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Music in
early
childhood

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Editorial

Editorial: music in early childhood

Nicola Burke

It has been a great pleasure to edit this edition of the Early Education journal particularly at a crucial time in terms of policy due to the uncertainty of what the review of the Early Learning Goals (ELGs) in England may entail. The proposed revised Expressive Arts and Design goals have introduced the word “performing” which suggests a narrow perspective of music and the arts. As well as this we have the introduction and piloting of baseline assessment, focusing entirely upon maths, communication, language and literacy. It is therefore good to be able to focus on music when it appears that the arts are increasingly become less valued and less supported in early childhood education policies.

“Progress” in music and the arts is hard to monitor and measure. In this current climate of data, targets, measurement and assessment obsession, the things that are immeasurable appear to have become less important. Placing an emphasis on “performing” for 5-year-olds is potentially a damaging perspective on music and the arts; but perhaps easy to judge and measure. Music is much more than performing, it is not just a “subject”, it is a part of life, and it is intrinsic to human beings. The work and research of Stephen Malloch and Colwyn Trevarthen, (2009) clearly highlights the musicality of language and the vital part that music plays in our lives. “Communicative musicality” is one of many aspects apparent in human behaviour that is musical. One only has to observe children playing to hear and see the musicality that is interwoven throughout, eg creating rhythmical patterns whilst building with blocks, vocalising in role play and playing with sounds within water play.

There are signs that the National Plan for Music Education (NPME) may include the early years from 2020, a change from the previous plan which did not include children from birth to age 4 (Department for Education, 2011). This brings with it some complexities; how will this be administered? Who will be responsible? Will “progress” need to be measured? If the ELGs do include “performing” I am apprehensive as to how this may coincide with the NPME and the potential models of practice that may be suggested and/or implemented.

The work of all our contributors to this journal demonstrates the complexities of early childhood music but also celebrates the natural musicality of children. Susan Young explores core ideas about music and young children’s musical learning that are widely held in the UK. She broaches some conflicting beliefs about music, children’s musicality and what and how children should be learning in music.

Steve Grocott offers an insight into his role as a musician working in early years settings. He discusses the importance of combining repertoire with improvisation, the role of the adult and social music making. Gina Westbrook and Jane Parker from Take Art share their organisation’s work that aims to question assumptions, explore, understand and develop the professional role of the early childhood music practitioner and bring an array of partners together. I reflect on rationales and the place of music in early childhood music practice and share the innovative work of a music hub in west London.

The thread that runs through all of the articles is the “why” underpinning early childhood music practice and the prospect of a different way of looking at music in early childhood.

Key messages from this journal issue are that children are naturally musical and that this needs to be further understood, discussed, nurtured and valued. Beliefs and ideologies of early childhood music need to be shared and discussed, models of practice need to be questioned. We need to continue this discourse to ensure that quality musical experiences for children in early childhood are offered and provided for, and do not focus or rely on “performing”.

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Red ribbons: analysing beliefs and ideologies of music in early childhood education and a call for high expectations

Susan Young

My trip to Beijing for a music education conference was some years ago now, but many of the opportunities it gave me to observe young Chinese children in preschool settings and in concerts are still vivid in my memory. In one concert performed by children for the conference delegates a group of about eight to ten 5-year-olds played guzheng (a Chinese stringed instrument, a kind of zither, that is plucked with the fingers). The children performed two or three pieces, flawlessly, in unison. No doubt they were pupils from a show-case music school, but nevertheless the performance showed impressive skills and discipline from children so young.

Our responses as early childhood music educators were mixed. On the one hand the children were performing very beautiful Chinese folk tunes to a musically high standard on wonderful sounding instruments. They seemed to be genuinely immersed in the beauty of their music and to be enjoying the occasion. On the other hand, we worried about the probability that the children had been drilled hard and the performance pieces had been drummed into them; educational practices that conflicted with our beliefs of music learning as about the individuality, freedom and imaginative expression of musical ideas. The sight of children performing like automata, dressed alike, not a note or red ribbon - in the girls' hair or as a bow tie for the boys - out of place, somehow dis comforted us. We talked of Chinese socialism and the ideals that underpin the upbringing and education of children in Chinese culture. Seeing the outcomes of an educational system that are so different to our familiar experiences brought core beliefs about

music and children's learning to the surface and highlighted the political ideologies that steer and constrain educational practice. But these beliefs and ideologies are much easier to identify when we come into contact with a culturally defined education that is unfamiliar to our own. It is much harder to recognise the beliefs about childhood, musicality and children's learning in music that permeate our own education system. Then, even more challenging to recognise how these beliefs combine with policy directions so that both operate, hand-in-hand, to powerfully shape and constrain the educational experiences we offer to young children.

So in this short article I want to explore the core ideas about music and young children's musical learning that are widely held in the UK. What might I see if I eavesdropped on a typical early childhood nursery setting? In British educational practice - and here I have in mind general practice, not sessions led by a specialist music educator - music suffers badly from some confused and conflicting beliefs about music, children's musicality and what and how children should be learning in music. We like to think our education system is based on very different ideals to socialist China, on principles of individualism, free expression and acquiring dispositions for learning such as creativity. But are those principles genuinely borne out in all our practices, and how do they translate into early childhood music education? I argue that while music in the early childhood curriculum is ostensibly about expressive and creative activity, it is in fact underpinned by conservative and neoliberal views of education that severely constrain the

contribution of the arts in general - and music specifically - to children's learning. It results in the promotion of particular types of music practice that encourage bland, low-level conformity and neglect pedagogies that encourage individuality, creativity and agency. We only have to look at the most recent proposed revisions to the Early Learning Goals in England for clear evidence of this. The revisions have reduced the music component to merely the performance of songs, removing any remnants of musical creating and individuality that clung on in the previous set of Early Learning Goals. The arguments I make in this article, therefore, now have even greater urgency in the face of these impending revisions.

