

Sounding Out, 2019-2021

Full Report, April 2021

1. Delivery

Sounding Out is Creative Futures' flagship project with deaf children. Following the success of its first phase working in secondary schools (2015-18), the project moved to two primary schools with deaf units in April 2019 and will continue in these schools until at least the summer of 2022. This report covers the period from April 2019 to April 2021.

Sounding Out takes place at Selwyn Primary School (in Newham) and Laycock Primary School (in Islington). Each of these schools has a specialist deaf unit within their mainstream provision. We worked exclusively in the deaf units, with 65 children aged 4-10 years with a range of hearing impairments and in some cases further additional needs. More than 70% of the children were from non-white-English backgrounds.

The project was delivered by two experienced music facilitators, Phoebe Osborne and Tiziana Pozzo, and supported by the project manager, Dr Kathryn Mason a researcher in the field of deaf children's communication. Two trainee music leaders also took part in the project to work alongside the experienced facilitators, build their skills, and support the workshops.

Delivery took place weekly in both schools during term-time. 71 half-day sessions were delivered in the schools, each consisting of two or three workshop sessions with different age groups between Reception and Year 4. A further 16 sessions took place online at times when the schools were either closed or limiting access from external organisations due to the government's coronavirus lockdowns (March to July 2020, and January to April 2021). 8 online videos were also created during coronavirus 'lockdowns' which were made accessible to the schools and families, and which are now freely available on the Creative Futures [website](#).

Our musical approach was broad, and included composition, playing instruments, improvising and creating musical narratives, and a particular focus on singing and vocalizing in order to build the children's confidence of exploring and using their voices.

As part of the project we redesigned and expanded our free online Sounding Out Toolkit, including the addition of new videos and activities. The revised toolkit (available [here](#)) was launched in March 2021 and is aimed at teachers of the deaf as well as music leaders working with deaf children.

2. Evaluation Methodology

Evaluation of the project focused on 3 key areas:

- musical development;
- communication skills (both verbal and non-verbal); and
- self-confidence.

Evaluation data was collected through observation of live sessions, analysis of recorded zoom video sessions (during COVID-19 restrictions), feedback from teachers, and practitioners' notes.

Observation of live sessions focused on children's vocalisation, spoken and non-spoken communication skills, and around children's confidence and level of participation.

3.1 Impact of the programme on children's musical development

From Spring 2019 to Spring 2020, sessions at Laycock Primary school were led by Phoebe Osborne, and sessions at Selwyn Primary school were led by Tiziana Pozzo. Both were joined for a period of time by a supporting trainee practitioner. The two music practitioners had different musical approaches to the *Sounding Out* sessions, one with a focus on singing and vocalisation, and the other with a broad approach focusing on instruments, movement and improvisation. However, there were many areas of overlap in the types of activities and songs used by both practitioners, as a result of sharing ideas and experience with each other, and this interaction bore fruit in the revisions to the Sounding Out Toolkit, with the inclusion of activities and methodologies from both practitioners.

In Autumn 2021, Phoebe took over delivery at both schools. She integrated musical activities used by her colleague (e.g. use of soundpainting), providing both continuity to the class as well as new activities and approaches.

The inclusion of trainee practitioners meant that the children were introduced to a wider variety of instruments and music genres. Children were observed enjoying learning about instruments that were new to them, and experiencing new sounds and timbres. The music room at one of the schools was particularly well equipped, and during one of the observed sessions in Spring 2020 several of the children were seen investigating instruments in the room. At this point in the project, their musical curiosity had grown and they wanted to know what instruments were called and how they were played. This prompted the practitioner to center the rest of her sessions on exploring instruments and the different types of sounds they made. The variety of sounds possible from one instrument was fascinating for many of the children and they appeared excited to have the opportunity to experiment for themselves with instruments and sound.

A wide range of activities and approaches were used by both practitioners over the course of the project, as they got to know the children in their groups and adapted to their needs. Music visualization technology such as "Sing and See" helped to reinforce concepts of high

