



An introduction to approaches in early childhood music

Written by Emma Hutchinson with additional material by John Webb
Edited by Nicky Dewar
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Introduction

In 2010 Sound Connections launched the [London Early Years Music Network \(LEYMN\)](#) for music leaders working with very young children which aims to:

- encourage sharing of best practice, resources and information within the sector
- be a safe place to debate key issues referred from Network members and Sound Connections staff (e.g. pedagogic approach, quality of music, role of franchises, children's musical development etc)
- be the first port of call for anyone looking for information on early years music making in London
- keep abreast of other early years music networks' activities regionally and nationally
- advise and be a critical friend to Sound Connections on its early years music strategy (training, tenders and project delivery)
- offer continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities to all music leaders

There are many different ways musical activities can be shaped, facilitated and delivered. This overview introduces some of these approaches and aims to help those new to the sector to better understand the world of early years music making. For those who want to discover more we have included some suggested further reading.

For LEYMN it is important that we recognise all approaches to early years music making, and we believe that reflective, theory-based practice – that which considers how children learn and then is applied to practice – is at the heart of high quality musical experiences for children.

We know there are a considerable amount of commercial franchised music activity in London and beyond. These have not been included here because of their vast number and because we know less about the theory behind their work.

This paper has been written by [Emma Hutchinson](#) from [Music House for Children](#) with additional text regarding child-led music-making by [John Webb](#). All information has been collated from different sources or from the writer's own experiences of the approach or method. Emma is a core member of LEYMN.

Child-led music-making

Child-led music making places a child's spontaneous, playful and creative music making at the heart of their musical learning, though it is an approach to be used in conjunction with adult-led musical activity, which may itself spark children's individual curiosity and exploration. So it is an approach which fits alongside the other approaches outlined in this booklet rather than replacing them. Its starting point is the best practice of early years learning in which children choose activities in the setting and are allowed to freely explore these. The adult's role is to observe the child's learning, to work out what they are interested in, and to extend and support learning in that area. This is achieved by playing alongside or with the child(ren) and providing activities and resources which will extend the challenges available. In terms of understanding this approach one might explore, for instance, schemas and sustained shared thinking.

Traditionally, music with young children has been based around an adult-led circle time – singing songs and perhaps playing instruments. But children often explore aspects of musicality through their self-directed play and it is the aim of the adult to spot and support these; it's surprisingly easy to support the non-musical aspects of children's play and to miss the musical ones!

Ways in which this may work include:

- Noticing sing-song like speech (or indeed spontaneous singing) and imitating it back to the child, or recording it on a dictaphone so they can hear it back. This as the aural equivalent of sticking a picture they've made on the wall.
- Playing percussion instruments with children, carefully following the speed, dynamics and rhythms they use.
- Children tapping or hitting objects inside and outside to discover their sounds: provide a range of interesting objects and beaters which could be used for further exploration; provide objects which can be made into sound makers in the recycled materials area.
- Extending play through improvised narrative songs about what a child is doing. This could characterise role play (using different speeds and dynamics, for instance) or match rhythms the child is unconsciously using (when building a brick tower, for example). If the children respond to this by creating their own songs/sounds follow this up through imitation.

The approach embeds music making in everyday early years practice, and so can be hard for a music specialist to deliver if they have only a short time with a group. Ideally, it is a practice to be developed by music specialists and non-specialists alike, so that children's spontaneous music making is noticed and supported. And, as Susan Young writes, it's important that adults are flexible enough to take on a variety of roles in relation to children's music making:

"The adult sometimes just needs to listen, to stand back and hear the child's music, respond and comment. At other times it may be appropriate to join in and play with the children, partnering them in music play interactions. At other times the adult may take the lead, perform and model for the children. So while I don't wish to diminish the value of adult-led music Working with under-fours in music can cover a wide spectrum of adult roles. Most important, these roles are fitted around children's own ways of being musical rather than the other way round."

