



# THE MUSIC HOUSE FOR CHILDREN

PIANO ★ GUITAR ★ VIOLIN ★ DRUMS ★ PERCUSSION ★ TRUMPET ★ CELLO  
UKULELE ★ SINGING ★ MUSIC FOR BABIES ★ MUSIC FOR UNDER FIVES  
INSTRUMENTAL LESSONS ★ HOME TUITION ★ WORKSHOPS ★ CONCERTS

**‘Words May Sing’ funded by Youth Music**

**Musical Storytelling in two libraries for children with speech and language delay**

## **Main Findings**

1. Children’s vocalizations are more refined, often more creative and imaginative when they use all their senses, are emotionally engaged and have been moving their whole bodies.
2. When leaders allowed the children to lead and responded to their vocalisations and interests, there were unexpected levels of musical attunement (Trevvarthen, 2010) and harmony as well as ‘conversations’ where they sparked each other’s ideas.
3. Thee library assistants were invaluable in supporting the leader. However they did not reach the stage of leading a whole session. Due to staff shortages they did not access the musical professional development sessions offered by Music House for Children.
4. Parents became more settled and confident over the time of the project. They enjoyed singing, especially to the tune of contemporary popular songs. Semi-structured interviews indicated their realisation of the value of personal input through actual experience of the importance of music to their children’s communication.

Supporting references from published literature and links to evidence are included in the following discussions.

## **Meeting intended outcomes**

### **Generic Outcome 1 – indicators**

**To improve the quality and standards of music delivery for children and young people.**

All leaders will be instrumentalists and able to play more than one instrument to share with the groups. Instruments for the children to use will be age appropriate, safe, tactile, colourful and high quality sound making percussive instruments. They will be un-tuned, to enable a variety of sound textures to be explored. The tuned percussion will reflect multi-motor development (glockenspiels) with a focus on pitch-based activities



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- Music leaders will reflect and improve on their own skills/delivery of sessions
- Music leaders will gather observations from families to identify language development and music making skills to improve the delivery of the sessions.
- Stories will develop and improve language, vocalising and promote creative musical storytelling.

Both Music House for Children leaders discussed and changed their delivery based on the children's responses. The basic structure of the session had a number of elements including invented 'tag' refrains that connected to the theme of the book. Each session incorporated plenty of high quality instruments such as claves, shakers, drums and recorders (Young 2003; p115). Initially a keyboard was played but the leaders considered that this caused a barrier between themselves and the children, especially when it was on a stand. Playing guitar or ukulele allowed for movement amongst the group. Another important approach was to initiate learning through whole body movement by encouraging children to move and dance freely, using props such as chiffon scarves and large stretchy Lycra squares and distributing masks, puppets and small toys.

Over the course of the 10 month project the leaders adjusted from 'delivering' the session to a more organic approach, where they followed the children's cues and trusted that they would listen and respond (Young, 2003; Pound and Webb / Fleming; 2013). Some children attended regularly and the leaders knew them well enough to recall their particular interests and allow them to lead the vocalisations.

Because of the objective to support phonics the leaders initially put emphasis on first letter sounds. Quite quickly they realised that inherent repetition in songs and sound-making served the same pedagogic purpose more successfully (Bruner and Trevarthen cited in Young, 2003; p55). They built up the confidence to allow silences, which gave children time to think (Young; p74).

In turn this led to the story developing according to the children's interpretations of the illustrations and their own experiences, which the story evoked. Children who normally attended a regular part-time nursery were confident enough to add their own ideas. By allowing more time for their responses, younger children then became confident to contribute more vocally. This is in line with the social constructivist theory of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) and peer apprenticeship (Rogoff, 1990).

At the heart of the structure of the session alternate quiet and exciting activities were offered (Young; p63). The quality of delivery was noticed by a number of parents and carers. In their experience as parents and carers they understood that very few practitioners are able to keep children engaged and involved for a full hour. This is testament to the leaders' skills. (Session notes and semi-structured interviews)

Leaders had found that two subsequent sessions based on the same story worked well. Allowing time for children to think and vocalise their own ideas took more time so four extensions to the story were planned but only two delivered each session. Depending on children's responses, the alternative extensions were incorporated in the second session for each book. Planning incorporated age-appropriate knowledge of the developmental outcomes recommended in the EYFS (2012) document.

