YOUTH MAKES MUSIC MAKES

**Engaging 'Hard-to-Reach' Parents in Early Years Music-making**

Commissioned by The National Foundation for Youth Music
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## Foreword

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### Introduction

Early Years music-making (for children aged 0 -5 years) has been a longstanding priority at the National Foundation for Youth Music, a charity dedicated to providing life-changing music-making opportunities to young people with least opportunity. Since our inception in 1999, many of the Early Years projects we support have reported difficulties in engaging parents, both in terms of attendance and participation.) We commissioned the Institute of Policy Studies in Education to undertake a study to identify effective approaches to engage 'hard to reach' parents in making music with their children. Its aims were to:

1. Increase understanding of the barriers that currently exist to prevent some parents from getting involved in Early Years music-making.

2. Investigate good practice that currently exists in the field.

3. Provide case studies, practical examples and tools to support organisations and practitioners to improve their practice.

The research comprised three strands of activity:

1. A comprehensive literature review, including academic and 'grey' literature and Youth Music evaluation material

2. Scoping exercise with eleven organisations, leading to four in-depth case studies that included perspectives from music leaders, strategic staff, stakeholders and parents,

3. Action research with three Youth Music-funded projects who were provided with tools to reflect on and evaluate their practice.

### Why Early Years?

Today Youth Music plays an important role as one of relatively few specialist funders of early years music-making. At any one time, around 15% of our funded projects focus on Early Years. Since the charity was founded we have amounted a growing body of evidence suggesting a number of positive outcomes arising from Early Years music-making projects, particularly in musical confidence and broader language and communication (Lonie, 2010:15; Lonie et al, 2012: pp. 37-43). Studies by other researchers report a number of further developmental outcomes for young children (See 'Early Years Evidence Review' Lonie, 2010: pp. 8-14 http://network.youthmusic.org.uk/sites/default/files/research/Early_years_evidence_review_2010.pdf ).

### The Early Years Music-making Landscape

The National Plan for Music Education focuses on provision for children from aged 5 to 19 (despite the recommendation in the Henley Review that the plan should provide a pathway right through from Early Years https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/music-education-in-england-a-review-by-darren-henley-for-the-department-for-education-and-the-department-for-culture-media-and-sport). More recently, while Early Years is referenced in the Government's Cultural Education policy paper (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cultural-education), it does not feature prominently, leading the Cultural Learning Alliance to call for greater 'exploration and recognition of the role of Early Years, youth and informal providers in this landscape' (http://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/CEP.aspx).

The simplified Early Years Foundation Stage, launched in March 2012, was well received by the sector for (amongst other things) the explicit inclusion of the 'expressive arts and design' area of learning. We would also argue that music-

making activity can achieve positive outcomes towards all the other areas of learning, including the primary areas of communication and language, physical development and personal, social and emotional development. That said, Early Years professionals and strategic managers may need support to understand the best ways that music can help achieve outcomes in the other areas of learning. The Youth Music Network (*http://network.youthmusic.org.uk/*) is our online platform which provides a growing number of resources relating to Early Years music-making, helping to meet this need. We recognise that Early Years settings might need focused and individualised support to embed a musical culture within their everyday practice beyond online resources, and many organisations are receiving this support through our funding programme (you can search for Youth Music-funded projects on the Youth Music Network: *http://network.youthmusic.org.uk/ near-you/projects*).

We know that there are a wide range of projects providing music-making for young children, employing a wide range of approaches and pedagogies. Most approaches advocate the importance of involving parents and/or carers in young children's music education, but those in the sector report a continuing reluctance on the part of some parents to get involved in music-making with their young children either within settings, or in the home. This research is therefore an important starting point in examining some of the issues and challenges faced in engaging parents, and we hope that it will spark debate and help us all to continue on our journey of improving practice in this area.

## Key findings from the research

### 'Hard to Reach'?

What is meant by 'hard to reach', and is it a valid term? The authors explore several definitions in

relation to the term (pp. 18-19), before positing the notion that perhaps professionals exploring this issue should be re-conceptualising 'hard to reach' not as the parents themselves but as the services and institutions who seek to serve them. Further to this, they argue that organisations need to explore their motives for wanting to engage parents in the activities they provide, as this will influence the means to engage them. In this respect, one of the key themes in the report is that practitioners or organisations can be guilty of applying a deficit model to 'hard to reach' parents - changing parents to 'fix' them - which might prevent service providers from having a conversation with parents on equal terms. (p. 22).

### The Voice of Parents

*The Hearing 'Hard to Reach'* Parents section of the report concluded that: *"music featured significantly in the family life of all those interviewed"* with parents saying that they enjoyed and valued music. *"Where music was a regular practice and everyday feature of home life, children readily engaged with it; and hence engaged with their parents. It was not a planned, structured learning activity, but inconspicuous cultural learning through doing." (pp. 56 – 68)*

The authors provide examples of 'everyday musicality' (children listening to music in the car, dancing with their parents, choosing songs or choice of radio station, singing spontaneously) that on the whole are linked to pop and other mainstream songs. This is in contrast to much Early Years music-making provision, which is more likely to feature nursery rhymes or traditional genres. The authors suggest that there are missed opportunities to capitalise on 'everyday musicality' within Early Years music-making provision, extending the musical environments that young children experience in the home. This begs the question: how can those who run music-making groups adapt these 'everyday' activities in a way that maximises engagement?

Other findings from the interviews with parents showed that cost and quality of provision are important factors influencing participation; as are the rigidity of structures and formality of sessions and programmes. In addition the make-up of the group and its dominant social class (where sessions viewed as principally middle class spaces led some mums to feel "despised" and "looked-down on" (p. 66)).

The notion of 'hard to reach' parents being isolated is also challenged. Many of the parents interviewed were active in informal networks organising activities for their children, for example at church or with groups of friends.

## Barriers and Effective Practice

A key finding of the research is that it takes time for the parents to get to know each other and the session leaders. A way of encouraging this interaction and make everyone feel more comfortable is to add sociable features such as 'chat' times, refreshment breaks etc. within projects (p. 10). Music leaders who are warm, respectful and rooted in the communities that they are serving are most likely to achieve engagement. The importance of longer rather than short-term interventions is highlighted at numerous points and is an overarching finding of the research.

The notion of class features very prominently within the report, particularly around the formation of middle class spaces within Early Years music-making settings. The authors highlight the fact that the cultural connotations of the most significant cohort of Early Years music leaders (white, middle class and often classically-trained) can be off-putting for some parents. Interviews with practitioners, project managers and parents themselves point to a 'colonisation' of Early Years music-making by middle-class parents (pp. 45 and 65). This can lead to the development of tacit rules within sessions around punctuality, active participation (of parents), and

regulation of children's behavior that can deter participation and attendance. These findings are significant because elsewhere in the report the importance of groups as communities is highlighted, creating a stable and inclusive environment "whereby the music leader can engage in a more personalised way with individuals and families" (p. 48).

Cultural awareness and understanding (or lack of) appears many times within the report, as there are many different cultural players involved in the process of Early Years music-making. As mentioned above, sessions can develop their own tacit rules and cultures that serve to exclude those who do not conform. For projects targeting specific groups of parents (as with the action research project targeting the Roma community) having a trusted member of the cultural community involved in the project can be a valuable asset for recruitment and planning.

As might be expected, the venue and timings of activities were key factors to participation. Familiar, non-threatening and neutral venues were felt to be important considerations when planning provision; as well as the timings (particularly for working mums and dads) and consistent scheduling. In addition to this, recruitment strategies and the way that sessions are marketed to parents is important (where information is placed, the accessibility of the information, the use of bridging relationships between service providers and communities such as parent champions, and inter-agency sharing to identify parents for targeted provision).

It would seem obvious that to support the engagement of 'hard to reach' parents you would consult with them about their needs, interests and preferences. Yet the authors found that "*insufficient opportunities are made available to consult families about their preferences*" and that "where families were persistently not engaged … there was little attempt to systematically ascertain

the reasons for this" (p. 10).

The skills and approach of the music leader are important factors in ensuring sessions are inclusive and engaging. The report suggests that there can sometimes be a disconnect between the motivations of Early Years settings in running music-making projects (who are likely to be primarily focused on engagement) and the music leaders who are employed to carry out the work (who may be naturally more motivated by music and musical progression and thus less patient with poor timekeeping, children roaming around during sessions and other aspects that might be viewed as disengagement). Interviews with parents showed an expectation on their behalf that music leaders should have an appreciation and experience of working with very young children (p. 64); one project provider suggested that a pronounced music specialism might alienate some parents (p. 37) and one music leader suggesting that artists "need to be willing to lose their 'expert persona' and place emphasis on co-construction, providing scaffolding and 'celebrating failure'" (p. 54).

On the other hand, Early Years practitioners, who are often also involved in musical delivery, are often seen to be lacking in confidence and skills in music-making – but while there is often specific training directed at these practitioners, the same is not always true for the musicians: "whilst there is some evidence … that Early Years professionals would benefit from additional training in music-making the need for music specialists to undertake training in Early Years and family support work remains unacknowledged" (p. 37)

## Conclusions and Implications

The research undertaken by the authors included observation and analysis of a range of Youth Music and non Youth Music-funded provision. Their findings have highlighted critical learning that is highly relevant to Youth Music

programmes. With a relatively small sample size, to what extent can we say that these findings reflect the whole picture? As part of our annual impact reporting we will look at the implications of these findings for both Youth Music and the wider sector.

While at times the report may appear critical of existing provision, there is little doubt of the positive intentions of the project managers, Early Years practitioners and Music Leaders delivering the work. We look forward to harnessing this generosity of spirit as we debate and move on in our practice, and we believe that honest reflection and shared learning will be key to this.

We hope that this research will spark lots of discussion. We plan to harness your views to build on the 'action research toolkit' developed as part of the project, providing a tool for practitioners and projects managers alike that will include helpful strategies, hints and tips based on your own experiences of working with young children and their parents. We look forward to working with you on this.

# Executive Summary

In 2010 Youth Music commissioned the Institute for Policy Studies in Education (at London Metropolitan University) to undertake a study aimed to identify effective approaches to engaging 'hard to reach' families in early years music-making.

## Research Objectives

The research had the following objectives:

1. to identify models of effective engagement in early years music-making with 'hard to reach' parents;

2. to establish what components of parent-child early years music-making could most effectively be replicated/disseminated and in which contexts to encourage greater participation; and

3. to track the implementation of these components and assess which are most successful at engaging 'hard to reach' parents in music-making.

## Methods

In order to meet these objectives the research had three main strands of enquiry:

- **Strand One:** a comprehensive review of literature;

- **Strand Two:** an investigation into effective practices in engaging 'hard to reach' parents; and

- **Strand Three:** action research to track the implementation of identified engagement strategies and to assess their effectiveness.

## Strand One

Firstly, an extensive review of the literature provided insights into the barriers to parental engagement in early years music-making. Published academic and grey literature on music-making with 'hard to reach' parents, including

Youth Music research and evaluation was drawn upon. Good practice was identified by drawing on literature and evidence of strategies used to reach parents in other types of non-music based programmes.

## Strand Two: Scoping Exercise & In-depth Case Studies

An essential aspect of this research was to gain an understanding of the current nature of parental engagement in early years music-making projects, levels of parental engagement and participation, challenges encountered by practitioners in engaging particular groups of parents; and effective strategies used to enhance the engagement of 'hard to reach' groups within early years music-making.  A scoping exercise of current and recently completed early years music-making projects achieved a broad coverage of the views and experiences of leaders, and added to the robustness of the evaluation by gathering information about other neighbouring services designed to engage families deemed 'hard-to-reach'.

Leaders of eleven Youth Music funded projects located across the regional areas identified by Youth Music were interviewed. The interviews assisted with the identification of interesting and/or good practice, as well as projects that are encountering challenges with particular groups, and informed the sampling of projects for the next stage of the study. In addition to the interviews with YM music leaders information about other related/parallel (non-Youth Music funded) services in the area and general approaches taken to engaging 'hard-to-reach' families (in the form of published/publically available material and through additional telephone interviews) was collected. Telephone interviews with Children's Centre managers or Local Authority Music Advisors provided strategic information about the range of provision available to families in the local area.

Materials and information about a range of services in a given area were systematically collected with the aim of mapping/scoping the strategies taken to better engage parents. Extensive internet searches helped to build a more comprehensive picture of the activities/ approaches taken in the chosen areas. Demographic data available via Local Authorities were included to ensure that the regions chosen offered diversity (so that various aspects of 'hard-to-reachness' were included in subsequent strands of the study).

## Case studies of parental engagement strategies in four areas

To complement the scoping exercise and gain a more in-depth understanding of parental engagement in early years music-making case studies was undertaken. They primarily focused on Youth Music funded projects in four different areas in England. Some included Children's Centres, but the range of early years music-making practices in these areas within (and outside formal, statutory provision) was included.

The literature review and the scoping exercise were used to select a sample of case study areas. The case studies provided evidence about the full range of early years music-making interventions and challenges to engaging parents. The scoping exercise and literature review allowed for the selection of areas that used successful or interesting interventions to engage 'hard to reach' parents as well as those which have experienced particular challenges. As parental groups that are 'hard to reach' vary from area to area, informed by the specific socio-economic, cultural and ethnic composition of particular localities, the sample included a range of urban, suburban and rural locations; and areas with different socio-economic and ethnic profiles.

Interviews were conducted with music leaders, strategic staff, stakeholders and parents; and observations of early years music-making

practices were undertaken in each case study area. Contextual data were also collected to provide richer insights into the case study areas, for example demographic data on the socio-economic and ethnic profiles of parents and children.

## Strand Three: Action Research

The final strand of research involved IPSE supporting a small number of Youth Music funded music-making projects to:

- reflect upon the approaches they currently adopt in engaging 'hard to reach' families;
- systematically assess the impact of altering their approaches to engaging 'hard to reach' families; and
- disseminate the findings from the action research exercise to other music-making projects.

Three, Youth Music funded, early years music-making projects were identified to participate. The projects were provided with an action research 'toolkit' to guide and enable effective assessment of approaches taken to engaging and supporting 'hard to reach' families. Since action research is intended to be iterative the projects were required to conduct an initial phase of self-evaluation to establish what practices and strategies they currently adopt in attempting to attract and engage 'hard to reach' families. Following this initial reconnaissance phase the projects were in a position to consider ways in which they might adjust their approach with 'hard to reach' families. Changes in approach and delivery were informed by the research-evidence generated in Strands One and Two of the research. By supporting projects to more systematically reflect on their approaches, important learning occurred within the projects.

## Findings

The study began by drawing on the literature to

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## Findings

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(re)consider the concept 'hard-to-reach' and allow for a shift in focus towards policy, organizational planning and service delivery rather than seeing 'problems' as residing in individuals or groups. The literature located early years music-making within wider parenting, child development and educational outcomes agendas. Therefore it is important to trouble the underlying motivations that various actors hold when wanting to engage parents in music-making. A series of probing questions were identified that might help to establish possible motives behind attempts to engage all parents:

- Why engage parents?

- Should 'hard to reach' parents become engaged in early-years music-making because they are 'deficient' and music-making represents a means of improving parenting/family life?

- Should diverse families become engaged in music-making simply because it is personally fulfilling?

- Is there a reciprocal agenda?

- Can music and music-making be enriched by a wider range of people becoming involved?

The answers to these questions are complex but create opportunities for organisations to reflect upon the policies informing their practices, and to understand practices that play out in local contexts.

## Effective Practices

Following attempts to trouble the concept 'hard to reach' a review of the literature highlighted a range of strategies and approaches that might assist EYMM providers ensure provision is more appealing to the widest range of families. The literature indicates a need for services to be attuned to the families that make up the local communities in which they are located, and further to resist making assumptions about groups and individuals and their perceived

'needs'. As Boag Munroe and Evangelou (2010) stress, services need to "build relationships of trust with families and with each other'. Such trust-building requires time and resources to ensure continuity of staff and provision.

Several overarching themes emerged from the literature about what works to engage parents; firstly, a focus on longer rather than short term interventions. Secondly, working holistically with sound inter-agency practices to support families is essential. Providing flexible and innovative delivery and considering how delivery models may exclude invisible or often overlooked groups of parents is an important issue. Boag Munroe and Evangelou (2010) state that the following key skills: communication, flexibility, adaptability, contextualised and community-based work, careful design of appropriate settings, and relationship building, should be developed in order that services can better reach and engage 'hard to reach' families.

Further to this, developing genuinely culturally inclusive provision is central to effectively addressing 'hard-to-reach-ness'. This is specifically relevant to excluded minority ethnic; religious, and linguistic groups but is also relevant to working-class groups who may feel excluded from provision, and indeed those with disabilities (physical, sensory or learning) who face wider discrimination or find services are inimical to their needs. Effectively engaging parents starts with raising awareness and interest but relies on working collaboratively with them, to deliver something parents and families want and value.

## Scoping Exercise

The scoping exercise revealed a set of overarching themes about the approaches taken to define and engage families deemed in some way 'hard to reach' in early years music-making. In general, approaches to assessing and monitoring the profile of families engaged in EYMM were inconsistent; projects appeared to

keep only partial information about attendance, retention and so on. Information about 'hard to reach' families in the context of EYMM was scant and hence discussions about strategies to reach and engage them were based upon impressionistic hunches and negative stereotypes about parenting/family life of particular groups.

The principles of interagency working outlined above (communication, flexibility, adaptability, contextualised and community-based work, careful design of appropriate settings, and relationship building) were identified as the best means to support 'hard to reach' families. However, policy shifts and funding restrictions meant that such practices were threatened and demands for more 'targeting' had significant implications for the approaches taken at local level.

The organisation and delivery of EYMM raised an important set of tensions in terms of interagency and partnership working. Children's Centres have an overt commitment to engaging specific groups and constructed EYMM as an important means of attracting families. This view of EYMM was not necessarily shared by music providers, particularly when music became constructed primarily as a 'hook' to other services, rather than appreciation of musicality for its own sake. Another key tension related to professionals feeling their respective expertise was devalued. Music specialists had little experience of working with very young children and some early years practitioners were viewed as lacking musical confidence.  Respective expertise and pedagogical approaches were rarely negotiated, instead professional hierarchies emerged that placed music providers as superior to early years practitioners- which has important implications for the nature, content and delivery of EYMM.

Rationales for engaging families in early years music-making included the likely therapeutic benefits; developmental gains; school-readiness; and improved parental confidence. The ways in which the various rationales were presented implicitly reinforced deficit assumptions about children within 'hard to reach' families – as in greater need of the benefits that EYMM can offer.

## Case Study Observations & Interviews

The in-depth qualitative research in EYMM projects in four case study areas highlighted a range of important factors that facilitate or hinder the engagement of 'hard to reach' families in EYMM. First was the important interrelationship between where a music session is located, the reputation it builds over time, and how this becomes valuable knowledge that can be fostered amongst a captive audience (i.e. those attending multiple services in one venue) or readily taken up by those seeking good quality services at little or no cost. Following this, locating EYMM in 'neutral territory' was central to attracting the widest range of families. Unlike Children's Centres, libraries and other 'community venues' were symbolically distanced from policy requirements to target, engage, monitor and regulate particular families.

A key factor to improve the chances of engagement in family services (including EYMM) is proactive and strategic outreach work. Families tend to be most receptive to invitations, referrals and encouragement from their peers (parent volunteers) rather than professionals.

Practical factors such as timing and scheduling were also vitally important. EYMM sessions become a routine part of 'mental diaries' that busy parents keep i.e. music group 10.30 at the library Mons & Weds; Swimming 2pm Tuesday; Rhyme Time 3pm Friday etc.

There was an identifiable disjuncture between those funding/facilitating provision and those delivering EYMM sessions. This is a recurring issue presented throughout the report about the

Children Centre agenda which constructs music as a 'hook' to reach families versus music specialists concerns for mastery, cultural enhancement and appreciation of the benefits of musicality. These competing agendas have important implications for how families view EYMM sessions and there is a need for improved synergy between family services and music specialists.

The targeted/universal provision debate was a central issue which has important repercussions for attendance at EYMM. Where attendance has a scent of coercion or compulsion levels of commitment to regular attendance and active participation can become adversely affected. Having been referred to EYMM families are implicitly identified as having 'a need' which can unwittingly stigmatise them and ultimately act as a deterrent to EYMM. This directly relates to questions presented above about the underlying motivations and agendas for wanting families to engage in EYMM.

Providers employ a range of strategies to make parents aware of EYMM, connect it to other family services, ensure universal (or targeted) access is variously negotiated which inevitably results in different outcomes and patterns of provision. It is for any given EYMM project to determine the principle objective (music education, social inclusion etc), the arrangements in place to engage and accommodate local families, and ultimately to recognise that reaching 'hard-to-reach' families will have implications for the nature of the EYMM delivered.

EYMM projects tend to (often unintentionally and despite best efforts) privilege normative (white, British, middle-class, heterosexual) practices through the choice of songs, unwritten behaviour codes and the judgements made of performances that sit outside ideas of normative parenting. Music leaders are likely to achieve engagement/participation when sessions are warm, respectful, and when the music leader is a recognisable member of the local community. However, where music leaders are 'parachuted in' they lack this connection. Furthermore, music leaders tend to be white, middle-class and often classically trained musicians for which the cultural connotations can be off putting.

EYMM sessions tend to be rigidly structured and highly regulated spaces with unwritten scripts, and implicit expectations for punctuality, active participation and adherence to unspoken rules. Where families appear to breach these conditions in some respect they become 'read' as less engaged. This interpretation is dependent upon preconceived notions and interpretations of particular (classed, cultural) behaviours. Through critical reflection and by troubling 'taken-for-granted' assumptions about EYMM and the engagement of families it is possible to interpret scenarios and behaviours differently and adjust provision accordingly and so avoid judging groups of parents against a middle-class norm.

Insufficient opportunities are made available to consult families about their preferences for EYMM. Professionals relied on intuition and professional wisdom (in some cases to great effect) but where 'hard to reach' families were persistently not engaged in EYMM there was little attempt to systematically ascertain the reasons for this.

The findings indicate that meaningful engagement evolves over time and is facilitated by the incorporation of sociable features (such as 'chat' times, refreshment breaks etc) within projects. The significance of supporting community relationships (and indeed the potential for EYMM projects to represent a 'micro-community') was stressed throughout the case study observations. However, there appears to be a staunch resistance to the creation of artificial communities, where families feel coerced or compelled to participate.

Those involved in EYMM have an awareness of the need to form relationships, provide scaffolding and so on yet complexities remain from the symbolic representations of music(ians) and the ways in which judgements about ('hard to reach') families are based upon (often unfounded) assumptions.

## Hearing from 'Hard to Reach' Families

Hard to reach' families employ a range of strategies to engage children in music-making or music related pursuits. Despite generally relaxed stances music featured significantly in the family life of all those interviewed. Music held important symbolic socio-cultural significance. Engaging with music was thought to contribute to the formation of particular identities, and to opportunities that might become available from finding an affinity with music (from life skills to self-discipline to social mobility).

For 'hard to reach' families the presence of music, and engagement with it, was routine and habitual rather than a discrete activity requiring dedicated practice. For working-class families music was inherently embedded in the daily practices of domestic life. Where music was an everyday practice and a regular feature of home life, children readily engaged with it; and hence engaged with their parents. It was not a planned, structured learning activity, but inconspicuous cultural learning-through-doing.

The construction of working-class parents leading 'chaotic' lives and middle-class mothers as 'shrewd and meticulously organised' was challenged. All parents recounted the inevitable chaos that comes with having young children; this was further compounded when families expand. Therefore attending formal early years sessions (music-making or otherwise) was a challenge they preferred not to negotiate.

This group of parents was deterred from attending EYMM because it is often too structured and incompatible with the competing demands on their time. The type of provision of greatest appeal to this group of parents tended to be flexible and informal.

Cost was as an important consideration and a particular barrier for those unemployed or on low-incomes. Related to cost was doubt over the quality of EYMM sessions. From prior experience, concerns were raised that music leaders lacked singing ability; over relied on traditional nursery rhymes; and provided insufficient instruments. Music leaders were expected to be competent, engaging and organised but also to have some appreciation and experience of working with very young children (the latter was found lacking).

The working-class mothers advocated popular music to teach young children about society. Cultural learning through popular music does not preclude opportunities to acquire cognitive development associated with more traditional genres (repetition, word/letter recognition, etc). For these families popular music was not regarded as a replacement to traditional pre-school music; it was viewed as complimentary.

Policy imperatives to reach and engage these sorts of families rest upon assumptions that there is a need to stimulate them through formal music-making, however there was a general view that provision was not stimulating enough. This finding raises important questions about the symbolic cultural representations (and perceived superiority) of some forms of musical engagement (EYMM) over others (that which occurs habitually within the domestic sphere).

Findings from 'hard to reach' parents further supports claims made in the literature and in previous chapters, that formal EYMM can represent judgemental, White, middle-class, heterosexual, normative spaces.

Non- or sporadic attendance at EYMM does not necessarily denote social exclusion or

marginalisation. The musical activities of 'hard to reach' families are invisible in policy terms yet parents are often engaged with their children in music-making at home, with friends and outside formal EYMM settings.

## Action Research

The Action Research strand of the study remains a work in progress since the three participating projects are involved in on-going revisions to their practice with families deemed 'hard to reach' in the local context. However, the preliminary findings appear to indicate that the paying attention to the issues highlighted above can make an important difference to the nature and level of engagement of specific groups of parents.

The close critical reflection that the Action Research EYMM projects undertook reinforced the findings that engaging families deemed 'hard to reach' is both challenging and time consuming. Establishing and sustaining relationships is key to more effective practice but means of achieving it rests on strategic planning and attention to detail in the minutiae of EYMM sessions. For example, the ways in which parents are addressed is vitally important and so too is the use of technology. Making use of interactive whiteboards and the production of a book and video were some of the strategies employed to ensure that parents can review a project, celebrate achievement, and discuss the value of EYMM for their children's learning.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

This report sets out the findings from research undertaken by London Metropolitan University, on behalf of Youth Music, to explore the approaches taken by music providers to engage families conceptualised as in some way 'hard to reach'. In 2011 Youth Music commissioned the Institute for Policy Studies in Education (IPSE) to carry out a mixed-method study to further understandings of, and identify effective strategies to engage, families conceptualised as 'hard to reach' in early years music-making.

The early years has been a strategic focus for Youth Music since its establishment in 1999 which has resulted in various programmes targeted at very young children and their families. Youth Music has long recognised the well-documented benefits that music-making can have for children from birth to five years (Henderson & Coker, 1999a, 1999b). During their early years young children experience important and unparalleled physical, cognitive, emotional and social developments; which can be supported and enhanced through music in multiple ways.

