Young children's musical activities in the home

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Abstract

The association between human speech, language and communication (SLC) and participation in music is manifest in music education and psychology literature in a number of ways. Research studies into young children's SLC are numerous and policy focus on this area of children's learning and development and their later literacy has been intense. By contrast there is a gap in research into young children's musical worlds especially in the home, even though existing research shows the additional benefits of shared music activities over shared reading activities for children's prosocial skills and music making for parent-child communication. This paper reports on a survey and interviews of parents carried out in England with a focus on the musical activities of children aged birth to five in the home. Contrary to previous studies, findings suggest that children participate in a range of spontaneous shared musical activities in the home daily. The factors that both promote and inhibit musical activities in the home for young children are highlighted. The study also shows that children are participating in a wide range of organised, structured musical activities outside the home. Research is needed to examine the quality of such activities and the appropriateness of formal musical activities for very young children to ensure that formality does not disturb spontaneity in young children's musical worlds.

Key words:

Early years; music; communication; parents and families; policy

Introduction and background

The policy focus on young children's speech, language and communication (SLC) development from successive English Governments has been intense (Blackburn, 2014; 2016) over recent decades. This is because SLC is perceived to be a predictor of later literacy and academic skills. The English Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2014) places communication and literacy as a 'prime' area of learning whilst music is an activity to be promoted under expressive arts and design as a 'specific' area of learning. This is despite the fact that even though early sound discrimination is promoted by music activities ais a foundational step for phonic and vocabulary development. NeverthelessDespite this, the potential of music in early years' settings remains unrecognised or at least undervalued. Lonnie (2010) and Fawcett, 2012) note the contrasting attitudes of staff towards mark-making (literacy) and music-making (creativity) which may result from policy focus on young children's readiness for school for which skills in literacy and maths are prioritised (Whitebread and Bingham, 2011). As noted by Young (2007), the emphasis on language acquisition in early childhood as well as the basic skills of literacy and numeracy means that practitioners and researchers are required to explicitly demonstrate the efficacy of music in supporting children's wider learning rather than appreciating children's creative competencies. There is also concern that the quality and developmental appropriateness of music activities offered to young children and their parents are given due consideration (Young, 2007). Papousek (1996: 108) stressed the importance of informal musical stimulation for very young children, illustrating the importance of children's spontaneous and natural rhythmic patterns:

> For the infancy period, it may be advisable not to disturb the earliest forms of intuitive musical stimulation by rationally guided artificial manipulations and formal educational interventions, but to keep them concealed as a precious part of early parent-infant relationships.'

As far as research into the musical worlds of young children is concerned, the majority has been laboratory-based experimental research with little conducted in home or early years settings, except for children aged three to five where the focus has been on music education (Young, 2007). For example, Gromko (2005) and Bolduc (2009) conducted experiments on children in pre-schools to test the effect of music on phonic development (Gromko) and phonological awareness (Bolduc). For both studies there was an experimental and a control group and both studies highlighted the positive influence of music on children's phonic development/awareness during the study. A further limitation is the research sample which has been predominantly white, middle-class North American or North West European mothers and infants. One study conducted with parents of children under the age of two highlighted the significant exposure that very young children have to music in the home (Young, 2008). Technology has contributed to an increase in this and resulted in multi-modal, often hybridized musical participation. For example, children might watch TV at the same time as singing and dancing along to TV tunes (Young, 2008). Whilst Young (2008) found that young children were exposed to music that was not child-orientated, Lamont (2008) noted by contrast that for children under the age of three, the significance of children's choice and agency over musical activities in multiple contexts such as home and school. The inconsistency between studies that address different age groups highlights the need for this study that explores young children's musical worlds in the home across the age ranges covered by the EYFS (DfE, 2014) (birth to five). Taking a bio-psycho-social perspective,

children's earliest experiences in the home are important for early years practitioners to acknowledge and value in their planning and practice.

Theoretical framework

The study takes a bio-psycho-social approach which acknowledges that children grow and develop in a social and cultural context influenced by the bi-directional interactions and relationships within and between the environments they inhabit that interact with their own unique characteristics and personalities. Their learning and development is therefore socially and culturally constructed through interactions and relationships with others in environments where meanings and languages are shared. The personal activity, setting, caregiver and child characteristics are most likely to be most potent in affecting the course of development. They include those characteristics that either encourage or discourage children's engagement with features of their environments such as people, symbols and artefacts that 'set in motion, sustain, and encourage processes of interaction between the [developing] person and two aspects of the proximal environment: first, the people present in the setting; and second, the physical and symbolic features of the setting that invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with an activity in the immediate environment' (Bronfenbrenner, 1993: 11).

