

Sounding Out

Music with deaf children

2015-18 REPORT



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1. Project Aims and Objectives

Sounding Out was a three-year vocal and instrumental music programme developed by Creative Futures (<http://www.creativefuturesuk.com>) for deaf pupils at two specialist London secondary schools and one mainstream primary school with a deaf unit. Its principal funder was the National Foundation for Youth Music (<https://www.youthmusic.org.uk>).

Sounding Out grew from a collaboration between Creative Futures and researchers from University College London (UCL Ear Institute and the UCL Institute of Education) in another London primary school where we found that specialist singing activities improve aspects of young deaf children's pitch perception, production and speech perception, thus improving their access to and enjoyment of music and their speech and communication skills.

Aim:

'Sounding Out' will open the door to music for deaf pupils, inspiring and enriching their lives through participatory vocal and instrumental music-making. It will develop and promote new methodologies for musical interaction with the deaf, explore impacts on wider learning, and train new music leaders in this field.

Sounding Out was designed to fill a gap in the opportunities which deaf children receive, as most specialist schools for the deaf offer little or no music provision – whereas there is increasing evidence that these children can and do enjoy music-making and can benefit hugely from it.

The objectives of the project are summarised as:

- (a) Increase deaf pupils' exposure to and participation in music-making
- (b) Increase participants' musical skills
- (c) Enhance participants' communication skills, self-confidence and aspiration
- (d) Strengthen skills for delivering appropriate musical activities with deaf children among both music-leaders and school staff.
- (e) Improve understanding of how deaf pupils engage in, and benefit from, music-making.

2. Delivery model and content

Sounding Out took place weekly during term-time in three schools each year, over three years. It was delivered by a number of specialist Creative Futures music practitioners, and included opportunities for others to be trained. The programme included partnerships with four schools (two secondary, two primary), two Music Education Hubs, Music and the Deaf, and researchers led by Professor Graham Welch (UCL-IoE) and Dr Deborah Vickers (UCL). The researchers sought to understand the nature of pupils' musical and other-than-musical development through systematic observation of (a) changes in musical behaviours (using the Sounds of Intent Framework www.soundsofintent.org) and (b) changes in interaction, engagement and communication skills (using a specially designed framework).

Key outputs 2015-18:

- Weekly music workshop delivery took place in 2 schools each year.
- 2 secondary schools (one for 2 years, one for 3 years) & 1 primary school took part.
- 209 workshop sessions were delivered in total, with two or more practitioners delivering the majority of sessions.
- 9 additional full days of music making took place during 2015/16 and 2016/17, including a partnership with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra.
- Performances included a feature in the 'Brighter Sounds' Wandsworth Music Service event at the Royal Festival Hall in March 2017, and performances at the end of most terms at each school attended by other pupils and staff.
- 8 specialist training sessions were delivered by Music and the Deaf (MATD) over the 3 years for our music leaders.
- In addition to formal training, we held termly practice sharing and planning sessions among our team of music practitioners.

- 10 Creative Futures music practitioners led the sessions, 6 more served as guest musicians, and 6 music leaders were trained on the project – although all those involved developed their professional practice.
- We produced two short films at the end of 2017/18 about how students' performance pieces had been created.
- We engaged researchers from the UCL Institute of Education (Professor Graham Welch and Dr Jo Saunders) who evaluated the impact of the project on musical development; and UCL Ear Institute (Dr Deborah Vickers and Dr Kathryn Mason) who evaluated the project's impact on participants' communication development.
- A detailed online Toolkit was produced in 2018 by Tiziana Pozzo, one of the lead musicians, and Dr Kathryn Mason. The Toolkit, launched in September 2018, is aimed at professional music leaders who may be working with deaf children/students, as well as at classroom teachers who have interaction with deaf pupils.