This on-going commitment to music-making in the early years remains central to Youth Music's work, however the significant structural and policy changes that have occurred in the respective fields of music education and early childhood education and care have necessitated reflection on how best to organise and deliver provision to young children and their families. In 2010 Youth Music undertook a systematic review of the evidence pertaining to the multiple benefits that are possible through early exposure to music-making (Lonie, 2010). The review highlighted some important findings in relation to the gains that can be experienced by young children from engagement in early years music-making (increased confidence, to improved language skills and so on). The importance of

parental involvement was stressed and potential gains for local communities were also referred to. The review also usefully highlighted a series of tensions and gaps which the research reported here sought to address.

This study endeavoured to broadly map the range of provision available to families deemed in some respect 'hard to reach' and the deliberate strategies employed by music education providers and/or early childhood education and care providers. Further the research took as its focus the effectiveness of those strategies through in-depth case study observations and interviews with families (including those deemed 'hard to reach').

The review (Lonie, 2010) also identified a lack of integration between academic studies and project evaluations and the need for music projects to more effectively collect, analyse and report reliable evidence about effectiveness to reach and engage the widest range of families. This study sought to address this through assisting a small sample of projects to undertake more systematic and rigorous approaches to critical self evaluation. An Action Research Toolkit was produced as part of the research to facilitate rigorous and transparent self evaluation. Youth Music has provided access to the resource via its website so that more early years music-making projects can consider issues such as accessibility and relevance through systematically and critically reflecting on its provision. This report is intended to further support Youth Music, and the projects it funds, to discern how best to engage and meet the needs of all families through early years music-making.

Following this introduction the report is organised into eight broad chapters. Chapter two provides a detailed account of the methodology employed throughout the four discrete but iterative strands of the study: literature review; scoping exercise; case studies; and action research with music

providers.

Given the ambiguity inherent within the concept 'hard to reach' chapter three is devoted to contextualising the concept, debating the unintentional effects of deploying such labels, and instead arguing for a reconceptualisation that places attention more firmly on the perceived relevance and appeal of early years music-making provision.

Chapter four then presents a thematic review of research evidence about best/good practice in terms of tailoring services, reaching and engaging families.

Chapter five presents findings from the national scoping exercise to provide an overview of the features generally associated with effectively engaging 'hard to reach' families in early years music-making. The chapter also highlights some tensions to emerge when music specialists and early years professionals are brought together to co-ordinate/deliver EYMM, including the views held about the value and purpose of EYMM for families deemed in some way 'hard to reach'.

In chapter six findings from the in-depth case study observations are reported. The chapter provides a detailed description of the four case study areas and the projects that were observed. The remainder of the chapter is organised thematically to present an account of the practices and issues that contribute to effectively engaging 'hard to reach' families. Throughout attention is drawn to nuance and tension so that important messages about effective as well as problematic strategies of engagement can be considered.

The accounts of parents not currently engaged in EYMM are presented in chapter seven. The views of a small sample of 'hard to reach' families highlight the factors that dissuade them from participating in formal music-making. The chapter usefully dispels some common misconceptions

about 'hard to reach' families and stresses the central place of music in the daily domestic lives of families assumed to be disinterested in early years music-making.

Findings from the Action Research element of the study are reported in chapter eight. An overview of the participating projects is provided and an introduction to the approaches to critical reflection and attempts to revise the approaches taken to engage families is also offered.

In conclusion, chapter nine offers a brief synthesis and overview of the main findings from the study and a series of recommendations that EYMM projects might want to consider when seeking to understand the reasons some families do not participate and the strategies that might be employed to ensure greater appeal and hence engagement.

# Chapter 2: Research Design

## Research Aims

The overarching aim of the research was to identify effective ways of engaging parents in music-making with their early years children, with a particular focus on those who are less likely to appreciate the value of music-making or are not accessing existing provision.

It was specifically intended that the research would build on the established literature with a practical focus on what methods and models are most effective at encouraging musical participation amongst 'hard to reach' parents and their children.

## Research Objectives

- Identify models of effective engagement in early years music-making with 'hard to reach' parents;

- Establish what components of parent-child early years music-making could most effectively be replicated and disseminated and in which contexts to encourage greater participation; and

- Track the implementation of these components and assess which are most successful at engaging 'hard to reach' parents in music-making.

## Methodology

The study comprised three broad strands of investigation using a mixed-methods approach to meet the stated aims and objectives. The first strand involved a comprehensive review of the literature; the second investigated examples of effective practices used to engage 'hard to reach' parents through a scoping exercise and in-depth case studies. The final strand involved providing support to identified music providers in a process of action research to better inform practices employed for engaging 'hard-to-reach' families in early years music-making. This section provides

detail about each strand.

The study was designed to be iterative, so that each strand would inform the next thereby culminating in a series of key insights designed to inform both policy and practice around understanding the barriers to engagement and ways to learn from, and improve music-making provision available to all families.

## Literature Review

In order to establish what is already known about the barriers to parental engagement in early years music-making a comprehensive review of various bodies of literature was undertaken including policy oriented publications; academic journal papers (covering the areas of music education, sociology of education, inclusive education); research reports; internet resources; grey literature (that not readily available in the public domain); and literature available from 'experts' in the field.

Given the aims of the research, it was important to establish a conceptual understanding of precisely what the term 'hard to reach' means. It is a highly politicized term, readily employed in the academic literature, in policy discourse and amongst practitioners working directly with families. Yet there is little consensus about precisely who falls into the category or the effects of being defined in these terms. Therefore considerable space is devoted to establishing a reconceptualization of 'hard to reach' to avoid deficit notions of particular families and instead reach an understanding which places the emphasis on service reform.

The literature review also enabled the identification of a series of 'good/effective practices' that family services can adopt to better identify the interests of families and engage parents in early years music-making. The literature review usefully informed the approach taken in the second strand of the study.

## Scoping Exercise

Strand two comprised two empirical investigations. Firstly, a scoping/mapping exercise of current/recently completed Youth Music funded projects to establish broad insights into the range of approaches taken to engage families deemed 'hard to reach'. This exercise involved interviews with leaders of eleven Youth Music funded projects from across the regional areas [1]. In addition, telephone interviews were undertaken with strategic staff at a range of music charities, heads of music services and music advisors within/across Local Authorities; independent music/arts project co-ordinators and staff at Children Centres including managers and parent involvement officers. In total 25 interviews were undertaken across the 11 regions. Materials and information about the range of related services in the area surrounding the Youth Music funded projects was also collected. Additional sources of general information were also collated for the areas in which projects were located including census data, Children & Young People Plans 2010-2014; National Indices of Deprivation including Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) data; and further information from focused web searches of the local areas.  The data from this exercise were intended to provide some indication of the services available to families, the current nature and levels of parental engagement; challenges encountered by practitioners in their attempts to engage specific groups; and effective strategies that are used to ensure engagement.

## Case Studies

The literature review and scoping exercise usefully informed the selection of four case study areas. The case studies were identified through the scoping exercise and were ultimately chosen on the basis that effective or innovative approaches to reaching and engaging a wide range of families (including notoriously 'hard to reach') were routinely employed.  Further, the

case studies were selected to ensure that a range of groups deemed 'hard to reach' were included in the empirical investigations e.g. teen mums; migrant families. A mix of urban, rural and suburban locations were included as well as more/recently established projects from across the regions. There was also a mix of Youth Music funded and non-Youth Music funded projects.

Within each case study a series of interviews and observations were undertaken. Interviews were typically carried out with the music leaders, Children Centre managers, venue managers (i.e. Head of Library Services), key Local Authority informants (i.e. Family Information Services). Observations of music sessions were conducted to capture data about the style, structure, delivery of sessions as well as evidence of parental dis/engagement and reactions to this; and the nature of various social interactions within the sessions were recorded. Following the sessions informal interviews with parents were conducted (16). Additional interviews with (12) parents from the catchment area of the provision (deemed in some way 'hard to reach') were conducted face-to-face and by telephone at a later point to ascertain levels of awareness, impressions of and reactions to the early years music-making provision available locally.  All research instruments used for strand two are appended at the end of this report.

Table 1 below provides an overview of the four case studies included in this phase of the study.

*Table 1: Case Study Profiles*

| Case Study | Region | Demographics | Funding | Venue | Est | Principal Lead | Aim of Project |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | London | Deprivation Cultural/ethnic diversity | Non-YM Children's Centre | Library | 2005 | Music Charity delivers | Accessible, high quality, culturally diverse music sessions |
| 2 | South East | Affluent county Pockets of deprivation Significant Polish & Asian communities | Non-YM Local Council Arts Fund | Children's Centre | 2011 | Partnership: Children's Centre recruits/ hosts & Music Education Charity deliver | Appreciation of 'world cultures' through range of activities incl. music sessions |
| 3 | North East | Deprived wards Principally White British population | YM-funded | Children's Centre | 2007 | Children's Centre recruits/ hosts & Music Specialists deliver | Engage teenage mums in family services |
| 4 | North West | Mid-range of IMD: pockets of affluence/ deprivation. Predominantly White British YM-funded | YM-funded | 3 settings: 2 Children's Centres, 1 local Music Centre | 2007 | Partnership between CCs & Music Specialists | Support parent-child interaction, bonding and confidence building – through relaxed, fun music sessions |

## Action Research

The final substantive element of the study involved supporting a small selection of Youth Music funded projects to undertake action research. The aim of strand three was to support the projects to reflect upon the approaches currently adopted to engaging families deemed 'hard to reach'; to systematically assess the impact of altering those approaches; and to disseminate the findings of their research to other projects. In conjunction with Youth Music three projects were identified to participate in this stage.

Table 2 below provides an overview of the three projects included in the Action Research stage of the study.

*Table 2: Action Research Profiles*

| Action Research Project | Region | Demographics | Venue | Est | Principal Lead | Aims of project |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | South East | | | 2012 | | Roma |
| 2 | London | Strategy to reach specific communities in identified areas of London | | Longstanding | Music Charity | Outreach |
| 3 | London | Pocket of Deprivation in affluent inner London Borough | | | | Disabled |

An 'Action Research Toolkit' was devised to guide the nominated projects through a methodical and cyclical process of self-reflection (see appendix). The toolkit encompassed a summary of the key findings from the literature review, scoping exercise and emergent themes from the case study investigations. This provided the projects with an 'at a glance' summary of effective current practices. In addition the toolkit posed a series of prompts to enable the identification of research questions, appropriate methodology, research instruments and other key issues to consider when undertaking action research (ethics, confidentiality, reporting back the findings and so on). The role of the university research team at this stage was principally Socratic (i.e. as a supportive, critical friend).

Following this chapter the report includes a presentation of the literature reviewed and further details about the empirical research and the themes to emerge from an analysis of the data.

# Chapter 3: (Re-) Conceptualising 'Hard to Reach'

This chapter (and the next) provide a review of relevant literature to contribute to a better understanding of 'hard to reach', and insights into examples of good practice in respect of reaching and engaging families. This chapter presents a conceptual debate, informed by the literature, to make better sense of the notion of 'hard-to-reach' and the implications of this for Youth Music. The next chapter moves on to identify examples of best/good practice in terms of tailoring services and in reaching and engaging families.

A wide range of literature was explored in order to inform understandings of engaging 'hard to reach' parents in early years music-making. The literature on engaging 'hard to reach' populations is included, but also literature on parental involvement/engagement; parenting; early years provision; and music education. Within these bodies of literature 'hard to reach' was specifically searched for; attention was also paid to the silences- where 'reach' was not fore-grounded. Literature on inclusive education was also reviewed as a means to explore the possibilities that early years music-making might be informed by this, in order to engage marginalized or excluded families. This search for literature involved drawing on literature the research team were familiar with; journal searches in key academic journals (for published material from the past five years); internet searches for policy and practice material related to 'hard to reach', parental engagement and early years music-making, including grey literature; and proactive requests from 'experts' in the field.

## Conceptualising 'Hard to Reach'

The term 'hard to reach' is employed inconsistently, and as Brackertz (2007) points out, it misleadingly implies some kind of homogeneity. The literature exposes the following disparate groups who have all, in one context or another, been identified as 'hard to reach': minority ethnic (religious and linguistic) groups (Carpentier & Lall, 2005; DCSF, undated; Wilkinson, Stöckl, Taggart, & Franks, 2009); travellers (DoH, 2002; Wilkinson, et al., 2009) refugees/asylum seekers(DoH, 2002; Wilkinson, et al., 2009); unemployed; those living in poverty (DCSF, undated; DoH, 2002); those with low or no educational qualifications; those with low levels of literacy (DCSF, undated); disabled people (learning, physical or sensory) (DCSF, undated; DoH, 2002; Wilkinson, et al., 2009); those suffering from mental illness (RBKC, 2006; Wilkinson, et al., 2009); drug or alcohol dependents (RBKC, 2006); those experiencing domestic violence (RBKC, 2006); those living in remote, rural areas (Jones & Newburn 2001); those in prison/in the criminal justice system (DoH, 2002; Wilkinson, et al., 2009); homeless (DoH, 2002); migrant workers (Wilkinson, et al., 2009). And specifically in terms of parental engagement: non-resident parents (Hollingworth et al., 2009); and fathers (RBKC, 2006).

In her insightful working paper 'Who is 'hard to reach' and Why?' Brackertz (2007) points out how 'hard to reach' can be used to refer to minority groups (such as minority ethnic groups, gays and lesbians); it can be used to refer to 'hidden populations', (groups of people who do not wish to be reached, such as illegal drug users, sex workers); while at other times it may refer to broader segments of the population (such as old or young people or those living in remote or rural areas) (Jones & Newburn 2001: vi cited in Brackertz, 2007). Wilkinson et al (2009) alternatively conceptualise 'hard to reach' into two groups: those who are not heard and those who do not want to be reached. Also, a study by NfER (2004) identified three broad definitions in use by service planners and providers: minority groups; those slipping through the net; and

service resistant.

Boag-Munroe & Evangelou (2010) point out that there are often complex and multiple reasons for parents being 'hard to reach,' stressing that it is unusual for barriers to exist in isolation, rather 'some families have multiple problems and complex needs.' Further, within this, there are degrees of 'hard-to-reachness': those facing one issue; will be easier to engage than parents facing multiple issues, or with multiple reasons for non-engagement.

Further, Landy and Menna (2006) argue that there are six stages to the engagement of families: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance and termination. Therefore, in order for parents to engage, they must first be aware that a service exists; but further, they must consider the relevance and mentally prepare themselves. All of this before participation; then the issue of maintaining an interest manifests. Landy and Menna (2006) argue that the first three stages of this are perhaps the most challenging for services, however, all stages must be seriously considered, as each stage represents a set of profound challenges.

Fundamental to this study though is the question: why should efforts be made to engage families defined 'hard to reach'? Posing this question reveals a set of tensions at the level of politics, policy formation, organisational planning and service delivery. The review of the literature explores some of these tensions so that alternative ways to conceptualise the notion of 'hard to reach' might be considered.

## The Policy Context of Engaging "Hard to Reach' Parent

The activity of engaging 'hard to reach' parents, in the UK at least, originates under the New Labour government, where policies aimed at intervention and prevention (as opposed to policies that are more remedial) took a particular

new shape in the context of families with young children. The idea was to invest heavily in improving the experiences and support for the most disadvantaged families in order to improve life chances. The solution was to invest heavily in the early years and education more generally, to improve outcomes and opportunities for people later in life. This has been grounded in a steady stream of (predominantly cognitive-behavioural) research which has pointed towards the importance of the early years from pre-birth to five, to later outcomes (most notably Feinstein, 2003; Feinstein, Hearn, Renton, Abrahams, & MacLeod, 2007; and see Field, 2010; Marmot, 2010 for review of this literature) and hence the importance of parents; parenting (see Hollingworth & Osgood, 2007 for a review) and parental involvement in early child development and education (Desforges, 2003). Underpinning the term 'hard to reach', is a notion that those families deemed by policy makers to be socially deprived, must be assisted to access social, cultural, and economic capital which will lift them out of deprivation (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2010)

Such conceptualisations of 'hard-to-reachness' were enshrined in Every Child Matters, which has underpinned significant expansion of early years education and care, but also other measures to improve the experiences of parents, such as extension of parental leave, increased family support through the development of Sure Start Children's Centres and fiscal measures designed to support families with children. The Sure Start programme was at the heart of this, initially a targeted approach to parents living in certain areas of 'deprivation' including a one stop shop for parents in terms of the health, welfare and education of families with young children. The Marmot review (2010) claims:

*This activity represents a revolution in early years provision and parenting support and, although it takes time to measure the*

*outcomes of early years interventions, evidence is now emerging that these policies are making an impact'.fn 256*

Throughout the 2000s under New Labour, statutory services for families with young children received massive investment and achieved many of the government's stated objectives; with a steadily expanding workforce which provided these services and actively encouraged families to use them.  It is within this context that the notion of the 'hard to reach' family emerged; where it was recognised that some families would be easier to engage in statutory services than others. An explanation of 'hard-to-reach'-ness is given by NESS (2005:170 cited in Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2010) writing in the context of the Sure Start programme:

*A group of parents for whom the [Sure Start] programme knew they would have to make more purposive and or consistent effort to reach, a task complicated by the fact that it was difficult for them to be specific about who is hard to reach. By definition these groups are hard to define.*

Thus the very fact that there was an imperative to actively seek and reach families meant that there was a need to determine which families might be harder to reach than others.

A recent review of the literature found mention of 'hard to reach' parents in a variety of contexts from social work; education; early years provision; to health and criminal justice, generally acknowledging the fact that there are people with significant needs who, for various reasons, do not make use of the support offered to them by statutory agencies (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2010). Other synonyms used by statutory agencies to  describe the  'hard to reach' include: hidden populations, vulnerable, under-served, fragile families, socially excluded, disengaged, marginalised, non-(or reluctant)-user, high risk, at risk, families with multiple or complex needs,

minority groups, minority ethnic, ethnic communities, and less likely to access services.

Essentially, 'hard to reach' groups are in many ways defined by their minority, marginal, or excluded position so they are 'hard to reach' because they are peripheral, not mainstream. Many of these terms also invoke a notion of deficiency (fragile, vulnerable, complex needs, at risk). There is an underlying conceptualisation of the poor- as 'socially excluded.' This concept of 'poverty' goes beyond a lack of material resources to conceptualise exclusion as social, cultural and political as well as economic (Walker and Walker 1997 cited in Byrne, 2005 ). However, other authors have stressed that social exclusion is a process (of systematic deprivation). It is not a state but a 'process which creates a cumulative set of circumstances,' (Jon, 2005) . Regardless of  definition, there appears to be a presupposition in policy discourses that most families want to be reached and included (Boag-Munroe & Evangelou, 2010).

## Engagement as Remedy

Critics have problematised the policy drive to engage 'hard to reach' parents by highlighting a tension between engaging the 'hard to reach' as a remedial strategy and engaging the 'hard to reach' in order to have more inclusive democratic institutions, provision and communities.

In terms of formal education, the 'hard to reach' are explicitly understood as those parents who have less involvement with the school, appear to have less involvement with their children's education, and, crucially, their children are underperforming (Carpentier & Lall, 2005).  For children who are doing well there is no need for the school to expend resources 'reaching' their parents. Often inherent in the act of reaching the 'hard to reach' is the implication that there is a problem that must be addressed, and parents must be engaged in order to adequately fix the perceived problem. This deficit model sees the

problem as residing within the parents or families themselves, rather than as systemic (see Archer, Hollingworth, & Mendick, 2010; Colley & Hodkinson, 2001; Gerwirtz, 2001; Whitty, 2001).

Some authors have argued that a fundamental paradox in New Labour policy is that 'remedial' work focused on the poor, is misrepresented as 'active democracy', in which services are trying to be 'universal' (thus avoiding stigma) but are simultaneously 'targeted' (to make sure those who need 'fixing' or improving are reached). For example, the Healthy Child Programme (2009:10) uses the phrase 'an increased focus on the vulnerable children and families, underpinned by a model of progressive universalism'. Despite this drive, focus and targeted approach, there is some suggestion that such services are still not reaching those most needy families (Marmot, 2010). An explanation for this might be found in the deficit approach which stigmatizes some families.

There is a danger that recommendations to the coalition government in the Field Review (2010) will serve to further alienate 'hard to reach' parents. The review fails to engage with recognised limitations of simultaneously universal and targeted approaches, and instead recommends continuing this approach with Sure Start and Children's Centres. Field (2010) proposes intensifying a targeted approach, to 'pool, data and track' parents who are not 'engaged', and use health visitors to collect personal information on 'parenting capability' and so on to lever (non-compliant) parents into provision. This represents a potentially backward step and has implications for further repelling 'hard to reach,' by introducing measures of judgment and surveillance.

## Reconceptualising 'Hard to Reach'

It is a critique of this policy context which has led scholars to reconceptualise the issue, not as parents being 'hard to reach', but to understand

services and institutions as 'hard to reach' or exclusionary. This involves a shift in perspective from seeing families as the problem, to reflecting on how organisational settings and programmes may be alienating for some parents (Landy and Menna, 2006).

Some authors argue that services and provision, including schools, have a white, middle-class heteronormative bias, that can alienate parents who do not fit this model (Crozier, 2005; Crozier & Davies, 2007; Osgood, 2012; Reay, 1998; Richardson, 2005; Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 2006; Vincent, 2002; Vincent & Martin, 2005) In recent years this reconceptualisation has filtered down to the front line and terminology now more readily refers to 'excluded families' (Evangelou, Kate, & Sylva, 2008; Together for Children, 2009) and or 'priority' groups (RBKC, 2006; Together for Children, 2009). However, the fact that there are excluded families, and those who need to be 'targeted' or 'prioritised' reveals the persistent inequity in access to services, provision, and hence to outcomes. How 'hard to reach' families or parents are defined is not trivial: it has an impact on the strategies employed and their effectiveness.

## Engagement for Democratic Citizenship

With regard to music-making and music education it is necessary to pose a set of difficult questions to establish possible motives behind attempts to engage all parents:

- Why engage parents?

- Should 'hard to reach' parents become engaged in early-years music-making because they are 'deficient' and music-making represents a means of improving parenting/family life?

- Should diverse families become engaged in music-making simply because it is personally fulfilling?

- Is there a reciprocal agenda?

- Can music and music-making be enriched by a wider range of people becoming involved?

The answers to these questions are complex yet they make space for organisations to reflect upon the policies informing their practices, and to understand practices that play out in local contexts.

For example, El Sistema (a universal Venezuelan Music Education system) has risen in popularity in the UK, and while not enough is known about the way in which it was designed and implemented in Venezuela, when adopted here, embedded and aligned to the existing UK policy context, the 'fix it' motivation is palpable in much of the rhetoric. A 'universal' programme, about 'music for all'; becomes a vehicle by which to target and 'transform' the lives of 'children in the most disadvantaged communities.' [2] Its main function is seen to develop 'aspirations, self-esteem, concentration, creativity' and 'foster confidence, teamwork, pride and aspiration in the children taking part' [3] (all of which reinforces deficit notions). The programme is further charged with having a demonstrable impact on families and the wider community.  A Times article featuring Youth Music describes El Sistema as producing 'amazing social and musical results' [4]. A tension about purpose is exposed leading to further questioning of the motives behind engaging families in music-making.

Some researchers have argued that particularly in the case of education, rather than focusing on changing parents to fix them, an 'equitable dialogue' with parents is crucial (Walker & MacLure, 2005). An article in Futurelab's Vision magazine argues that in the policy drive to 'engage parents', there is a danger that schools could treat parental engagement as an expectation, rather than as opportunities to consider parental needs and identify ways to work more collaboratively [5].  For example, in respect of the Traveller community, a key 'hard to

reach' group, Pona (2007) argues:

*Stereotyped attitudes in society have been heightened by poorly constructed policies aimed at controlling and changing the Traveller's way of life rather than adapting provisions to reflect their needs and culture.*

The difference is one of bottom-up versus top-down, which has seen the reconceptualisation of 'hard to reach' into 'excluded' families. Through this process the onus is placed upon the institution to meet the needs, or not, of its users thereby actively including, or excluding them. However, this debate still fails to fully capture a democratic participatory motivation of engaging parents and families. It leaves unanswered the question: should providers endeavour to 'include' parents or should they merely provide a service that families want?

Vincent and Martin (2005:116) trouble the concept of 'parent as partner' discourse in relation to schools and education.  Analysing parental involvement schemes in education, they show how the expected role of the parent as partner has largely been passive and narrowly defined, for example as 'supporting', 'helping', as 'audience', 'volunteers' and 'supporters-from-a-distance'. 'Sharing', or 'negotiation'  are missing; and the notion of 'equitable dialogue' (Walker & MacLure, 2005) fails to find space.

Parents represent a fragmented group with numerous, often competing expectations and demands. By considering the power relations at play it becomes possible to better understand why some parents are more engaged than others (see Reay, 2005). It is important to understand the various ways in which some (often white, middle-class) parents are able to command advantage, colonise and commandeer services and provision (Phillips, 2005; Reay, 2005; Vincent & Martin, 2005) rather than focusing solely on the reasons other families might not be engaging.

Reay (2005) conducted research with mothers about their involvement with their children's schooling. She found that there were distinct differences in how parents from different social class backgrounds perceived their role, with working-class parents more likely to see the teacher as expert and see their role as supporting the school to educate their child, but with a sizeable number of middle-class parents perceiving themselves as compensating for school education; and even attempting to modify it (Reay, 2005). Further, Vincent and Martin (2005:132) argue 'parents already in a position of social advantage [use] their particularity to consolidate that advantage.' These issues are relevant to this study as the take-up of and engagement with early years music-making is also shaped by power asymmetries between provider/teacher and parent. For example, Young and Glover (1998:6) recommend:

*Holding conversations with parents in which they can gather information enables teachers to begin to understand the range of children's previous experiences of music. On this foundation, they [the teacher] can build continuity of experience for the child to ensure that what is provided reflects and values the child's cultural background.*

In this process of teacher 'gathering information' from parents, all kinds of value judgments are made about family 'background' (Comber, 1998). This relies on teachers avoiding value judgments, on parents having positive relations with the teachers, which in turn rests upon parents feeling comfortable to share their knowledge with teachers (Reay, 2005).

## Chapter Summary

This chapter has mapped out the conceptual terrain surrounding the notion of 'hard to reach' and illustrated the processes at work at different levels (political, policy, service design, service delivery) which come to shape ideas about

particular groups of people. By drawing on the literature opportunities to reconsider the concept of 'hard-to-reach' becomes possible so that a shift in focus occurs towards organizational planning and service delivery rather than 'problems' residing in deficient individuals or groups.

Early years music-making sits within wider parenting, child development and educational outcomes agendas. However, the debates presented in this chapter in relation to a 'deficit model of engaging parents' should be considered when seeking to better understand 'hard-to-reach'-ness in early years music-making. Underlying motivations to engage parents in music-making should be fully interrogated and questions about perceived purpose raised.

