



Soundwaves Case Study - 2017

St Peter's Primary School

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The sessions would involve mark-making and sound making simultaneously. Musical instruments and marker pens were presented on paper that covered the classroom floor. Children were encouraged to respond in any way that the materials took them.

These sessions would happen in parallel with another workshop session which involved making sounds electronically to explore the making of connections musically, electronically and socially.

As a group, we explored the difference in the sound produced by a metal glockenspiel and a wooden xylophone. We listened to the sounds and tried to hear the point where the sound really stopped.

B describes the difference between the xylophone and the Glockenspiel. He describes the glockenspiel as a “ding” and the xylophone as a “bang”

The children explored the sounds and the marks that they could make in many ways;

Robin (Mr Murray) and L are communicating through simple rhythms on a chime bar. They are repeating simple rhythms and varying which parts of the phrase are loud or soft. They are communicating, mimicking and suggesting back and forth – lovely to watch!

(Mr. Murray’s response) “Lovely for me to step back from being the focal point as the teacher and be able to have these kind of experiences with L.

L enjoys attention and can sometimes present negative behaviors’ in order to achieve this.”



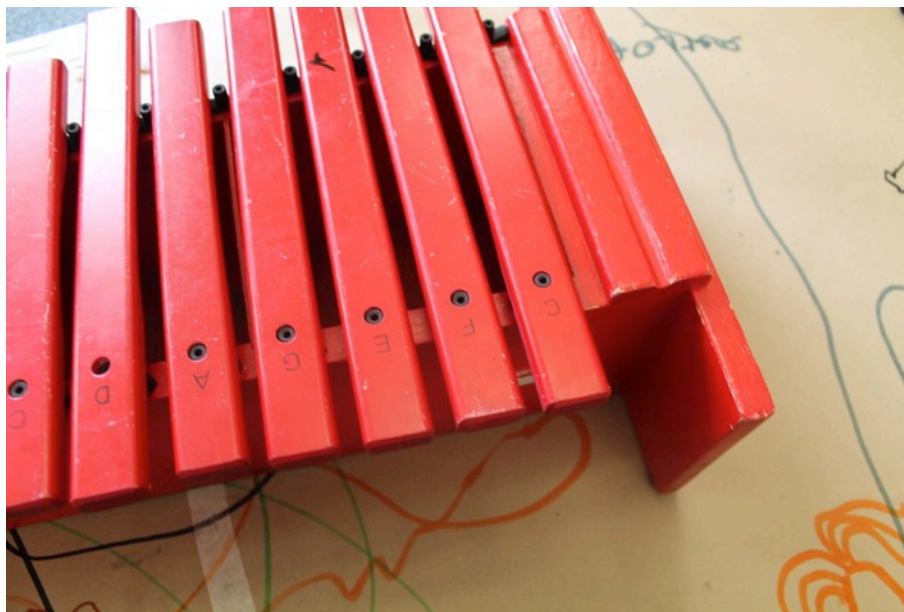
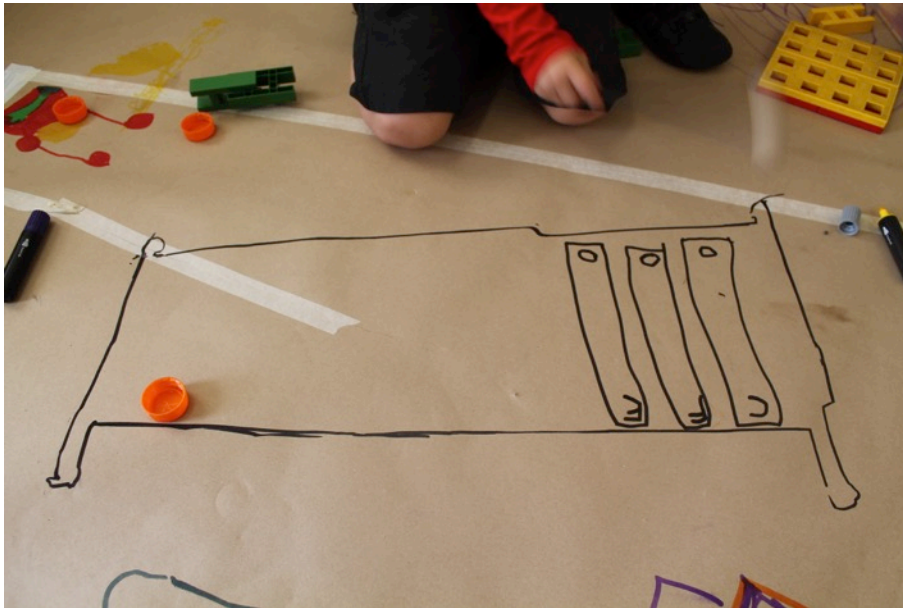
B thoughtfully plays the xylophone throughout the session. He does this with conviction, curiosity and care and is deeply engrossed. Various members of staff tell me that this is amazing; B is a child who is seen to often not engage with class activity.