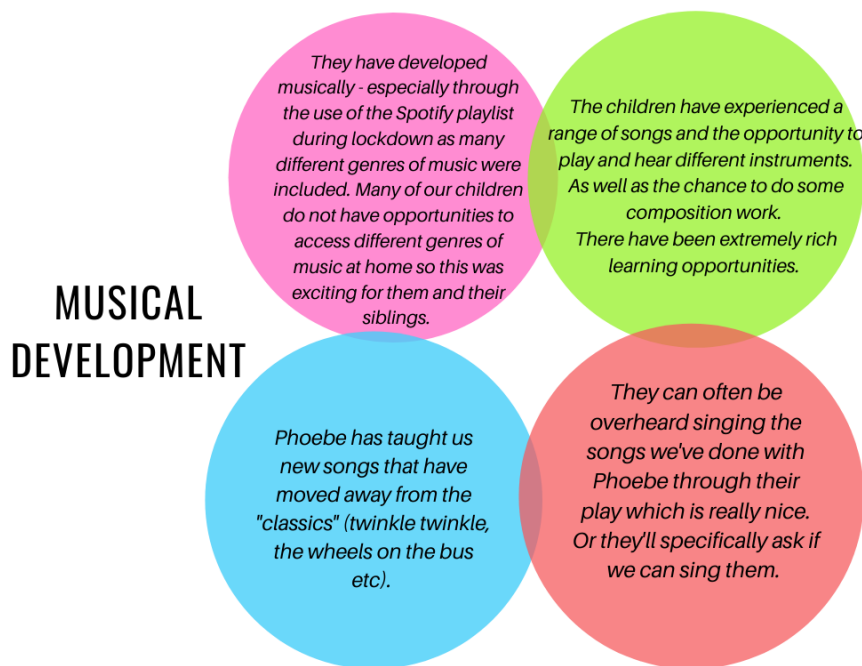
and low pitch, thus building skill and knowledge in this area, and was also used as an introductory tool for composition activities with the older children.



Feedback from Teachers

A selection of feedback from teachers at both schools regarding children’s musical development is in figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Teachers’ impressions of children’s musical development



Musical development case study

“J” was in Year 1 in Spring 2020, and had become an enthusiastic participant in the *Sounding Out* sessions. Although J tended to become distracted easily during the sessions and had a tendency to disrupt other pupils early on, his musicianship skills could clearly be seen to develop over time. He was observed on several occasions singing an ostinato independently,

whilst the group leaders sang the melody to a song. He also became more musically engaged with other children in the class (rather than disruptive), e.g. “counting them in” when it was their time to sing, and supporting some of his peers who were struggling with keeping time playing a drum. In the Autumn of 2020, he was singing accurately pitched notes, copying rhythmic drumming patterns and offering to lead on many occasions. By December, he was able to copy complex rhythms, and was confident in asking questions about activities and instruments.

3.2 Impact of the programme on children’s communication skills (verbal and non-verbal)

Observations were made of the children’s verbal and non-verbal communication during the sessions, and notes were made regarding the development of communication skills for individual children over the course of the project. The two primary schools taking part in the project have different communication approaches with their deaf children, in accordance with the needs of the children in the school. Laycock primary using spoken English as the primary method of communication with the deaf children, and whilst Selwyn Primary also primarily uses spoken English, there are also some children who use British Sign Language, or Sign supported English (signs accompanying spoken English) to communicate. Both of the practitioners sang songs with the children in English and other languages, and integrated some signs to accompany singing.

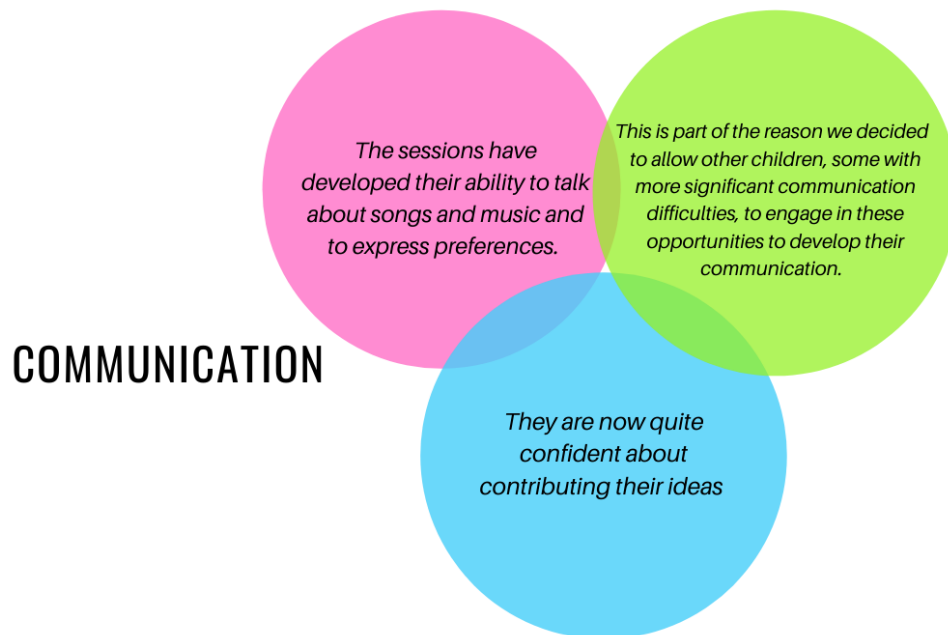
Call and response songs and copying the practitioner’s varying vocalisations (e.g. making “sound effects” vocally such as car sounds, high and low pitches, varied intonation) were particularly successful in encouraging many children to use their voices confidently, without pressurizing those who did not want to use their voice.