So in many respects, surprising though it may at first seem, music is approached in British practice with more surface similarities to our Chinese colleagues and the young, red-ribboned, guzheng players than differences. Conformity through performance predominates. In typical British practice the mainstay of music in early childhood is "performance" of music, albeit of songs in informal group occasions rather than instrumental pieces in such a formal occasion. The adult gathers the children and songs are presented for the children to learn by rote and sing in unison. They must sit in place and conform. All the children reproduce the same song in exactly the same way. However one key pedagogical dimension in comparison with our Chinese colleagues is missing. Set aside for one moment any anxieties we may hold about strict didactic Chinese teaching methods and stay with me as I set out the argument. What is missing is the level of



expectation. The Chinese children were taught to perform music that was accurate, aesthetic and musically expressive. They were taught hard and worked hard to learn. In no way do I advocate unrelenting drill and skill learning, but what I suggest is missing in our approach to music education is the focus on musical learning per se and high expectations that children can and will progress their learning in musical directions.

Let me explain further. Although the song is typically introduced in an adult-led, rehearsal style approach so that the children are familiarised with the words and melody, the activity goes no further. The song is often sung as a mild diversion at the end of a session; a moment of winding down and transition. The song-singing occasion is often more a means of bringing children together, calming them down, rounding off the session than it is about the song itself and how it is sung. The song-singing thus becomes merely a lightweight vehicle for other aims. If asked, the educator may

say that song-singing supports language development or more broadly, that it supports communication and social bonding. These days educators have often picked up on other benefit arguments for music that are in circulation and may assert that music benefits brain development, helps to improve their reading or maths skills and so on. Indeed musical activity may well have wider benefits if taught rigorously and as part of a well-rounded curriculum, but the jury is still out among music psychology and neuroscience researchers as to whether there are genuinely any lasting transfer effects or how any such transfer mechanism may occur (Benz, Sellaro, Hommel & Colzato, 2015). But, in any case, to be blunt, a song sung collectively at the end of a morning in a humdrum way with little attention to how children are singing and participating musically will achieve very little in any domain.

Currently the early childhood curriculum places high emphasis on discipline-specific

aspects of the curriculum, that is on literacy and numeracy, which are then conflated with domain-specific aspects such as emotional and social skills. Thus music is valued only in as much as it serves either discipline-specific areas (language mainly through nursery rhyme words) or domain-specific (learning to share, to sit still and so on). The whole dimension of music (indeed all the arts) as a separate disciplinary area of understanding, thinking and imagining in and of its own right has disappeared. Hence how easy it is for music to revert to its default position of merely singing simple songs (that is, performing them) because in a such a narrow curriculum performing songs can have its uses in delivering alternative outcomes. Hence the easy slip back to this very narrow, impoverished definition of musical achievement in the revised English Early Learning Goals.

Yet, early childhood music educators have argued for a long while that group, adult-led performance of songs is only one small part of well-rounded music provision (Young, 2003). It is comparable to literacy education consisting only of children reciting rhymes in unison or art education consisting only of sticking ready-made cut-outs onto photocopied templates. Both examples are obviously a travesty of what literacy or visual arts education should be, and would be rejected outright by early childhood educators if they were inscribed in curriculum documents or learning goals. Yet the musical equivalent passes by with barely a notice except for the loud protestations of early childhood music specialists.

The principle of early childhood education is that children learn through play. There is longstanding and detailed research that has observed, documented and analysed the richness of children's self-initiated musical play; with voices, body movement and with sound-makers. Children play musically all the time, whether we notice, encourage and support it or not. It is irrepressible. If their musical play is not provided for and recognised, young children simply do it under their breath, while they sit at tables for snack-time, in free play, in the toilets, whenever they have to wait in line, to entertain themselves and one another, or to manage the varied and often highly emotional situations of their lives (Ilari & Young, 2016). If it is not valued and provided for in education it goes underground. Not only do young children play musically, but they are teaching themselves about music through these processes, trying to do it on their own as best they can, and creating their

own self-generated musical subjectivities and peer musical cultures. That they are motivated and have a strong need to be musical and to make music, attests to the crucial role of music in all our lives, and also attests to the powerful cognitive, embodied and imaginative ways that music engages us. Why then is music so reduced and impoverished in our educational practice to the mere group singing of a few songs, and, honestly speaking, often tired, dated songs, poorly sung?

The problem lies in conventional understandings of music and being musical that have longstanding, historical roots in European classical music and have sunk deep into our cultural beliefs about music and how one learns to be musical. We have a legacy of very narrow understandings of what it means to “be musical” that are in sharp contrast to “unmusical” and what it means to be musically “talented” in opposition to “not talented”. Moreover, conceptions of being musical and talented are closely associated with being able to play an instrument, and play it to a high level. As a result of these deep-set beliefs, engagement in music is believed to only be genuine if it involves successful performances (in a very narrow sense) in a professional or semi-professional context. In other words, this very fixed set of beliefs about what it is to “be” musical leaves very little possibility for “becoming” musical. If only a very few children are likely to be musical and if being able to “do” music is confined to skilled performance on an instrument, accessible to only a gifted minority, then musical provision in early childhood education accepts this construction of children as unmusical, as untalented and provides no alternative. Music thus loses any real purpose or direction and remains a quasi-entertainment, low-level activity. It may find purpose in serving other curriculum areas, but not from within its own domain. The knock-on effect is that music is very poorly resourced: in terms of funding, equipment, personnel and training.

