

Youth Music - Communicate Through Sound Project **Term 5 Spring 2024 Report**

Key

ML - Music Leader

ASC - Autism spectrum condition

Aim: To improve communication skills and to help improve communication between the child and their wider family unit or social setting. All of the children taking part will have some form of communication delay/need.

The group sessions were conducted at Hazelmere Library over 12 weeks. Participants included children with speech and language delays, emotional difficulties, autism spectrum condition (ASC), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), undiagnosed ASD/ADHD, English as an additional language (EAL), and learning difficulties. Each session accommodated up to 20 families.

Theme for Term 3:

The theme for Term 3 was 'Musical Storytelling,' featuring weekly sessions centered around different books, allowing exploration of various animals and themes.

Structure of Each Session:

Each session followed a musical structure, including:

- Hello: Utilizing vocal greetings and sounds.
- Warm Up: Making sounds and using Makaton signs.
- Group Playing: Engaging with untuned percussion or ukuleles, incorporating familiar sounds and words.
- Group Singing: Using various instruments to sing/make sounds and communicate.
- Moving to Music: Incorporating movement with props like pom poms and dance ribbons.
- Drumming: Playing Djembes or claves to encourage responses.
- Listening: Engaging with quieter sounds and vocal responses using chimes and triangles.
- Goodbye: Using voices and sensory props to signal the end of the session.

Participant Diversity:

Participants included families from the local community as well as those who traveled further due to their child's needs, creating an inclusive environment. Children received support from parents, grandparents, childminders, nannies, or guardians to ensure their full participation. For example for some children had support on how to play an instrument, others needed support with language and making sounds which they mirrored from the ML and also guardian.

Attendance:

Sessions were consistently sold out, with 80% regular attendance and the remaining 20% comprising both regular attendees unable to attend all sessions and those only able to attend a few.

Engagement and Comfort:

Children displayed excitement and comfort upon entering the library, familiarising themselves with the environment. The hello song served as a positive and energised start, with children actively participating. The hello song also used counting to 3 on fingers. The children concentrated hard on this section each week trying to lift their fingers one at a time whilst counting.

Book Selection and Engagement:

Books chosen for musical storytelling were familiar to the children, eliciting enthusiastic responses. Each story introduced new signs, sounds, and words, allowing children to learn and engage actively.

Upon intruding the book the children would often make sounds or use words such as "yay", "oooo" "I love it", "my favourite".

The books woven into musical storytelling were:

The Very Busy Spider

Dear Zoo

Hide and Seek Pig

Brown Bear, Brown Bear what do you see?

Dinosaur Roar

We're going on a bear hunt

Rosies Walk

Meg and Mog

A hole in the bottom of the sea

Guess how much I love you?

The Gruffalo

Variety in Activities:

A diverse repertoire of songs and rhymes was utilised, encouraging different responses from the children. Activities included using instruments for sound effects and incorporating puppets to bring characters to life. The children enjoyed learning new signs each week to introduce characters and the sounds these produced. The ML throughout the sessions would ask the children and families to repeat the sign with it's sound. This enabled the children and families to leave the session with a 1-3 new signs, sounds and words each week.

As each story was different the repertoire of songs and rhymes used was varied which encouraged different responses from the children.

This included ...

Horsey Horsey - using castanets and galloping around the room making clip clop and neigh sounds

Slowly Slowly snail and mouse - using a variety of instruments to experience slow and fast playing and sound making

Row row row your boat - using stretch lycra strings to use gross movements using and pulling the strings with a partner

As the stories were familiar to the children some would shout out and offer well known sentences or words within the story when prompted by the ML. This in turn encouraged further children (as the project commenced) to offer their suggestions after seeing the response their peers had received from the ML and often met with applause or cheers from families attending.

The range of repertoire also enabled the ML to use lots of different instrumental sounds to evoke responses e.g.

