

Music in the Early Years: Who, What & Why?



Written by Linda Bance

BRIEFING PAPER

“Years ago I was lucky enough to be offered a student placement job in a nursery school. The job was a pathway towards taking my Nursery nurse exam and required me to spend three years in nursery placements with two days a week as a student at the local college. When I was not washing paint pots or toilets I felt most at ease sitting on the carpet with my guitar playing and singing with the children. We sung Wheels on the Bus, Wind the Bobbin Up and Five Green Speckled frogs. Sometimes the musical instruments came out but not very often and there were too many complaints about the noise. I gained a reputation for my music making with young children and felt it was the most exciting and wonderful work. I was the lady who ‘did the music’ whilst everybody else looked on saying they could not do it. A familiar story, I guess, for many but things are changing as we become more knowledgeable about the ‘why’s’ and ‘how’s’ of music in the early years.”

Linda Bance

The London Early Years Music Network (LEYMN) has gathered the many questions we are most often asked and shared the answers here to provide an introduction to music-making in the early years.

What do we mean by music in the early years?

With knowledge that **new born babies** can remember tunes and sound sequences heard whilst in the womb there is an increasing awareness of the importance of singing and music has for the well-being of both baby and new parents. Through singing and crooning, moving, dancing and listening to music with our young babies we can reinforce relationships and be aware of their emerging voices, response to musical toys, and their ability to listen and respond emotionally to music played to or with them.



As **toddlers**, singing, music making and dancing comes very naturally for this happy, nappy, brigade. In addition to the spontaneous songs and vocalisations that happen during their play, musical activity also has a way of engaging, distracting them or changing their mood. Their voice-play and songs are becoming more tuneful and they are developing more control over sounds, pulse and rhythms. These wonderful natural music makers are so proud of their unique musical compositions and are very eager sound explorers.

For most **pre-schoolers** so much goes on in the home even before they reach us in our settings. With TV providing a rich amount of interactive musical programmes, computers, digital media, karaoke-style games and family activities there is often plenty of opportunity for musical stimulation, listening and interaction. In pre-school settings, whether at free

playtime or during organised music sessions the emphasis is on playing, singing, dancing, listening, and playing freely with instruments inside and outside. Whilst engaged in these experiences, our pre-schoolers could be learning about pitch, and melodic contour, about beat and rhythm, texture, timbre, phrase, composing, creating their own music and making their own choices. All learnt through play.

As children reach full time schooling, music is still an organic activity nurtured through play and sometimes it is also a scheduled 'school-like' activity. The content of this is largely dependent on the skills and ability of the teacher.

The film '[What's That Noise?](#)' was made by LEMYN to help practitioners recognise and support children's own musicality. This film can help you understand more about music concepts and how children are discovering these whilst playing.

Where is music in the early years happening?

Beside the home, most day-care centres, pre-schools, playgroups, library rhyme times, nurseries, reception classes and special needs groups use singing and music-making in their work. Other places include:

Children's Centres which offer music sessions to families. They might be held by musicians, rhyme-time leaders, play leaders, or music franchises. They are seen to be an effective social and intellectual learning activity for both children and adults.

Music Services, Music Hubs and Community Organisations often include early years provision in their services. These organisations can direct us to teachers and specialists that provide musical activity for families with young children or run projects in collaboration with early years departments. Music specialists often focus on a particular model of music learning such as the Dalcroze method or the Kodaly approach to prepare children for playing a musical instrument.

In addition to this there are many **orchestras, independent music teachers** and **music franchises** around the UK which run projects offering weekly sessions of music making with babies and children in their early years with their families.

Why is music in the early years seen to be so important?

A great deal of research has been carried out with regards to musical activity and the brain and it is now evident that music-making, singing and dancing aids the general development and well-being of our very young. Regular musical activity both child-led and adult-led can help support children's acquisition of language and communication. It can aid their personal and social development, their physical agility, well-being, imagination and creativity. Musical activities may also help towards an understanding of maths, allow us to make sense of our world and possibly aid literacy skills.



Above all there is a good case for including music for music's sake. It is an effective way of maintaining short amounts of concentration, and focus. It can be distracting, and soothing, it brings people together, breaks down barriers and forges relationships.

To know more visit the Sound Connections site to read [EYFS Framework – 'A Musical Overview'](#)

What is my role as a practitioner?

Whilst working daily with children in their early years there are many ways in which you can weave music throughout the day:

- Provide an 'enabling environment' inside or outside where children can go freely and uninterrupted by adult ideas so that they can be curious, explore, and create their own music using sound-makers, made and brought. This is an ideal opportunity to find out more about what children already know and what music is already happening in their own home with their family. Your music area could reflect this in what sounds, music and props it provides. Your role to support this activity is very important so that you can encourage, reassure and extend
- Sing a song to make things happen, 'tidy up', 'wash your hands', 'welcome' songs or songs for celebrations
- Gather children in small groups for short music sessions
- Hold family music-making sessions
- Invite musicians to come and play for, and with, the children in your care

All this will encourage *everybody* to participate so that music is seen as something for *everybody*.

What is my role a musician?

Working as a visiting musician in an early years setting is a great privilege, rich in learning possibilities. As a musician you will gain valuable experience working alongside the children and early year's practitioners and in turn the adults and young children will learn from your experience and talent. As a musician you can:

- Introduce new sounds, ideas and musical styles
- Forge special relationships with staff and children, which result in building trust, creative learning and a feeling of belonging for everybody
- Provide opportunities for children to play with a musician and their musical instrument

- Respond to child-initiated music encouraging and supporting children's own musical adventures
- Offer ideas that can be used by non-music specialist staff to help them build confidence in planning and delivery of music
- Offer families a relaxed meeting point to listen and play together

How can I become involved?

It is free to join LEMYN and benefit from its training, information, advice and guidance and inspirational resources. Sound Connections' website and LEYMN's eNewsletter and Facebook page will keep you up-to-date with current trends and opportunities.

For more information and please contact Nicky Fleming at nicky@sound-connections.org.uk