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Soundwaves Case Study - July 2016

Ukuleles and More: Building social & cultural capital through Music

Knowle West Children's Centre

To find out about *Soundwaves Extra* visit www.takeart.org or contact jane@takeart.org

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Research question:

In what ways can a music project build social and cultural capital?

Through this project we hope that we will:

Raise the profile of Early Years music.

Become better musicians ourselves.

Be spontaneous music makers.

Use music as part of our every day practice.

See children engaging in self initiated music making.

Help parents make the connection between music and learning.

Words by Helen Hogg, Bill Roberts & Matt Caldwell 2016

The Ukulele Project

Working in conjunction with Soundwaves and Bill Roberts, KWCC conducted a research project using music as a focus. KWCC is a researchful setting and before the project started we thought carefully about the process we might use and how we might measure the impact. We know that action research is a way of bringing about self reflection and this project was no different.

“The metaphor that might best represent my image of the school is that of a construction site, or a permanent laboratory, in which children’s and teachers’ research processes are strongly intertwined and constantly evolving...Learning does not proceed in a linear way, determined and deterministic, by progressive and predictable stages but rather is constructed contemporaneous advances, standstills and ‘retreats’ that take many different directions.” (Rinaldi 2006)

Children, practitioners and parents were all part of this ‘permanent laboratory’ and the weekly visits of Bill kept a thread of constancy, challenge and aspiration. As an outside agent, Bill was able to ‘give permission’ to the practitioners to be musicians and to ‘be’ in the moment as they made their own music and music with the children.

In the next few pages, hopefully you will see how this process worked, the data we managed to gather and the conclusions we drew.

Week one and Bill arrives with his musical instruments. The children are curious. It does not take them long to approach him. He responds sensitively, smiling, engaging with the children through song.



The children are used to having the freedom to make choices about what they want to do. The resources we provide here at Knowle West are freely available, high quality and open ended. We want to build on our children's innate curiosity and desire to be competent. We observe them as they explore the percussion instruments. They find out the different sounds they can make. They are interested in the guitar. They are not afraid to have a go, even though Bill is holding it.



Each week a different practitioner takes a turn at working alongside Bill as he sings and plays. These sessions can be very loud at times. Large groups of children join in with the music making. They come and go as they please.



We realise that for some children this is a completely new experience. We need to put boundaries in place to ensure that the instruments are looked after. There is a fine line between their curiosity to find out and appropriate behaviour. We establish that it is not ok to throw the instruments or play them in the sand pit.



We take note of the children who want to join in. Some children stay for long periods of time. Some revisit again and again. Bill's interactions are sensitive to the needs of the children. He follows their lead, responding to what they say and do, not intruding on their learning path way but carefully guiding them forward. The children are building a strong relationship with him.



Exploration continues each week. The children still need time to figure out how things work...whilst others need the reassurance of a sensitive adult.



There is a strong, growing feeling that making music is a collaborative activity and that this is fun.



The practitioners are becoming more confident in their own music making.



We are becoming better musicians ourselves. Music is becoming part of our everyday practice. We are becoming spontaneous music makers.



Bill gives some of the parents a short lesson in how to play the ukulele. The parents take the ukulele home for a week.



We talk about the link between singing and helping children's language to develop. One parent feeds back that they are going to buy their own ukulele.



Meanwhile our feeling of well being grows.
Our new skills give us pleasure - upskilling becomes 'upjoying'.



As time goes by the children become more confident and we notice some changes in their behaviour: Children start to make choices about the songs they want to sing and hear;

On days when Bill isn't here they visit the music area and engage enthusiastically with the instruments. We are seeing children singing, dancing and music making for sustained periods.

We are hearing children singing who haven't sung before.



But something else is emerging that excites us because it helps us to reflect on the impact our music making is having. The lessons that Bill gives the practitioners each week is having a greater impact than we anticipated. During the session Bill teaches us new songs and shows us how to play the ukulele. When this happens we are noticing that the children become part of the teaching session too. They come and sit down with a ukulele and do what we do. The children are learning how to learn as we are in the process of learning ourselves.



Michelle, the practitioner is following Bill's lead. Notice in the picture how the child is following Michelle's lead.



Through this project we hoped that we would:
Raise the profile of Early Years music.
Become better musicians ourselves.
Be spontaneous music makers.
Use music as part of our every day practice.
See children engaging in self initiated music making.
Help parents make the connection between music and learning.

