



# Seeds Creative

Reflective Practice Projects

## Using Popular Music in Early Years Education

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## Introduction

Creative Futures provided an opportunity for me to undertake a small scale study to explore the use of popular music in an Early Years (EY) setting. It is difficult to define genres let alone “pop music” as there are many fusions that intertwine, however for the purpose of this study I focused mainly on music in popular culture i.e. that recently featured in the UK top 40 music that is widely listened to and accessible in many homes.

My interest in the use of pop music stems from my observations whilst working as a music practitioner, during which I observed children’s desire to sing pop songs as well as nursery rhymes. In this study I examine possible reasons for this observation and how pop music can be integrated into practice.

I undertook some background research to identify key ideas that I could use in my own sessions. I then made three visits to a children’s centre in West London, where I incorporated some of the findings from my background research.

Following my visits, I evaluated the sessions and reflected on some of the implications for the use of pop music in my practise and for EY Music in general.



## Background Research

In order to explore current ideas about the use of pop music in EY Music Education within the time constraints of a small scale study, I limited my background research to three areas:

1. Current EY Literature / Guidance
  - Burke N (2018) *Musical Development Matters in the Early Years* Watford: The British Association for Early Childhood Education
  - Young S (2018) *Critical New Perspectives in Early Childhood Music* Oxon: Routledge
2. Interviews with experts who use pop music in EY education in New York
3. Relevant discussions at an EY conference, training and a meeting I attended in February 2019

The table below provides a summary of findings relevant to the use of pop music for 2-3 year olds i.e. the age of the children who attended my sessions at the Children’s Centre.

Research	Key issues relevant to sessions
Burke N (2018) <i>Musical Development Matters in the Early Years</i> Watford :The British Association for Early Childhood Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggests familiar music may help engage children in active listening</li> <li>• Recommends :               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- playing a range of songs that involve different styles of singing e.g. opera, rap, scat</li> <li>- Talking to parent/carers to seek info about songs that are significant to children</li> <li>- Singing phases of songs whilst moving</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Suggests children often move and express themselves differently to different genres of music</li> <li>• Children model moving to music</li> </ul>

<p>Young S ( 2018) <i>Critical New Perspectives in Early Childhood Music</i> Oxon: Routledge</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notes we cannot assume similar musical backgrounds or similar musical goals and directions ( p. 86)</li> <li>• Suggests shared karaoke singing and children’s popular culture can be a medium to unite a family and promote enrichment and enjoyment ( pp. 88 – 92 )</li> <li>• Points out that music apps enable children to create new compositions and listen to a wide range of music ( p. 98 )</li> <li>• Says that apps could be better designed if they had learning purposes built into them and included pop, rock and world music in order to bridge into other musical worlds ( pp. 102-103)</li> <li>• Suggests YouTube provides a significant role in children’s music experiences ( p. 98 )</li> <li>• Gives example of blended, hybrid .bicultural activities – Somali story, rhyme, poetry leading into song ,rich with dual language learning ( p. 132)</li> </ul>
<p>Interview 21/2/2019 Dr Gareth Dylan Smith – Visiting Professor Association of Pop Music , New York and founder of “Little Kids Rock”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggested 2 x apps to help children develop own beat – “Drum Jam” and “P locket”</li> <li>• Argues that Pop music is music for the people, it is accessible and a reflection of what is going on today</li> <li>• Philosophy for “ Little Kids Rock” is the idea of “sound before sight” – listen to music first and move/dance at the same time before learning theory when older ( informal learning )</li> <li>• Recommended Artistic Citizenship book by David Elliott – focuses on music making us better people in society</li> <li>• Recommends giving children in EY best tools possible and not limiting to nursery rhymes</li> <li>• Asserts importance of being aware of diversity in society</li> <li>• Discussed song “Havana”– Cuban origin and very popular with some young children</li> <li>• Rap/Hip – Hop/ Grime/Drill/Trap can be made appropriate for young children – some children may find easy to dance to – good to</li> </ul>

