



MUSIC, MUSIC, MUSIC AT RIPLEY NURSERY SCHOOL

INTRODUCTION

My name is Cathy Bednal and I have been immersed in Early Years Education for the past 33 years and led at Ripley Nursery School and Ripley School Childcare as both Deputy and Head Teacher for the last 23 years. I am a strong advocate for every child to have access to a rich indoor and outdoor learning environment to cultivate attitudes of curiosity, agency and care of the natural world. Our focus at Ripley Nursery School is in developing confident, able and happy learners within an ambitious and inclusive curriculum. Currently we are reviewing and developing our creative curriculum which has included working with a range of musicians and artists to upskill staff, renew learning environments and develop sequential creative learning opportunities for all of our children. We have reaped the benefits of working with Derbyshire Music Hub and Musical Exchanges in training staff to deliver high quality music sessions, to increase the confidence of adults and children to use song as a effective form of communication and in supporting all children to access a rich music offer.

I have used the following two case studies to illustrate the power of using song to support listening and attention, to develop confidence and purposeful communication, to embed and expand children's vocabulary and to promote access to all areas of learning.

CASE STUDY 1 - EWAN

Before musical exchanges

Ewan was very unsettled when he first started nursery. Ewan would explore the setting independently but would not communicate with adults or peers in the setting. Ewan was reluctant to join in with adult led activities or base time and he would be very shy and embarrassed if an adult spoke to him

During the programme

Ewan was unsure of musical exchange sessions when we first began as it was something new and different for him. Staff built new, simple repetitive songs with actions and props into a weekly whole class session, based on the musical exchange input. Staff used a variety of call and response and singing games to encourage children to develop their voices and confidence in singing, as part of a group and individual singing.



Staff choose songs where they could play with tempo—speed,

pitch—high/low,

dynamics—louder/quieter

timbre—quality of voice

and provided many opportunities to develop a steady beat using actions and instruments.

Each week Ewan's confidence increased and he began to join in with actions first, then songs. Ewan was always keen to use the instruments on offer and staff regularly provided different offers in the music area, including opportunities to make their own instruments. Ewan began to seek out instruments in the environment and use these to enhance his play.

After modelling by an adult, Ewan confidently composed his own music using the colour shapes and button bells. Ewan was able to order the colours (up to 10 at a time) and play the corresponding bell to create his own music.



Ewan has responded well to the Music Bears activity; able to identify the different beats for Mummy bear and Baby bear—this supports his growing understanding and competency in keeping a steady beat.

Ewan's confidence in the nursery environment has increased, he is happy to come into school and loves engaging with the Tuneful Tuesday music sessions. Ewan began to sing "Hello," in respond to his name during registration. Ewan can often be found exploring our music areas with his friends, he showed great enjoyment using the instruments to make music whilst singing Christmas songs during free flow time.

After musical exchanges:

Ewan is more confident in school, he is communicating with peers and familiar adults. Ewan now makes his needs known to familiar adults.

Ewan has developed lovely relationships with his peers and enjoys playing alongside his friends. Ewan is confident to lead play when it is something he enjoys doing, music making being a good example. Ewan's listening and attention skills are improving in a group situation and he enjoys leading musical games in base time. Ewan has been observed in his imaginative play showing his baby a toy and humming a familiar tune.

Ewan continues to grow in his confidence in accessing the curriculum on offer, in his verbal communications with adults and peers and in his understanding of musical concepts including keeping a steady beat and composing and playing music.



CASE STUDY 2 - MINH

Minh's first language is Vietnamese and he speaks English as an additional language. Minh's parents speak little English and we translate his learning journal for parents to access. Minh had little opportunity to mix with peers in the local community before joining school.



Before musical exchanges:

Minh would rather play alone and would become frustrated if his peers approached an activity he was playing. Minh found group times difficult and would only attend to a group activity for a few minutes. Minh would become frustrated and cry when he could not communicate his needs to staff.

During the programme:

Minh was one of the first children to pick up the repetitive songs used each session. He was very enthusiastic and would sing the loudest! Each week Minh's listening and attention improved as staff began to incorporate music and song in every opportunity; to support transition, to de-escalate any potential areas of conflict, to give information, to attract children to more challenging activities. Minh would be so excited to see the Musical Exchange musicians Katie and Charlotte. He would try his best to wait for his turn in activities and songs but the temptation would sometimes be too much! We added more instruments to our learning environment and Minh would seek them out to explore and practice singing games he had learnt in the musical exchange sessions. Minh would ask staff to repeat the songs that Katie and Charlotte introduced us to throughout the week and this helped to create secure attachments with the staff in nursery.

After musical exchanges:

Minh will now initiate turn taking songs with his peers in his free flow play and this has been a powerful mechanism for Minh to develop friendships. Minh's language has improved: he can now talk about his needs, wants and feelings with adults and his peers. Minh has developed secure attachments with staff and recognizes and attends to the verbal and non-verbal cues in social communication.

Minh has formed friendships and will seek out particular children to share play experiences with, at the moment these are mostly song based games.

Minh's language and confidence have increased steadily and he is eager to tell his Dad all about singing time. Minh has begun to be playful with language and songs, for example, changing the words to the 'hello' song to 'goodbye' as he was leaving for lunchtime.

Minh no longer requires a fidget toy at base time. Through accessing song and music activities Minh has developed his listening skills and his understanding of English and of social communication. All staff have experienced the power of song and music in promoting active engagement with all children, including those with communication difficulties, with English as a second language, with children who struggled with social interaction and/or demonstrated demand avoidant behaviours.





CASE STUDY 2 - MINH

The power of song

All staff have been involved in this project; to develop confidence in singing and develop the skills and knowledge to teach singing and music in the early years.

All staff have worked collaboratively led by two school music leads who have been supported by Ju Birchall, Derbyshire Music Hub and through engagement in the fabulous Musical Exchanges project. We regularly review where we are during staff meetings and celebrate progress made. Staff recorded the progress they have made in delivery of music sessions, effective use of musical instruments, singing as part of a daily routine, confidence to make up songs and rhymes, understanding of developing a steady beat and the development of their own repertoire of songs—all staff reported good progress.

Summary

Singing is a powerful tool in teaching and modelling language and teaching and modelling social communication—but also effectively supports listening and attention, self and co-regulation, confidence and well-being, play skills, fine and gross motor and musical knowledge and ability.



Staff were asked to share an example of the power of song and music;

"A made a musical instrument at the make and create table, then we both made up a story and song about a fairy playing the instrument, we were both confident and I would not have done this before."

"B came up to me and explained they had a new song. They then adapted the words to 'Wind the bobbin up' to include claps and jumps."

"Dealing with an upset child, refusing to engage and change out of wet clothes, saying "No" to every suggestion. I started singing instructions instead and we managed a whole change of clothes working together".

"Having a child with low interaction skills sing one of the songs I had made up, back to me".

"Hearing children spontaneously sing as they work and play in school, makes me feel very happy".

