



Where research meets practice
in early childhood music
education

Early Years Music Skills Sharing Session

Reflections from grant recipients

Vicki Hook

The activities / discussions you thought most useful

I really felt the discussions regarding the 'Safe Space', and making adults comfortable around music, were really thought provoking. Also positively reassuring for myself, to be reminded that the job in hand is actually a very complex one, where we must possess a good skill set, to be able to read the room, to manage all the different moods, characters, circumstances, personalities etc (the list is endless) that enter our 'Safe space'. To be conscious of what it has taken for the adults just to turn up with their little one!! and how we then approach the music session. To perform, to enable, to educate and to encourage, and all this before we even start our carefully 'planned session'! And not to jump to any conclusions.

Also, making music inclusive, this was a thread that repeated itself through the day. Music sessions offered often where English was not the first language and therefore, how to make it accessible to all... 'to have lots of fun, where the learning then takes place', to often have food and drinks, to get down on ground level and to make bonds, relationships and connections.

Important to have a financial backing, before you embark on such an inclusive music session/ sessions.

I am still left wondering....

Our title?

'Performer'- vital to engage your audience initially in order to for the learning to take place. To lead the session, add a certain amount of entertainment, but not to overpower, and take away from the child who is at the centre of the learning.

'Musician' – to inspire and learn// from a trained background, bringing live music into a session, the voice being just as important.

'Facilitator'- to encourage and make happen, make adults comfortable around music, parents to join in singing, participate with their child, educate.

'Practitioner' – On the ground, getting stuck in, making it happen..- we all mostly decided this is what we would probably call ourselves.

Seanine Joyce

This 'Skills Share' event was a wonderful opportunity to meet people from the Early Years community across the country. It was inspiring and humbling to get an insight into the variety of work that everybody is doing beneath the early years music banner. I enjoyed learning a variety of new warm ups, songs and activities but perhaps the most important idea for me to follow up on for the moment is the idea of creating a local group of practitioners for skills sharing and reflection.

It was great to finally meet some of the people whose names have popped up frequently on the Facebook page. In some instances, it was an opportunity to strengthen contact with people encountered on previous courses or events. It was lovely to find out more about what people are doing with their businesses and the trajectories of their career paths.

Certain people were particularly inspiring as their energy and passion sparkled. Lucia's charismatic approach to encourage parents to join in with singing was charming. Simple suggestions for alternating new and old songs and active hand clap/slap songs to reunite the group were great to hear. Many of these ideas are what we might do instinctively or previously in our practice, but it is nice to be reminded of their effectiveness.

It was a great opportunity to meet people sharing our interests or physical proximity. The idea I would like to follow up on initially would be that of setting up a local group of early years practitioners. I have made several contacts in my area and I think an opportunity to share skills and research would be very welcome. It would bring a positive energy where I previously have felt isolation. So this event has been particularly effective in triggering me to consolidate my own base of early years practitioners locally

Cina Aissa

The skills sharing day and my application to the MERYC grant all came from my encounter with Steve Grocott in July 2019 when I had not managed to find a guest musician to invite to my Friday groups at Kentish Town Health centre.

Up until then, I had lived a hidden life as a early years music enthusiast who would not dare calling herself a musician and who rarely interacted with other musicians as I had the feeling that my musicianship wasn't good enough since I only had the ear but could not read music and wasn't always sure about which note I was playing. Five years ago, I had set up this group as a result of having experienced intense isolation when raising my two daughters alone for two decades as a disabled migrant mum. So music was the tool I was using to bring people together and create community between families. It came as a total surprise when Steve agreed to come to my session very humbly as I had heard of him and of his fantastic body of work.

My entry point in getting involved in the skills sharing day was that I had strongly identified with the mother who did not want to take part in music groups on the Netmums thread. Even though I've now set up my own, I understand how intimidating these spaces can feel, especially when a parent is not feeling well (for a variety of reasons). My practice is Parent-centred: working with parents to ensure that parents are confident and happy and comfortable. Parents can often feel isolated and alone, so if we can get through to them, those children will have the support and help needed within the class.