In order to answer the question: *who is 'hard to reach' in early years music-making*? it is necessary to understand where parents encounter specific barriers to the music-making *itself*, or to engaging with their children more generally; but also where there are particular barriers to engaging in formal early years music-making provision. Family engagement in early years music-making in the home represents different issues and requires different tactics to those necessary to engage parents in formal early years music-making provision. The literature offers some important insights to make provision more inclusive.

# Chapter 4: Identifying Good Practice

In this chapter research evidence and literature on engaging 'hard to reach' parents is outlined, and the barriers identified, examining how they may be relevant when applied to engaging parents in early years music-making. Where available, evidence of good practice to overcome the various barriers is included. We make use of Boag-Munroe and Evangelou's (2010) review of published literature from 1990 to 2008 (in the UK, USA, Canada and Australia) on 'hard to reach' families which reflects the shift in perspective (from seeing parents as 'hard to reach' to seeing services as 'hard to reach') to identify a series of organisational barriers to parental engagement.

## Provision as 'Hard to Reach'

Boag-Munroe and Evangelou (2010) breakdown organisational barriers into two categories: communications and settings.

*Table 3: Organisational Barriers*

| Communications | Settings |
|---|---|
| Language | Lack of visibility within the community |
| Culture | Accidental exclusion of community resources |
| Literacy | Service too specialised |
| No access to phones | Inappropriate activities |
| Hearing impairment | Timing of activities |
| Service uses too much jargon | Long waiting lists |
| Difficulty in accessing information about project/ service | Unwelcoming setting |
| Difficulty in asking for help or articulating need | Inappropriate venue |
| Lack of common understandings across linked practitioners | Cleanliness of venue |
| Service not listening/not interested | Service seen as cliquey |
| | Stigma of being associated with setting |
| | Lack of effort by services |
| | Lack of consistency |
| | Lack of resources and/or funds |
| | Poor quality of service |
| | Lack of organization/infrastructure for outreach |
| | High staff turnover |
| | Programme location |
| | Allowing families to slip through the net |

The barriers outlined in Table 2 have been identified elsewhere within the literature though sometimes using different labels. We examine some of these pertinent organisational barriers in further detail in the remainder of this chapter.

## Language & Literacy

For some parents with English as an additional language or with low literacy skills, engagement may be inhibited when activities are delivered only in English or where there are expectations from practitioners that parents are literate (Avis, Bulman, and Leighton 2006; Harris and Goodall 2008 2009; Landy and Menna 2006; Wade and Moore 2003). These communication difficulties can create barriers between parents and early years staff. Such parents may find it difficult to understand the way that information is communicated to them and the expectations on them for participation in music-making activities with their child.

Staff should understand and work with the cultural needs of families (Tunstill et al. 2005). Using translators or bi-lingual practitioners may facilitate communication with 'fringe' parents (Temple, Young, and Bolton 2008). For example, Bookstart programmes (which seek to engage parents to share books with babies and children) use bilingual nursery nurses to cater for the needs of 'fringe' parents with literacy problems and also provide cassette tapes with verbal material and explanations available in other languages (Wade and Moore 2003).

## Jargon

There are other ways in which language can be a barrier. The use of jargon, unfamiliar concepts or esoteric language by practitioners, for example in relation to children's cognitive development, can alienate parents who do not feel they have the 'right' vocabulary to speak to practitioners or the appropriate level of knowledge to understand and thus engage in their child's learning

(Milbourne 2002; Avis, Bulman, and Leighton 2006; Landy and Menna 2006; Devaney 2008; PEPL 2007). In the context of early years music-making this has unique implications: the use of jargon by music leaders and early years practitioners (for example about particular musical styles) may repel some parents. Developing a shared language between parents and early years practitioners is critical. The literature suggests that practitioners should reflect on the kind of language used with children and parents in order to overcome some of these barriers and to make parental engagement less daunting (FPI 2009). Avoiding the use of specialist language in relation to musical styles or cognitive development can help to avoid alienating parents.

## Cultural (in-)appropriateness

Jon (2005) conceptualises social exclusion as both active and passive. This is useful to help explore the ways in which the exclusion of some families from services can be experienced actively as overt discrimination (such as bullying; name calling), but also passively, silently or in hidden ways (such as provision or content that bears no relevance). Literature on parental engagement highlights cultural insensitivity in settings can alienate parents when practitioners fail to recognise or value different cultural practices (for overview see Moran et al. 2004). In the context of music-making, some activities in direct delivery settings may not appear accessible or appealing to particular social-cultural groups (see Bond, 2002). Some parents may feel the music-making activities on offer to be middle-class and/or Western-centric. Research has demonstrated that children engage with a wide range of music in the home but this kind of music-making or engagement may not be validated within settings (Lamont, 2008; Lonie 2010; Young, 2008).

In their evaluation of the Music One-to-One project, Young, Street and Davies (2007) argue

that the content of group music sessions tends to be more attractive to middle-class, white, and often older mothers, demanding a public display of particular 'stylized playful behaviours'. By contrast, 'those who 'have most to gain' find such demands daunting' (2007: 257). They also suggest that some music practitioners who have training in music rather than early years education tend to place greater value on particular musical styles and genres (namely classical, traditional or esoteric genres) and much lower value on popular musical styles which tend to be preferred by parents. This can mean that everyday musical encounters between parents and children centred on familiar and popular music are devalued. The findings from this research support these claims (see chapters six, seven and eight for detailed examples and discussion).

Cultural differences also play a role, particularly where the musical practices and demands made by settings on parental engagement clash with cultural preferences and values. For example, in their evaluation of the Chamber Tot programme for three and four-year-olds in London, Young and Rowe (2009) found that parents from Muslim communities were more reticent to take part in movement based musical activities. While they did not interview parents Young and Rowe drew on their previous work to speculate that such groups of parents 'may have particular values concerning the nature of songs, [particularly the topic], dancing and instrumental music [percussion and blown instruments] that are appropriate for their children' which can have a bearing on how they engage in programme activities (2009:20).

Cultural appropriateness needs to be considered when planning and delivering early years music-making programmes. Practitioners should make a conscious effort to be inclusive of parents (FPI 2009). Services should consider the music styles, knowledge and behaviours that are privileged within music-making activities and how these may alienate parents. Young, Street and Davies (2007) suggest that services are more likely to engage parents in music-making when they use and give value to musical genres and practices that parents are most familiar with. Activities 'must be perceived as relevant, and as close to their own style of parenting, if parents were to accept and incorporate elements' (2007: 23). This may mean popular music or music that is based within particular ethnic or cultural communities. Again, the data collected from parents in this research further support the claims made by Young et al (2007) and are reported in detail in later chapters.

## Assumptions about Parenting

Services can be constrained by particular assumptions about parents. It has been argued that family and early years practitioners tend to (unwittingly) operate from a model of parenting that is associated with western, white, middle-class families (e.g. Palkovitz 1997 in Shears 2007; Crozier and Davies 2007; Robinson & Jones-Diaz 2006; Osgood 2012). This can result in inappropriate services (Zeanah, Stafford, and Zeanah 2005). Furthermore, the assumptions that practitioners have about parents, along with targeting criteria used within settings and informed by policies for engaging 'disadvantaged' parents, can lead to the use of negative constructions of parents (as 'disinterested' for example) which can impede engagement. Parents detect such labels leading to unease and suspicion at being singled out for special treatment (Willan 2007). Other research highlights barriers faced by fathers. For example Sanders et al (unknown year) conducted research into engaging fathers in Head Start (Early years, state funded) programmes in the USA and found that female staff were ambivalent about father's involvement and felt awkward about engaging with fathers because of the possibility of flirting or other behaviour being misread. Ghate, Shaw and

Hazel's (2000) research on fathers confirms this and they also suggest that services can reinforce gendered notions of parental responsibility for childcare as 'women's work' through the services and approaches offered. Kahn and Hewitt-Taylor's (2009) research with fathers found that some fathers associated their experiences of not feeling welcome within early years settings with wider societal views that deters fathering in the public sphere.

In music-making programmes, the background of practitioners involved in delivering sessions can have an impact on their assumptions about and relationship with, parents. For example, Young, Street and Davies (2007; see also Young 2007) found that freelance professionals delivering music-making tend to lack direct experience or knowledge of early years education and this was seen to lead to problems with how practitioners engaged with parents. For example, they found that practitioners did not always reflect on the different parenting styles and preferences which may inhibit parents from active participation. They also found that some practitioners 'communicate[d] in infant-directed speech throughout, even when addressing adults which could lead parents to feel patronised.

The literature points to a number of ways in which services can improve their practice in this area. Firstly, establishing respect for differences in parenting styles, and how these may affect parental engagement, is particularly important (Landy and Menna 2006; NESS 2005). Further recommendations include: achieving more diversity in staff including male practitioners and cultural/ethnic diversity to reflect the local community; staff training to encourage reflection on the diversity of parents and parenting styles among the communities they serve and on interpersonal communication skills which may alienate some groups; treating every parent as unique and avoiding stereotyping (Kahn 2005;

Early Home Learning Matters website; Shears 2007). Literature and examples of projects that have sought to engage fathers suggest targeting fathers through play or outdoor activities (see DfE 2010).

## Approaches to Learning

Some initiatives can operate as principally didactic, 'top down', and one directional so that parents are expected to take activities away from the session, rather than practitioners seeking to involve and build on existing familial practices (Music One-to-One, 2006, Carpentier and Lall, 2005 and see DCSF, 2009). This can alienate parents who may be unsure of what they should do with their child and may need more support from practitioners. The increasing professionalization of practitioners in the early years (Osgood, 2012) may inhibit parental engagement where parents may see workers as specialists and therefore 'sit back' rather than get involved in programme activities with their children (Willan, 2007).

## Timing

The timing of activities and programmes has a significant bearing upon which parents can engage. The tendency for settings to open in 'office hours' can create particular barriers for working parents (Avis, Bulman, and Leighton 2006; Coe et al. 2008; Korfmacher et al. 2008). This illuminates the conflicting struggles that settings may face in engaging a wide range of parents, where ensuring accessibility for one group can inhibit accessibility for another. For example, the National Evaluation of Sure Start (2005) found that working parents were denied access to many of the Sure Start centre services and that working parents expressed some reservations about the programme that 'revolved around provision for minority ethnic groups and the focus on the most deprived, making it difficult for working parents to use the service' (NESS 2005 in Willan, 2007: 24). The predominance of

an office hours culture can also mean that some parents who may not be immediately identified as 'hard to reach' (in policy terms at least) – namely middle class working parents – can also be excluded by organisational practices. Evaluations of music–based programmes have similarly found work and other commitments to be barriers to engaging parents (e.g. Young and Rowe 2009). Research suggests that work commitments prohibit fathers' involvement and engagement with young children's learning and early years development (Kahn 2005; Sanders et al unknown year; Lloyd et al 2003). A PEPL case study project aimed at engaging fathers through active play (DfE 2010c) found that many fathers could only attend weekend or evening sessions.

## Location & Venue

Settings can also be hard to access because of their location.  This is particularly pertinent for parents in rural areas where 'time, cost and transportation become barriers especially if parents are not reimbursed for transport or if transport is not funded by the local authority as for school-age children' (Willan 2007: 25). Location may also be an issue for parents with physical disabilities when programme settings do not have adequate access or are inappropriately designed (NESS 2005). A recent poll by IPSOS MORI for Creativity, Culture and Education (2009) found that transport problems and a lack of opportunities in the local area were key barriers to participation in cultural and creative activities for working-class parents.

More flexible and innovative approaches to delivering services and activities have thus been advocated to encourage participation (DfE 2010abc). Services should give "further consideration of how they might shift even further away from the office hours and central setting model of provision to meet the needs of those who are geographically isolated or who work during office hours" (Boag-Munroe and

Evangelou, 2010: 28). Recommendations for engaging fathers emphasise the importance of holding sessions to fit around fathers' work commitments, such as scheduling programmes at weekends (Kahn 2005). Services may think about providing transport for families in rural locations or without access to affordable transport (Coe et al. 2008). Examples of effective practice to encourage participation among parents and children unable to attend formal sessions include providing equipment that can be used at home such as musical instruments and other resource packs (Young and Rowe 2009).

## Promotion, Information, Awareness

Some parents may not engage in programmes or settings simply because they lack awareness (Avis, Bulman, and Leighton (2006); NESS 2005; PEPL 2007).  A lack of visibility of settings, programmes and activities and poor promotion of services hampers parental knowledge of the services available in their local area, thereby prohibiting participation (Timms et al 2010).

Where and how to advertise and publicise is important to ensure local communities are reached. This involves consideration for where information is available (such as GP surgeries, Children's Centers as well as other community venues) but also ensuring that this information is accessible, for example making it available in languages which are accessible to EAL parents (Osgood & James, 2006).

The use of parent ambassadors, outreach workers such as Homestart volunteers, and health visitors has also been used to raise awareness of services and encourage participation among certain communities (Osgood 2003, 2005, 2008 and Boag-Munroe and Evangelou 2010; Moore and Wade). For example, in a variation of the Bookstart scheme, project officers from the 'Babies Need Books' project in Birmingham attended a range of venues and services such as health centres, baby

clinics and parent-toddler groups where they gave parents information packs and gave informal presentations about the benefits of sharing books (Hall 2001). Lessons from the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) Project (2004) include involving parents as parent champions, from the communities served, who formed bridging relationships between service providers and communities (DfE 2010b). Parent Champions helped deliver sessions and received training in return. Recommendations to engage fathers include ensuring that publicity of activities is unambiguous and welcoming and not solely available to mothers (Kahn 2005).

## Welcome Settings & Workforce Diversity

The atmosphere and environment in which programmes are delivered can also facilitate or deter parental engagement (Barnes, McPherson, and Senior 2006; Landy and Menna 2006). The decoration and layout of settings can alienate some parents (Boag-Munroe and Georgeson (2008) particularly where cultural and ethnic diversity is not reflected.

Literature on engaging fathers illustrates some unique barriers that fathers encounter in early years settings. Work by Kahn for the DfES (2005) found that fathers were intimidated by the predominantly female nature of the settings. Predominantly female staff can mean that fathers feel uncomfortable and unable to participate. This is supported by other research (Sanders et al, unknown year; Lloyd et al 2003). In music-making, settings are highlighted as crucially important. For example, Bond's (2002) evaluation of the First Steps programme found that the culture of an early years setting is an important factor in determining whether parents were successfully involved.

Good practice guidance for Early Years Foundation Stage (Key Elements of Effective Practice (KEEP) provides a range of recommendations for how early years

practitioners can work together with parents as partners. Some of these recommendations relate to producing more inviting atmospheres for parents, including: displaying posters, pictures and other resources which show positive messages about disability and reflect cultural, ethnic and social diversity. It also suggests that settings display words from home languages used by children and invite parents to contribute to these, suggesting that seeing their languages reflected will encourage parental involvement (DfES 2005).

Recommendations have been made in the literature to develop a more diverse workforce as a way of producing more inclusive environments. For example, there have been calls to address the gender imbalance in the early years workforce by employing more male practitioners and encouraging more male volunteers so that fathers feel more relaxed, as well as providing gender-awareness training for practitioners (Kahn 2005). However addressing the 'female-centricity' of early years settings may be difficult and even when achieved, may not necessarily lead to more success in engaging parents. For example, some authors are critical of the idea of Black teachers as role models because it rests on the assumption that Black people are homogeneous; and that Black teachers will necessarily tackle issues of discrimination/have an antiracist approach to teaching (Carpentier & Lall, 2005; Hollingworth & Osgood, 2007; Jon, 2005). Ensuring gendered or cultural 'matching' can be tokenistic, reinforce stereotypes, and alone fails to improve the quality of the provision.

## Multi-Agency Working

While holistic approaches to working with parents are advocated in literature and policy discussions about engaging 'hard to reach', there is also evidence of the constraints to effective multi-agency working. For example, in her research on Sure Start in rural areas, Willan (2007) found that

practitioners found it difficult to identify and target parents who may be 'hard to reach' because of a lack of information-sharing between agencies that would allow them to target these groups. For example, data protection and confidentiality issues meant that practitioners relied on personal contacts and grapevine knowledge rather than utilise the valuable knowledge of other practitioners such as health visitors and outreach workers.

## Quality of Service

Boag-Munroe and Evangelou (2010) group together literature on a further set of organisational factors relating to the quality of services offered and how these can create barriers to engagement. This includes literature on a lack of effort to engage parents (Barnes, McPherson, and Senior 2006); inconsistency of service (Devaney 2008); a perceived lack of resources (Barnes, McPherson, and Senior 2006); poor quality of service (NESS 2005; Barnes, McPherson, and Senior 2006); a lack of organisational structures to support outreach work, and high staff turnover (Devaney 2008). More specifically, engaging parents may not be a priority among staff and thus not considered in project planning and delivery (Bond 2002). Bond (op cit) also found that some staff viewed parental involvement a burden or distraction rather than an asset.

## Other Considerations

Whilst wishing to avoid reinstating 'hard-to-reach'-ness as residing in individuals or groups of individuals we recognise that: 'families who are already isolated by factors over which they have limited control thus become further isolated because services are not making appropriate provision to overcome barriers to access' (Boag-Monroe & Evangelou, 2010:13). Below we provide details on some further barriers.

## Valid Musicality

Research has demonstrated that children engage with a wide range of music in the home but this kind of music-making or engagement may not be validated within settings and may mean parents do not see the educational value of what they do with children at home (Lamont, 2008; Lonie 2010; Young, 2008;). The IPSOS MORI poll for CCE (2009) illuminated variation in the value parents place on their children's participation in cultural and creative activities, including music, drama and visiting libraries. The poll found that both participation in creative and cultural activities, and parents views on the importance of such participation, varied by social class, educational level and ethnicity. Specifically, rates of cultural participation, and agreement that cultural participation is important were greatest among white, middle-class parents.

## Prior Educational Experiences

Some parents may feel alienated from services as the result of their own negative experiences of structured learning activities (Reay, 1998; Salford and Sullivan 2007). The Parents as Partners in Early Learning project (PEPL 2007) identified a poor experience of education among parents as a common barrier to parental participation in early years settings. Reporting on a review of current policy and practice across 150 local authorities in England, a key barrier identified was parental mistrust of education stemming from their own educational histories.

## Distrust of Services

Some parents also experience negative encounters with services and early years professionals (Milbourne 2002) which can result in parental mistrust about how they are viewed and judged contributing to a reluctance to engage (Bond 2002; Moran et al. 2004; Willan 2007; Landy and Menna 2006). Some parents also feel anxious about how their children will behave (Avis, Bulman, and Leighton 2006)

thereby deterring attendance.

Developing informal networks for parents to communicate and build relationships with others, and informal gatherings with practitioners, may help alleviate fears in this respect. Open and transparent relationships with staff are also advocated (Landy and Menna 2006). Parent champions may help bridge the relationship between parents and practitioners (Avis, Bulman, and Leighton 2006; see earlier ref). Community organisations which already engage these parents may also provide important integrating roles (Curtis et al. 2004).

## Prior Music-making Experiences

In relation to music, some parents will have encountered negative first-hand experiences of music-making themselves (see for example Bond, 2002) and therefore be resistant to engage. It is also important to acknowledge that what is recognised as formative 'music-making' will differ for families according to social and cultural background (Young, 2008). There is some evidence that the educational benefits of music-making tend to be emphasised by parents with higher educational levels or by more middle-class parents (Music One to One, 2006; Bond, 2002; Hollingworth et al, 2009). In her research on children's musical journeys, Margaret Barret (2009) suggests that sufficient financial resources to access music programs and parents' recollections of their own positive musical experiences are important (see also Custodero and Johnson-Green, 2003).

## Confidence

Perhaps because of negative experiences of education or music education specifically, parents may lack confidence to become involved in early years music-making. Cuckle's (1996) research on parental involvement in young children's literacy found that while many parents were competent at helping their children to read they lacked confidence that they were doing it

correctly. Bond's (2002) evaluation of the First Steps programme found parental self-consciousness in music and singing was a barrier to attracting and engaging parents, inhibiting their involvement. A lack of confidence in supporting children's learning more generally has also been identified across a range of areas (see Hollingworth et al 2009). For fathers, a lack of confidence may be accompanied by a reluctance to ask for help related to societal views about masculinity (Ghate, Shaw, and Hazel 2000).

Focus groups with parents conducted by Creativity, Culture and Education found such emotional barriers to parental engagement in cultural activities more generally (CCE 2009 in Timms et al 2010). A fear of the unknown was found among many parents who said they felt nervous about trying out new cultural activities with their children. This will be particularly pertinent therefore for those who did not have access to cultural experiences including learning and practicing music themselves in childhood.

Evaluations of early years programmes have variously shown how planned intervention can increase parental confidence in activities with their children and increase knowledge of their role as child-educator. However, this depends on engaging and reaching these parents in the first place. There is evidence to suggest that music can be a more inclusive and safer way to involve parents. For example, in their research on parental involvement in school-based creative activities, Safford and Sullivan (2007) argue that creative programmes (art, music etc) offer parents 'low risk' invitations which encourage engagement with their children's learning and the school because they can appear less daunting and formalised than supporting their children in with traditional subjects such as numeracy and literacy.

## Emotional Barriers

Stressful lives and emotional or mental health

issues may also be factors that prevent parents from engaging in provision outside of the home. The PEPL case study project on engaging fathers through active play (DfE 2010a,c) found that some fathers were not involved in local services due to a range of emotional issues including depression and a reluctance to leave the home and thus use provision outside of the home.

## 'Race' & Culture

Research on BME parents' involvement with their child's school education, has found BME parents (mothers') feelings about their relationship with the school largely characterised by distrust and betrayal (Crozier, 2005; Mirza & Reay, 2000; Vincent & Martin, 2005). Crozier presents research which suggests Black parents invest a considerable amount of 'emotional work' into their child's education, but this is met with racism; both in the ways in which their child is deemed less likely to do well in education; and in the assumption that Black parents, or Black homes are less supportive environments. Her research found Black parents having to put a lot more work and resources in to their child's education because the school is not supporting their child enough (because of these assumptions); managing racism and unfair treatment that their children (and they) face, where their children are often blamed or excluded wrongly, and they are positioned as problem 'pushy' Black parents; and simultaneously being ignored and humiliated. They were invisible (not given important information about their children) but at the same time subject to public scrutiny (named and shamed when their child does something wrong) (Crozier, 2005). Such experiences of compulsory provision for Black mothers could deter engagement with mainstream, extracurricular provision (including early years provision or music-making).

Further, it is important to consider the provision available within ethno-religio-cultural communities that may be separate, culturally or faith specific, such as Supplementary Schools (see Jon, 2005; Mirza & Reay, 2000); culturally focused community centres, faith schools, churches, mosques and so on. The presence of faith groups in providing informal music-making has implications for how services categorise 'hard to reach' groups in particular local communities.

## Cost

Those on a limited budget may not prioritise activities that represent a cost (for example requiring transport or childcare cover) or involve buying equipment (Early Home Learning Matters website). The IPSOS MORI poll for CCE (2009) found that socio-economic factors appear to act against more widespread participation in cultural activities: parents from groups DE were more likely to mention cost as a barrier to involvement in cultural activities than parents from group AB (49per cent compared to 30 per cent).

## Gendered Parenting

Some research examining fathers role in their young children's learning suggests that fathers may experience resistance from female partners who play a gate-keeping role which can prohibit their engagement (Ghate, Shaw, and Hazel 2000; Kahn 2005; Kahn and Hewitt Taylor 2009).

## Labelling

Some parents may be 'hard to reach' because they are invisible to services or isolate themselves because they fear being labelled as 'abnormal' or 'deviant'. This may include parents who are considered to live in ways that are considered in breach social norms (such as traveller and gypsy parents, sex workers, prisoner families or LGBT parents). They may choose not to engage in services because they fear the consequences for themselves or their children (such as being stigmatized), or because they perceive services to be insensitive to their needs, beliefs and values

(Boag-Munroe and Evangelou 2010). An holistic approach, to engaging these families has been advocated which is non-stigmatising, respectful and based on trust (Statham 2004). Coe et al. (2008) also suggest that services need to work together to reach such families, engaging the most 'hard to reach' through outreach programmes, parent ambassador (or champion) schemes or snowball (i.e. word of mouth) referrals.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter has highlighted the need for services to be attuned to the families that make up the local communities in which they are located, and further to resist making assumptions about groups and individuals and their perceived 'needs'. As Boag Munroe and Evangelou (2010) stress, services need to "build relationships of trust with families and with each other'. Such trust-building requires time and resources to ensure continuity of staff and provision.

Several overarching themes emerge from the literature about what works to engage parents; firstly, a focus on longer rather than short term interventions. Secondly, working holistically with sound interagency practices to support families is essential. Providing flexible and innovative delivery and considering how delivery models may exclude invisible or often overlooked groups of parents is an important issue. Boag Munroe and Evangelou (2010) state that the following key skills: communication, flexibility, adaptability, contextualised and community-based work, careful design of appropriate settings, and relationship building, should be developed in order that services can better reach and engage 'hard to reach' families.

Building on the conceptual debate presented in chapter three and taking account of the multiple factors outlined in this chapter, developing genuinely culturally inclusive provision is central to effectively addressing 'hard-to-reach-ness'.

This is specifically relevant to excluded minority ethnic; religious, and linguistic groups but is also relevant to working-class groups who may feel excluded from provision, and indeed those with disabilities (physical, sensory or learning) who face wider discrimination or find services are inimical to their needs. Effectively engaging parents starts with raising awareness and interest but relies on working collaboratively with them, to deliver something parents and families want and value.

# Chapter 5: From the Field

Following on from the review of literature outlined in the previous two chapters empirical fieldwork with a selection of music projects was undertaken through a national scoping exercise and through further in-depth case study investigation. The broad findings from the scoping exercise are presented in this chapter. The identity of specific projects and individual interviewees has been protected since the objective of the scoping exercise was to offer illustration of emergent themes and to highlight issues for further in-depth investigation in subsequent stages of the research.

## The Scoping Exercise

The scoping exercise involved interviews with a range of music providers and key strategic staff in early years and/or family support services from across the Youth Music defined regions of England. A snowballing method was employed to generate data about the range of early years music-making occurring in the surrounding areas, with the particular aim of identifying any projects thought to demonstrate effective practice with respect to family engagement. The exercise provided general insights into the broad range of programmes available in different localities across the country, the types and modes of delivery; and various approaches to working with families. In addition to this broad overview the scoping exercise enabled the identification of specific projects (both those funded by Youth Music and those by other sources) to include more in-depth investigation through four case studies.

