



# all together now

Introducing  
music  
workshops to  
your setting is  
the perfect way  
to involve  
parents in their  
children's  
learning, says  
**Sue Newman...**

**I**t is widely acknowledged that parental involvement in a child's learning is more powerful an influence than family background, size of family, or level of parental education in creating positive outcomes for children. Working in partnership with parents is central to the EYFS, and as a consequence early years practitioners have a key role in supporting what has come to be known as the home learning environment (HLE).

Shared learning experiences can be an important part of this support, as they give families the skills and confidence to support their children's learning at home through play and everyday activities. Early years settings are ideal places for family learning because they provide a comfortable and familiar environment for both parents and children.

Past articles in *Teach Nursery* have considered the cross-curricular benefits that pre-school children can derive from access to a rich and varied music provision in their early years setting. However, this provision can become far more powerful an influence on outcomes if it is also practised at home. Music workshops represent a great way to engage parents in joint learning and give them the resources and ideas to continue the practice away from the nursery. We all know the power of music to motivate and uplift the mood, so such workshops are a great opportunity for bonding between parent and child, improving their relationships and communication. They can also help improve relationships between parents and their children's carers, and provide more continuity between the setting and home.

## Encouraging involvement

As has been mentioned, evidence suggests a strong link between parental involvement and outcomes for the child. This is particularly true for communication skills, and two studies in the last 12 years have focused on the impact of structured music-making on parent/child communication:

- **De Gratzer (1999)**. Parents reported non-musical benefits around improved relationships and communication between parent and child. Many parents described how these classes allowed them to 'get into their children's worlds'.
- **Nicholson, Berthelson, Abad, Williams and Bradley (2008)**. This showed that music-making provides an engaging and enjoyable activity for parents and toddlers to work on their communication skills.

Other studies, however, such as that carried out by Bookstart in 2009, showed that the majority of today's parents find nursery rhymes and traditional songs boring and irrelevant to life today. So, to ensure all parents are inspired to take part and engage and take the practice home, it's important that music-making activities and songs are inspiring, modern and upbeat. In the experience of Boogie Mites such workshops can reach and motivate

parents from minority groups and hard to reach areas if they are well-planned around inspiring songs and activities that use lots of props, drama, chants/rhymes and home-made instruments.

Of course, leading parent and child groups is very different from leading children's group activities in the setting, and it may be that staff training is needed to support this effort. Several of the ECaT (Every Child a Talker) projects nationally have chosen music as the way to engage parents with settings to support communication. Boogie Mites have worked with projects in Portsmouth, the Isle of Wight, Brighton and Surrey to train practitioners in settings to lead inspiring music workshops for parents, and initial feedback has been excellent.

Music has the power to spread joy and fun as well as support learning. Getting parents involved makes the support so much more powerful and therefore the potential impact, particularly on listening and language skills, on children by school age will be stronger. At the same time, by offering well-planned workshops, settings can achieve their objective of supporting the HLE and involving parents.

# 3

Have a well-planned format that involves getting out and putting away props and instruments throughout to keep children engaged and encourage cooperation and socialisation. For example:

- Introduction: arrival, social, paperwork, ground rules, learning aims.
- Vocal warm-ups and welcome song.
- Physical warm-up, action, shaker songs.
- Themed section: stories, role-play songs, etc.
- Percussion section: rhythm sticks; drums and tidy-up; teddies, quiet rhymes and lullabies.

# 4

End the session with a summary, including the following:

- Praise for all involved and a review of the learning goals and how they have been covered.
- Questions from parents (be available at the end for individual chats with parents too).
- Giving out CDs. Encourage parents to use the CD at home for joint activities as well as for playing in the background or car. Stress that such activities will really help children to tune in, listen and learn through music.

## put it into practice

### Ideas for planning a parent/child music workshop at your nursery...

# 1

It's important to set clear goals for both children and adults from the outset:

#### Goals for parents

- To bond with their child in a joint learning session.
- To get to know the practitioners at the setting.
- To gain an understanding of how music supports learning in all six areas of the EYFS.
- To learn and enjoy new and old songs, led in an inspiring way.
- To be motivated to continue practice at home.

#### Goals for children

- To bond with their parents in a joint learning session.
- To have fun and enjoy music making with parents.
- To gain confidence to work in a group, cooperating and taking turns.
- To continue with music-making and singing activities at home and to share them with the wider family.

# 2

You should also lay down ground rules. For example:

- Parents must join in with their child.
- Participants must sit on the floor if comfortable (make chairs available if they're required).
- Parents are responsible for the safety of their child and must supervise them at all times.
- If a child is distressed they may leave the room and return when they're calm. (Don't worry, it's completely normal for children to play up when mum/dad is present!).
- No chatting during the session (allow time at the beginning and end for socialising).
- Parents and children should practise at home between workshops (it's ideal to have a CD of the songs for parents to take home for this purpose).

## find out more

Sue Newman is Director of Boogie Mites UK Ltd, a company that writes songs to capture the imagination of children in the early years and which compiles programmes to motivate practitioners and parents to provide a rich and varied music provision both in settings and at home. Visit [boogiemites.co.uk](http://boogiemites.co.uk)

