

‘Lessons Learnt in Lockdown’ by Amy Hardwick and Eliza Wylie

Amy and Eliza (Certificate Music Education: Early Childhood students in Somerset) share their experiences of working together as Early Years music practitioners on The SoundWaves Network

Our SoundWaves Network experience begins with our own workforce development as Early Years music practitioners paired up to co-deliver on the programme. Like ourselves, most practitioners are either doing the CME:EC course or have completed it. Coming together as community of learning with your fellow SoundWaves Network colleagues is very important to Take Art, so time is built in at the start of the programme for us to spend together as delivery team with Dr Susan Young, Jane Parker, Gina Westbrook and Nadine Griffiths. The heart of the work is about self-critical collaborate practice and collaboration. We spent time sharing appropriate repertoire (thinking about the intended musical learning), immersing ourselves in musical play, discussing a structure to the half day sessions with settings, evaluation... and eating. Food is an important focal point to bring people together.



Discussions between The SoundWaves Network music practitioners guided by Jane Parker and Susan Young.



Working lunch with The SoundWaves Network team



The SoundWaves Network
Early Years Music
Practitioners...playing

Our Somerset programme started in December 2019 as the model normally should, with the visiting music practitioners (ourselves!) and the Take Art Early Years team meeting at two Early Years settings in Somerset to discuss the programme.

Armed with our training from Susan and Jane (and also our involvement in the CME:EC course), plans were made with Abacus Nursery in Taunton and The Willow Set in Stoke St Gregory on scheduling the observations, workforce development and CPD. We met again in early February 2020, at the CPD evening for Taunton Early Years Network where early years practitioners from across Somerset were taught some simple songs and rhymes, an outstanding Djembe workshop with Eliza, and we considered spontaneous musical behaviour of babies and very young children.



Project Launch Evening at Ruishton Village Hall, Somerset with CPD for Early Years practitioners attended by staff from Abacus, The Willow Set and other settings in the Taunton area.

The programme started in earnest in February as we began to spend half day sessions with the two settings. Take Art and Dr Susan Young had emphasised the importance to initially step back and simply observe, watch and listen to gain a better understanding of each setting's practice. We wanted to support the settings to create a rich enabling musical environment. Consideration was made of the layout and structure to provide the best opportunities for the setting's staff and utilize their inside and outside space. For example, Abacus had a specialist babies' room and a creative arts area for the older children. The Willow Set had two large outdoor spaces for outdoor musical play.



Eliza modelling the role of the musical play partner.

We planned our sessions with the settings every other Friday - to allow staff to reflect and try out ideas in between sessions. We visited The Willow Set in the morning and Abacus in the afternoon. The structure of each half day session was always the same: touch base with staff, a short adult-facilitated group session, setting up provocation space to encourage musical play, and capturing spontaneous musical behaviours in the setting followed by feedback with staff. (Total 3.5 hrs each session).



Amy modelling the role of the musical play partner

Between each session we asked staff to document observations of children's spontaneous musical behaviours. We also tasked them to continue to practice the simple rhymes and songs we introduced which built on developing pitch matching and moving to a steady beat. Added to this we suggested the setting asked the parents what recorded music was meaningful to their families and create a Spotify playlist.

Then, the announcement of lockdown. From March 24th 2020 all SoundWaves Network face to face sessions paused. The programme required thinking time to carefully consider how best to adapt and make sure it still aligned with our objectives. In the meantime, we were both trying out our own private early years music classes via Zoom, learning fast about the opportunities and challenges through a new medium of delivery.

After lots of consultation with everyone involved, it was proposed we continued the programme via Zoom. The settings were both still open with children attending, so we would continue our co-facilitation, in our separate Zoom boxes from our homes - with the staff and children in their Zoom box. Unfortunately, Abacus could not overcome technical issues with their network in order to receive these sessions online. The Willow Set however were still very keen to be involved, had good broadband and suitable tech equipment.

We delivered our first pilot session via Zoom in June, with each of us projected onto a large screen.



Amy, Eliza and The Willow Set setting interacting via Zoom

It was wonderful to see the children again but there were many issues on delivering in this way. We needed more thinking time. We didn't want it to be entertainment, it was too difficult to see and hear the children or staff... and we couldn't observe their spontaneous musical play or really set up any meaningful provocations.

In July the whole project team, led by Jane, got together to provide more training via Zoom for The Willow Set staff to explain the new online way of working. We were joined by PhD researcher Ursula Crickmay from the University of Exeter who was interested in our project and provided us with some really interesting insights.



Overview



- ❖ Explaining the new programme with Zoom – who is who /dates / types of activity
- ❖ Each activity in further detail
Group Singing / Listening / Adults play partnering musical play / Adults noticing and capturing spontaneous musical behaviour
- ❖ Conclude – main messages – everyone's role...
- ❖ NB This will be a practical session – so we may intersperse things with a song or two....or three....or four.....

