Music Moves: the development of intercultural approaches to engage musically with 'hard to reach' families

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Abstract
This paper explores some theoretical perspectives and implications for practice through the experiences learned from project work with families traditionally considered to be 'hard to reach' in three urban settings in the UK. The discussion focuses on the ethical responsibilities, implications for work in partnership with parents and practical challenges for Early Years music educators. Four Music Leaders experienced in working with families and their pre-school age children aimed to work alongside Children's Centre practitioners whose remit is to visit and engage with families who are considered isolated for a range of health, social, cultural and linguistic reasons. Policy recommendations in the UK emphasise the importance of working in partnership with parents, though there is little guidance in how or what this means; even less is it articulated or researched in relation to music and its place in early learning.

Ethical dimensions emerge through developing work with families. These ask questions of practice that all too frequently prioritises the professional's knowledge over that of the parent. Examples of practical strategies for meeting and working with culturally diverse groups of families are offered for consideration. These have evolved through fostering intercultural awareness, by attuning to young children's musicality, and by listening to and performing with parents. Through music, culturally diverse families and settings staff develop common understandings of ways to support young children's learning.

Keywords: intercultural awareness, cultural diversity, music, ethics, parents

Background
This paper discusses the findings and implications for practice of 'Music Moves', an action research project using music with parents/carers and pre-school age children who are traditionally viewed by local services in urban areas in the UK as being 'hard to reach'. It follows in the footsteps of similar projects over the last ten years, such as Music One2One (Young, Street & Davies, 2006) Musical Babies (Street, 2009) and Time to Play (Young & Street, 2010) that were situated in Children's Centres or 'stay and play' settings; community based spaces where families could gather socially and where adults obtain information and support. These projects each had a research element in that they first consulted parents for their views of everyday music at home, their repertoire of songs and the place of music in their children's lives. It might be over-idealistic to claim that in each case we sought to make a difference through providing positive musical experiences and inviting parents' participation, as though all three projects were driven by concerns

of social justice. There was a certain pragmatism in bidding for funding that would be available if project aims met the ideals of Government departments to reach minority groups; for example, to address the needs of working class families (Music One2One), or to work with Muslim women (Time to Play). However, the resulting recommendations for practice in each case aimed to contribute to a greater understanding of how music education can involve parents as partners. Policy recommendations in the UK emphasise the importance of working with parents, though there is little guidance in how or what this means; even less is it articulated or researched in relation to music and its place in early learning.

In 'Music Moves', four experienced music leaders each worked with different communities traditionally seen by settings as 'hard to reach'. Nuzhat Abbas invited stories and songs remembered from childhood by South Asian mothers. Her language skills in Urdu and Punjabi and as a singer in the Sufi tradition allowed parents to explore their fears and hopes for their children in their home languages. The songs collected and sung together built an understanding of the helpfulness of music in bonding with their babies and in expressing their home cultures. The four music leaders liaised with local Early Years practitioners and other professionals known to families, kept a reflective log of their twenty weeks of practice and brought their ideas to four reflective seminar days held at regular intervals during the project. Visiting musicians were also invited to work alongside the music leaders with families for some sessions, and to attend the seminars as part of joint professional development.

Aims

This paper considers theoretical perspectives and implications for practice relating to the first of three key themes which emerged during the course of the project. It explores the skills associated with intercultural competence we found helpful in working in music with culturally diverse groups, and the challenges and opportunities this work afforded. The other themes are implicitly related, namely our interpretations of 'hard to reach' and what this term can mean for building relationships. The third is the value of integrated working with other professionals whose remit is to support parents with children under four. These were the outreach workers from the Children's Centres' staff on whom we depended for contact and engagement with families. Their perceptions of the value of using music as a means of engaging were important because of the short-term nature of the project. Sustainability in this kind of work depends not only on funding available to provide activities, but also on the prevailing attitudes in settings towards the relevance of music for and with families.

Intercultural awareness in practice

As global economic conditions fluctuate and people move in search of employment or safety from conflict, many cities in Western Europe are hosts to newly arrived immigrants. Migratory patterns over the last fifty years have led to successive generations of immigrants for whom the UK is now home, notably for and in established communities of South Asian and east European origin. The resultant cultural and linguistic diversity is viewed by media and existing services as alternately challenging or to be welcomed. Services that support their maternity, health and social and education needs increasingly have to respond with some intercultural awareness to difference and develop practice accordingly.

Lessons learned from previous research on music with Muslim families (Young, 2009) highlighted the importance of developing intercultural approaches to music provision. Intercultural - or cross-cultural – competence in relation to education is a term subject to scrutiny in whether it refers more aptly to a fixed ideology (or –ism) or rather to a set of circumstances which imply 'dynamic interactions' between cultures and individuals (see Baldock, 2011: chap 3 for an overview). Byram (2008) considers that in addition to knowing *about* other cultures, individuals have to be prepared to suspend disbelief eg with ideas one does not share, to attempt to interpret and understand, to discover new things through interacting and to be critically self-aware.