The findings from the scoping exercise echoed the literature review in many respects however; it also highlighted a need to focus on a range of specific issues in subsequent stages of the research. Data from the scoping exercise were broadly aligned to other research identified in the literature (e.g. Wilkinson et al, 2009) that defines

'hard-to-reach' as including groups such as younger parents, those in poverty, those living in inaccessible locations; families with English as an additional language, fathers, and Travellers. However, it became apparent that there were inconsistent approaches to assessing and monitoring precisely which families were engaging with early years music-making. There appeared to be a general lack of systematic approaches; firstly to identifying which families were reluctant to participate, and secondly to compiling detailed records of the range of families attending and level of retention. Consequently many of the views expressed by the interviewees appeared to rest on impressionistic hunches rather than evidence about hard-to-reach families and hence the effectiveness of projects in this respect.

With this caveat in mind, interviewees nevertheless identified a range of features they felt effectively contributed to engaging 'hard-to-reach' families in early years music-making. These broadly fell under the following headings:

- accessibility (free/low cost; rooted in communities);
- partnership working and local knowledge;
- familiar content;
- consistent staffing;
- putting families at ease;
- involving/empowering parents;
- build trusting/long-term relationships;
- music as part of broader social experience.

Whilst these features were identified variously as the most effective means of reaching and engaging families deemed 'hard-to-reach' considerable time was spent describing the difficulties and tensions that exist to extending early years services to local families. The significance of shifts in government policy (to a more targeted approach); related changes to

funding arrangements; and general reduction in staffing of local services inevitably informed the views expressed by interviewees. The Sure Start/ Children's Centre Agenda of the late 1990s-2010 has seen a cultural shift in service planning and delivery, with an heightened emphasis on integrated services, attempts at greater cohesion and communication, and a willingness to refer families between services (DfES, Every Child Matters, 2003). However, the current funding restrictions and staff reductions were felt to play out in various negative ways; for example professionals retreated within their specialist field and focused energies on those with most acute need for which their specific service was there to address. For example, as an initiative Sure Start performed a vital outreach function, with chaperoning (through home visiting for example) an integral part of the programme (see Osgood 2003, 2005). However, escorting individual families to services and supporting them towards independent, active engagement represents a considerable workload and operational cost – which is unsustainable in the current economic climate.

As debated in chapter three the ways in which 'hard-to-reach' families are discursively constructed by the service providers can act to unwittingly reinforce deficit ideas. There was some evidence of this in the interview data collected as part of the scoping exercise. Music providers and those with responsibility for parental support made certain assumptions about 'hard to reach' families' and used language that pathologised them, for example: 'a lot of them (children in 'hard-to-reach' families) are stuck in front of a DVD and that's it'; 'they will live on a typical council estate, probably single parents with all the typical problems associated with that'; and 'Asian women are just more reserved – you can't push them too much'.

Conversely, when discussing engaged groups of parents the following sentiments were raised: 'Yummy Mummies have generally more confidence; they're prepared to give it a go' and 'Outreach work is important, you need to be empathetic and understanding; encourage them, you know 'posh parents can do it, you can too!'. These comments signal the ways in which service providers can (albeit unintentionally) homogenise socio-cultural groups and privilege middle-class ways of being.

## Uniting Professionals

Another key issue to emerge from interviews during the scoping exercise related to the challenges inherent with the partnership working between music specialists and family support professionals. It proved challenging through the course of the research to identify and reach key individuals within a region with responsibility for parent support, music-making and/or early years. This signals the potential for this particular sphere of provision to slip between the cracks of various services. The strategic location of music-making services varied considerably from region to region, whilst some came under the remit of the educational advisory service this was not always the case. Music advisors (where they could be found in the Local Authority structures) generally began careers in teaching or other music education capacities; whereas family support workers (working directly with 'hard-to-reach' families) had very different professional backgrounds (usually Social Work or Nursing). This reportedly presented challenges to Early Years Music Providers, as balancing the demands of engaging families and delivering music provision left them uncertain about identifying key individuals at the strategic level to assist them in accessing information about families in a given locality. As this Early Years Music Making provider stated:

*We need a more co-ordinated, strategic approach which identifies the areas*

*(geographic or otherwise) which are most 'hard-to-reach' and proactively targets them. At the moment it feels very patchy.*

Children's Centres were widely regarded to address some of this lack of (strategic) co-ordination. Government policy intended that Children's Centres would provide a hub within communities, offering a range of services to children and their families (Glass, 2005). However, with the recent shifts in terms of Children's Centre policy and funding there is considerable variation in terms of vision; leadership structure; location, range of services offered and the professionals employed. Despite this variation there remains a focus on integrating services and working with local families and as such Children's Centres represent an important means by which music providers can engage 'hard-to-reach' families.

Partnership working between music providers and early years services (such as Children's Centres) has mutual benefits. For the managers of centres, music-making sessions were considered an important means of attracting and actively engaging ('hard-to-reach') families in local services. Whilst there were mutual benefits to both parties there were also a range of tensions. Children's Centres have a core objective to engage families which was not necessarily shared by music providers. This is an issue that was more extensively explored in the in-depth case studies and fully reported on in chapter six – but an overview of the broad tensions is outlined below.

## Competing or Complementary Specialism?

An emergent theme from the scoping exercise related to professional specialism. There were apparent tensions about the degree of emphasis that should be placed on music or knowledge of early years/families within the planning and delivery of EYMM projects. One project provider believed that overt or pronounced music specialism could be alienating for some parents, a factor to ultimately inform the choice of music leader:

*Orchestras typically have that connotation of 'music leader as expert'; what we need to do is promote to parents that music education is not all like that…she [preferred music leader] said "if we can get mum singing a lullaby at night with her child" that is vital, her projects are focusing on making music inclusive and accessible.*

Some music specialists had little experience of delivering projects with very young children, conversely some early years practitioners were viewed as lacking confidence and skills in music-making, as this EYMM project leader stated: 'early years staff are rarely musically trained; and music staff lack the early years training'. Significantly, there was general consensus that it was early years practitioners that were most lacking, particularly in respect of confidence. Increasingly early years practitioners are expected to plan and deliver music-making with young children (and families) as part of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Whilst there is some evidence (Music Speaks) that early years professionals would benefit from additional training in music-making the need for music specialists to undertake training in early years and family support work remains unacknowledged.

There are also important distinctions between early years and music specialists in a pedagogical sense. EYMM projects described throughout the scoping exercise were highly structured and this was felt to be important in terms of family engagement. Yet the literature on 'free' play in early childhood could usefully challenge this dominant view. Planning for play is a key element in the EYFS and the freedom to behave spontaneously and for children to direct their learning through play has untold benefits (DCFS,

2008) yet this view is denied space in the music specialist discourse. Working to overcome the hierarchical constructions of professionalism (which places the music specialist above the early years specialist) alongside a recognition and negotiation of differences in pedagogical approaches could usefully inform the development of EYMM.

## Motivations for Engaging Families

Findings from the scoping exercise can be mapped onto the conceptual debate presented in chapter three, so that it becomes quite clear that the different actors in EYMM hold various, and sometimes competing views about the value and purpose of EYMM and reasons to attempt to engage families deemed 'hard to reach' . Four broad rationales amongst those interviewed as part of the scoping exercise were identified:

1. **Therapeutic**: to encourage bonding between parent (usually mother) and child;

2. **Developmental:** to enhance language and communication skills (parents' and children's);

3. **'School-readiness':** to prepare young children for institutional learning environments; and to regulate negative/promote acceptable behaviours;

4. **Parental confidence:** to enthuse parents in music-making so that they will continue at home.

Underpinning these rationales are implicit deficit assumptions that the children within 'hard-to-reach' families are less bonded to their mothers; behind in their development; less school ready; and less likely to engage in music-making at home when compared to the (white, middle-class) normative child. A discussion of the findings from interviews with 'hard to reach' parents in chapter seven provides a direct challenge to each of these deficit assumptions.

It is also interesting to note that the emphasis within these various rationales is squarely located in child outcomes. The parent (mother) is constructed as little more than facilitator to her child's acquisition of a certain set of skills, behaviours and dispositions. Yet the objective of engaging families in EYMM would indicate that there are benefits to parents as well as their children.

The social benefits to parents from engaging in EYMM were recognized by some interviewees (indeed for some projects it was the principal objective with the above list of child outcomes almost incidental). Yet one Music Leader described her intolerance of parents who treated music sessions primarily as social gatherings. This is an important tension, which became the focus of further exploration in the case study phase of this research. The engagement of any family, in any programme, is likely to involve an interweaving of a complex range of factors – one of which is likely to be sociality/ relationship building. Literature on understanding 'quality' in early childhood services (e.g. Dahlberg and Moss, 2005) highlights the diversity of perspectives of different stakeholders (including children, parents, music leaders, early years professionals, strategic managers) and the means by which different elements come to be constructed as more or less valuable dependent upon the power that different stakeholders have to shape provision. This is crucially important in the context of this research where the emergence of professional hierarchies and dominant discourses can be identified which privilege normative (middle-class) families and music specialists over 'hard-to-reach' families and early years professionals.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter has mapped a set of overarching themes about the approaches taken to define and engage families deemed in some way 'hard to reach' in early years music-making. In general approaches to assessing and monitoring the

profile of families engaged in EYMM were inconsistent; projects appeared to keep only partial information about attendance, retention and so on. Information about 'hard to reach' families in the context of EYMM was scant and hence discussions about strategies to reach and engage them were based upon impressionistic hunches and (unwittingly) reinforced negative stereotypes about parenting/family life of particular groups.

Interviewees were well versed and committed to the principles of interagency working as outlined in the previous chapter (communication, flexibility, adaptability, contextualised and community-based work, careful design of appropriate settings, and relationship building) as the best means to support 'hard to reach' families. However, policy shifts and funding restrictions meant that such practices were threatened and demands for 'targeted' approaches had significant implications for the approaches taken at local level.

The organisation and delivery of EYMM raised an important set of tensions in terms of interagency and partnership working. Children's Centres have an overt commitment to engaging specific groups and constructed EYMM as an important means of attracting families. This view of EYMM was not necessarily shared by music providers particularly when music became constructed primarily as vehicle for engagement in family services, rather than appreciation of musicality for its own sake. Another key tension emerged when respective specialism was devalued. Music specialists had little experience of working with very young children and some early years practitioners were viewed as lacking musical confidence. Respective expertise and pedagogical approaches were rarely negotiated instead professional hierarchies emerged that placed music providers as superior to early years practitioners- which as the next chapter

illustrates, has important implications for the nature, content and delivery of EYMM.

Rationales for engaging families in early years music-making included the likely therapeutic benefits; developmental gains; school-readiness; and improved parental confidence. The ways in which the various rationales were presented implicitly reinforced deficit assumptions about children within 'hard to reach' families – as in greater need of the benefits EYMM can offer.

The mapping exercise usefully informed the selection of four case study areas within which specific EYMM projects were identified for participation in in-depth qualitative investigation through observations and interviews. The issues and tensions outlined in this chapter are extended further and investigated in depth through an analysis of the data collected throughout the case studies in the next chapter.

# Chapter 6: The Case Studies

The four selected case studies included for in-depth qualitative investigation were identified as representing effective or innovative practice in engaging families categorised as 'hard to reach' in EYMM. This chapter begins by offering an overview of each case study area and the projects located within the area; then moves on to a thematic presentation of the findings so that issues and challenges as well as effective practices are identified and explored.

## The Areas & Projects

**Case Study One** is an urban inner London borough characterized by high levels of deprivation and a considerably mixed community in terms of cultural/ethnic identities. The ward within the borough which provided the focus of the investigation is the second most deprived in England with high levels of child poverty (44 per cent compared to the 21 per cent national average). 100 different languages are spoken; most common are Turkish, Yiddish, French, Gujarati, Bengali and Yoruba.

The principal EYMM project within the case study is well established (running for more than five years); and offers two regular weekly drop-in session to families with children under the age of five. The sessions take place in the library, are run by music specialists from a music education charity, and funded by a local Children's Centre. The sessions are very popular with local families, sessions are always to capacity (around 30 parents) and there has never been a need to actively recruit other than advertising within the library and Children's Centre. The sessions are free of charge, available on a first-come, first-served basis, and aim to offer culturally diverse music to reflect the local community and stories of migration. Further to the weekly drop in sessions the project holds a session twice termly in the Children's Centre as a means to reach those unlikely to attend sessions in the library.

Also in the case study area is a toddler group at The Salvation Army which incorporates musical activity with parents and young children. The stay and play sessions run three mornings of the week, are free of charge (although there is an expectation that parents donate 50p), and popular (approximately 30 parents at each session) with a broad cross section of the community in which it is located in attendance. The sessions have a loose structure of free play, snack and non-percussion music during circle time. It is very informal and the emphasis placed on sociality over the acquisition of musical skills.

**Case Study Two** is a large university town located in South East England. The surrounding borough has densely populated areas contrasted by other more suburban locations. According to 2009 estimates, 82 per cent of the population were described as White (74 per cent White British), eight per cent as South Asian, four per cent as Black, three per cent as Mixed Race, one per cent as Chinese, and two per cent as other ethnic group. In 2010 it was reported that 150 different languages were spoken. There is a notably large Polish community, which dates back over 30 years.

The focal EYMM project under investigation in this case study area offered an eight-week project which incorporated music sessions and culturally-inspired lunches. The project was funded by the council's Art Fund and run by a Children's Centre in conjunction with an independent music education provider. Each session involved all partners and further input from a 'guest musician'. The project was running for the first time and stemmed from the Children's Centre having identified unmet needs of the diverse cultural groups within the local community. Therefore a music education provider was commissioned to devise a programme of activity to facilitate an exploration of world cultures by combining music, story-telling, dance

and food. The music sessions took place in the Children's Centre and were followed by lunch in a community centre located on the same site. Each music session, lunch and the guest musician were 'themed' around a specific world culture (e.g. Caribbean, Polish, and Indian).

Other parallel projects running in the case study area included those undertaken by a local visual artist in conjunction with schools and Children's Centres to engage local families in community activities.

Most notable in the area though was a drop-in music session at a nearby library. The library is located in one of the most deprived wards in the borough and the head librarian has a reputation locally for her enthusiastic work with families, making creative use of spaces within the library, and a long history of working in conjunction with other services (e.g. midwifery, health visitors, schools) to reach and engage families. The EYMM evolved from regular story telling sessions at the library. The head librarian introduced singing, rhyming and then percussion instruments and puppets to enliven the sessions which became hugely popular. A Creativity Grant enabled the library to resource the sessions with a range of percussion instruments. The twice weekly, hour long sessions operate an open-door, no-turn-away policy – as a consequence the sessions cater for large numbers of families (sometimes as many as 100 adults and children in a given session). They are free and booking is unnecessary. The sessions are preceded by a 'talk period' where parents and carers are given the opportunity to socialise and seek information and guidance about local services (many of which are located at the library e.g. Baby Clinic). The library and its music sessions provide a central hub for the community which has been formally recognised by the Local Authority through its Children's Centre agenda.

**Case Study Three** is a University town on the North West coast of England. The area has witnessed a steady decline in the tourist, mining and production industries; however the town itself is middle ranging in the Index of Multiple Deprivation with small pockets of wealth and others of acute deprivation. The area has a predominantly White British population, with only nine per cent of the population from a minority ethnic background (principally Pakistani and Indian but there is a small but growing Eastern European population) (ONS, 2009).

The project under investigation was run by a locally based music charity that received funding from Youth Music to deliver the project in various sites across the region. The fieldwork was undertaken in three separate sites; two Children's Centres and a local Music Centre (directly affiliated to the music charity). All sessions were delivered by the same music education specialist. The recruitment to the sessions was the responsibility of the centres whilst the content and direction of the individual sessions was the preserve of the music specialist. The sessions were aimed at children aged birth-to-five and comprised well known, traditional children's songs, opportunities for the children to use percussion instruments, and the leader played the guitar. The sessions incurred a fee at the Music Centre (£3) and at one of the Children's Centres (£1 – although waived for 'targeted' families) and the sessions were entirely free at the second Children's Centre. The project is well established having run for approximately five years and at the time of fieldwork the sessions were familiar to many who had attended over the years.

**Case Study Four** is a small town in the North East with a varied economy including surrounding rural areas with a well-established agricultural industry, and the town centre is a popular visitor destination, consequently the leisure and tourism industry is strong. However, there are pockets of

acute poverty and the town was recognized as a teenage pregnancy 'hot spot' (NHS, 2009) and lone parent households with dependent children comprise five per cent of all households. The town is predominantly White British (98 per cent) with the next largest ethnic group being Chinese (less than one per cent). The DEFRA Rural definition identifies over 30 per cent of the population in the district live in rural areas.

The EYMM project was run by a Children's Centre located within the most deprived ward of the town and was deliberately targeted at young mothers (under 22) living in the local catchment area. It has been running since 2005 and the focus was primarily to combat the social isolation that teenage mothers experience and to engage them in a sociable activity, in a safe and non-judgmental environment. The sessions were scheduled to follow a drop-in slot at the Children's Centre to facilitate seamless participation at 'stay and play' to musical activity. The music sessions lasted an hour and were intentionally loose in structure to allow freedom for children and mums to dis/engage at will; there was a mix of traditional and less recognizable children's songs. The sessions were facilitated by two music specialists; the Children's Centre and Connexions Service were responsible for recruitment and managing referrals. The musical aspect of the project was a secondary consideration and child outcomes almost incidental. The sessions were free of charge and the cost of travel was covered by the Children's Centre to incentivize attendance.

The overviews of each of the case study areas (and the projects within them) outlined above, is intended to offer a reference point when reading the remainder of this chapter. The findings from the case studies are presented thematically since the specificity of context, the role and attitude of key individuals, changing policy landscapes (both locally and nationally), rationales underpinning the

projects, all mean that a single approach taken in any one project cannot offer a universal formula that might be applied elsewhere. Rather, this chapter intends to highlight the range of effective practices and the key issues/challenges experienced within the projects when endeavouring to reach and engage 'hard to reach' families in EYMM.

## Visibility, Reputation, Accessibility

Building upon the literature presented in preceding chapters, the findings from this study reinforce the claim that location is a significant factor in terms of attracting families to EYMM. Most projects were located in central venues such as libraries, community halls and Children Centres. Libraries were felt to offer 'neutral territory' whereas Children's Centres tended to be associated with the local implementation of government policy, with an overt emphasis on addressing 'the social needs of local families, whereas we are just here, always been here'. However, it is interesting to note the recent diversification of services that libraries offer. For example in CS2, the example of the evolved music-making session at the local library provided clear evidence of the important role that the charismatic head librarian played in raising awareness of the library and the increased range of services available (from Baby Clinic, Ante Natal Group, ESOL Classes to the 'phenomenally popular' weekly music sessions). This reflects in part, a reaction to the current economic downturn and the national threat to libraries (Culture, Media & Sport Parliamentary Committee, 2012) and a consequence of the Children's Centre Agenda that requires statutory services, such as libraries, to be more integrated with other services and to offer a wider array of activities to the local community (DfE, 2012). The advantages of this trend to diversify the uses to which libraries are put were tangible, as explained by the Head Librarian, in CS2:

*I put the empty rooms in the library to use…to me that was the way that I could get people into the library. With the PCT we set up Baby Clinic where the health visitors see new mums; breast-feeding sessions; and then the room is used twice a week for English Classes…I did a bit of evaluating how things were going with that and it was like the United Nations; we had people from all over the world coming…From Poland, Slovakia, China, Africa…and they were all together…and they heard the music session going on and they said to me that they didn't speak a lot of English, how could they learn the songs and I just said there's only one way – come along and keep coming back.*

The visibility and local reputation of music projects was felt to account for sustainability and popularity. Staff from the most popular projects spoke about reputation having grown over time and through 'word of mouth'. This resulted in over-subscription for which the projects had to either relocate the session into a bigger room and/or provide additional sessions. Conversely, projects with an overt 'hard to reach' agenda struggled to attract targeted groups precisely because of the location of the centres, typically in pockets of deprivation in otherwise affluent areas. These projects reported that the services were failing to reach those they intended (migrant families, fathers, working-class) and instead were most popular with local middle-class families. This signals the important interrelationship between where a music session is located, the reputation it builds over time, and how this becomes valuable 'hot knowledge' (Vincent & Ball, 2006) that can be fostered amongst a captive audience (i.e. those attending multiple services in one venue) or readily taken up by shrewd middle-class mums seeking good quality services at little or no cost.

A key strategy employed by the EYMM projects was that of proactive and strategic outreach work

in the local community to attract a wider or targeted population of parents from the local area. Outreach and referral were cornerstones to Sure Start local programmes (Osgood, 2003) and such practices appear embedded in the routine professional practices of Children's Centre staff. For example the Children's Centre that struggled by virtue of its location deployed a team of 'play rangers' (volunteer parent outreach workers) to reach those in more dispersed, semi-rural locations. As other research bears testament (Avis, Bulman & Leighton, 2006; Draper & Duffy, 2006; Osgood 2003, 2006, 2008; Whalley et al, 2001) this is a very effective means of initially building relationships amongst local parents and thereafter referring and where necessary chaperoning reluctant parents to services. There was evidence of several projects employing such tactics to great effect.

By comparison library staff across the different areas were less consistent in their approaches to outreach and parental engagement. Whilst there was evidence of proactive visits and firm relationships with other family services (health visiting, midwifery, schools, Children's Centres) this varied from library to library. An interesting tension emerges from this finding; whilst Children's Centres are well practiced at outreach work the appeal of attending sessions located at the Centres was not always favourable. Whereas the 'neutral territory' of the library, despite often 'shabby environments' by comparison to Children's Centres, tended to appeal to a wider range of families. The explanation for this appeared to reside in the symbolic distance of libraries from the requirement to meet a target-agenda, and perform a surveillance and regulation function. This quote from a Children's Centre manager illustrates the pronounced alignment to a statutory policy agenda, which was detected by some parents:

*We're always trying to engage the more vulnerable, the at risk, or as you say 'hard to*

*reach' because obviously it is one of the government priorities and we have to try to reduce levels of poverty and all those related targets….we try to get more families in but we don't want it to become just those targeted families that are so needy it gets very hard to engage anyone then. Sometimes it's easier if it's universal so you've got a mixture of families that share experiences rather than bringing everyone down kind of, sometimes if you got too many complex needs then everybody…. [sighs].*

Related to 'neutral territory' was a concern to extend a warm, non-judgemental welcome to families. This was effectively achieved where time was factored in to the music session for socialising and refreshments.  The music session specifically and exclusively available to young mothers was housed at a local Children's Centre. This was considered a 'non-stigmatising' venue to this group of parents, who routinely experienced prejudice and discomfort when attending more mixed activities, or as the Children's Centre Manager phrased it:

*Some of the girls have tried other sessions that are open to all but they always come back and say that they felt they were being stared at and judged…This is a very middle-class town so that's got a lot to do with the way people see young mums.*

 Having attended related family services at the Centre (ante natal, baby group, parenting classes) it was reported to be 'familiar, non-threatening'. The 'warm welcome' extended at this centre was reinforced by an ethos of voluntary participation at a 'drop-in' session which encouraged free-play and comfort breaks with refreshments. The emphasis was very squarely on sociability with some reference to government targets (social isolation, employability etc).

## Timing & Predictability

The literature reviewed in chapter three indicated that timing was a concern to services if engagement of the widest range of families was to be achieved. A particular concern raised was 'office hours' opening and the negative implications of this for working parents and especially fathers (Kahn 2005; Lloyd et al 2003, DfE 2010). Whilst there was some mention in this study about strategies to engage fathers, such as scheduling targeted father's activities at the weekend, the issue of engaging working parents was not raised. This could be explained in part by an assumption that where parents are at work their birth-to-five children will be under the guardianship of an adult childcarer (i.e. nanny, childminder, grandparent) and therefore attendance at EYMM provision was still possible for the children.

Discussions about timing tended to focus upon predictability, for example there was general consensus that appropriate scheduling was crucially important to ensure attendance at EYMM. Consistent scheduling (on the same day(s) and time) each week was heralded as the key to ensuring that parents would firstly become aware and secondly consider the feasibility of the session within their busy family lives. An example was available from the case study visits where attendance at a session was adversely affected by the rescheduling of a regular weekly session from Thursday to Friday part-way through an eight-week programme. Despite family support workers (attached to a Children's Centre) waging a concerted and strategic drive to target members of particular cultural groups from the local community families failed to attend because of the last minute rescheduling.

A number of participants charged with organising the EYMM sessions strongly advocated a 'no-booking policy'. This was framed as an attempt to ensure an egalitarian allocation of places.

There was a clear awareness of the practices of middle-class, organised mothers who reportedly seek out and secure places at good quality early years provision. A method of addressing this trend and safeguarding places for families deemed 'hard-to-reach' was to allow access on a 'first come first served' basis. However, this did not guarantee universalism as middle-class mothers were considered well-organised and punctual. Therefore EYMM projects then provided a second session directly after the first, or extended separate sessions at Children's Centres exclusively to those invited to participate by key workers, outreach officers or through other formal referral mechanisms. As this Family Information Services Officer explained family services are required to consider various strategies to prevent the middle-class from colonising universal services:

*They [EYMM project] were getting middle-class parents coming half an hour early; being really organised to get their places and save places for their friends....so I went through a variety of different things to see what we can do to try to make sure this really is open to all parents, you know those who are just not as together, who just come in at the last minute and so find themselves excluded.*

Most of the EYMM sessions began around 10.30am which was widely viewed as an optimum start as it allowed parents enough time to get out; whilst an hour long session provides substantial activity for the morning, whilst ensuring sufficient time to return home for lunch/nap. Yet this scheduling becomes inconsistently available where sessions are oversubscribed and places allocated on a first come first served basis. However, the library in CS2 adopted a 'no-turn-away' policy which saw the EYMM sessions swell to 100 parent and child participants. Whilst arguably inclusive this level of capacity raises potential questions about the nature and level of interaction between music provider and

members of the group; and opportunities for movement.

It is clear that the range of strategies employed to make parents aware of EYMM, connect it to other family services, ensure universal (or targeted) access is variously negotiated and therefore results in different outcomes and patterns of provision. It is for any given EYMM project to determine the principle objective (music education, social inclusion etc), the arrangements in place to engage and accommodate local families, and ultimately to recognise that reaching 'hard-to-reach' families will have implications for the nature of the EYMM delivered.

