



End of Project Report

September 2023

Meaningful Music with the Under 5's

As I reflect on over a year of work, I consider how impactful this project has been on both those families and settings that I have worked with but, for my own personal research and development.





The Project

This project partnered with local libraries and nurseries in order to offer accessible music sessions and equip staff within the organisations to continue meaningful music provision within their settings.

When I embarked on this project, music education (funded by local authorities and music hubs) started at age 5 and, unless families were able to pay for music sessions privately, under 5's and their families had no access to musical activities. In my local area, all music sessions for babies and toddlers are highly-priced franchises, not led by professionals or those with a creative background. I am passionate that, we should be offering the highest level of creative experiences to our communities, including children and families. There is also a practice within music education for the under 5's that doesn't align with the EYFS framework. I spent the year exploring and researching the use of meaningful music and meaningful music activities within musical play.

What I planned

37

Creative Practitioners

1152

Active Participants
(Libraries)

1296

Active Participants
(Pre-schools)

3

Volunteers

What I Did

51

Creative Practitioners

709

Active Participants
(libraries)

1332

Active Participants
(Pre-schools)

0

Volunteers

Developments throughout the project

While I had a plan for what I wanted to achieve with this project and how I was going to achieve it, I was still learning and adapting along the way. There were some changes made after the projects inception based on how I was developing as a practitioner and what I was observing and understanding.

- Initially I offered 6 weeks of music sessions for the pre-schools, however, it became clear to me quite quickly that I would need week 1 to be an observation with the children in their normal play time to observe them and to engage in some child-led musical play. This was especially important for the children who thrived during musical play (usually those with additional needs or towards the lower end of the age range). It gave me an opportunity to see what the children were doing musically, naturally, and to set a base line for their individual assessment sheets. I, therefore, changed the model to 1 week of observations and then 5 weeks of musical sessions.
- While I was flexible based on each settings needs and the spaces which they worked in, I tried to encourage inclusivity and work within their main spaces as much as I could. I certainly developed my skills in having these conversations and explaining to staff members why there were so many benefits (particularly to children less likely to engage if they were taken out of the space) to making the sessions as inclusive as possible.

Use of freeplay

Time for freeplay is a really important part of each session to allow the children to explore but also to encourage social skills such as sharing, turn-taking, interacting with their peers and inventing their own musical play. It also serves the children, typically in the younger age bracket, to enjoy music as they can share their skills within this more child-led environment. This time is where everyone was able to show self-expression and do what they wanted, musically. This was also the section of the session that drew in more reluctant members of the group and helped to grow their confidence in engaging with the more structured activities. It was also a wonderful opportunity for the children to listen, dance and sing to the music they had selected while choosing to be musical (or not) with their peers or in their own space.

Significant moments in the project

- One of the positive outcomes of this project is changing the perception of what Early Years Music can be, and how that can look different for different children. Through listening, understanding, questioning and having conversations centered around music practice and children's musical development with staff and parents; the conversation has really been changing in the communities in which I have worked. The perception that music is sitting down and singing nursery rhymes has been challenged and examples have been demonstrated for more age-appropriate and accessible musical education.
- Seeing children react to their meaningful music has been magical. Along the way, I have asked families for feedback on which songs and musical games their children enjoy so that I can include them in my plans. There have also been songs that children have responded really positively to throughout the duration of a session (which I have observed). In these instances of children hearing music that really captivates them, I have seen them dance energetically (by themselves and with peers), sing the song from start to finish completely lost in the moment, show obvious signs of excitement such as clapping, waving, smiling and looking at their caregivers and for the older children, telling me they love the music and telling me all about it. Our children deserve these special moments of musical connection with their peers and caregivers and using music that is meaningful to them really drives this intention forward.
- Some of the most significant responses came from children who had additional needs or were more socially isolated in their day-to-day play. One child in particular, following on from the music sessions, began using music and song successfully as a communication tool within her setting. Many children who often would not participate in group activities, would find themselves drawn into collective play or observing before joining in with the sections that they wanted to.

Evaluation

I collected four categories of data for this project:

- Feedback
- Observations
- My plans
- Individualised assessment sheets

Pre-schools; setting musical outcomes

60%

of children met all of their musical outcomes

84%

of children met 80% of their musical outcomes

100%

of children met 60% of their musical outcomes

Please find reports from the different settings below:

[Reports](#)

Library sessions: feedback

Did you enjoy the Mini Maestros sessions that you attended?

Yes 100%

No 0%

How welcoming was the environment?

Very Welcoming 94%

Average 6%

I didn't notice 0%

Not very welcoming 0%

Was the quality of the sessions...

Excellent 89%

Good 9%

Average 2%

Poor 0%

Making Music Meaningful

All of the music sessions were curated specifically for the children who attended them by using songs and musical games that they had previously stated they engaged with or by observing the more popular activities among the group and developing those. There has been research to show that there are huge benefits to using recorded music and using music that the children actually enjoy and respond to (rather than what we think we should play). Nicola Burke's 'Tune into Listening' project explores this further: <https://macbirmingham.co.uk/mac-makes-music/training/tune-into-listening>.

The sessions were also meaningful as I used individualised assessment sheets where objectives were set after meeting the children. This meant that I could assess how they were being musical in different ways that were accessible to them rather than just how well they sang a nursery rhyme, for example. The 'A' shows the places where the objectives were 'Achieved'.

