

Chapter 2

Pedagogy

Putting it simply, in current early childhood music education practice there are two main ways in which music is planned and provided for. One is the adult-led, performance model which focuses on the singing of songs as a whole group. The children typically gather for a music time when they join in songs that the adult chooses and leads. This may extend to instruments for the children to play, some movements or body percussion activities, but generally the adult will introduce these and probably guide the children quite precisely in how they should join in. When working with larger groups, the need to manage children in an orderly way inevitably comes to dominate the approaches. The other is the free-choice, play-centred model of children being given opportunities to discover and explore, usually in free play with instruments. Typically, the adult leaves the children to play independently and there is rarely any input designed to develop these explorations. The overall result is that there are two contrasting versions of practice, two ends of what might be imagined as a kind of continuum – the one adult-led and the other child-led – but with no pedagogical approaches that span between the two.

Both approaches are underpinned by theories of how children learn: either that they learn by direct transmission or by discovering for themselves. There has in recent years, however, been a strong shift away from both these versions of learning to understanding learning as a two-way process between those who have more experience and those who have less. Probably, adults are the more experienced, but not necessarily – it might also involve children working with children. From this view education is thought of as a form of dialogue between partners whose contributions are equally important to the process. This shift in thinking

has come largely from the theories of Lev Vygotsky (1987). Vygotsky emphasised the central importance of learning as a social communicative process between those with different kinds of experience and knowledge – of give and take on both sides. Much of his theoretical work focused on the use of talk to develop children's understanding. Although talk is certainly important, for music education his theory of learning as dialogue can be drawn into the medium of music itself: making music together and sharing musical processes as a means to learning.

The chance to interact with adults as more experienced partners is not simply about directly passing on knowledge and skills, although this might well get woven into the process. Through shared activity the adult helps children to build ideas and understanding, to 'construct' from what they both contribute. The notion of learning that underlies this pedagogical approach is that it is neither passively absorbed from those who tell us, nor does it well up from inside us as a release of creativity, nor is it 'discovered' by playing with material things. Learning is understood to be an active process of constructing understanding from what all those participating bring and give. It is actively assembled from the sources available. Children constantly gather up from every opportunity and try to make sense out of all the disparate 'bits and pieces'. The adult can assist this process by endeavouring to arrange the bits and pieces so that they have more chance of joining up, so that there is some coherence and continuity between them. Therefore, through the adult's efforts the children have more chance to develop their skills and understanding. But also, and this is a kind of paradox that adds to the challenge of working to develop children's creativity, the adult should not smooth things out too much, or emphasise logic and sequence at the expense of the unexpected and divergent. Creativity arises in the unexpected, in taking a turning that is not the most obvious, in finding new combinations and possibilities. If the adult over-structures the children's learning, they have no freedom to develop their own imaginative ideas. This process of structuring is often termed 'scaffolding'. But scaffolding to me implies a quite rigid framework that builds upwards towards a goal. There might be some aspects of music where a goal is in mind – learning a song, for example. But alternative ideas such as 'co-construction' or 'shared musical thinking' allow for the possibility of the musical activity going in directions that have not been decided in advance – for creative music-making, in other words.

A key element of Vygotsky's theory is what he referred to as the 'zone of proximal development'. This is the distance between what the child

can do on their own and what they can achieve with guidance or collaboration with their more experienced partners. The aim, then, becomes to assist children within this zone and to provide the support children require to do things successfully that would otherwise be just a step or two beyond them. The difficult task for educators is to decide what kind of input, when and how much. Pitch it too low, and the effort is wasted; pitch it too high, and the children are bypassed. So working out where children are now, and where they might move to next, become central pedagogical skills. It is a highly skilful way of working with children. In adult-centred approaches, when teaching music to young children is thought to be about breaking music itself down into very simple bite-sized portions to feed to children step-by-step, the task seems relatively straightforward – hence the innumerable activity ideas and curriculum books. In child-centred approaches, when learning about music is thought to be something children discover for themselves by exploring and adults should not disturb, the task is, again, straightforward.

So here is one of the central ideas I hope to convey in this book – the existing models of practice that lie at two ends of a continuum might each develop through interactive processes between adults and children (or children and children). This doesn't mean it need always be an equal balance. There will be moments when the adult may take a strong directive lead or when the child takes full lead and the adult withdraws, watches and listens. But the decision to take or relinquish control will have been made knowingly and knowledgeably, not out of habit or by chance. What I hope we arrive at as the chapters unfold is a wide repertoire of possible ways to work with children in music.