Did we achieve that?



The music project has achieved all of these things but most of all it has demonstrated the power of modelling new learning. The adults involved have modelled the new behaviour they want to see and the new language they want to hear. We have been modelling how to learn. Young children will imitate what they see if it is presented as something which is fun, interesting, desirable, enriching, exciting, safe, achievable.



Has the project built social and cultural capital for our children and families?

We are referring to “non financial social assets that promote social mobility beyond economic means.”

Cultural and social capital indicate forms of knowledge , skills and educational advantages that a person has that gives them higher status in society. Parents provide children with cultural capital by transmitting the attitudes and knowledge needed to succeed in the current education system.

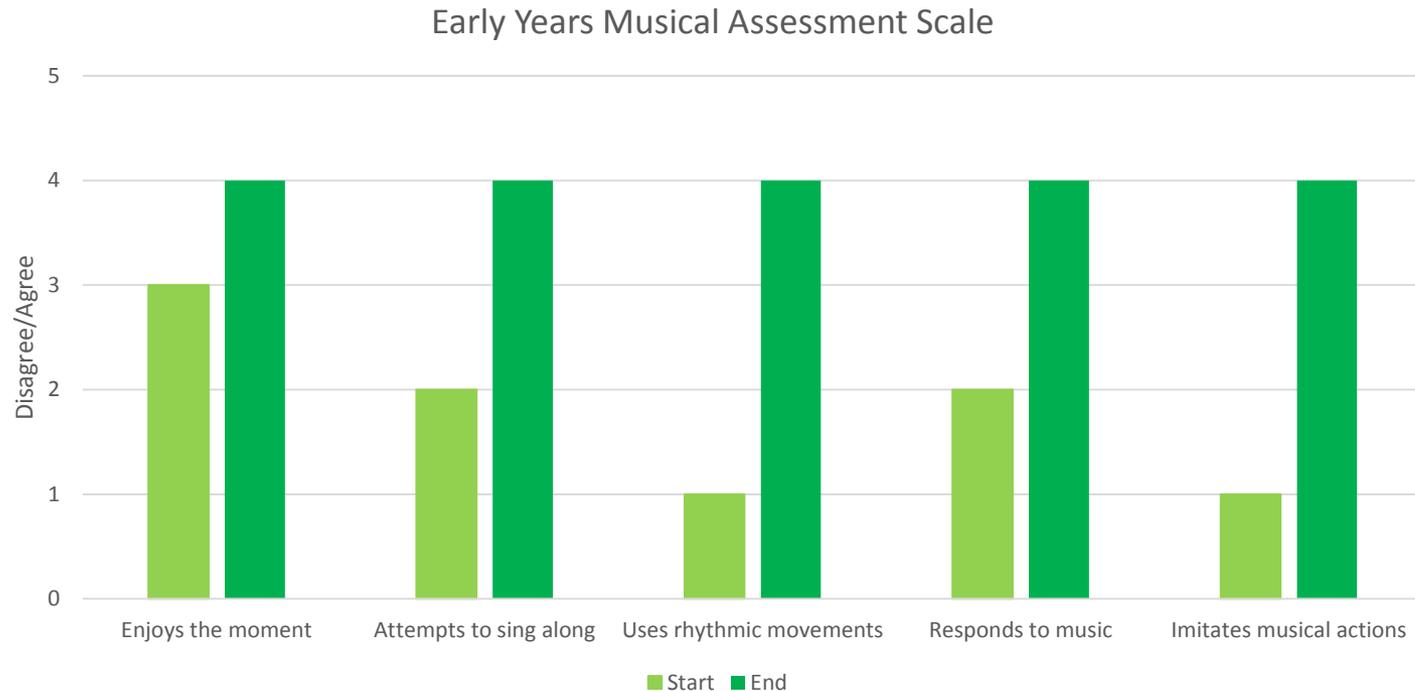
Have we done that?

By inviting parents to become learners themselves we hope that they will use the experience to transmit positive attitudes and new knowledge to their children, just like we as educators do. We hope we have given them a taste of how powerful their interactions can be. We believe that music enables children to build their learning power by:

- developing their self confidence
- satisfying their innate desire to be competent
- promoting their sense of curiosity and the exploratory skills they need to act on and find out about the world
- interacting positively with others
- experiencing the feeling of well being that comes through learning a new skill.

