

Youth Music - Westfield

'Engaging Sounds' - Increasing engagement of learning through music

Term 3

KEY:

ML: Music Leader

TML: Trainee Music Leader Buckinghamshire Music Trust

WPS: Westfield Primary School

The Term 3 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 3 of the project consisted of the Music Leader (ML) and Trainee Music Leader (TML) providing weekly music sessions to three classes in KS1. The project will run for 6 terms alternating between KS2 and KS1 classes with Term 1 focusing on KS2 and Term 2&3 focusing on KS1. Term 4&5 will focus on KS2 before returning to KS1 in Term 6. All sessions for Term 3 were able to run face to face. Most COVID-19 restrictions for the ML and TML were removed resulting in increased interaction between ML's and children.

This term saw the arrival of a new reception year group and new children in KS1 as the school has expanded. There were children in all KS1 year groups who had not participated in music groups before. The most noticeable differences this term compared to Term 1&2 were the needs of the new reception group children. Significant sensory, social and communicative needs meant interacting with peers and ML's, exploration of certain props and resources, and participation as a group provided additional challenges for many of the children.

As a result the lesson plan structure needed to be adapted to allow the children to enjoy and participate in the music sessions within their needs and safe boundaries. For example we started using percussive and tuned percussive instruments during the first few weeks of sessions however decided to remove them as the group needs meant instruments were often thrown. The children also needed to move around the space throughout the sessions and were often not together as a group. Therefore we decided to provide a more free, exploratory and sensory experience for the children. We will discuss how this was achieved later in the report.

The lesson structure for Term 3 for YR1 & 2 was also adapted due to the needs of the children to include more improvisational activities on a 1-1 basis and encouraging flexible and spontaneous moments of group engagement. We did this for a number of weeks until the children felt comfortable which eventually led to more participation, exploration and playing as a group.

The following structure and outcomes were the basis for Reception and YR1 & YR2:

***Welcome* - Sing Hello (Reception & YR 1)**

Day 0 and What's your name? Makaton signed (YR 2 - 2 groups)

- Singing repeated song, fine/gross motor skills, vocal sounds, following musical cues, rhythm and pulse. For all sessions this term we increased the number of Makaton signs we used.

***Group Playing* - Nursery Rhymes & Christmas Songs suggested by Reception/YR 1 teacher (Reception & YR 1)**

3 Little Birds, Don't worry be happy, Christmas songs (YR 2 - 2 groups)

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

***Group Singing or Sound Making* - Let it go, Improvised Sound making (Reception & YR 1)**

What can you sing? What can you play? - an improvised song which the children led (YR 2- 2 groups)

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

***Moving* - Led by TML playing instrumental music and adapting based on children's responses**

- Moving and engaging creatively, independently and as a group, improve gross motor skills and physical response to the music.

***Rhythm* - Can You Play Along, Name Song, Hakuna Matata, Improvised patterns (ALL YR GROUPS) (weekly + new song)**

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

***Songwriting* - If you were an animal what would you be? What would you like for Christmas? (Y1-2 only)**

- Writing topical songs together led by the children.

Listening (YR2 only) - This section has adapted to Listening and Performing. Children perform solo to the rest of the group by playing a musical instrument along with TML. These include Piano, Tongue Drum, Cajon.

- Reacting to a piece of music heard by responding with instruments, vocalisation or movement.

Goodbye - Sing Goodbye (Reception & YR 1)
Reach for the Stars (YR 2) (weekly, with signing)

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

The reception children adapted well to the new structure and were animated and excited on entry to the sessions. Each week they found a space in the hall that was familiar to them and for some children habitual which enabled them to take part in the sessions how they wanted to and within their needs.

The Year 1&2 children would usually sit on the benches provided but also move freely around the space when needed. By allowing this flexible approach the children offered many interesting ways of communicating and engaging with the group and sharing their musical ideas. For example children would move independently or with a friend to the music, would play their instrument in new ways e.g. blowing into the drum base, scratching instruments, playing them upside down and using their feet to make a sound. Some would play their instruments far away from the rest of the group (in another part of the hall) but still follow instructions as part of the group. All of these responses and musical interactions were valued and celebrated.

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*

It was a difficult decision to remove the instruments for the reception group for a few weeks as this is usually an important element of exploration and initial engagement within the music sessions. However, the safety of the children was paramount and instead we used soft textual resources such as scarves, pompoms, snowballs, ribbons and beanbags to enable the children to interact with the musical activities in ways which supported their sensory needs.