Before we move on, it is valuable to notice that these ideas of learning through communicative music, of the dialogue being a musical one, also line up with recent theoretical perspectives on music itself. From studies of music in diverse cultures, from popular, folk and jazz music studies, music has increasingly been understood as made in social processes of people playing together, or listening and dancing together. Conventional music theory casts music as a solitary, academic pursuit concerned with the inner workings of the musical sounds themselves – analysis of pitch and rhythms, analysis of structure and so on. So we can see, too, how 'music as theory' has infiltrated early childhood music education practice in the emphasis placed on children learning about the elements – the basic building blocks of music. Not that there isn't a place for these aspects –

but we need to be clear on how and why they contribute to children's musical learning.

From another direction, the relatively recent area of research into infant and caregiver interaction has demonstrated that the non-verbal processes of communication between the pair are characterised by musical qualities of melodic, phrased vocalisations and rhythmic gestures: non-verbal communication born along by processes that are essentially musical in nature. From all these directions it is a small step to see that, if music is something as made between people, if music is deeply rooted in young children's communicative abilities from babyhood, then it makes sense to conceive of educative processes that are essentially about the social processes of music-making. And when music is made between people, when it is shared, it is animated, it becomes expressive. Children don't express 'ideas' that arise from solitary minds; they join in musical experiences with others so that the very act of sharing music fosters their musical imagination and creativity.

PEDAGOGICAL SKILLS

If the actions of adults in interaction with children are now understood to be so crucial to children's learning, then it is important to develop a high level of awareness of these pedagogical techniques and how they might be applied. So in the sections that follow I now discuss these in some detail.

Eliciting and prompting

'Eliciting' is about planning the times, spaces, groupings, things and people to provide situations in which children are motivated to make music and to make music in ways that are designed to suit their capabilities and interests. I like the term 'eliciting' because it suggests planning situations that invite or draw in the children to participate. Setting out the same group of well-worn instruments may not be very motivating. Sitting on the carpet and starting to sing a gathering song may elicit considerable interest and quickly draw in a whole class of children, motivated and ready to sing. Thus, some eliciting environments will be designed for children to make music with a high level of independence; some will be designed with a high proportion of adult guidance and input.

Planning clearly includes anticipating how the children will participate. Some prompting may be required as the activity starts up, to give impetus or to direct or redirect it. This might be as simple as offering beaters on an instrument or providing more structured prompts or stimuli such as starting to play drum rhythms or putting on a CD. Think back to the imaginary day at the beginning of the book and to how Niki, the early years professional, had planned a range of situations to motivate the children's participation.

Listening and watching

The shift to understanding learning as processes of two-way interaction between adults and children places extra demands on practitioners being very aware of what the children are doing individually. This information tells us what input to make. Then pedagogical interactions are not left to mere chance or habit. Listening, watching, interpreting and deciding become central activities. There is already a strong emphasis on listening and watching in general early years practice that is not marginal to the pedagogical process but central to it. In adult-led music work it is probably true to say that there is much less of a tradition of listening and observing intently – at least nothing more than a casual unstructured noticing. It is important to see observation not as a luxury extra, nor as a follow-on to be written up afterwards, but as far as possible an integral and ongoing part of the process. For music this creates particular challenges. If the adult is making music with children, actively singing, playing, dancing, then it's not so easy to have post-it pad in hand or to balance a camera on one knee – but more of the practicalities later.

It is not only the practical complications that make listening into children's music-making a challenge. It is, as well, because there has been so little tradition of listening to children's music, of holding high expectations of its worth and knowing how to make sense of it. Recall in Chapter 1 how I talked about the notions of music as a specialist subject, the idea of musical talent worming its way into every aspect of how music is provided for. Here is just one example of how this operates to deny value to children's own self-generated musical activity. In the chapters that follow, I will give descriptions of children's likely patterns of interest that have been arrived at from some research studies, because these can provide helpful frameworks for interpreting and making sense of what children do musically.

And there is another subtle but very important point to add. When we are listened to intently, respectfully, empathetically, it is empowering. Just the very act of being listened to feeds back into what we are doing, how we feel about what we are doing, so that it grows and develops. Listening is, just of itself, a valuable pedagogical strategy.

Interacting and structuring

So the challenge of working with children in music is in making judgements, often snap judgements, about when and how to join in – how to connect up what you sing, play, dance, say, draw, gesture, with what the children are singing, playing, dancing . . . often termed ‘intervention’. But to intervene implies something abrupt to me, as if interrupting the flow or rhythm of an activity rather than smoothly joining in, picking up the pace and dynamic set by the children. Pause and reflect for a moment here. Mostly we expect children to join in with our music, a song we have started up, or live or recorded music, rather than we, as adults, trying to join in with them, with their music. This turnabout may be difficult to imagine, so let us hear about the work of two experienced practitioners.

