

Youth Music - Westfield

'Engaging Sounds' - Increasing engagement of learning through music

Term 1

KEY:

ML: Music Leader

TML: Trainee Music Leader Buckinghamshire Music Trust

WPS: Westfield Primary School

The Term 1 report was completed by Kath Borer (Project Leader and ML) and reviewed by Kirsty Mees (Evaluation Officer)

OVERALL AIM

To enable Westfield Primary children to engage in high quality ensemble sessions that challenge, develop and progress musical, social and personal skills for life.

The 'Engaging Sounds' Project offers live group music making sessions and performance opportunities to the children attending Westfield Primary School (WPS). WPS caters for children experiencing difficulties in communication and interaction. Term 1 of the project consisted of the Music Leader (ML) and Trainee Music Leader (TML) providing weekly music sessions to four classes in KS2. The project will run for 6 terms alternating between KS2 and KS1 classes each Term.

Due to COVID19 restrictions all sessions in Term 1 were presented online via Zoom with some children accessing the sessions from home and others from the classroom. Later in the term, once schools were fully open, Zoom sessions continued with all children in the classroom and the ML and TML presenting online. Lesson plans were adapted for the online format and ML coordinated and led the sessions with the TML supporting. Some of the children were familiar with the ML as she had been running intermittent sessions with various classes prior to the project commencing.

Performance opportunities in Term 1 focused on the ML and TML sharing their musical expertise singing and performing songs, playing a variety of instruments, improvising and encouraging the children to explore through instrumental exploration, movement and vocalisation. A live concert or sharing concert for the families did not occur during Term 1 due to restrictions around COVID19, however, two live concerts and two sharing opportunities have been scheduled during Term 2.

The majority of the children adapted to the online format and appeared engaged and enthusiastic about the musical activities. There were challenges around the online platform which meant some aspects of the sessions were different compared to face to face. Challenges related to (i) technical issues such as sound and video quality, access to platform (ii) distractions within the

home/classroom environment (iii) individual needs such as sensory sensitivity and auditory processing.

Additional challenges were also noted by the ML in the delivery of the online sessions. ML describes (i) difficulty maintaining the flow from one activity to the next due to sound quality and delay (iii) musical cues and conducting not as easy for the children to follow on screen (iii) leaving space and pauses to promote independent musical exploration and improvisation did not have the same impact online as sound was often lost or delayed (iv) difficulty in interpreting responses and individual needs due to lack of real-time feedback and close up visual observation (v) some instruments not being as effective in exploring musical goals online such as pitched instrumentation. This was a result of latency issues which meant it was difficult for the children and ML's to hear what was being played and to play along to accompaniment. ML reflected on examples of frustration from individual children when their ideas and feedback were impacted by technical challenges.

Despite these challenges, overall the children showed resilience and acceptance within the online music format and continued to achieve and progress in their musical and communicative responses. Some sections of the sessions worked particularly well via Zoom such as rhythmic activities with instrumental exploration such as drumming and hand percussion. These activities were more free and although there was still delay it was much easier to match responses to musical cues. The ML therefore adapted the plans to focus on untuned percussive instruments for all instrument led activities.

The following structure and outcomes were the basis for all sessions:

Welcome - We Will Rock You

- Singing repeated song, fine/gross motor skills, vocal sounds, following musical cues, rhythm and pulse

Group Playing - New song each week

- Playing together, dynamics, crescendo/decrescendo, performing to each other during weekly sessions, playing and following simple melodic patterns, playing untuned percussion in solo, duet or as a group using musical games

Group Singing or Sound Making - New songs each week

- Language, word and sound making skills, singing and sharing favourite pop, folk & world songs together with instruments

Moving - New songs weekly but with the same aims

- Move and engage creatively, independently and as a group, improve gross motor skills and physical response to the music

Rhythm - Everybody Can You Play Along (weekly + new song)

- Playing in time and feeling the rhythm/pulse, following musical cues, playing untuned percussion in solo, duet or as a group using musical games, improvising rhythmic patterns using simple notation

Songwriting - Improvised songwriting

- Writing topical songs together led by the children.

Listening - New piece each week based on a topic

- Reacting to a piece of music heard by responding musically, vocally or with movement.

Goodbye - Reach for the Stars (weekly, with signing)

- Singing repeated song, fine/gross motor skills, vocalisation & following musical cues.

