Magic Acorns Network at Snape Maltings

Empowering Musicality in Early Years Practice

13 March 2020

A day of networking, workshops and curated discussion
for artists, organisations and educators working with 0-5 year olds.

Summary

On 13 March 2020 Snape Maltings were pleased to welcome the Magic Acorns Network for a day's networking, presentations, workshops and curated discussion around empowering early years practitioners to embed music within their practice. 25 practitioners attended from across a variety of sectors; some local and some from further afield. Motivation for attending included:

- To connect and network with others in the field to share ideas and knowledge
- Curiosity about latest practice and research work (particularly via Charlotte and Sophie)
- Opportunities for growth and learning in early years musicality:
    - to gain confidence in incorporating musicality into early years practice
    - to refresh, enthuse and inspire musical practice in early years settings
- Space to just 'be' – time out for rejuvenation, reconnection and refuelling

Charlotte Arculus presented ***More Than Words***; detailing her latest PhD research and highlighting innovative data collection methods, case studies and the notion of complicité as a vital element of this work. Details of Charlotte's presentation can be found on her blog. Artist Sophie Fox led a workshop on **musical mark-making**, beginning with visual exploration and translating this concept to sound and play worlds.

Dr Amy Mallett facilitated an Open Space discussion around **Empowering Musicality in Early Years Practice**. The group proposed, explored and debated 20 topics, with a plenary session drawing together common themes and identifying potential needs and actions.

Key words: Space; Trust; Role Models; Play; Conversations; Change

Key themes:

- **[Safe] spaces** – expectations, preparations, trust, who is in the space, inclusivity, equality of collaboration, incentive
- **Partnerships** – wide range of stakeholders, importance of high-level support, sharing of resources, embedding importance of musicality within culture
- **Practice** – importance of adaptability, transitions/invitations, establishing common ground, listening, cross-pollenisation, modelling, child-centred, no 'one-size fits all'
- **Roles** – of the artist, adults, children, role models, specialists v generalists, male/female disproportionality, valuing/devaluing of the artist and their work
- **Training** – how to expand the experience, invest in ourselves, context of CPD, reflective practice

Needs and actions:

- Buy-in from all stakeholders (particularly senior management in organisations) is vital for this work to be valued and the workforce adequately developed and supported
- There is a common need for further opportunities for practitioners to network, share and develop practice, particularly across sectors
- The Certificate in Music Education (Early Years) offers an accessible, flexible, subject-specific CPD offer
- Recommended fee rates for artists should be established, published and adhered to by all parties
- Residential opportunities for artists to develop work for EY audiences would allow more families to access high quality music/artistic experiences
- Artists, settings and organisations working in this field are advised to explore artistic opportunities with their Local Cultural Educations Partnership (LCEP)

About Magic Acorns

Magic Acorns is an early years (EY) arts development organisation which aims to build a community of practice around EY arts in the East of England by developing cross-sector connectivity, igniting productive partnerships and inspiring new ways of working. They work with artists, EY practitioners, arts organisations and importantly our youngest children and their families to develop new work, experiences and practices. Magic Acorns Network events are made possible by working with partner organisations and the ongoing support of the Norfolk and Norwich Festival Bridge.

About Snape Maltings

Snape Maltings is a place of energy and inspiration – one of the world's leading centres of music and a visitor destination of outstanding natural beauty. In all our work we are guided by founder Benjamin Britten's pioneering vision for a place of international importance, rooted in its local community. In addition to our performance programme, Snape supports a wide range of musicians through a year-round programme of professional development. Over the next 10 years we are expanding this focus to become a national and international hub bringing together all those involves in music's place in the world: musicians, researchers, clinicians, communities and audiences. We bring:

- A high-level focus on music in society, growing out of an internationally regarded heritage
- A creative laboratory –space, time and support to investigate important questions, take risks and develop new work and approaches
- An inspiring place for innovative, practice-based training connecting musicians and other professionals, and nurturing their holistic wellbeing
- A world-renowned platform for public events of all kinds showcasing and celebrating the impact and power of music in society

Magic Acorns

SNAPE MALTINGS

FESTIVAL BRIDGE

Open Space Minutes

How do we work with limited resources?

- Sharing through contact with other settings/rest of school, parents
- Local Arts Council Partnership (CEPs) – resources, project funding
- Local music service – in particular primary music consultancy teams
- Kodaly approach (first thing music) – become trained?
- GCSE musicians come in to play (local secondary schools)
- Grant funding from Co-op, Tescos etc
- Facebook groups
- Arts Award and Artsmark

How do we tackle artist poverty?

- Don't work for free/undercut/devalue
- Issue of different rates (as recommended by various artist unions/per art form)
- Issue of isolation
- Who is paid to be in the room?
- On costs/rates
- Projects configure artists last
- Need residentials for cross pollination – call on funders for this

Is it important that practitioners know what progress in music(ality) looks like?

- 'Progress' tends to be seen as linear
- 'Development' or 'expansion' better terms
- How does musicality spread outside of music-time?
- Need:
    - a musical ethos
    - to accentuate the positive in musical play (e.g. when children enjoy traditional songs)
    - to acknowledge the time and space of the child (the NOW)
- Practitioners need:
    - Knowledge of how to expand musical experiences
    - Confidence
    - Knowing where spaces should be
    - Recognition that not any one size fits all

It's complicated: How can we facilitate open conversations across different musical lenses?

