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HISTORY

The average age of my fan club is 2. I'm a musician from a lucky young age, having spent much of my education at a music school, followed by studying theatre and dance

I was asked to accompany toddler dance classes to give 73 year old Peggy Hawkins a break. This remarkable lady insisted that I played the piano using Dalcroze methods (more of this later) to highlight absolute listening and focus – thereby encouraging direct links from music TO movement.

EARLY BEGINNINGS

In addition to piano teaching I developed an interest in researching and teaching music to young children. Through teaching music at drop-in sessions a number of nursery schools I began to employ a combination of methods in my quest to create a truly rounded, educational, yet fun and relaxed musical experience for both children AND also their accompanying adults.

In 1994 I founded The Music House for Children to give children unable to afford private tuition the chance to enjoy musical activities from baby music to instrumental tuition. Over the last 15 years we have ongoing

Music appreciation for babies and young children
Music training for early years music delivery
Group instrumental tuition at our school
Instrumental tuition in homes across London
Workshops and early years musical storytelling shows
Music provision in primary schools

TRAINING

My early years music training has been an eclectic mixture of Dalcroze, Colourstrings, Kodaly, MusikGarten and of course, practical teaching experience. Details of all those training methods can be found in your hand-outs.

I developed my own format for delivering music sessions that embraces all those long established methods. It was important for me to acknowledge these excellent methods and to interlink those ideas with my own, thereby encouraging creative and individual thinking and delivery as a teacher. In 2003 I began to train specific groups in the ability to enjoy and to give music experiences independently. The main groups are:

Musicians - deliver music sessions effectively to young children
Non-musicians – empower them with skills to enjoy music making
Early years practitioners – Teach them new ways to deliver music sessions

PROBLEMS

The Music House trains musicians to give music sessions in places like

Church halls

Children's centres

Nursery schools

I quickly realised that if the accompanying adults were not engaged – whatever the venue, the social or cultural background and the quality of music teaching, children would struggle to focus, or even to participate. Recurring problems included:

Talking

Non-participation

Abstract behaviour

Young children engage and learn through the positive participation of their trusted adult. As music facilitators we needed to encourage participation without appearing to force rules and regulations on the adults.

Time and again the same solution came back and yet, is the hardest to achieve:

COMMUNICATE COMMUNICATE COMMUNICATE

Music educators have an incredibly hard job in persuading early years groups to embed music making within their daily routine, rather than to simply see it as an add-on on entertainment. Many nursery groups see music as a specialist subject, therefore unattainable. Subsequently many musicians feel unsupported and sometimes bizarrely unwanted.

As a musician it is one thing to be brilliant at delivering musical experiences. It is quite a different story when dealing with a specific age group. This is a complex issue, not least because some of the responsibility lies in the training courses on offer. There may be no specific recommendation to try out early years teaching, and much of teacher training focuses on the older age groups. Practical opportunities are often dependent on a careers officer, and are not part of an overall course.

Notable shortcomings include:

Understanding the psychology of babies and young children

Understanding the motor and sensory ability of young children and babies

Use of appropriate materials

Effective communication with each group leader and staff

Similarly early years practitioners and parents often feel inadequate when confronted with music making. They may not understand the significance of participation and regular music sessions.

They may be reluctant to sing for fear of being judged. They may have little understanding of how best to offer musical experiences beyond the same tired cd and familiar songs such as the tried and tested four – 'Baa baa black sheep', 'Twinkle Twinkle', 'If you're happy and you know it' and 'Wind the bobbin up'. Hands up who knows them all?

With our training we encourage both parties to communicate at every level and share their very different skills and knowledge:

“Sing a song of sixpence” is an impossible song for young children to sing. It’s an impossible one for many adults to sing too! There are hundreds of wonderful songs and activities from folk tunes, international songs, poems and melodies that increases confident singing in adults as well as children very quickly. However unlike purists who would argue this traditional British nursery rhyme should be abandoned, such a song is a useful tool in physical memory, imitation, co-ordination and sensory recollection.

Encouraging consistency in music making together and by investing in training – perhaps just once a year as part of an inset experience, additional module within college study and others music educators, nursery leaders and families could not only deliver music sessions, but participate fully. This will empower each person with new skills, increasing playful communication between adult and child, and engage all musically.

The rewards are:

Enthusiasm

Varied

Unique

Unexpected

Praise – they always love you!

Presents at Christmas

I can’t explain it

Why do I do what I do? Because I love working with young children. Getting on with children is fundamental to any person considering music teaching with this age group. In fact, any age group. Children are canny creatures. They will instinctively know that you are uncomfortable in their company. Young children will eat you for lunch. Or send you running for the door as one of my trainees did – “please don’t make me go back into the nursery – they were crazy!”