The children became confident and familiar with the structure of the sessions quickly and would anticipate what would come next. The teachers were integral to supporting the children and promoting musical responses; handing out instruments, maintaining focus and supporting individual needs. The repetitive session structure helped the children to engage and build confidence in the musical activities as well as wind down towards the end of the session as the focus switched to songwriting and listening rather than playing instruments.

The project enabled the school to purchase a variety of new instruments for the children to use throughout the project and beyond. These included chime bars, ukuleles, drums, castanets, claves & dance props. The children were very excited by the variety of new instruments for them to enjoy and explored them in lots of different ways. Video evidence captured children holding castanets close to their ears, playing them with fingers and thumbs, tapping them on hand, tapping them away and near. Any instrument that could be shaken was shaken enthusiastically and sometimes forcefully by many of the children. Over the term the majority of the children began to adapt their shaking and instrumental exploration in response to the musical cues within the piece of music performed by ML and TML such as dynamic and tempo changes.

A school governor who observed one of the sessions commented:

'Children explore the new instruments in a number of ways. Children make a sound in a traditional way with the instruments but some hold it close to their ear, put it under their foot, turn it around and around reach inside or around it. Children find the instruments very tactile and like to explore.'

The drumming section of the session consistently resulted in enthusiastic responses from the children each week. Levels of excitement and also autistic traits such as spinning, bouncing, rocking were apparent just before drumming began. Drumming and percussion can be very inviting with many of the children creating sound instinctively and exploring how loud and fast they could play each time. Drumming and percussion is also very accessible, open to different ways of exploration, provides multi-sensory input, and achievements can be made in many musical areas. There were many examples of the children performing and copying (i) simple rhythmic patterns (ii) changes in dynamics: loud, quiet, crescendo, decrescendo and tempo: fast, slow, accelerando, ritardando (iii) musical cues.

Drumming and percussion activities also presented challenges for some of the children due to auditory sensitivity. ML reflects on a small number of examples where children became overwhelmed by the volume and unpredictability of sound during drumming/percussion activities in the classroom. ML notes when planning for Term 3 with the KS2 classes to (i) allow time for children to settle back into face to face music sessions (ii) support children who may need access to sensory supports such as ear defenders, taking a break etc. (iii) monitor the length of these activities and individual responses while children re-familiarise themselves with the face to face music session structure (iv) include further turn taking and sharing of drums to reduce overall volume while re-introducing drumming as a group.

OUTCOME 1 - MUSICAL

To improve rhythm, pulse & tempo skills using group musical activities

This will be explored by:

- *Playing untuned / tuned percussion in solo, duet or as a group using musical games*
- *Improvising rhythmic patterns using simple notation*
- *Moving and dancing with a variety of props/instruments to different tempo's*

Exploring music as a group has motivated and encouraged the children to build their musical skills. It has also created opportunities to extend social skills through turn taking, acknowledgment of peers musical responses and building musicianship skills. The children appeared to enjoy turn taking and listening to different instrumental sounds. They were very eager to have their turn, however, would often sit and wait, watching and listening to their peers before it was their turn to play. This is an important ensemble skill and feedback from teachers and ML observations suggests that this can be an area of difficulty for the children. The ML highlights the achievements of the classes overall in their listening skills and social/emotional understanding and describes examples where children would still play their instrument however very quietly so as not to distract their peers. ML notes that it was wonderful to see how the children supported their peers and gave them the time to showcase their individual musicality and express their ideas.

The ML led each activity within the music sessions by playing guitar, singing or playing various untuned and tuned percussion. The TML would support the children with visual and verbal cues such as actions, singing and musical commands. This joint approach supported the children to participate, achieve and engage within the sessions and was particularly helpful during the zoom sessions when ML was playing an instrument as it provided an extra visual cue throughout each activity.

The drumming song 'Everybody Can You Play Along' was repeated each week. The children watched (eye contact via the screen), listened and replied with their drumming pattern. Simple drumming call and response patterns follow within this song. The children were very focussed during this activity and confident sharing their musical understanding and ideas. ML observations of the children's participation and responses during this activity included joint attention, focus, smiling and animated responses suggesting that drums were a preferred instrument for the classes overall. Please see video section ***VIDEO EVIDENCE RHYTHM.**

During the movement section of the sessions, the children explored freely and creatively, dancing and moving along to the music. Many of the children would watch the screen and listen for musical cues and changes, responding in their own way. The children were also aware of peers responses and often examples were observed where the children would copy and follow their peers. Ribbons, scarfs and pom poms were explored during these activities and would often be placed on faces and body parts to feel the textures. The questionnaires completed by the children and teachers suggest that movement activities were a favourite within the groups. ML describes this section of the session as being free with little instruction and therefore the children were able to respond in their own way which reflected their individual preferences and needs.