Of particular relevance to this study is Bronfenbrenner's attention to an individual's interaction with the world of symbols and language (semiotic systems) within microsystems which he believed to be significant in understanding the formulation of people's intentions, goals and actions towards each other (Lerner, 2005). This is because music is noted to be used in the home for relational and practical purposes by parents such as calming, soothing and motivating children, contributing to the routine and structure of children's daily habits, such as nap times and meal times and promoting parent-child interactions (Young, 2008; Lamont, 2008; Williams *et. al,* 2015) that serve to promote language.

Literature

As noted earlier early years policy and frameworks have focused on language and literacy while creative activities such as music receive less attention. The association between human speech, language and communication and music is manifest in music education and psychology literature in a number of ways making it difficult to disaggregate musicality and communication. For example, research has shown that a developing foetus can discriminate sounds in the womb from 22 weeks gestation and that early sound discrimination helps to promote later phonic and vocabulary development (Hepper, 1992). In addition, during early social interaction between caregivers and infants there are noticeable patterns of timing, pulse, voice timbre, and gesture that follow many of the rules of musical performance, including rhythm and timing conceptualised by Malloch and Trevarthen (2009) as 'communicative musicality'. Powers and Trevarthen (2010) noted the significance of daily patterns and rhythms that occur in family social patterns and practices in children's musicality and communication, stressing that 'long before they can speak, infants begin adapting to the parental culture and the family responds, giving objects and actions a clear sharable sense for the learner by offering rhythmic participation in rituals and tasks.' For some children, music can serve as a proxy language, for example where children have limited speech (Ockleford, 2010). Music and communication appear to be connected which raises the question of the manner in which communication is prioritised over music in policy.

Hallam (2015) notes the benefits of children participating in music activities (or actively making music) on children's intellectual, social and personal development. She illuminates specifically the advantages of active music making for children's aural perceptive and language skills, literacy skills, aural and visual memory, spatial reasoning and mathematics, intellectual development, executive functioning and self-regulation, creativity and general attainment. Further to this, she proposes that musical activities are recognised as contributing to children's personality, the engagement in education of disaffected children, social cohesion

and inclusion, pro-social behaviour, empathy and emotional intelligence, psychological wellbeing, personal development and self-esteem, health and physical development. It is important to note that she is talking about active involvement in musical activities that involve an instrument and notes some important characteristics of music learning sessions that underpin these claims as well as the methodological issues in studies upon which these claims are made.

Overall, Hallam suggests that there is sufficient evidence that engagement with music plays a major role in developing perceptual processing systems which facilitate the encoding and identification of speech sounds and patterns, the earlier the exposure to active music participation and the greater the length of participation the greater the impact. Transfer of these skills is automatic and contributes not only to language development but also to later literacy (Hallam, 2015). Lonnie (2010) points to the growing imperative to value young children's entitlement to musicality and cultural expression which may require a reframing of a dominant approach that values transfer effects of music making. Furthermore, there is call for caution in the interpretation of claims that music can influence children's achievement in other areas (Young, 2005; Lonnie, 2010). Although there are claims it is likely that children have advanced musical perception skills from an early age;, are likely to have a well-developed sense of musical agency by the age of three;, benefit from engaging in musical activities with their parents and *may* develop greater phonological awareness, reading and language skills as a result of structured musical training (Lonnie, 2010), there is concern that such claims of transferable benefits are 'being exaggerated and based on over-simple cause- and effect readings of research evidence' (Young, 20075: 291). For young children, participation in musical activities does not necessarily and indeed often might not involve a musical instrument, especially in the home environment. This is because young children are likely to participate in singing activities with parents as discussed later. Moreover, early

childhood is a unique stage of development offering opportunities for rapid growth and development in children's skills and competencies particularly in relation to socio-emotional, communication and physical development as noted by the EYFS (DfE, 2014). Research that relates to older children cannot necessarily be transferred to early years contexts of home and early childhood settings (Lonnie, 2010). Furthermore such activities for very young children might often be shared musical activities given the need for them to be supervised in their play and social activities as discussed below.