For the most part I love the challenge of facing a group and observing the spontaneous response to musical activities on offer.

The rewards are those finer moments when you hear a 2 year old sing in pitch “cobbler cobbler mend my shoe” or a shy 15 month old reach out for a maraca and utter “daa daaa, brrrrrr” – a real mark of achievement. Or, observe a mother previously resistant to participation - singing WITH their child and enjoying natural accompanying movements. Or as I noted just last week, a deaf child of 2 years old uttering for the first time to my duck - “Quaaaack”.

Practical experience is undeniably the only way that any educator will gain experience and confidence. All the training in the world will not prepare you for a child reacting unpredictably. I teach regularly and subsequently bring new ideas in training and workshops. This brings me to the subject of training and the work that we do at The Music House for Children.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF

* As employers we look for people demonstrate genuine enthusiasm and a desire to work with young children. People that want to learn how to reach this age group through effective group management, combined with appropriate tools to do so.

* As trainers we encourage trainees to bring their own ideas, personality and instruments if they have them, and to use all these actively in music making I try to recognise the potential in a trainee whether they are a musician, early years worker, parent or

guardian. Then to facilitate existing skills by embedding other areas required in early years music teaching.

Training modules for the most part includes:

- **Enhance existing skills**
- **Learn new skills**
- **Introduce appropriate materials/resources**
- **Working with different age groups**
- **Develop creative/lateral thinking**

To retain the highest level of provision we encourage

- **Observation of each other once per term**
- **Enjoy pre-term training sessions**
- **Sharing of resources and ideas**

We also provide teaching opportunities through mentoring -

Two hour introductory training sessions involving:

- **Structure of sessions – including movement**
- **Management of specific age groups**
- **Using own instrument to engage children**
- **Use of appropriate levels of communication**

With this free training we expect the following commitment:

- **Attendance to at least two music sessions**
- **To learn specific song to support activities**
- **To participate fully**
- **To demonstrate their instrument**

This provides music students from colleges such as the Royal College of Music and Royal Academy of Music with a practical insight to working with this age group. It's often a wake up call for those imagining that teaching young children -

**'provides easy income',
'is a sweet, part-time hobby',
'they'll do anything you ask'**

These practical experiences can help students to decide what career path not to take –

**'They don't do anything'
'They need the toilet'
'They can't sing'
'They interrupted my performance'
'They're so naughty!'**

Is there such a thing as a naughty baby???

Happily, and in most cases, we have seen an increase in interest by those looking to pursue a shared career in early years teaching and performing.

Other training we provide encourages non-musicians to learn how to provide music sessions without the need to play an instrument. We have our voices and our bodies – that's plenty.

MUSICLEADER CODE OF PRACTICE

www.musicleader.net

The Music Leader's Code of Practice is a useful tool from which to be guided, should musicians and teachers be considering working with young children. The Music House has, over the years embedded several strands of its guide-lines.

Six core policies include:

Be well prepared and organised

Be safe and responsible

Prepare for and reflect on work

Work well with people

Be committed to professional development

Organisational skills are definitely taught – I remember well my dishevelled notes prior to taking music sessions. Then abandoning the lot since the group went off in a different direction. Preparation and the logging of all sessions does much to encourage professional development, and the sharing of material and good practice.

Music Leader supports ongoing professional development and advice through highlighting training on offer, as well as to put the quality stamp on the work that teachers do across the country. We have found the website incredibly helpful for highlighting other early years activities on offer, as well as to reduce the sometimes alienating effect that being a freelance teacher can have. As mentioned earlier, open-minded communication and professional sharing is one of the key players in the development of good teachers.

THE FUTURE

The Music House for Children is delighted to have recently established a new early years training development partnership with Stepping into Music, a new and accredited training strand of early years music teaching using the Dalcroze method of music teaching. In addition to the one year's training we hope to work together to provide developmental days, weekend courses, inset training events in nursery settings, and the sharing of material and resources through our school and sister company, Bush Hall.

The Music House will continue to run bespoke training sessions for individual groups, children's centres, nursery settings and teachers. We hope to recruit new and committed early years music teachers in the coming months for our early years programmes – based mainly in West London.

Teaching music, training musicians and non-musicians. Inspiring the lives of families and children in musical activities, and ultimately embedding a musical foundation from which they can spring. That is what The Music House does. It's what I love and what wakes me up in the morning. Sometimes it's scary. But when I'm on the ground with our children, it's always incredibly rewarding. Thank you.

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