**The following points are a summary of the musical and communication strategies used from the beginning.**

- Session starts with real music. Children are welcomed by name, given eye contact and a big smile.
- Leaders reassured parents that their children could participate in their own way (Young p79).
- Vocal sounds are illustrated with big movements.
- Leaders modelled the physical movements that linked with the song.



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- Tunes and instruments in themselves are used to calm down (triangles) or excite (drums and shakers) the children.
- Leaders accompany the children's words and musical sounds with their own instrument (e.g. initially keyboard, then ukulele or guitar).
- Leaders respond to children's idiosyncrasies e.g. Call-and-Response interlude with Kath led by Jaime.
- Familiar children's tunes are vocalised but with different words and rhyming couplets.
- Children's ideas were affirmed through repetition so everyone could hear (Pound & Harrison, 2003). This gave children time to understand what was said, to think and to respond
- Open-ended questions were planned for to extend children's thinking.
- Amusing questions were asked to foster emotional engagement e.g. "Is your name Cucumber?" and incorporated into the 'Hello' song.
- Questions were started and children encouraged to complete them.
- Puppets with moving mouths which made sounds were introduced and the children were encouraged to vocalise and speak through them.

### New strategies leaders took on.

- During each session parents were reassured directly that their children could move about independently as they wished, but that they had to take responsibility for them if they moved outside the boundaries of the session. Chairs and cushions were set up in order to facilitate movement behind the group at Askew Rd, which avoided the need to walk through the group.
- Children were encouraged to stand, walk and jump both through the songs (as instructions) with the actions modelled by the leaders.
- Aural connections between the pitch and loudness of the leaders' voices and the pitch and loudness of the instruments were explicitly modelled and made visual through movement.
- Variations in pitch and loudness were used to accompany musical words, body actions and types of animals.
- Both Kath and Kirsty learnt to play new instruments such as woodwind and drums.
- Children 'had a go' at playing the leader's instruments during the session and they were available to play afterwards. This often allowed quieter children to demonstrate their musical and language skills e.g. As Jason (EAL) played the keyboard he vocalised musical concepts: "Change that sound" and, "That is fast".
- Leaders changed the loudness and emotional quality of their voices more consciously to give dramatic tension.
- Instruments were placed so they could be easily reached by the leaders. The flow and pace of the session was not disrupted.
- Moving amongst the group playing an instrument encouraged children's development and refinement of their movements.

Further Communication and Language development was encouraged by

- Responding to children's ideas by repeating their words in a sentence and asking for clarifications (*Appendix 7*).
- Repeating children's suggestions and singing their words as a refrain
- Modelling spontaneous rhyming.
- More modern tunes were introduced to capture adults' interest and involvement.
- Microphones and megaphone sound-makers introduced which gave voice to the very quiet children as well as encouraging individual singing.



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By the middle of the second term the children were so used to contributing their own musical and conceptual ideas that they lost interest if the leaders became too directive (Young, 2003) and reclaimed the lead: e.g. “No! I think we should put them on our shoes!”

Imaginative and individual creative musical and vocal responses almost always followed whole body movement. Dalcroze (1921, cited in Specter, 1990) found that his observations of students “*led me to the discovery that musical sensations of a rhythmic nature call for muscular and nervous response of the whole organism.*” (page 55)

It was significant that so many of the children’s movements and vocalisations were accompanied by a high emotional response (seen in session reports as ER), whether they were physical or musical repetitions, verbal responses to closed questions, imaginative interpretations of the illustrations or invented words.

By the third term, children in the library sessions were attuned (Stern, 1998) and listening to each other to the extent that they played percussion instruments to the same rhythm and beat. An astonishing finding was the spontaneous unified recorder playing at the Family Project (two, three and four year olds)

## **LISTENING TO PARENTS**

It is important to clarify that children between the age of 18 months and 3 years do not actually tend to sing in groups. The characteristic signifiers of participation are that they listen intently, they mouth words to the songs without sound, they do the actions to go with the song and they move and bounce to the beat. Any oral contributions are key sounds or final words of a refrain (Young, 2003; p63). Thus it was important for the leaders and monitoring officer to check with parents whether their children sung at home. This age group will sing alone, to key persons or while playing independently in a familiar setting.