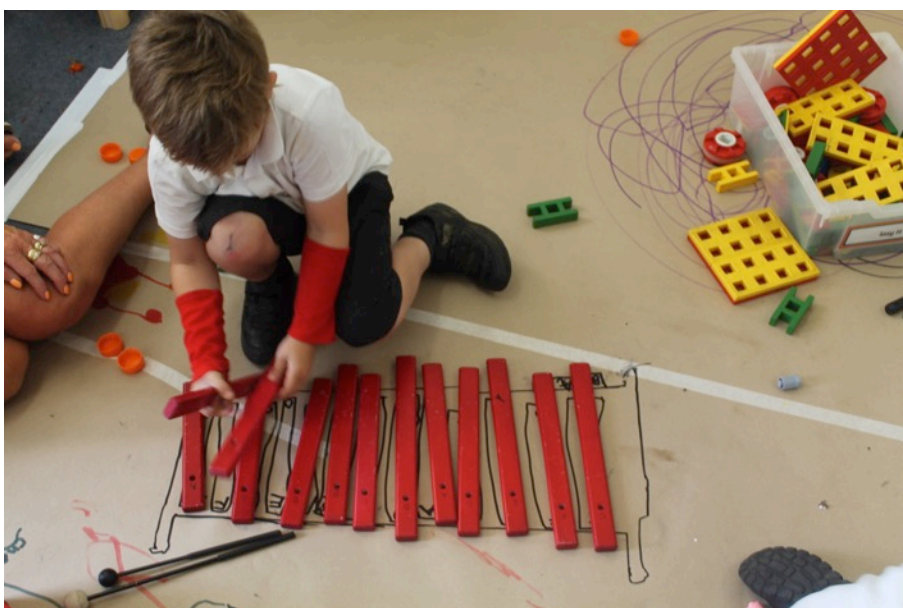
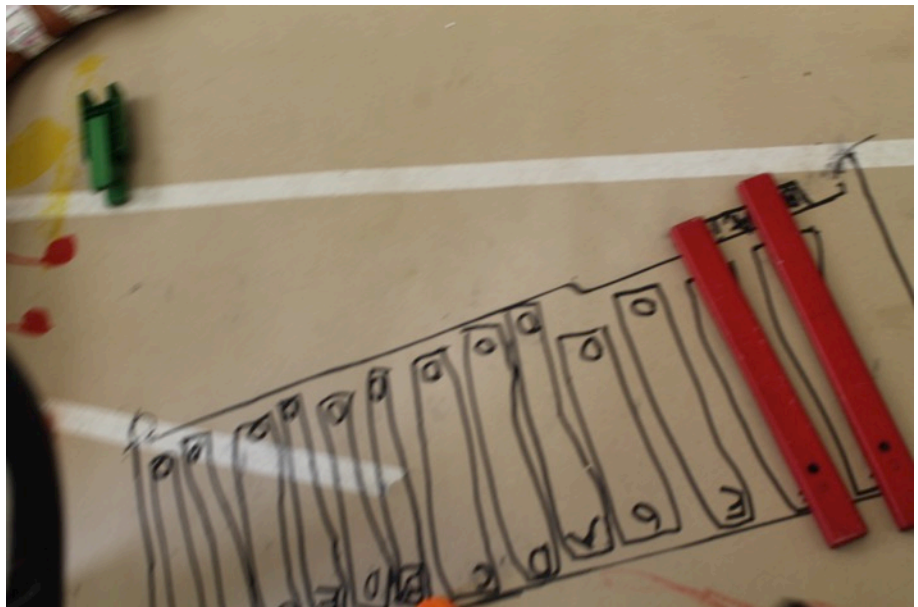
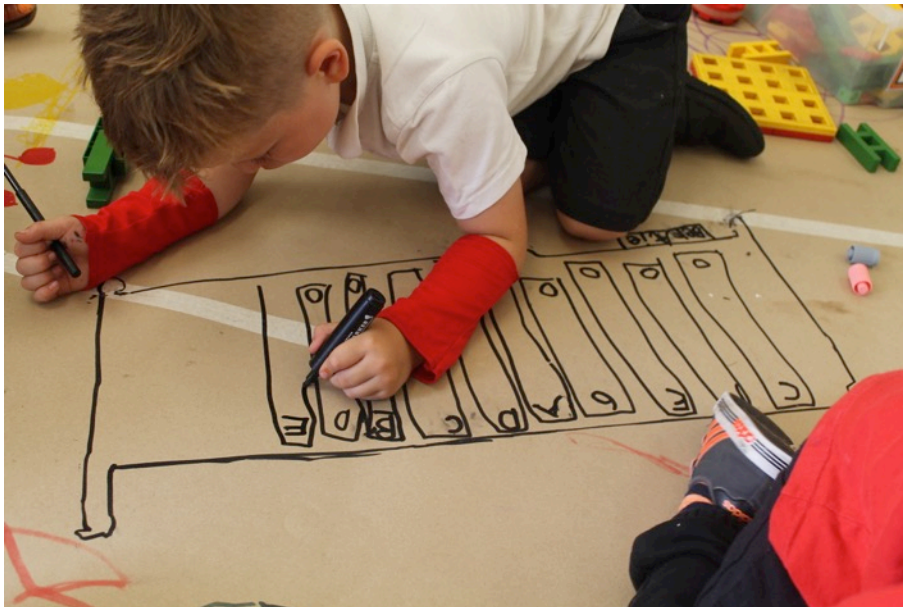
“B often tries activities for a short time but then chooses to move on and play with his friends before long. Their play can often become boisterous and sometimes disruptive. It was interesting to see that he remained engaged throughout the whole session.”