Here it is useful to return again to my opening example of the Chinese children, their educators and parents. Interestingly the many, many young Chinese children who learn instruments and attend music sessions are not doing so because their parents think they are specially musical, they are doing so because their parents think that working hard at something makes it achievable, and that natural talent has very little to do with becoming musical (Lum, 2009). So the Chinese belief in how

children succeed musically is rooted in hard work and application, coupled with the high expectations of both parents and teachers that children will, and importantly they can, do the music well. If we believed, in British society, that all children have the capacity to become musical through effective pedagogy, the expectations in early childhood education would change overnight. We believe, after all, that all children have the capacity to become readers or become numerate, and that they need to be taught through carefully structured and well-designed pedagogical approaches. It would be completely unacceptable to claim that only a tiny minority of children are literate, therefore the majority will not succeed and need only receive an impoverished, quasi-entertainment literacy education.

Let me now summarise the culturally embedded beliefs about children’s musicality that I have explained in the previous paragraphs and then also demonstrate how they have neatly dovetailed with neoliberal educational policies so that each mutually reinforces the other. Only a tiny minority of the population who are musically gifted are believed to be able to genuinely learn and succeed in music and therefore general music education cannot have any real educative purpose and direction for the majority, except as servant to other learning disciplines and domains. The result is that all children’s learning in music, indeed their right and entitlement to learning and receiving quality pedagogical input, is completely neglected. Because of the narrowing of the curriculum to academic skills and school readiness in line with neoliberal educational policies, the creative and expressive arts are no longer valued for their intrinsic qualities but have either been squeezed out completely or hijacked to serve these policy directions. That education is predicated on utilitarian learning - to put it bluntly, to get a good job and serve the economy - results in education for creative and critical thinking, for learning to live harmoniously with others and with the planet, being ignored. These alternative aims can seem like woolly, idealistic thinking in the face of economic pragmatism, yet the future calls for radical educational alternatives if we are to learn to live well, without conflict, on a planet that we seem bent on destroying. The danger with neoliberal policies is that they suppress alternatives (Moss, 2019).

Shifting the deeply entrenched, culturally embedded beliefs about musicality is an uphill struggle, particularly when this also means going against the tide of powerful

policy directions. New ways of thinking may be challenging because they destabilise what is familiar and comfortable but they also, in current times, require us to stick our heads above the parapet and challenge the political structures that currently control and constrain educational practice. But we have an ethical responsibility to do so, as educators who prioritise the learning entitlements of young children and what they need to live well into the futures that we are bequeathing to them. I obviously am not suggesting a Chinese-style music education that aims for children adorned with red ribbons who present note-perfect guzheng playing. Other articles in this issue will present models and pedagogies for alternative early childhood music educations that can lead on from this article. But unfamiliar pedagogical practices from other countries can illuminate our own and prompt us to reflect carefully on beliefs, ideologies and expectations.

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It is what you do, and it is the way you do it: improvisation and why it is an essential ingredient in early years music and education

Steve Grocott

The ideas and activities presented here are derived from my experience of making music. This includes performing, composing, arranging, recording, teaching and, most relevant here, a great deal of social music making with both adults and children. They form a part of ongoing practice of music in early years (EY) settings and training for practitioners. There are two main strands to this. The first is providing a repertoire of material that enables children to form a mental map of their own world and connects them with the rest of society. The second is to value children's own spontaneous music making and encourage a creative attitude using improvisatory approaches. We need to "socialise" children without crushing their spirit.

What you do: repertoire

Creativity and imagination do not exist separately from knowledge, understanding and skill; they are interdependent. We do not create in a vacuum. The more a person is skilled and grounded in an understanding of music - or indeed gardening, engineering, cookery and so on - the more inventive they can be. Equally, the more innovative and open-ended a person is then the more knowledge and skill they may acquire by trying new things and seeing a wider range of possibilities. It is a virtuous circle that applies for both children and adults. It is also one reason why it is valuable to have people who are "experts" (having knowledge, skills and experience in a range of fields) working in the early years. Including in this category are practitioners who bring their curiosity and passion for any activity and share it with the children.

Children need a repertoire of compelling songs, rhymes, games and stories that provide a framework for music making,

movement and invention that helps to develop a shared mental map of the world. This is important because one of the most valuable aspects of music making is that, while it is sometimes intensely personal and bound up with our sense of identity, it is also a shared activity and one of the ways in which we create community. As children grow during their early years the circle of shared engagement extends the "communicative musicality" (Trevarthen and Malloch, 2009; Trevarthen, 2017) of the relationship with the mother to a wider group. Language develops from communicative musicality, which involves synchronised gesture, movement, tone of voice, mirroring, turn taking and a general sensitivity to patterns.

For the most part the EY classics such as *Wheels on the Bus* and *If You're Happy and You Know It*, live on because they are rich in fun, form and friendliness. They are a valuable resource not least in connecting the music making at home in families with that in settings. There is a need, however, to extend the repertoire partly to take account of how long children are now spending in various kinds of childcare. *Wheels on the Bus* is fine but if it is a staple for a full five years or more it might be getting a bit worn out. We need to introduce more high-quality songs, remembering to include music from a range of cultures that immeasurably enriches the pot. It is also clearly important to have a range of material including different moods, genres, etc.

Giving attention to the quality of the repertoire is essential. Some songs are better than others. One way we can develop a feel for spotting the good ones is by observing children's engagement with them and another is by having knowledge of

different musics and musical elements to inform our choices.

There can be an over-emphasis on simply learning repertoire and performing it with attention given to accurate reproduction of, for instance, melody, lyrics, rhythm and tempo with the idea that there is one right way of doing things. If we do this then children's own personal musicality and some of the joy will be lost. This brings us to the other strand, which is how you do it.