Benefits of shared music activities

In a longitudinal Australian study that used a large dataset (5,107 children) from the Infant Cohort of the Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) study (parent reports), Williams *et al.,* (2015) aimed to identify the benefits of shared musical activities in the home and any associations between frequency of these activities and later outcomes for children in comparison shared reading activities. On analysing data from children's participation in activities at age two to three years and later outcomes at four to five years, findings suggest that the frequency of shared parent-child music activities (in common with shared reading activities) correlate positively with children's later prosocial skills, vocabulary, numeracy and attentional and emotional regulation. Williams *et al.,* (2015) further found that shared music activities were more strongly associated with later prosocial skills than shared reading activities. Williams and colleagues also point out the possible additional benefits of shared music that relate to the physical and multi-sensory nature of musical activities that might promote intersubjectivity (or shared joint attention) and development of children's fine and gross motor skills.

Where children are engaged in shared musical activities with older generations (such as grandparents) there are benefits to both children and grandparents of 'intergenerational music

making' including socio-emotional benefits and the fostering of intergenerational relationships that can benefit older generations by making them feel valued, introducing them to technology used by younger generations for musical activities and both generations to new genres of music (de Vries, 2012).

Parents play a foundational role in nurturing young children's development including participation in music. Arguably, parents from musical backgrounds are more likely to provide opportunities for participation in musical activities for their children, especially infants (de Vries, 2009; Ilari, 2005) Custodero *et al.,* 2002), however, this does not lead to the conclusion that parents without a musical background do not provide such opportunities. Custodero *et al.,* (2002) found that whilst infants were likely to be exposed to singing and music playing daily, children aged 24 months and older were less likely to experience singing and music making.

In a study of shared music activities provided in the home for children under the age of five, de Vries (2009) (n 63) found from his survey participants that despite parents reporting that they valued the benefit of music for children's development, only 18% of parents played music to their children daily, 9% sang to or with their children daily, 14% encouraged musical play with their children, 11% played instruments with their children and none encouraged their children to create/make up their own music. Although nearly half (49%) of parents played instruments with their children once a week or less and a similar percentage encouraged children to create their own music, they also reported that children's participation in musical activities was something that was best organised outside the home due to their own musical incompetence, as exemplified by these statement from focus group participants:

> I had one of my kids go through pre-school two years ago and.. they just love music. They seem to do it every day there, so it's covered. Which is lucky

> because I'm so unmusical. I'm no musician, just like I'm no scientist or maths whiz. So I don't do those things with my children, that's what their teachers do. But I do read to my kids – everyone does, you know how important that is, the whole literacy thing.

de Vries (2009: 398)

In the extract above, tThe parents seemed to liken music to academic subjects and not within their own competency of parents, whereas reading was something that parents can do and should do. It seems that the parent in this extract is suggesting that music is something that is taught and is technically akin to science or maths, whereas reading is an informal activity that can be shared between parents and children. This is especially surprising when we consider that 51 of his survey participants and seven out of eleven focus group participants reported having a musical background. Other reasons for the low levels of shared daily engagement in music activities in the home included lack of time, lack of parental knowledge about music and parents reporting that children could access music independently through use of technology such as videos and CDs which did not require adult participation. Parents often report that the car provides an ideal opportunity to engage in shared music activities with children (de Vries, 2009; Ilari, 2005). This suggests that parent's confidence as well as time and place play a significant part in determining the fulfilment of children's entitlement to participation in musical activities. Given earlier comments about the risks of children's learning being formalised too early (Papousek, 1996 coupled with concerns about the quality of formal musical activities for young children and their parents (Young, 2007), this raises concern for family practices especially in light of Williams and colleagues findings that shared music activities are beneficial.

As already identified the majority of studies reported here relate to children outside of the UK and generally older children. A systematic review of early years music making (Lonnie, 2010: 3) found a 'relative lack of published research relating specifically to early years music making.' The study reported in this paper aimed to identify how young children are involved in musical activities in home. The aim was not to contribute further to psycho-acoustic debates about the significance of rhythm, sound and music for emotional and social development as these have been discussed elsewhere (for example Hallam, 2015; Lonnie, 2010). Rather the researcher acknowledged the body of evidence that supports the benefits of children's participation in musical activities and their spontaneous musicality. The focus of this study was to explore children's lived experiences in the home through parent reports, given the acknowledged body of wisdom that the home learning environment has a significant impact on children's later social and academic achievement and overall wellbeing (Sylva *et.al,* 2004) and is constant with the bio-psycho-social model (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). The researcher was interested in parents' perceptions of what constituted musical activity and what kinds of activities children participated in during solitary play, play with siblings and peers and shared musical activities with adults. This study aimed to address the following questions.