Susan Young, *Music with the Under-Fours*, p19

Useful literature and websites

- Early Years Foundation Stage Forum., 'Developing Sustained Shared Thinking To Enhance The Areas Of Learning And Development; Prime Areas'.
- Evans, Nancy. 'Tuning In To Children: An Approach For Child-Led / Adult-Responsive Music Making | Youth Music Network'. Network.youthmusic.org.uk. Web.

- Nutbrown, Cathy. *Threads of Thinking: Young Children Learning and the Role of Early Education*. London: Sage Publications, 2006. Print.
- Sound Connections for LEYMN. YouTube,. ['What's That Noise? Recognising And Supporting Young Children's Musicality'](#). 2013.
- Young, Susan. *Music With The Under-Fours*. London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2003. Print.

Colourstrings (1972)

A Hungarian musician and educator called Géza Szilvay (b. 1943) believed that children are able to learn music from 18 months old, and should continue with the same principles and materials of learning up to 18 years old.

Szilvay created the idea of a musical journey involving singing, clapping, marching and socialising using a wide range of musical activities together with composed songs. Much of his philosophy comes from Kodaly (page 7) where he encouraged developing the inner ear through musical games, play and appropriate resources.

All the activities are carefully devised to include different musical concepts of rhythm, pitch, melody, dynamics, tempo and style. By the time children reach five years old they are expected to be able to read a style of music writing called 'stick notation'. At this point children can opt to learn an instrument.

The same music and songs are then explored through instrumental playing. The familiar songs are reassuring to older learners and help to adjust their early music learning to a new instrument. These songs are available through Colourstrings Singing Rascals collection. The books are given to young children so they can enjoy looking at the illustrations before developing the ability to read and subsequently learn the music.

Colourstrings provides training courses and INSET training to schools in the UK.

Useful literature and websites

- Colourstrings.co.uk, 'Colourstrings Homepage'. N.p., 2015. Web.
- Szilvay, Géza. *Singing Rascals*. London: Colourstrings, 1991. Print.

Emile Jacques-Dalcroze (1865-1950)

Dalcroze was an educator and philosopher in music education. During his teaching work at the Geneva Conservatoire he noticed that musicians were not fully engaged together. In some cases they were simply not listening to each other.

Dalcroze realised that music needed to come from a physical connection as well as listening and playing. He set out to create a new approach to understanding, listening and responding with activities involving music and movement.

By awakening both the mind and body through a new idea called 'eurhythmics' Dalcroze provided the possibilities of musical understanding with very young children including those with additional needs. One example of a well-known Dalcroze activity is to encourage young children to walk when they hear a regular beat in a song such as 'Baa baa black sheep'. The song was then repeated at a faster pace. In this way the teacher could demonstrate the basics of fast and slow.

Lots of materials can be used to encourage the understanding of beat and other musical components in interesting ways. These include balls, ribbons and scarves to encourage young children to participate. Many early years music teachers now apply the principles of Dalcroze to their teaching work since most areas of musical learning correlate with early learning goals.

Training courses are available through the Dalcroze society's website. The Dalcroze method continues to be widely used and adapted across the world.

Useful literature and websites

- Dalcroze.org.uk, 'Dalcroze Home Page'. N.p., 2015. Web.
- Gell, Heather, and Joan Pope. *Heather Gell's Lessons In Music Through Movement*. Nedlands, W.A.: Published by CIRCME, The University of Western Australia in association with the Heather Gell Dalcroze Foundation, 1997. Print.
- Haselbach, Barbara. *Dance Education*. London: Schott, 1978. Print.
- Jaques-Dalcroze, Émile. *Rhythm, Music And Education*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1921. Print.
- Mead, Virginia Hoge. *Dalcroze Eurhythmics In Today's Music Classroom*. New York: Schott, 1994. Print.

Edwin E Gordon (1927-2015)

Gordon created early musical experiences to provide a foundation for lifelong music development in young children. In his work he explored the idea of 'stages' where children should be exposed to a variety of musical learning as appropriate to their learning ability.