	<p>break down political boundaries and hierarchies</p>
<p>Interview 21/2/2019 Martina Vasil – Association of Pop Music for EY New York</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggests playing with syllables helps word development whether nonsense songs or scat singing</li> <li>• Notes that increasing use of Ukulele has harmonic and melodic possibilities for pop songs –we need to move on from the recorder!</li> <li>• Highlights protectiveness over folk songs in the US ( Irish Influence)- can be limiting</li> <li>• Orff theory – taking on possibilities of the time/ going with the flow of the time</li> <li>• Advises observing free play – “universal” language of play – children make up their own songs and sing to themselves – children have creative ideas and can develop experimental songs on their own – recommends giving more creative options –we can underestimate their ability – (Martina refers to this as “Kids Culture”)</li> <li>• Recommends making a repertoire of pop songs “standards” as a resource for practitioners (we have had 100 years of pop music!)</li> <li>• Proposes pop music can be used in conjunction with nursery rhymes – gives children more tools and helps children develop preferences and tastes</li> </ul>
<p>14/2/2019 Sound Connections Inclusive Practice in Action conference</p>	<p>Use of a wide variety of genres in EY education :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provides more tools to think critically and imaginatively</li> <li>• supports socio-cognitive development</li> <li>• supports other academic attainment</li> <li>• could break down barriers of elitism in music</li> <li>• is important for wellbeing and inclusion</li> <li>• is accessed and available within the home</li> <li>• has the potential to introduce more complex musical features than nursery rhymes</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• challenges current “neutral” practice i.e. middle class re-cycled cultural identity</li> <li>• can facilitate parent involvement engagement and enjoyment</li> </ul>
<p>27/2/2019 Tr Music Together - training with N Burke</p> <p>From Burke (2016)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disney song Frozen popular when Nicola undertook research</li> <li>• New Disney similar to pop songs with sophisticated music production</li> <li>• Babies can feel heavy bass line (vibrations) music in womb</li> <li>• Babies born with musical memory and preferences</li> <li>• Cultural identity – finding relevance, confidence, sense of self - World Music</li> <li>• MAC – Midlands Art Centre (Nicola’s listening resources includes dance music and music without lyrics)</li> <li>• Guided listening – free play (improvisation) and guided circle (chants and dances).</li> <li>• The importance of silence and background music – pop music 3<sup>rd</sup> most listened to background music in nurseries</li> </ul>
<p>28/2/2019 LEYMN music meeting - Mayor of London’s strategy to develop culture and heritage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mayor of London’s strategy to develop culture and heritage includes pop music</li> <li>• Innovative practice to expand repertoire</li> <li>• Use of Free play</li> </ul>

The background research provided me with a lot of food for thought and many areas that I would have liked to try with the children. However for the purpose of this study I focused on the areas below when developing my visits to the Children’s Centre:

- Talk to parent/carers to seek info about songs that are significant to children ( N. Burke and Sound Connections conference)
- YouTube provides a significant role in children’s music experiences (S. Young)
- Familiar music may help engage children in active listening (N. Burke, G.D Smith)



- Use Pop music in conjunction with nursery rhymes to give children more choice ,tools and creative possibilities – focus on the music not just words (G.D. Smith, M. Vasil )
- Rap/Hip – Hop/ Grime/Drill/Trap can be made appropriate for young children – easy to dance to – good to break down political boundaries and hierarchies and potential to introduce more complex musical features ( G.D. Smith)
- Observe free play and universal language of play – children make up their own songs and sing to themselves – children have creative ideas and can develop experimental songs on their own – give more creative options (M. Vasil , N. Burke)
- Promotion of wellbeing and inclusion (N. Burke and Sound Connections conference , G.D Smith, M. Vasil)

These are the areas I felt resonated with my own practice and personal experience.





## Methodology

I made 3 visits to the centre. At the end of each visit I sat down with the nursery teacher and discussed what worked and what didn't work. I wrote down notes about these conversations and typed them up when I got home.

Participants were invited to opt-in to the research. As children were not able to give written consent, parents were invited to sign a permission form. Children whose parents did not give permission were still able to come and engage with me and music activities but were not included in my discussions or notes.

The children already knew me from my previous work at the setting and I do not feel that my presence created any ethical concerns for the children.



## Visit One

My first visit to the Children's Centre was on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> March. I had previously worked at the Children's Centre and had built relationships with both the staff and children. I had been corresponding about my project with N one of the nursery teachers. N recommended pop songs that she thought the children would like and joined me for the session. N had selected a group of nine children who were of "mixed abilities" and genders. Within this group, she included a few boys that she felt needed extra support. I had previously worked with these boys and it was them that had given me the initial idea for the project because of the way they enjoyed and identified with pop music and how it seemed to help them engage with their musical learning.