On return to the group sessions in schools, some children have appeared less animated and enthusiastic during the movement sections. ML suggests some of the children may be feeling a little self-conscious performing and dancing in front of peers after time away compared to sessions at home where they may have felt less inhibited. The zoom session format may have also been more challenging when the children were together as a group due to sound quality, latency and visual interaction. When sessions continue with KS2 in Term 3 they will be held in the WPS hall where there will be room for children to spread out and find their own space to move which may support further movement based responses. ML is also aware of age-related responses to

particular activities and plans to incorporate children's own song choices and a wide variety of movement options and experiences.

A few children who were very active participants when at home have been absent or removed themselves from classroom music when back in school. This appeared to be due to sound levels and auditory sensitivity, feeling overwhelmed, and/or a dislike of particular activities (often related to song choices). In Term 1 ML supported children who may have found the return to sessions in school challenging by acknowledging their participation in sessions, directing questions and requesting preferences. ML will continue to work with teachers and staff to support all children to participate in ways appropriate to them.

ML observations of musical and rhythmic responses during the movement based activities:

N: recognised the same rhythm from 'We will rock you (welcome song)' to 'I love rock n roll'. Instinctively he started tapping his knees and tapping his chest in exactly the same pattern that we use for the welcome song.

B: used his iPad (at home) to dance with by moving it around in circles and shaking it. B does not like to dance in front of his peers but he creatively used his iPad to move and join in with the group.
***VIDEO EVIDENCE MOVING**

J: is very free when moving. He really finds his groove and moves around the space and with props creatively. He moves in a very calm and gentle way similar to ballet. ***VIDEO EVIDENCE MOVING**

B: tapped his pom pom on the drum in time to the music and then started to move his whole body in a very fluid way. Very in-tune to the music. ***VIDEO EVIDENCE MOVING**

OUTCOME 2 - PERSONAL

To improve language and communication through composition and songwriting

This will be explored by:

- *Singing and sharing favourite pop, folk & world songs together with instruments*
- *Writing topical songs together led by the children*
- *Sound making games*

The songwriting section has been a very rewarding part of the project so far. The children really enjoy this part of the lesson plan and offer imaginative and creative suggestions. So far the ML has been suggesting a topic for the children to engage with and explore lyric ideas. The ML has then played simple melodies whilst the children listen and think about words or sentences that could fit with the melodic idea. Ideas suggested by the children in Term 1 have been elaborate, highly imaginative, complex, funny, utilised an extensive range of vocabulary and told stories.

The songwriting and the listening sections were calm moments within the online lesson format without instruments, which some of the children appeared to prefer and need within the session format. Examples have been observed where children whose participation may have been intermittent during the first part of the session have refocused and engaged enthusiastically during the songwriting and listening sections.

SONGWRITING - TERM 1

SONG LYRICS

Theme 1: ANIMALS

(M1)

I would be a wolf - aooooooo
And I'd play a snow
I would be a wolf - aooooooo
And I'd play a snow
I walk along and I'm friends with everyone
Oh I want to be a wolf - aooooooo
***VIDEO EVIDENCE SONGWRITING**

(M4)

I would be a Unicorn Anaconda
And I'd play at the mountain by a beautiful blossom tree
I'd crawl on my belly, my friend is a horse snake
Oh I want to be a Unicorn Anaconda

(M2)

I would be a Bunny Rabbit playing in the garden
I would be a Bunny and I'd hop along
I'm friends with other bunnies and I eat all the carrots
Oh if I were a Bunny

Theme 2: SPACE

(M1)

In space there are space men
In space there are stars
In space there is a moon and it's made of cheese
In space there are planets
In space there are scientists
In space there are stars
And the moon is made of cheese
***VIDEO EVIDENCE SONGWRITING**

Theme 3: WORLD BOOK WEEK

(M1)

Once upon a time there was a book
There were angry birds and star wars characters
And they were fighting
Why were they fighting
They were fighting the animals
But why were they fighting?

