

“MUSIC CAN BE A TOOL FOR LEARNING”

With its Kodály-inspired approach, Do Re Mi Day Nursery is aiming to nurture a musicality that will benefit every aspect of its children's learning in the early years and beyond, as *TN* discovered...



When Jane Todd decided to set up Do Re Mi - her classes and her day nursery - it was with a desire to make more of the opportunities music had to offer children in the early years. As she explained in *TN* last issue (the article is available to read online now at TeachNursery.com), there's more to early years music than singing nursery rhymes. But what is Do Re Mi offering children and their parents, and how does placing music at the heart of the EYFS affect children's learning?

The philosophy behind Do Re Mi is that of Zoltán Kodály, whose desire to make music education both more widespread and more accessible in his native Hungary led to a pedagogy based upon three stages of musical learning, dubbed 'preparation', 'presentation' and 'practice'. "There's the unconscious 'preparation', for example, lots of circle games, puppets, songs; then the 'presentation' when children are a bit older, where you make musical concepts - for instance, beat or pitch - conscious; followed by lots of practice," Jane says of these stages in action. "Importantly, Kodály's

approach is not 'Tick, we've done that - let's move on', but a constant cycle, a journey."

Early years might represent only the beginning of this journey, but in Kodály's view starting early is essential: "Music education begins nine months before the birth of the mother," Jane quotes, a sentiment reflected by Do Re Mi to the extent that Jane plans to offer classes for mums-to-be, as well as for children at every step of the Foundation Stage. The latter begin by encouraging bonding between mother and baby, before progressing on to group music-making sessions in which the focus is squarely on the use of the voice, in keeping with another key aspect of Kodály's methodology. "It's really important for babies to hear their mums' voices - both for bonding and when they're developing their pitch; if they're always singing along to backing CDs, children are not actually tuning their inner hearing," Jane explains the theory. "As they become older and go into Do Re Mi 'one 2 three' and above, we start to make conscious things that they've been doing and having fun with: 'Actually, that movement you're doing there is called the beat'."

The idea, Jane makes it clear, is to give children a solid foundation for later musical learning, but it is not aimed solely at those whose parents might wish them to learn an instrument. "There's no point in children learning an instrument if they can't feel the beat, and don't have an understanding of rhythm or pitch; if that's in place they'll pick up an instrument much quicker, and with more understanding of what they're doing," she says. "But some of our children may never learn an instrument; I still want them to be able to enjoy, understand and feel music. There's so much research into the cognitive and behavioural benefits that it can have, and a recognition that it can be a tool, a vehicle, for other types of learning."

A central role

Jane's belief in music's potential for supporting learning has resulted in the principles of the Kodály Method, and a focus on music in general, being embedded within her setting. Whilst she aims to personally deliver regular, 15-minute sessions to the children, giving them the same experience enjoyed by those attending her 45-minute classes, she is encouraging her team - who are EYFS but not Kodály trained - to use music-based activities and initiatives across the curriculum, and to make musical resources accessible at all times, for free play. "Being a musical nursery doesn't mean that we'll have the CD player playing all day!" she stresses. "Practitioners will use their voices and the instruments, and we aim to use music in a variety of ways - in terms of physical development, for example, we might look at the Jabadao approach or 'Dough Disco', and we've also looked at things like 'Squiggle whilst you Wiggle' for reluctant writers.

"Your provision is only as good as your team, and that's why it has been really important to get not only well-qualified practitioners but those who really understand the ethos of what we're trying to do.

"I'd like to think that the musical focus is what will draw parents to the nursery," Jane says when asked about her prospective customers. "We're not short of nurseries in Durham, and I've not set up Do Re Mi because I think those that are there are doing a bad job. The key is that every child is different, and it's the job of nursery owners to provide something different; we don't all want to be the same.

"And ultimately, I'm doing this because it's my passion, my love, and I want to share it."

For more information on Do Re Mi Day Nursery and classes, visit Doremidaynursery.com

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