The consensus of my initial research was that using pop music was a good idea. However, there was a lack of practical examples on how to use pop music in practice. Therefore, my preparation for the session focused on listening and learning the pop songs that had been recommended to me by Natalie as well as searching YouTube and the internet for suitable music and videos such as the Rap version of "Llama Llama Red Pyjama" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFtHeo7oMSU>), where Ludacris (an American rapper) raps the words of the story by the American children's author Anna Dewdney.

I started the session by playing the recommended pop songs (see session plan below). N highlighted that many of the children had been listening to "In my Feelings" ("Kikki" song) by Drake, "Shotgun" by George Ezra, "7 Rings" by Arianne Grande and "Don't Call me Up" by Mabel on Kiss FM at home. I kept the structure of the session loose and simple in order to be flexible and respond to the children's musical preferences. I was mindful that I would need to mix the session with things I had done before and were familiar to the children (e.g. nursery rhymes and visual stimuli such as the use of lycra) alongside listening to pop music and the new original activities that I had prepared.

Following the visit I wrote up what happened - see below:

First session		
Activity	Music	Rationale for choice
<p><b>Pre - session:</b></p> <p>Played extracts from each song (recommended by nursery) for 5 min as children were arriving</p>	<p>“In my Feelings”( Kikki) - Drake            “Shotgun”- George Ezra            “7 Rings” - Arianne Grande            “Don’t Call me up” – Mabel</p>	<p>To observe general preferences.</p>
<p><b>Adult-guided session:</b></p> <p>Hello Song</p> <p>Warm Ups</p> <p>Songs</p> <p>Dynamic Practice with songs</p> <p>Game with Lycra</p>	<p>“Hello Woah”</p> <p>“Elephants on the ground and freeze”            “Wiggle your Fingers”            “Shake and Stop”</p> <p>“Frog song”</p> <p>“Peanut Butter song”</p> <p>“Kalala”</p> <p>Waves In the River</p> <p>“Once I caught a fish alive”</p> <p>Headlines -            Drake (instrumental)</p>	<p>Familiar to the children</p> <p>Familiar</p> <p>Familiar</p> <p>Familiar to the children and uses humour, which encourages them to be more open and welcoming of new ideas.</p> <p>Familiar and a favourite. Good for grasping a musical dynamic sensitivity. Also gives children confidence in leading.</p> <p>Familiar and introduced sea imagery (waves, crocodile and fish)</p> <p>Familiar and necessary revision prior to next activity</p> <p>Using “Once I caught a fish alive” with rap/hip hop beat, using lycra to anchor sense of rhythm amongst the group.</p>

<p>Goodbye Song</p>	<p>The Next Episode – Dr. Dre (instrumental)</p> <p>“Goodbye Woah”</p>	<p>Using the familiar “Pea Pod Song” for lyrics on top of rap/hip hop instrumental with lycra being used to emphasise musical tension before the “pop”.</p> <p>Familiar and musically identical to “Hello Song”</p>
<p><b>Free flow:</b></p> <p>Llama Llama reading with rap</p> <p>Individual Ukelele playing</p> <p>Rhythm call and response</p> <p>Guided listening using movement and dance led by the children</p>	<p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFtHeo7oMSU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFtHeo7oMSU</a></p> <p>Nursery Rhymes Vs “Kikki”</p> <p>Using percussion instruments</p> <p>“In My Feelings’ “Kikki”</p>	<p>Integrating story with popular music.</p> <p>Children wanted to play their own songs on ukulele</p> <p>Although a little unrelated to the research topic, this was a request from children who were familiar with the exercise. I also saw this as an opportunity to build relationships with children I hadn’t worked with before in preparation for the next session and to gain an understanding of their musical interests and sensitivities.</p> <p>Based on the 5 minute introduction and endless requests for this song.</p>

**Pre - session:**

I started the session by playing extracts from a few pop songs, which had been recommended by N, the nursery teacher. I played extracts from the entire songs (clean versions). Out of all the songs I played, “In My Feelings” (what the children refer to as “the Kikki song”) was a clear favourite. The children were not as interested in any of the songs that followed and Z, J and M demanded that I put the “Kikki” song back on.



