The Role of Music in Increasing Well-Being and Providing Strategies for Learning in Preschool

Dr Liz Scott Hall
University of Winchester Centre for the Arts as Well-being
City-wide challenges

- Negative parental educational experience
- Lack of parental knowledge about children’s emotional and intellectual needs
- Financial hardship, depression, substance abuse
- Poor speech and language skills
- First language not English
Theoretical framework

The transformative paradigm:
“directly addresses the politics in research by confronting social oppression at whatever level it occurs”

Analysis: Grounded Theory approach allowed overarching themes, and then, sub-themes to emerge from the data.
(Glazer and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006)
The data
My own and staff observational notes
Post-session evaluation questionnaires and short unstructured interviews with parents
Semistructured interviews with staff
Reports from the preschool managers
City-wide improvement targets

1. Giving access to good quality play and learning
2. Promoting an increase in the proportion of babies and young children with normal levels of personal and social development for their age
3. Promoting an increase in the proportion of babies and young children with a normal level of communication and language development for their age
Use it or lose it!

Early experiences (positive and negative) influence the brain’s formation of connections between neurons.

Language acquisition in under-fives is vital, as neural pathways are ‘hard-wired’ through repeated use, or lost through ‘pruning’.
Music and the bodymind

Singing causes pleasure-producing chemicals to travel through the endocrine system to produce body-wide physiochemical states.

In pregnancy, these chemicals cross the placental barrier, and babies are born with a predisposition to equate music with pleasure.
Singing and cognitive skills acquisition

♫ Listening
♫ Phonological awareness
♫ Maintaining concentration
♫ Anticipating what’s coming next
♫ Sequencing, pattern recognition
♫ Taking turns
Non-verbal communication and eye contact
Vocabulary development
Sentence development
Aural memory
Spatial-temporal reasoning
The preschool project

Three preschools invited parents to come for music with their children at the start or end of a session, on a weekly basis.

Younger siblings were welcomed

All children whose parents couldn't attend had their own, separate music session.
The music sessions

♫ Familiar songs to raise confidence
♫ Lively action and on-the-lap songs
♫ Body and instrumental percussion
♫ Movement
♫ Listening
Social Time (and data collection)
Parents at home

♩ I often sings many of the songs at home, and sometimes, when I sings instructions to him, like at music, he’s much better at doing things - without having a ‘paddy’.

♩ Best song - all the little ducks. We play at home -upside down. She says, ‘again, again’. I do with her (baby) brother too. Is the best!

♩ Tia doesn’t struggle now when I want her to get dressed. I sing to her - and she laughs instead of screaming.
I sing him the ‘food’ song sometimes, when I’m dishing up his dinner. He can say ‘spaghetti’ and ‘fish’ now – instead of ‘gaspetti’ and ‘fiss’.

Spence puts all his teddies in a circle and sings the “hello’ song to them. He has developmental delay, and I feel I can help him more through the songs. I think he’s more confident now – and his speech has really improved since we started the music.
Engaging and enabling parents

'It’s good being able to do things with Taylor - and get to talk to the staff - I feel part of things much more, and more involved in Taylor’s education.

Mebrak, she bring me. I not understand letter from school. I like sing English. Sing help understand words. Sing in home with Devora.

I haven’t played an instrument for years, but I got out my old violin and started playing it again. Joe’s really interested and wants to learn.
Parental enjoyment and confidence

♩ I’ve enjoyed coming and meeting other mothers. Me and Clara sing together at home - and music has helped me play with Clara and we get on much better - and her behaviour is so much better.

♩ I come because Carly enjoys it so much. I’ve got to know some of the mums now and I walk home with Dita nowadays.

♩ I always thought asylum seekers were spongers. But I’ve made friends with Ooma since I’ve been coming. We met up at half term with Sally and Catherine and had our own little music session with the kids.
Staff comments

Mrs. S told me she’d like to come in and help. We never used to see her - she was very shy of us and used to leave Kylie at the door and rush off. She’s really enjoyed seeing Kylie in school during the project!

Scott’s mum feels more confident to come in and talk to us now. I think doing music together has shown her we’re ‘normal’ people.

Several parents have noticed the strategies of behaviour management used in the sessions. Of course, they wouldn’t normally get to see that! They tell me they’ve started using them at home.
Staff observations

Stephen’s behaviour has noticeably improved—he listens better and pays attention for longer.

Jack clearly benefits from the music sessions, because now he gets so caught up in the song activities he forgets to be shy!

Jodie carries on singing the songs during the morning – and the words are really clear. Her speech is becoming much clearer too.
Managers’ comments

We’ve begun to start the day with songs and games from the project, which everyone is much more confident to plan and deliver.

Mr F. realised he could link many of the activities he experienced in the music sessions with the suggestions being made for children to experience sounds.

Staff records show that Annie settles down much more quickly now we start the day with music.
“Every area of learning can be taught through music—so while the obvious outcome may be the development of the children’s musical skills and/or knowledge, they could also be counting, creating patterns, learning and using new or familiar vocabulary, developing fine and gross motor skills and/or working together”.

(Pre-school manager’s report)
The most significant factor that came out for all the staff was to **MAKE MUSIC MORE FUN!**

And through participation and training, they have become confident enough to do just that!
Outcomes

- Increased knowledge of songs, and ideas about how to use them
- Increased mutually rewarding fun-based musical interactions
- Increased confidence
- Closer engagement and communication
And finally, for non-first language English speakers

- A heightened sense of well-being
- Relating to and communicating more readily with staff and other participants, leading to
- Inclusion in the wider community
References


