

CMST Early Years Music Education Service
Phase 2 Research Project.
Case Study

Words by Ann Stott and Jo Parsons, with contributions from Kasey Smeeth and the staff of
St Pirans Playschool.

*‘To what extent can music play a part in developing children’s confidence in an
Early Years setting?’*

The Setting - St Pirans Playschool, Delabole, North Cornwall.

St Pirans Playschool opened in November 2006 and is registered with OFSTED to provide sessional Early Years Care and Education for 30 children. Sessions vary from 1 to 8 hours and are available to children from the age of 2 to 5 years. It is a non-profit making organisation with charitable status and is run by a voluntary committee, of mainly parents, which is elected each year at the AGM held in September/October.

Several of the children in the setting lack confidence and find it difficult to engage in and contribute to group activities. Their lack of confidence also impacts on their language development and this in turn can have implications, such as inappropriate behaviour, due to the frustrations of being unable to make themselves understood, to their peers and staff.

Delabole is situated in rural North Cornwall, an area of outstanding natural beauty and approximately a mile from the North Cornish coast. The village is classed as being amongst the 50% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country by The Department for Communities and Local Government, English Indices of Deprivation 2015. The indices provides a set of relative measures of deprivation for small areas across England, based on seven domains of deprivation and shows that Delabole;

- is amongst the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country in the Living Environment Deprivation Domain
- is amongst the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country in the Education, Skills and Training Domain
- is amongst the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country in the Barriers to Housing and Services Domain.
- amongst the 40% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country in the Employment Deprivation Domain.
- is amongst the 50% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country in the Income Deprivation Domain.

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, which was then agreed by the setting and CMST.

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, Jo Parsons and delivering some Adult Led activities. These activities were initially delivered by Ann but as the weeks progressed Jo’s input increased.

Ann encouraged the setting to create an environment to encourage and support the innate musicality of the children. This gave the children the opportunity to react, respond and

communicate through a variety of musical mediums.

There was also the opportunity for the children to engage with live music provided by visiting musicians and Jo.

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

Our aims and hopes for the outcomes of the project.

- To have an impact on development of the children's confidence, within the setting.
- To increase the confidence of the Early Years practitioners in recognising and responding to children's innate musicality.
- To encourage the use of spontaneous music making in an improvised manner, moving music away from music only being a planned activity.
- To leave a legacy within the setting, providing ideas and resources to be used long term.

Getting Started

- Ann made time every session to discuss musical observations and the project in general with the Early Years Practitioners. They filmed the adult led activities in order for them to use and refer back to, in the future.
- Several 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.

Next steps



Between the first and second visits to the setting, the staff and parents had spent a weekend creating outdoor music spaces, using donated and reclaimed materials, for the children to explore sounds (timbre) and improvise.



Observation - 'T1-thoughtfully and gently, experimented with the different sounds on the outdoor music stand.'

The staff in the setting were very positive about the project and at an early stage, implemented some of the ideas from our discussions. For example, the continuous provision of a selection of musical instruments indoors.

Having the resources to make music inside and outside the setting created, some interesting observations by the staff.

“One child (R2) independently chose to play instruments, (he doesn’t usually choose anything independently), some of the other children joined in with him playing a loud, louder game. (dynamics).”

The same child had explored the outside music wall, Jo had modelled playing the spoon handle over the plastic ridges – R2 copied and followed her rhythm, then Jo copied his actions.

Jo commented *“It’s the most interaction I have observed with this child since he started at the group”*.

The children adapted other resources, available to them, to use in their musical play, for example racquets and bats became guitars in a band and steps became a performance area.



The setting used their usual circle time as a vehicle for some adult led activities, These were initially led by Ann but as the weeks progressed Jo delivered parts of the sessions, culminating in her planning and delivering her own activities by week 12 of the project. Other members of staff were also using some of the activities and repertoire, modelled by Ann, adapting them to the settings own resources.



The staff filmed the adult led activities to use as an aide memoire for the future but also for reflection and observation purposes. The films and other photographs of the children at play, were useful tools in observing the increased confidence and changes in engagement of the children taking part.

Gaining Confidence

From their observations the setting noted how particular children's engagement, behaviour and confidence changed over the period of the project.

I1 - Aged 46 - 50 months (during this Case Study).

I1 had a speech and language development delay which caused frustration and a lack of confidence in communicating with his peers and staff. The frustration led to some challenging behaviour and isolation from group activities.

In the first session of adult led activities he withdrew from the activity area but observed from another part of the room. In the second session he stayed in the group for all of the activities and took part in tidying up the resources for one of the songs.

By week 4 of the project he was exchanging eye contact with Ann and was much more actively engaged in the music activities, anticipating and joining in with some of the actions. He was also beginning to vocalise in one of the songs and lay calmly with the other children for the relaxation part of the session.

As the weeks progressed his increasing confidence enabled him to further engage in the sessions. He rocked purposefully from side to side, on the pulse, when dancing. He took turns well when passing to and from his peers during scarf activities. Even when his mother, who works in the setting, was not nearby he had the confidence to stay in the session.