### **Session:**

I started the session with a familiar hello song followed by some warm ups and songs that the children already knew. I had originally planned to do a hello rap but it did not feel appropriate to introduce something new at this point in the session. I started with familiar songs to promote engagement before gradually moving onto more experimental territory.

I introduced pop music by using “Once I caught a fish alive” (nursery rhyme) with a Rap/Hip Hop instrumental (Headlines by Drake), using lycra to anchor the sense of rhythm amongst the group, bouncing the lycra to the pulse. The instrumental hip-hop/rap tracks were used because the words were not appropriate and an instrumental gave scope for freedom of words.

I started by encouraging the children to revise the nursery rhyme unaccompanied before playing the instrumental accompaniment. I then used the “Pea Pod Song” for lyrics on top of a Rap/Hip Hop instrumental (The Next Episode – Dr. Dre) with lycra being used to emphasis musical tension before the “pop”. The children did not verbally acknowledge the instrumental accompaniment to their singing, however their movement with the lycra suggested otherwise as there was a clearer sense of pulse and accurate sense of musical togetherness within the group when the Rap/Hip Hop instrumental was used. This could have been due to the beat within the instrumental, which kept the group in time like a metronome. The music also fitted well with the pea pod song, with the vocals entering at the exact moment of the pea pod popping, which amplified the enjoyment of the “popping” moment, reinforced by the children asking to repeat the game. As they repeated the game, they also started to recognise the “dah dah dah dah dah” as an association with the break of tension (both musically and of the pea pod). The reason I selected both of these rhymes to introduce pop instrumentals was because they contained numbers which are easily recalled by many children and therefore leave scope for experimentation and improvisation. The familiarity of the rhymes lend themselves well to an informal understanding of the hip-hop rap pulse.

I then finished the session with a familiar goodbye song and explained the potential musical options available for play.

### **Free flow**

Although I tried to start the ‘Llama Llama Red Pyjama’ story with the rap song, the children were gravitating towards the percussion and the ukuleles. I suspected that this was because they were not familiar with the story and I decided to work with what they wanted to focus on.



I worked on the ukulele with four of the children, two wanted to play the “kikki” song (M and J), even when I had given them the option of playing nursery rhymes to see which one they would prefer. H and R chose nursery rhymes, (they did not seem as familiar with the “Kikki” song). An interesting moment was when I gave one of my ukuleles to J and my other ukulele to H. They were next to each other, playing a ukulele each and seemingly unaware of each other, in their own worlds, both playing and singing the songs they wanted to play. J was playing the “Kikki” song and H was playing a standard alphabet song. The juxtaposition was an interesting display of musical preferences and something that I had aimed to make possible through working one on one with the children and giving them the tools to choose which song they would prefer to play and sing.

I revisited the ‘Llama Llama Red Pyjama’ song. J and Z showed some interest in the story and the rap (perhaps because the instrumental of the rap reminded them of the genre of “Kikki”) however after a few moments they persisted to request the “Kikki” song. We finished playing the “Kikki” song and Z, J and M were singing and dancing to it enthusiastically.

As the children left, new children came into the space whilst the “Kikki” song continued to play. They also expressed their interest in the song. One boy started break dancing and said: “I love your music”. It was interesting that he used the word ‘your’ because it felt like an acknowledgement that this was different to the music that he had been exposed to by their practitioners and associated with being in a nursery setting. One of the girls told me: “This is my daddy’s favourite song, he plays it in the car.”

### **Reflection with teacher**

N spoke to me in detail about what each child listened to at home (as she had observed from home visits). Through this, I found out that many of the children who enjoyed the Drake song either had older siblings (9 years old and over) or younger parents (in their 20s).

We also discussed gender differences, after observing that more of the boys seemed to be more engaged with the offered pop songs than the girls.

### **Preparation for next session**

In preparation for the next session I left the ‘Llama Llama Red Pyjama’ book with the teacher. She was keen to read it to the children throughout the week. I asked if she would be able to familiarise both the boys and girls with the story as I planned to look at their responses to the rapping of the story in the next session.