Theme 4: MUSIC

(M2)

Music makes me happy
Music makes me sad
And music calms me down
Music makes me happy

Music makes me sad
And music calms me down
Music reminds me of lots of different things
And music makes me want to dance
Oh Music is Happy
And music is sad
And it can calm me down

***VIDEO EVIDENCE SONGWRITING**

(M4)

Music helps me do things
That I wouldn't normally do
It helps me to express myself
And sometimes I dance

***VIDEO EVIDENCE SONGWRITING**

Theme 5: SCHOOL

(M2)

School is fun we love it
We love lunch
School is fun we love it
And we love maths
School is fun we learn how to follow a beat
Schools is fun we learn, the little children learn how to eat

***VIDEO EVIDENCE SONGWRITING**

Theme 6: SPORT

(M4)

What sports do we like to play
What do we like to play
Squash and rugby
World cup and six nations
Bailey's good with a skipping rope
And all of the sport is Fitness!

***VIDEO EVIDENCE SONGWRITING**

When continuing sessions with KS2 classes in Term 3 the ML hopes to revisit some of these songwriting ideas creating further parts and adding in other musical elements such as instrumentation and actions/choreography.

LISTENING - TERM 1

This section of the online sessions has been inspiring and thought provoking for both ML, TML and the children. In Term 1 the children have listened to different pieces of music performed by TML on a variety of instruments and have then been invited to discuss what they have heard or what the music made them think of. These performances were pre-recorded videos by TML and shared on screen to improve sound and video quality. The children often listened intently to these recordings and have been eager to share their responses and ideas after the pieces have concluded with many children calling out and/or raised their hand enthusiastically to share their ideas. The comments and ideas shared by the children have included detailed vocabulary and

imaginative storytelling, reflective of what they have heard. Responses are documented below and highlighted on ***VIDEO EVIDENCE LISTENING.**

Malagueña / Ernesto Lecuona

'It's like a snake from an Egyptian map, a character from a Egyptian map'

'Soundtrack in my game when you're riding on a horse. It makes me think of a horse'

The Buccaneer

'Pirate movie'

'A dramatic scene'

'A sea shanty'

'It sounds like it was Ice Age 4'

'Credit music from an old horror movie'

March of the Wooden Soldiers / Léon Jessel

'It sort of reminds me of a those short animations, like a guy playing golf and he can't get it in the hole. It's a place where you can only get a hole in one. It lands right next to the hole and sometimes in the sand or water. But he got it in and he was like "that's a hole in 2!"

'It reminds me of golf because it reminds me of outside, I really liked it because it was gentle and smooth and not like all the other stuff'

'A man sitting on a bench watching the sun go down'

Due to COVID19 and face to face sessions with ML and TML not being possible in Term 1, instead of weekly feedback, the ML provided end of term questionnaires. There were separate questionnaires for the children, teachers and TML. Responses are documented below.

CHILDREN'S FEEDBACK

1. What do you like about music sessions?

Everything x 6
Whacking the drums
I'm not sure
Learning about music
I like making sounds on the instruments
Playing the instruments x 4
Reach for the stars, when ML sings & plays guitar
The guitar
Pom Poms
Dancing
Singing
Playing the drums
Nothing I'm not being mean
When I dance

2. Is there anything you don't like about music sessions?

I get nervous
We Will Rock You - I hate it
My friends behaviour
It's a bit too childish
Nothing
The video is fuzzy
Music is too long
Pom Poms they make me itchy
Not playing the guitar
When CC leaves
If I can't touch the instruments
CC playing the guitar
When people talk over CC and I don't listen
Reach the song we sing at the end
No
When I have to sing
How loud it gets
The computer
People just play the instruments instead of sticking to the beat
We don't do actual songs, they don't rhyme

3. What instrument is your favourite?

Flute
Piano
All of them
Guitar x 2
The drum x 8
Xylophone and chime bars
The big drum x 2
Shakers
Bells
Recorder

4. What song or activity have you enjoyed the most during music sessions?

None of them
I love Rock & Roll
Spider man
All of them
Listening to the guitar
There are too many
Reach x 5
Pom Poms
Guessing the song
Making a new song
We will rock you
Shaking
Drums

5. What new songs would like to explore during Music Sessions?

Video Game Music
Saturdays alright for fighting
Songs from Jungle book
Disney songs
I like to move it
You got a friend in me
Toy story / Cars songs
Little Peter Rabbit
Old town road
Movie songs
Sea Shanty
What does the fox say
Mr Sandman
Somebody I used to know

6. Which emoji best describes how you feel during music sessions?

😊 14 🥰 7 😞 3 🤔 2 🙄 3
🤔 1

TEACHERS FEEDBACK

1. How do you feel music sessions are going for your group?

'1-3 children really enjoy it but for the others they either become over aroused, annoyed by others or don't attend fully because they find the noise to much'

