

MUSIC WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

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Who am I?

- Royal College of Music: pianist
- Dalcroze Eurhythmics in Switzerland, Kodaly in Hungary
- Postgraduate teaching qualification
- Have taught in general schools and a music specialist school across 4-18 age range
- PhD – spontaneous music of 3-4 year olds
- Training early years student teachers
- Freelance research and consultancy – half at the university, half with arts and education organisations

My Research

- Research integrated in to practice – trying to work at the borders of change by questioning the assumed limits of traditional practices, creating new forms of artistic understanding and shaping new ways of learning and teaching. Such activities are a form of research - conducted in and for the arts and education, rather than simply ‘about’ arts or education.
- The longer I work in early years music, the more questions I have.

The parts of the presentation

- PRELIMINARIES – a few things to always hold in mind
- BACKGROUND – A VERY VERY SHORT TOUR a view from the UK
- RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: Babies and building upwards
- WHAT'S NEW: New 'social studies of childhood'
- FOCUS: on 'communicative musicality', research and application in practice
- FINALLY

PRELIMINARIES

PRELIMINARIES: Challenges

- Birth to 6 years is a very wide age phase - differentiating practice so that it is developmentally appropriate is a big challenge
- Music is difficult stuff to work with, it's noisy, invisible, it doesn't stay still but it's also wonderful – we use other media, but these may pull away from the music
- Working with child and parents/carers is very different to working with groups of children and a teacher
- Educational training, research, focus tends to prioritise the older age phases
- Early years is low status in music education and music is marginal to general education
- Assumptions that 'it's little children, so it's "simple"'
- Political tendency to look for quick, surface solutions rather than long-term investment

What counts as quality in practice?

- What systems of accountability? – national curricula, national standards, national qualifications, policies?
- Who gets to decide? Who is listened to?
- In the UK – lots of people ‘do’ EY music and it IS written in to Curriculum Birth-5, but in a very broad and general way. [It is a play-based curriculum however.]

Background of professionals

Nobody has an EY music professional as their primary role – always a development from another background, training, professional role, identity, set of values.

- Early years practitioners – varying levels of qualification and training, very little in music
- Musicians – high levels of training in performance, low pedagogical training

UK BACKGROUND: A VERY, VERY SHORT TOUR

Theory, research and innovative practice

- Late 1980s, early 1990s – UK
- Influence of John Paynter – children as composers, creative musicians and not reproductive, learning about music by making it
- Composition in the UK National Curriculum for all children, all ages
- Studies of children's musical creativity and children's spontaneous singing, music-making
- Ideas of music as play relating to theories of play

Late 1980s developmental models

- Swanwick and Tilman spiral model of musical development [data was sets of commissioned music-making activities, one school, one teacher, 40 children]
- Welch – model of children's singing development [for learning songs]

two positions

- John Paynter – creativity, children as composers, children's own music and musicality
- Keith Swanwick – developmental models, music as listening, performing and composing – leading towards adult models of music-making

For early years

- Practice tends to be 'top down' – a conversion of practice for older children
- Either a fun diversion for all OR the start of serious skill-learning for a minority
- European methods – Dalcroze, Kodaly, Orff, still very influential [methods can become inflexible, have evolved pedagogies, tend to become belief systems]

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Babies

- Neuroscience – adult studies mostly, some recent with babies [Rauscher, Gruhn]
- Music perception – babies' reactions to music fundamentals [Trehub, Trainor]
- Socio-biological studies – adult-infant interaction as 'music' [Papousek, Stern, Trevarthen] 'Communicative musicality'

What has been found?

Some degree of musicality is innate –
'hard-wired'

Musical expressiveness and
responsiveness appear at birth

Musicality is resilient

Complex interaction between genetic
and environmental factors

Environmental stimulation allows
brain of newborn to develop

The brain changes in response to
music learning experiences

Neuromusical studies have focused on
those familiar with Western music
only

But don't forget - -

All laboratory studies

Mostly white, North
American middle class
mothers

The 'myth' of the first 3
years – determinist
outlooks, 'hot-housing',
feeds in to anxieties

New baby research

- Allows us to build 'bottom up' approaches
- To think about young children's music and musicality [Paynter's priorities] – what is it?, how do we foster it?

Children's Music

- No long tradition of studying children's music and musicality [e.g. not like visual arts]
- Low level of understanding of how it sounds
- Low value for children's own music
- Little understanding how it is structured, on their terms
- Little current research in to influences of recent changes from digital technologies and diverse cultures

- Video of children playing with saucepan lid in a nursery in Bologna, Italy. The work of Franca Mazzoli.

IS IT?

- Just random noise with saucepan lids?
- Exploring sounds?
- Making music?
- How do the space, the resources, the social interactions play a part?

Small strand of research activity

Interest in children's spontaneous, own made music

- Pillsbury Nursery Studies – 1939-1944?
- Invented Singing – Davies, Bjorkveld, Sundin, Young
- Music on instruments – Cohen, Flohr, Glover, Young,

My study of music play

- Music play
- Musically supportive environment [sound space, resources]
- Musically interactive adults
- Multi-modal activity – interwoven with other activity
- Expressive behaviour
- Informed by its own priorities and criteria

NANCY EVANS: BIRMINGHAM

- Video clip of two children improvising with a balafon and some other percussion instruments. They sing about having no shoes on, they play the instruments and dance. Nancy responds, sometimes imitating them and sometimes introducing new ideas.

