross-disciplinary and/or cross-cultural work in the journal as well as work from authors who are sometimes underrepresented in academic journals due to their geographic location, professional affiliation or career stage.



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