B continued to show high levels of engagement throughout the sessions. He showed a continuing interest in the xylophone and spent much time playing it and later, drawing it.

B continued to be very engrossed in the project throughout. One day, he had been playing the xylophone and then started to draw around it. He moved the xylophone, revealing the outline of

its shape. He then proceeded to draw in the bars. When I saw him doing this, I realised that he was not drawing the bars in the ascending order. I was surprised as he had been so focused and was about to say something to him but then realised that whilst playing the xylophone, B had been experimenting with the notes in a different order – this was what he was drawing.





The mark making and sound making combined in many other ways; stories were drawn along with to the music and marks were made to describe particular sounds. The instruments also seemed to be explored through drawing; I wonder if drawing allowed a different understanding of the nature of the instruments and the sounds that they create.

H is playing a xylophone; he tells me, "We already knew which notes to play..... We'll play the low notes and the high notes." We talk about which notes are low and which ones are high and soon we are singing high, low and middle notes to each other as we play them on the xylophone.

At the start of the session, B2 starts to play with a fire engine away from the paper and the rest of the class. When I notice this, I beckon him over and start to draw a road on the paper onto which B2 puts the fire engine. I give B2 the pen. Later I see that the road has gone all the way to one of the xylophones and B2 has eventually started to play the instruments in which he has become very involved.

"This is particularly interesting for me as B2 struggles to engage with activities particularly recently. He often wonders of and starts playing with construction toys and is very reluctant to re-engage. He often does not like too much noise and takes himself into the cloakroom or outside area. It was lovely to see him choose to come back and re-engage with the activity."

B3 plays the same notes that I had been playing when she arrived. I was playing a pattern when she joined me. I stopped playing, she started and I suddenly realized that she was playing the same group of notes, mirroring the patterns that I had been playing.

"B3 can be shy and lack confidence at first. Good to see her interacting with you so early in the project."

Mr Murray noted that children teamed up and collaborated with children that they might not normally work with. This was understood to be to children's explorations stimulating the relationship, which could move outside of the social norms of the class dynamic.

One of the big themes in the reception class that was developing was the way that the children collaborated and shared their learning experiences. Mr Murray was surprised by the amount of very positive collaborations and concentration that was happening within the class. He was also surprised by who was collaborating, noting that children were forming partnerships with people that they would not normally do so.

We continued working in this way over a number of sessions, and so the class returned to a similar learning environment (the paper, instruments and pens); this allowed children to continue the development of their explorations each week. Some children visibly developed the way that they played different instruments. It was also evident that the way children listened to the sounds that were being created was also developing. This could be seen in the ways that the children played the instruments and in their reflections.

"The music can grow, like your tuba. When you're in a bigger space the music can grow."

"When we were sticking our heads in the tuba, we only heard the first bit (of the sound) but when we were outside we could hear the last bit."

This open-ended way of working allowed many different explorations to happen simultaneously; in one session, a groups of children started chanting a verse. This verse developed and the group marched together repeating this chant. As they did so the rhythm and words of the rhyme gradually developed in a very fluid and playful way. This was a very strong example of the class creating and collaborating in a large group musical experience with input from many of the children in developing the piece.