## Content

The EYMM projects across the case study areas were diverse and the focus of research attention because they sought to engage families deemed in some way 'hard to reach'. However, the professional philosophies and personalities of those delivering the sessions were significant in shaping the content and pace of the session observed. Most music leaders were appointed by a family service (Children's Centre, Library etc) to deliver specific sessions. They typically had little involvement in recruitment or advertising but instead negotiated a means to deliver music education within the parameters of a broader agenda. There was identifiable structure to all sessions, typically including a welcome song followed by a series of familiar nursery rhymes designed to promote active participation. Several music leaders spoke of the need to 'lead by example' and 'provide scaffolding' so that parents and children would feel confident to participate. This was generally achieved through consistency and a degree of predictability in terms of the content and the scheduling of songs, times for active participation through percussion or dance/movement.

All sessions were carefully organised and the space regulated in particular ways to achieve

particular outcomes. For example, comfort breaks were an integral element of some EYMM sessions whilst others encouraged socialising before or after the session. There was an 'unwritten script' that accompanied each session, where over time and with regular attendance the parents and children came to learn what was expected of them, not just in respect of musical engagement but in terms of the etiquette associated with the particular session.

## Rationale, Expectations, Focus

The issue outlined in the previous chapter relating to the potential for tensions to emerge from the competing agendas of family services and music specialists were apparent in the case study observations. Where music sessions were funded and co-ordinated by Children's Centres the commitment to reach and engage 'hard to reach' families was overt and important in shaping the constituents within a group and the overarching objective of the music project. However, as outlined above, in most cases sessions were delivered by (independent) music educators, and whilst they demonstrated an appreciation of the overarching Children's Centre agenda it presented some challenges to their own personal philosophies about the purpose and potential of music sessions. Hence the organisation, and 'ground rules' of some sessions appeared to sit in contrast with the practices and ethos of Children Centres. For example, in the inner London music project the Music Specialist delivering the sessions in the library firmly believed in clear structure; unambiguous expectations of both parent and child; and respect for time-keeping and demonstrable engagement:

*It can take time for parents to realise that they need to expect something of their own children...they need to contribute, work through the activities with their children and*

*then they will get more out of them...I really believe that everybody gets more from it when they completely engage, I mean I totally understand people come because they want to get out of the house and meet people, but I also make it clear that's not what I think the sessions are for, so they have to contribute....I think you only get out what you put in, if you see what I mean, and that can take people a while to get.*

This music leader, like others, was classically-trained and very passionate about the potential for music to be transformative. She was supported by an assistant (also a classically trained musician) and each session a 'guest musician' participated by bringing new musical genres to the session which reflected cultural diversity. However, observations and feedback from parents suggested that the class signifiers embodied in the music leader and her assistant had important affects in determining the appeal of the session and parental 'performances' which tended towards an implicit recognition of what was expected of them and their children (punctuality, active participation, adherence to unspoken rules). For example, consuming food during the sessions, roaming free and chatting were actively discouraged and were viewed as signalling disengagement and acting as a distraction.

This sits in direct contrast to other music projects which were premised on the importance that parents and children must feel relaxed and at ease to variously engage throughout a session. At the other end of the continuum to this London-based project was that targeted at young mothers in the North West. The music group followed a free-play, drop-in session and many of the toys remained available for children to play with, a snack-break was factored into the session and no pressure was placed on the mothers to sing or participate. The music leader at this session summarised her position about

expectations for participation:

*It didn't surprise me that they didn't want to sing but the thing is, even the mums, the non-teenage mums, the mums that come to my other classes, sometimes they didn't want to sing either and neither did some of the children in the class but they told me that the child always sings at home and that they sing with him – at home. You know they feel self-conscious, because singing is you – it's putting yourself out there to be judged…we don't mind too much if they don't sing in the session so long as they take it away with them and sing at home – which they tell us they do.*

Another music leader reflected on the balance that was required to be respectful of parental willingness to participate, achieve the objectives of the session whilst negotiating the (sometimes competing) agendas of Children's Centres and music education. She stressed the need to be reactive to the participants in any given group and to endeavour to tailor sessions to specific interests and levels of confidence. She constructed the groups as micro-communities whereby participants came to build relationships over time, becoming enculturated into that particular community of practice:

*When it's a regular thing and people are used to coming they build a group relationship with each other […] Yeah they're all keeping a check on each other…making sure everybody's alright and everybody is welcoming, you know because that person is now part of that social group…it becomes more than the music because you can build those little pockets of community….and of course they get to know me, and that gives you that, your knowledge of the people who are there and what their relationship is in the world. You know what you need to know about them and that helps you to tailor it to them….it's about the stability of the group and continuity.*

The above quote signals the ways in which music groups can become self-regulating, not through the explicit presentation of expectations and 'rules' but through the relationships that form over time to create a stable environment whereby the music leader can engage in a more personalised way with individuals and families. This approach was celebrated by staff at the Children's Centre and by parents, her style was described as 'outgoing and able to make it feel comfortable' and she was recognised as 'part of the community'. Through establishing relationships with families this music leader was able to covertly insert music education and parenting skills into her sessions:

*Rather than just having a jolly old time, which of course we do; but there's actually something really vital that is being passed on and in some way they don't even necessarily need to know; parents don't actually need to know that that's what we are doing – they can get something from it; however if they want to keep going with it and do it at home, then yes it becomes more about teaching them the importance of it, but that learning can be subtle.*

Whilst the head librarian in CS2 was not a music education specialist she was attuned to the multiple benefits of music enrichment activities for children (she cited speech and language development, confidence, self-regulation, school readiness) and for families (bonding, and improved confidence) however she placed greatest value on its potential to tackle social exclusion. Given the popularity of her session (with up to 100 individuals attending any one session) she stressed the need for structure, boundaries, and clear expectations to the group. Like the Music Leader in CS1 she was intolerant of eating, chatting and children 'running wild':

*Now they could run around before it started, then I would arrive and I always started and*

*finished the session with The Wheels on the Bus – so they knew it was starting; then they knew it was finished. Now once it had started everybody had to sit still. It wasn't playgroup; if one child starts to run they all run. So they all sat on mum's knees or on the floor. But every so often (and I promise you I'm no dragon) I would explain that letting them run around was spoiling it for everybody else. And the idea also was the children could concentrate, I mean it really becomes a discipline in a way; the children learn what they need for school. And of course culturally it was interesting because we've got big variations in how parents raise their children but they all accepted and knew what was coming and I just kept the momentum up; once I started I didn't stop until the end.*

A local reputation as 'a pillar of the community' (characterised by long-standing relationships with statutory services and local voluntary groups) placed this librarian in a commanding position amongst local families. Her long-term commitment to address the issue of maternal isolation formed the initial impetus for the sessions and the musical element was incidental, having evolved organically from enlivening story-time with musical accompaniment. It is interesting to note the similar importance attached to disciplining the space in CS2 and in the inner London project, despite the rationale underpinning the regulation being slightly different in focus (delivery of music education versus opportunity for social inclusion). However, the way in which regulation is accepted and understood is to some extent shaped by what the music leader comes to symbolise. The librarian described herself as 'everybody's granny' and spoke in quite emotive ways about her attachment to local families, similarly in CS3 'local belonging' was associated with the music leader. Conversely the music leader in CS1 was primarily defined by her musical expertise, therefore her

attempts at disciplining and regulating the environment were not as readily accepted.

Several issues raised here will be revisited since relationship building and empowering parents reappear throughout the data as significant factors to shape the extent and nature of engagement.

## Framing Music-making

Related to the discussion above (about the means by which parental awareness is raised and their engagement secured) is a consideration of the ways in which various actors within projects, across the case study areas, frame the purpose of EYMM. The scoping exercise identified four key rationales for delivering EYMM to groups deemed 'hard to reach': therapeutic, developmental, school-readiness and parental confidence each of which is echoed through the case study investigations.

The accounts given throughout the research tended to draw upon a range of discourses thereby signalling the multiple purposes that EYMM can serve and its potential to satisfy various goals. However, mindful that the research was concerned to explore effectiveness at engaging 'hard-to-reach' families EYMM was frequently constructed as 'a hook' to draw families in to a broader range of local family services. In CS2 the focal project, which combined culturally themed music sessions and lunches, stressed the important function that the sessions played in drawing families into the Children's Centre on the premise of a non-stigmatising, non-punitive activity:

*The paramount issue is trying to get the parents engaged with their children so that the active learning they do here can be replicated at home. So if we engage the parents within the centre we can teach them how to role model and what have you and then that works well with the children at home. And*

*the music and the lunches work really well because it fits into the healthy eating, sharing a meal, meeting different cultures – cultural diversity and stuff like that; so it ticks loads of boxes.*

So implicit within the offer to families of the EYMM and lunch is parent education; by achieving a captive audience the Children's Centre is enabled to put its agenda - to improve parenting skills and family relationships – to work. It is possible that parents detect this hidden agenda as reflected in the sporadic attendance and not always reaching those families that had been targeted through outreach and referral.

In CS3 the free music sessions extended in the Children's Centre were very well attended although there was fluctuation in numbers. The Music Leader, although not responsible for or involved with recruitment to the sessions suspected that families were targeted in a similar way to those in the music-lunch sharing project in CS2. Sudden increases in the number of families at a given session reportedly altered the dynamics of the group and the music leader reflected on how this required careful management:

*The centre do refer lots of people to the group….we had four brand new families join last week who I suspect had been referred so the flow of things in that session was a bit whoa! What's going on? For me there were suddenly loads of new people and some of them obviously had issues…it will be interesting to see if they come again, that's the challenge, when people have been referred, actively encouraged to come, whether they make it two weeks on the trot becomes the difficult thing.*

Others shared this music leader's concerns that where attendance has a scent of compulsion or coercion levels of commitment to regular attendance and active participation can become

adversely affected. A music leader in CS2 felt that if recruitment to EYMM becomes too targeted it becomes obvious that families have been identified 'as having some sort of issue or need' and this can unwittingly stigmatise attendance and ultimately deter families from returning. The debate about universalism and targeted provision was presented in earlier chapters, but it is worth revisiting briefly at this point, if only to signal that professionals were attuned to the underlying agenda and its implications for engagement and participation. A sense of feeling targeted actively discouraged many parents, yet this is clearly the direction in which policy is moving as signalled by the Marmot Review (2010) which advocates heightening practices of targeted provision.

Whilst some of the EYMM projects included in this study were deliberately targeted at an identified 'hard-to-reach' group (such as the young mums session) and others foregrounded a targeted agenda there was a shared view that family services generally, and EYMM specifically, worked best at engaging the widest range of families when they were universal, as this quote illustrates:

*If a session that's purely for a target group doesn't make people feel comfortable and confident because they get the sense that they have been targeted, and there's no diversity…so say when I get someone who doesn't speak much English, doesn't know any of the songs well they're quiet for a few weeks but slowly over time they join in but that doesn't mean that they're not enjoying it and lots of those people come back week after week…if it was just a session full of people who didn't speak English they wouldn't ever hear other people singing, only me and that makes you feel quite isolated…of course that was what Sure Start always set out to do – have a whole mix of people.*

## How Inclusive is EYMM?

The various ways in which music comes to be symbolically constructed was also the cause for some dissension. Whilst the notion of EYMM as 'a hook' was palpable; working on the premise that music was integral to the lives of all families and individuals within them in some shape or form, and hence represented a non-threatening means of attracting families or as the librarian in CS2 termed it: 'music is a great leveller – everybody has some relationship to it'. Yet this idea of music as free from socio-cultural connotations became complicated in some instances.

It is interesting to note that all the music leaders included in this research were white-British and middle-class, so it is perhaps unsurprising to find that where music leaders' embodied enactments of middle-classness were pronounced some parents were turned off. Allied to this was the predominance of certain musical genres (i.e. 'traditional' English); and preferred delivery approaches (which tended to reinforce notions of musical expertise and self discipline). The classed connotations embedded within the EYMM projects were thought to have important consequences for attendance and perceived relevance. For example, these reflections on a recent change of music leader give some indication of the tensions that can arise from the pronouncement of certain 'highbrow' associations:

*Who it appeals to has definitely changed… the previous leader was quite hippy-ish - probably just as middle-class but not nearly as posh, and while parents in this area are used to being 'not with their own', I think some families are put off.*

## Maintaing 'Expertise'

As described, in some of the EYMM sessions the musical element was secondary and in other cases almost incidental. It is interesting to note

the stoic, 'keep calm and carry on' approach adopted by music leaders in CS4 where the young mums and their children were actively encouraged (through the organisation of the space and the informality of the session) to determine levels of engagement. This could be interpreted as empowering the young mothers who in other settings found themselves marginalised and disempowered. However, it did have implications for the nature of the EYMM that was extended which in some respects challenged the music leaders' sense of expertise:

*I like to try out more new songs, ones they're perhaps not so familiar with and that add some variety, whilst I know there is value in traditional songs – I can see that, children also respond well and become familiar with new songs through repetition, over time but it's not really welcomed.*

A complex picture emerges whereby music becomes symbolically represented in a variety of ways dependent upon the primary aim of the EYMM-session, the music-leaders' identity, willingness to consider alternative styles of delivery/musical genres, and service level reflection upon the assumptions on which the EYMM session is built. For example, there was a sense of the need to dumb-down or adhere to principally 'traditional' music styles, since it was assumed that this would appeal to young children and families deemed in some way 'hard-to-reach'.

Yet the data from 'hard-to-reach' parents that do not access EYMM sessions indicated an enjoyment of a wide range of musical genres (gospel choir, steel bands; popular; R'n'B) and venues/modes of delivery (attending concerts, carnivals and festivals; street dance; at home). Strategic staff interviewed as part of case studies reflected on the potential gains that might be achieved in terms of engagement if EYMM was more aligned to the interests of those deemed

'hard to reach' mentioning street dance and popular music, unfortunately this did not find expression in the EYMM observed instead classical, traditional, and culturally themed (to particular national identities) were found. The findings from interviews with parents classified as 'hard to reach' (reported in the next chapter) provide further insights into the features of EYMM that deter attendance and the means by which musicality forms an integral part of their lives which challenge some of the assumptions that EYMM providers hold.

## Privileging Normative Parenting

The providers of EYMM in CS3 reflected on the differences between the sessions they provided at the three local venues (two Children's Centre and an independent hall). Whilst the content was broadly similar, and their commitment to work flexibly and react to the interests and engagement of the group was broadly constant, the musical progress achieved by primarily fee-paying middle-class families was considered greatest. These music providers indicated that removing the 'hard to reach' objective enabled attention to be more squarely placed upon music appreciation and development. They cited greater group stability, more sustained engagement, overt commitment to child development and regular attendance.

Furthermore, a view expressed widely was that EYMM represented a means of teaching parents the correct way to interact with children. Also, as highlighted previously the concern to discipline the space in which the EYMM occurred was also an important means of subtly reinforcing a series of middle-class normalising practices from children's self-discipline (in readiness for school) to  parents' public demonstration of their ability to regulate their child in appropriate ways.

This echoes the literature reviewed in the previous chapter (Vincent & Martin, Vincent, Reay) about middle-class mothering strategies (of performing genuine: motivation, engagement, commitment and containment) which become the normative ideal. Therefore parenting practices that differ from this are viewed as lacking. Observation at various 'mixed' sessions indicate that non-White, non-middle-class mothers attended, participated, and reported feeling enthused by the sessions, however some of their parenting practices (late arrival, allowing their children to eat during the session, sitting to the side) were negatively judged as deficient. The classed judgements are significant and determine the degree to which families feel a sense of belonging (in White, hetero-normative, middle-class spaces).

The apparent lack of willingness to engage or ready disengagement from EYMM by particular cultural and ethnic groups presented a conundrum to many of the Children's Centres that had actively sought to engage through outreach. There was some suggestion that this could be read as resistance or not wanting to be reached (Wilkinson et al, 2009), as this music leader reflected:

*The local Asian community is tiny, no more than one or two streets but I suspect they are probably self-serving, they probably get together amongst themselves, in each other's houses and do it [socialise] that way…I don't think they are all in isolation or that their children don't meet other children. It works for them in their own little community. Similarly with the Traveller community you know they won't do things like this [EYMM] because they do it like that…they have their own ways of being; which is true for the Polish community too.*

However this interpretation of particular cultural groups is based upon assumption and could act to reinforce homogenising and stereotypical notions of entire minority ethnic groups.

Furthermore, assuming and accepting that cultural-ethnic groups are 'self-serving' and therefore free to resist engaging in family services available locally finds little space in government policy or within the targets that Children's Centre are required to meet.

This concern to engage specific cultural and ethnic groups and to make EYMM culturally appropriate was evident in both CS1 and CS2. The strategies employed by two projects were to theme the EYMM by attaching a cultural-ethnic association to the sessions by inviting guest musicians, focusing on musical traditions from particular cultures and combining music and cuisine from a given culture. As Young, Street and Davies (2007) suggest, services most likely to engage parents in EYMM are those which use and give value to musical genres and practices that parents are most familiar with. Despite being guided by an objective of 'cultural appropriateness' some challenges and complexities were encountered when endeavouring to achieve it. For example, the music-lunch project was themed around discrete cultures each week including Caribbean and Polish. Yet there was conflation of cultures (i.e. African and Carribean; Polish and Czech) both in respect of the families targeted to attend, and the authenticity of the food provided, for example 'rice bread' was served at the Polish session which is distinctly un-Polish according to the Polish guest musician. Both projects were well intentioned and driven by a desire to engage families that might find themselves excluded from services on the basis of their cultural identities, however, the culmination of the culturally-themed events could be (mis)read as 'exotic othering', as the quote from this middle-class mother illustrates:

*'We came to this one [Caribbean themed session] because it looked fun, we thought that it would broaden their horizons and it's a good thing to do, you know learn about other cultures and anything Caribbean is going to be fun…I think the children did really enjoy the music, and he was great wasn't he [the guest musician]? But the food wasn't quite what we were expecting; where was the pineapple?… …No, no we didn't fancy the Polish session, it just didn't sound as appealing you know'.*

The Children's Centre staff were responsible for the recruitment and advertising of the eight-week project and offered some critical reflection on the possible shortcomings of attempting to foster appreciation of cultural diversity through nationally-themed EYMM sessions and lunches. For example, they suspected that the local Czech community may have been deterred from attending the Polish session because it lacked relevance. Upon further probing the Children's Centre had thought the session would appeal to Eastern Europeans more broadly; similarly it transpired that the Caribbean session was intended to reach African families. This highlights a very significant issue about attempting to engage families on the basis of their cultural identity when a sensitive and nuanced appreciation of difference is absent from service planning and delivery.

## Parent Voice

In relation to the discussion above regarding cultural sensitivity and the means by which EYMM projects plan, recruit and deliver projects is the issue of family consultation. It is useful to refer back to the Sure Start initiative of the early 2000s and the central tenet of parental involvement/empowering local communities to determine the services available to them (Glass, 2005). A key feature of Sure Start local programmes was parent consultation exercises, parental engagement officers, parent committee members and so on. By incorporating local parents into the decision-making structures of local programmes, Sure Start provided services that local communities wanted and in modes of

delivery that were sensitive and appropriate. The challenges inherent with making space for parent voice to be heard are well rehearsed (refs) however commitment to consult and respond to what (the widest range of) families value was seemingly lacking in the projects observed as part of this research. Rather, all involved in delivering EYMM projects (Children Centre staff, librarians, music leaders etc) apparently worked on intuition and professional wisdom, and in some cases to great effect. However, where attempts to reach and engage 'hard to reach' families were less successful few took the opportunity to engage in systematic reviews or meaningful consultation to ascertain what local families might value in respect of EYMM. Interviews conducted with parents as part of the case study phase of this research illuminate some of the tensions inherent when EYMM projects working on a set of assumptions about the reasons some families are persistently 'hard to reach'.

Parents interviewed as part of the case study observation exercise had been 'reached' since they were attending an EYMM session but (as highlighted already) the level/nature of engagement was subject to various forms of regulation and judgement by those providing the service. Parents generally spoke about the value of EYMM as offering benefits to their children and an important opportunity for them to socialise and 'get out of the house'. Parents drew on similar discourses to the staff about the perceived value and purpose of attending EYMM such as the therapeutic benefits; school readiness/self-regulation. For example, a number of middle-class mothers spoke about the 'therapeutic effect of music' and the essential role it could play in terms of cognitive development. For these mothers the highly structured, predictable nature of the sessions and the expertise of music specialists were considered part of a vital cultural enrichment activity (Ball & Vincent, 2006). For the

parents more likely to be deemed harder to reach (i.e. single parents, working-class, minority ethnic) these sentiments were less forcefully expressed; instead reference was made to their child's 'enjoyment' of the activity and the importance of 'fun'. Several mothers with English as an additional language praised EYMM sessions for the opportunity to develop English language skills; the acquisition of nursery rhyme lyrics provided a relaxed means of practicing a second language with their children (both at the sessions and subsequently at home).

The tacit 'rules' of the EYMM sessions were reflected upon by parents with general acceptance that punctuality, active participation, and regulation of their child's behaviour were reasonable expectations. Where these 'rules' were in someway breached (such as late arrival, eating food, chatting) parents detected the general disapproval and consequently became subject to the invisible disciplinary technologies of the situation. Interviews with 'hard to reach' parents (reported upon fully in the next chapter) indicate that it these very features of EYMM are what act to deter them from attending.

The implicit expectations of EYMM sessions, coupled with the dynamics between music leaders and the parents who attend, provide a set of interesting insights. Whilst some projects foregrounded a relaxed environment the consequence was that musicality became a secondary consideration and sociality was the primary objective. In these projects the cognitive, educational and developmental gains that children might make from participating in the sessions was not emphasised despite similar levels of engagement and enthusiasm (to the projects with a more structured and rigid approach and an overt emphasis on musical development). This important finding, about the ways in which different groups of parents are 'read' as more or less engaged is dependent

upon preconceived notions and interpretations of particular (classed, cultural) behaviours. Through critical reflection and by troubling 'taken-for-granted' assumptions about EYMM and the engagement of families it is possible to interpret scenarios and behaviours differently and adjust provision accordingly and so avoid pathologising groups of parents against a middle-class norm.

In CS2 an Artist in Residence reflected on the strategies he had employed when trying to engage families deemed 'hard to reach' in a local community project which had a tangential musical aspect. He stressed the need to build trusting relationships through empowering local families to take the initiative in building the Musical Sculpture Garden and hence enjoy a sense of ownership.  For example, after a number of weeks building relationships with families who attended an early years centre they were encouraged to 'rally the troops' (i.e. their extended families) to start work on a 'muck in day' to do 'the big dig' to clear the outside space and begin planning the construction of the sculptured garden. The day culminated in a barbeque and party. This echoes the sentiment raised by others that meaningful engagement evolves overtime and is facilitated by the incorporation of sociable aspects within projects. The significance of supporting community relationships (and indeed the potential for EYMM projects to represent a 'micro-community') was stressed throughout the case study observations. However, there appears to be a staunch resistance to the creation of artificial communities, where families feel coerced or compelled to participate. The next chapter offers critical insights into the resistance of 'hard to reach' families when they suspect that encouragement to engage with family services is a thinly veiled attempt to address perceived inadequacies of their parenting skills.

The Artist identified the key to engagement and

sustainability of families deemed 'hard to reach' was to recognise that there is often a suspicion of authority figures and if artists or music leaders are to work effectively then they need to be willing to lose their 'expert persona' and place emphasis on co-construction, providing scaffolding and 'celebrating failure'.  Whilst the findings presented in this chapter have illustrated an awareness of the need to form relationships, provide scaffolding and so on there are nevertheless a range of complexities to emerge from the symbolic representations of music(ians) and the ways in which judgements about ('hard to reach') families are based upon (unfounded) assumptions.

The final phase of the research (action research with three selected EYMM projects) provides some insights into the benefits that can be enjoyed when opportunities for systematic and rigorous reflection are built into EYMM projects.

## Chapter Summary

Findings from observations of EYMM projects in four case study areas indicate that there is an important interrelationship between where a music session is located, the reputation it builds over time, and how this becomes valuable knowledge that can be fostered amongst a captive audience (i.e. those attending multiple services in one venue) or readily taken up by those seeking good quality services at little or no cost.

Locating EYMM in 'neutral territory' was central to attracting the widest range of families. Unlike Children's Centres, libraries and other 'community venues' were symbolically distanced from policy requirements to target, engage, monitor and regulate particular families.

A key factor to improve the chances of engagement in family services (including EYMM) is proactive and strategic outreach work. Families tend to be most receptive to invitations, referrals

and encouragement from their peers (parent volunteers) rather than professionals.

Practical factors such as timing and scheduling were also vitally important. EYMM sessions become a routine part of 'mental diaries' that busy parents keep i.e. music group 10.30 at the library Mons & Weds; Swimming 2pm Tuesday; Rhyme Time 3pm Friday etc.

There was an identifiable disjuncture between those funding/facilitating provision and those delivering EYMM sessions. This is a recurring issue presented in earlier chapters about the Children Centre agenda which constructs music as a 'hook' to reach families versus music specialists concerns for mastery, cultural enhancement and appreciation of the benefits of musicality. These competing agendas have important implications for how families view EYMM sessions and there is a need for improved synergy between family services and music specialists.

The targeted/universal provision debate was a central issue which has important repercussions for attendance at EYMM. Where attendance has a scent of coercion or compulsion levels of commitment to regular attendance and active participation can become adversely affected. Having been referred to EYMM families are implicitly identified as having 'a need' which can unwittingly stigmatise them and ultimately act as a deterrent to EYMM. This directly relates to questions presented on page 6 of this report around the underlying motivations and agendas for wanting families to engage in EYMM.

Providers employ a range of strategies to make parents aware of EYMM, connect it to other family services, ensure universal (or targeted) access is variously negotiated which inevitably results in different outcomes and patterns of provision. It is for any given EYMM project to determine the principle objective (music

education, social inclusion etc), the arrangements in place to engage and accommodate local families, and ultimately to recognise that reaching 'hard-to-reach' families will have implications for the nature of the EYMM delivered.

EYMM projects tend to (often unintentionally and despite best efforts) privilege normative (white, British, middle-class, heterosexual) practices through the choice of songs, unwritten behaviour codes and the judgements made of performances that sit outside ideas of normative parenting. Music leaders are likely to achieve engagement/participation when sessions are warm, respectful, and they are a recognisable member of the local community. However, where music leaders are parachuted in they lack this connection. Furthermore music leaders tend to be white, middle-class and classically trained musicians for which the cultural connotations can be off putting.

EYMM sessions tend to be rigidly structured and highly regulated spaces with unwritten scripts, and implicit expectations for punctuality, active participation and adherence to unspoken rules. Where families appear to breach these conditions in some respect they become 'read' as more or less engaged. This interpretation is dependent upon preconceived notions and interpretations of particular (classed, cultural) behaviours. Through critical reflection and by troubling 'taken-for-granted' assumptions about EYMM and the engagement of families it is possible to interpret scenarios and behaviours differently and adjust provision accordingly and so avoid pathologising groups of parents against a middle-class norm.