This implies practice to be sensitive to parents' attitudes to childcare and education as well as to everyday things like dress, respect for those in authority and customs that permeate daily routines with young children, such as how they are lulled to sleep, are changed and washed. Brooker (2008) explores the significance of such factors for young children's identities and sense of self as they enter school and early years settings, while Pascal and Bertram (2009) have persisted in their focus on ways of listening to the voices of the children themselves, to understand their experiences as refugees crossing borders.

Understanding issues of cultural diversity as they affect parents can develop through action that requires a growing awareness of how relations of power operate within accepted hierarchies, such as exist in day care settings. Vandebroeck et al, (2009) have argued that the daily interactions and negotiations between immigrant mothers and day care staff are opportunities for creative dialogue in very concrete, here-and-now practices, and that these can be expressed within a conceptual view of inclusive and relational citizenship that are:

> 'not to be understood as another set of competences that the individual should perform, but as a quality of relations, an ethic of encounters without predefined outcomes' (2009: 212)

Here is expressed the unpredictability of this kind of work and the importance of open-ended activities. For the music practitioner it implies being prepared to take risks, and simultaneously considering a number of options according to who attends and how parent/child interactions appear. These may be at odds with their own views of which interactions can be 'helpful' for supportive learning.

Understanding of 'difference' between self and other has ethical dimensions. Where music provision works within relationships in partnership with parents with their children, questions emerge about whose knowledge and expertise is in the foreground; what counts also within the debate about diversity itself? Vandenbroeck (2009b) points out how taking stock of parents' views on early childhood education is not the same as relating with them on their perspectives on issues of diversity. Noddings (2010: 7) analysis of the ethics of care suggests that being 'in relation' to someone comes before 'caring for' them and that it takes both parties to play their part. She asserts how care ethics are not so much about rights as about responding to needs, where emphasis is on attention, listening and understanding.

These roles are not fixed. They may change places as the balance of power alters from one moment to the next. When genuinely open, this balancing can make working with

parents and extended families feel both rewarding and terrifying, as practice learns through a quality of empathy what others may be going through or feeling about the process. In an educational context care is not conceived as warm and fuzzy, but includes the competence and critical thinking needed to carry out the caring responsibilities, as educators respond to a host of diverse needs and evaluate their capacity to respond.

Hence the challenge for the Music Moves project was in allowing enough time to establish what is important to parents, while simultaneously trying out a range of musical activities and expanding our musical repertoire to be meaningful and appealing. Across the three urban centres our interviews with thirty five carers started with asking them to describe their background. This resulted in thirteen different groups being identified including Iraqi, Yemeni, Afghan, Polish, Palestinian, Philipino and Ukrainian. Nuzhat Abbas worked with mainly South Asian mothers and their children whose rich variety of home languages included Urdu, Punjabi Shahmukhi, Pashto, Bengali, Punjabi Gurmurkhi and Hindi. Nuzhat can speak some of these languages and asked the mothers for songs and stories remembered from their childhood.

Sixty miles away in a different city Trish provided music in a 'stay and play' where families drop in to pass time, chat and can meet outreach workers and play workers from the local Children's Centre. Here two Somali mothers would often attend, together with a Polish woman with her two year old and two Chinese families. These illustrate the linguistic challenge; when no English can be heard in the room, where does one start? In a hyper-diverse context Trish reflects that in any one session there could be
'Somalian women, Chinese women and no one speaks any English – but we all communicate through the music … there are some people who come and sit, arms folded – and they sit on the outside, whereas the Chinese women all pile in and play and we communicate through drumming.'

Practice in this context has to be very porous and respond to visible cues such as gestures and smiles. Trish provided a range of quality musical instruments and responded through her own improvisations to the patterns children played, meeting their musicality. She also drew attention to the children's competence through recording and photography. This documentation was appreciated by the parents and helped to build understanding and weekly points of reference.

There are questions to ask about those who sit on the fringe, who might constitute the 'hard to reach' parents. Yet those who appear uncomfortable about joining in are not always those who speak a different language. They can hold very different priorities and perceptions of their role in relation to their child compared with the views of the professionals who offer support. Through persistent thwarted attempts to do home visits with families we found that these carers are hard to reach because of chaotic lifestyles [defined in research studies as disorganised homes where there is a lack of routine] and/or daily problems of poverty, ignorance or fear. The answers to these questions may depend on the relationships and understandings over time of the identities, needs and experiences of both music leader and parents, and of seeing the learning potential for both emerging through this awareness.