Ocean drum - used for stories with water which prompted children to make further sounds or tell the ML what it sounded like

Tongue drum -

Cabassa - for snakes sounds

Individual Participation:

Each child had the opportunity to play instruments, fostering confidence and curiosity. The use of different instruments and puppets enhanced engagement and understanding.

The children each had an opportunity to engage in hands-on activities by taking turns to play instruments, exploring their textures, and listening to their sounds. This interactive experience was pivotal in building their confidence, as they eagerly participated week after week. The rotation of instruments generated excitement and anticipation among the children, nurturing their curiosity.

Puppets played a significant role during these sessions, complementing different instrumental sounds to animate characters from the stories. For instance, a bee buzzing around was represented by a kazoo, while snakes slithered with the help of a cabbasa. An owl perched atop chimes, producing subtle sounds. The visual aid provided by puppets facilitated the children's retention of signs and sounds, enhancing their learning experience.

Observations from the ML include ...

Child A - Undiagnosed SLD and ASC

Child A exhibited a cheerful demeanour upon arriving at the sessions, often engaging in independent activities such as reading with their mother or exploring the space while creating their own sounds. However, their excitement peaked when the puppet performances commenced. Child A eagerly anticipated the appearance of the puppets, expressing a desire to interact with them by holding and manoeuvring them around the space, mimicking the actions, sounds, and signs demonstrated by the Music Leader (ML). With the ML's encouragement, Child A actively participated in these interactions, leading to a noticeable growth in their confidence, vocal range, and communication abilities over the course of the sessions.

As Child A became more comfortable with the ML, Child A began to emulate words, phrases, sounds, and signs demonstrated during the sessions. While Child A briefly engaged with instruments, they primarily preferred to move around the space, immersing themselves in the music and dancing along with their peers and the ML.

Drumming sessions, however, captured Child A's interest, as they enthusiastically played the drums, enjoying the sensory feedback and creating their own accompanying sounds. Child A's enthusiasm for the sessions was evident to their mother, who noted their excitement each morning, often mentioning "library today." Additionally, Child A demonstrated their enjoyment of the sessions at home by reenacting parts of the session and incorporating musical play with their own collection of books.

As a result, Child A's vocabulary and ability to string together words have noticeably expanded, a development acknowledged by their mother.

Child B - EAL

Child B consistently positioned themselves in front of the Music Leader (ML), eagerly anticipating the introduction of new instrumental sounds or the distribution of group instruments. Their keen interest was evident in their fascination with the shapes, textures, and playing techniques of the instruments. Child B actively experimented with the instruments, exploring various ways to produce sounds while vocalising simultaneously. Their vocalisations ranged from babble to recognisable words, indicating an increased vocal presence during instrumental play. This interaction fostered both auditory and tactile exploration, contributing to Child B's engagement and developmental progression within the sessions.

Child C - SLD

Child C's participation in the sessions exhibited a pattern of intermittent engagement, often starting at the beginning before venturing into the library space, seemingly requiring time to acclimate to the auditory and social stimuli present. Their preference was to dip in and out of the session, selecting specific segments to participate in, particularly favoring individual instrument activities where they could engage according to their own preferences without feeling pressured to conform or imitate actions or signs. Over the course of the sessions, Child C gradually extended their duration of participation, with fewer instances of wandering into other areas. By the end of the term, Child C demonstrated increased comfort and adaptability within the session environment, indicating successful adjustment to the sessions and interactions with peers. This progression reflects Child C's evolving engagement and integration into the session dynamics and highlights their ability to navigate and regulate their participation according to their individual needs and preferences.

What we have learnt so far

We would like to learn from Communicate Through Sound two year project:

1. *What changes and impact our curriculum has on children displaying communication difficulties and document any differences or similarities that may be shown between different groups of children.*

Throughout Terms 1, 2, 3, and 4, visual cues such as puppets or Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) symbols have played a crucial role in aiding children's understanding and communication. These visual aids provide clear identification of animals or objects, allowing children to communicate without feeling pressure to comprehend signs or words immediately. In a group with mixed abilities, visual cues facilitate communication for all children, particularly those with communication delays who may initially rely on sounds but gradually develop signs and words as the sessions progress. The consistent use of visual cues has been a prominent feature throughout the project, significantly influencing communication responses and fostering inclusive interaction among participants.

