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Music in early childho<u>od</u>



How and why Take Art supports early childhood music

Gina Westbrook and Jane Parker

Take Art is a Somerset-based arts organisation of many faces. We are one of the only Arts Council England (ACE) National Portfolio Organisations with a specialisation in early years (EY) creativity. Since the last century, Take Art has worked with thousands of under fives in all art forms. with an emphasis on dance, theatre,

digital, visual and music. We work hard to secure funding to provide networking, training and teaching opportunities for the current and future childhood early workforce in Somerset and, for EY music, across the South West of England.

The

SoundWaves Network, Early Childhood Music Jane in action our programme, has action research with a drummer at its heart. Our role is to question assumptions, explore, understand and

of

develop the professional role of the early childhood music practitioner and bring an array of partners together.

Working in a reflective way is important to us. We ask the artists to work together with the EY practitioners in the setting to document the work. One of our ambitions is to allow the work to speak for itself and, as well as offering a great experience for and with the children, to share it as a model of good practice. We share it on our website and more widely, for example through Youth Music Network or in key documents like Early Education's just published Musical Development Matters.

We want early childhood to hold its rightful place in the National Plan for Music Education (NPME) and, with this in mind, we are members of the EY Special Interest Group run by the Music Education Council (MEC). We believe that the sector needs a clear message to make any headway and are working towards making that message clear.

Building on the learning so far: The SoundWaves Network

Our current work, The SoundWaves Network, builds on the work of previous action research programmes, Little Big Bang and SoundWaves Extra. Both shifted between two worlds and their ideologies: the EY and music/creative arts sectors.

One of the challenges of interprofessional working is to find a common language, communication systems and terminology that a diversity of professionals can recognise and "sign up to" (Young, 2012). Throughout our work, we have found ourselves shifting between two different cultures and their ideologies; the music education arts world and the early years world. It is our job to translate between the two and find common ground which involves finding the common language, communication systems and the right terms to establish a clear understanding of roles and contributions. Young reminds us "...this always takes time, but is time well spent. The challenges together very different bringing discourses and approaches should never be underestimated or glossed over" (Young, 2012:30).

The SoundWaves Network involves bringing together partners from both the music and early years sector to learn from each other. It is an ambitious, three-year programme that is being shaped by an array of interested parties all with their own sets of values, experiences and practices. It takes place within three music-learning communities located in Plymouth, Bristol and Somerset. In each learning community we are working with music practitioners, early years settings, Early Childhood Studies' degree students (our future workforce), university lecturers, EY advisory teams and Music Education Hubs. We hope that this co-working of strategic partners and

practitioners can continue to bring a wealth of knowledge and skills together, along with diverse world views.

Conclusion

This work demonstrates our desire as an arts organisation to collaborate with an array of passionate people who share our goal of developing a high-quality early childhood music infrastructure throughout the South West.

In order for our work to have a sustained impact and to ensure we fully support early childhood music, it is imperative that we engage with all partners involved in the education of young children. Taking on board Wenger's concept of "communities of practice" (1998), Take Art believes that mutual engagement, joint enterprise and a shared repertoire are key dimensions to multi-agency group working. It's vital to consult with all involved in an early childhood music programme regarding their conviction and belief in the value of musical play, their knowledge of how young children play musically and their early childhood music pedagogical expertise. We believe that all voung children have a right to the very best musical opportunities in order to learn and develop.

Gina Westbrook is the Director of Early Years Creativity at Take Art. Jane Parker is Take Art's Early Years Music Lead managing The SoundWaves Network. You can find out more about The SoundWaves Network here:

takeart.org/soundwaves-network

References

Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of Practice. Cambridge: Cambridge **University Press** Young, S. (2012). The Little Big Bang Report. Somerset: Take Art Ltd



TAKE ART CASE STUDY: Making music with clay - a very creative approach to music supporting positive engagement and communication

Artist: Richard Tomlinson at St Peter's C of E Primary School, Budleigh Salterton, Devon

How can it possibly work?

We asked Richard to tell us more....

I'm a "Creative Technologist", exploring how digital technology can create still and moving images, sound installations, interactive and multimedia artwork. I have many years' experience working as a participatory artist, facilitating film/photography and media projects with community groups. Half of my experience as a facilitator has been in EY, mostly on Take Art's *Little Big Bang*.

Digital and early years creativity is an unusual combination. People think digital media involves processing information and staring at a screen. But EY creativity is developing ideas "in the moment", is tactile and sensory.

I wanted to facilitate something that:

- used digital media discreetly (not
- direct use of computers)made use of ordinary objects we encounter
- everyday (not high-tech computers)
- was sensory, specifically exploring touch and sound
- had not previously been explored at the setting
- was experimental
- involved making music with objects that weren't traditional instruments.

Why do this?

Digital technology produced for very young children is usually designed for passive engagement; playing a pre-programmed game, sorting pictures, triggering sounds by pressing a mouse. Our aim here to provide an opportunity for children to manipulate technology and become inventors of their own ideas, not simply consumers of digital product.