How you do it: improvisation

An improvisatory approach favours children's autonomy, valuing their choices and responses. A deepening understanding of the material comes through immersion, repetition and variation. It starts by observing children's spontaneous musical activity to better understand what children's own music making entails - described here by Susan Young (2006:270).

Because music has been generally conceived to be a discrete activity, the ways in which musicality connects - interweaves with other forms of activity as one mode among many - and the processes of interconnection have tended to be overlooked. By observing the children while they were able to follow their own directions in self-guided play, the descriptions capture both their singing and how it is part of the children's play with things, their physical movements and use of space.

There is a personal aspect to our engagement with music that is intimately bound up with our sense of self and child-led practice takes account of this. There is a lot of good provision in settings that involves noticing, recording and valuing children's own music making, providing opportunities

for free play with sound makers, listening to children and echoing their sounds and so on.

An excellent video on this topic can be seen at:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=vCdh1XDsydA

In addition to allowing a wide variety of individual responses, working with a shared repertoire has the advantage of facilitating co-operation. An important aspect of this, is learning about the sharing of attention, who gets listened to and whose choices are taken up by the group. Given the chance, children are remarkably good at organising themselves.

Jamming in the playground

Here is an observation of some of the things children were doing in one outdoor jam (improvising) session in a nursery school. I was working there regularly, and we had a shared repertoire of good jamming songs and rhymes. I was singing and playing the mandolin, giving a musical structure (pulse, rhythm and form) to the session:

- ▶ Most children spent some time dancing and singing.
- ▶ Children were using beaters (dowel sticks) to play a range of things including the ground, a fence, the side of a shed, hand held percussion instruments, large wooden building blocks, a chair and plastic oil drums. Most were in some way relating to the common pulse. If things got absolutely out of time I may have stopped and done some synchronising. I echo and expand on rhythmic or other innovations introduced by the children.
- ▶ One group built a structure with large wood blocks that was like a drum kit that they sat inside and played. They spent as much time organising and reorganising their setup and defending it against interlopers as they did playing.
- ▶ A group laid out some big blocks in a row and used it as a stage, standing on it using beaters as microphones.
- ▶ Each song was repeated over and over again so there was time for variation and for attractive innovations to be picked up by the group and incorporated in a shared version of the song.
- ▶ One extrovert performed extravagantly, and a small group provided him with an audience.
- ▶ Some children went and found plastic tennis racquets and played along, guitar style.
- ▶ At one point a child, who is generally very noisy, put his hands over his

ears and said it was too loud, so we negotiated a halt to the shed playing and all performed a dramatically quiet version of Twinkle Twinkle.

- ▶ Children took it in turns to choose which songs we played.

In these very fluid situations, children often respond in more indirect ways. Alvin, on a tricycle, screeched to a halt at the edge of the session, a trolley in tow. The minute the music started he was off at about a hundred miles an hour. He returned and repeated the whole thing. We were providing a sort of sound track to his activity, a celebration. It is common for children to hover on the edge of the area, sometimes joining when invited but often just wanting to be in the general area observing and listening. Parents often say these children are singing the songs enthusiastically at home.

The creativity that is a part of these kinds of jamming sessions is very much a social thing involving, making each other laugh, copying, arguing over instruments and dancing.

The session described above depends upon the presence of a competent musician (this includes anyone who will sing and keep time confidently) who plays and or sings to provide a framework and who can respond in real time to children's ideas. This way of working is inspired and informed by adult music sessions, particularly in Ireland, where groups of musicians get together and play informally in social situations, often in a pub. These sessions provide a place relatively free from performance anxiety where people at different levels can play together; all improve, everyone has fun and they provide a kind of glue that holds the community together. I like the idea of music as a place where we go to put ourselves back together. It is notable

that two of the most interesting groups in the acoustic music world, Imagined Village and The Penguin Café Orchestra were conceived as places that foster community.

Early years settings are not only places of education, at their best they are hubs of the community where people go for contact and nourishment. Similarly, music and storytelling are not "subjects" but essential aspects of what make us human. Doing them well, with all the different meanings of that phrase, matters.

The role of the adult can usefully be divided into three broad areas:

- ▶ Leading from the back: providing space and resources and sitting back to see what happens, this might be followed by echoing or extending as in other types of play.
- ▶ Leading from the side: the musician/practitioner provides pulse, rhythm and form by singing and playing and children are able to join in as they wish as in the session described above.
- ▶ Leading from the front: the adult tells a story or teaches a new song or way of performing (varying tempo, dynamics etc.).

Of course, the boundaries between these three are fuzzy. A competent musician can do an enormous amount of subtle teaching in leading from the side mode.

All these three modes are available to the practitioner who is not a specialist musician.

Training practitioners to improvise

Elements of this approach can and have been taught to practitioners who are not



musically confident, enabling them to take a broader and more creative approach to music and story sessions (and enjoy themselves enormously in the process).

This has the advantage of connecting with what they are already doing, making it more likely to be incorporated into their daily practice. In a situation where only a small proportion of children are benefitting from a music project or regular visits from a musician this is has to be seen as a good thing. Even when there is a visiting specialist, practitioners who see children every day have a deeper **relationship** with them. That relationship can be improved by music making and this, in turn, improves the quality of the music making.

Many people have an idea of performing music in general and of improvisation in particular as very high-level activities that are best left to professionals. These same people may be practitioners who are skilled at including children's names in well-known songs or altering the lyrics to fit a particular theme which is, of course, a type of improvisation. Improvisation is one of those words that has a very wide range of meanings. The definition I use to help practitioners use more improvisation is simply "repetition with variation."

We use songs that embody some of the basic elements of music. These provide a toolkit of simple options that we practise for making variations and rhythm accompaniments.