Building on what families already know and do

Previous projects (eg Time to Play) have indicated the importance of allowing time to build relationships of trust and understanding what families already do and know. Shehan-Campbell (2011) emphasises the key influences on children's musical development and behaviours from the daily sonic surroundings in family life. She draws on ideas from the anthropologist Appadurai (1996) whose notion of '–scapes' comprise ethnoscapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, mediascapes and ideascapes. These categories help us to consider the social and cultural processes that all play their part in encircling the day to day lives of parents with children and which contribute to their musical childhoods (Young, 2009).

Although the South Asian children attending the groups were under school age (four years), from the interviews it was clear that the mothers appreciated their children already heard a rich variety of music at home including Punjabi and Indian songs, music on TV, radio and Playstation, music played by digitised toys, CDs, the computer, books with built in sounds, DVDs, and Youtube via ipads. The repertoire of songs was also extended by other family members, both nearby and through daily on-line trans-continental communication. Grandparents sing songs and Urdu Gazals as well as loris (lullabies) and these both excite and soothe their babies. There were also a few English nursery rhymes labelled as favourites, such as 'Twinkle Twinkle little star' and 'Baa Baa black sheep' which had been learned through the Children's Centre. These are all embedded within the social and cultural, local and international networks in which family life proceeds and through which children build up knowledge of what is meaningful to them. This illustrates Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) for children's development, which describes the environments around the child being 'nested' like a set of Russian dolls, where the closest contains the family and the outer layer the dominant beliefs and culture. What is interesting here is that through on-line communication, such as Skype, the intimate interactions of a lullaby can be communicated and jointly experienced across time zones, carrying strong emotions in very immediate cultural contexts.

Working with South Asian families: a case study

We aimed to produce an audio resource (CD) for South Asian families that can both celebrate the rich linguistic diversity and support ways parents can relate, care and play with their children through sharing songs. The following case study is an example of how Nuzhat Abbas, a PEEP worker, engaged with women in song through exploring meaningful questions about their own identities. The manager in the Children's Centre had observed how South Asian mothers would sit and watch rather than participate in activities. For a range of reasons the setting found them hard to reach.

Nuzhat writes:

> When I started working with a family, the mother was feeling very low due to her isolation and language barrier. She couldn't cope with her day to day life and needed support with her two young children. Mostly she missed her mother and family back home in India. Her longing became sadness as she never had a chance to visit her family since she was married here in the UK. During my sessions I was mostly listening to her and her stories of longing. One day she was very upset and I suddenly started singing a folk song which was describing her situation. That song became an

emotional healing process for her. From that significant starting point it seemed a natural progression to start a group for such women to try to nurture them through their folk music and songs. The women sang their traditional folk songs they loved in the following sessions while their children were in the crèche. In that way the women had an opportunity to explore who they are, as mothers and as women.

We created a tree with leaves; each leaf symbolised their thinking about who they are. They wrote on the leaves what came into their minds …They were mothers, daughters, daughters-in-law, wives – and women, but none of them managed to think about their own selves and names. My task was to draw their attention to a central leaf that asks 'Who am I?' and to support them to recognise themselves as individuals with all their own abilities. It was a slow journey towards empowerment; but we had lots of interesting debates, talk, music, through learning new songs, discussions on gender roles, tears, laughter – everything.

After some sessions we had an opportunity to talk about the impact of music on children's early life through loris (lullabies). I asked them what they think about how music and lullabies can help children's learning and developing their senses and feelings. They described it easily, saying "It would surely impact on children as the way folk songs impacted on us." We explored together how listening, talking, learning new words through singing lullabies can develop better communication and bonding between mother and child. These sessions helped us to gather a few traditional songs and lullabies from the mothers' childhood memories which were mostly forgotten. As a small step forward I have recorded the CD for them to remember their own voices and share this journey with their young children. It's so rewarding to see the mothers singing with their young children in their own languages at home.

Conclusion

This case study draws attention to the value of settings employing the services of practitioners who can speak the native languages of immigrant families, and who are sophisticated in understanding the cultural challenges that women face in their daily lives as women, mothers and potential supporters of their children's learning. This paper has shown how - through inviting parents' own stories, their memories of songs and their purpose in daily lives with their children - we aimed to develop our own understandings of intercultural competence. Our understanding was strengthened through our sharing and reflecting together on ways of working; finding that activities required an open-ended approach, respected what parents already know and do and which drew attention to their children's musicality and to parents' potential to support. Reflections on how music can both facilitate approaches and bridge differences serve to ask ongoing questions about the underlying ethical dimensions that permeate relationships where settings seek to work in meaningful caring partnerships with diverse families.

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