'Really well, the children have been looking forward to the sessions and remained fully engaged whether at school or home'

'My class loved the sessions and all participated enthusiastically both at home and in school'

'My class love them and they all interact and engage'

2. Is there anything that would be useful to change or adapt in sessions to meet the children's needs?

'Fewer instruments out'

'If equipment is on the list the children expect to use it'

'Some found the noise level difficult to manage'

'Children need to show expected listening behaviours before changing activity'

3. What activity do you feel the children enjoy the most during sessions?

'Playing the instruments for 3 but the 1 who flits in and out enjoys listening at the end'

'Any opportunity to use instruments and dancing'

'They particularly enjoy listening to Shima and this lent itself to completing minutes of listening tasks. It's helped tremendously'

'Pom poms and dancing'

4. What activity do you feel the children enjoy the least during sessions?

'They find listening harder, although their ideas did improve over the term'

'Generating ideas for songs'

'When it is not their turn on an instrument'

5. Are there any topics that would be useful to cover in music?

'Different ways of playing instruments with timbre'

'Perhaps discuss emotions and how music makes them feel'

6. Are there any other resources you feel would be helpful to have at music sessions?

'Moments of silence on the drums'

'More adults'

TML FEEDBACK

1. How are you finding sessions at Westfield School via Zoom?

‘They require extra focus and flexibility because of the restriction of the medium. At the same time, it is fascinating to see the presence of a ‘shared music experience’ at a more personal level amongst participants’

2. What challenges have you encountered?

‘Finding to effective ways to engage in the workshop without actual real-time ensemble because of the nature of the Zoom platform which only allows one voice at a time. Instead of participating by playing, I used more animated gestures to visualise ‘loud’ ‘soft’ ‘high’ and ‘low’ etc., when Kath was demonstrating’

3. What have you enjoyed during sessions?

‘The imaginative responses of the children when they listen to my recordings. I also enjoyed the composition time where children’s ideas are musically put together by Kath and seeing the excited reaction of the children when their words are sung’

4. Do you think there is anything we could change to make sessions more effective?

‘In my view, having the clear, repetitive structure creates a sense of security and gives children confidence to explore these ideas further. Instead of changing the structure of the workshop, it would be rewarding if some improvisation is allowed to emerge organically when children respond well to a particular section of the workshop’

5. Is there anything that you are not enjoying during sessions?

‘Not in particular’

6. So far what have you learnt from the project?

‘Before the beginning of the sessions, I couldn’t imagine how a music workshop can be meaningfully conducted remotely. However, I have learnt that it is possible with careful lesson planning and support from the school and parents’

The 'Engaging Sounds' Project supports individual ownership and leadership with many of the musical activities being chosen and/or guided by the children. Based on feedback from the questionnaires and responses observed across Term 1, the ML will adapt plans and activities to support preferences, needs, requests and interests as much as possible in both Term 2 with the new KS1 classes and when continuing with the KS2 groups in Term 3.

Adaptions based on feedback and observations may include:

- Continue to explore a wide range of instruments
- Managing expectations and supporting individual needs relating to noise levels during face to face sessions
- Incorporating some of the songs the children would like to play/sing along to into the sessions
- Fewer instruments on display so the children do not get overstimulated
- Encourage active listening sections, moments of silence and refocus before each new section of the lesson plan
- Explore improvisation and opportunities to play solo during percussion activities when face to face sessions resume
- Implement strategies to support participation for all children
- Explore timbre and different ways of creating sounds and using instruments

CONCLUSION

Overall the 'Engaging Sounds' Project has started off successfully despite the challenges that COVID19 has presented with all sessions in Term 1 being online via Zoom. Examples of the children's resilience, adaptability and enjoyment of the musical experiences have been observed throughout the term. The children have shown significant growth in communication, ensemble and listening skills and musical learning.

In Term 2 the project will focus on KS1 with four classes from reception to Year 3 attending music sessions face to face. Two live music concerts and sharing concerts with the families have also been scheduled for Term 2 as well as continued support and training for TML and classroom teachers.

In the songwriting words of the children, music has helped them to do things they wouldn't normally do and express themselves:

'Music helps me do things
That I wouldn't normally do
It helps me to express myself
And sometimes I dance'

A final comment from the school governor:

'The music sessions are an important addition to the wider school curriculum in enabling children to explore other non-academic learning and individual interests and talents and are evidently much enjoyed by the class I witnessed. The Governing Body to note this addition to the curriculum and its evident success in engaging children.'