There is no pressure to do anything impressive but a focus on **listening and trying different things**.

Having simple techniques and ideas for finding rhythms and ways of varying contributions is a great aid for building confidence. Here are just a few:

- ▶ Use the lyrics to generate rhythms.
- ▶ Be aware of the form, a song such as *If You're Happy and You Know It*, for example has lovely gaps where you can put in a sound or action.
- ▶ Use different sounds or tone of voice.
- ▶ Stop and listen, do nothing or just do something minimal that enables you to listen.
- ▶ Do something different, do something different, do something different!

Children have very strong preferences for particular songs and choosing is a very



important part of a jam session. There is no better way of establishing rapport with some children than by playing the themes from their favourite television shows etc. and some, not all, of these are very good jamming material.

Armed with these ideas, practitioners can enhance their music sessions with actions, dance, body percussion, percussion instruments and vocal variations. This approach can easily be applied to material they already know in addition to the new winner songs they take away from the session. Freed from a fixed idea of what should happen, they are free to sit back a little and take notice of what children are doing.

Improvisation as an attitude to education and life

Setting the tone is an important part of what we do in any place of education and sharing an improvising attitude can be a valuable part of it. In his book, *Do Improvise*, which is about improvisation as an approach to life in general, Robert Poynton (2013) identifies three core attitudes that make for fruitful improvisations:

Notice more: it is easy to see how this relates to the observations discussed in the previous issue of this journal.

Let go: when we are narrowly focussed on a particular aspect of a situation or have a particular goal fixed in our minds we are limiting the possibilities available to us for all kinds of wonderful things such as problem solving, enriching our experience of life, learning new things and simply enjoying the

journey. Abandoning a fixed goal allows us to notice more and to explore a wide range of possibilities including those that interest the children we are working with.

Use everything: using whatever is at hand. This refers partly to the meaning of "improvisation" conveyed by a statement such as "She improvised a drum-kit using plastic buckets, metal pan lids and a pair of wooden chopsticks." It also can mean seeing problems as opportunities. If the train is late it is a chance to read that article or if the children

are arguing over instruments it is a chance to pause and spend some time exploring the sounds made by objects in the space and so on.

Poynton emphasises how these three aspects feed each other. If we "let go" of our original plan then we have spare attention to "notice more" possibilities for making something of any given situation.

Try it – it works!

Steve Grocott is an Associate of Early Education and the creator of the Sparks series and Story Songs of CDs.

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How and why Take Art supports early childhood music

Gina Westbrook and Jane Parker

Take Art is a Somerset-based arts organisation of many faces. We are one of the only Arts Council England (ACE) National Portfolio Organisations with a specialisation in early years (EY) creativity. Since the last century, Take Art has worked with thousands of under fives in all art forms, with an emphasis on dance, theatre, digital, visual and music. We work hard to secure funding to provide networking, training and teaching opportunities for the current and future early childhood workforce in Somerset and, for EY music, across the South West of England.



Jane in action with a drummer

The SoundWaves Network, our Early Childhood Music programme, has action research at its heart. Our role is to question assumptions, explore, understand and develop the professional role of the early childhood music practitioner and bring an array of partners together.

Working in a reflective way is important to us. We ask the artists to work together with the EY practitioners in the setting to document the work. One of our ambitions is to allow the work to speak for itself and, as well as offering a great experience for and with the children, to share it as a model of good practice. We share it on our website and more widely, for example through Youth Music Network or in key documents like Early Education's just published *Musical Development Matters*.

We want early childhood to hold its rightful place in the National Plan for Music Education (NPME) and, with this in mind, we are members of the EY Special Interest Group run by the Music Education Council (MEC). We believe that the sector needs a clear message to make any headway and are working towards making that message clear.

Building on the learning so far: The SoundWaves Network

Our current work, The SoundWaves Network, builds on the work of previous action research programmes, Little Big Bang and SoundWaves Extra. Both shifted between two worlds and their ideologies: the EY and music/creative arts sectors.

One of the challenges of inter-professional working is to find a common language, communication systems and terminology that a diversity of professionals can recognise and "sign up to" (Young, 2012). Throughout our work, we have found ourselves shifting between two different cultures and their ideologies; the music education arts world and the early years world. It is our job to translate between the two and find

common ground which involves finding the common language, communication systems and the right terms to establish a clear understanding of roles and contributions. Young reminds us "...this always takes time, but is time well spent. The challenges of bringing together very different discourses and approaches should never be underestimated or glossed over" (Young, 2012:30).

The SoundWaves Network involves bringing together partners from both the music and early years sector to learn from each other. It is an ambitious, three-year programme that is being shaped by an array of interested parties all with their own sets of values, experiences and practices. It takes place within three music-learning communities located in Plymouth, Bristol and Somerset. In each learning community we are working with music practitioners, early years settings, Early Childhood Studies' degree students (our future workforce), university lecturers, EY advisory teams and Music Education Hubs. We hope that this co-working of strategic partners and

practitioners can continue to bring a wealth of knowledge and skills together, along with diverse world views.

Conclusion

This work demonstrates our desire as an arts organisation to collaborate with an array of passionate people who share our goal of developing a high-quality early childhood music infrastructure throughout the South West.

In order for our work to have a sustained impact and to ensure we fully support early childhood music, it is imperative that we engage with all partners involved in the education of young children. Taking on board Wenger's concept of "communities of practice" (1998), Take Art believes that mutual engagement, joint enterprise and a shared repertoire are key dimensions to multi-agency group working. It's vital to consult with all involved in an early childhood music programme regarding their conviction and belief in the value of musical play, their knowledge of how young children play musically and their early childhood music pedagogical expertise. We believe that all young children have a right to the very best musical opportunities in order to learn and develop.