After a few conversations with Steve with whom I shared a story about 'radical listening', it became obvious to me that there was something very important to be learnt there, so ('radical) listening was the framework through which I engaged in taking part in the (dreaded) skills sharing day.

We all introduced ourselves and after a couple of introductory numbers, I was invited to talk about 'radical listening', which I defined as truly listening to the other person without coming up with a response in your head and undoing our ingrained habits of superficial listening.

After all, weren't listening and observing as important to learning and developing as practice and learning an instrument?

By agreeing to take part in the day, I had agreed to listen to people despite all of my past experience of attending early years music training courses .

Taking a few minutes to talk about this felt amazingly liberating as I suddenly realised that I had something to offer and that my own experience was as valid as anybody else's in the room.

This moment of vulnerability, when I had spoken, felt exhilarating but as I opened my eyes and my ears, I heard more people in the room transform from being 'guarded/wooden' to sharing ideas and reflections with the rest of the group. I realised at that moment that everyone was nervous in this new environment, surrounded by people they had never met before. Putting my own nerves away, I could finally listen to what others were saying.

I heard some of the most confident looking people in the room, people I had only heard about through the network of Early years musicians on Facebook, people who ran amazing groups and projects, yes, I heard these people say that they were very insecure about what they do.

During the day, I learnt about the importance of making use of music that is already happening in the setting (that can be the sound of a hammer or the cooing of a baby in the room), free flow music that is based on children's play.

Have you noticed how people claim to hate listening to their recorded voice? That's because of the difference between expectation they have about what they are supposed to sound like and the sound of their actual voice, processed through the filter of their own harsh judgment. This unhelpful approach can be transferred across any experience where there is high pressure/expectation to be a certain way and accepting the less than perfect reality. That stands for new mothers and for freelance musicians, working on their own more often than not, without colleagues, supervision, guidance or feedback. It can be a lonely and a frightening journey. I have enormously benefitted from the skills sharing day and have since tried to branch out with other artists and musicians. That is a work in progress and I am not there yet but I have made a vow to develop partnerships with other musicians and settings. I would like to develop my practice, to learn new skills and I have finally realised I had something quite special to offer the world of Early years music making.

Alison Dodd

Days like this are a privilege to be a part of. With so many experienced and passionate practitioners in one space there was much interesting discussion and many engaging practical activities and ideas shared.

I really enjoyed the practical activities that some practitioners shared. When someone else is leading an activity, it really helps you to reflect on what makes a good 'user' experience (for want of a better term) for both the children and the adults involved. Sometimes it can be difficult to find time to go and see a range of other Early Years specialists delivering sessions, so bringing us all together to share our knowledge and experience was so useful, and to give us this viewpoint. I was reminded that there is a lot of joy to be had from simple activities and from being able to participate with other people. And that you don't have to do anything particularly fancy to draw some really amazing musical experiences out for people - sometimes just quietly adding new things in can get you to a complex musical activity without even noticing. This was particularly evident for me with Len Tyler's Cat and Mouse song where the group were in 2 parts with one part stepping out crotchets and one part stepping out quavers and you could really see how easily the children could be guided there.

I also enjoyed the scrunchie activities we did. I find myself sometimes dismissing things as being for show rather than having real value, but this was a really great example of how we can use anything to help develop musicality in others. I've always avoided scrunchies before but will be investing in one now. I have also re-evaluated how I use the parachute in my sessions and the benefits we can derive from it. I have gone from having it in my session because it's 'fun' to using it to develop a sense of tempo, listening skills, cooperation, beat and dynamics (AND it's fun!!)

It was a really timely reminder of how much learning you can fit into fun, early years appropriate activities.

Following on from the session, I have been practising how I introduce myself and the pride I show in my work with very young musicians. I have always felt this pride but often play it down when talking to others. Our discussion around what we call ourselves, and even just introducing myself to others at the beginning of the day, made me realise that I often act like I am embarrassed by what I do, when in fact I am very proud and very aware of how important it is. Behaviour like this relays to other people that early ye

I am also planning to do some more research in Kodaly and Orff and the way they integrate movement and music. I am particularly interested in how they

view the progression of musical learning from birth. This would help me structure my sessions to encourage real progression throughout them.