

# To what extent can music increase the wellbeing of children within an Early Years setting, using the Leuven Scale as a measure?

Truro Nursery, CMST Early Years research project, phase 2.

## Introduction

It has been widely documented that music has a positive impact on our brains, stimulating them and impacting on our emotions. In 2015 the University of Sheffield set up a dedicated research unit studying the relation between music and wellbeing<sup>1</sup>. Participating in music or listening to music affects our nervous systems, controlling our pulse and blood pressure<sup>2</sup>.

This project is a case study questioning whether an increased involvement in music within a group of 3 to 4 year olds would lead to an increased level of wellbeing. More children than ever before are being treated for stress and depression, possibly due to increasing pressures from their academic work and increased expectations upon them<sup>3</sup>. Is music a good way to combat this stress? If we introduce music in Early Years education will that help develop a good foundation for a child's wellbeing?

## Truro Nursery.

Emily Garrod spent her time for phase 2 of the CMST Early Years project at Truro Nursery. The nursery is one of two maintained nursery school's working in Early Year's education in Cornwall. The children range from age 2-4 and there are up to 98 children who attend. The sessions at the nursery are run by qualified teachers and they have highly trained staff, specialising in many areas including speech and language development and forest school. The nursery is a teaching centre and received an outstanding grade at their last Ofsted inspection. Julie Benson, an advanced TA working at the nursery, wanted to be involved in the music project as she felt that although there was a lot of music making at the nursery she desired the opportunity to gain confidence and spread her work through the nursery.

## Getting started.

Emily arranged to visit the nursery on a Wednesday morning and work primarily with Julie Benson. This was planned to be every week from February through to the end of the summer term, 20 weeks in total. Catherine Stephens was also heavily involved with the project but only worked at the nursery every other Wednesday. The sessions started at 9am and lasted until 11am. The adult led activities were between 9.15 and 9.45 and 20 children were involved in these activities. Emily then

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<sup>1</sup> <http://musicwellbeing.group.shef.ac.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bhf.org.uk/informationsupport/heart-matters-magazine/news/behind-the-headlines/music-and-blood-pressure>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/what-we-do/research/well-being/publications/promoting-positive-well-being-children>

spent some time in the nursery or garden observing the children in their play and watching to see how they used sound and music. Sometimes she would bring in her musical instruments and encourage the children to join her in making music and at other times she would scaffold their ideas and encourage the children to develop them.

We chose 20 children aged 3-4 years old to take part in the adult led activities. Some of the children were chosen since they had low self-esteem and it was felt that they would benefit from the music sessions. The nursery had analysed their February assessment of the children and had highlighted 20 children whose score was low on the EYFS development matters scale of self-confidence and self-awareness. After initial observations we then focussed specifically on the three children within this group who scored low on the baseline Leuven Scale.

We decided to use the Leuven scale to measure how the music has been impacting the children's well-being. Catherine had attended a conference by professor Laevers in September 2016 so felt confident in sharing and leading how to use the Leuven scales. The Leuven scales are centred in a very child orientated approach when observing children and place the emphasis firmly on prioritising the child's engagement and wellbeing. The scale has been devised by researchers at Leuven University in Leuven, Belgium under the guidance of Professor Laevers. It is a way of measuring a child's involvement or well-being. There are five levels; Level one rates the wellbeing or involvement of the child are extremely low and level five as extremely high. We have used the well-being scale primarily to observe the children's wellbeing and although it only gives a snap shot of the child's behaviour it has been useful to show how the children have reacted to the adult led activities.



## **How did the setting react to the music?**

There was a very positive response to the music. The adult led activities were recorded on an iPad and made available to the staff. Many members of staff who were not directly involved with the music activities were inspired to make more music available to the children. Julie gained a huge amount of confidence and gave the children lots of opportunities to explore the instruments and resources at the setting. She has made it "normal" to have music playing and the instruments out. She is very good at supporting children in their improvised music within their play.

Emily noticed that the staff already used singing a lot when communicating with the children. One of her favourite moments was when she heard Mrs Fitzpatrick singing in the sand garden...

"I could hear singing coming from behind some trees in the Sand Garden. Mrs Fitzpatrick was singing 'I am driving in my car' and had found a prop for a steering wheel. She was walking around singing to the children who were joining in and following her. Ch came up to her and started to sing 'beep beep' to a pulse at a repeated pitch. He mimed beeping a horn with his hand. Mrs Fitzpatrick copied him at the same pulse and pitch and the children started to pretend to beep their horns."

Sera Stringer is in charge of the 2 year olds and their class room is next door to where the adult led activities take place...

"Sera was very excited. The children had heard us making music and wanted to join in. She read a story to them and used lots of sounds and gave the children instruments. She recorded them on the iPad so I could see."

We had some good feedback from parents.

"N has been marching all week because of his session last Wednesday!"

"J has been singing the Cherry Pie song at home".

The 20 children had much more confidence by the end of the project. They were more willing to lead and join in. They were happier during the adult led activities and there was a lot of smiling and laughter! Their behaviour was always very respectful of each other.