Responses observed with the reception children included:

- (i) Lying down whilst the ML and TML walked around and played/sung next to them
- (ii) Walking, running, dancing through the space
- (iii) Moving close to ML to play her guitar or the TML's harmonium or keyboard
- (iv) Making sounds or using their own vocabulary to sing along to familiar songs
- (v) Interacting with their teachers who supported exploration by dancing with the children, comforting them, and using signs or words to help them engage
- (vi) Interacting with the resources by either shaking, throwing, pushing and wiggling

Observations:

T - YR2

T often appears frustrated by his peers not always 'listening' as he describes something. He goes up to them and says 'listen' or tries to turn their head or make them sit down. T was in a different group last term that could move and sit in various places around the room and participate together. This group is more mobile, moving freely around the space and this unsettles T. However he still joins in with every song/activity and vocalises throughout despite his frustration. At times this has also enabled some of his peers to participate in a different way as T tries to support them to participate in a more 'traditional' way. T clearly loves music and wants his peers to enjoy it in the way he does.

M - YR2

M consistently starts off the session with her hands over her ears. She tries to play all instruments with one hand so she can put the other hand over one ear. However when the drums come out she is excited and plays with gusto and loudly without her ears being covered at all. She sings, plays in rhythm and beats her own patterns. After this she seems more comfortable and sings and dances around the room. It appears that the sensory difficulty for M is not the volume of an instrument or activity but the timbre of the sound and the unpredictable nature of particular instrumental sounds or activities. Drumming has similar patterns each week and seems to be within her comfort zone.

OUTCOME 2 - PERSONAL

To improve language and communication through composition and songwriting

This will be explored by:

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

For Year R & YR1 responses for language and communication were observed through eye contact, vocalisations, joint attention, interaction or a performance. Some of the children are non-verbal and communicative responses were expressed through gestures and exploratory sounds and actions. These responses indicated how they were feeling or wanted to participate.

F - R

F gave such strong eye contact as the ML played guitar in front of her. After a few moments she then did a series of ballet type movements. She repeated this for a few minutes whilst ML provided the music for her to dance too. She repeated her pattern, connecting with the music. F is often distracted or processing experiences in her own way and finds it hard to connect with others and the music. Today she felt confident to interact and connect with the ML and enjoy the musical experience.

C - R

C often vocalises when the ML sings 'Hey' and 'Hello'. C stopped moving when ML created a silent moment. He would then look for where ML was in the room and then make a vocal sound. When ML started singing and playing again he would continue his journey around the room. This usually involved wandering around the room in solo picking up/throwing objects/instruments up and down. Occasionally he would stop and smile.

For YR1&2 some of the children were able to offer suggestions to musical songs and stories. N would connect with songs using items/ideas relating to his immediate environment. For example, when singing about what the children wanted for Christmas N sang 'a table'. This was in his immediate world and familiar to him. H in contrast was able to offer 'Ninja Lego', this was on his Christmas list. T who has limited vocabulary and mainly communicates with sounds, signs and gestures was trying to tell us what he wanted. We kept singing and trying to work out what he wanted to contribute to the song without it being overwhelming or frustrating for him. Collectively, working with the teachers and support staff, when T made a superhero type movement we understand it was something to do with superheroes. T then made wiggly gestures with his fingers and we understood this to be a spider. Spiderman! T was ecstatic, smiling, laughing, holding his thumbs up. He was so proud that his suggestion was in the song and he marked this by dancing around the room, playing his instrument and making vocal sounds whilst we sang his part. Being understood meant so much to him and enabled him to connect with the music.

T also communicated using vocal sounds when drumming. I would often start with a simple pattern using call and echo and ending with a beat and lifting my hands calling out a vocal 'hey'. T would then 'take over' by calling out and singing his own sounds loudly which we all copied and ended when he did a 'hey' and lifted his hands. He then also pointed to each child in turn and gestured for me to sing their name with a drum pattern but only when he pointed at them. The other children also really enjoyed this interaction and often encouraged him with lots of 'go on T' or laughing and smiling with him. Again his voice was heard and he conducted a group of children beautifully.

SONGWRITING LYRICS

Theme: ANIMALS & CHRISTMAS

Storytelling song with responses added by the children

If you were an animal what would you be?
If you were an animal what would you see?
Who are your friends?
What would you eat?
If you could be an animal?

Responses were as follows:

If I were a Pig
I'd see a Crocodile
If I were a Pig

I'd see a Crocodile
I'd play with piglets and eat biscuits
Oh if I were a Pig!

What would you like for Christmas

N - would like a Table
T - would like Spiderman
H - would like Ninja Lego
F - would like a Fire-Engine

In Term 3 the children also listened to a variety of pieces of music performed by the TML. To keep the children's focus they also played along with the TML using softer and more tonally suitable instruments such as wind chimes and triangles. This meant the children were able to sit for longer periods using instrumental sounds that were calming and supported a shift in responses to a more calmer state.

TEACHERS FEEDBACK

1. After a term of music sessions how do you feel the sessions have been for your year group?

A1 - Amazing! The children love exploring the different instruments.

A2 - Children enjoyed it. They looked forward to it on the day. Most of the children participate in every session.

A3 - Very beneficial although in that vein the over all arousal of some would detract for the positive side of sessions.

A4 - Became more engaged as the sessions progressed.

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

A1 - Visuals of the instruments we are using of now and next or timetable.