Research questions were:

- What are the views, perceptions and reported practices of interested stakeholders (parents) in young children's musical activities?
- What are the perceived benefits of and barriers to young children's musical activities in the home?
- What musical activities are young children involved in within home settings?
- What further research into early years musicality can be identified from this study?

Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was adopted for this study that combined an online survey with interviews in order to obtain a more in-depth view than could be gathered from a survey alone. The survey was designed and trialled with three parents and carers of children aged birth to five before being launched and promoted using existing networks and social media. Parents, grandparents and foster carers of children aged birth to five residing in England were invited to participate. Attempts were made to promote the survey as widely as possible to a range of different social and cultural groups, for example, parenting groups aimed at both genders, groups for grandparents and minority ethnic and cultural groups, fostering networks and general social media groups.. Questions included closed questions relating to demographics of participants and number and ages of children in the family as well as the frequency, category and role of technology in musical activities that young children participated in and these allowed for descriptive quantitative data. Open questions about the perceived benefit of young children's participation in musical activities in the home, organised musical activities outside the home and general comments provided qualitative data.

In developing the survey account was taken of themes generated by previous studies such as the nature and frequency of musical activities in the home, whether they were solitary or shared, children's preferences for musical activities, activities outside the home, parents own musical backgrounds and any influence this might have on children's participation. The perceived benefits of children's participation in musical activities as well as any barriers was also of interest

Following the survey parents were invited to participate in an interview to explore emerging themes in more detail. Parents were asked about the families' musical background, the

nature, frequency, context as well as barriers and benefits. They were also asked about children's participation in organised musical activities outside the home. Questions for the interviews were derived from responses to the survey.

Ethical approval was obtained from Birmingham City University Faculty Academic Ethics Committee. In addition, the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) were followed at all times in relation to researcher conduct. With regard to the online survey participants were provided with sufficient information about the aims and nature of the study to decide whether to participate and provided with contact details of the Principal Investigator should they have any questions or cause for concern. Interviews were conducted at a time and place convenient to participants. During interviews (which were digitally recorded) participants verbal and non-verbal signals were observed at all times for signs of discomfort or distress. Participants were provided the opportunity to verify the contents of interview transcripts and comment on emergent themes from analysis.

Analysis

Data were analysed to answer the research questions at the first level allowing common and discrepant themes to emerge subsequently. Research questions identified *a priori* themes and thereafter emerging themes were identified. Qualitative content analysis provided the opportunity to organise, condense and categorise data through a process of interpretation of and inference from participants' original expressions. This was an inductive process rather than being theory guided and deductive. A process of reducing and clustering to form initial codes or sub-categories that described followed. The unit of textual analysis was an extract from a transcription with factual connection to an idea and issue. After initial codes had been identified in data of two or three transcripts, codes were compared with each other according to similarities and differences to determine which data "look alike" and "feel alike" as

suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985: 347). This clustering process led to the formulation of sub-categories with some minor differences in the same stakeholder group. In the second stage, main categories were formulated by abstracting and combining sub-categories of each stakeholder group. Categories stayed close to the original expressions of the information; broad categories included more abstraction of the ideas of which categories were presenting. Member checking was employed by sharing emerging themes with participants to increase validity and trustworthiness. The data analysis was informed by processes of thematic analysis – a foundational analytical method designed to identify, represent and report thematic patterns that occur within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Data were transcribed, read and initial codes were then generated that reflected recognition of musical participation or the presence or absence of benefits to children and their relationship with others. The inductive codes that emerged from the participant's responses to the semi-structured interview questions were then compared with responses to the survey interview. This was done to strengthen and add depth to the emerging patterns by providing examples of similar and diverse perspectives within each code.

Findings and discussion

Participants

A total of 125 responses were received to the survey. Of these 80% were parents, 17% were grandparents and 3% were foster carers. The majority (94%) were female and 89% of White British heritage making this a narrow socio-cultural participant population in common with previous studies. In addition, 70% were married and qualified to degree or post-graduate level. Interestingly, 20 participants reported that they had a musical background or that the family was musical.

