



Undertaking & completing an MA in

Early Childhood Music Studies

Nicola Burke

Introduction

I am an early childhood music specialist with 14 years of experience working in a range of early childhood settings and on a range of action research projects in London, Birmingham, Portsmouth, Southampton, Hampshire, Surrey, Staffordshire and West Sussex. I undertook the MA in Early Childhood Music Studies through the Centre for Research in Early Childhood Studies (CREC) in Birmingham after hearing about it from early childhood music expert Susan Young who I had worked with on action research projects in Birmingham. I completed the course in 2013.

Why did I choose to do the course?

I embarked on the MA programme to further my knowledge and understanding of young children and their musicality. I was introduced to action research by my involvement in projects delivered across Birmingham. I worked with early childhood music experts Susan Young, Alison Street and Nancy Evans and at the time, the Director of the St Thomas Children's Centre, Cynthia Knight. I developed a passion for academic reading, a thirst to learn more, read more in depth and develop my academic skills. The course was very appealing because the majority of the work was self-study and there were only seven contact days during year one and five in each of the other two years of the course. This meant that I was able to squeeze the contact days into my busy schedule of juggling work and family life.

What did I hope to learn?

I wanted to learn about child development, children's musical development, a range of pedagogues, approaches to working with young children, child psychology as well as how to become a good report writer and researcher. I also wanted to learn about early years education and the development of this historically. The 3-year course involved seminars given by the tutors as well presentations from guest speakers who were invited to present on different areas of research.

What did I hope to benefit?

As a visiting artist to many settings across the country I have often been asked –

- “Are you a qualified teacher”?
- “Did you train as an early years practitioner”?
- “What kind of course did you go on to do your job”?
- “What is your background and how did you get here”?

I wanted a formal qualification to certify my role in the early years education sector. Although I received initial training in early years through a music company and have attended many training courses throughout my career I wanted to be able to answer the above questions with a clear answer, rather than describing my experience and how I had got to where I am. I felt that gaining an MA in Early Childhood Music studies would complement my experience and in essence validate my role.

What was the experience like?

It had been 14 years since I graduated and it was very difficult to get back into a habit of studying whilst juggling work and family life. The first year proved challenging and very difficult to schedule time in my life to read, take time to think and then put pen to paper. There were times when I just wanted to stop but with the support and help of family and fellow students, somehow I persevered. The contact days at CREC were always a treat – not only to listen to tutors and speakers and learn, but also to come together with likeminded people to debate and discuss in a safe environment. The contact days also involved 1-1 time with a tutor who would offer their advice, support and encouragement.

What unexpected things has the course provided?

I am taken aback by my own eagerness to continue in the academic world! If in year one someone had said to me that I may go on to a PhD I would not have believed them. I recently wrote an article for Nursery World which I am sure I would not have done if I hadn't done this course. The article was based on my third year dissertation so not only was the content a direct result of the course but my ability to write has developed over the duration of the course and enabled me to write the article.

Where do I plan to go next?

I have recently been involved in an action research project with Trish Power for LEYMN and have found that the skills that I developed on the MA are being utilised. I am in the process of a funding application to further the research that I began in my third year and plan to study for a PhD in the near future. I have recently become an Associate of The Association for Early Education and I was a guest speaker at an early years conference held in Camden in February. The MA most certainly supported me to gain these roles by furthering my knowledge and understanding of young children and equipping me with the skills to write and present.

If you are considering embarking upon the MA:

- Be prepared to be disciplined and committed to allocating substantial time to study
- Be assured that the tutors at CREC will offer you an incredible amount of support
- Be prepared to plan your work/study/family life carefully to enable you to fit the course into your life realistically