

CMST Early Years Music Education Service
Phase 3 Research Project.
Case Study

Written by Ann Stott with contributions from the staff at Boscastle Play School.

“To what extent can music activities support the development of children’s fine and gross motor skills in an Early Years setting?”

The Setting - Boscastle Play School.

Boscastle is situated in an area of outstanding natural beauty on the North Coast of Cornwall. It is a very popular destination for tourists and many of the properties within the village and surrounding area are holiday lets or second homes. This has an impact on the availability of housing for local families and Boscastle is ranked by the UK government’s English Indices of Deprivation (2015) as being amongst the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country, due to barriers to housing and services.

Boscastle Play School was first established in 1969 and has run continuously since. In October 2010 the setting moved into its current building with the support of family services and Boscastle C.P. School. The building uses the old site of the church hall and was designed for the children to learn through free flow play. It has an outside area on several different levels incorporating a woodland section with a small stream, a productive garden and a fully enclosed outdoor play area. The setting also has 4 guinea pigs and 2 chickens.

Indoors the setting has a large open plan area where the children have access to a wealth of resources for play, learning and creating.

The setting is open for 50 weeks of the year from 8.30 a.m to 5.30 p.m, Monday to Friday, only closing for Bank Holidays and Christmas. They provide a range of child care from full day care to just a few hours and provide a breakfast club every weekday. They can have up to 20 children at any one time between the ages of 2 - 5 years and offer 2, 3 & 4 year old funding for those eligible and extended hours (30 hours) funding as part of the current government initiative.

They have 5 Play Workers with a minimum of NVQ level 3 and 1 staff member working towards an NVQ level 3 in child care.

The Project

Ann Stott, CMST Early Years Music Education Lead, met with all the setting staff to outline the project and discussed the area of research. The setting manager and staff felt that several of the children needed support in developing their coordination and motor skills. These areas of development formed the basis for the research question which was then agreed by the setting and CMST.

It was agreed that the project sessions would take place on Monday mornings with a cohort of approximately 12 children aged between 24 and 60 months.

The 20 week project delivered by Ann, began with an initial observation session followed by a weekly visit of 2 hours, which included mentoring a member of the settings staff, Sophie Miller and delivering some Adult Led activities. These activities were initially delivered by Ann but as the weeks progressed Sophie’s input increased.

Ann encouraged the setting to increase their repertoire with an emphasis on actions songs and rhymes. The children were encouraged to be co-creators using their own sounds and movements to songs and rhymes. This created an environment to encourage and support the innate musicality of the children.

The children were given the opportunity to react, respond and communicate through a variety of musical mediums both indoors and outdoors at the setting.

There was also the opportunity for the children to engage with live music provided by a visiting musician.

Ann, Sophie and the setting staff observed and gathered data.

Our aims and hopes for the outcomes of the project.

- To have an impact on the development of the children's gross and fine motor skills.
- To increase the confidence of the Early Years practitioners in recognising and responding to children's innate musicality.
- To increase the repertoire within the setting.
- To increase the children's musical experiences.
- To leave a legacy within the setting, providing ideas and resources to be used long term.

Getting Started

- Ann made time in every session to discuss musical, motor skill and other observations with Sophie and the other Early Years Practitioners.
- Sophie filmed the adult led activities which were used in two ways. Firstly as an aid to reflection and observations, secondly as an aide memoire for the future.
- Some children lacked confidence in being able to speak in front of each other and participate in group activities.
- Some children had difficulty in engaging in group activities, of which some displayed challenging behaviours.



The Activities

The activities used in the Adult Led, Circle Time sessions were chosen to explore the children's innate musicality, fine and gross motor skills and to support the children's development in both music and movement.

The activities used a range of movements from using two fingers to control a puppet, using two hands to pass a scrunchy, holding hands whilst dancing with a partner and being part of a marching band.



The repertoire of songs and rhymes supported the children's natural movements and encouraged movements to the pulse and rhythm.



As part of the project the children had the opportunity to interact with Barbara, a visiting musician and her instruments.



M played the Cello with control and intuitively held the neck of the instrument correctly. Her brother plays the Cello.



N had a good bow grip.

Barbara's visit led to some wonderful observations.

- The children listened while Barbara began to play a tune she thought they might know, N recognised it as "Twinkle, twinkle."
- Barbara played an animal sound on the Cello, J1 recognised it as a Cow sound.
- Barbara accompanied our dancing for "Jump Jim Joe," N jumped using both feet together, this was an observed first! She usually used alternate feet.
- Sophie observed that J1 was singing a made up song to Barbara playing the Cello.
- L3 vocalised along with the violin when Barbara was tuning it. He was engaged in strumming the Violin and Cello.
- L2 played the bell stick to the rhythm whilst singing "Jingle Bells." He also clapped the rhythm with Barbara.
- T used both arms and wrist bells to keep a steady pulse to "Jingle Bells."
- V strummed both instruments (he usually declined when asked to try something in front of the others).