In the sessions most parents and carers became comfortable enough to allow their children to participate in their own way: e.g. A young mum new to the session allowed her baby to crawl in and out of the space. Another example was a grandmother who allowed her 15 month-old grandson to play in the bubble behind the session space. When he became interested in the music and singing, she held him high so he could see. She sang along with the songs and made the actions for her grandson while allowing him autonomy (Young: p79).

Parents and Carers often approached the leaders before or after the session although time was limited on both sides. They described or showed videos of their child singing and making music while involving their parents in the activity. Parents interviewed often said that their children had requested their own musical instrument for home.

In the relaxed space after the session younger children showed imaginative divergent thinking on hearing a key word in a different context (e.g. When Ishan (20 months) heard Kath describe a child as ‘zooming’ across the space he began to sing ‘Zoom, Zoom Going to the Moon’

Jordan’s Mum at the Family Project commented on how much more language her son learns when he hears songs, plays musical instruments and hears music (Pound and Harrison (2003: pp 77, 78). After a session he ‘sings’ the new words over the next week.

Each week many parents and carers excitedly reported new words their children learned.

## **STORIES**

The story had to be easily accessible to the leader as well as the children. Because songs and music were introduced and the book put down at a number of points in the session the leader had to identify the next page to use



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quickly in order to keep flow and pace. With the monitoring officer they began to analyse (mid second term) the qualities of the books that worked well with this age group.

In general, the books that worked best for children had painterly, slightly ambiguous illustrations. They had double page spreads which stood alone in meaning which meant that leaders could skip pages to accommodate musical extensions to the story. Elements which interested both boys and girls were animals; children; vehicles (especially trains and boats); dragons/dinosaurs and royalty. Initial interest led to many interactive conversational responses.

Planning a two week cycle for each book worked well, because children remembered events in the story and added in their own knowledge and experience.

## **Generic Outcome 2 – indicators**

**To embed learning and effective practice in host and partner organisations and share practice beyond the project.**

Rhyme time leaders will be trained in age appropriate delivery of music, music techniques, and how to use instruments in different ways and effectively.

Observation notes will be exchanged with participants and a final report will be shared with leading organisations working in early childhood music making.

- 1 Evaluations and reports, as well as weekly meetings will ensure improved practice/delivery for the life of the project. As seen in the session reports, high levels of engagement were established early in the session by the middle of term
- 2 Library assistants were more visible and supported the Music House leaders more effectively. Monitoring emphasis differed slightly each term.
- 3 In Term 1 individual children's language development was tracked through observations at monthly intervals and discussed with the leaders and library assistants.
- 4 There was a focus on leaders' strategies for eliciting imaginative and creative responses to the story during Term 2 and these were shared to some extent with the library assistants.
- 5 Musical responses, movement and language were observed in the whole group in Term 3. The greater contribution of the library assistants was also observed and next steps determined by the leaders.

See Outcome 1 for evidence of improved delivery of leaders and Outcome 5 for library assistant / rhyme-time leader delivery.

## **Outcome 3**

Improve personal, social and emotional development of young children at higher risk of delay through participation in creative musical activity. Cross-cultural singing, phonetics, group music making and dancing will be explored.

### **Groups**

The change in approach allowed children to take the lead more often in sessions led to some interesting displays of empathy and social awareness. In musical terms this was shown in the natural lapse into playing in unison shown in many session reports from Term 3.

Children also seemed to be in attunement (Stern 1998) to each other's movements. In communication the 'conversations' where children responded to each other's utterances also showed listening skills and turn-taking. Aside



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from adding to a conversation, children began to listen to and be interested in what each other said: e.g. Louis's horse and Sofia's butterfly were mentioned again by others as favourites.