Each session a similar pattern which gave the children a sense of security through the familiar routine. The routine always began with a warm up and always finished with a cool down. Emily then introduced new songs whilst making sure she gave children to repeat and practice old favourites. She also sometimes brought in different instruments either her saxophone or instruments for the children to play. Emily's planning was tied into the nursery planning and wider events in the community such as Flora day in Helston and also the wedding between Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. As the sessions progressed Julie took the lead with more of the activities and Catherine as well during the sessions she attended. The children were always deeply involved and had opportunities to lead and make choices throughout the sessions.

## **The Children.**

The three children that we focussed on out of the 20 were Ev, Ja and Li.

Ev had problems detaching herself from Julie. She did not have the confidence to be by herself or lead and she was initially worried and tearful during the adult led activities. Her Leuven score at the start of the project was 1 and was 4 by the end. After the 20 weeks she was able to lead with

encouragement and be in charge! She was able to be somewhere else in the room and independent from Julie. Her mood tended to dip noticeably after the adult led activities, and they seemed to give her a distraction where she could have some fun. Julie noticed how well Ev reacted to the music and she used it a lot with her away from the Wednesday mornings. For example, she encouraged Ev to bring in music CDs from home to listen to in the day at Truro Nursery.

Session 6: Ev had a brilliant session. She set a pulse for us to march to and suggested some great alien sounds!

Session 7: Ev came and pressed the keys on the saxophone, then got her toy turtle to have a go at pressing the keys.

Session 9: Ev did a very loud "hey!" in the tractor song and smiled!

Session 11: Ev did some balancing to the samba. Her and Fr also played the chime bars in time to the music in their free play.

Ja was very quiet at the start. His Leuven score was 2 and was 4 by the end. He would sit on a chair and on the first session he surprised Julie by taking his shoes and socks off- something he hadn't wanted to do before! He rarely showed any expression and didn't want to join in with any of the activities. He wasn't comfortable talking in front of the other children. By the end of the project he smiled regularly and was able to keep eye contact with the other children more confidently. He would join in with most of the activities and would sometimes lead and share ideas. Julie has noticed that he uses music a lot in his free play. He often "forms a band" with his friends in the garden using imaginary instruments and singing together.

Session 6: Ja didn't talk or join in or wear a cape. He did come up to me at the end of the session though, he has started to do this each time. I showed him how to put the saxophone away and he touched the keys.

Session 8: Ja was much more involved this week. He didn't want to join in with the marching at first but did eventually. He played a musical instrument for the first time in the group (!) and really enjoyed marching with the scrunchie. This is a massive difference in confidence. He also smiled at me a few times with eye contact- he'd not previously done this. He helped me put the instruments away at the end and was very proud of himself.

Session 9: Ja spoke for the first time in front of the others, making a very loud lion roar!!! Him and Au also conducted, setting their own pulse.

Session 12: Ja was very animated. He joined in with all of the activities with confidence and wasn't at all shy.

Session 13: Ja, Ev and Li were all very content and happy to share ideas. Ja was very smiley. He spoke several times in front of the others without worry.

Li was a very quiet member of the group. Her Leuven score was 2 at the start (4 by the end) and she found it hard to talk in front of the other children. She sometimes did not want to join in at the start and would only lead with a lot of encouragement and with a friend to support her. She didn't like to give eye contact to anyone that she didn't know well. She liked the routine and it gave her comfort

and confidence working with the same people each week and having the activities at the same time. She showed that she had a great sense of pulse and rhythm.

Session 9: Li and Lo were very good at tapping the rhythm to Twinkle Twinkle. Li also led the pulse today.

Session 10: Li was very happy to join in today.

Session 12: Li was very distressed at the start of the day. We almost left her in the classroom as she seemed too upset to join in. She did however decide to come and join us in the Nurture Room. By the end of the session she was much happier and was joining in with the activities.

Session 17: Li had a great session. She really seems to be enjoying herself. Today she even supported her friend, so her confidence levels are much higher!



### **Other wow moments!**

There were many other “Wow” moments though out the project that involved other children. These include the children dressing up as super heroes and running through the garden with total abandon and dancing around the maypole to Star Wars music!

On one Wednesday we took some instruments into the computer room which is next to the two year olds room. The two year olds heard the music playing and decided to come into the room to explore. One little girl, I, explored timbre by using the beaters to hit different parts of the instrument and surfaces. She was very expressive and did some great dancing, jumping up and down. We recorded her dancing. Her friend, R, is normally very shy but came into the room to listen to the music. This pleased her teacher.



On one afternoon Julie noticed a group of 3 and 4 year old boys playing together. They were singing "I'm still standing" and playing imaginary musical instruments. One of them was using a plank of wood as a keyboard. They were having a wonderful time, laughing together and singing at the tops of their voices.

Julie also noticed Ma and No playing in the garden with little sticks. They were tapping leaves from different plants and commenting on the different sounds that they were making. They were very absorbed and enjoyed exploring timbre.