WHAT'S NEW?

'New' social studies of childhood

Scandinavia and UK [James, Jenks and Prout]

- Criticises ideas of development as a linear pathway towards adult musical behaviours [usually Western classical music]
- Criticises developmental models as being detached from context and everyday lives, as passive unfolding of capabilities
- Criticises developmental models as implying all children are the same [white, middle class] – points to increasing diversity

'New' social studies of childhood

- Children are active 'constructors' of experience – are agents, are of their own times and places
- Some prominent theorists of child sociology use Reggio Emilia [an approach to nursery education from one region of Italy] as an ideal philosophy for education [children as active agents in their own learning]

Social studies of childhood

- Draws attention to the increasing diversity of childhood [European countries are now multi-cultural]
- Is interested in children's everyday experiences, their out-of-school lives, [e.g. how media and technologies are influencing their lives]
- Current challenge – bringing these approaches in to music education
- Idea of 'musical childhoods'

FOCUS: COMMUNICATIVE MUSICALITY (BACK TO BABIES)

Research: Adult-infant interaction

- Adult-baby interaction
- Infant-directed speech and singing, multimodal
- Rhythmic, Dynamic, Repetitive, short phrases, accumulating to a climax
- Lullabies, lap games and songs
- Communicative musicality (Trevarthen and Malloch)

Italy: 2 year old girl at home

- Lap game between mother and child

‘Communicative musicality’

MUSIC AS MADE BETWEEN PEOPLE

- Muziek op Schoot – ‘communication’ understood as central
- Taken up by me to develop an approach to adults interacting with 3-4 year old children playing instruments
- Music therapy
- Studies of improvising – particularly jazz and from ethnomusicology

Main idea for me

- Using children's ability to communicate, be socially playful as a generative source for musical ideas and structure. [Music therapy works the opposite way]
- Music education usually adopts traditional Western classical music criteria to decide what and how children are learning – e.g. to recognise and perform rhythms/pitches with accuracy

The problem

- ‘Western classical musical criteria’ are taken from adult music practices in one musical tradition only [not Jazz, not pop, not traditional or ‘world’ musics] – they are ‘top down’ criteria
- What do children ‘do’ musically from their own imaginations, own social resources – how can we ‘grow’ that? Needing ways of understanding that emerge from children’s own musicality.

‘communicative musicality’

- To inform the role of the adult
- Allow child to start
- Pick up child’s rhythm, dynamic, structured ideas
- Turn-taking or synchronising
- ‘do it again and a bit more’ rule
- Balance of repetition and variety

TRISH KEELAN: BIRMINGHAM

- Video clip of small ball playing with indian bells. Trish responds with another set of indian bells.

How is it useful?

- Fits with pedagogical models that seek to co-construct from children's ideas
- Is accessible to both formally trained musicians and general educators
- Prizes creativity and idea of music as something 'made between people'

How is it less useful?

- Difficult to integrate in to working with larger groups [Israel – children improvise in pairs and others listen; Bristol, UK – groups of 6-8 improvise in a more formal way]
- Can be difficult to develop progressively [adult introduces new ideas]
- Need interesting instruments + can neglect singing

Progressing an improvised activity

- Video clip of young boy playing bongo drums will Trish Keelan plays a song on a piano accordion. He keeps time with her, and then later they echo play with some rhythms. This improvised activity has more formality, more structure to it.

FINALLY

Children as active and autonomous

- 'democratic' underpinning of Reggio Emilia philosophy
- MEETS
- 'new' social studies of childhood from Scandinavia, UK (and Germany?)

In Italy

- Practice in the nurseries of Reggio Emilia is only one region out of many – happens to have become internationally known
- Visual arts – drawn images, made models, is central to RE practice – music, to me, seems to be served less well
- High investment - emphasises observation and documentation of children's activity – then dialogue, interpretation, building on children's current activity

Listening to playback

- Video clip of three children clustered around a laptop computer resting on the floor. They are watching an immediate play-back of a video recording of them improvising on xylophones.

Finally -

- Children as being able to make their own decisions, as being creative and independent
- Look at the reality of the musical childhoods of the children we are working with
- Beware of falling in to a view of 'childhood as innocent' and wanting to hold on to this – this child is often a white, middle class, like us.
- Beware of arriving at two levels of music education – formal lessons for middle classes, and creative, short-term projects for lower class and immigrant communities

WHERE NOW?

- Work to change professional status of EY music
- Develop a wide repertoire of pedagogical approaches for adult-led/child-led, creative/skill learning, whole group/individual, multi-media/multi-modal activity, old and new technologies, diversity of music and musical childhoods etc.
- Select and integrate traditional pedagogies
- Select and integrate new technologies
- Understand and integrate diversity of music and musical childhoods, musical adulthoods and musical communities
- Reflect on our own musical identities and values

Information

Eunet MERYC- European network of Music Educators and Researchers of Young Children

MERYC website has information

Conference, July at the University of Bologna

Books:

Young and Glover, 1998 – Music in the Early Years

Young, 2003 – Music with the Under Fours

Young, 2008 – Music 3-5