Feedback from Teachers

Teachers agreed that the sessions provided rich opportunities to develop communication skills, both verbal, non-verbal and musical. In spring term 2021, one of the schools was keen to allow some other children who had not taken part in the sessions before to take part. Four of these children had additional communication needs, and it was felt that the opportunity to take part in the Sounding Out sessions may be an additional support to their developing communication skills.

A selection of feedback from teachers at both schools regarding children’s communication development is in figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Teachers' impressions of children's communication development



Communication skills case study

"H" was in Reception class in spring 2019 and had a visual impairment as well as deafness. At the start of the Sounding Out project, H was observed to be very easily distracted, quiet and not very communicative during the sessions. She was shy when answering questions and used very little verbal communication, however, by Spring 2021 she was observed answering questions verbally on a more regular basis. Integration of signs into the music sessions seemed to be of particular benefit to H, and she was observed confidently signing and connecting signs to lyrics in a song. Use of visual cues that were more accessible to H, along with use of sign language to reinforce instructions and musical concepts allowed her to become more engaged and connected during the sessions, confidently following her peers and taking part fully in the sessions.

3.3 Impact of the programme on children's self-confidence

Over the course of the project, there was evidence that many children grew in self-confidence both musically, and as engaged and active participants in the sessions.

Observation and practitioner's notes contained many examples of emerging leadership skills in some of the children, with more confident children beginning to feel able to lead the group in singing, and to sing solo in front of their peers. Children who were shy, and who either appeared to be non-verbal or used minimal vocalisations at the start of the project, were observed responding and gaining confidence gradually, supported and encouraged by both the music leader and on many occasions their peers.

Feedback from Teachers

A selection of feedback from teachers at both schools regarding children’s self-confidence is in figure 3 below.

Figure 3. Teachers’ impressions of children’s self-confidence during Sounding Out



Self-confidence case study

In the Spring term of 2019, Reception-age pupil “R” was very quiet when asked questions, although willing to give responses, and appeared to be very shy during the sessions. It was apparent that she really enjoyed the sessions, and had many ideas although she was slightly hesitant to contribute when there were more dominant or outgoing characters in her peer group. Over the course of the project, R was observed becoming more confident musically; initially seeking frequent reassurance that she was doing the correct actions to accompany a song, whilst also demonstrating a good sense of rhythm and ability to accurately copy the music leader. By Autumn 2021, almost weekly improvement in R’s confidence was recorded, she was willing to offer ideas readily, even making helpful and supportive suggestions to peers when it was their turn to lead. She seemed very happy during the sessions, talking more and offering many more ideas than she had done previously.

4. Conclusion

This phase of the *Sounding Out* project has continued to be very successful with positive outcomes for the children involved across all three outcome areas. We are confident that both approaches taken by the music practitioners (signing/vocalization focused and instruments/movement focused) appeared to be successful, although due to the government closure of schools we were unable to fully assess the differing impacts between the two. It appeared that what worked well, or didn't, was more dependent on the needs of individual children and levels of access to particular activities, and the level of support offered to the children by the school in the sessions (e.g. the involvement of a TA to support particular children was always very positive).

We are delighted with the new edition of the Sounding Out Toolkit, which combines both of the musical approaches adopted through the project, and which demonstrates the range of musical experiences participating children were exposed to.

We were also pleased with the success of sessions conducted online, although these inevitably proved challenging for some of the deaf children involved in the programme. Online education particularly disadvantages deaf children as lack of face-to-face teaching produces further communication barriers for them. Children with a range of hearing levels depend on lipreading, which becomes harder to do via video, and much more tiring. Poor video quality makes communication and understanding very challenging, so the children who took part in the Sounding Out project were at particular risk in terms of accessing their education during COVID lockdowns. Taking access into account, the practitioners created videos which were designed to be as accessible as possible, and yet we realised that they worked best when used as a supportive tool for teachers, i.e. as part of a teacher-led session, rather than when sent home to be used by parents. "Live" zoom sessions involved greater input from class teachers, with the practitioner and teacher jointly leading the sessions. A positive legacy of the zoom sessions is the growing interaction by class teachers during subsequent face-to-face sessions, and a notable boost to their confidence in delivering music with their class.

Overall, we have been pleased with the programme delivered, despite various challenges, and it has been a pleasure to witness the range of positive impacts – and the joy – which music brings to deaf children. We look forward to developing the programme further in coming years.

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Dr Kathryn Mason & Dr Julian Knight, Creative Futures, July 2021

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