His mother was also noticing the impact of the music sessions on his confidence, she had remarked to Jo, *"I1, sang Kay-la-la on the way to Pre-school this morning and inserted his name in the correct place."*

By week 10, even though he did not have a family member present, in a shared session, with parents, he was actively engaged throughout the activities. He continued to show improvement in confidence, in listening, in use of vocabulary and speech and in his connections with staff, his peers and Ann.

At week 13 of the project he was confident enough to imitate another child's sound and adapt it to his own style, by lengthening it and changing the ending. He was also creating his own sounds such as "brrrrrrrr", which was very striking because he struggled with enunciating both 'b' and 'r' in his speech. He also felt confident enough to suggest using his newly created sounds in a different activity and to initiate a particular activity that he enjoyed e.g. scarf blowing and the Peek-a-Boo song.

Throughout the sessions I1 had always chosen to sit next to D1 with whom he felt more at ease, however by week 13 he felt confident enough to choose and engage with T4, when choosing a dance partner.

By the 14th week he was confident to vocalise his own name and join in naming the other children in his group, during a voice play name game. He paid attention to what Ann was doing throughout the session and showed anticipation in what was to happen next.

T2 - Aged 35 -39 months (during this Case Study).

At the beginning of the project T2 joined the other children for the adult led activities but as an observer. He did not speak and his usual means of communication was to point or make a short vocal sound. He was very reserved and it took a while for him to show any engagement.

However by week 4 we noticed that he was subtly engaging in the adult led session, joining in with some of the actions and swayed very gently, to the pulse of a piece by Einaudi. He also gave Ann some eye contact and smiled as they played in the sand together.

Although his engagement continued to be quite subtle, he really engaged in playing a stirring drum during the instrument session at week 5 and by week 6 was tapping his thigh with his finger to the pulse of “Chop, chop, choppity chop”.

He gradually became more confident in his interactions with Ann and whilst using her Djembe as provocation during her 8th visit, he engaged in playing and responding, to short patterns of sound, on the instrument. He even vocalised, “Ha!” as part of this game. He then became quite vocal, pointing to a sticker he was wearing and mentioned a coherent “Mummy” when Ann asked about it. In the same session he went over to the Optician’s (role play) area and brought Ann lots of leaflets, each time he pointed to the people on the cover, he said “Mummy” or “Daddy” depending on the gender of the person pictured. Later he joined Ann in playing “Round and round” on the Djembe skin and copied the word “round”. This was a huge leap forward for this child, much more speech than usual and confidently engaging with Ann.

In the next session, with his increased confidence, he instigated the “Round and round” song by moving his scarf round and round. He enjoyed having his suggestion acknowledged and that everyone joined in with his chosen activity.

R2 - Aged 38 -39 months (during this Case Study).

R2 had a Speech and Language referral and had limited speech tending to use one word answers, if asked a question eg. “Yeah.” “Mummy.” “Daddy.” It was noted at an early stage in the project that R2 reacted in a positive way to the opportunity to use the music resources, available inside and outside the setting. They acted as a catalyst in his interaction with Jo, as mentioned in an earlier section of this case study.

From the beginning of the project he engaged in the adult led activities in a passive way, listening and watching but by week 4 he was trying to sing along with the songs and vocalised the “Beeps” in “The Little Red Jeep.” After the session he began to sing “Baa, baa, black sheep” but stopped when he realised Jo had observed him. Jo then sang the song and he kept the pulse on 2 sticks, accompanying her singing.

Over the weeks his confidence grew and he became more engaged in the music and singing activities, taking place in the setting. For example Mel, one of the practitioners, had used the name song “Kay-la-la” in a group activity, she noted “*R2 joined in with all the words and sang his name twice, in a big voice, so everyone could hear, he is usually very reticent and quiet.*”

By week 12 it was noted that both R2 and T2 responded well to the physical activity of scarf waving, smiling and moving their hips, knees and upper body to Ella Fitzgerald’s version of “Old MacDonald.”

C1 - Aged 34 - 38 months (during this Case Study).

C1 was very shy and found it difficult to speak in a group situation. It took a few weeks for him to feel comfortable with the adult led activities, in a “Hello” song he didn’t want to make contact with Ann, putting his head down to avoid eye contact and didn’t want to shake hands. In free flow time he avoided Ann or covered his face when he passed her.

However, with support, he began to engage in the sessions and by week 4 was anticipating the “Beep” in “The Little Red Jeep”, raising his hand, in readiness for the action. Interestingly, during this session, Jo observed that C1, R2 and J2 were watching each other and taking the lead from each other’s cues. After the session C1 was, intermittently, joining R2 and J2 in their play, this was a new social engagement for them.

Although C1 engaged in the sessions, he was quite reserved but he showed increased confidence by week 14 when he took the lead in a “Peek- a- Boo” game, singing the song, confidently and clearly.