I also planned to:

- I. Repeat the successful hip- hop/rap instrumental with nursery rhyme lyrics fusion.
- II. Look into music that these girls might enjoy.
- III. Focus on Choruses of songs and short and catchy tunes.



## Visit Two

My second visit was on Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> March. Prior to the session, teacher N sent me an email to inform me that her colleague, B, would be taking her place for the session as she was also interested in what I was doing. The email also mentioned the success of the ‘Llama Llama Red Pyjama’ book over the last week, stating that the children had enjoyed the story and the nursery had ordered multiple copies of the book. N also told me about other songs that the children had been listening to: “Happy” by Pharrell Williams, “Waka Waka” by Shakira and “Follow the Leader” by The Soca Boys. In preparation for this week’s session, I listened to some of these songs and learnt one of the choruses of “Waka Waka”. I chose the chorus which was completely in Fang language, so I could focus on the melodic and rhythmic elements of the song as opposed to the meaning of the words as recommended by Martina Vasil. The words I used were:

*Tsamina mina eh eh*

*Waka waka eh eh*

*Tsamina mina zangalewa*

*Anawa aa*

See below for the outline programme for the second session:

Second Session		
Activity	Music	Rationale for choice
<b>Session:</b>	Hello Songs	Familiar
	Are you ready? YEAH YEAH	Unplanned and improvised call and response chant like. Response (“Yeah Yeah” in minor 3 <sup>rd</sup> intervals) created by children after I sang “are you ready”
	Peanut butter/ Frog song	Familiar
	Waka Waka	Introduction of pop song familiar to children





		We revised the chorus of the pop song with a dance.
	Lycra Game	Using Hip Hop/Rap beats
<b>Freeplay:</b>	Llama Llama rap	They now knew this book and I was interested to see who would be interested in the rap.

**Pre - session**

This week, I moved straight into the session because I did not want the children to get carried away with the “Kikki” song and I wanted to try a few different things. Instead, I met B and talked her through the aim of the sessions.

**Session**

After the familiar hello song and the spontaneous “Are you ready?”, I moved onto “Waka Waka”, which resulted in a positive response to the music from both the boys and girls.

I broke down the “Waka Waka” song using my ukulele to highlight the chorus. Even though I focused on the chorus, I found that M (who is exposed to a great variety of music at home) could recite the whole song, highlighting the potential capabilities of children of this age.

The children quickly grasped “Waka Waka”, so we moved on to create a dance where there was a move for each group of words that repeated when the words repeated. The children came up with the dance ideas. This could have worked better if the repetition of the words was more consistent but otherwise, the idea worked well and the children understood that when the chorus came up in the song, it was their cue to do a dance together. The sense of collaboration was also observed in the way that the children were smiling and laughing, whilst watching themselves and their peers dancing.

I then repeated the lycra game from last week with the Hip/Hop Rap instrumentals. This time, I refined the timing of the nursery rhyme to match the drop in the instrumental when the pea pod was supposed to “pop”. There was a great response from the children asking for the game to be repeated again and again. I could also tell that there was a clear musical response to the instrumental. For example, H, was creating his own unique actions with the lycra to the beat. This was interesting because H had shown more interest in the nursery rhymes last week.



### **Free flow**

I focused more on the “ llama llama “ song this week as the children were now familiar with the story. This was a great success particularly with J, who seemed to love the book. We started by reading the book. At the end of story, I played the rap and showed the video of Ludacris performing it in the studio. J immediately replicated some of the hand actions that he saw in response to certain repeated words such as “hums a tune tune”. I then took away the video and just played the rap, wondering if he might be able to replicate the rap. Despite having quite complex off beats, I was astonished at how well J picked up the rap. He turned each page at exactly the right point according to the rap too. M, Z and H also got involved.

### **Evaluation with B**

Teacher B had noticed that child H seemed to be gaining confidence in general throughout the week. Before the first session H had not been observed singing anything at all (let alone nursery rhymes)

We observed that J only responded and showed interest in the Hello song and the rap. Perhaps he likes the Hello song because it includes a “millennial whoop” on the word “woah”, which may be more familiar to songs he is exposed to at home. J was rapping the ‘Llama Llama Red Pyjama’ song with a feel for Ludacris’ flow as he was moving his head and turning to the correct page in time.

