



Soundwaves Case Study - 2017

How can music support Social Communication for 2-3 year olds (particularly children with EAL and SEND)

Frome Opportunity Nursery

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SOUNDWAVES EXTRA at FROME OPPORTUNITY NURSERY

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Frome Opportunity Nursery is an Early Years pre-school setting with children aged from 2 to 4. The catchment covers one of the most deprived areas of Somerset. We have up to 24 children in a session, including children with English as an additional language and children with additional needs, some of whom have been diagnosed with autism, others with needs not yet identified. Some of the children don't speak any English yet.

THE MUSIC SESSIONS



Joanna visited for 10 weeks, the first session for observation, 8 sessions with the children working with staff Early Years practitioner Louise Hunter and the last collating our findings, photos and video with Louise. Louise documented the sessions with notes, photos and video and planned and discussed with Joanna for about 15 minutes before and after each session. Joanna brought in various instruments for free play, and led a 20-30 minute session during group time with the younger children (about 12) at the end of each day.

Each week Joanna brought an instrument or group of instruments for free play:

- A balafon
- Child-sized accordion
- Ukulele
- A selection of drums and percussion



She would spend some time in the nursery (or outside) playing her guitar/ukulele or accordion and singing alongside the other activities taking place. She would then get out the instrument/s and invite the children to join in free play, either one to one between herself and a child, or between two or more children.

Group time with the younger children included a hello song; roll the ball; another song; an activity with instruments (shaky eggs, claves, castanets) including free exploration and playing together along with a song; dancing to songs in a circle or pairs (Old Brass Wagon, Jump Jim Joe, Sally Go Round The Sun); a rhythm/name song with a drum; and the setting's own goodbye song.

IMPACT

Some of the children were immediately engaged by the balafon. J2 spent 10 minutes during the first session with Joanna exploring rhythms, playing high and low, loud and soft, enjoying the interaction and being mirrored by Joanna. https://youtu.be/Utij6cf_E3w Children played either with Joanna mirroring or in pairs, and sometimes up to four playing together with a beater each.

Over the weeks we noticed a core group of children who would want to explore the instruments in free play for increasing periods of time, while others would come and go, or just observe. As well as the balafon, the accordion, ukulele and drums drew interest from the children, exploring

the sounds, watching and listening to each other, playing together, swapping instruments.

On Joanna's observation session she saw that the children used a drum at group time to tap out the rhythm of their names and had the idea to extend this into a song/rhythm call and response game taking the drum round the circle or using the Gathering Drum.

<https://youtu.be/MEaYod2V9Qo> Louise took this idea and used it as a fresh idea for a hello song to start her group time sessions, and all the children joined in.

Case Studies

Joanna and Louise focused on four of the children identified as having additional needs:

- J2 is non-verbal and from a Polish family, his parents speak very little English
- J1 is diagnosed with autism
- S is diagnosed with autism, French spoken at home, mostly non-verbal.
- K's parents are Russian and Polish who speak no English. K is non-verbal with little concentration or focus and difficulties in social interaction.

The latter three were all quite new to the nursery, only in week 2 when Joanna started visiting. In the group time sessions, at the beginning of the study three of the children were very unsettled, and S and K would be brought in only for 5 mins max, crying continuously. By session 8 they had settled in, to the extent of joining in with some of the songs (particularly "Roll the Ball") and happily engaging with the session.

Case Study 1



S - At the start of this study S was very unsettled, screaming, trying to get out of the door to go with his mother after being dropped off. He was very dependent on his Key Worker, but crying and inconsolable.

Session 1: Joanna sang Frere Jacques (French being the language spoken at home) and S's

keyworker noticed the calming effect of this on him. She commented on how he was interested in the sound of the balafon and nearly enticed out of his corner.

Session 2: Louise noted "S watching Sam play (the balafon) at a distance, bending his knees and swaying a little to the sounds... stayed watching for 10 minutes".

Session 4 Louise noted "Jo caught S's attention a couple of times singing French songs. When she sang his name, he stopped and watched for a while, a fleeting smile... S goes for a snack and Jo starts playing Twinkle Twinkle Little Star. S begins joining in with her singing, and later this is repeated and caught on film". <https://youtu.be/ndIRiL7d0uc>

Session 5: "Crying after mum left, stopped when Joanna played French Song, really calmed down, watching intently for 10 or 15 minutes, kept looking over and after 5 minutes was playing happily independently, moved away from his key worker. Swayed, almost dancing, to '3 Little Birds' and making some vocal sounds. Later in group time, in the drum game, said his name and drummed."

Session 8: showed recognition and excitement when he saw Jo, lots of engagement and eye contact. First he noticed the music Jo was playing and he stopped straight away and looked over, went straight to the basket of instruments and pulled out a rainstick, moved around the room with a dancing motion shaking the instrument. In group time, S stayed for the whole session, no crying, and drummed with his feet! Louise also observed him singing along to the monkey song. S has started to notice and play alongside the other children more, starting to have eye contact.

