

Birth to Five Matters

Practice Example – Expressive Arts and Design

Interacting with Infants' Vocal Play
Why this case study? The aim of this example is to illustrate what children's musical learning in Ranges 1-2 might look and sound like and how adults can support
What are the links across Birth to Five Matters (pages/areas etc)? • Responds to and engages with the world around them eg sounds, movement, people, objects, sensations, emotions (their own and others). (EAD, Birth-5 Matters) • Active learning, maintaining focus, showing high levels of fascination, not easily distracted, paying attention to details. (CoEL) • All children bring funds of knowledge
The Case Study An adult offers a playful, wordless vocalisation ('aaaaaahhhh') while a young infant gazes at his face. The adult waits for a response. The infant continues to gaze. The adult waits again and the infant attempts to mimic the adult's vocal sounds. The adult then offers another similar vocal invitation. He waits again while the infant studies his face. Steadying her breathing, the baby responds with a long-sung vowel-like sound. This play continues through back-and-forth interactions. Each time the sound moves between the adult and the baby it changes slightly – sometimes led by the child and sometimes by the adult. Points to note: • This interaction requires a relatively quiet environment, but as the pair are close to each other, they are able to concentrate on the activity even with background sound. • The event was not planned or part of a music session but happened spontaneously over 1 minute. Small moments can provide significant opportunities for learning, when 'adults tune into and sensitively respond to babies' communications.' (EAD, Birth-5 Matters). This requires careful attention and knowing how and when to initiate vocal play with individual children. • Vocal play is different to singing songs. Singing songs to babies is fun and supports their learning and cultural belonging. However, songs usually have a pre-determined structure with words and are often sung too fast for young babies to participate. Vocal interactions offer rich, more open-ended opportunities to support children's expressive communication and musical development.
Connections to theory, research and the resources on the website

- **Musical Development Matters** is a free guidance that is available to download from Early Education [here](#).
- **Musical Development Matters** free online resource can be accessed [here](#).
- **Sound Communities** free online resource supporting practitioners to use music to strengthen children's communication, language, and social development can be accessed [here](#).
- **The Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC)** offers a range of papers on early childhood music from CREC alumni [here](#).
- **Magic Acorns** share a range of research and resources to strengthen creative practice in early years arts [here](#).
- **Take Art – Early Years Video Library** is a collection of training and project videos showcasing Take Art's early years arts work to support practitioners' creative practice [here](#).

Reflective questions for practice

- What might vocal play look and sound like for older children?
- What do you notice about how children's vocalisations change when they are: outside, engaged in water/sand play, mark-making, in a new environment?
- How can you support colleagues to feel confident to engage in vocal play?

Glossary

Vocal play