H worked with masking tape and black and orange discs to create patterns, which seemed to reflect the music-making going on around her. What she made certainly had a very strong sense of rhythm. *"This is a really long snake – it's going to the music."*



This process for H continued and developed through the course of my visits suggesting a fundamental process of enquiry. The patterns she made continued to be very rhythmic and I wonder how much the music in the air supported this. H's process of making seemed to inspire others to follow a similar path. I feel that it was because H was able to pursue this line of enquiry over a length of time that others were able to gradually pick up on this.





H2 finds a hard beater and says, "Maybe I could try it on that one (the glockenspiel)." I ask, "Why?" H2 responds, "Because that one is made of metal." (The harder beaters make a more satisfying sound on the metal instruments than the wooden ones).

H2 then brings the dolls house next to the xylophone and proceeds to animate the characters in the house along to the music. This mixing of narrative and music seems to give both the story telling and the music more meaning and context. The music supports the story telling and the story telling starts to define how the music should be made.



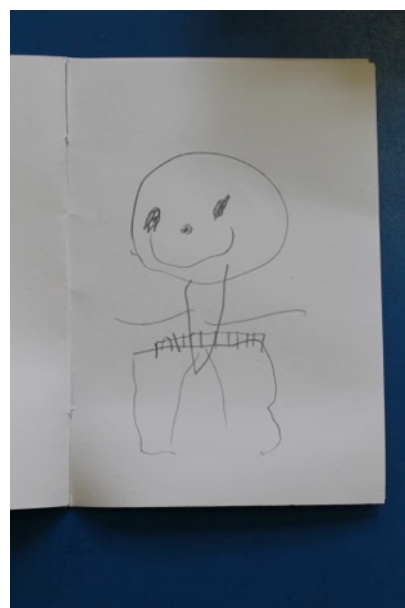
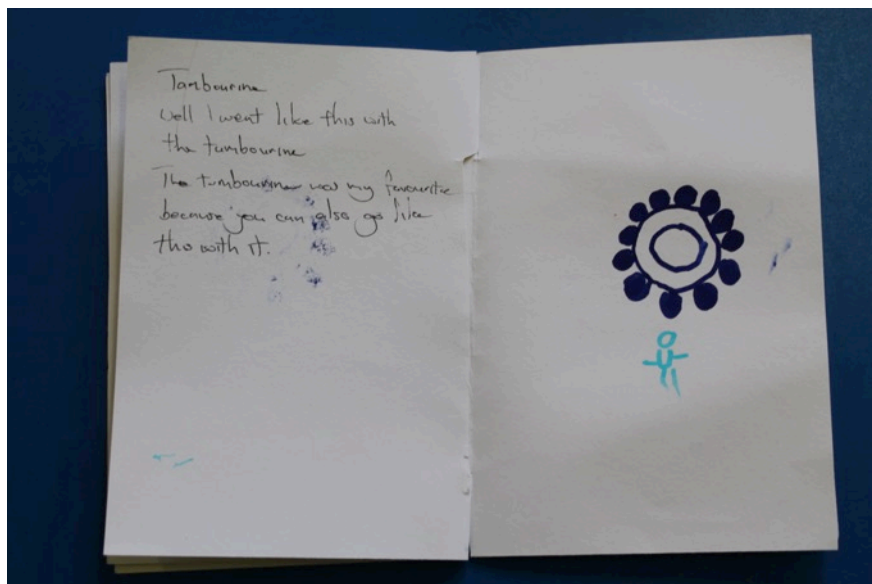
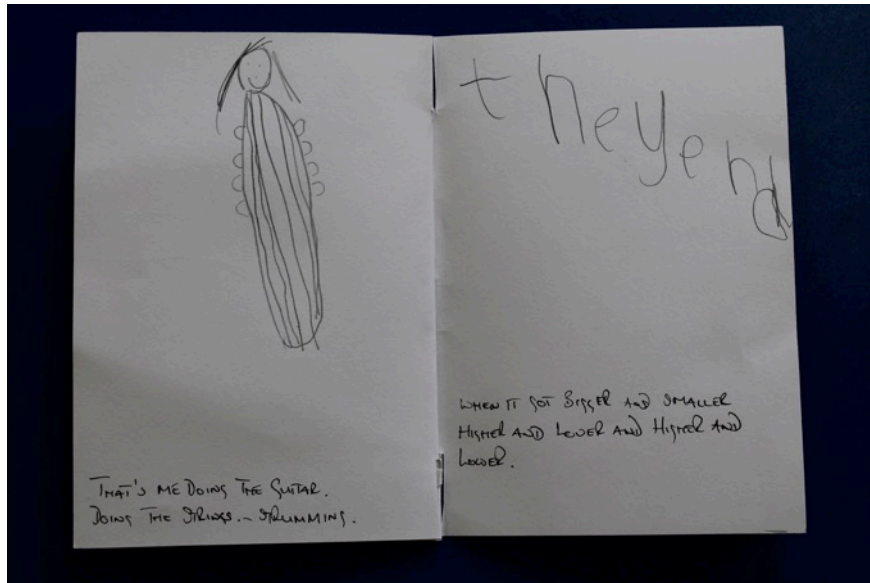
For the penultimate session, I took children into the playground. I had a bucket of chalk and place different sounding instruments at different points in the classroom. I asked the children to explore the sounds and to see if they could draw and make marks to represent the sounds of the instruments.