Joanne Rutkowski and Yun-Fei Hsee are early childhood music educators working in the US and Taiwan. Together they are researching and developing ways of working with children in group activity based on principles drawn from Vygotsky’s work and notions of scaffolding (Hsee and Rutkowski, 2006). Their aim is to work with groups of children in ways that offer much more flexibility for the children to contribute their own ideas than adult-led, large-group activities conventionally do. They demonstrated their approach in practice. Joanne clapped rhythm patterns for the children to echo – a well-known activity. However, after a few turns, she paused, waited without a word, quite still. After only a brief moment, some of the children contributed their own rhythmic patterns without bidding. She copied one pattern and the other children echoed as before. This continued with various children offering pattern ideas. If an idea offered didn’t ‘fit’ quite so well with the tempo they were all holding or with the length of the four-beat gap, Joanne could straighten it out rhythmically as she imitated it. In this way rhythm patterns were invented, shared between her, individual children and the whole group. Joanne could be sure she was taking up patterns that matched the children’s current skill levels but at the same time ‘feed in’ her expertise to lead the children on. Moreover, because the children could, for the

most part, join in successfully, even though her contribution was sometimes needed to tweak the rhythm, she could be sure the activity was well pitched. Too often these kinds of musical games are merely consolidating what children can do already rather than moving them on.

The lesson continued with some recorded music to which the children moved freely. Both Joanne and Yun-Fei participated in the dancing, imitating the movements of certain children when they came within their orbit and, if it seemed welcome, joining in to make a partnered dance with them. Then a song was sung and developed into improvised phrases, again with plenty of opportunity for the children to contribute their own ideas.

Joanne and Yun-Fei were taking an active participatory role in order to make the activities musically accessible, and also musically coherent and meaningful. For the song, or the rhythm activity, it meant breaking the activities down into smaller, manageable parts so that the children could 'get on board'. Or with the dancing it meant helping to build up the dances by responding, by imitating the children's dance movements, so that they started to grow into more coherent dance forms and connect with the music. Through these various ways of co-constructing the music with the children, the adults were making the activities more learnable and also ensuring that the activities had developmental potential.

To clarify these processes, the adult aims to:

- ▶ *Imitate* the child/children's actions (singing, vocalising, instrument playing, moving, drama) and also offer ideas for children to imitate.
- ▶ *Assist* the children in continuing musical ideas or allow the children to assist others.
- ▶ *Prompt* new actions on the part of the child that are meaningful within the shared activity or allow for and take up prompts from the children.
- ▶ *Introduce* new ideas that extend or enhance, without interrupting or taking over the direction of the activity, or take up ideas introduced by the children.

Assisting and instructing

The careful observation of children will also reveal moments when the adult recognises that one child or group of children would benefit from

some kind of direct input – assistance or instruction. Music requires specific skills: how to sing; how to handle instruments and produce sound; how to operate technology. While some skills may be picked up from the adult modelling, there is benefit in developing them by providing progressively structured activities. Again, however, these need to be well judged to be developmentally appropriate, so that they match the children's current levels of ability. While much early years music focuses on singing, for example, it is rarely conducted with children in such a way that supports their learning to sing, but for the most part consists of merely singing through familiar repertoire.

THINKING IN AND ON PRACTICE

All these processes of attentive listening and making judgements about just what contribution is the right one require the self-awareness and thoughtfulness that is often encapsulated in the term 'reflective practice'. There are different layers of reflection. Dorte Nyrop, a very experienced early childhood music professional working in Copenhagen, Denmark, has coined the term 'micro-pedagogy' (Nyrop, 2006). By micro-pedagogy she means the myriad small decisions and actions that have to be made on the spot when working with children. Nyrop's idea of micro-pedagogy, thinking on the hoof, is very similar to Donald Schön's notion of 'reflection in action'. Schön contrasted 'reflection in action' with 'reflection on action', by which he means thinking back over teaching once completed (Schön, 1987). By reflecting on practice it is possible to become more aware and conscious of micro-pedagogy – in-the-moment thinking and acting.

Working with children cannot be explained in terms of 'learning' or of 'teaching' as separate processes – or, to put it another way, cannot be focused on what the children do or the adult does without recognising that it is the active contributions of both in interaction that explains the quality of the children's experience. Even when a child is playing on a xylophone apparently quite independently, behind the scenes adults have provided the space, the time, the equipment, and have allowed for solitude. Traditions of observation in early years practice tend to focus on the specificity of the child's actions and behaviours – to be child-focused. Traditions of paperwork in early years music practice tend to focus on the plans and actions for teaching – to be adult-focused. Reflecting on practice within a pedagogy that understands learning/teaching to be a

form of dialogue means that the focus becomes adult and child in interaction.

To reflect on practice, information is needed. This may be simply a memory of what happened, written up in a log book for example. But memory can be unreliable. Evidence is more formal and reliable if it is collected in action as field notes, drawings, photos, video or audio recordings. The processes of reflecting on practice, as an integrated part of pedagogy, are given more attention in the short sections that follow.