We want our parents to believe that too because when parents and educators work together children learn at a higher level. There is still work to be done here. We need to offer parents plenty of opportunities to be an integral part of the learning experience so that they can continue to transmit their new knowledge and positive attitudes.

Children's Data



The practitioners assessed the children at the beginning and end of the project
1 = strongly disagree 5 = strongly agree

The greatest shift appears to be in the use of rhythmic body movements with control and coordination, but there were benefits observed across all areas over the ten weeks of the project.

Practitioner's Data

At the end of the project:	
A greater understanding of childrens musical tastes	Agree
A greater understanding of music in children's home environments	Neither Agree/Disagree
Confidence to use music in the setting	Strongly Agree
Increased musical	Agree
Better at music observations	Agree
More likely to add music into planning	Agree
More likely to attend music training	Strongly Agree

The practitioners thought about their own development over the course of the project.

There was strong correlation between a building of confidence as well as comments made about a strengthening of the team. This data fulfils all the aims of the project and also goes further in building capital within the team too.

Practitioner Voice

We have come together as a team, shared a sense of achievement, grown in confidence and we have a new identity.

We have all become more confident in using the ukuleles- they are part of our circle times now.

Some children are more confident to use their language.

More parental involvement, they are sharing learning together.

We learnt as a team, it made me feel our team became very strong.

Musician's comments

I work right in the moment. I play with children, responding to what they are interested in: I trust my instincts about what feels right to do - when to sing with them, when to simply watch and appreciate, when to be silly, when to join in and sing about what they are doing, when to introduce a different song, when to make a suggestion, when to be silent. I believe that the aims of all the well thought out developmental goals and targets will be best met by meeting children in their experience, validating, encouraging and joining in with their world, which for me is through music.

What was new for me in this project was realising the value of practitioners learning instrumental skills around the children, and seeing for the first time a setting where music has become a natural and joyous thing for the staff. My parting memory as I left for the last time was seeing a practitioner in the garden singing with her ukulele to a child on the climbing frame, her head touching his as she sang what he wanted.

I also have a tool kit of songs and instrumental skills to share, and the willingness to sing whatever comes into my head about what's happening, to provide live improvised songs about the realness of this moment.

I bring a range of appropriate instruments. Some instruments can be used by children as a prop to support their singing or moving - holding a ukulele, singing through a bugle, or using a beater as a pretend microphone. Ukuleles allow children to control sound and develop motor skills. Melodicas require learning to blow and play a keyboard at the same time. Bugles require the perseverance to purse the lips tightly and blow into the mouthpiece. Egg shakers give failure-free success, drums enable instant feedback about pulse and loudness in relation to hand movements. Deskbells and glockenspiels allow exploration of high and low pitch.

Parent Voice

We borrowed a ukulele from school. We all had fun playing it and learning new songs. Mummy learned Wheels on the Bus and Daddy learned Twinkle Twinkle. We are looking at buying a ukulele so we can keep playing and practicing at home. He loves music and it's fun learning new things.

Conclusion

Music has the power to relax, invigorate, hold our attention and help us be creative. It is also an important way to join together a culture or group. This is certainly what happened in the 2 Year Old room at KWCC over the course of the project and showed practitioners that they could build their own social and creative capital. This in turn helped them think how to extend this capital to the children and the families. It also made them think that they needed ever better and more innovative ways to engage parents. The more that music is promoted and discussed, the more this becomes an underlying ethos that staff and families engage with.

“Each culture or cultural subgroup has its own beliefs and values which are reflected in differences between the practices that are used to socialize new members...into that particular group.” (Rogoff 2003)

The Ukulele Project made the team realise that music is as aspirational as any other area of learning, but to really have impact, this needs to be made explicit to everyone around the child. Certain types of music or making music should not be seen as for one group of people, and every child and adult needs to be seen as capable of becoming a music maker.

“We see that the social, cultural and emotional capital gained by the middle-class children due to their families resources...can be partially matched by schools for working-class children. This illustrates the important role that schools can play in bridging the cultural capital gap between the social classes and contributing to the social mobility of less well-off children.” (Siraj 2014)

The Ukulele Project certainly enabled us to build social and cultural capital and made us reflect on the part that music plays in learning and wellbeing for children and families.