It was noticed that children who arrived early and spent time reading with their mothers were more confident to participate more fully. This became apparent when the regular children came late. If they did not have time to claim their space and chat to the leader, they were upset and found it difficult to accept others in the group. One child was so annoyed that he sat in his buggy all session while his mother joined in with the activities.

Regular children made close attachments to both Music House leaders in addition to the already library assistants they already knew. Some parents reported they spoke about Kirsty and Kath at home.

Over the life of the project children became confident to move about much earlier in the session. Regular children tended to take the lead and others followed. Children tended to make movements appropriate to the space they had for the session, defined by the physical environment and number of participants. At Shepherd's Bush library children made smaller movements compared to the Askew Road Library where they could spread out further. Accidental bumping was very rare.

By the second term children almost always waited for others to pick instruments out of the basket when offered, the older ones often waiting for the younger. During the first term the library assistant at Shepherd's Bush library witnessed the more dominant girl of a pair consciously begin to help the other with her instruments and dancing. Often children who had been coming to the session regularly would make sure that new children had an instrument or toy. When noticed, leaders and parents spontaneously clapped and praised the children for their caring.

Plenty of instruments were available so children could be confident that they would not miss out (Goldschmied and Jackson, (2004). There was variation within the instrument sets so children could exert individual choices: e.g. shakers and drums in the basket of un-tuned percussion. It was difficult for the children if there were only one or two of a desired object e.g. sparkly ball. Because of their age and learning English in addition to home languages, most of the younger children were not developmentally ready to wait their turn. In drop-in sessions like these they need to re-establish their sense of security each week. Interestingly, the large puppets did not cause the same problems, perhaps because they were used more often.

The following individual case study shows an example of the effect of the sessions.

Paul's mother is very ill, and Paul has attended Speech and Language sessions after being referred because of a bad stammer. His mother reports *"He is much more confident and now talks to everyone he meets. Previously he always wanted to play alone but now engages much more at home and with children on the street. He enjoys making up words, especially for his feelings."* (Paraphrased interview in session report; 26.7.13).

Kirsty the Music House leader also reported that his overall confidence had increased significantly. *"Previously if the group had been bigger than 10, he has found it harder to respond interactively"*

Parents and children were very tolerant of those with language delay and its consequential behaviour patterns. However it was difficult to reassure their mothers enough to keep them coming. Their children showed higher development at home so it was painful to see their difficulties in a structured group situation. For example, tracking showed Jonah's improvements in movement, language and musical communication but after attending for four weeks, his mother found a more comfortable alternative.

These issues are discussed further in Section 2 of this report.



## Outcome 4

Improve communication, language and literacy development of young children at higher risk of delay through participation in creative musical activity. Families are encouraged to bring songs from their culture to share with the group in English and mother language. Families bond with movement, instruments, rhythm, sounds and singing.

*The number of families sharing cultural songs will be logged weekly. We expect to see an increase in the number of songs offered throughout the project as families become confident in musical delivery.*

- Development of the children's vocalisations and verbal, non-verbal and musical communications was tracked and collated in Term 1. Values for engagement were loosely aligned to those developed by Nordoff and Robbins (1973) and signs of well-being and involvement were recognised according to Leuven criteria (Laevers, 2005). Children's responses were analysed according to a model created by Emma Hutchinson (2011) which judges learning in terms of vocalisation, movement and emotional responses.
- Informal chats and recorded interviews with parents showed that the younger children who did not vocalise during the session repeated key phrases and sang sections of songs at home.

By the middle of the second term individual children's levels of engagement were high at an earlier point in the session. Their utterances and conversations indicated an increase in imaginative and creative responses (coded as RA – reverse action) to the story. These often came after the 'Warm-up' phase which involved repeating the movements and vocalisations of the leader.

Some examples of creative responses are:

- Jason (EAL) dances and jumps to the rhythm of the movement of lycra 'sea'.
- Liam (SEN) introduces Buzz Lightyear into the story "To enfarry and beyond" and exclaims "I'm too tall to sit down!" He gave an alternative ending to the story 'So Much' - "Have baby things – there's milk, strawberries and rattles."
- Two year - old Charity (EAL) plays her bells during quieter times. Thirty month-old Maya (EAL) exclaims "I rows and rows pink shoes!" and "I going at home!" at appropriate points in the story of 'New Shoes'.