The participants had 157 children between them 52% of which were boys and 48% girls. The number of children reported in each age band was similar with the majority being the in 12 – 24 and 48-60 month age bands of the EYFS as shown in table 1 below. The children reported on here therefore include those children in the broad birth to five age category of the EYFS that previous studies have not addressed. A few children were reported to have delays and difficulties in their learning and development.

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Age groups used are in line with those in the EYFS. As might be expected the number of children attending early years settings rose incrementally with age.

Thirty-one participants provided contact details in their survey response and of these only five responded positively to a request to participate in an interview. All five participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule that allowed for participants' own reflections on children's early experiences in the home. Two participants were interviewed at the University campus, two were interviewed at their home and one participant was interviewed by telephone according to preferences. Children reported on in interviews were aged from 11 months to four years of age. Two interview participants reported that they had a strong musical background. Another participant reported that although she did not have a musical background, the family had a strong theatrical background, including dancing and singing, which had increased her experience of, and interest in, music. The remaining two were not particularly musical. Details of participants are shown in table 2 below:

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Themes

Themes emerged from analysis of the data in the areas of the benefit of participation in musical activities for children's overall development; the nature and frequency of musical activities that children participate in within the home; the role of adults and technology in children's musical activities; the range of organised musical activities that children participate in outside the home; the perceived difference between spontaneous musicality organised and structured musical activities.

i) Value of participation in musical activities

All participants from the survey felt children's participation in musical activitives was important. The reasons given for this were not related to music education but rather the perceived benefits for children's learning, development and wellbeing as shown in figure 1 below:

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The primary benefit was that participation in musical activities served to promote children's communication skills. Included in this were the skills of listening, speech, language and self-expression and communicating with pre-linguistic infants, which serves to reinforce Government policy focus on speech, language and communication. Following this, children's enjoyment and sense of fun was thought to be important as was the benefit for children's 'brain development'. As can be seen from figure 1, the perceived benefits were included aspects related to spirituality and humanity and emotions as well as the noted transfer benefits (Hallam, 2015):

> Music is part of being human. Interaction with music allows children to express their emotions and feelings including sadness, love, singing, happiness, joy, imagination, movement, anger, quiet time, dance, joy and exuberance (survey participant 13, parent).

> It [music] helps to develop children's communication and language. Children learn best through activities and experiences that engage all senses for example music dance rhymes and songs (survey participant 52, grandparent).

These findings were echoed by interview participants who mentioned the benefits for children's sense of enjoyment and contribution to their communication development. Also mentioned by one parent each was that music participation in music offers distinctive benefits in terms of inclusion, participation, calming, soothing, engagement and adult-child interaction "on a different level".

ii) Frequency of involvement in musical activities

In contrast to previous studies (for example de Vries, 2009) the majority of parents (73%) reported that children participate in musical activities every day, with the remainder reporting that children participated less frequently but in most cases at least weekly.

Twenty-one participants qualified this answer by saying that music was a part of everyday life, nine said that they sing to their children 'all the time'. For eight participants, music was something that happened in particular contexts, as "music/singing is something that takes place mostly in the car" whilst for five grandparents, the frequency was determined by the frequency of visits from grandchildren. Two participants said that frequency depends on the weather as music was something that happened indoors and if the weather was fine, the children would be outdoors.

> Music is part of our life. We sing to make things interesting for example phonics, car journeys. Our son is autistic and music helps him to reduce anxiety and relax (survey participant 63, parent)

This highlights the spontaneous, inclusive and shared social nature of musical activities in the home

From interviews, in terms of defining music in the home, two participants described this in terms of occurring daily, being a shared activity and representing an important aspect of family practices and processes stressing that music is "part of everyday life" and "part of everyday routines" such as feeding, hygiene routines and food preparation routines. In this regard, music was useful for calming, communicating with and motivating children and important for routines as noted by Powers and Trevarthen (2010) and is an important aspect of the characteristics of the microsystem noted by Bronfenbrenner to promote development. Four participants mentioned the range of musical instruments (both toy and real instruments) that were available for their child, whilst the remaining parent stressed the rhythms and patterns that inhered in nursery rhymes as being a significant part of her child's music in the home. Whilst music activities could occur "anywhere" and everywhere" including in the car, where music could be a distraction to boring car journeys, there were particular times of the day where there was an increased likelihood of music (especially singing) for younger children (birth to two years old). These included bath-time, bed-time, waiting for food to cook, feeding times, hygiene routines such as nappy changing:

> If I am stuck in traffic I find either singing or telling a story with sound effects is a good way of distracting them from a boring experience... for babies it's about fun, they swing their bodies in time to the music, in line with the music spontaneously.