### **The Music day, 27<sup>th</sup> June.**

The music project at Truro Nursery included a music day. The idea of this day was to have an informal celebration of the musical collaboration between the Cornwall Music Service Trust and the Nursery. The morning was as usual with adult led activities and the 20 children who normally took part. Their parents were invited to come and join in. The afternoon was mainly live music with an interactive edge to include the children.

Laura Jacobs (the daughter of a staff member) brought her ukulele in and her violin. She serenaded the children on her violin and they particularly loved dancing to the jigs. She sang nursery rhymes whilst playing the ukulele. The children were able to join in whilst playing their own ukuleles. All of this music took place in the outside space.

Saxotonic also played in the garden. This group is made up of adult amateur saxophonists. The children were encouraged to join in using hand-held percussion. One of the 2 year olds, Z, was very engaged with the music and danced around, shaking his instrument. Z has difficulty communicating with others and is currently being assessed to see if he has autism. His teachers were delighted with the reaction that he had to the music and are planning to use sound and music more in the future with his play and learning.

Ann Stott came to do some more adult led musical activities in the garden for the children and adults to join in with. She had lots of children and parents singing and they were especially delighted with Fiona the fish!

Cameron Wright (a son of a staff member) brought in his turn-tables. He allowed the children to have a go at touching them to change the sound. Some of the children practised their break dancing! It was really good to have an electronic element to the day.

The day was a great success and the Nursery are going to make a music day a regular annual feature.

### **Conclusions.**

The Leuven scores (see table below) showed that all of the children reacted positively to the adult led music activities. We noticed throughout the project that all the children grew in confidence, were able to talk/sing in front of each other, smiled and laughed more increasingly, supported each other and worked together well. The children were proud of their work and enjoyed the routine of attending the music group every Wednesday. There were more signs of the children being relaxed and content as the weeks went by and more spontaneous and confident in their music making.

Name	Baseline	25 <sup>th</sup> April	11 <sup>th</sup> July
Arl	3	3	4
Ar	3	4	4
Au	2	3	4
Bo	3	4	4
Ch	2	3	3
Ev*	1	4	4
Ha	3	4	4
Ir	2	3	4
Is	2	3	4
Ja*	2	2	4
Jo	4	4	4
Li*	2	3	4
Lo	3	4	4
Ma	2	4	4
Mi	3	4	4
No E	2	4	4
No H	3	4	4
So	2	4	4
Th	2	3	4
Ze	2	3	4

Truro Nursery have embraced the music project. Julie Benson is passionate about involving the children in music as much as possible and the music project has encouraged her to develop this within the setting. There is brilliant communication between staff at the nursery and they are all keen to take part in Julie's ideas for the future. The Leuven tracking has shown that the children's well-being has all improved due to an increased involvement in music making.

### **Julie Benson.**

My name is Julie Benson and I am a Higher Level Teaching Assistant at Truro Nursery School. I completed my nursery nurse training in 1976 and later advanced my training to become a HLTA. During my many years of working with children and also a short time working with adults in nursing homes, I have always found music to be a very valuable tool that people of all ages and abilities can benefit from. I find it easier to "sing" a request to a child as it then comes across as fun, and not a command! Music is accessible to EVERYONE! I enjoy all types of music and love to sing and play the piano (badly!). My aim is to give all the children at Truro Nursery School lots of opportunities to explore, discover and experience music, song and dance of all types of genres. We have a wide range of musical instruments including a keyboard, drums and beat blocks and every child of every age is given the chance each week to join in with music and dance. As long as my heart beats the pulse, I will encourage people to "Make your own kind of music"!

**Catherine Stephens.**

I trained as a teacher in London in 2005 specialising in early years education and have taught in the early years in London, Spain and Cornwall. I am the SENCO at the nursery and have an interest in Special educational needs. I have always loved music and played the flute to grade eight while at school. Since becoming a teacher I have been fascinated by how children respond to music. Children are such natural musicians and love to sing and play instruments. I use music especially singing in my every day practice but would love to see how it affects children's emotions and especially their wellbeing.

**Emily Garrod.**

I am primarily an instrumentalist and studied classical clarinet and jazz saxophone as an under and then post graduate student. I have been teaching woodwind for over 10 years, first for the Bristol Music Service and now for the Cornwall Music Service Trust. My love of performance has led me to play with many musicians from various backgrounds and in several ensembles including "The National Saxophone Choir of Great Britain" (with whom I toured in Europe and performed extensively across England and Scotland), Bristol Latin Band "Salsa Nova" and the Malbec Clarinet Quartet. My interest in working in Early Years music started about ten years ago when I took a course run by Susan Young. I was inspired by my fellow course members, many whom had been working in Early Years settings for a long time and found that I loved the energy, diversity and improvisatory nature of the work. I am very excited to be part of the new Early Years team for the Cornwall Music Service Trust and am loving working with very young children at an age where music is such an incredible source of communication, fun, learning and comfort to them.