Gina Westbrook is the Director of Early Years Creativity at Take Art. Jane Parker is Take Art's Early Years Music Lead managing The SoundWaves Network. You can find out more about The SoundWaves Network here: takeart.org/soundwaves-network

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TAKE ART CASE STUDY: Making music with clay - a very creative approach to music supporting positive engagement and communication

Artist: Richard Tomlinson at St Peter's C of E Primary School, Budleigh Salterton, Devon

How can it possibly work?

We asked Richard to tell us more....

I'm a "Creative Technologist", exploring how digital technology can create still and moving images, sound installations, interactive and multimedia artwork. I have many years' experience working as a participatory artist, facilitating film/photography and media projects with community groups. Half of my experience as a facilitator has been in EY, mostly on Take Art's *Little Big Bang*.

Digital and early years creativity is an unusual combination. People think digital media involves processing information and staring at a screen. But EY creativity is developing ideas "in the moment", is tactile and sensory.

I wanted to facilitate something that:

- ▶ used digital media discreetly (not direct use of computers)
- ▶ made use of ordinary objects we encounter everyday (not high-tech computers)
- ▶ was sensory, specifically exploring touch and sound
- ▶ had not previously been explored at the setting
- ▶ was experimental
- ▶ involved making music with objects that weren't traditional instruments.

Why do this?

Digital technology produced for very young children is usually designed for passive engagement; playing a pre-programmed game, sorting pictures, triggering sounds by pressing a mouse. Our aim here to provide an opportunity for children to manipulate technology and become inventors of their own ideas, not simply consumers of digital product.

Digital creativity is also associated with the use of hi-tech gear. Our aim was to demonstrate that we can be creative with digital technology whilst interacting with ordinary objects that we encounter everyday. And interaction with technology is often a solitary activity. Here we wanted to creatively explore it and encourage children to collaborate and share ideas.

The number on roll at both Nursery and Reception at Budleigh Salterton is growing and the ratio of adults to children is shrinking. An early years practitioner noted that when resources are stretched, creativity suffers. Here was an opportunity to bring some fresh creativity into the space and allow time for observation by practitioners.

Photos: Richard Tomlinson



Children used clay, buttons, shells and scrapstore bits and bobs to create sound inventions



The children discovered that their inventions made a sound when touched.



Children experimented with clay

Making digital technology tactile and playful

The technical set-up for this project was simple and inexpensive:

- ▶ a laptop computer
- ▶ Scratch software
- ▶ *MakeyMakey* board
- ▶ wires / crocodile clips
- ▶ materials including clay, fruit and vegetables.

Scratch is a free programming language (see www.scratch.mit.edu/about). Its intuitive interface means anyone can create their own interactive stories, games, and animations in minutes. It wasn't the intention that very young children would program. *Scratch* suggests running projects with children 8+. Early years practitioners might be inspired to build simple interactive applications informed by their children's interests and the setting environment.

Scratch was used to make a simple application that told the computer to play one of 18 sounds when a key was pressed. We developed a *MakeyMakey* (www.makeymakey.com), a small electronic board (under £40 online) not much bigger than a credit card that connects to the computer via a USB cable.

The next step was to connect the *MakeyMakey* to the computer so that when an everyday object was touched it too would make a sound. We created a Carrot Piano (18 carrots each trigger a single note when touched). With the *MakeyMakey* you can make anything a little bit conductive (containing moisture or carbon) into a computer key. Inventions could include a banana cowbell, watermelon bass drum or talking plant.

All sorts of objects can be turned into computer keys:

- ▶ leaves, flowers
- ▶ clay, as long as it is moist
- ▶ graphite from a pencil (you can draw a piano on paper and really play it!)
- ▶ foil and other metal objects (coins, magnets, nuts and bolts, forks, pots and pans)
- ▶ people are conductive! (you can trigger sounds when two people shake hands)

The process

We worked with Nursery/Reception class over nine half-day sessions. Initially, children were encouraged to think of themselves as inventors or scientists using clay to create amazing noisy machines, weird musical instruments or loud creatures.

We ran clay modelling sessions in the Science Garden, a familiar activity. Whilst modelling, the children talked about the object they were inventing, describing its size and the sound it made. This tactile activity was very effective in encouraging collaborative working. Children intuitively shared the clay with each other and understood that some inventions were bigger than others and might require more

clay. The children communicated with each other, either verbally or through actions, sharing ideas and inspiration. Some children even combined their models together to create super-inventions!

Then the *MakeyMakey* was introduced. The children instantly understood its potential and started connecting their clay models to it. They realised that when they touched their model it produced a sound. When they touched two models simultaneously, two sounds were produced.

The children continued their creative experimentation, producing:

- ▶ sound emitting clay inventions
- ▶ musical instruments made from fruit and vegetables
- ▶ musical instruments made from buckets of water
- ▶ objects that, when connected together with wires or wet string, produce noisier sounds.

What we learned

The process encouraged children to use words. Those with little confidence in verbal communication were able to use simple words like: food, shop, carrot, dinner and water. Those with higher levels used words like: scientist, inventor, magician, aubergine, connect and circuit.

Children understood that, though they were working with everyday objects, they were also creatively exploring digital technology and completing circuits. They said phrases like "attach me to the computer", "join me up", "plug me in" and "I'm an inventor".

As well as using words associated with technology the children used words and phrases to describe their modelling with clay and the everyday objects: "I'm building a town with a river through it, the water will make the connection", "here's a noisy pie", "the bigger carrots will make a bigger noise."

Children who had previously been assessed as having lower organisational skills demonstrated that they were very capable of organising the resources involved; they were clearly able to attach different wires to different objects to create a range of sounds.