Both leaders reported how most parents have become more genuinely engaged and involved. Parents became more confident in their own abilities (especially singing) and actively supported their children to say words and follow the rhythm of both the music and story. The majority of nannies do not become so involved.

The pace and speed of the music began to trigger appropriate body movements without any prompting. (Entrainment – p67 Clayton et al cited in Malloch and Trevarthen 2009). This did not happen in the early sessions.

Parents and nannies became more engaged with movement and music when asked to help with the activities e.g. washing line with triangle or bouncing toys on the lycra square. They became even more involved when given instruments or invited to have children on their knees during fast / slow songs. Children could feel movements through their bodies and stopped and started their instruments with exact timing.

As the leaders gradually allowed children to lead, parents became more interested which in turn led to more creative responses from the children.



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The leaders began to incorporate cultural songs less and less. Repeating simple cultural favourites (Bella Mama, or Senya de dende) each week became the signal for the end of the session that interrupted the flow. Getting songs from parents and trying to learn them well enough to deliver in sessions proved difficult because correct pronunciation could not be ensured and parents themselves were not confident enough to initially sing alone. We planned to record songs and lyrics but this proved difficult for both the Music House leaders and parents due to timings. Another approach to this could be to sing 'Hello' in different languages and incorporate different language songs that connect with the theme of the story.

New registration forms were developed to have 'languages spoken at home' instead of 'nationality' (as most were British nationals). Sometimes different forms were used. One form had 'languages the child is learning' – the parents responded with 'English'. It seemed that they did not consider that home languages were being 'learnt'.

### Outcome 5

- \* To improve language skills through music and sound making.
- \* To mentor and closely train the rhyme time leaders to engage in new ways of musical storytelling with families which will enable the quality sessions to continue after the project has ended with the library leader therefore leaving a legacy.
- \* A minimum of 2 library leaders will increase their music skills throughout the life of the project.

The rhyme-time leaders were not able to access all the scheduled training from the Music House leaders but their confidence developed as a consequence of practical participation and support over the project.

The Shepherd's Bush Library library assistant had very little experience in deliver as she did not lead any of the Rhyme-time sessions. However, she developed more confidence in moving, playing simple instruments and singing. She ably assisted the leader by holding the book and modelling big movements as Kath sang. She sang refrains with the parents. She supported Kath to keep pace by distributing and collecting instruments and other resources while Kath started the next activity. At points she acted as a co-leader. By November was singing small sections herself in a rich, strong voice. The children were beginning to notice what she did and follow her as well as Kath.

At Askew Rd Library the rhyme-time leader regularly delivers a storytelling and singing sessions to morning groups of at least 40 very confidently. She also learned to play key chords on the ukulele. Her input in the Friday afternoon session was patchy due to staff shortage. She and Kirsty (Music House) often discussed how the session went and what could be altered for the next. During the third term Kirsty gave her particular pages of the book to plan for. She delivered these quite ably when free to do so.

### Problems experienced

Parents with children with special needs (most diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorder) felt embarrassed and did not come to more than five sessions. Both the library assistants and Music House leaders offered alternatives that the parents preferred or chose to access. Two of the children were enrolled into sessions at Music House for Children and one regularly attends the Family Drop-in Project nearby.

The library leader at Askew Road was not able to engage fully for the first term due to annual leave, sickness and the library being short staffed. When they are short staffed there is no one monitoring the front desk creating a possible, unsafe environment for attendees. From this perspective it was better for the library leader to manage the desk and the music leader to carry on with this session alone. A chat with the manager has quickly rectified this and the library leader will be on board fully participating for the next term.



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The majority of children in the Askew Road session are under 1yrs due to the demographic of the area and the families who receive information, and attend the library. We have considered changing the aims for the younger age group. There is another project to which we are referring these children so we are able to focus on the age group intended. Further promotion and marketing has been done to ensure the intended age group has been targeted.

Emma Hutchinson is not THE music facilitator. Emma has taken on an advisory role and regularly attends sessions to observe and monitor, and to ensure aims and objectives for all are met.