- Expanding world view
- Comfort zone not panic zone
- Everyone is valued
- Need a revolution from the inside
- Keep going back to CHILD perspective

- Holding space
- Inhabit
- Keep going
- Time and patience

How can music help early years children express their emotions?

- Play (doesn't have to be happy)
- Symbols (no judgment, no "sh!")
- Soundtracks – exploring
- Ask for info on the children before working with them
- Provide a range of instruments and allow non-standard ways of playing
- Creating a means of quick assessment of feelings
- Maybe use drawings too
- Providing a safe space (maybe outside? get children to set their own safe rules)
- Are one-offs more tricky?
- Endings are important (sometimes hard to leave)
- Role play
- Agreeing

Can we leave the staff outside? – No but we understand why we might want to…

- Can we afford to leave them outside?
- We need to work with them
- Music is a treat
- Repertoire builds confidence
- Adult staff = early years provision
- Twilight training for staff

If we had no inhibitions/barriers how musical can we be? or can play be?

- The world is your oyster
- We are very good actors
- Ourselves – inner child
- Knowledge
- Role modelling
- All follow the same ethos

How do we access more/ongoing training?

- How much are we as practitioners prepared to invest in ourselves?
- Incorporate CPD for practitioners in projects from start
- Subsidise costs/cover travel
- Skill shares – split costs of training between group
- Opening up current practices to others
- Libraries as source/space of potential training
- One must be creative and bold about finding training
- Embrace how vital CPD is for everyone

How does a traditional circle time empower children and their musicality?

- An 'oven-ready' approach – great for schools
- Invitation to sit down
- Can work if well facilitated

- Does it need more educational content? Is there room for educational/non-educational?
- Implicit in invitation is that you can decline
- Honesty, trust in the experience – make both visible
- Importance of routines against a chaotic background
- Respect of knowledge
- Create a safe space

How can I counteract negative viewpoints of the value of music (i.e. that it isn't important/necessary)?

- Include senior leadership project workers
- Reason to come (cake/refreshments)
- Long term process – gaining trust
- Play – use books and stories
- Inclusive

Why are there no men in the room?

- Do men feel they can open up/express themselves?
- Greg Bottrill
- Do we make it too 'female'?
- Bristol early years men

What form should CPD take to make it effective, transformative and sustainable?

- Out of context CPD is the worst form of CPD
- Best model is to work in setting over a period of time and step check
- Accessing training is challenging –
    - not provided in directories
    - twilight timing tricky
    - cost
    - not given priority/value
    - socio-economic issues
    - transport/physical access/rural locations
- Minimum time ½ day – need continuity
- Needs to include observation
- Value of video of spontaneous play
- Adult led (offer tools)
- Provocations
- End of each session should include reflection (EYP MEYP SET)
- Helps if leader is a member of the EY community – can model from within, not judge, a gentle influence providing valued support
- One size does not fit all, needs to be top down and bottom up

How do we empower children and/or EY practitioners?

- Empower children to play, EY practitioners to observe – raise profile of this
- Route to musical delivery – behavioural
- Confidence – EY practitioners feel they need validation (e.g. certification/training)
- Specialist v generalist – expert disempowers
- Need to move away from the notion of expert
- What is the role of the adult? ITMP decisions
- Modelling/scaffolding
- Need to learn more than one way to music

How do we transfer musical empowerment to children's' families?

- Think in an opposite way – rather than what do we send home, what comes to us from home?
- What about young children who might not have language but express vocally in a very musical way?
- Get families involved early – when babes in arms (children's centres)
- It takes time to build trust and confidence with families – a number of weeks
- Some families you seldom see – how to reach these?
- Parents really value words. Facilitate with parents that words will come!
- Key to all this is collaboration – getting parents to join in, to be part of any activity and to stay and play

Facilitating change

- Just do it, and see how it goes
- Empower the carer
- Be kind to yourself
- Start small
- Have patience
- Believe in yourself
- Time
- Trust, understanding
- Remember we're not alone

Where/how do you start to enable an experimental and playful setting in a 'place' full of rules and expectations/judgement

- Experimenting, playing, etc. instead of talking (remove the words)
- Navigating what the rules of the project are – keep communication open
- Acknowledge things are often awkward when they start
- Start a conversation with staff about the process/observations, listen to the needs of the setting
- Go in and hang out first, see how things work
- Make 'complicite' with the nursery practitioner

Links/Resources

Sound Communities https://soundcommunities.org.uk/about-the-programme/
Sound waves network https://takeart.org/soundwaves-network
SALTmusic report https://network.youthmusic.org.uk/saltmusic-research-report
Artist Educator Network https://www.facebook.com/groups/461235851187812/
Musical development matters https://www.early-education.org.uk/sites/default/files/Musical%20Development%20Matters%20ONLINE.pdf
Local Cultural Educations Partnerships LCEPs
https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/children-and-young-people/working-partnership
http://lowestoftrising.co.uk/cultural-education-partnership
https://enjoy-greatyarmouth.com/
Meryc England http://meryc.co.uk/ and EU https://meryc.eu/
CME EY http://www.crec.co.uk/level-4-cert-music-ed-early-childhood
CREC MA http://www.crec.co.uk/early-years-music-module
Snape Maltings residencies https://snapemaltings.co.uk/music/residencies/