It encouraged children, particularly the boys, to interact gently with one another. Both Nursery and Reception classes had a higher percentage of boys and play could often be very physical. The children realised that by gently holding hands they could complete a circuit and create a sound.

As well as stimulating communication, the process also encouraged children to think about maths, systems and science.

You can watch a short film about the activity here: <https://vimeo.com/257690127/fd66cc3f54>

Making music the focus again in early childhood music making

Nicola Burke

For the past 18 years, working as an early years music practitioner across England, I have had the opportunity to encounter many points of views and rationales for the purpose and place of music in early childhood. In this article I explore common rationales offered to “justify” music making with young children and the impact this has had on the purpose of music in early childhood. I also share details of an innovative early childhood music project that I lead which focuses on developing music provision and practice in west London.

Music and its place in early childhood education

During my time working in early years, I have found that there tend to be three reasons why music in early childhood is offered and justified:

- ▶ to support other areas of learning and development, eg music to support speech and language development, health & wellbeing
- ▶ to create the next generation of musicians and to “prepare them for instrumental tuition”
- ▶ for children’s rights to cultural, artistic and creative experiences; a broad and balanced education.

I whole-heartedly agree and understand that music making has other benefits and I have first hand experience of this. However, I strongly feel that music should not be offered solely on this basis. Music education in primary and secondary schools is not solely offered to support other areas of learning and development so why is this so prevalent in early childhood?

As Young (2018) highlights, the whole dimension of music as a separate multidisciplinary area of its own right has disappeared. This concurs with the first

bullet point above regarding why music is offered in early childhood. This was also found in Greenhalgh’s research (2014) which involved early childhood music practitioners and explored the aims of their music sessions. The research found that “The most popular order of priority was “Enjoyment and having fun” followed by “Early Education” with “Learning about Music” deemed least important.” (2014:36). Of course, we want learning to be enjoyable and fun for children, the point is that the musical experience and musical aims were the last on the list of priorities.

An internet search for “early years music sessions” will result in an abundance of offerings for music sessions delivered by a range of franchises, people and organisations, many of whom use promotional headlines along the lines of “music develops motor skills”, “music to support literacy” and at times accompanied with bold claims regarding the impact of music making on cognitive development and capacity.

This is becoming increasingly apparent in recent years resulting in some music services and organisations justifying their music offer for early years as a vehicle for other learning. This is an indication that the pendulum has swung too far towards music being subservient to other subjects, particularly in early childhood education.

“The Mozart Effect” is perhaps a contributing factor to this. “The Mozart Effect” was a term which attracted media attention during the 1990s due to research conducted by Rauscher, Shaw and Ky (1993). The results of the research suggested that listening to the music of Mozart temporarily raised spatial IQ test scores. Rauscher has since brought attention to the fact that that the research

involved college students and not children and has also classified that “there is very little research to suggest that children who listen to Mozart score higher on ability or intelligent tests than other children” (Rauscher, 2009:244). The effects of this term are still apparent today; “The Mozart Effect” exists as a “scientific legend”. Bangerter and Heath (2004:608) refer to the “scientific legend” of Fraser and Gaskell (1990, cited *ibid*) that “propagates in society, originally arising from scientific study, but that has been transformed to deviate in essential ways from the understanding of scientists”. They also continue to say that “‘The Mozart Effect’ is omnipresent in US culture, where the media and various interest groups quickly saw in it a new, easy technique for enhancing intelligence” (*ibid*:608).

The more that music is used for other areas of learning and development the more this may contribute to music becoming obsolete in its own right.

Music making in early childhood is not centrally funded in England. The National Plan for Music Education (NPME), created by the Department for Education (DfE) in 2011 sets out a central vision for schools, arts and education organisations to drive excellence in music education. Although the NPME acknowledges that “music teaching starts in the Early Years” (DfE, 2011:9) funding from the DfE is for children aged 5 and above. National policy does not include music making for children from birth to 4 years.

The fact that music in early childhood is not supported in policy, may contribute to the notion of music being used for other outcomes, eg music for speech and language development. This is also reflected in project work that is funded by

organisations and charities. When reporting on the impact of music projects there is often a requirement to report on the impact on other areas of learning and development such as communication and language, personal and social skills.

As a child of the 80s growing up in Birmingham I was fortunate to be influenced by a prominent music scene and a family that placed music at the core of all family occasions. This instilled in me a love and passion for music; this was before parents were placed under the pressure that they are today to ensure their children are participating in sessions to support, and in some cases “speed up” their children’s development. Parents are currently encouraged to take their young children to lots of classes including yoga classes, music sessions, swimming lessons, sensory sessions and dance sessions. Some of these sessions will be positive, however, the rapid increase in these types of sessions over the past 20 years has brought with it some poor models of practice. This field of work is completely unregulated. Models of practice have developed that are based on poor and limited knowledge and understanding of child development and early childhood pedagogy. The model of early childhood music making embedded in practice tends to focus on adult- led activity; typically circle time activities led by an adult that leads songs and at times games. This differs from what is considered to be quality early childhood practice which is that children learn through play. Children do need adult direction and guidance, an element of this is important. The problem with the prevailing model of early childhood music practice is that it focuses on adult-led activity and often leaves little room for musical play and child-initiated, adult-responsive music making.

There is a lack of knowledge and understanding of musical development in early childhood due to a myriad of reasons; lack of music within early childhood programmes of study and lack of continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities are two contributing factors. This has resulted in early childhood music practice being based on a diluted version of what one may offer for older children.

Perhaps this diluted version of music practice and lack of understanding infused with legends such as the “The Mozart Effect”, have created the perfect recipe

for the loss of musical focus within music practice and the demise of music as a separate multidisciplinary area in its own right.

Tri-Music Together, EY music project, West London.

