

# SMALL STEPS



# BIG NOISE

**The World Café**  
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## The World Café

Small Steps Big Noise concluded with the WORLD CAFÉ, where 40 strategic partners discussed how they can be “Supporting Quality Early Years Creativity in Today’s Climate – with a focus on music in the Early Years”. A key Early Years sector individual was invited to lead each of five tables and groups rotated around each table.

The following is a summary of the discussions and potential opportunities that surfaced during the evening:

### Table 1: “Early Years Music Research”

*- Led by Dr Susan Young, Early Years creativity researcher, author and academic*

Individuals valued the impact research had on their own reflective practice. Skills required to interpret research were felt to be important aspects of citizenship, which should be taught through school as a philosophical way of thinking. Evaluation and research in Early Years was felt to be of varying standards with some lacking statistical significance - a problem for the sector.

It was felt that the more public facing research was around a search for evidence from funders and stakeholders. There is a huge amount of evidence already out there, but poorly surfaced.

#### *Opportunities:*

- The development of a repository of good research which promotes quality work
- Guiding principles and examples of evaluation strategies to develop skills within the sector
- MERYC continues to develop research knowledge through the MA and the certificate of Music Education <http://www.meryc.co.uk/cmeec.html>

### Table 2: “Issues facing Early Years music leaders and musicians”

*- Led by Dr Jess Pitt, Early Years music pracademic*

Early years music and the workforce that inhabits it are seen as passionate and enthusiastic. In the most successful examples this is fuelled by a strategic advocate working in senior leadership roles (Hubs, schools, board members).

As many Early Years musicians are freelance the opportunity to have a voice can feel limiting, often chasing their tail for the next piece of work this can leave limited opportunity for development time.

Sustained long-term working relationships were far more beneficial than short-term project work where the skills and expertise of the musician could be included (and paid for) in the cycle of planning, delivery and evaluation.

The life of the Early Years musician can be isolating and co-delivery and collaboration, although costly, can bring huge benefits. Musicians and project partners were urged to be bold in their vision and planning with outcomes for the children at the heart.

#### **Opportunities:**

- Music leaders and project designers need to value and include the voice of the Early Years music practitioner at the earliest stage
- The sector is in constant need of the next wave of Early Years musicians; initiatives such as the CREC
- Funders need to recognise the freelance nature of Early Years musicians and include payment for planning and reflection time
- The confidence of Early Years practitioners was still felt to be low with regard to music, often being an area they are willing to teach. Initiatives to support staff at an initial teacher training stage need to be developed
- Early Years musicians and Hubs need to connect to look at what clear offers they can collaborate or support each other on, this involves musicians clearly and confidently communicating their skills and potential roles as well as Hubs engaging with the workforce
- Participants felt a week-long immersive play experience could be everybody's yearly activity

### **Table 3 “Music Hubs and Early Years music”**

*- Led by Ken Parr, Head of Devon Music*

There was clear recognition that Hubs are not consistent when it comes to Early Years and for all stakeholders fewer inconsistencies would be beneficial. Although funding is announced for two years at a time, the reality is that the cycle rarely fits with financial years and staff are unable to commit funded delivery from one year to the next.

But it wasn't always about the money. There were real examples of how Hubs were beginning to work effectively with the sector, examples which were wider than the 5-18 funding corridor. They can include musical instrument hire, CPD, bursaries, project work, networking opportunities and shared partnerships. But these are not consistent and not all Hubs would be aware of Early Years child-led activities.

Hubs are starting to collect data, providing greater intelligence about Early Years, they are becoming more informed about what is needed in the Early Years sector and their role in supporting priorities. This additional task is not a current requirement and some felt that this wasn't going to be taken up by all Hubs.

The National Plan for Music does provide common ground through SEND, Early Years and the role of technology, the inconsistency lies in that these don't feature in the core or extension activities of the Hubs.

However, it was felt that with leadership prepared to take on board a wider perspective of child development there were opportunities to start being more creative about pushing the boundaries. Both the Hubs and the Early Years sector need to start asking “what do we want to do?” If we can understand what we want to do, how do we then try and secure the funding to make that possible? The writing of the Hubs’ new plans are a key opportunity.