Gordon's musical activities include a range of music babble, much in the same way as babies vocalise in response to conversational patter that they hear. Gordon developed the idea of 'unstructured informal guidance' in his group music activities. These consisted of compositional games involving sound making and activity. Together with parents, toddlers experience activities encouraging musical patter or babble.

From three to five years children will engage in 'structured informal guidance'. This means the adult and music educator make a plan on what the children will say and do, but do not enforce the responses.

From the earliest beginnings of sound making, Gordon's programmes provide activities within a rigorous programme of musical study. Each separate age group is broken down into the different areas of understanding before they move onto the next level.

More detailed information on Gordon's methodology can be sourced from various websites. The Gordon Institute for Music Learning provides training for families and educators to help facilitate musical understanding and delivery in young children.

Useful literature and websites

- Giamusic.com,. 'Edwin E. Gordon Biography- GIA Publications'. N.p., 2015. Web.

Kindermusik (1978)

Founder of Kindermusik Dan Pratt established an early childhood music programme with resources, with the idea of supporting quality music learning in young children in nursery groups all over the world. He adopted many methods to perfect his package and since he started, Kindermusik has reached over a million children and their families.

His programmes help children up to six years old enjoy a combination of music with movement, stories, instrumental exploration, dancing and singing. They are graded in order of age and ability. Sociable and communicative, gross and fine motor development are all emphasised as one of the main objectives and also include learning goals such as curriculum based outcomes including mathematics, literacy and language.

The balanced set of activities aim to develop all the areas of learning, and families are encouraged to participate with lessons so they can continue with the activities at home.

The training and accreditation of Kindermusik teachers is rigorous and detailed. Kindermusik has collated instrumental resources, digital music packages and a complete teaching programme to help nurture ongoing musical experiences in young children.

Useful websites and releases

- Freddie Flamingo and the Kindertown Five, an album by Kindermusik: Kindermusik International. Original Release Date: 1 Jan. 2006.
- Kindermusik.com, 'Music Classes For Children And Schools | Kindermusik'. N.p., 2015. Web.
- The Best of Kindermusik, an album by Kindermusik: Kindermusik International. Original Release Date: 15 Jan. 2003.

Zoltán Kodaly (1862-1967)

Kodaly had a huge influence across Europe in his efforts to nurture and raise the standard of singing in young children. He believed that children should be able to express themselves through their singing voice. Through active participation in singing and musical games children could develop an understanding of music from a very young age.

Kodaly's method incorporates the effective music system called solfège. Solfège involves assigning the notes of a scale a particular syllable starting from a low to a high sound. These syllables are known as:

Do Re Me Fa So La Ti

Kodaly believed that children learn best through engaging, fun musical games. Through a range of age-appropriate activities beat and rhythm were embedded as part of a child's musical foundation. Games that incorporated 'Ta' and 'TiTi' helped children to understand the musical terms 'crotchet' and 'quaver' in physically playful ways. These simple words were a way to embed young children's understanding of how music worked with the help of movement and song. By listening carefully too, young children developed their concentration and focus.

Hand signals helped children to visualise the notes going up and down. Like Dalcroze, Kodaly explored different ways of moving to help young children develop their motor skills, and to remember the activities they enjoyed through awakening of all their senses. Rhythmical activities included walking, running, hopping and so on. Kodaly used movement to help internalise beat and rhythm. Moving with singing always related to the song and included walking, running, skipping, hopping and stopping during moments of silence. Music educators used many of Kodaly's musical games to help build interest and music ability in young children.

Kodaly collated masses of songs over the years. These were related to children's own culture, and were chosen because they were appropriate for this age group. Music lessons included musical games that helped children to remember simple phrasing and rhyming patterns. This in turn helped with storytelling, making up own songs and themed activity.

Nowadays the training courses in the Kodaly discipline are rigorous and faithful to his methodology. Short courses in the application of the solfège system are also available.