Sounding Out's delivery model included a variety of approaches and methods, and evolved considerably over the three years in response to learned practice and factors imposed by the schools. Here are some examples of the activities that took place:

- Drumming
- Playing other instruments, including trombone, cello, flute, saxophone, keyboard, guitar
- Improvising
- Creating new music together
- Creating music to a film
- Collaborating with other pupils on a multi-media piece including dance, drama and design
- Vocalising, and exploring the voice
- Singing together
- Body percussion
- Sound painting
- Composing new songs
- Using music technology
- Performing within the school, and in public, including at the Royal Festival Hall

Given the nature of the children's needs, a highly visual approach to learning was embedded across the project. A good example of this was the use of a specially created 'map' of London, which pupils designed with their music leader, which served both as a form of visual timetable for the session as well as a thematic inspiration for new music or songs:

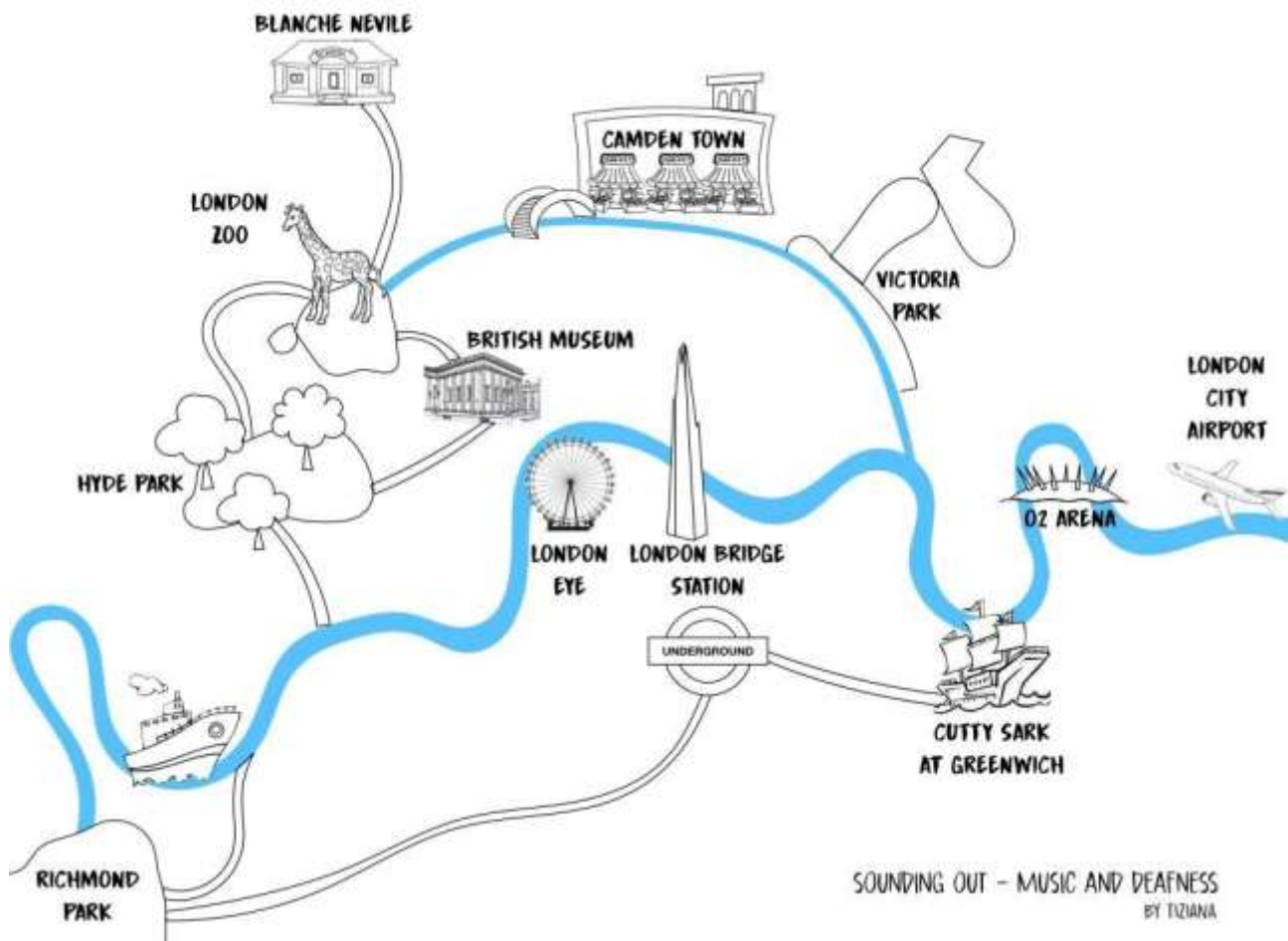


Figure 1: map of London

3. Digital resources



At the end of *Sounding Out* our music delivery team met to reflect and share ideas on the overall success of the project. The collective decision was made to document our findings and share our research through a free toolkit for teachers and music practitioners looking to work with deaf students. One of the key elements for us was that the toolkit illustrate what we noticed as being the main differences between making music with deaf children, compared to hearing children.