#### *Opportunities:*

- Hubs to look at how they can consistently collect data on Early Years music activity and look at sharing this with key partners. Conversely, delivery agencies can share data with Hubs to gain a clear picture of activity and need
- Early Years should have a place at the Hub table with clear representation at operational as well as strategic level, each Hub could invite an Early Years representative to their board
- Early Years musicians to be involved earlier at funding development stages
- Early Years and Hubs to jointly lobby for the inclusion of Early Years in the National Plan
- Hubs are well placed to signpost and support with current and future workforce development and this is a very practical way for the sectors to collaborate
- Easy access for Early Years musicians to simple, high quality instruments e.g. Chime bars and claves.

#### **Table 4 “The voice of the child”**

*- led by Rachel Parish, Early Years practitioner voice*

This table talked about the voice of the child through storytelling, music and imaginative play. The simplicity of the stories and storytelling should be acknowledged and it was felt that that sometimes we are making it too hard. “We need to just give time, give the child a voice, listen, and use real objects”

The desire to use storytelling as a vehicle, not just for the imagination, but as a way of children, within a safe environment, to be able to tell their own story that they might not be able to tell in any other way was voiced.

Constraints were seen in the form of the amount of assessments and observations, in some settings practitioners were less confident about how to carry these out effectively. References to Dr Young’s presentation at the conference earlier in the day on “children becoming data” were made with individuals wanting to know and listen to the knowledge and passion the practitioners have in what actually makes a difference to children’s learning and development – it was acknowledged that this can be hard to quantify.

In some areas more high quality CPD was required to ensure the workforce has the opportunity to think creatively about how we listen to children.

Funding formula, were recognised as low, but there was a desire to look at money, grants and the formula to think creatively to find ways of taking time to listen to the children, where they are now and where they want to get to.

*“Children need to fulfil their aspirations and dreams, and our pedagogy should support, develop, and extend children's learning to achieve those aspirations and dreams.”*

### Opportunities

- Quality CPD offer that explores the child’s voice across storytelling, music and imaginative play
- A common language, “because there were some new words came up in our table that some of us had not heard of”
- The need to take time to listen to our children
- Sometimes we’re making it too hard. We need to just give time, give the child a voice, listen, and use real objects

### Table 5 “Strategic Partnerships”

*- led by Dr Karen Wickett, ECE lecturer, Plymouth University*

This table looked at strategic partnerships, at Early Years leaders, leaders of arts organisations and Music Education Hubs.

A real positive was the way that some bids acknowledge that collaboration and partnerships take time, and that they value the process of establishing those relationships. People who are looking at big applications want to see that applicants are making time for this.

There was a clear acknowledgement that the Music Education Hubs have no core funding for Early Years resulting in targeted provision instead of universal provision.

Understandably, people who are coming to these partnerships have diverse priorities and aims, different understandings, different perceptions of words, different visions. So they perhaps all end up squabbling – a tough climate.

The idea of a more phased process for project development with scope to establish relationships and partnerships to build the bigger bid was felt to be important.

The role for an Early Years arts education partnerships was further discussed with education being seen in its widest sense: *“Not schooling; a community education model, bringing parents in, the community members in, so it's the wider sense of education”*.

Part of the partnerships could be Hubs, Early Years leaders, early childhood education, health and wellbeing and care leaders, arts organization leaders, and independent musicians.

There would be a role for FE and HE, both where they're working with the students, but also where they're working as researchers.

### *Opportunities*

- The value of taking time to establish collaborations and partnerships should not be underestimated, it results in strong bids, this needs to be built into individual and organisational practice
- A greater distribution of power needs to be encouraged, with key stakeholders collaborating to address the power imbalance
- The fact that we now have targeted instead of universal provision needs to be acknowledged and recognised not only for its limitations but also for its opportunities
- The introduction of a more phased funding application process to enable time to establish relationships and partnerships to build the bigger bid should be encouraged
- The introduction of an Early Years arts education partnership could be explored
- The need to bring parents and community members in, so there's a wider sense of communication around projects should be encouraged