The Outcomes

The development of the children's gross and fine motor skills.

Through the project activities the children were assessed on specific movements as listed below.

- The ability to twirl a scarf,
- Use both hands to pass a scrunchy around a circle,
- Jump with both feet together,
- Use two fingers of one hand to imitate walking on the back of the other hand or arm,
- Control a finger puppet,
- Clap or tap to a given pulse,
- Tap to a given rhythm,
- Use a toy hammer to tap a pulse or rhythm,
- Use a hand to beat the pulse or rhythm of a short song on a Djembe,
- Use a beater to strike a drum, woodblock or other instrument to the pulse whilst marching.

After the initial observational visit to the setting Ann gradually introduced the children to various different songs and rhymes with accompanying actions, some of the repertoire used specific props.

In the first adult led activity the children were encouraged to interact with scarves, stop and start moving different body parts and try to use a chopping action to the pulse of a chant.

At week 4 the children were introduced to twirling scarves, passing a giant scrunchy round a circle, using two fingers to control a finger puppet and using two fingers of one hand to imitate walking on the back of the other hand or arm.

These activities were repeated or revisited over the following 4 weeks and observations made.

V, B and J2 couldn't use both hands to pass the scrunchy. However both V and B were able to slide the scrunchy through both hands the following week.

By week 5 and L2 could use two fingers of one hand to imitate walking on the back of the other hand or arm. M, L, J1, N and T could also use two fingers to control a finger puppet.

At week 6 it was noted that T could use a chopping action to the pulse of a chant.

M, J1 and L1 could all use a toy hammer to tap the pulse to a chant.

Initially O, V and B couldn't twirl a scarf but by week 8 of the project they were able to do so.

At week 7 Ann introduced the children to a Djembe which they were able to explore during their free flow play. During the adult led activity the children were invited to play along to one of the short songs they had learned through the project.

It was noted that L2 tapped his foot to the rhythm Ann played and B moved her leg to the rhythm.

N used her hands to mark the pulse on the Djembe whilst the group were singing.

V played the rhythm of the song on the Djembe, he also used a toy hammer to tap the rhythm as we were singing.

In week 8 the children were introduced to “Jump Jim Joe,” a dancing song which involved head nodding and shaking, jumping with two feet together, moving around whilst holding hands with a partner and changing partners. The song was repeated over the next 3 weeks and revisited with our visiting musician, Barbara, at week 12.

The children really enjoyed dancing and could soon follow the actions however it was noted that N was unable to jump with both feet together.

V was reluctant to join in the dancing and watched. However he had joined in fully by week 11.

By week 12 everyone was following the dance as Barbara played along on the violin and N had mastered jumping with both feet together, a real achievement.

During the free flow play in week 11 the children were encouraged to take some of the instruments outside.

V, B, N and L1 played their instruments on the pulse as they marched with Ann in the playground.



The Manager’s assessments and observations.

At the beginning of the project the children were assessed in line with the EYFS Physical Development area of Moving and Handling by the setting Manager. These assessments were reviewed towards the end of the project.

N was at emerging 30-50 months and on review was at 30-50 months progressing. She no longer used whole hand grasp when painting and usually holds the paint brush correctly. She holds pens properly and uses them effectively.

T was at secure 30-50 months and on review was at 40-60 months progressing. She was negotiating space successfully. She used simple tools to effect changes to materials. She was beginning to use anticlockwise movement and retrace vertical lines. She holds a pencil effectively.

J1 was at 30-50 months progressing and on review was at 40-60 months progressing. He was now using tools effectively. He was showing a preference for a dominant hand. He used anticlockwise movement and could retrace vertical lines.

J2 was one of the children that was below normal targets for gross motor skills. Over the course of the project he has become less clumsy and accident prone. He loves the music and dancing

and participated in the activities really well. It was considered that this participation had contributed to his physical development.

L1's Summer assessment was at 30 - 50 months progressing. However in one term she has moved through 30-50 months secure to 40-60 progressing. She usually struggled in engaging in group activities but remained fully engaged throughout the group music sessions. The manager noted that the music activities had positively impacted on L1's development in all areas.

L2's Summer assessment placed her at 30 - 50 months emerging. During the project she moved through 30 - 50 months secure to 40 - 60 months emerging. L2 fully engaged with the music activities and the manager noted this had beneficial repercussions across her development.

L3 had behavioural challenges both in play school and at home and tended to dip in and out of the music sessions. He engaged in music making with instruments and can keep to the beat on a drum, his favourite instrument. He is 30 months old and his physical development is at 30 - 50 months progressing.