Insufficient opportunities were made available to consult families about their preferences for EYMM. Professionals relied on intuition and professional wisdom (in some cases to great effect) but where 'hard to reach' families were persistently not engaged in EYMM there was little attempt to systematically ascertain the reasons

for this.

The findings indicate that meaningful engagement evolves overtime and is facilitated by the incorporation of sociable aspects within projects.  The significance of supporting community relationships (and indeed the potential for EYMM projects to represent a 'micro-community') was stressed throughout the case study observations. However, there appears to be a staunch resistance to the creation of artificial communities, where families feel coerced or compelled to participate.

This chapter has illustrated that those involved in EYMM have an awareness of the need to form relationships, provide scaffolding and so on there remains a range of complexities to emerge from the symbolic representations of music(ians) and the ways in which judgements about ('hard to reach') families are based upon (often unfounded) assumptions.

# Chapter 7: Hearing 'Hard to Reach' Parents

A key objective for this research investigation was to ensure that the views and experiences of families (readily categorised as 'hard to reach' in one respect or another) were heard. Therefore this chapter offers a detailed analysis of the accounts provided by eleven such parents who were interviewed about EYMM, and their attitudes towards music more generally. Whilst this sample is small it is not intended that the findings be generalisable but rather illuminate a set of hitherto unidentified and unexplored counter narratives to those which come to dominate current policy about 'hard to reach' groups.

Table 4 below provides a summary of the participants:

*Table 4: 'Hard to Reach' Parent Profiles*

| Pseudonym | Gender | Age | Nationality | Social Class | Marital Status | Number of children | Location |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mark | male | 42 | White-British | M/C | married | 2 | London |
| Comfort | female | 35 | Black-Nigerian | W/C | married | 1 | London |
| Vicky | female | 25 | White-British | W/C | co-habiting | 3 | South East |
| Sheila | female | 28 | Black-Nigerian | W/C | married | 2 | London |
| Sue | female | 34 | Mixed Race | M/C | married | 2 | London |
| Francis | female | 29 | Black-African | W/C | single | 3 | London |
| Natalie | female | 20s | White-British | W/C | single | 1 | North West |
| Sarah | female | 36 | White-British | M/C | married | 2 | London |
| Leticia | female | 30 | Mixed Race (Jamaican/White-British) | W/C | married | 2 | London |
| Danni | female | 31 | White-British | W/C | married | 3 | North West |
| Sam | male | 39 | White-British | M/C | married | 2 | London |

## Musical Dispositions

It appears that regardless of social class background, 'race', gender or age that affinity to music amounts to personal preference. Although the symbolic and cultural value attached to different musical genres, and the ways in which these families engaged with music highlighted a range of interesting issues. For example, the middle-class mothers spoke nostalgically about the central place of music in their childhoods, either from playing an instrument (such as clarinet or piano) or alignment with particular musical genres to define youthful identities (i.e. as politicised or rebellious). However, when reflecting on their current lives the middle-class mothers recounted 'being too busy' to find space for music:

*Me personally I feel that I don't have time for it at the moment which is sad. We've got a piano for instance, we've got an upright piano and I'd love to just get back to playing you know but I simply don't have the time at the moment…I don't listen to music, if I turn on the radio I'm listening to Radio 4. I don't listen to an i-Pod. I don't have headphones. I don't have a sound track going on.*

[Sarah]

Conversely, Vicky and Natalie professed to be avid music lovers. They similarly reflected on how the place of music in their lives had altered overtime, for example Vicky attended ballet, tap and modern dance as a child, but abandoned tap and ballet as she grew to dislike the music. Her passion for contemporary music developed in her teenage years when she went clubbing and enjoyed popular dance music. 'Having the radio on in the background' was mentioned by all the parents interviewed, whilst Radio 4 was cited by Sarah and Mark, more commercial stations, playing contemporary popular music (such as Magic and Heart) provided the background music within the homes of other respondents.

The strategies employed to engage children in music-making or music related pursuits varied widely and it is interesting to note that despite generally relaxed stances music featured significantly in the family life of all those interviewed.

There was a general tendency to encourage children to pursue activities for which they showed some innate, 'natural' interest, and for some that was music. The children within these supposedly 'hard to reach' families were actively engaged in a range of organised activities including swimming, ballet and children's theatre. Where children showed curiosity in music or indicated some desire to make music this was actively encouraged but none felt it was necessary to force an interest. The more middle-class parents claimed not to want to 'push' music on their children:

*I didn't really see the point in forcing him- just because I like it…I don't want to push it when they are too young.*

[Danni]

*I'm certainly not going to send them off to like music lessons which a number of our friends have done with kids and you know made them play every week, we're just not that disciplined or whatever with the kids.*

[Mark]

Several middle-class parents stressed the importance of not coercing their children into organised EYMM sessions; or admonishing their (older) children if they withdrew from playing musical instruments. They demonstrated liberal middle-class parenting strategies in the belief that their children would come to view music as a valuable interest with little more than gentle encouragement on their part. However, others considered the pursuit of organised enrichment activities (including music) a potential means to broaden the opportunities available to their

children in later life, as Leticia explained:

*When I was younger I did swimming and I did ballet but I always dropped out of things when I was younger. And that's why always as a kid I always if I found something hard I just didn't want to do it any more. So although my Mum got this piano, its really just that thing once I found it hard I was just like 'No' I can't do it I don't want to do it anymore. So I didn't want my children to have a similar mentality so I always encourage them and push them and just make everything sound so fantastic. [...] A lot of the people are poor- even myself you know, we don't earn a lot but everything I have it goes into you know getting my children lots of things to do basically so they have a few more options when they're older.*

She later went on to stress that 'there is nothing for my child to aspire to' in the area in which they lived and therefore fostering a sense of aspiration and exposing her child to cultural enrichment activities was an important parenting strategy in her quest for his social mobility.

Interestingly, Mark later qualified his liberal stance by stressing the significant symbolic cultural associations of mastering a musical instrument:

*Neither my wife nor I ever learnt any musical instruments as children....Though we're both quite keen that our children should have that opportunity because we're both great music lovers.... like at a later stage but then there'd be a question of music-making, listening to music and how to hopefully gently to allow them to do something that neither of them do, but I think it's a great life skill, it's quite a sort of it's an issue that we do have in our minds. [...] I think it was about having some quite focused other adult attention of having some discipline and something else to do.*

These quotes illustrate the symbolic socio-cultural significance of music to the formation of particular identities, and the opportunities that might become available from finding an affinity with music (from life skills to self-discipline to social mobility).

It is interesting to note the ways in which the working-class and minority ethnic parents in this sample framed the perceived value of music. Like the working-class and minority ethnic mothers interviewed during the observations of EYMM sessions, these parents also variously made reference to 'fun' and 'happiness'. For example, Comfort stated quite simply:

*It's fun...she likes it...She's just happy. She's pretty happy, yeah, she's loving it and she wants you to join in and she wants to make the body move and all of that and kind of stuff.*

For these mothers the fact that the music enjoyed was at home was a significant factor to influence the level of 'fun', and the consequent 'happiness', that was experienced. For their children the secure and familiar home environment enabled their children to feel uninhibited and so 'run wild' and 'throw themselves around' – behaviours can be surveilled and regulated in some EYMM sessions, as reported in the previous chapter.

## Music(-making) at Home

The research with this group of parents was intended to provide insights about the informal and 'invisible' musicality that may feature as part of the routine family life of those deemed 'hard to reach'. Some interesting classed patterns emerged from the data about the symbolic representation of musicality and musical instruments in the home. For example, the more middle-class families tended to have musical instruments around the home, but interestingly they were rarely played with. Instead musical instruments came to represent cultural artefact or commodity - visibly on display but otherwise redundant. The following examples of 'instrument

as artefact' were cited:  the 'unplayed' piano; 'stacks of vinyl but no record player'; the 'special occasion' ukulele; the 'few songs' guitar; a 'misplaced' recorder; and 'musical bits and pieces around the house'. However, on the rare occasions that the instruments were dusted off/located and played with it was viewed as an 'important cultured activity' [Mark], generally as part of extended family gatherings, Ben spoke of:

*'Yeah there are hymns around the baby grand at Christmas; my mum is in a choir and my dad is an organist so that has become something of a family tradition, but the rest of the year it is an attractive piece of furniture I guess'.*

When asked specifically about the ways in which their children engaged in musical activity at home there was mention of precise items including percussion set, drum kit, musical bath set, and electronic keyboard but generally children were active in decision-making about the choice of radio station or CD. Where music provided a constant backdrop to family life children reportedly listen and sing along to a wide range of music from popular, R'n'B, nursery rhymes to Christian Hymns to Nigerian music. Educational CDs which incorporated music as a means to learn foreign languages were also cited and some children had radios in their bedrooms. Therefore the presence of music, and engagement with it, was routine and habitual rather than a discrete activity requiring dedicated practice. For the working-class families music was inherently embedded in the daily practices around the home.

A further example of the means by which musicality was unwittingly embedded in the minutiae of everyday life was through car journeys. The car represented a key site for playing music and singing with the children- and this involved anything from nursery rhyme CDs, to their own preference CDs, to radio, and some children being 'selector'.

It is interesting to note from the eleven interviews with 'hard to reach' (predominantly working class parents) the assumptions of some EYMM providers reported in previous chapters (i.e. that children reside in a cultural vacuum, positioned in front of the television and have little interaction with their parents) appears entirely unfounded. Although these parents resist engaging in formal EYMM provision or other public displays of musicality, music featured in the domestic routines of family life in various ways: radio/CDs in the car; singing and dancing in church; listening to dad play guitar; music on their favourite television programme; and/or nursery rhymes at the end of play group. Where music was an everyday practice and a regular feature of home life, children readily engaged with it; and hence engaged with their parents. This was not a planned, structured learning activity, but inconspicuous cultural learning through doing. Natalie's comment provides a good example:

*I don't play any instruments; I can play a little bit on the keyboard but nothing major.  But I do like music like that, I love guitar playing and things like that, I really do like people playing the guitar and stuff so yeah I'd like to encourage it with my son if I could, as he gets older.*

What about singing?

*Yes. I'm always singing all the time. My son sings a lot as well, he's always singing, I think he must get it from me as well a bit...because yeah, I'm always singing.*

Other examples were available; Vicky's children dance around the house with her to pop music, 'shaking, wiggling, laughing and giggling'; and make fun of their father when he plays heavy metal anthems on his electric guitar. Whilst Leticia's three year old is not yet at nursery but she enjoys the company of her father, who regularly practices with his band at home. Sue

and Natalie provide further examples of everyday musicality:

*Yes I would say it is a big part of family life but we don't necessarily agree on what we, our music is – I mean I'm from quite a musical family like my parents play a lot of instruments and things. I'm quite musical and I like the very poppy stuff. My husband prefers kind of rappy stuff and my youngest likes the really, really modern stuff that's just coming out you know she listens to Kiss on the Radio. My eldest prefers the musically dancy, she's really into ballet and theatre and all that kind of stuff. We don't always agree but there's usually something playing. She got an iPod for her birthday.*

[Sue]

*I'm really a big music lover, I love listening to music and that's pretty much all I do when I'm at home. I have my stereo in the kitchen and my TV in the front room so basically I have them both on, the telly for him and the music on in the kitchen for me so he just loves it. That's how I just realised that he liked it but I think I listened to a lot of music while I was pregnant so that's why he's a big music lover. [...] I listen to all kinds of music, I don't specifically like any kind, just all different kinds of music going from Alanis Morrisette to the seventies, to all that kind of stuff really, chart music, dance music, just all kinds of different music really....I used to go to musical festivals and I still go clubbing occasionally when I can, when my son is staying at with his dad...so it's everywhere really.*

[Natalie]

For Mark, however, everyday musicality is constructed differently, his children are not active in choosing the radio station or selecting CDs rather their engagement with music in the routine course of family life is presented as relatively passive: whilst the radio is constantly on in the background his children have never questioned nor complained:

*I have Radio 3 or Radio 4 on a lot in the day so they hear a lot of music and I quite like, I quite enjoy listening to – I didn't grow up with classical music at all but now I think it's probably something that they won't necessarily hear that much of elsewhere in the world. I quite like that being on and neither of them have ever complained. [...] , I quite like having classical music on in the house, not very loud, just in the kitchen if we're – if I'm cooking with them or something. They've never asked about it particularly.*

[Mark]

For other parents everyday musicality was very much more active. The following description of Vicky's routine family life, and the central place of music, provides an interesting account to challenge many of the 'taken-for-granted' assumptions that circulate about 'hard-to-reach' families and their seeming disinterest and resistance to engage with music. Vicky recounted the huge part that music plays in family life. In her attempt to discourage her children from watching too much television she encourages them to listen to music (often whilst they are engaged in playing or other activities and while she is doing the housework). Radio, CDs or Spotify [the online free music portal] provide background music to their daily lives. The children have their own music tastes and are proactive in pursuing them. Vicky briefly played an instrument at school but now is content to consume rather than create music and actively listens, dances and sings along to the soundtracks that accompany domestic life. The children's father plays electric guitar (he used to be in a band as a hobby) and remains interested in a range of music including Ska, Punk and Metal (Metallica and Slipknot). 'He's very

passionate about music and he tries to give that to them which is quite nice.' However, the children police their father's music tastes. Vicky likes all kinds of musical genres, from classical to R'n'B and likes some of her partner's music 'that is not too heavy' such as King Blues and Less than Jake.

We have music on 90 per cent of the time 'cause I don't like them watching too much telly. And I like them to have noise, kind of thing, so I put music on. They do so much dancing, they're used to doing music for kind of: 'right come and do some housework, you can do some jobs for Mummy' and we have music on in the background doing arts and crafts with them and I'll actually spend specific time with them dancing. They have their own playlist on my iPhone…so I kind of put that on and they would go 'and this songs a nice song what I wanted on here', and so they recognise the songs that are on.

Vicky reported that each of her children has their 'own song' which was identified when she was pregnant and inadvertently played the same song regularly and noticed increased foetal movements which she interpreted as preference for the particular song:

*[Music] It's very, very important. When I was pregnant the whole time I was pregnant with all three of them I always played a lot of music. I always chose a specific song for each one of them. It would happen to be my favourite song at the time but I played repeatedly…Yeah when I was pregnant I'd start playing music. I had my little girl I always used to play James Blunt's songs- one in particular, I can't remember the name of it now- But it literally-…and then when he was first born- every time he cried I used to play this one particular song and he'd be quiet and he'd calm down straight away. And it sort of lulled him into not just sleep but calm, everything's okay and I mean*

*he used to really like enjoy listening to the music. Same with my little girl I had a particular song which I used to play which was, it was actually it was the only one I had a nursery rhyme for, which was interesting- [Baby Beluga the Whale]*

Therapeutic discourses are apparent in Vicky's articulation of the potential affects that music can have on emotional wellbeing. The potential for certain forms to calm babies has been well rehearsed in various bodies of literature and reinstated through the professional discourses of midwives, health visitors, and so on and permeates much of the parental guidance literature (e.g. The Continuum Concept). Vicky is clearly positioned within these discourses but articulates her interpretation and application with seeming confidence and independence from normative ideas about 'the right' way to introduce children to 'the right' music. She went on to describe her son's various engagements with a range of music:

*And my latest one likes 'You're Sexy and You Know It'. He's really upbeat and like with it but as soon as you start playing that he goes all happy and starts laughing and giggling. So he's had a completely different effect because the type of music is a lot faster, a lot more 'pop-y' and so he tends to be laughing… He got used to it when he was in the womb and when he came out I noticed he was really grumpy one day and I was dancing around and the song came on and he started laughing and giggling. And every time the song comes on he does laugh and giggle…really happy*

The choice of song for her unborn child and her two-year-old might raise questions about suitability. However, a careful consideration of the way in which Vicky and her children engage with the music and the concomitant invitation to dance, wriggle and recognise the satirical overtones of the music video and the lyrics,

provides an alternative reading. The song is essentially a parody and invites playfulness which the baby responds to, and the mother and little sister are engaged in unregulated playfulness that brings about laughter and enjoyment. Through this encounter the children are actively learning on multiple levels and the music provides the platform upon which therapeutic (mother-child, sibling bonding); developmental (language and communication skills); behavioural (interaction, controlled bodily movement through dance); and confidence (enthusiasm for music) can all be realised.

Leticia provides another interesting counter narrative to those that dominate ideas about young children's engagement with music. For Leticia and her family the connections that her husband has formed from attending the local church have an important impact upon music within the home. Having once been a DJ and played in clubs, he now produces music at home, and has weekly band practice, also at home. Furthermore, he runs a music teaching service with a friend through the Church, to teach singing, piano and guitar. Leticia said:

*My husband he produces music and makes music and writes music. And so he's always playing music in the house. [...]He likes to make a variety of different, anything, anything he will make it because he just loves it. He doesn't stick to one particular type. RnB or funky house or you know, he just puts it all in. So he knows quite a lot about music and he's good at playing different instruments- in fact the piano [...] He used to be a professional. But now it's more of a hobby. He does it in his spare time. At the moment he's writing a book and he coaches people on how to be more positive and so yeah he does it in his spare time basically and he's involved in the Music Hour at our church and he helps teach the piano and helps teach them how to sing. Band practice*

*means that our whole family is involved in it so for example there's a guitar player that comes to our church, actually comes to our home every Monday and we practice music so the children get to see like the guitar being played and the piano being played so [...]-and so cos my youngest daughter's at home a lot cos she only goes to school part time for half a day she comes home to see music if you know what I mean, she knows quite a lot of the songs that are played*

Leticia reflected about the benefits of this for her youngest daughter who is at home much of the time and that simply being in proximity to her father when he is practicing is hugely educational:

*My youngest she's at home a lot with my husband's music. She listens to his music a lot and the type of music he plays sometimes gospel, sometimes his own music. She sings a lot of song that he plays but for example he was practicing a song for an event that was going on at church and she knew all the words of the song and at the time I was just like 'wow' I couldn't believe. I mean obviously you listens to something over and over again you get to know it.*

It is clear that this three-year-old is intrinsically involved in music-making at home, at church, and is exposed to a range of genres and practical demonstrations as part of her routine everyday life.

It would be misleading to suggest that the everyday musicality described by these parents is left unmediated. Both mothers stressed the need to manage their children's music consumption. Despite dancing to 'You're Sexy and You Know It,' children are not passively and uncritically exposed to inappropriate sexualised music videos, as this quote illustrates when Vicky is reflecting on Lady Ga Ga:

*I just have to be careful what ones [music*

*videos] I put on then, so I was like 'right now you're copying the dance moves I'll have to make sure the videos aren't quite gyrating' […] I think some can be quite raunchy and you kind of think 'hmm okay' [concern] but then I see it as, it's like if you saw it now, slowly, then when you get older you're going to know more and be more aware that it's not appropriate in certain circumstances you know, you shouldn't degrade yourself by doing it in certain circumstances and all the rest of it. If they ask me a question I'm pretty honest with them, I'm that sort of parent.*

Leticia is also attuned to the kinds of cultural learning her children are likely to get from mainstream pop music:

*She puts it on but I'm very selective in what I love to listen to cos I don't think there's a lot of modern music out there and the words and the songs I don't think for a three year old and a just turned seven year old are quite appropriate. So I'm selective in what they listen to. I let them listen to classical music and as for commercial music I only let them listen to Magic because its not so much of the later stuff its more of the old stuff. I think that music is very powerful and I think if there's, I don't want to be too over protective with my children but as I said earlier well I'm very selective in what they listen to I think that's going to actually benefit them. As I said about Muzzy [foreign language learning] although its not only music they did play a lot of music on it, so you can see how powerful something is like they've learnt so much from it so they can enjoy it. But it's something that's going to benefit them as in learning a different language. I think that as I said it's a very powerful and I'm just very selective in what I let them listen to […] my aim is to just let them be children for they're children now. I don't want them to grow up too fast if that makes*

*any sense.*

Whilst Leticia and Vicky have different parenting approaches to the role and influence of popular music in their children's lives, neither are passive nor unreflexive.

## Resistance to Formal EYMM

The construction of working-class parents having 'chaotic' lives and middle-class mothers as shrewd and meticulously organised was challenged by the narratives of these parents. Without exception, all talked equally about the inevitable chaos that comes with having young children; this was further compounded when families expand. For these parents, attending formal early years sessions (music-making or otherwise) represented a significant challenge which they preferred not to negotiate.

Reflections on having two children under-five revealed a particular set of challenges for these parents especially if the age gap between siblings was such that EYMM sessions were inappropriately pitched and therefore unlikely to engage one or other of the children. Also mentioned was the highly structured nature of formal sessions which can be off-putting. Structure - both in terms of what is expected of the children, and also timing (because getting out of the house, on time, with two or three children under-five is fraught with challenges). This is an issue for working-class and middle-class parents alike. It was clear that all of these parents at one time or another had sampled EYMM sessions and consequently had detected the 'tacit rules' and 'invisible disciplinary technologies' identified in the previous chapter. For example Sarah talks about how her children are quite chaotic and unable to adhere to routine:

*My children, they have much more of a shorter attention span and they wander off and don't really get the idea of having something structured […] now I'd be a pariah from that group because there's no way I could keep my*

*children under control and so no one would benefit from the session.*

Mark also claimed his daughter was one of the less engaged and focused children when he had attended a local music-making session:

*She doesn't seem that enthusiastic about it but she wanders about…she of all the kids there I would say she's in the least sort of focused 20 per cent, you know, she can easily wander off and not sit on my lap and do all the stuff.*

Mark and his partner; and Sarah and her husband, fit with the liberal middle-class fraction identified by Vincent & Ball (2006) in their study of middle-class parents and childcare choices. Liberal parents are seen to favour 'invisible pedagogies' and relaxed boundaries in parenting style and prefer pedagogies based around play, exploration, avoiding fixed structure, performance and outcome. Mark stated that 'we're just relaxed', 'let them do their own thing' and that his children's attendance at local state schools was a conscious parental decision. In terms of music sessions, Mark spoke about allowing his daughter to wander and variously disengage; and also that his son has been given the freedom to come back to piano if and when he chose. It is interesting how this approach to parenting is interpreted differently when the family in question is working-class, single-parent, minority ethnic and so on. This research is amongst numerous studies that illustrate the means by which certain families get read as in some way deficient; and 'lacking' the correct parenting skills, discipline and boundaries and therefore in need of correction whilst others are merely considered 'liberal'. Whilst Mark appeared untroubled by his daughter's lack of engagement at the EYMM or the possible judgements that might have been made about his parenting, he nevertheless ceased attending because it 'felt like too much hassle'.

This group of parents were principally deterred from attending EYMM because it was overly structured and incompatible with the competing demands on their time (studying part-time, caring for other children, school drop-off/pick-up etc). The type of provision of greatest appeal to this group of parents tended to be characterised by flexibility and informality. For example, Sarah regularly attended a local 'Stay & Play' drop-in centre. She particularly liked that it required no formal, long-term commitment; that it was free; in a nice location in the park; opened at noon and closed at 3.30; and offered the freedom to drop in at her convenience; and there was no age restriction for children, as she explained:

*That works better for me at least than saying there's a class there at 2.30 and be there or you can't do it. So yeah, the sort of freedom was the biggest draw and they had really nice kind of play workers and it attracted lots of different children, lots of different parents and you could always just chat to someone and like there were a couple of sofas so if you were breast feeding you could sit on a sofa and also there was no kind of great structure to it, they'd have one table of activities but there were also just like corners of the room that were [inaudible] and boxes of toys and a bit especially for the babies and stuff outside as well if it was good weather. I don't know it has always kept my, especially my toddler really happy and we could always spend an hour or two.*

Mark shared Sarah's concerns that EYMM sessions are often too structured and strict which can be off putting. He also preferred Stay & Play for many of the same reasons outlined by Sarah; he also felt that not committing to pay for a term in advance allowed his daughter the choice to decide whether she wants to participate in music at any time in the session:

*I slightly think with our daughter she's just a*

*bit young at the moment to have any you know real interest…she might take in a bit of music because she might want to do music, you know when we go to the Round Chapel and Sally Army there are instruments around, you know, plinker plonker around for 5 minutes or not. But it's not a problem if she decides she doesn't want to…. I think it was sort of 4 or 5 quid which for an hour when you can go to Sally Army for 3 hours for sort of 2 quid or whatever and I know that our daughter's not necessarily going to get much out of it on a particular day and it begins to look a bit pricey. I think you were sort of encouraged to sign up for a whole half-term and I just thought 'oh you know it's too much'.*

Cost was frequently cited as an important consideration by all the parents and was a greater barrier for those currently unemployed or on low-incomes. Related to cost was doubt over the quality of EYMM sessions. From prior experience these parents reported feeling underwhelmed; particular concerns included: music leaders who lacked singing ability; reliance on only-traditional nursery rhymes; and insufficient instruments for all children. They expected music leaders to be competent, engaging and organised but also to have some appreciation and experience of working with very young children. There was recognition that this represented two separate sets of skills but in order to justify spending money, and mobilising themselves to attend EYMM on a regular basis, both would need to be in clear evidence.

## A Place for Pop

As illustrated earlier by the examples provided by Vicky and Leticia popular music, and the various mediums in which it is available (CD, video, Spotify) provide a range of opportunities for adults and children to engage with, and make sense of popular cultural references and react to the music through dance and parody. When

reflecting upon perceived short-comings of formal EYMM several mothers were at pains to stress the missed opportunity of failing to build upon children's interest in popular culture. Vicky was most vociferous about the potential for popular music and popular culture to be used to great effect in EYMM, as she explained:

*I mean S-Club Juniors, their music was brilliant there's nothing wrong with music like that to be played for children. And I think songs like Spice Girls - it was very empowering you know and things like Girl Power and especially with the world how it is now I think songs like that, that kind of 'yes you know we are strong! We can do this'. They're very good songs as well. And the pop relief songs and sports relief songs they're always absolutely brilliant songs because they're for charities and that. It would be nice to have a wider range of things like […] it would be nice to listen to a bit more stuff than just nursery rhymes. And also like TV programmes; songs like Postman Pat and Telly Tubbies. My little ones love songs like that off CBeebies. So they really enjoy that.*

These views were shared by others, advocating the application of popular music as a means to teach young children about the society in which they live and the (unequal) differences between groups of people in society (i.e. men and women) and a moral conscience (i.e. charitable causes). But this sort of cultural learning does not preclude opportunities to acquire cognitive development associated with more traditional genres (repetition, word/letter recognition, etc). For these families popular music was not regarded as a replacement to traditional pre-school music, rather it was viewed as complimentary. For example, Vicky played music of varying tempos at different times in the day; upbeat Ska during the day, and more calming music to aide concentration or as a means of calming before bed. In addition she instigated nursery rhymes in

the bath:

*In the bath they have a musical instrument set and they enjoy making music in the bath and bath time I always do singing with them as well. I sing nursery rhymes in the bath with them like at bath time I try to find a new nursery rhyme so they learn the nursery rhyme themselves; much to their disgust. The kids seem to prefer the other songs; they prefer more of the songs that I listen to on a daily basis.*

Given the findings presented in this chapter it is perhaps unsurprising to learn that the respondents' children were not stimulated by the music on offer at EYMM, which their parents regarded as dry, bland, turgid and 'boring'. Whereas the policy imperative to reach and engage these sorts of families rests upon a set of assumptions, that such families require stimulation through formal music-making provision, a reason given for non-attendance is that the provision available is not stimulating enough. This finding raises important questions about the symbolic cultural representations (and perceived superiority) of some forms of musical engagement (EYMM) over others (that which occurs habitually within the domestic sphere).