Focus

It is useful to decide upon a question or problem that launches and guides the collection of information and this then determines a focus and narrows the process. As a general rule, it is better to go deeper than to endeavour to collect observations from all that happens.

Selection

There are some ways of selecting (often called 'sampling' in research terms) in order to increase the focus:

- ▶ *The numbers of children.* Select a number of children to track rather than the whole group. For example, in one study, out of a group of 20 we selected six to track over 12 sessions.
- ▶ *The types and range of activity.* Select certain types of activity to focus on. For example, I focused once on children's spontaneous singing during free play. In another study we focused on just three songs and how a group of children learnt and participated in these over a series of music sessions.
- ▶ *The time or space.* Decide on a time-sampling system. For example, every ten minutes we noted down who was playing at an instrumental set-up and what they were doing.

Collection

Video is a very good medium for working with children's activity in music because it captures the sound and action of music-making. With the increasing availability of cameras, particularly digital video cameras, it is becoming easier to work with video.

I find I use the digital camera more as an aide-memoir for factual information, such as place, space, children present, equipment and so on. Still photos do not capture the music itself, so need to be accompanied by copious notes about the music taking place.

Writing observational notes of music activity as it happens is hard work and requires concentration. (Here I have in mind the continuous writing of notes, rather than the occasional jottings.) I write only on the right-hand page of the notebook, on lined paper, leaving every other line free. Then, as soon as possible afterwards, I go back through the notes and fill in gaps. Later, when I review the notes, I have the left-hand page for further thoughts and interpretations.

Description

In writing observational notes from live action or from camera recordings it is important to write in detail about what the children are actually doing, but try to avoid starting to make interpretations or judgements. One of the key principles in research is to differentiate clearly between description and interpretation. So 'Ozman bangs the drum noisily' is both bland and beginning to interpret. Whereas 'Ozman holds the beater in his right hand, high above his head and brings it down strongly on to the drum with many, slow big swings (about eight?) making a loud sound' gives much more factual information from which a picture emerges. We can interpret from this information that the strikes are likely to be loud. But to describe it as noisy banging is already moving towards an interpretation that contains a hint of negativity. The discipline of trying to write factual information helps to focus attention on what is actually happening rather than slip into subjective impression of what we think is happening.

A similar process can happen with photographic and video data. Where the camera is positioned, how it zooms in or out, how it pans are all decisions that can carry implicit assumptions about what is more important to record. The aim is to produce as unbiased a record as possible. Most importantly, the video needs to pick up what both the adults and children are doing and not eliminate one or the other. This can be difficult in larger group work without jerking back and forth or standing so far back that no detail is picked up. One answer is to video children and write detailed notes of adult activity.

Interpretation

The first stage in interpretation is to go back through the information collected, be it notes, video data or whatever, and to look at it repeatedly, 'stay with it' and avoid moving too hastily into interpretation. As I start to think through field notes, I put ideas that are beginning to move towards interpretation on the left-hand page, along with notes of what I plan to do next. With video data, if you have a simple editing software, it is possible to start reducing it to shorter clips. This helps with managing the video data and pulls out those sections that are most informative. Usually it is not necessary to transcribe any of the visual data, but it is still important to review it several times. It is surprising how things not noticed at first start to emerge from the process of looking again and again.

Drawing on relevant theories or research findings can be helpful in both focusing the process of collecting information and making interpretations. For example, if the focus is on how reception-age children are learning to sing, then models of children's singing development or theories of how children best learn could be used to help with making interpretations.

Application

Collecting, describing and interpreting the children's activity all lead to one aim, which is to decide what to do next. Increasing our understanding of children's musical activity will only be a valuable exercise if that understanding is converted into future action and influences how situations for music learning are planned for. Curricular plans, activities and materials are useful to provide suggestions for what to do next, but these must be married with decisions about what the children would most benefit from in terms of their own progress and development. Reflection on practice becomes a constant cycle of review and forward planning in order to continually develop and improve.

Interpreting and acting on interpretations involves, as well, a conscious act of thinking deeply about the assumptions and 'taken-for-granted' ideas that all of us bring with us and that inevitably frame our interpretations. To analyse, interpret and then go on to criticise and resist what is comfortable and familiar is a process often termed 'deconstruction'. We bring into this process of criticality our conceptions of children, conceptions of music, and our values and philosophies. And this involves our feelings

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and sense of identity too. Unsettling these aspects of ourselves where our professional and personal identities are interlinked can be helped by collaborating with others, using them as sounding boards, scrutinising practice together and debating.

It is in this process too that relations of power in terms of gender, race, class, age and how they mediate our expectations and operate to disadvantage some children in relation to others should be examined. Our aim, as in all education, is to continually search for how best to work with children to promote greater equality of experience and outcomes.