



If I am not a specialist, how can I teach music?

CASE STUDIES

Sarah Schleich shares her motivation for becoming a London Early Years Music Network Apprentice

I have been working with children of varying ages in different settings since I qualified in 1989 as a Nursery Nurse. I have been working in an Infant School, within the EYFS, for 11 years now and have been delivering music to three Reception classes for the last three years supporting our music specialist, Susannah. I also supported the music in Year 1, which has its advantages to be able to observe children's transition onto their next developmental stage, as well as continued professional development for me. When Susannah, reduced her hours she encouraged me to take her role and to apply for the LEYMN Apprenticeship.

I believe that I have a fairly extensive knowledge of what makes a four to five year old 'tick' but my initial lack of confidence in myself made me feel a little inadequate and daunted by the thought of being partly (in partnership with the class teachers) responsible for the development of the children's musicality. Particularly in guiding them to attain firm foundations and skills in the 'Elements of Music', whilst enabling them to display the 'Characteristics of Effective Learning' in 'Expressive Arts'.

I hoped that my enthusiasm would make up for my failings in not being able to play an instrument or read music competently. As for my singing, this was mostly 'aired' in the privacy of the time spent under the shower or in the car! Obviously, I have been singing with the children and my colleagues over the past eleven years and with my own children prior to that, but this opportunity meant that I would now be leading the singing in a more structured way with learning intentions and outcomes, as opposed to just joining in and enjoying the feel good factor that singing evokes.

Where do you start? How do you begin to plan a lesson with a specified time constraint? What resources are out there for a non-specialist? How do you differentiate to meet the needs of all your children that are, let's face it, like an assorted box of chocolates and how do you assess their progress when you are teaching on your own? These were all the questions I asked myself.

So where did I start? I initially tried marrying the curricular topics/themes of the classroom, together with different 'schemes of work,' by pulling out various,

appropriate repertoires. This, I suppose, kept me in my comfort zone but was probably not the answer in successfully scaffolding the children's musical skills.

This now directs me to my lesson planning, which I changed each week as I had 18 children in each of my three sessions but which children I had, varied from week to week, some were the same and some were different. The explanation for this is:

1. My music sessions cover PPA for the Reception teachers and I am unsupported, so I have 18 children instead of a whole class of 30 and
2. Each reception class (30 children) is split into five groups with six children in each. Two of these groups, which are rotated each weekday, spend time in our Shared Indoor and Outdoor Learning Environment with a Teacher's Assistant, while the other three come to music.

My Achilles heel is to over think things, maybe being too ambitious and over complicating lessons. However, this is in my genetic make-up but being aware of this helps me to self-critique and make adjustments where needed.

"I now know that the saying, 'less is more' is paramount when planning a music session with the under 5's. Keep things simple, active and repetitive to build up their confidence and self-esteem."

Get them talking to one other (we use the phrase, 'Turn to your partner'), sharing ideas and the chance to unleash their imaginations and creativity to give them some ownership of their learning. I believe the importance of being able to 'receive' sounds as well as to 'transmit' sounds is a vital skill that needs to be embedded as early as possible. As the children in Early Years are like little sponges absorbing information, I do use musical terms in the hope that some of it may rub off on them and whilst some of it goes way over their heads you cannot help but smile when you get the occasional child that pipes up 'ostinato rhymes with tomato' (a coined phrase Susannah uses!). I now build on my lesson plan each week, 'refreshing' and 'renovating' rather than 'rebuilding' altogether, embedding the seven elements of music in a gradual, sequential manner.

With regard to resources, I have to say that one of my frustrations has been researching which 'scheme of work' or 'published material' suits my style. I want to be able to see what is 'out there' before I invest, as School budgets are always tight and music, in my view, is still undervalued! 'Amazon' is fast and efficient but there is no try before you buy option and I am yet to find a shop that allows you to peruse such material, at your leisure. As a non-specialist this is quite important and a CD back up is essential when you do not play an instrument!

Differentiation is enabled by knowing your children and luckily for me I am able to work with the children outside my music sessions as well, which I feel, is definitely an

advantage. Assessing them whilst teaching is not so easy and I do find myself scribbling on the white board frantically during the lesson, so I do not miss the opportunity to note down an achievement! I may trial a Dictaphone and will continue to research what is the best method as the time it takes to note something down, can sometimes detract from the flow of the lesson especially when a child asks you why you are writing a name on the board!

Confidence is key but this skill is acquired over time and if a lesson has not gone the way I planned, I have tried to learn from it and adapt it. Time to reflect is so important. I am working on not seeing imperfections as failures but as experimentations that with a tweak here and there will then get the desired outcome! Equally, when a lesson goes well I think about how I could make it even better.

Ultimately, the one thing that has helped me was being selected as a LEYMN Apprentice. This enabled me to have the opportunity to observe other professionals at work in a variety of environments and settings. It has opened my eyes to the diverse world of musicality that is out there ready to be accessed. The structure, energy and repertoires that I come away with, that inspire me, can then be personalized to my strengths. If I do not believe or feel it, neither will the children and they will not respond authentically. As a result of these opportunities, it has led me to uncover the perfect scheme that also creates a firm foundation for our KS1 and KS2 based curriculum. Something I am passionate about doing is to have more 'impromptu' music sessions happening outside the classroom for the children to have a chance for experimentation and to embellish the musical skills that are inherent. Some things in life are infectious, musicality being one of them only this one has no detriment to your health and makes you a better person, so let's just get on with it!

The work of Sound Connections and the London Early Years Music Network is funded by Youth Music

 National Foundation for
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Supported using public funding by
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