We highlighted specific moments that occurred during the sessions which changed our perspectives as practitioners and which became the foundations on which we built the activities employed during the course of the project. For example, we observed that the children were very

visual based learners and so we created musical games based on clear visual cues that all the children could follow.

The toolkit consists of two sections, a theoretical guide and a practical section with activities accompanied by videos. The theoretical guide is intended to help teachers in areas such as communication, working environment and examples of potential difficulties that can arise during sessions. It also highlights two key areas of learning (inclusion and the relationship between music and movement) that underpin the activities. The practical section includes step-by-step guides to creating activities such as warm ups, musical games aimed at improving musical skills, and main activities. The video examples support the practical elements and provide visual based learning information.

The process of writing this toolkit has been a fantastic opportunity for us to go deeper in our way of teaching and has allowed us to shape and improve our methodology and approach. To have a framework that better informs our learning and decision-making will give us a platform to provide better musical education opportunities for deaf children in the future, and we hope will encourage other music practitioners and school teachers to embed more music in their teaching of deaf children.

The toolkit has been written by Tiziana Pozzo (leader of the weekly sessions) and Dr Kathryn Mason (UCL), thus giving the Toolkit input from two different perspectives: leader and researcher. Both were present at the sessions, allowing them to observe the children from different perspectives as well as monitoring their changes and development over the course of the project. This led to a continuous discussion about the musical approach, and gave the delivery team greater flexibility when trying out different methodologies. This regular insight helped provide the foundations on which this toolkit is based.

<https://www.creativefuturesuk.com/resources>

4. Outcomes and impact

i) Impact on musical development

Pupils' engagement improved over each year period, and increased where group sizes were reduced to match pupils with similar levels of need and ability together. It also increased when pupils were working towards specific goals, such as the RFH performance in Year2, end of term performances in Year3, and during composition activities. Activities which linked music and sound to other themes or visual cues worked particularly well, such as a map of London with key landmarks used in Year3 (Figure 1 above):

"Julia introduces the hand-drawn London map, and shows the children images of the British Museum. Children were very engaged, and started talking about where the museum is located." (Mason, observation notes)

“There are times when the different ‘musical personalities’ of the children can be seen. For example, some of the children express a particular interest in Jazz or Rap and this comes across in their musical choices when they are given the freedom to create their own music.” (Vickers & Mason, UCL, 2018)

Musical progression was tracked using *Sounds of Intent (Sol)*, a musical development framework for children and young people with special needs and disabilities. The Sol research-based framework was specially designed for the special needs school population and grounded in analyses of many hundreds of examples of observed musical behaviour over several years (see <http://soundsofintent.org> and related sources, e.g., Ockelford & Welch, 2012; Ockelford & Welch, 2018; Welch et al 2009).

“The findings for the second and third years of data collection (2016-17 & 2017-18) suggest that there was a highly significant difference in SoI ratings for participants from the schools across the year’s four observation points.

Overall, our data suggest that *Sounding Out* programme has been a success musically, with clear evidence of virtually all pupils achieving more advanced musical behaviours as their academic year progressed. This is very commendable and provides a solid evidential foundation from which to argue that all HI pupils should have access to appropriate music education provision, whether in Primary or Secondary schools to support learning in and through music.” (Welch & Saunders, UCL IoE, 2018)



Pupil in an instrumental workshop with a member of the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, 2015

ii) Impact through music

Throughout the project we looked for traceable impact of the programme on pupils' communication skills and self-confidence. There was a limitation to the data we were able to collect, in that only 11 pupils' parents gave consent for hearing testing by UCL, so we relied on observation and video analysis for many aspects of tracking. There were 3 videoed sessions per school over the year.

For those pupils with parental permission, UCL colleagues tracked progress across the final year of the programme from October 2017 to June 2018 in two areas: (1) 'Speech in noise':

"The noise level adapts to find the point at which 50% of speech is audible. Across the group there was no change in speech in noise perception [not unexpected over this relatively short time-span]. Of interest is one child, an outlier at both time points, who could not do the task at all in October 2017 but by June 2018 was starting to be able to use the information." (Vickers & Mason, UCL, 2018)

(2) Pitch discrimination: scores were obtained in a piano tone discrimination task where the pitch of the note changed by 1, 2 or 3 semitones. There were 6 contrasts each presented 10 times. The same child who improved on the speech perception task from session 1 to 2 improved on her ability to perceive pitch differences by the second session.

