

With intent

A new national project uses music to support wider development. The University of Roehampton's *Adam Ockelford* and *Angela Voyajolu* explain

Sounds of Intent in the Early Years (SoI-EY) is an exciting initiative for those working with young children (from birth to seven years) in developing musical skills or using music to support wider learning and development.

It is based on psychological research involving many children and practitioners, and builds on earlier work (called simply Sounds of Intent), which explains how children with learning difficulties evolve musically. SoI-EY differs in that it offers ideas and materials for all children in the early years.

The SoI-EY framework and resources are freely available on the internet and provide an understanding of how children's musical development usually occurs, and enable those working with children to understand where they are at with their musical development and to chart their progress.

The scheme, supported by a three-year grant from charity Youth Music, is being rolled out across children's centres in England, through seminars, workshops and hands-on sessions with children, their families and practitioners.

Some practitioners are already enjoying the benefits of the scheme. One reports: 'SoI-EY has been an eye-opener in relation to my practice with children in pre-school.

'I have realised that children are constantly making music, inside and outside, and sometimes it may go unnoticed.

'I've been able to recognise changes in children's confidence and well-being through music. They can make sounds and sing tunes without any expectations of being "right or wrong".

'As a mum, I was also fascinated to learn about exposure to sound and music in the womb. I can see that my own background in music, love of music and singing with my children has impacted on their musicality.'

SOUNDS OF INTENT FRAMEWORK

Musical development

At the heart of SoI-EY is a framework that sets out how children develop musically, through six levels, four of which usually occur within the early years. Level 1 can be observed in the context of children with profound learning difficulties, and Level 6 represents musical maturity, which usually occurs during adolescence. Levels 2, 3, 4 and 5 are as follows.

Level 2: Sounds interesting

Babies and young children react to an increasing variety of sounds, learn to make sounds themselves and enjoy interacting with others using sound. Three months before birth, babies can already hear internal and external sounds within the womb. From birth, babies explore the sounds they can make vocally – expressing their needs, cooing and babbling on their own and with others, and exploring objects using all their senses – including hearing – as well as responding to the myriad of sounds around.

Level 3: Copy me, copy you

Children enjoy copying others and being copied. They begin to listen to patterns in sound, anticipating what may happen next. Babies make distinct, repeated vocal patterns when babbling, and older children recreate patterns of sounds they hear in the environment, as well as making up their own patterns using everyday objects or instruments.

Level 4: Bits of pieces

Children learn that music is made up of distinctive groups of notes, which psychologists call 'chunks'. They may sing short themes from nursery rhymes or jingles, or they

The initiative uses a framework of developmental levels to assess and plan for children's musical engagement



combine them to make up their own songs. Children may sing while they appear to be concentrating on something else, like looking at pictures.

Level 5: Whole songs, in time and in tune

Children hear thousands of hours of music in their early years, and through this exposure they learn that the music of their culture tends to use the same underlying patterns of notes over and over again. As children become better able to control their voices and develop a feel for the regular 'beat' in music, they begin to sing and play in time and in tune on their own and with others.

Types of engagement

The SoI-EY framework sets out three ways in which children engage with music. These are:

- reactive (listening and responding to sound and music)

'I have realised that children are constantly making music, inside and outside'





- proactive (making sound and music on their own) and
- interactive (musical engagement that occurs with others).

Depicting musical development

The SoI-EY framework is illustrated as a set of circles (Level 1 innermost; Level 6 on the outside), divided into three segments, one for each domain (reactive, proactive and interactive).

A detailed version is available at www.eysoi.org. Here each level is broken down into four elements, which describe children's musical engagement in more detail.

Using the framework

When using the framework to assess and plan for children's musical engagement, bear in mind the 'when' and 'how' of musical development.

When the SoI-EY levels of development occur is dependent not on a child's age but on the opportunities he or she has to engage with music; sharing everyday musical experiences with others, singing, listening and playing. So milestones based on age are purposefully excluded from the framework, encouraging those working with children to focus purely on their musical engagement. Our research shows that children can engage with music at Level 5 as early as 18 months, or this may not occur until the child is six or seven years old. The main factor in this variability appears to be the richness of the musical experiences on offer. Remember, everyone can engage with children through music.

How the SoI-EY levels of development occur is also important. Children do not move seamlessly from

one level to the next: the levels of musical development build upon one another in a fuzzy way and may well occur simultaneously. Children will have a profile of musical development, showing engagement at different levels, within different domains.

Resources for recording children's musical achievements that can be downloaded from www.eysoi.org allow this type of layered engagement and development to be recorded.

Resources

Other SoI-EY resources, which can be accessed at www.eysoi.org, include:

- a booklet explaining musical development and the framework
- a poster with suggested activities
- record sheets for charting a child's musical development over time
- four resource books, which are in the process of being produced, with suggestions of activities for every level (these are deliberately incomplete, since the SoI-EY team would like parents and practitioners to contribute their own ideas, which will in due course be made freely available to others)
- a film explaining the framework and its use in practice
- an A0-size poster – purchased at www.soundabout.org.uk

Please check for new material on www.eysoi.org, which will continue to expand as the project continues.

IMPLEMENTATION

SoI-EY is underpinning a large three-year project, funded by Youth Music, and led by the charity Soundabout, in partnership with the University of Roehampton and the UCL Institute of Education. Three thousand resource packs have been distributed to every



MORE INFORMATION

- Chiltern Music Therapy, www.chilternmusictherapy.co.uk
- *Communicative Musicality: exploring the basis of human companionship* by S Malloch and C Trevarthan (2010), Oxford University Press
- Creative Futures, www.creativefuturesuk.com
- *Music for Children and Young People with Complex Needs* by A Ockelford (2008), Oxford University Press.
- SoI-EY, www.eysoi.org. For information on SoI-EY, contact Adam Ockelford, Professor of Music at the University of Roehampton, on a.ockelford@roehampton.ac.uk or Angela Voyajolu, research student on voyajola@roehampton.ac.uk
- Soundabout, www.soundabout.org.uk
- *The Developmental Psychology of Music* by D Hargreaves (1986), Cambridge University Press
- *The Child as Musician: a handbook of musical development* by G MacPherson (2006), Oxford University Press
- World Heart Beat academy, www.worldheartbeat.org

children's centre, music hub and local authority in England.

Over the next three years, practitioners from Soundabout will deliver training and support to children's centres, nursery and early years staff, parents, carers and music practitioners through 27 ten-week projects, three in each of the nine English regions. These will track musical development alongside progress in core aspects of the Early Years Foundation Stage, aiming to giving practitioners confidence to make music a core element of teaching and care.

Sound Beginnings

SoI-EY is being used by the World Heart Beat Music Academy in Wandsworth in a project entitled Sound Beginnings. This project uses oral music traditions such as Asian, Celtic, folk and jazz, creating an inclusive early years music curriculum to respond to the different stages of children's musical development.

School-readiness

Creative Futures is running a project called Music for Change in collaboration with the UCL Institute of Education and the University of Roehampton. The project aims to enhance the school-readiness of children by exploring the impact of a specially devised music programme. SoI-EY will be used to track musical aspects of the children's development.

Well-being

The University of Roehampton and Chiltern Music Therapy are exploring the musical potential of children born very prematurely and visually impaired as a result. The project will use SoI-EY to understand how music can support wider development and well-being in these children. ■