A2 - Transitioning keeping it in the one space of the PE hall.

A3 - Depending on the children attending each session, keeping them sat while participating would avoid behaviours and potential injuries due to over arousal.

A4 - For early years more than one session in a week (not longer just increased frequency).

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

A1 - Exploring the instruments.

A2 - Listening to music while throwing the snowballs and the drums and triangle.

A3 - Snowballs, dancing and drumming.

A4 - Drumming, snowballs, child-led sections.

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

A1 - Sitting on the bench together.

A2 - Wasn't anything they didn't like.

A3 - Cannot think of any examples they did not enjoy.

A4 - None.

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

A1 - Nursery Rhymes.

A2 - Nursery rhymes for younger years.

A3 - Cannot think of any.

A4 - Seasons.

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

A1 - N/A.

A2 - It's all covered.

A3 - Snugs that live in the PE hall. (Weighted Blankets over shoulders).

A4 - Drawing on the white board to represent the sound of the music being played to them.

TML FEEDBACK

1. What challenges have you encountered?

They were younger age group children with less experience in musical interaction in general. Drawing their attention to music and sustaining it for the duration of the session posed challenges at times.

2. What have you enjoyed during sessions?

It was rewarding to have the opportunity to give music lessons to children while musical activities were restricted due to the pandemic. One of the positive experiences was that pupils who had rejected the sound of my instrument as unbearable at the beginning of the term started to enjoy my playing and began to talk to me in the second half of the term. To see this happen was one of the things I was pleased about.

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

Perhaps a smaller group session where we could give more individual attention would have been more effective, although this was not possible.

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

None in particular. The Covid restrictions certainly reduced the choice of what we can normally do. There were times when it made things harder - but this was inevitable.

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

During the workshops in the Autumn Term, we explored different environments in which children could focus on music. Both classroom and the hall settings had their advantages and disadvantages, and we found that children's responses to music varied to some extent depending on the environment.

ML REFLECTIONS

Term 3 has been more challenging with regards to the needs of the children in reception particularly. However the children made huge progress throughout the term which included staying in the room for the whole session, coming up to the ML's and playing their instruments with them, moving to the music, lying, sitting, standing whilst listening to music, interacting with peers by holding hands, dancing, being next to them, eye contact with ML's and moving their hands/arms to play instruments in a certain way, offering new ways of interaction within their needs. The 3 older groups in KS1 showed progress in musical aptitude by recognising the differences in tempo, pitch and dynamics and were able to perform in front of their peers. They also built confidence in sharing ideas for musical compositions and experiencing this element of music making.

CONCLUSION

Term 3 of 'Engaging Sounds' highlights consistent examples of achievements in musical engagement and exploration for young children with additional needs who may be new to group musical experiences. It also presents examples of how ML's supported children with significant sensory, social and communicative needs to become familiar with, build confidence, participate and succeed, during the music sessions across the term. The impact of effective practice was evident throughout the term as ML and TML interpreted responses and supported individual ways of communicating.

This support, flexibility in approach, and adaptive practice was vital in ensuring the children's interests and ideas were acknowledged and actioned. When this occurred children felt confident, connected and motivated to interact with ML, TML and staff and explore the musical activities. Children feel safe, supported and valued when their communicative needs are met, resulting in new musical exploration, achievement and learning. Effective practice was also evident as the ML scaffolded musical responses resulting in extension of new musical skills such as conducting and leading musical activities and songs.

Feedback from ML, TML and teachers ensures the project continues to develop, and best supports participants needs. The ML consults with staff regularly to discuss the children's responses and ensure flexibility in planning to support group needs. In Term 3 teacher feedback provides affirmation of the projects impact and the enjoyment of the children in the music sessions. It also offers suggestions for tools which may further support participation and transition. This feedback is vital in supporting the children and ML can incorporate suggestions into future planning. Term 3 provides many examples of children becoming more settled, confident and engaging in the musical activities. TML notes that children began to accept different instrumental sounds and enjoyed listening and engaging with her playing increasingly over the term. The ML and TML also increased the use of Makaton across the term supporting communication and expression of musical ideas.

Term 3 provides an initial insight into the positive impact returning to sessions with reduced COVID-19 restrictions can have of musical engagement and interaction. We may also consider the potential negative impact the pandemic may have had on young children with additional needs. Opportunities to engage in group activities, attend structured activities and even individual support may have been restricted over the last 2 years. Although it is difficult to know the full impact of these restrictions, an awareness can ensure music sessions are adapted to support individual needs and promote social and communicative interactions.

The change between Key Stages each term may have disadvantages in this context. Regular, consistent music sessions allow young children, particularly those with additional needs, to build their familiarity, acceptance, connection, engagement and interaction with the musical activities and structure. Developing familiarity with the music sessions and activities reinforces achievement, participation and supports the development of new musical skills and learning. The potential impact of two terms break will be explored further in Term 6 when the sessions return to KS1.