Useful literature and websites

- Academy, David. 'THE BRITISH KODÁLY ACADEMY: With Music In Mind'. Britishkodalyacademy.org. N.p., 2015. Web.
- Geoghegan, Lucinda. *Singing Games And Rhymes For Early Years*. Polmont: National Youth Choir of Scotland, 2000. Print.
- Sinor, Jean, and Forrai Katalin. *Music In Preschool*. [Budapest]: Corvina, 1988. Print.
- Vinden, D, and Rowsell, C. *Jolly Music (Beginners – Reception) Teaching music skills to children through singing*. Jolly Learning Ltd, 2008. Print.

Musikgarten (1994)

As a pioneer of Kindermusic's approach Lorna Heyge later created Musikgarten in Canada to support musical learning and engagement in young children and toddlers.

Musikgarten uses moving, singing, instruments and dance to develop musical learning which in turn merits other learning outcomes in young children such as communication. Families are encouraged to participate fully to ensure that children can develop through interaction with them both in classes and at home.

Just as with Kodaly's approach, many of the songs used are passed down through the generations. They are available on CD, and also in a music book with lots of ideas and lesson plans. Heyge developed a range of instrumental resources made from natural (unvarnished) wood.

The progressive routes of musical learning are age-aligned and go up to nine years old, when children are encouraged to learn the piano or other instrument. Musikgarten is sold throughout the United States, Canada and other countries worldwide. Musikgarten's ethos holds the musical joy and learning in young children at heart.

Useful websites

- Musikgarten.org,. 'Early Childhood Music Education, Music And Movement - Musikgarten'. N.p., 2015. Web.
- Musikgarten.co.uk,. 'Musikgarten Uk'. N.p., 2015. Web.

Carl Orff (1895-1982)

Carl Orff was a German composer and teacher. He was a firm believer in the importance of teaching children music through the mind and the body. He developed ideas that joined singing, dancing and acting together. He also created percussion instruments that were appropriate for the younger age group.

By creating a set of activities he aimed to simultaneously alert children's body and mind. The musical resources helped develop musical understanding and ability. Orff believed that play should be a part of musical learning since much of young children's learning comes from play. The development of percussion instruments helped to engage young children practically. They had fun exploring different sounds, and achieved musical goals too. Resources such as a poem or mini-story helped to focus the different areas of musical learning such as:

- Clapping in time whilst reciting the words.
- Developing the creative nuances of the poem through chosen instruments.
- Learning about rhythm, harmony, texture, form, pitch, tempo and so on.
- Encouraging teamwork and turn-taking in instrumental and word play.
- Thinking about the activities and musical outcomes.

Training courses in the Orff method continue to be available in the UK and across Europe. Online resources and materials are also available for educators and early years teachers.

Useful websites

- Estrella, Espie. 'The Orff Approach'. About.com Education. N.p., 2015. Web.
- Make-music-better.com,. 'Did Music Education Fail You? Let's Fix It!'. N.p., 2015. Web.
- Orff.org.uk,. 'Homepage | Teacher Training CPD Activity Resources Primary School Music Classes Community Workshops | Orff UK'. N.p., 2015. Web.
- Studio49.de,. 'Studio 49 - Musikinstrumentenbau Für Orffsche Instrumente. Wir Fertigen Glockenspiele, Metallophone, Pauken, Vibraphone, Marimbas ... Und Ersatzteile. Mit Online-Literaturverzeichnis Über Das Orff-Schulwerk.'. N.p., 2015. Web.

Sounds of Intent in the Early Years (SoI-EY)

SoI-EY explains how young children (aged 0-7) develop musically, and sets this out in a large circular framework shared through a poster. It gives ideas for activities suited to children at different stages of musical development, and provides a simple way of recording their achievements. SoI-EY is fully inclusive and is suitable for all children, irrespective of their abilities and needs.



Children's development starts in the middle of the circles and moves outwards as they grow up. The unborn baby in the centre is there to remind us how much musical development happens before birth. The stage in the womb before this, before hearing gets going, is said to be Level 1 of a child's musical development.