The music facilitator is Kirsty Williams as a part time member of our team. She leads the Askew Road sessions.

We had intended for the piano to be used as a lead instrument. However the piano often acted as a barrier and children were resistant to participating as much, as opposed to a ukulele or other, more portable instrument. It was notable that guitars, ukuleles and wind instruments retained a much closer connection with the children.

Numbers are capped for each session to a maximum of 35. Any more than this and the group struggles with focus, with the music leader's role initiating vocal response being less specific. With such great numbers we have discovered too, that parents' chat and their children are subsequently are distracted.

Extra books were purchased for the libraries so additional books can be loaned to children after the sessions. This was based on a suggestion from the monitoring officer after she had spoken to the families about what the children do at home after the sessions. Children often recite the story and songs at home either copying what the leader has shown or an elaborated version. More books to loan after the session encourages further language and musical development and play at home.

### **Project engagement with local services and the community**

Flyers and posters have been given to all sites e.g. children centres, local schools and units.

Other project reports we have written have used information to collate further evidence in the value of the project.

We have spoken to new organisations such as the white city children's project and MENCAP about the value of such projects to perhaps work these organisations in the future. Children and families from these organisations also invited to sessions.

Instrument MAKERS have been spoken to about new instrument as above.

Early years practitioners and teachers have been invited to a training session on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> September. We have shared with them our findings and have incorporated any ideas into our mainstream lesson plans.

Findings discussed with leading organisations such as LEMYN, MENCAP, SOUND CONNECTIONS, TRI-BOROUGH Services, THE DAISY TRUST AND OTHERS

We approached new schools and centres and discussed with them the value of this way of working with music making to facilitate and include early foundation goals, as well as clear signs of language delay. We continue to look at how we could include this model in schools programmes and what other educational benefits might be supported.

### **The legacy of the project**



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Both Kath and Kirsty reported that the project has had a significant impact on their general music teaching and they now find that their use of stories to anchor the music engages different groups of children for longer and brings out more creative responses. (Egan, 1986)

- Library leaders are now delivering active parts within the sessions.
- Music leaders are reducing their active engagement to encourage the library leaders
- There are more opportunities for children to lead and share ideas with their own stories.
- All of the above will ensure that by the end of the project library leaders will be able to continue the sessions without the need for a music leader.
- Project staff are involved in numerous other projects as a result of these sessions. These include musical storytelling sessions for those with additional needs such as Autism, ADHD, hearing impairments and profound and multiple needs. Training courses attended have also helped to shape the leaders knowledge and understanding of how children with language delay can communicate successfully musically.
- Children from both sites are attending additional music classes and projects with the music house for children. These include additional musical storytelling sessions, music appreciation, instrumental learning, concerts and events. Both leaders identified children who would benefit from further sessions and highlighted these to the families attending. All children were also invited to The Music House's summer party in July at Bush Hall. This gave the children another opportunity to play and listen to a variety of instruments and sounds.
- Instrument baskets and books purchased will be left at both library sites for the libraries to continue to use after the project has ended. The library leaders will be able to use all instruments for musical storytelling sessions and also rhyme time sessions. We hope the library leaders will continue the sessions after the project has ended so the instruments and resources will continue to create musical stories.
- Lesson plans and models are always shared with our team of teachers each term to continue to improve our practice and suggest new ideas and ways of working. Our reports and findings have also been shared with other leading early years specialists including LEYMN and Sound Connections. Since we started the project the sessions have developed to allow children more freedom in their responses. Children are now more comfortable with leaders and library staff, confident with their peers and finding their voices. When these barriers have been dismantled children are more verbal, and offer sounds and musicality much more readily.
- Overall the project has enabled children to have a voice, share ideas and not be restricted verbally or musically. Sessions are free flowing and ideas encouraged whatever the response. This empowers children and as a result they are more confident about sharing ideas. As there is no right or wrong answer children express with words, sounds, instruments and movement to create their own stories. The sessions have not only improved language and sound making but also developed musical skills and an appreciation for a variety of repertoire. We hope the project leaves a legacy to continue musical storytelling at the libraries but also in family homes.



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