Digital creativity is also associated with the use of hi-tech gear. Our aim was to demonstrate that we can be creative with digital technology whilst interacting with ordinary objects that we encounter everyday. And interaction with technology is often a solitary activity. Here we wanted to creatively explore it and encourage children to collaborate and share ideas.

The number on roll at both Nursery and Reception at Budleigh Salterton is growing and the ratio of adults to children is shrinking. An early years practitioner noted that when resources are stretched, creativity suffers. Here was an opportunity to bring some fresh creativity into the space and allow time for observation by practitioners.



Children used clay, buttons, shells and scrapstore bits and bobs to create sound inventions



The children discovered that their inventions made a sound when touched.



Children experimented with clay

Making digital technology tactile and playful

The technical set-up for this project was simple and inexpensive:

- a laptop computer
- Scratch software
- MakeyMakey board
- wires / crocodile clips
- materials including clay, fruit and vegetables.

Scratch is a free programming language (see www.scratch.mit.edu/about). Its intuitive interface means anyone can create their own interactive stories, games, and animations in minutes. It wasn't the intention that very young children would program. Scratch suggests running projects with children 8+. Early years practitioners might be inspired to build simple interactive applications informed by their children's interests and the setting environment.

Scratch was used to make a simple application that told the computer to play one of 18 sounds when a key was pressed. We developed a *MakeyMakey* (www. makeymakey.com), a small electronic board (under £40 online) not much bigger that a credit card that connects to the computer via a USB cable.

The next step was to connect the *MakeyMakey* to the computer so that when an everyday object was touched it too would make a sound. We created a Carrot Piano (18 carrots each trigger a single note when touched). With the *MakeyMakey* you can make anything a little bit conductive (containing moisture or carbon) into a computer key. Inventions could include a banana cowbell, watermelon bass drum or talking plant.

All sorts of objects can be turned into computer keys:

- leaves, flowers
- clay, as long as it is moist
- graphite from a pencil (you can draw a piano on paper and really play it!)
- foil and other metal objects (coins, magnets, nuts and bolts, forks, pots and pans)
- people are conductive! (you can trigger sounds when two people shake hands)

The process

We worked with Nursery/Reception class over nine halfday sessions. Initially, children were encouraged to think of themselves as inventors or scientists using clay to create amazing noisy machines, weird musical instruments or loud creatures.

We ran clay modelling sessions in the Science Garden, a familiar activity. Whilst modelling, the children talked about the object they were inventing, describing its size and the sound it made. This tactile activity was very effective in encouraging collaborative working. Children intuitively shared the clay with each other and understood that some inventions were bigger than others and might require more clay. The children communicated with each other, either verbally or through actions, sharing ideas and inspiration. Some children even combined their models together to create super-inventions!

Then the *MakeyMakey* was introduced. The children instantly understood its potential and started connecting their clay models to it. They realised that when they touched their model it produced a sound. When they touched two models simultaneously, two sounds were produced.

The children continued their creative experimentation, producing:

- sound emitting clay inventions
- musical instruments made from fruit and vegetables
- musical instruments made from buckets of water
- objects that, when connected together with wires or wet string, produce noisier sounds.

What we learned

The process encouraged children to use words. Those with little confidence in verbal communication were able to use simple words like: food, shop, carrot, dinner and water. Those with higher levels used words like: scientist, inventor, magician, aubergine, connect and circuit.

Children understood that, though they were working with everyday objects, they were also creatively exploring digital technology and completing circuits. They said phrases like "attach me to the computer", "join me up", "plug me in" and "I'm an inventor".

As well as using words associated with technology the children used words and phrases to describe their modelling with clay and the everyday objects: "I'm building a town with a river through it, the water will make the connection", "here's a noisy pie", "the bigger carrots will make a bigger noise."

Children who had previously been assessed as having lower organisational skills demonstrated that they were very capable of organising the resources involved; they were clearly able to attach different wires to different objects to create a range of sounds.

It encouraged children, particularly the boys, to interact gently with one another. Both Nursery and Reception classes had a higher percentage of boys and play could often be very physical. The children realised that by gently holding hands they could complete a circuit and create a sound.

As well as stimulating communication, the process also encouraged children to think about maths, systems and science.

You can watch a short film about the activity here: https://vimeo.com/257690127/fd66cc3f54



Musical Development Matters

Musical Development Matters in the Early Years is a new guidance document published in September 2018. Its overall purpose is to support practitioners, teachers, musicians and parents to see the musical attributes of young children and to offer ideas as to how they can support and nurture children's musical development by offering broad musical experiences.



Musical Development Matters forms part of the legacy of the Tri-Music Together project. The free online accompanying resource can be found here:

network.youthmusic.org.uk/musical-development-matters

Download a copy for free or buy a printed copy from

www.early-education.org.uk/musical-development-matters

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