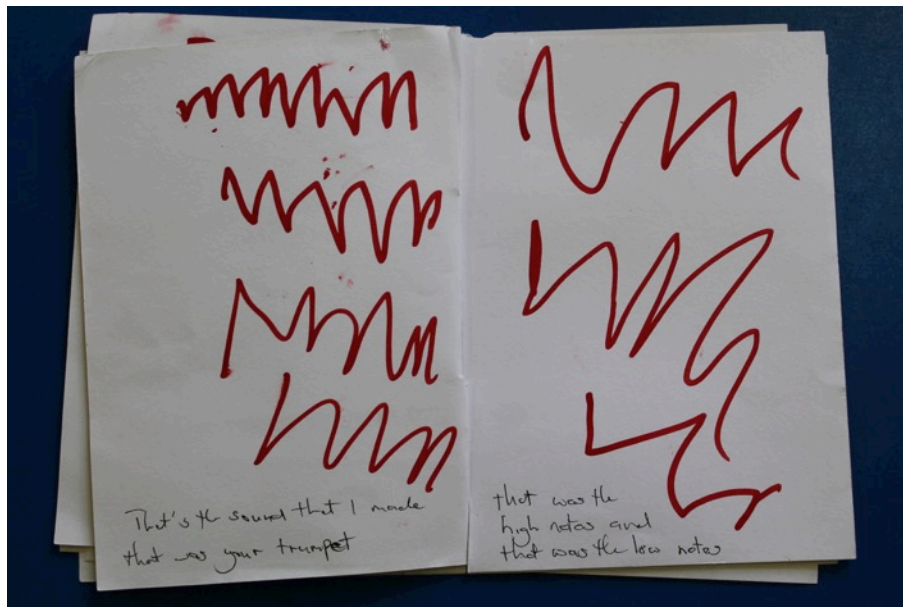
This generated a lot of listening, thinking and talking about the quality of sounds. We talked about long sounds, low sounds, volume, pitch etc. and the level of engagement and imagination to match marks to sounds was truly exciting to watch.





During the last session, we made some books and some of the children reflected on the nature of the sounds created.





Research findings: -

The first thing Lisa told us in the evaluation meeting was, "It's been brilliant!"

She went on to tell us how the number of children in the nursery has grown dramatically in the last couple of years and that she feels that creativity has been diminished as the staff team feels under greater pressure.

Lisa also said that she felt that having an "unstructured task" (open-ended learning opportunity) had allowed children to thrive and follow their creative noses. She said that she realised that she had assessed children lower for creativity after observing the children's involvement during these sessions.

Lisa also talked about the benefits of using resources that are simple and open-ended (orange lids, black disks and masking tape) allowing space for creative exploration. There were a large number of lids and discs and this allowed children to use them in a variety of ways.

During the meeting, Lisa also noted how much confidence Robin, who was a newly qualified teacher had gained through the weeks of the project. This was partly due to the fact that Robin felt able to step back from being the "teacher" and was able to participate and play in the activity, allowing him to gain a new perspective on the children's learning.

She also said that she realized that their evaluation of the children, particularly creatively, had been low and that they needed to re-evaluate this. When asked why, Lisa thought that she had not really seen them operating in such a child-led and open-ended learning environment and this allowed the children to really inhabit a creative learning process and to follow a thought process completely.

From a more recent e-mail, Lisa writes;

"It would also be worth noting that as a Preschool/Nursery we have changed our provision quite dramatically after reflecting on the project and the findings from the project. We are now doing 'in the moment planning' - so no structured planning - all driven from the children and their creativity with us finding 'teachable moments' alongside. We also have an empty table policy - the children have clear resources around the room (all spaces have mark making opportunities/reading opportunities/ musical opportunities) that they choose to collect and bring to an open space and return when they are finished. They can therefore bring anything they like together to create what they want to achieve. From this then we add a provocation each week or add a resource to support interests."

Thank you all so very much for such an inspiring project."

