

MAKING MUSIC TOGETHER

What are the most important things for Early Years professionals to remember when they are running music sessions? In this special feature, expert annA rydeR explains how you can do it – even if you think you can't!

Many childcare professionals question whether they can ever be as effective as a trained musician in running music sessions and the answer is YES! You can and you will be. Effectiveness in music making is not measured by how 'musical' you are or whether you can play an instrument. It results from having the right approach.

● **Give it Time:** You can't run an effective music session in 20 minutes. If you think you are doing it in 20 minutes you're probably not, unless it's singing some known songs together. Try an hour.

● **Encourage Exploration:** Allow everyone to explore and try out what they want. Things will be noisy. You can always stop people and start again or take away a particularly noisy instrument! This is a new language and these are new objects for the children to find out how to use – you can't possibly expect them to make music on them straight away, without exploring and experimenting first.

● **Listen:** Listen to the children and what they are doing and then support THAT. Don't try to make them do what you want to do. If someone is doing something interesting, try to respond. For example a 3 year-old I was working with wanted to place all the drums around her and play them all one at a time. Others got interested. Everyone wanted to do it. People got annoyed. I asked them what was the matter and they said they wanted to do what she was doing. We realised there weren't enough beaters and the drums needed re-arranging. So they moved the drums into a line and we found wooden spoons to hit the drums with, and soon a sort of musical game developed where everyone got to play by going up and down the line of drums hitting each one as they went. The children and I ended up learning something unexpected through this approach because the child's idea was supported and therefore developed.

BUT I'VE GOT NO BUDGET...

Budget is much less important than having the right approach. Let's look

at what you really need . . .
 ● **Instruments:** You really don't

need fancy or expensive instruments – you just need some things to make sounds with and you can make your own shakers and simple drums from recycled materials (making your own instruments is great fun and an education in its own right – get in touch if you'd like some ideas and suggestions) or you can buy them for as little as a few pounds each if you shop around (but do try to buy real instruments, not plastic ones!). But if and when you have the budget, DO buy good quality, age-appropriate instruments and as many as possible!

● **Support:** You will almost certainly need advice and support and so it can be very helpful to have an experienced expert on call, to answer questions and give you a sounding board. Some instrument suppliers now provide this as a free service.



● **Training:** You certainly don't need loads of training, though you may find an introductory workshop helpful as a confidence booster and a way to get quickly immersed in the nitty gritty of music making. Nurseries with budgets may also find it worthwhile to invite a musician in to 'model' music making with the children – this can be really useful for both practitioners and the children

● **Session ideas and 'knowledge':** Even though you'll find that sessions take on a life of their own if you follow the 'exploration' approach, it's also useful to have a little store of musical ideas in reserve. You can find these online.

I know I put a big emphasis on professionals learning TOGETHER

TOP MUSICAL TIPS

- Stop talking and listen and stop giving directions!
- Have a go on all the instruments yourself. Get immersed and see how the children respond to your engagement.
- When asked a question by a child e.g. 'How do I play this?' reply with another question: 'How do you think you can play it?' or say something like: 'Show me how you think it can be played'.
- Remember! When you make music with young children no-one gets embarrassed!

with the children but it really is very effective. I think it's the same with all early years learning – most practitioners do the activity WITH the children don't they? With music it works particularly well precisely because many practitioners don't think of themselves as 'musical'.

This can be a real advantage as it puts children and practitioner on the same level. The practitioner will therefore genuinely be discovering things, which they would want to share with the children, and the children will be sharing discoveries with the practitioner. This kind of learning is instantaneous and gets deeply embedded both in children and practitioner because it is a first for both.

annA rydeR has worked in Early Years and other education and community settings for over 25 years, leading music-making and music exploration sessions with children and professionals, as well as with older people and those with learning and physical disabilities. annA is also a singer/songwriter, long time performer and a Musical Advisor to Sound Children and author of annA rydeR's Music Cards. For more information visit:

annaryder.co.uk
soundchildren.co.uk