Child's Name: Soya	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5
To shake and stop	A	A	A	A	A
To show loud and quiet	A	A	A	A	A
To sing along	In part	A	A	A	A
To participate in the movement songs with the correct movements		A	A	A	A
To share ideas				A	A
To show a steady beat	A	A		A	A
To explore rhythm					A
To demonstrate high and low		A	A	A	A

Other observations or special moments:

Date: 17/01/2023	Soya was following the melody pattern to most of the songs that we sang today, even confidently joining in with songs which were not familiar to him. When we marched to <i>Heads, Shoulders, Knees & Toes</i> , Soya instinctively increased or decreased his marching speed to match the minim (2 beat note) and crotchet (1 beat note) example I was offering.
Date: 07/02/2022	We used the claves today to explore rhythm and pulse. Interestingly, when I switched from playing pulse to rhythm, Soya chose to start singing along to the rhythm as well as attempting to copy the rhythm with his claves. Soya is beginning to explore the difference between rhythm and pulse.

How did you feel about the use of music and songs being tailored to the participants? (more than one available to choose)

I loved it!	92%
My child had a really great response	63%
I didn't really notice	0%
I found it uncomfortable to share ideas or musical preferences	0%

Making Music Meaningful

This project has enabled me to offer an accessible, high-quality option to families and pre-schools in the local area. Community activities for the under 5's and their families are normally franchises which are highly priced and are in rural areas. The area of Early Years Music is also unregulated and this can result in options for under 5's being of lower quality.

Early Years Music in pre-schools is largely sitting down and singing nursery rhymes which is supported by the very musically narrow Early Learning Goals around music featured in the EYFS:

(ELG 7; being imaginative & expressive, page 15; <https://shorturl.at/bgB04>)

- Be able to sing a range of well-known nursery rhymes and songs.
- Be able to perform songs, rhymes, poems and stories with others, and when appropriate try to move in time with the music.

There are many other ways in which children are musical and, a lot of the time, children's musical instincts are linked with their physicality and movement so it seems counterproductive to expect them to sit down and sing along to a group of songs (some of which they may not even enjoy!)

Moving Forward

Moving forward, while I see huge benefits to community sessions for the under 5's and their families, there are more challenges here in engaging with a larger cohort. It was sometimes difficult to engage with a wider audience and/or get some sections of the community to come along to the sessions despite using accessible and well-known spaces, the low-cost element and engaging with local community and religious groups direct. However, the work within pre-school and nursery settings was hugely successful with positive outcomes across the board with regards to observations and assessments of the children involved and showed really high engagement levels. While the staff may not have been confident in music or how to incorporate musical play, they were very receptive, enthusiastic and welcoming in every setting.

Building on my findings from this project, I believe that, particularly with the National Plan for Music changing to now incorporate early years, the way forward is to engage with the Under 5's through their education settings. While this could take the form of Early Years Music Practitioners visiting pre-schools, nurseries and schools, I feel that these music sessions must come with some discussion and information sessions so that the children's day-to-day caregivers and teachers can feel more confident to engage with music in more organic ways.

A great way to get music, and using music, to be better utilised within Early Years settings is to make it a part of the training for Early Years Practitioners whether they are completing a college based qualification or an apprenticeship. Through this project, I have continued to develop links with Kent Music Hub and will be exploring different ideas with them to continue to provide high-quality, meaningful and authentic music practice within the local area.

All of it - please bring the sessions back! Everyone loved it and was so sad it was over

KELLY IS AMAZING. IT'S FUN AND ENGAGING.

Seeing the children interact with each other and the instruments. I can't rate this class highly enough. I would recommend it to everyone.

We loved the parachute! The music that accompanied was great and really evoked a feeling of waves and the sea. This is the section that hooked my son into the activities.

Each of the children were highlighted at points in the session and included. Kelly was very patient and was attentive to what caught their attention

The parachute game, the pop up puppet and Kelly's enthusiasm . Best of all it held my grandson's attention for 99% of the session and for the other 1% he was easily led back to the group having wandered to the kids books.

Please describe your highlight of the Mini Maestros sessions

KELLY TOOK MUSIC REQUESTS IN ADVANCE AND PLAYED SOME OF MY DAUGHTER'S FAVOURITE SONGS, I THOUGHT THAT WAS REALLY SPECIAL. KELLY'S GOT A LOVELY VOICE AND JUST IN GENERAL HER SINGING AND ENGAGING WITH THE CHILDREN IS A HIGHLIGHT. THANK YOU KELLY!

It was a fantastic interactive session that was great fun and my children loved from the start to the end thank you

New songs. Great use of instruments. Kelly just brilliant and brings music to life effortlessly. Child has loved it.

The very fact that both kids joined in throughout. My son hasn't liked any music sessions we have been to. He has actively avoided them in the past and asked to leave. This was not the case with your group. He loved it, talked about it between sessions and was always keen for the next session.

MINI
MAESTROS
MUSIC

The logo features the words 'MINI', 'MAESTROS', and 'MUSIC' stacked vertically. 'MINI' is in a simple, outlined font. 'MAESTROS' is in a larger, colorful, outlined font with each letter in a different color (M: blue, A: pink, E: yellow, S: blue, T: pink, R: yellow, O: blue, S: pink). 'MUSIC' is in white, bold, sans-serif font inside a green rectangular box. To the right of 'MINI' is a stylized illustration of piano keys and musical notes in green and blue.

100% of families and settings that Mini Maestros Music worked with said that they would work with them again or attend another session in the future.