### **Preparation for next session**

In preparation for the next session I focused on the girls in the group especially N and R who were starting to show more interest in the songs .

Other preparation included:

- I. Refining the dance moves for Waka Waka.
- II. Considering taking an even smaller excerpt of the lyrics so that there is even clearer repetition in order to facilitate a symmetrical and logical dance pattern. For example, using repeating :

*Tsamina mina eh eh,*

*Waka waka eh eh*



- III. Playing and singing the 'Llama Llama Red Pyjama' rap with other children both from the recording (used on the projector this time) and playing acoustically on the ukulele.



## Visit Three

My third visit was on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> March. A different nursery teacher joined in the session, as did the mother of M. For this visit, I aimed to engineer the session with as much “pop music” material as possible now that the children were more familiar with the new songs and exercises. Ideally, I would have liked to have more time with the children so that I could explore other ideas such as the “millennial whoop” but I managed to touch on this concept in the session.

See below for the outline programme for the session:

Third Session		
Activity	Music	Rationale for choice
<b>Session:</b>	<p>Hello songs, warm ups and some familiar songs</p> <p>“Are you ready? Woah”</p> <p>“Birds in the sky song”</p> <p>Waka Waka Chorus</p> <p>‘Llama Llama Red Pyjama’ video demonstration and dance.</p> <p>Lycra with Rap/Hip Hop instrumental</p> <p>Solo singing presenting to group</p>	<p>Familiar material to warm up.</p> <p>Millennial whoop inspired “woah” response to see observe whether they would particularly latch onto the “woah”</p> <p>Scat singing and storytelling exercise</p> <p>Revise, practice and observe response</p> <p>To observe how well they knew the story and familiarise them with the rap in preparation for one on one free play work.</p> <p>Revising this game with the addition story inspired lyrics.</p> <p>A few of the children had requested to do this.</p>
<b>Freeplay:</b>	<p>Ukelele songs of choice</p> <p>‘Llama Llama Red Pyjama’</p>	<p>To see what the children’s preferences were</p> <p>To see if any of the children might start rapping the story with the book, based on the video demonstration.</p>



## Session

For this session, the warm up material was significantly reduced in order to focus on the use of pop music. Therefore, I then integrated a more contemporary “Are you ready?” song, inspired by the concept of the millennial whoop. The millennial whoop is a tool used in pop songs that is thought to imitate bird songs and characteristically involves a catchy hook, which is often based on vowel sounds (such as “Oh” and “Woah”) and is easy to remember. I noticed that the children latched onto the “Woah” hook very quickly, despite the hook being primarily melody focused rather than lyrically focused. It would be interesting to explore this further.

I wrote a tune for storytelling called “Birds in the sky”, which was also based on the millennial whoop concept. The microstructure of the song allows space for the story ideas to flow quickly and spontaneously. The song starts off with a verse with the lyrics: “There are birds in the sky” and then the chorus follows: “they go tweet tweet tweet tweet tweet tweet tweet tweet tweet tweet tweet tweet”. The melody for the verse is always the same length but the children made up different lyrics to the verse each time in accordance with what had been said before. The chorus stays the same each time and everybody sings it together. Although some of the children struggled with ideas for the story, all of the children seemed to enjoy singing the chorus together which proved a millennial whoop promotes inclusion and enjoyment.

*And the birds go to Africa  
And then they eat lots of ice cream  
And they played with their friends  
Then they went to their mummy*

We repeated the chorus of “Waka Waka”, which seemed to work more coherently with simplified words and a dance. There was still some confusion around some of the dance but the children enjoyed revisiting the song both acoustically and with the backing track.

To break up the session, Natalie helped me to set up a big screen playing the ‘Llama Llama Red Pyjama’ rap video. I thought it would be interesting to observe how the children would react to this now that they were familiar with the story. We played the video twice. The first time, the children sat very still watching the video. The second time, R, M and J started trying to take part in the rap. The children watched the video followed by a group dance to this. Then in story time, they were rapping the story. They would have needed to listen to it more to do more work on the rap, although it was well received.