In addition to visual cues, gestures and facial expressions serve as important communication tools, enabling interaction without the need for verbalisation. By following a child's lead in how they prefer to communicate, whether through sounds, signs, or gestures, the sessions create a supportive and respectful partnership, encouraging trust and mutual understanding.

In Term 5, the incorporation of puppets representing characters from books with distinct sounds and signs enhances children's ability to remember and utilise them repeatedly, even outside of the session environment. This reinforces learning and encourages continued engagement with communication skills beyond the sessions.

2. *What range of skills a music leader needs in order to work with children with varying needs who display communication delay.*

Throughout Terms 1, 2, 3, and 4, several key skills were essential for facilitating effective communication and engagement:

Listening Skills:

Listening to the thoughts and ideas expressed by children.
Paying attention to parents' feedback and suggestions.

Facilitating Communication:

Allowing extra time for vocal responses.
Providing opportunities for one-on-one interactions.
Supporting children to participate comfortably anywhere in the room.
Understanding and accommodating different ways of communication or response to musical activities.

Flexibility and Patience:

Allowing children the freedom to move to process information or regulate if needed.
Demonstrating patience by providing ample time for children to respond.
Adapting the curriculum to meet the evolving needs and interests of the children.

Resource Management:

Ensuring a solid range of resources to support different needs, such as various sound makers.

Designing a curriculum that supports varying needs, allowing each child to succeed.

Acceptance and Praise:

Accepting each child's unique response and praising their efforts positively.

Understanding and utilising Makaton and other visual aids effectively.

Structural Considerations:

Structuring the curriculum to accommodate a large group, ensuring adequate resources for each child.

Allowing children to dip in and out of sessions as needed.

Collaborating with the centre's team to encourage participation and understand children's needs.

Supportive Environment:

Providing time and space for processing information.

Facilitating child-led activities to foster trust and respect.

Maintaining eye contact and offering praise to each child in the group.

Incorporating repetitive tidy-up songs to encourage independence and social skills.

For Term 5, an additional focus is required on allowing ample time for children to explore instruments thoroughly. This involves ensuring they have sufficient time to experiment with different sounds, feel the instruments, and engage fully before transitioning to the next activity.

What format will CreateED's curriculum move in, in order to work with early years children with communication difficulties and how is this influenced and adapted by the children and their families input?

Throughout the project, there have been consistent opportunities to promote focused interaction and attention through the use of instruments and sensory resources.

In Term 5, we delved deeper into this aspect by prioritising ample time for children to actively listen, explore, and experiment with new instrumental sounds. This approach elicited a range of vocal responses from the children, including expressions of curiosity such as "What's that sound?", "That's a funny noise," and inquiries about the mechanics behind the sounds they encountered. Additionally, children began to repeat and imitate the sounds they heard, demonstrating increased engagement with the auditory stimuli.

By providing sufficient time and space for exploration, we observed a notable uptick in interactions among the children, as well as between the children, Music Leader (ML), and families. This extended exploration not only fostered individual curiosity and engagement but also facilitated collaborative learning experiences, as children shared discoveries and reactions with one another and with supportive adults. Overall, this emphasis on unhurried exploration proved instrumental in promoting active engagement, communication, and social interaction within the sessions.

Feedback from Hazlemere Library Team

The ML was brilliant, she engaged the children with fun songs and guitar playing. The ML was always professional and organised with setting up and planning her sessions. We had a large amount of interest in the sessions, with customers enquiring about more sessions. The attendance was much higher than other events we hold, with not just regular customers attending but drawing in new customers too.