"At one of the schools, a large difference in interaction between the practitioners and children can be seen between the first and final videos. In the first video, there is much more reliance on interpreters in comparison to later videos. As communication between the children and adults in the room becomes more comfortable, we observed how communication channels become more direct, with the practitioners using a lot more gesture and direct interaction with the children. This is as one may expect, but the videos offer a useful opportunity to witness the difference. It is likely that the use of soundpainting helped to improve this too, as it bridged the communication gap between the children and practitioners." (Mason)

We also used a bespoke tool to track soft outcomes. Information gathered suggests that both teamwork and self-confidence improved in the majority of tracked students over the programme. This is supported with evidence from session observations:

Child K was "very keen to count the group in: 1, 2, 3, go"

Child M "waits patiently for her turn and observes K"

Child K2 "supported T to clap on 5, when she didn't respond helped her friend understand the game." She also "offered ideas for variations to the games".

At one primary school in particular many pupils became more vocal in expressing their opinions and ideas (including musical ideas), better at waiting their turn during musical activities, and keen to lead/conduct activities when asked.

iii) Impact on the sector

The programme's impact extended beyond the scope of the project's delivery in the participating schools, and included the training of music leaders, school teachers and support staff developing new skills, wider dissemination of the approaches we used through the Toolkit, and presentations about the project's research findings at international music education conferences.

Our own music leaders received a number of professional development sessions led by Music and the Deaf over the course of the 3 years, which were very well received. These offered useful tips, insights and learning: "I found them to be very informative and a source of great ideas. It was a safe space to discuss any difficulties as well as new strategies to improve myself as a teacher of the deaf." (practitioner)

Our music practitioners also reported developing their skills in managing behaviour, harnessing focus, and working out the needs of each individual child in order to enable them to access the activity.

We trained 6 less experienced music leaders through hands-on involvement as workshop assistants in all the sessions. We were delighted that 3 of these trainees went on to become workshop co-facilitators in subsequent years of the project, further developing their skills and confidence. "Having never really done work in classrooms, the process helped unlearn a lot about what teaching should look like. Finding out how it flows, responding to your environment, learning about the expectations of children" (trainee).

School support staff were always included in activities as participants, taking part in the games, following the direction of the practitioners. Their main role was to interpret for the children, but as the musicians and children got to know each other better and could communicate with each other more directly, the support teacher took part in more spontaneous, hands-on support. E.g., on one occasion she asked if she could play the xylophone, (the child who usually played it was absent), and was able to help support the child next to her, whilst taking part in the session as an active participant. Similarly, in sessions when Tiziana used sound painting to conduct the children playing keyboards, the support assistant also played the keyboard and appeared to be more comfortable and willing to express herself musically during the sessions than previously. This gaining in confidence was apparent at both schools.

Overall, *Sounding Out* offered learning on multiple levels, both individual (music leaders, school staff), organisational (for us at Creative Futures, and hopefully for the schools), and for the wider sector, through the influence of the Toolkit and other practice-sharing opportunities which the project offered.

5. Conclusion

Sounding Out was an ambitious three year programme, working with vulnerable children and young people. In addition to its musical aims, there was a considerable research agenda which, despite adding some degree of constraint to the programme's shape and delivery model, enabled us to demonstrate the programme's impacts across multiple domains. We evidenced significant musical development of the participating deaf children, as well as seeing strong social benefits such as increased self-confidence, teamwork, and enhanced communication skills.

These positive outcomes serve to reinforce the findings from our pilot singing programme at another London primary school, where a long-term singing approach with Key Stage 1 pupils has also seen significant musical development, and has also seen longer-term benefits to deaf children's hearing and speaking abilities (a research report on this will be published in 2019).

Sounding Out's impact has spread, both through the online Toolkit which has been widely downloaded, and through papers and presentations at international conference by our research teams at UCL and UCL IoE.

We have invested in training a group of highly skilled music practitioners, now specialists in this field. We look forward to further opportunities to use their skills and experience to support deaf children, and the teachers who work with them, in order to ensure that deaf children have just as much access to making music as their hearing counterparts.

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