J2 - Aged 34 - 38 months (during this Case Study).

J2 was reluctant to speak in playschool but spoke well at home. Initially he engaged with the first adult led activities with support however he needed less support in the activities than expected. During the session with Jo, he made eye contact with her and smiled. This was unusual for him.

By week 4 he engaged with Ann during free flow time by giving her eye contact and with a little encouragement from Jo he engaged more easily in the adult led activities. During the relaxation part of the session, Jo noted that J2 got up and joined R2 to lay down and they locked in to a long spell of eye contact.- Jo had never seen these children do this before.

As his confidence grew, he engaged, independently in the activities. During the session, at week 7, he put a scarf on his head by himself for the Peek-a-Boo game. Being acknowledged as the leader of the activity really boosted his confidence and he really engaged in all the activities, including dancing with a scarf.

By week 8, his social engagement had increased and he was confident to approach other children. He observed and waited while E4 (a new child to the setting) played the Djembe, he then gave her a toy train and brief eye contact, as communication and invitation to play. He also engaged with Ann and the Djembe, copying the rhythm of her singing, “Round and round and round we go”. Later he went back to Ann and played a loud rhythm whilst giving her lots of eye contact.

During the session at week 13 he was really engaged in the song “Old MacDonald Had A Band”, he followed the actions for each instrument, keeping to rhythm of the song through out.

By week 16 he was confident enough to engage with a visiting Saxophonist giving eye contact whilst pressing the keys on the saxophone.

The Impact on the Setting

- 35% of children made significant progress in PSED - Making relationships (26% of girls / 45% of boys)
- 17% of children made significant progress in PSED - Self-confidence and self-awareness (11% of girls / 25% of boys)
- 28% of children made significant progress in PSED - managing feelings & behaviour (20% of girls / 40% of boys)
- The speech and language of 4 children has significantly improved.
- Increased confidence of staff with music and singing, both of which are now more firmly embedded into continuous provision as well as planned adult-led sessions e.g. circle time. Staff are more likely to break into song or tap out a beat / rhythm than previously. Staff are more likely to plan music into their children's individual planning.
- Children have more opportunities for singing and music making through continuous provision due to the introduction of free access to musical instruments all day every day, indoors as well as outdoors, through the provision of homemade music resources..
- As a result of being introduced to some of the musical instruments during the sessions, we have purchased further instruments to provide a wider variety and choice.
- Staff and students are looking more closely at children's play and learning and are able to more frequently identify musicality, which they are then noting and linking to the EYFS to inform planning and assessments, for example;



*T2 had been exploring the doweling sticks – banging together, drumming alternately on a plastic box, then on the writing cupboard, hard floor and carpet. (Exploring Timbre). He played longer on an object he liked eg. He preferred the plastic box to the hard floor. **“It was one of those moments when I had to step back because I realised he was experimenting with sound NOT just banging the box”.***

- Children and staff have a greater repertoire of songs.

Parents and Carers Comments

As part of a questionnaire the setting asked parents “Have you see any changes in your child since we have been running the music workshops?”

“I’ve notice a big difference with R1 and his confidence trying to play along to songs, and music acting out the instruments being played and loves trying to sing now.”

“P1 has certainly been singing a lot more songs and he has always liked dancing and continues to dance along to allsorts!”

“A1 is definitely more "involved" with music than she was, when listening to music now she will often clap along or bang her hands on her thighs and she headed straight to the dancefloor at the disco's when on holiday without needing mummy or daddy to go with her so her confidence has come on even more.”

“I have noticed some big changes in P2. She has been coming home singing several new songs, has begun to make up little rhymes of her own and enjoys performing them for us. She has also taken an interest in her older sister keyboard and they have been spending time together developing this new interest. I do think the sessions have improved her confidence but also are having a marked effect on her developing language skills phonetically, in readiness for learning to read.”

“Definitely! Language improvements, has also started making up own rhymes. Has an interest in singing and his sisters keyboard.”

“Pays more attention to music, often claps and slaps thighs in time to music, more confident getting up to dance at music events.”

“She has sung some new songs that I don’t know with actions.”

*“Both **** and ***** make up little songs now, with lots of different sound effects!”*

“He sings songs to himself and I have noticed him making up songs and rhymes”

*“ ***** Identifies music instruments and use most things now as a drum”*



The Early Years Practitioner



Jo Parsons

Jo Parsons has been at St Pirans Playschool since September 2017, and is currently studying a Foundation Degree in Early Childhood Studies at Cornwall College. Jo has been involved in Early Years since 2011 and has previously been committee member and chairperson of an Early Years setting, also volunteering with the children. Jo has 4 children aged 9, 7, 5 and 4 and as a child learned violin, piano and music theory. Jo enjoys listening to a variety of music from classical to pop, but her passion is Disney and musicals.

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 and more recently as a freelance music educator.

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, to provide tailored sessions for a variety of Early Years settings.

Ann believes passionately that singing and music should be fully inclusive.