M's Summer assessment for physical development was 30 - 50 months progressing but has moved to 40 - 60 progressing during the project. She has stayed fully engaged during the music activities.

B has become more and more engaged in the music activities over the duration of the project. She liked to break the rules to see the adults reactions and this is no longer as pronounced as it was. She has tried hard to follow the actions in the activities and her physical development has progressed from 22 - 36 months emerging to 30 - 50 months emerging during the course of the project.

V has progressed from doing the actions in a very subdued manner to joining in more energetically. He will generally do the activity on the outskirts of the group but occasionally forgets himself and comes in closer.

T1 has only attended the Monday music sessions since Christmas. He was very withdrawn at the beginning but has become increasingly confident.

The Manager concluded that, "all the children have developed their coordination and it had been great to practise fine and gross motor skills in a fun and innovative way. However the music and movement activities have helped the children's development in all the learning areas."

The increased confidence of the Early Years practitioners in recognising and responding to children's innate musicality.

At the beginning and end of the project the setting staff completed questionnaires to ascertain their confidence in using music activities with the children.

The staff agreed that their confidence to use music in the setting had increased, they had a greater understanding of children's musical tastes and that the children's participation in music would form part of their observations. They were also keen to attend further music based training,

Ann worked alongside Sophie for the duration of the project with other staff members joining in with the adult led sessions.

Sophie soon embraced the notion of observing children's musical play and recorded her observations of their innate musicality in Tapestry alongside her other observations.



O1 singing along to Old MacDonald



V playing drums to a steady pulse.

Lyn and Felicity also shared their observations with Sophie and Ann.

Lyn noted “children spontaneously do some of the activities alone or with their peers.”

Felicity commented that “Everybody look at me” works brilliantly, we now use it in all aspects and activities.” For example, putting shoes on and off for P.E activities.

Overall the staff felt as a team their confidence had increased by being part of the project.

Felicity expressed the staff team's achievement as “working together with the children and learning new songs - going through the journey together.”

Sophie commented;

“As an individual the music project has helped me to build confidence which was the main reason I wanted to take part in the project. It has also given me ideas to use with the children. We have learnt several different songs and games that we can carry on using once the project has finished.”

Increase the repertoire within the setting.

From the comments above the staff have increased their repertoire and have been left with ideas and resources to use in the future. Their increased confidence is also enabling them to adapt known songs and to embrace the children's own music.

Increase the children's musical experiences.

Although the children had access to musical instruments all the time in the setting they needed support to engage with them fully. The staffs increased confidence in musical play has enhanced the children's experiences both indoors and outside.

Barbara's visit gave the children the opportunity to interact with live music and exposed them to instruments they may not have experienced before.

Leaving a legacy within the setting, providing ideas and resources to be used long term.

During the project parents were invited to join the activities and give their feedback on the project. Many had noticed the impact the music activities had on their children's development and were experiencing their child's innate musicality.

“Lots of gentle singing whilst playing and some made up words too - lots of ‘L’ sounds.”

“N loves to perform the ads she watches on T.V. She asks me to take a video of her singing/dancing and playing the whistle.”

“Speech is developing quickly at the moment, 10 new sounds every day.” “Singing “hello light, hello door etc in theme to the ‘goodbye song’ from stay and play.”

After visiting a session some of the parents put forward to the the Play School Committee for the provision of outdoor upcycled instruments for the children, this has been agreed and an outdoor music area will be created.

Sophie will cascade her knowledge and experiences to the other staff in the setting in order to sustain the practice informed by the project.

Sophie has become a member of Cornwall Early Years Music Network provided by CMST where she will be able to connect and share resources with other Early Years Practitioners in the county.

Sophie and the setting have connected with the staff at St Pirans Play School, who recently participated in a similar project with CMST, enabling a sharing of best practice for the future. The CMST Early Years Team will be available for further support when required.

Biographies

The Early Years Practitioner



Sophie Miller

I have studied both level 2 and 3 diplomas in childcare at St Austell college. I have completed several work placements in different nurseries and a school. My previous employment was with a childminder for a year and a half, looking after children between the ages of 5 months and 11 years. I am currently working at Boscastle Play School and have been for half a year now.

The Music Leader

Ann Stott



Over the last 25 years Ann has passed on her love of singing to countless children and young people, as an educational practitioner, freelance music educator and currently as Lead for Early Years Music Education for Cornwall Music Service Trust.

Ann's career in education began in Early Years settings and she has seen many changes from Stepping Stones through to the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework in place today.

Ann is a skilled vocal trainer and workshop leader, drawing on her educational experiences, imagination and sense of fun, she has provided tailored sessions for a variety of Early Years settings. Ann believes passionately that singing and music should be fully inclusive.