Intro slide by Jane in our Zoom training session with The Willow Set staff explaining the adapted programme now being delivered via Zoom



Your role now?

- **Learn songs** that Eliza and Amy teach you and then start to lead them. Understand WHY you are doing a particular song. Record it – watch the children....what are THEY doing? Are they really keeping a beat? Are they really matching your pitch? Share on google drive
- Find out what children listen to at home. **Create a class playlist**. Observe children carefully when you put recorded music on. Put it on when they are not just sat in a group on the carpet....but with a blank sheet in front of them ready to draw....or a space ready to dance...etc. Film it. Share on google drive
- Go and **find the spontaneous music already happening in your setting** e.g. the quiet vocalisations whilst they are deeply engrossed in their play or the vocal mash ups of snippets of songs you have taught them. Film it. Share on google drive
- **Be musically playful in your everyday interactions** – scaffold their musical play. Film each other being the non verbal musical play partner. Share on google drive.

Concluding slide by Jane for The Willow Set staff

From here on, the project was looking very different from the usual model of The Soundwaves Network Programme. From September to December 2020, we scheduled six more sessions zooming into the setting rather than face to face. For the first time the cameras were turned on the staff. Ironically this encouraged them to take ownership of leading the adult-facilitated sessions earlier than planned.

The blended sessions were still 3.5 hrs. Still touching base and co-facilitating the sessions but with the knowledge that the setting staff were required to lead much sooner than perhaps in a face to face project. As we neared the end of the project we had the feeling that we were seeing many silver linings in this cloud; the staff were gaining so much confidence leading the children in the room and it became clear to us that perhaps this was a better way style of workforce development than us “trainers” actually being there with them in the room continuing to model. In short, the staff had the advantage of being there with the children. We didn’t. The live interaction for staff was more immediate and attractive than interacting with us through the screen. We concluded that the staff reached a place of greater confidence and independence with leading the songs than we ever could have reached by being there each week. It was perhaps uncomfortable for them at times but when we all reflected at the final online event, ‘Lessons Learnt in Lockdown’, it was agreed that there were some real advantages to this online delivery way of working. Reflected discussion at the end of the session were still important, with staff sharing films they had captured of spontaneous musical play throughout the week. In the feedback time they considered what the children were really doing when playing with the musical instruments. Of particular interest was the sustained shared thinking – it was noticed that some children engaged for longer periods playing instruments if they had an interested adult playing with them / scaffolding their learning and confidence building.

The Willow Set manager Rachel Parish said

“This programme has had a positive impact on all of our children. Most children have shown an increase in pride, happiness, interest, positive emotions and greater emotional regulation when involved in this music project.”

She drew our attention to one particular boy that can be seen thoroughly involved in a particular extract of video where Eliza was on Zoom playing her djembe.

“The little child in the middle has very little language and doesn’t always show his engagement so visually”.

The staff gave us lots of examples where they had noticed individual children expressing themselves more through music such as Increased eye contact during music, increased vocalisations, certain children interacting socially and expressing more.”

On reflection the staff at the setting were really positive about the project. Rachel and her team had the following to say about the programme:

“All staff now have a greater understanding about what quality early childhood music practice looks like. Together we have gained this understanding through training at the start, then working alongside our amazing two music leaders and finally reflecting with each other, gathering our data for research and going forward we will access other training events. Being involved in the project has built all our confidence up. Looking ahead we want to continue to fund Amy and Eliza on a monthly basis to come into the setting”

Towards the end of the programme, with restrictions briefly lifted, we were very fortunate to visit face to face for one final session. It was such a joy to be able to see and hear the children and see the confidence that the staff had gained over the weeks. We started the live session in the playground with the drum and then moved inside. The children were so

engaged and focused and we had the opportunity to hear for ourselves the progress they had made over the months.

The Willow Set is now providing a more musically rich environment for their children. They purchased new materials and resources to help create an inviting immersive sound / play space. The practitioners are ready and willing musical play partners - modelling non-spoken interaction, allowing and encouraging the child to lead the play and then following. They think about the musical learning behind each activity. They are still moving towards planned group music time that is more child-centred, using simple songs and rhymes. Staff also now create a much richer music listening experience for the children, understanding how recorded music can be used far more effectively.

We invited the wider network to hear our lessons in lockdown at a Sounding Board Zoom sharing event in January 2021. The event focussed on gaining different perspectives from all the project's participants. Attendees learnt how the adapted programme impacted on Willow Set setting staff, Ursula Crickmay's PhD research and ourselves.

We are grateful to Take Art for their vision and continuing support throughout the programme (and CME:EC Course) and Youth Music for funding the work. We are now putting some dates this summer into the diary to go back and see how The Willow Set are progressing!