Over the weeks, S has definitely been interested in and soothed by the music and the singing, and sung along and watched, but not played the instruments (apart from rainstick). At the last session Joanna brought the balafon again and we observed S picking up the beaters, holding them up, looking closely at them, confused, then dropping them on the floor. A few observers commented that S seemed to expect the sound to be coming out of the beater, and was disappointed when he held it up, that no sound came from it.

Case Study 2

J1 - diagnosed with autism, at the beginning of the study only interacts with his keyworker, no interaction or eye contact with other children or staff. He communicates in a very expressive babbling language, some coherent sentences.

Session 2: Louise observed J moving over to Jo when she was playing balafon. When his key worker had a turn and Jo moved away, J smiled, crouched down and put his ear near the balafon.

Session 3: "Joanna playing accordion outside, children playing on slide nearby. While Maddie was playing, J on the slide pointed to accordion and said 'What's that?' Came over to Jo, his first interaction with her, babbled at her, very animated and expressive, pointing at the accordion, obviously talking about it excitedly. In group time we danced to 'Jump Jim Joe' and J was happy to dance with Jo."

Session 5: "J joined Joanna and his key worker, Kerry, with the group of drums, explored them all, Joanna mirroring his play, he noticed this and smiled. Got into a great game, lots of stopping and starting, drumstick poised, J saying 'Stop', 'Ready'. Organising and swapping the drums, giving directions to Kerry and Joanna for at least 10 minutes. J chatting away to Jo and making eye contact".

Session 7: "J very slowly started to engage, in and out of the room making humming sounds. Kerry encouraged J to beat on a drum with her, after some time he would beat twice, then run out. Then he stayed for half an hour really engrossed interaction with Jo, waiting for Jo to mirror

his play, chatting and babbling, smiling and making lots of close eye contact. In group time, J joined in singing 'Time to go Home' song".





Session 8: “extended play, lots of talking. Sustained interaction with C (another child) instigated playing together by giving C beaters and drum, talking to him and giving him instructions”. J played one to one with Jo on the balafon, Louise commenting how this reminded her of J2’s explorations in the first session. J1 engaged in a broad exploration of the sounds and scope of the balafon.

OUR RESEARCH QUESTION

How can music support Social Communication for 2-3 year olds (particularly children with EAL and SEND)?

Social Communication covers: social reciprocity, social interaction, social skills, communication or communication skills and language or language skills.

We wanted to observe how music might be supporting children with developing these skills, particularly looking at how the musical activities were supporting or encouraging confidence to interact, make eye contact, verbalise or make sounds and join in with other children one to one, in small groups and in larger group activities.

We observed that the instruments provided a focus and means for self-expression, and interactions between the children with each other, with Joanna and with the staff. Playing the balafon and other instruments made opportunities for the children to interact, take turns, copy each other and play together in engaged and sustained play.

We observed how Joanna’s singing in his mother tongue helped S to calm down, it really seemed to connect with him emotionally. Joanna commented at one point “it’s (the music) like an anchor in a stormy sea”. Alongside some sorting activities and puzzles that S would do with his key-worker, the music in the setting was observed to strongly engage, interest and soothe him. It also appeared to give him more confidence, to help him engage with the group time session, and towards the end of the study he was beginning to interact and play with another child.

With J, the instruments gave him a fun and physical medium to interact, first with Joanna and his key worker and later with another child, and exchange ideas and dialogue. Joanna felt that

the interplay with instruments gave him a means of non-verbal communication, which was clearly understood - the copying and mirroring of rhythms and sounds being like a conversation. This led to trust, confidence and then very sustained eye contact and a sense of connection and communication. During the last session his key worker commented that today had been the first time J had interacted with any of the other children. <https://youtu.be/9jL5DZlymKM>

We felt that the free play with instruments and the time we gave to it allowed those children with additional needs time to become familiar and to join in at their own pace and on their own terms. Given the freedom to come and go, it made space for some unpressured, meaningful engagement and interaction that might not have happened otherwise. The mirroring and copying play on the balafon and drums led to deeper and prolonged engagement and exploration of rhythms and sounds, and the musical dialogue was a satisfying and fun form of interaction and communication.

In one of the last sessions, R made up a rhythm as she was playing on a drum, played it repeatedly <https://youtu.be/Az6PEjimHcY> Soon after, when J2 and C were playing, first C and then J2 played the same rhythm. This struck Joanna to be a kind of unspoken but sophisticated communication between the three of them. <https://youtu.be/YPJ8oYaLfD0>

IMPACT ON THE SETTING

Louise will talk to her manager about creating a musical space in the new building in September. There will be a 'sensory room', which would be suitable as a musical space. Would like to continue music as a free play activity, perhaps one day a week. Louise is more confident about being able to get instruments out and use them in adult led free play – for instance using mirroring or following a rhythm as a way of music being a positive experience and interaction rather than chaotic.

Louise "it's been really interesting watching other people's key children and seeing how they've changed over the weeks; how their responses have changed towards the music; how it's affected their behaviour and their social interactions with children and adults"