Moving outwards, there are four more SoI-EY levels that can be identified in the early years. These are:

- Level 2, 'sounds interesting'
- Level 3, 'copy me, copy you'
- Level 4, 'bits of pieces'
- Level 5, 'whole songs, in time and in tune'

The four levels are divided into three domains:

- reactive, R, listening and responding to sound and music
- proactive, P, making sounds and music alone
- interactive, I, making sounds and music with others

The three domains are shown in the small circles at the bottom left of the poster. Placing the three domains over the four levels gives 12 segments. These are set out in the small circles at the bottom of the poster, in

the centre.

Each segment is divided into four elements, A, B, C and D (giving 48 in all), which are described in the circles at the bottom right of the poster. Elements are identified by their domain (R, P or I), their level (2, 3, 4 or 5) and one of the labels A, B, C or D. So 'R.4.C' means 'Reactive, Level 4, Element C', 'P.3.A' means 'Proactive, Level 3, Element A', and 'I.2.B' means 'Interactive, Level 2, Element B', for example. In the big circles, each element has four 'bubbles'. One is a picture of a child engaging with sounds or music, with a short description of what is happening. The other two bubbles suggest initial ideas of activities that may be appropriate for a child engaging with music at that level.

This is a new framework being launched in autumn 2015. The dissemination of SOI-EY is being led by Soundabout.

Website

'Sounds Of Intent In The Early Years - Home'. Eysoi.org. N.p., 2015. Web.

Shinichi Suzuki (1898-1998)

As a violinist, Suzuki created a method to help young children develop their musical skills using the violin to help achieve quality playing, and was interested in nurturing the child as a musician. By observing classes he realised that parents needed to participate fully in lessons so as to support ongoing learning at home.

Young children listen to stories long before they learn to read. Suzuki adapted this knowledge by encouraging his pupils to listen for up to a year before beginning to play the violin. Children from as young as three years old observe violin lessons and watch other children playing for up to a year. They then begin to learn pieces by ear and not by reading music. Suzuki believed this idea helped to improve children's memory and build up a repertoire of music that could be revisited over time.

Performing was another area that Suzuki felt passionate about. He believed this helped with sociable ability and examination procedure. He also believed that parents should be actively involved from the outset, practicing along with their child, and taking notes to remind each other of learning goals. By parents actively participating, a family would come to see musical activity as part of the daily routine.

The benefits of the Suzuki method are fundamentally to do with instrumental learning. However, the add-on benefits such as being sociable, being confident, able to analyse, remember and retain information are significant to a young child's life as a whole.

Useful literature and websites:

- [Britishsuzuki.org.uk](http://britishsuzuki.org.uk), 'The British Suzuki Institute'. N.p., 2015. Web.
- Suzuki, Shinichi. *Piano School – Volumes 1-7 (New International Edition): Piano Part*. Alfred Music, 2010. Print.

The Voices Foundation (1993)

Suzy Digby OBE created The Voices Foundation to help improve singing across nursery and primary schools in the UK. The organisation's philosophy is derived from observing Kodaly's technique used in other parts of Europe, the effective the solfège method of teaching, and the application of appropriate material for young children to learn.

Michael Stocks helped to develop the methodology of providing whole-classroom learning in early childhood music using a range of carefully chosen songs and musical games from which musical outcomes are noted. The methodology encompasses the key stages of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) UK, as well as being flexible to different age groups.

Since its inception The Voices Foundation has been implemented in, and adopted by many primary schools across the UK. This has been made possible by the intervention of training schemes through an In-School Programme. The materials, activities and resources nurture ongoing music provision by teachers, even when the specialist music educators have left.

The early years music teaching programmes have a similar ethos to The Voices Foundation, supporting sustainable music activities with using a mixture of movement, music, musical games, and structured music sessions.

Website

'Voices Foundation'. Voices.org.uk. N.p., 2015. Web.