## Exclusive EYMM

There was some recognition (from both middle-class and working-class parents) of (white) middle class colonisation of EYMM provision. The middle-class respondents (the liberal fraction of the middle-classes) demonstrated considerable ambivalence in regard to their position within very ethnically and economically diverse communities. Whilst there was a sense of celebrating their liberal politics there were also practices of gravitating towards 'people like us' (Robson & Butler, 2001). For example, Mark reflected upon the fact that despite enjoying living in an edgy, cosmopolitan, urban locale he tended to make friends with middle-class mums:

*You know that's an interesting one because you get, well firstly you know there are obviously quite a few middle class parents and I suppose in truth most of the friendships I have are probably with Mums from that sort of background. In fact that's probably more in terms of ethnicity I would certainly have friends, mothers who are different ethnicity to myself; whereas they probably are all middle-class one way or another.*

Sarah claimed to consciously disassociate herself from middle-class mothers, which was one reason she gave for not attending EYMM. The working-class mothers interviewed recounted the discomfort they experienced at entering principally middle-class spaces (such as EYMM) with emotive language: 'a struggle'; 'I felt despised', 'looked down on', 'they wouldn't come across to you – probably not look at you' – this was compounded further when they were young mothers, for example Vicky described the composition of a local EYMM she attended once:

*You tend to find it's Mums in well paid jobs that have that one day off, or stay at home Mums where the Dad's gone off and it's his house, she's got a lot of money. It tends to be the upper class kind of people who are in their 30/40s because –rather than Mums that have got a lot of younger ones who'd rather just stay at home or can't afford to... ...I feel like I've literally walked into the room and there's 30 year olds and it's kind of like- as lovely as it all is- 'you really don't like the same things as me'. They'll talk about like home made cottage pies and- fair enough I do cook- but I think sometimes, oh okay I'd much rather talk about different things. They're like oh, then, so they're very much the type 'oh well I wouldn't give my child chips' and I'm like 'alright fine'. [...] And I kind of feel like they look down on me as well which I kind of find a bit difficult being a parent because I'm like,*

*I'm probably just as good or sometimes even better than you are because I'm more chilled out. I give my kids more options and I kind of feel that sometimes some of the parents are kind of like they didn't live their lives how they wanted to so they're getting their child to [......] we just see groups and we do feel completely outnumbered by middle aged upper class women with the money to do it – and you know that they've got you know the services are there to use and everything,*

## Informal Networks

The assumption that the 'hard to reach' are isolated and need to be encouraged and supported to experience social inclusion appeared largely misplaced amongst this group of parents. Some parents who resisted regular attendance at formal organised provision created and sustained informal networks to organise activities for their children. For example, Vicky and Natalie are part of a large friendship groups (with mothers of a similar age) that regularly congregate at each other's houses or the park, with the children. Sue is part of a home-school network which provides mutual support and organises group activities (which are often free or relatively inexpensive). Vicky had the advantage of a career in childcare before becoming a full-time mother, she made use of the knowledge and networks she had about quality provision available locally and how best to access or replicate it with her network of friends.

For a number of families, regardless of ethnic background, Church was an important part of family life and source of musical enrichment ranging from hymn singing to a four piece band leading original music for the congregation to join in and dance to.

This supports the suggestion made by a music leader in the course of the case study observation work that non-attendance or sporadic

attendance does not necessarily denote social exclusion or marginalisation. Instead these informal networks are rendered invisible in policy terms but clearly represent an important and effective alternative to that which is visibly available.

## Chapter Summary

'Hard to reach' families employ a range of strategies to engage children in music-making or music related pursuits. Despite generally relaxed stances music featured significantly in the family life of all those interviewed.

Music held important symbolic socio-cultural significance to these parents. Engaging with music was thought to contribute to the formation of particular identities, and the opportunities that might become available from finding an affinity with music (from life skills to self-discipline to social mobility).

For these 'hard to reach' families the presence of music, and engagement with it, was routine and habitual rather than a discrete activity requiring dedicated practice. For the working-class families music was inherently embedded in the daily practices of domestic life. Where music was an everyday practice and a regular feature of home life, children readily engaged with it; and hence engaged with their parents. It was not a planned, structured learning activity, but inconspicuous cultural learning through doing.

The construction of working-class parents leading 'chaotic' lives and middle-class mothers as 'shrewd and meticulously organised' was challenged. All parents recounted the inevitable chaos that comes with having young children; this was further compounded when families expand. Therefore attending formal early years sessions (music-making or otherwise) was a challenge they preferred not to negotiate.

This group of parents were deterred from

attending EYMM because it was too structured and incompatible with other demands on their time. Provision of greatest appeal to this group of parents tended to be flexible and informal.

Cost was as an important consideration and a barrier for those unemployed or on low-incomes. Related to cost was doubt over the quality of EYMM sessions. From prior experience, these parents were concerned that music leaders lacked singing ability; there was reliance on traditional nursery rhymes; and there were insufficient instruments. Music leaders were expected to be competent, engaging and organised but also to have some appreciation and experience of working with very young children (the latter was found lacking).

The working-class mothers advocated popular music to teach young children about society. Cultural learning through popular music does not preclude opportunities to acquire cognitive development associated with more traditional genres (repetition, word/letter recognition, etc). For these families popular music was not regarded as a replacement to traditional pre-school music; it was viewed as complimentary.

Policy imperatives to reach and engage these sorts of families rest upon assumptions that there is a need to stimulate them through formal music-making, however there was a general view that provision was not stimulating enough. This finding raises important questions about the symbolic cultural representations (and perceived superiority) of some forms of musical engagement (EYMM) over others (that which occurs habitually within the domestic sphere).

Findings from 'hard to reach' parents further supports claims made in the literature and in previous chapters, that formal EYMM can represent judgemental, White, middle-class, heterosexual, normative spaces.

Non- or sporadic attendance at EYMM does not necessarily denote social exclusion or marginalisation. The musical activities of 'hard to reach' families are invisible in policy terms yet parents are often engaged with their children in music-making at home, with friends and outside formal EYMM settings.

# Chapter 8: Action Research

The third strand of this research study involved the identification of three EYMM projects to undertake self-reflexive action research on approaches to engaging 'hard to reach' families. The projects were identified in collaboration with Youth Music and informed by the scoping exercise. An Action Research Toolkit (see appendix) was devised and provided to each of the participating projects to support systematic approaches to assessing and developing EYMM practices in respect of reaching and engaging families deemed in some way 'hard to reach'. This was further supplemented by on-going face-to-face and email support from members of the research team.   This chapter is intended to provide an overview of the three EYMM projects that participated in the action research and to highlight some of experiences, challenges, advantages and unanticipated outcomes to emerge from this exercise.

## The Projects

During the scoping exercise attention was drawn to a small number of EYMM projects that for various reasons exemplified interesting or effective practice in respect of engaging 'hard to reach' groups. Furthermore, the specific focus of each provided an important site for further research (i.e. the Roma community; SEN/disabilities). Each of the projects worked directly with families with young children (either as part of their on-going, day-to-day music sessions or during specific sessions aimed at directly engaging parents). The three projects included:

1.  Roma project located in the South East involving the local authority music service and other project partners from local voluntary groups (EYMM in a Children Centre as well as Key Stage 2).  This project was launched in spring 2012;

2.  Large London based music charity:

professional musicians working with schools and nurseries (one musician was identified for the Action Research and two schools with which he works).  This was a well-established project, running for several years;

3.  London based charity providing a range of music services.  The Action Research focused on a project that runs from two Children's Centres: one targets families deemed 'hard to reach'; and the other is aimed at children with hearing impairments and their siblings. The latter project has run for a number of years.

## Project One: 'The Roma Project'

This project is run by the local authority Music Service; other initial partners included the local YMCA; AikSaath (expertise in conflict resolution, work with young people and working with traveller communities); and the local Sure Start programme. There are many other supporting partners such as the local school; Roma support groups; and other local organisations.

The project is located on the edge of a large town in the South East in an area of high deprivation (bottom 20 per cent Super Output Areas in England). The area consists of a diverse and transient population, covering Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Romanian, Somali, Polish and Refugee/Asylum seekers, with over 34 different languages spoken.  Pakistani, Indian, Polish and Romany refugees are the predominant cultural groups although there remains a small population of White British residents.  The area has an above average percentage of teenage crime, alcohol and drug abuse and prostitution compared to national averages. Most workers are in low paid jobs and untrained, with over 79 per cent categorised as holding 'no qualifications' or 'low level qualifications'.  Many people in the area are in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance (6.2 per cent against a national average of 3.6 per cent).

This EYMM project has the primary objective of engaging with Roma families from the local area.

Young people from Roma backgrounds have traditionally encountered a range of barriers, for example when people from the Roma community attempt to access services providers often present inadequate knowledge about the Roma community, its culture, needs and aspirations. High levels of illiteracy, a lack of formal qualifications and language barriers further marginalise this community and its young people. Discrimination and prejudice compounds the social exclusion Roma communities encounter, particularly in schools where Roma children have experienced racism and bullying (Rutter, 2004). This makes many Roma children reticent to pursue education to secondary level, ensuring that their marginalisation continues. The whole community has been demonised in the local press and Roma people more generally have been routinely pathologised through public/media representations (e.g. recent coverage on the BBC [6] has examined the issue of begging by Romanians in London, which has further fuelled negative stereotypes as reported in the free press: Metro, Evening Standard etc ).

The EYMM project sought to interrupt the widespread marginalisation of Roma families by establishing a service that would provide educational opportunities, challenge stereotypes and enhance socio-cultural integration in the local area. The specific aims were to:

- support  Roma children and their families (early years and Key Stage 2) to engage in educational experiences designed to boost confidence and self-esteem as well as enhance language skills;

- enhance music-making and to develop 'young leaders' to lead music sessions; and

- improve understandings about different cultures and address racism directed towards the Roma community.

The project offered initial taster sessions to Roma children (from birth to five years) and their families

at a Children's Centre. The sessions run from a community room in the centre, which acts as a multi-purpose room used by health-visitors; Stay and Play groups and so on. The EYMM sessions are led by a reception class teacher from a local primary school; she has been 'bought out' of her usual role in the classroom for one afternoon per week.  A member of Children Centre staff supports the teacher in the music sessions as there is a commitment to support Early Years practitioners to developing an autonomous ability to lead EY music-making sessions in the future (with the intention of sustaining EYMM at the Children's Centre). The children at the EYMM attend other provision at the Children's Centre and some of the older children attend the local primary school (in reception class). It is significant to note that parallel work is taking place with Key Stage 2 children in the local primary school.

The EYMM project encountered some initial difficulties when a key partner withdrew from the project.  This affected initial contact with a key member of the local Roma community, who it was anticipated would support the project in engaging with Roma families. Initially, it had been envisaged that the project would run from a renovated shop (now a base used by the Roma community) but owing to withdrawal of a key partner (that owns the building) this was not possible.  The local Children's Centre is recently built and hence potentially more attractive than the renovated shop but is not a key venue used by the local Roma community.  There may be an opportunity to use this building in the future but it represents a number of health and safety and safeguarding children issues because it is not specifically designed for Early Years activities.

The EYMM project faced a further challenge when a key worker in the local authority, with a Roma background, left her post. It was intended that she would provide a vital link and support the work of the project in engaging with Roma

families in the area.

The broader socio-economic and political climate also represented a considerable challenge to the project. Recent changes to local authority structures and related funding cuts more generally has resulted in dissipated local knowledge about the Roma community. Human resource issues have meant that communication between different partners has been hampered, the project has spent considerable time waiting for responses to communications in order to 'make things happen', for example, the project has been waiting a long time for leaflets about the project to be translated into Romanian.

## Key Developments in Project One

After some time the EYMM project recruited a Roma link worker, which should help engagement with the community because of shared linguistic and cultural heritage with the target families. She is well known locally and has relationships with families from her work at a local primary school, combining her role at the primary school and as link worker for the EYMM project will inevitably mean that the time she has available is limited. However, another Roma link worker in the primary school partnered with the Children's Centre is now engaged with the EYMM project too. Furthermore, training sessions with the Roma support group have taken place to raise awareness of the project team. The link worker is collaborating with a practitioner from the Children's Centre to raise awareness and become mutually well versed in the practices of engaging specific cultural groups in family services. The project has run a 'taster' session for families in the local primary school and is running some after-school sessions to engage families directly.

Clearly this project is in its infancy and has encountered various operational challenges. However, staff at the EYMM project have embraced the opportunities that participating in

the action research has offered in respect of reflecting critically about various aspects of provision from practical concerns to strategic planning.

## Project Two: Musicians working with EY Settings

In contrast to the Roma Project the second action research project includes a programme that has been running for 12 years with the dual purpose of enhancing EYMM for young children (aged two-to-to-five years); and supporting EY practitioners with their work in this area. Currently, the charity works in partnership with the music services of three inner London local authorities. The project works with school-based nursery and reception classes; children's centres and PVIs primarily in areas of deprivation.

The areas in which the project currently works are typical of inner London in terms of acute social, cultural, economic and linguistic diversity. The project currently works with 14 different settings across these local authorities and this involves six workshop leaders.

The project has the following specific aims, to:

- enhance the EYMM skills and musicality of young children aged two-to-five years, particularly in areas of deprivation;

- enhance children's personal, social, emotional development and creativity;

- develop the professional skills of EY practitioners in supporting young children's music-making to sustain music-making beyond the 'life' of the project (both more formal and more spontaneous music-making in settings); and

- encourage parental awareness and support for the project.

Projects typically have the following characteristics:

- run for six months;

- EY practitioners are contractually required to participate and attend three formal training sessions to help them identify and use their music skills with children;

- there are seven interactive workshops in settings over six months, including three sessions with professional musicians;

- sessions include some adult-led movement: singing; use of instruments and props; and a focus on child-initiated free play with a music focus. Music leaders spend the session in the setting to become integrated with the work occurring in situ;

- each setting is given a set of instruments to keep;

- parents are given a leaflet outlining the project; a website they can explore with their children as well as a CD to use together; there are posters displayed in settings. Parents are invited to attend an initial meeting and a later event aimed at sharing information.

- The project culminates in an event in which all children, practitioners and parents involved can participate

As the project is wide-spread, the Action Research focused on working with one music group leader and his work across Hackney and Tower Hamlets. He has worked with the project for 10-12 years and is also a governor of a Children's Centre. He proposed working with two settings (both reception classes) for the purposes of this project.

The group leader identified some difficulties encountered in engaging families with the project which was felt to reflect the relationships between the school/EY setting and families more generally. Another specific challenge related to the fact that children attend the setting as part of their more general education, consequently it can be difficult to engage parents (i.e. they do not have to take the children to the music session – it is part of the

programme of the setting). Reception class settings tend to prefer the more structured approach to music-making as opposed to a 'free play' approach. Despite these challenges the project enjoyed key achievements: firstly, the accompanying CD has received enthusiastic feedback; and secondly, where music events are tied into other scheduled activities there is sometimes a greater parental attendance.

## Key Developments in Project Two

- The EYMM project has introduced the use of video/photos of music sessions to share with parents.

- It has also made its presence more visible to parents as they come in to school to enable greater engagement in more informal conversations e.g. notable child participation in sessions.

- The project website has been displayed on the interactive whiteboard for parents to view at morning drop off.

- Over the course of the project photos of the sessions have been displayed for parents to see.

- The project has also specifically targeted influential parents with information and invited them in to an earlier session.

- A CD has been given to parents.

- The leader decided to have some instruments out for children (and parents) to play when they come in before the next session. However, thinking through how what works for children i.e. having instruments on the floor may not work for parents so having things available on table tops too.

- The project has undertaken to work with the reception class teachers so children make invitation cards for the parents' session. By including more engaging activities for parents in parent workshops, and by emphasising how children learn whilst having fun when engaged

in EYMM has improved awareness and engagement.

## Project Three: London Charity: 'Hard to Reach' Families and Hearing Impaired Children

This project runs from two children's centres in West London. The area is very mixed in terms of affluence and deprivation. This project is a late recruit to the action research phase of the study. The project aims to engage children and families in EYMM and to target families deemed 'hard to reach'. The music leader has a long working history in this locality and has identified that middle-class parents (and their nannies) tend to monopolise provision when it is universally available and free.

The project with hearing impaired children has run for many years and there are long-standing relationships between parents, children and the music leader. It runs after school in a Children's Centre hall space. The other project is relatively recent and runs in the early afternoon in another local Children's Centre. There are no Children's Centre staff present in the project with hearing impaired children but a Children's Centre worker supports a child with a disability in the other project. The music leader engages children and families in music-making with a wide range of activities and sometimes works alongside other music staff. The after school music provision for hearing impaired children also has a snack break as it can represent a long day for some children. Parents actively participate in the co-ordination and organisation of the session.

The project has reported some difficulties in collaborating with Children Centre staff to evaluate the project. Staff lack time for such work which occurs at a different venue to the Children's Centre in which they are employed which presents logistical challenges. Some families send children in to the music-making room in the

Children's Centre but do not engage themselves.

### Key Developments in Project Three

- The project is creating more opportunities to informally share music-making that occurs within the home and building on this;

- The project plans to create a video and book for each setting and a movie style event to show parents their children's engagement in sessions as a means to discuss the learning that has occurred.

### Emerging Themes

Clearly, each project is at a very different stage and varies in terms of target families; history of working in a particular area or with a particular community or setting; and the raison d'etre for their projects. However, building upon the findings reported from the previous stages of this research study, it in interesting to note emergent themes across the three action research settings provide further insights that can usefully inform service planning and delivery of EYMM.

### Establishing & Sustaining Relationships

For the Roma project, the importance of securing a Roma link worker cannot be underestimated, but due to budgetary cuts and attendant local authority restraints this has taken time and ingenuity. The appointment of a professional who shares a linguistic and cultural background with families is crucial to success.

Relationships are also important with link settings. Each of the three action research projects has links to either schools or Children's Centres and each project made sustained efforts to establish relationships with an existing team of staff, who have different professional heritages; different levels of confidence and interest in EYMM; and are also working with a high level of uncertainty over their work situations. When trying to establish relationships with families, each EYMM project comes into an already established

pattern of working with families. Project Two in inner London, the two schools have long established patterns of engaging (or not) with families: one is quite 'formal'/distant and the other less so. Regardless of how much EYMM projects try to engage with families, they are dependent on the context within which their project operates.

Space is a significant factor that impacts on relationships. Action Research Projects One and Three operate in rooms in Children's Centres, but these rooms are distant from the usual play space used by the children (typically a community room). Thus, it is difficult to forge relationships with other members of centre staff and there may only be one Children Centre member that comes regularly to sessions to support a child or group. It may also negate informal opportunities to meet families at drop off and pick up times as well as opportunities to engage with children as part of everyday play in settings. Space can also be perceived in a negative way by some families e.g. Action Research Project Two operates from school settings, one of which is a school that has tended, historically, to keep families at 'arm's length'.

Time is also crucial to forming and sustaining relationships. Action Research Project Three has worked with families with hearing impaired children in West London for a number of years. A visit to a session demonstrates the high degree of ownership parents have over the operation of the music sessions e.g. organising the space, the refreshment, talking about their child's progress etc.

Building in time to engage with families is also significant in sessions. In Action Research Project Three, the music leader spent the latter part of the session talking informally to parents about their children's music-making whilst the children engaged in more informal musical 'play' time. A wealth of information about the children's home

music-making can be gleaned e.g. a two year old Somali child who liked a story book at home with buttons that, when pressed, played nursery rhymes. The child knew most commonly sung nursery rhymes in full and could sing each in tune. In Action Research Project Two, the drop off time at the beginning of the day was focused upon as a key time for forging relationships with parents who did not generally stay with their children once the school day had commenced. Utilising times such as this to talk about a child's music-making appeared significant in forging relationships with parents – and demonstrates interest in their child and not just music-making more broadly.

## Difficulties with Targeting

Action Research Project Three noted difficulties when providing a service open to all families: a tendency for middle-class families to monopolise the service at the expense of the families with whom the project aims to engage. For Action Research Project One, it has been difficult to target Roma families until a Roma link worker has been recruited. In order to maximise the use of the EYMM on offer in the Children's Centre, sessions were extended to other children who may or may not want to participate (as in another part of the Children's Centre building) and so the sense of a stable group is hard to sustain.

## Small Things Make a Difference

Seemingly minor factors such as the weather can make a huge difference to engaging families in EYMM. The Roma project experienced very low uptake of its EYMM provision during cold weather and many children did not attend the Children's Centre during such periods.

Engaging families deemed 'hard to reach' is clearly challenging and time is needed to establish and sustain relationships, but small things can make a difference. Action Research Project Three documented the difference made

by standing up to talk to parents at the beginning of a session rather than always sitting on the carpet which is usual practice to engage children.

The use of technology is also important. Many school settings have interactive whiteboards which are often underused as a resource to share information. Again Action Research Project Two made its work more visible within the two schools through use of noticeboards. Action Research Project Three is aiming to produce a book and video so parents can see their own engagement in the project (parents attend with their children generally) as a celebration of achievement but also as a catalyst for discussion about the value of EYMM for their children's learning.

Finally, showing an interest in parents own children and not just more broadly in music-making seems to be a vital ingredient in engaging with families. Action Research Projects Two and Three noted the importance of such informal conversations.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter has illustrated a range of challenges that EYMM projects experience when endeavouring to be inclusive and/or reach targeted groups. The findings generally confirm what has been presented elsewhere in the report in respect of the strategies that can be effectively put into place to better reach and engage 'hard to reach' families. A synthesis of the broad conclusions and recommendations from across the strands of the entire study in presented in the next chapter. It is worth noting here that the self-reflection that these three projects undertook as part of this study has continued, and Youth Music intends to facilitate the dissemination of the toolkit that aided them through the action research and their experiences of making EYMM more effective at reaching particular families.

# Chapter 9: Conclusions & Recommendations

This research study provides an important contribution to on-going debates about 'hard to reach' families, specifically in the context(s) of early years and music-making. Through the three distinct yet iterative strands of investigation a set of key findings are identified which can support various actors to work with families in the most inclusive and respectful ways. Furthermore, the findings highlight the various means through which families (who wish to be reached) can become better engaged in early years music-making activities. What follows is a summary of effective practices that have been deployed by early years (and) music-making providers and related services to reach and engage families. Following this summary the chapter then offers a series of recommendations at the level of policy, strategic planning and service delivery.

## What Works

As the policy and funding landscape of early childhood services has altered in recent years, following a change of government administration and in the midst of an economic recession, the legacy of the Sure Start initiative and Children's Centre Agenda are under threat (*Nursery World*, 2012). Sure Start Programmes (and Children's Centres more broadly) in many ways represented the flagship for New Labour family policies. They were founded upon principles of co-ordinating and developing existing services within a local area to support families in various ways. Importantly, programmes were intended to avoid stigmatising particular groups and aimed to empower parents in various ways e.g. through consultation exercises and decision-making to shape services. By reshaping and enhancing existing services and increasing the co-ordination between agencies it was intended that Sure Start programmes would offer integrated service delivery to all local families (Sure Start Public Service Agreement, 1998) through outreach and centre based services. The national evaluation of Sure Start (NESS, 2005) and various local evaluations (e.g. Osgood, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009) provide evidence of the effectiveness of local programmes to achieve many of these stated policy objectives.

At the time this study was undertaken family services co-ordinated and delivered through local neighbourhood programmes (such as Children's Centres, Sure Start Programmes, Library Services) were experiencing acute financial cuts, staff reduction and demands for greater public accountability. This shift is significant for the ways in which families within local communities are constructed in policy terms and hence service delivery; where services are principally targeted (rather than universal) some families become pathologised as deficient and needy. There was evidence that the recommendations set out in The Field Review (2010) (for family services to become more targeted and for families deemed 'hard to reach' to undergo heightened monitoring, surveillance and coercion to participate in services designed to remedy the perceived shortcomings of their lifestyle and behaviours) were taking effect.

The factors identified through this study, that promote enthusiasm for and engagement in formal EYMM are those encapsulated by the Sure Start Initiative. Where early years services and music leaders are genuinely in touch with the local communities the level and nature of engagement is greater. Related to this is the formation of long-standing relationships and a commitment to long-termism; for many of the EYMM providers their place in the local area was established over time and participation was achieved through reputation and personal recommendation.

Again, echoing the principles of Sure Start, the EYMM provision that was most effective at

reaching and engaging the widest range of families (and specifically those deemed in some way 'hard to reach' in a local context) was achieved through working holistically. The inter-agency practices galvanised and consolidated through Sure Start Programmes and Children's Centres have left a lasting legacy on the working practices of many professionals involved in planning and delivering early years provision. However, as outlined above, such practices are threatened by the stripping of resources and loss of staff. It is also important to note the disjuncture between the professional agendas of early years professionals and music specialists where the latter are generally less well versed in this tradition of working in integrated ways and instead tend to privilege the perceived importance of musicality over family engagement in local services.

Drawing on Boag, Munroe & Evangelou (2010) other key features associated with effectively reaching and engaging potentially reluctant groups to EYMM included good lines of communication appropriately pitched, a willingness to be flexible, and to ensure that provision is contextualised and community-based. A range of practical considerations have also been highlighted throughout the report and whilst there can be no definitive set of ingredients to achieve engagement in EYMM these tend point to a level of predictability (in terms of timing, venue, structure) but attention to the setting and the implicit rules within EYMM sessions is also crucially important. The cultural and classed connotations associated with certain musical genres and particular community venues are significant. Exercising a degree of critical reflexivity around these issues pays great dividends in terms of parental willingness to engage in formal EYMM.

## Recommendations

To conclude, this research highlights a set of important recommendations that might address the seeming reluctance of some families to engage in formal EYMM. As outlined in Chapter Three of this report there is a crucial need for all actors involved in devising policies, planning strategically, and practically delivering services to families with very young children to undertake an exercise in critical reflection. It is vital to question underlying agendas – 'Why do we want to reach 'hard to reach' families?' 'Who will benefit from their participation?' 'Do we have a reciprocal agenda?' In troubling the 'hard to reach' concept progress can be made to avoid viewing individuals or entire groups within society as in some way deficient. The data from parents not currently engaged in formal EYMM (presented in Chapter Seven) illustrates the composition of such a group is diverse, and policies and practices designed to better engage such families rests on a set of stereotypical assumptions that must be challenged.