The lycra activity was even more successful this time round because the children were familiar with the exercise. I tried with different lyrics based on stories that were familiar to them, such as ‘Three Billy Goats Gruff’. For this, we held the lycra up (so that the children



were underneath the river, rapping "who's that hiding underneath the river, who's that hiding, who could it be? They'll give us a fright". On the word "fright", the group simultaneously held the lycra down and started waving it – they enjoyed this and asked for the activity to be repeated. H was doing his dance moves again in response to the rap instrumental and a few of the children had started to copy his moves.

We finished the session with solo singing with the ukulele as a few of the children had requested to do this. Romina, Jermani, Hafis, M and A took part. Interestingly, all of the children chose to sing pop songs. Myran chose "Waka Waka" whilst the rest chose the "Kikki" song. A, (who is usually quieter during sessions) wanted to sing the "Gummy bear song" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=astIS0ttCQ0>) and I accompanied her. The other children joined in with the catchy hook and we sang the song together. T directed the dynamics with hand signals as we had done with Kelele.

## **Evaluation**

It was the first time the teacher had heard the 'Llama Llama Red Pyjama' song and she said that she would certainly use it in her story-time sessions. She enjoyed the lycra activity and would not have thought to use rap music but said it was just as engaging for her as it was for the children. She told me that the session had given her confidence to introduce music that she actually liked and listening to into the sessions.

Teacher N and a few of the parents had mentioned to me that the sessions had been well received. N asked if I would be able to attend a meeting at the nursery next month in order to speak about the work and spark a discussion about the stigma around certain genres as well as examining the potential of using music that children listen to at home. I agreed that I would be happy to do this, with the knowledge that it might spark some initial controversy and even cultural identity debates, similar to those I had experienced prior to carrying out this project.



## Discussion

Based on the visits, I thought about the “Kikki” song’s appeal and potential. It is musically challenging and complex with cross rhythms, syncopation and chromaticism – features that are not usually found in common nursery rhymes.

The way in which I used “Waka Waka” was similar to “Simama Kaa”. The difference between the two is that the children recognise the level of musical texture within the production of “Waka Waka”, purposefully made to promote dance. Dancing can help to make this learning informal, thus giving children the chance to expand their musical tools in order to develop their understanding and creative participation. It worked well to break down the choruses of the songs. I used a ukulele but percussion (instruments or body) would work well .

The teacher on third visit mentioned that the rap music was as interesting for her as it was the children. I feel that this is an important point because it is important that teachers are engaged and enjoying sessions in order for the children to do the same. It also encourages teachers to seek out to find new music that they could bring to the sessions.

Home visits might also be a good idea for practitioners in order to tailor sessions more closely. N’s knowledge from her home visits was extremely useful in terms of selecting and learning my material. Although a similar model might be able to be used in other nurseries, it would be worth carrying out research before sessions to find out what is listening to in the home and how that can be transferred into the session.

Perhaps practitioners should be immersing themselves in popular culture. Attending and observing raves or school discos to get a feel for what siblings are doing? Creating and constantly updating Spotify playlists? This would produce more rounded musicians who could develop the tools to cater for different needs.



## Conclusion

As music practitioners, we need to have a palette that we work from so that we can adapt to the needs of all children. Pop music can be part of this palette and used when and where appropriate. Not all children will know or enjoy pop music but it is important to be tuned in to what children are listening to at home.

Pop music has the potential to engage children who haven't shown interest in existing music provision. Connecting with what they listen to in the home could be a key way of getting them to engage in nursery activities for a full rounded education.

New trends today might not be so fresh tomorrow - popular culture is always shifting and evolving. Children's musical interests and preferences change, which is something that we must keep up to date with. This project brought to attention the importance of updating our practice in order to accommodate these constant changes. CPD sessions alongside up to date articles and talks are valuable means of bringing these subjects to our attention. Podcasts may be another useful medium, as they enable freelancers to keep in the loop at a time that suits them, eliminating the pressure to set time aside for conferences and talks, which is not always possible. It is also important that we converse with an open mind towards new trends and a willingness to evaluate our opinions objectively.

I believe that there is scope for further exploration into this subject. Overall, the project scratched the surface of potential new ideas for practice in EY. The limitations of reflecting on so few sessions meant that I was not able to try out as much material as I had researched. It would be useful to introduce a greater number of sessions with the same children and then to compare with different children from different nurseries. It would also be interesting to try this model again in a different country and/or continent where the perception of popular music and their EY repertoire is different.





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