Tri-Music Together (TMT) is an early childhood workforce development music project taking place across three London Boroughs; Hammersmith and Fulham; Kensington and Chelsea; Westminster. The project was initiated by the Tri-borough Music Hub (TBMH). There are 123 Music Hubs across England that offer music education for children in their geographical area. As noted above, the DfE do not fund early childhood music and therefore hubs are not currently granted government funding for this age group. The lead of the TBMH, Stuart Whatmore, feels strongly that music education should start from birth and that all children have the right to a quality music education. Stuart took the initiative to develop early childhood music across the Tri-borough. He invited organisations to be partners of a consortium with an interest in developing music provision for children aged birth to five. The Tri-borough Early Years Music Consortium (TBEYMC) was created in 2015 and consists of fourteen partner organisations, the members include state-funded early years services, not-for-profit arts organisations, charities and performance venues.

They are:

- ▶ Chickenshed Kensington & Chelsea
- ▶ Creative Futures
- ▶ Inspire-works
- ▶ London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham Children’s Centres
- ▶ Music House for Children

- ▶ Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Children’s Centres
- ▶ Royal Albert Hall
- ▶ Royal College of Music
- ▶ Sound Connections
- ▶ The Voices Foundation
- ▶ Tri-borough Music Hub
- ▶ Tri-borough School Standards
- ▶ Westminster City Council Children’s Centres
- ▶ Wigmore Hall

The TBEYMC applied for funding from the National Charity Youth Music to develop early childhood music across the Tri-borough. In 2016 Youth Music awarded the consortium £100,000 to fund the project over a two-year period. In 2016 I was appointed EYFS Strategic Lead and I was excited by the challenge to develop music provision based on early childhood pedagogy and with music at the core of the project.

The aim was to develop music provision across the Tri-borough involving musicians and early childhood professionals. Throughout the two years we were able to identify the continuing professional development (CPD) needs of the workforce and explore models of practice.

We wanted musicians and early years practitioners to have the opportunity and time to explore music in settings, to observe children’s musicality and discuss together how they could develop the music provision and musically engage with young children. This model of CPD was known as the TMT mini project and involved 12 musicians being paired with 10 settings, to work in partnership, to have time to talk and reflect together. Musicians and early years practitioners had three days together in the



setting and were assigned a mentor who visited them for half a day at the setting. We also met as an entire group for 2.5 days for further CPD and reflection which took place at the beginning, mid-point and end.

The only requirement of the project was that on the first visit, the musicians would observe children, not “lead” any sessions and would familiarise themselves with the day-to-day life of the setting. This proved challenging not solely for the early years practitioners who perhaps were used to artists coming in to “deliver” but more so for the musicians who had only ever “delivered” music sessions in settings and schools. This provoked many discussions around the role of the musician working in settings. There were some deep reflections shared by the musicians:

Immersing myself in an EY setting was hugely valuable in many ways, I thought about my role ... which is still very focused on adult-led music – I want to change this.

I feel very lucky as a workshop leader to have had this opportunity and I can already see this project having an effect on my work – I WILL LISTEN!!! (to the kids).
(Pitt, 2018:33)

A bespoke reflective journal was created for the mini project to capture deep learning and insights about practitioners’ professional development, collaborative practice, and the project’s impact on children. The impact of the mini project was significant.

The mini project certainly was mini in terms of length, but vast in terms of impact and outcomes. Early years practitioners and musicians developed their understanding of children’s musical abilities, musicality and children’s ability to lead musically. The music provision in settings developed; practitioners observed and documented children’s music making; music was placed on the timetable and in some settings, they extended the music provision to include music making with families in the setting. Musicians developed their skills in responding musically to children and were also able to gain a deeper understanding of the day to day life of a setting and therefore the day-to-day experience of children in settings.

This was achieved through observation, dialogue and reflection. The model of practice we explored involved musicians and practitioners working together in partnership, exploring, talking and reflecting together.

If you have a visiting musician working with you, or you are an early years music practitioner, consider the possibilities of how a musician could work with practitioners in a setting. For example, observe children’s music making and musical play together, talk about the musical environment of the setting; is it enabling? Discuss the available listening repertoire.

There are some significant recommendations made in the TMT report, and the one I would like to highlight here is:

Future CPD EY Music projects should include “placements” for musicians in settings where they are not initially expected to “do” music, but observe before instigating any delivery.
(Pitt, 2018:8)

I would like to extend this to include the general practice of visiting musicians not just within projects; musicians need to observe and understand the children they are working with, to enable them to plan to suit the children’s needs and nurture their musicality.

Young (2018) has instigated a call for higher expectations, I would like to contribute to this call. Early childhood music practice needs to be steeped in early childhood pedagogy and involve a broad range of musical experiences. Early childhood music should not be entirely led by an adult and should not solely rely on the visiting musician visiting settings to deliver the music. The visiting musician needs to work in partnership with the staff and the children to enable quality and meaningful music making for children.

Visiting musicians can and should enhance the music provision – not just deliver it.

Nicola Burke is an Early Years Music Consultant and an Associate of Early Education. She is the author of *Musical Development Matters* (2018).

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Musical Development Matters in the Early Years

By Nicola Burke



Early Education
The British Association for Early Childhood Education

Musical Development Matters

Musical Development Matters in the Early Years is a new guidance document published in September 2018. Its overall purpose is to support practitioners, teachers, musicians and parents to see the musical attributes of young children and to offer ideas as to how they can support and nurture children's musical development by offering broad musical experiences.



Musical Development Matters forms part of the legacy of the Tri-Music Together project. The free online accompanying resource can be found here:

network.youthmusic.org.uk/musical-development-matters

Download a copy for free or buy a printed copy from

www.early-education.org.uk/musical-development-matters

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