To this end, the following key recommendations emerge from the study:

- The focus should be placed on organisations, and the actors within them to question underlying agendas, objectives and rationales for EYMM  rather than pathologising groups for a seeming reluctance to participate/engage;

- Furthermore, organisations need to challenge taken -for-granted assumptions, professional wisdom, intuition and hunches. Working upon an imagined worldview of what families need, want, and will engage with sets the foundations for services to be inappropriate, misjudged and in some instances offensive.

- Related to the previous point, those planning and delivering EYMM must avoid (often unwittingly) privileging (White, middle-class) normativity and instead consider a breadth of musical genres and modes of delivery.

- A very significant issue to emerge from this research is the generation of professional

hierarchies through EYMM projects. Music specialists, (tokenistic) representatives of cultural genres, and early years practitioners are all constructed in narrow ways that is limiting and unhelpful to achieving greater participation in EYMM. Specific attention should be paid to improving synergy between music specialists  and early years professionals;

- The Action Research Toolkit should be made widely available to facilitate on-going processes of critical reflection by EYMM projects; the findings of which can improve practice and be disseminated to generate debate.

- Use of the Toolkit will assist EYMM provider to maintain more rigorous and detailed data about families that use services to identify gaps; and establish how far changes to practice are improved through systematic assessment and critical reflection.

- Inherent within the toolkit is the expectation that EYMM projects consult families about what they want and value rather than operating upon a set of assumptions. This is an exercise that would necessitate a level of integrated working (discussed earlier).

## End Notes

1. Youth Music defines 11 regions; the nine regions identified by the Arts Council plus the additional regions South West (North) and South West (East); and South East (East) and South West (West).

2. *http://www.youthmusic.org.uk/news/In-Harmony-Liverpool.html*

3. *http://makeabignoise.org.uk/sistema-scotland/*

4. *http://www.youthmusic.org.uk/musicispower/blog/50/youthmusicpraisedinthetimes.html*

5. Futurelab (2009), 'Keeping it in the family', in Vision, Futurelab.

6. *http://news.bbc.co.uk/panorama/hi/front_page/newsid_9618000/9618038.stm* accessed 19 October 2012.

# Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

## Engaging Hard-to-reach families in Early Years Music-Making: Strand 2 Topic Guide: Music/Project Leaders

### Research Aims & Objectives

- identify effective ways of engaging parents in music-making with their early years children, with a particular focus on those who are less likely to appreciate the value of music-making or are not accessing existing provision;

- identify models of effective engagement in early years music-making with 'hard to reach' parents that occurs;

- establish what components of parent-child early years music-making could most effectively be replicated and disseminated and in which contexts to encourage greater participation;

- track the implementation of these components and assess which are most successful at engaging 'hard to reach' parents in music-making.

## 1. Respondent/Organisation Background

- Brief details about their role/remit

- Brief details about their professional background –e.g. music specialist, ey specialist, other

- What is their position on 'hard-to-reach' – how do they define it?

## 2. General Questions About Engagement in EY Music-making

- Give examples of range of projects they have been involved in

- Is parental involvement necessary?

- What are the benefits/disadvantages of involving parents?

- What strategies have they used to engage parents in EY music-making? which were the most effective?

## 3. About a Specific Music-making Project (current, most recent/relevant to the research)

- details of project:
  - ➢ location;
  - ➢ size;
  - ➢ length;
  - ➢ description of activities;
  - ➢ intended outcomes;

- aims and objectives of project (including whether involvement of parents was part of these);

- level and type of involvement by parents (i.e. attending events, leading activities, designing project);

- available data on children involved and, where possible, data on parents involved;

- views on which type/ groups of parents engage in projects and which are 'hard to engage';
  - ➢ perceived barriers and challenges to engaging parents;
  - ➢ strategies used to engage parents initially;
  - ➢ attrition rates – what strategies are employed to re-engage families;

- perceptions of 'what works';

- what works for whom? Which parents receptive to which strategies of engagement.

- direction to other parallel/complimentary services in the area that are known to effectively engage hard-to-reach families.

## Engaging Hard-to-reach families in Early Years Music-Making: Topic Guide: Strategic Overview of Area

### Research Aims & Objectives

- identify effective ways of engaging parents in music-making with their early years children, with a particular focus on those who are less likely to appreciate the value of music-making or are not accessing existing provision;

- identify models of effective engagement in early years music-making with 'hard to reach' parents that occurs;

- establish what components of parent-child early years music-making could most effectively be replicated and disseminated and in which contexts to encourage greater participation;

- track the implementation of these components and assess which are most successful at engaging 'hard to reach' parents in music-making.

### 1. Respondent/Organisation Background

- Brief details about their role/remit

- Brief details about their professional background –e.g. it's proximity to music, the early years

- What is their position on 'hard-to-reach' – how do they define it?

- Describe the local area: demographic profile, levels of affluence/poverty, etc.

- What approaches are taken to engage parents in service take-up and delivery in the area

### 2. Addressing 'Hard-To-Reach'(Ness)

- How does LA define 'hard-to-reach',
  - ➢ which groups are defined as 'hard-to-each';
  - ➢ are there priority 'hard-to-reach' groups

- What approaches taken to engaging hard-to-reach families in the area probe outreach, publicity, etc

- Identify range of exemplary services that effectively reach and engage families defined as hard-to-reach

- Nature of parental involvement in services designed to engage 'hard-to-reach' families (planning, delivery etc)

### 3. Perceived Effectiveness of Projects

- Views on which type/ groups of parents engage in projects and which are 'hard to engage';

- Perceived barriers and challenges to engaging parents;

- Strategies used to engage parents and perceptions of 'what works';

- Direction/referral to other parallel/ complimentary services in the area that are known to effectively engage hard-to-reach families.

### 4. Music-making Projects

- (Where) does music/music-making fit within their approaches to engaging 'hard-to-reach' groups;

- Knowledge about early years music-making projects in the area

- i.e. organisation, providers, scope, description of activities; intended outcomes;

- Level and type of involvement by parents (i.e. attending events, leading activities, designing project);

- Do projects self-evaluate and monitor their effectiveness in terms of reaching and engaging 'hard-to-reach' families?
  - ➢ Is this data available?
  - ➢ How effective do they consider the music-making projects to be? In what respects?

## 5. Details of Other Projects

- Can they direct us/provide details of specific projects

- What materials/resources are available

- Relevant strategic/LA level plans that can help to contextualise area-specific issues

## Engaging Hard-to-reach families in Early Years Music-Making: Topic Guide: Hard to Reach Parents

### Research Aims & Objectives

- identify effective ways of engaging parents in music-making with their early years children, with a particular focus on those who are less likely to appreciate the value of music-making or are not accessing existing provision;

- identify models of effective engagement in early years music-making with 'hard to reach' parents that occurs;

- establish what components of parent-child early years music-making could most effectively be replicated and disseminated and in which contexts to encourage greater participation;

- track the implementation of these components and assess which are most successful at engaging 'hard to reach' parents in music-making.

### 1. General Personal information:

- where they live,
- number and age of children,
- family formation,
- employment situation,
- primary carer?
- extended family,
- how long lived in the area;
- what they think of (provision) in the local area for parents and families

### 2. Experience of EY provision in general (or specific setting you interview them in)

- What do they generally use this setting for? How long have they come to this setting? How often? what do they like/ dislike? how compare to other EY provision, toddler groups etc in the local area?

- **OR** what do you tend to do with your children on a weekly basis IN GENERAL? Go out much? e.g.
    - ➢ Nursery
    - ➢ Children's Centre
    - ➢ Library
    - ➢ Leisure Centre
    - ➢ Family/ Friends
    - ➢ Church/ community groups
    - ➢ Formal groups/ sessions
    - ➢ Shopping

### 3. Music in the family and local area:

- **Experiences of music-making in the family:** To what extent is music a part of your life and your families life?/ Where does music appear in your life/ the life of your family?

- - Do they listen to/ make music **in the home?**
    - ➢ playing music,
    - ➢ listening to music,
    - ➢ singing,
    - ➢ using instruments,
    - ➢ watching music-based programmes - and genres, including music from their cultural heritage or family songs/ rhymes);
    - ➢ who? (mum/dad? grandparents?)

- - Do they do anything with music **outside of the home** – going to:
    - ➢ Other people's houses
    - ➢ Parties,
    - ➢ gigs,
    - ➢ festivals,
    - ➢ church/ faith based events,
    - ➢ attending concerts etc at community

groups etc – **either with our without your children…**

- What do they think the **benefits** are for them? for their children?

## 4. Experience or knowledge of EYMM *provision* in local area: knowledge of, perceptions of, and prior engagement in early years music-making provision in local area the private, voluntary and statutory sector (including perceived barriers);

- **are they aware of any music-making projects?**
- **what do they think of them?**
- **would they attend? why not?**

## 5. If haven't already said: how would you describe your:

- ethnicity and your cultural heritage?
- Religion?
- Age (roughly)?
- Education?

Engaging Hard-to-reach families in Early Years Music-Making: Strand 2 Topic Guide: Parents Engaged in Provision

### Research Aims & Objectives

- identify effective ways of engaging parents in music-making with their early years children, with a particular focus on those who are less likely to appreciate the value of music-making or are not accessing existing provision;

- identify models of effective engagement in early years music-making with 'hard to reach' parents that occurs;

- establish what components of parent-child early years music-making could most effectively be replicated and disseminated and in which contexts to encourage greater participation;

- track the implementation of these components and assess which are most successful at engaging 'hard to reach' parents in music-making.

## 1. Personal information (as much as we can get?):

- Where they live,

- Number and age of children,

- Family formation

- Employment situation

## 2. How / why they came to attend the sessions:

- How did they hear about it? Friends, family, children's centre staff, publicity

- Why did they choose to attend? or were they referred? if so, how do they feel about this?

- What do they **hope to get from coming**/ what appeals – chance to meet other parents? fun? enjoyment? children's learning? *

- Try to get to perceived value of music-making

## 3. Experiences so far:

- How many times have they attended?

- What do they like/ dislike – try to get to levels of engagement/ involvement and how they feel about getting involved/ singing/ dancing – enjoy or prefer to sit at back and watch?

- Perceptions of quality of activity and type / genre of music

- Perceptions of staff

- Relationships with other parents and the 'mix' of families (who comes, who doesn't and what they think of that?)

- How might it be improved? what would be ideal for you? what would it look like?

## 4. Impact:

- What do you think **your child gets out of** coming here? - is all about child development or just fun? Have you noticed any changes in your child?

- What do **you get out of coming here?** meeting people? seeing your child have fun/ achieve? getting out of the house? learning something new?

- Does it **impact on what you do with your child** outside of the session?

## 5. Prior experience:

- **Of the setting:** what do they generally use this setting for? have they attended other activities/ projects here? What did they think

- **Of EYMM provision:** knowledge of, perceptions of, and prior engagement in early years music-making provision in local area the private, voluntary and statutory sector (including perceived barriers); what makes this project different/ better / worse?

## 6. Music in the family and local area:

- Experiences of music-making in the family: To

what extent is music a part of your life and your families life?/ Where does music appear in your life/ the life of your family?

➢ Do they listen to/ make music in the home? (singing, listening to music, playing music, using instruments, watching music-based programmes - and genres, including music from their cultural heritage or family songs/ rhymes); who? (dad? grandparents?)

➢ Do they do anything with music outside of the home – going to gigs, festivals, faith based events, making music, attending concerts etc at community groups etc – either with our without your children...

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# Youth Music: Action Research Toolkit: Engaging Families in Early Years Music Making

## What do we mean by an 'action research toolkit'?

- This particular toolkit has been developed in order to support practitioners who work in early years' music-making with an aim of engaging families. For some of you, this may be with engaging a particular group e.g. traveller families or fathers.

- The emphasis is on engaging with families deemed 'hard to reach' to ensure early years' music-making practice is as inclusive as possible.

- We use the word 'toolkit' because this leaflet is based on what we have found out about engaging families in early years' music-making (EYMM) from an extensive review of the literature on the subject; a scoping exercise of EYMM projects across the country; talking to key individuals with expertise in delivering services for families; and case studies of four EYMM projects.

- It is called a 'toolkit' because it is likely that some 'tools' will be more useful in helping you to engage with families in your project – or at different stages of your project - than others. You have greatest knowledge of the families you are trying to engage in your particular projects and areas.

- These 'tools' relate to reflective questions to ask of EYMM practice (contained in the coloured boxes later on) as well as the research methods which might be employed at various points in an action research project. In this toolkit we provide a basic overview of research methods which might be employed but also give details of references where you can find more detail.

- It is hoped that by participating in an action research project aimed at engaging families in EYMM you will be further enhancing collective understandings of how to develop this important area of practice.

## What do we mean by 'action research'?

- This toolkit is based on ideas about the importance of action research (sometimes called 'practitioner research') as a means through which practitioners themselves work on enhancing their practice in a particular area.

- Action research often emerges from real-life, practical problems. Elliott (1991:52) describes this as 'practical wisdom', which he defines as 'the capacity to discern the right course of action when confronted with particular, complex and problematic states of affairs'. Here, the issue is how EYMM projects can engage with families in order to make their service as inclusive as possible.

- More critically, Brown and Jones (2001) argue that action research enables practitioners to problematize areas of their practice that have seemed 'common-sense'. When thinking about engaging families in EYMM this is a vital consideration as it is often these taken-for-granted ideas about particular groups of families and established ways of working that need challenging.

- A key idea in action research is the idea that people work collaboratively on enhancing practice as opposed to working in isolation. Crucially, for something to be sustainable, more than one person needs to have ownership of the ideas and be involved in changing practice.

- Action research can be thought of as a cycle in which you start by 1) identifying a particular issue (for the purposes of this project, this will relate to enhancing the engagement of a particular group of families in some way); 2) then develop a more rigorous understanding of the initial issue (through research); 3) then plan to make changes; 4) then monitor these changes; and finally, 5) evaluating the impact of changes made. This cycle may well develop into further cycles (Kemmis and Taggart [2005] suggest 'spirals') as new ideas for enhancing practice are likely to come to mind and these too may be implemented; monitored; and evaluated. You can see a very simple pictorial representation of an action research cycle below (taken from LLAS.ac.uk):



identify problems/
issues for investigation

carry out
research

formulate
action plan

reflect on and
evaluate action

## An action research cycle

- For those of you that are new to action research, this might sound like what you do anyway – after all, most practitioners are keen to improve their practice! – but action research involves a more rigorous approach to e.g. developing an understanding of the particular issue (why a particular group of families are not engaging with a particular EYMM project) as well as a more rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluating changes made to practice. In addition, unlike everyday practice, action research is often disseminated to a wider audience and we hope that in the course of your action research projects you share your findings and experiences with others.

*We include chapter 8 on action research from the book 'Research Methods in Early Childhood' by Mukherji and Albon for further reading.*

## What we have found out about engaging families with young children in music-making?

We have found that there are a number of factors that impact on the engagement (or not) of families in EYMM.  These include:

- ✓ The advertising and marketing of projects and sessions
- ✓ Time  and place of sessions
- ✓ Whether sessions are universal i.e. for everybody or targeted at a particular group e.g. young parents
- ✓ Monitoring who engages in EYMM
- ✓ Working closely with other services
- ✓ The content of EYMM projects and sessions
- ✓ How EYMM projects and sessions are delivered
- ✓ The importance of establishing and sustaining relationships

These are explored in more detail in the boxes below and with reference to work from the literature and data gained from this Youth Music funded research project so far.

### The advertising and marketing of projects and sessions

- How do families get to hear about your EYMM project?
- Do you involve a range of key professionals and agencies e.g. health visitors and nursery staff in a children's centre in publicising your project?
- Is there a key individual you can identify, who 'makes things happen' – this may be someone who is prominent in the local community (and not a 'professional')?
- Do you place any publicity materials e.g. posters and leaflets in spaces which are used by families with whom you find difficult to engage e.g. community cafes; football clubs; places of worship?
- Are any written materials you produce available in languages other than English? How do parents who cannot read find out about your project?
- How 'user-friendly' are your publicity materials?  Are they inviting to the particular families you are hoping to attract?  Have you elicited their views on any publicity materials and made any changes on the basis of this?
- Do you make use of technologies often enjoyed by the families with whom you hope to engage e.g. Facebook or text-messaging to advertise your sessions?

## Time and place of sessions

- Do your sessions run at a time which is convenient for your intended families e.g. after dropping children off at school/nursery or prior to this or especially if in a rural area, at times which dovetail with any local bus services?

- If your service is over-subscribed, how do you ensure that families (who for a range of reasons find it difficult to get to sessions at a particular time) are still able to access your sessions e.g. through keeping back a few places for late-comers?

- If you run sessions at different times, which families tend to attend particular sessions?  What can you learn from this?

- Where do EYMM sessions take place? Is the venue comfortable and accessible for all families? Have you elicited the views of families on the timing and venue of your project?

## Universal or targeted sessions?

- If you offer targeted sessions to particular groups of families, how is this presented to them?

- If your project has a brief to target a particular group of families, how was this 'target group' decided upon? What assumptions are made about particular groups of families in this process?

- How are the particular families you hope to engage with identified (if your service is targeted)? How do you avoid stigmatizing them as a group?

- If you offer sessions which are open to everyone, are there particular groups of families that do not attend your EYMM sessions?  Who? (see further points)

## Monitoring who engages in EYMM

- Is data kept relating to who attends EYMM sessions (i.e. demographic details around age; class; 'race'; distance travelled; whether the parent/child has additional needs etc…) and the regularity with which families engage with a project?

- What methods are used in order to gain this data?  How do families feel about this?

- Is this data analysed e.g. to see which families in a given area engage in EYMM sessions? (This might involve checking against demographic data in a given area and working closely with key services such as children's centres)

- How is this data used i.e. is it used to feed forward to developing new strategies for engaging with families?  Do you inform families of the purpose of collecting such data?

## Working closely with other professionals and other services

- To what extent and in what ways does your project liaise with other services in the locality, most notably early years' services such as children's centres?

- To what extent are you aware of the priorities of different services with whom you work and how your project fits into these priorities?

- To what extent do you share ideas with early years' practitioners e.g. ideas about how to enhance EYMM in early years' settings?

- How do you value the knowledge and expertise of early years' practitioners e.g. in their work with particular families and/or their expertise in working with very young children?

- Have you invited other professionals with expertise in working with families to observe and offer comment on your project?

- Is there any training provided locally e.g. in a local children's centre relating to engaging with families, which you can participate in?

## The content of EYMM projects and sessions

- Who decides on the content of an EYMM project? Does it build on the lived experience of children and families or do you always assume you know best what an EYMM project should contain?

- What attempts are made to find out what EYMM goes on in families outside of sessions e.g. in the home and local community?

- Are families encouraged to continue with aspects of the EYMM programme outside of sessions? If so, how is this presented and is there an opportunity to discuss this?

- Do you think of EYMM activity in its broadest sense (to include e.g. a wide variety of experimentation with sounds and music genres)?

- Does the content of a project or individual session make families proud of their backgrounds?

- Can the project actively challenge commonly held stereotypes relating to e.g. 'race', gender and class or does it reinforce these stereotypes?

- How open are you to criticism? What tools do you use when eliciting feedback from families on a particular EYMM project?

- Are these tools appropriate for the particular families you engage with? Do you gain a detailed account of different families' perspectives on your work?

- Do you use this data to feed forward to any new projects?

- Do you elicit feedback during the 'life' of an EYMM project to explore whether it is meeting the needs and expectations of families? If you do this, are you willing to change any pre-planned activities in a programme accordingly?

## How EYMM projects and sessions are delivered

- Are the skills and knowledge of all families valued in sessions? How is this achieved?

- Are you sensitive to cultural differences in communication?  Are you wary of interpreting noise levels, 'looks', body language or spontaneous hugs and kisses as' inappropriate'?

- Do you try to see your EYMM provision through the eyes of families who might not fit people's 'norms'?

- Can families bring food for their children to eat during sessions or is refreshment provided? How is this viewed?

- Are families made to feel welcome when they have a child who has difficulty conforming to the style of delivery of your programme?

- Are sessions organized in a way that is highly structured or in a way that is less structured/ flexible (or maybe a combination)?  Have you elicited feedback from parents as to their preferences and why?

- Have you elicited feedback from early years' practitioners (EYPs) experienced in planning and delivering activities for very young children about the style of delivery of your programme?  Have you had an opportunity to observe EYPs in their work e.g. engaged in creative play activities? What might you learn from this?

## The importance of establishing and sustaining relationships

- The quality of relationships which are established and maintained underpin many of the previous points.  These relationships might include practitioners within an EYMM project team; EYMM practitioners and other key professionals e.g. nursery staff; EYMM practitioners and key strategic staff e.g. heads of children's centres or managers of family services; and finally (and crucially): relationships between EYMM practitioners and families.

- Is time built into the project which will enable you to establish and maintain relationships with a range of professionals and agencies?

- What strategies do you have for forging new relationships and sustaining existing relationships when many services and professionals with whom you work are facing uncertain futures? How can you 'future-proof' your project?

- In working with families, do you maintain high levels of warmth and low levels of criticism?

## Translating these ideas into an action research project

- So far we have looked at what is meant by 'action research' and we have shared some insights in relation to engaging families in EYMM. Of course there are many other questions that might be posed in relation to practice – this is meant as a starting point. A central idea in action research is the need to reflect critically on practice as this is crucial in affecting change.

- Earlier on, we thought about action research as a cycle and suggested that it differs from everyday practice owing to the systematic data gathering that occurs at each stage. Often, at the beginning of a project, you might have a 'hunch' that something needs improving, but on closer reflection (and with reference to data gathered) the issue may be quite different than initially imagined.

- This final section of the action research toolkit aims to think about some research methods or 'tools' you might use in your action research project. We have thought about this in relation to four basic components of a typical action research cycle.

### 1) Starting point: Identifying an issue and finding out more about it

- You are likely to start your research by discussing the issue that concerns you with your EYMM project team – for example your concern might be around engaging young parents in EYMM.

- Crucially, you then need to ask people's permissions to carry out a piece of research – this will include signed permissions from all practitioners and parents involved in your EYMM project. People need to know what you are trying to do and why (the notion of 'informed consent'); the methods you hope to employ (interviews, written observations, videos of sessions etc…); assurances of anonymity and confidentiality; assurances about how the data will be managed; and an indication of how you hope to use the data gathered (perhaps it will be used as a report for the Youth Music website or a conference paper). Although very young children cannot give consent in the same way as adults, you should also be mindful that children give and withdraw their consent during sessions in the way they dip in and out of interest in what is happening and so should not be coerced into participation.

- These permissions might be on a written A4 sheet, but sometimes it might be more appropriate to get a group together and explain in person what you hope to do and why. In this way, families are able to ask you questions directly from the outset.

- Then you will need to do some systematic research to find out more about the issue that concerns you.

  - ➢ Maybe you need to ask someone other than your team to observe a session with a critical eye and make notes to share with you later.

  - ➢ You might carry out a focus group interview with particular families; possibly a questionnaire might be employed (but always remembering the levels of literacy of families you work with).

  - ➢ You may need to consider how you access a particular group i.e. if no young parents have attended your EYMM project in the past you may need to think creatively about how you will elicit their perspectives on why this is the case (possibly through working closely and sensitively with a local family worker).

  - ➢ These are just suggestions and there are many other methods you might employ.

- We'd strongly suggest that you also keep a reflective journal to document your thoughts on the research process.

- In action research, almost any research method might be employed. The key is 'fitness for purpose'. Therefore, any methods chosen need to help gather the data you need to explore your focus question in greater detail.

- Once you have gathered some data, you then need to begin to analyse this and in doing this, be reflective of your practice and open to criticism. After all, action research aims to improve practice. Think about what the data is telling you so far – from the heaps of comments you have gathered, can this information be organized into some sets containing similar perspectives? In doing this, you will have begun a process of systematically analyzing your data, which will help with the next stage.

## 2) Planning changes

- At this stage, you will need to work with your team to plan changes to your practice in order to affect an improvement to an aspect of work relating to engaging with families.

- Usually this might be done at a meeting (you might ask if you can record this as this too might be 'data' in an action research project). You might like to think who else you could include at this meeting – it might be a representative from a parent group or a key person/early years' practitioner; or an outreach worker from a children's centre.

- At this time it is useful to plot your plans of action onto paper so everyone is clear who will do what; when and how (but allowing for flexibility within this of course). These changes might relate to where you advertise your EYMM; liaising with a local health centre (which you have not done before perhaps); or asking a group of families who you hope to engage in EYMM about the music they enjoy at home and planning a project that uses this as a starting point. There are some reflective questions for practice contained in the coloured boxes earlier on in this toolkit. You might want to use some of these as a starting point for some reflective discussions.

## 3) Monitoring changes

- Once you have some plans in place you need to monitor these changes. This monitoring might be through systematic monitoring of attendance during sessions; videoing sessions (extremely useful in helping a team to reflect together on what is happening in a session – but you need to be very clear with participants how the data will be used, especially if you intend to share it with a wider audience when disseminating your project); asking a team member or someone outside of the team (if available) to undertake detailed observations of some sessions with a focus on how families engage with the music-making.

- By undertaking a systematic approach to monitoring, you will have data to reflect upon during the 'life' of the project but also well beyond it.

## 4) Evaluating the impact of these changes

- We expect that you are used to evaluating any project that you have been engaged in and these evaluations are important in helping to identify the degree of success of different projects and potentially, for securing funding for delivering EYMM projects in the future. This, of course, could result in silencing the perspectives of families who have found it difficult to engage with your EYMM project or could mean that you downplay the negative aspects that any project will inevitably encounter.

- This is understandable in a time of budget constraints, but in order to reflect critically on the impact of

an action research project it is important to review everything the data is telling you about your project.  Often, it is the 'voices' outside the 'mainstream' that tell so much about the services offered to families.

- It is also important to remember that when trying to engage with families – especially those who may have found it difficult to engage with a range of early years' services and not just those involving EYMM – small steps forward may be highly significant.  This is where a rigorous approach to collecting data is so important – it is your evidence!

- In sharing successes and sharing the difficulties encountered in a project, other EYMM  projects can also learn from your project.

- Finally, it is inevitable that when evaluating a project, new thinking about how to enhance practice is generated.  This is why Kemmis and Taggart (2005) prefer to think about action research as series of spirals rather than a unitary, cyclical representation.  So, it may be that an action research project is the catalyst for further research.

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