

Music Champions in the Early Years – exploring and playing with sound and music.

What did we learn?

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Centre for Research in Early Childhood

Through our research, consultancy,
postgraduate degrees and programmes,
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Evaluation across two years

- *Musicians and educators in 10 settings*
- *87 weekly reflections*
- *14 end of project reflections*
- *4 blogs*
- *2 sharing events*
- *Audio files*
- *Plus video of interviews and practice*

Child centred music making

Does not always feel natural at first: *'surprised how difficult some children found free exploration'*

Develops over time: *'noticing what children do and attending to that'*

Starts with relationships: *'Look boys, it's the music lady, your favourite!'*

Can have unexpected outcomes: *'The number of children that got involved in lots of different ways at different times – quite chaotic but lots of musical interactions!'*

Results in children with agency: *"play this" demonstrates rhythm. I repeat a drum rhythm but on guitar "now this"..... I do the same again. Shall we do it in turns?? "No" just when I say.'*

'I can't know this, but from re-listening to the recordings I think they knew that they had control of the music; when it started and when it stopped; the dynamics; and when each individual chose to play within the musical context. They owned it, and had agency over how it sounded.'

Through this child-centred approach there is reflective evidence of children's improving confidence, self-regulation, communication and language and socio-emotional development.

'There was also so much incidental learning: Self-identity and expression, enthusiasm and engagement increased, confidence to join in, vocal confidence, appreciation of others around them – taking turns/sharing/encouraging others...so much!'

'In a general sense I think the children learned how to regulate themselves; gained confidence to express themselves; and developed musical listening.'

'a child [was] nonverbal however after several sessions has built her confidence and now does use language'

'[They] left their mother's laps and came to play the tongue drum'

Parental Voice in programme design

Parents value music: *'They should learn at least one instrument in their life'*

Engaging parents can be more challenging than engaging the children:
'growing pains'

Drawing children in engages parents: *'She used to come here and spend a bit of time in that room, a bit of time outside, but now she loves coming for the music'*

Once engaged their contribution impacts others: *'one parent sang in Hindi and Gujrati.'*

Through child-centred processes and trusting relationships parents begin to engage in programme design: *'they talked about tabla & sitar so I used a piece of music by Ravi Shankar as 'intro' quite often after that.'*

Practice improvements

Slower, child centred practice emerged: *'I allow more time/space for each activity, am less concerned about a group getting bored and repeat activities more'*

Relationships and trust underpinned space to experiment: *'Working alongside each other, we found space to combine different creative disciplines in ways that supported the child-led approach. This not only enriched the sessions themselves but also sparked new ideas and inspired future partnerships beyond the project.'*

A whole setting approach supported greater impact: *'open mindedness from ourselves and our organisations', 'permission from selves and senior leaders.'*

Play is central within sessions, for children, educators and musicians: *Children playing musically were able to learn as much themselves as children "being taught" – we covered pulse, rhythm, dynamics, ensemble skills - with just a little nudge from the adults playing too, and it means more, is more fun and sticks with them!*

Legacy

Parents are inspired and connected to music: *‘He’s fascinated by the guitar. We don’t have one at home – we’ll have to get him one!’*

‘Parents have shared that their children are now asking for music at home, often wanting to recreate activities they’ve enjoyed at school. This shows how deeply the experience resonates with them and carries over into family life.’

Musicians and educators feel differently about music: *The joy, playfulness and responses from the participants in this project have given me the love for playing back!*

Music making fits naturally within early years: *‘we found a large cardboard tube and explored making sounds with it using mallets and voice’*

‘I love working with early years, and so I’m definitely going to move towards that!’