Once children matured beyond infancy and toddlerhood, three parents reported that children were more likely to prefer stories to singing and nursery rhymes highlighting the influence of macrotime (Bronfenbrenner, 1993) that acknowledges changes over time. One parent

emphasised the role of technology in enhancing children's musical experiences, reinforcing Young's (2008) findings:

> I think family time is very different now, it's very easy to plug children into a TV or put the ipad in front of them and I think they're getting music that way.

Parents felt that their own role was to join in with whatever their child initiated, to initiate musical activities for their child to join in, to model enjoyment of music and correct use of instruments, to facilitate participation in musical activities and praise children for their "music making".

iv) Typology of musical activity

Findings suggest that children are exposed to and participate in multi-modal musical activities within the home as shown in figure 2.

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Participation in shared musical activities was reported by participants more frequently than solitary musical activities. The activity that children were reported to participate in most frequently was listing to music with others, followed by singing with others and dancing to music with others, children played musical instruments with others less frequently than other shared activities. Included in the 'other' category were:

- Using music apps on touchscreen technology (ipad);
- Finding out what objects make different sounds, the creation of sounds using different objects;
- Creating their own music with instruments, sound makers and their own voice;
- Being sung to (for example bed-time lullabies);
- Performing actions to songs.

In interview participants elaborated on this by describing children's favourite musical activities, parents related a range of activities that including singing, using percussion instruments, reading nursery rhyme books with CDs. Participants reported their own preference for singing with their child above other musical activities, although one parent added that she preferred musical nursery rhymes that involve movement and interaction:

> [I like] anything that has gestures and movement because I like turning off the TV and engaging them in that way. For example, "row, row, row your boat" when E was born was a great motivator to do my stomach exercise, so it was multi-purpose.

v) Access to musical activities

From the survey, children's participation in musical activities appeared to be associated with the use of instruments for a number of parents which suggests a narrow perception of what constitutes musical activity. This perceived limitation had the potential to represent a barrier to participation. For example, although the majority of participants reported that children had free access to musical activities of some sort in the home (84%), some parents reported that access to particular activities was limited for a variety of factors:

- The cost of buying real instruments for five participants;
- The child's age and inability to utilise real instruments for five participants;
- Adult supervision is required for real instruments or activities that require the use of technology for four participants;
- Limited instruments available within the home for two participants;
- Parents had hearing difficulties making the 'noise' of children's musical activities a barrier for one participant;

- Grandparents' profession (childminder) meant that instruments needed to be stored safely for one participant;
- Adult time was a barrier for one participant;
- One child was reported to "not engage with music."

From interviews, three parents mentioned parents or children's lack of confidence in music (especially in relation to the use of instruments) as a potential barrier to children's participation in musical activities. It was stressed by one of these parents that this barrier could be mediated to some extent by parent and toddler groups in encouraging parents to "join in" and "have a go":

> One of the main barriers is confidence with parents in instigating music making. I really like what all the toddler groups offer in terms of encouraging parents to do things, you don't have to have an amazing voice and music can be as cheap or as expensive as you want it to be – the only barriers are those that people put in the way.

Other barriers included distraction from other toys, cost of instruments or lack of parent interest/motivation. One parent suggested that a database of online resources be available for parents so that they could easily find videos and other resources to share with their children that had been professionally trialled and validated.

vii) The role of technology in children's musical activities

The role of technology and media in children's musical lives was significant from the survey in providing opportunities for participation in musical activities and hybridising musical exposure. For example listening to music was often through the media of television rather than listening to music autonomously. The role of technology in children's participation in

musical activities in the home was influential for 65% participants across the range of activities discussed, even with activities such as playing instruments alone.

vii) Children's participation in organised musical activities inside and outside the home

From the survey, a relatively small number of children (11.6%) were reported to be participating in organised musical activities in the home including lessons to use a piano (six), a guitar (three), a violin (two), a cello (two) and a clarinet (one). However, two participants stated that children at this age were too young for instruments and were "playing around with sounds." By contrast 64% said that their children participated in a range of organised musical activities outside the home (64%) as shown below in table 3.

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The perceived benefits of children participating in organised musical activities were similar but subtly different to those for children's spontaneous and shared activities with families inside the home as shown in figure 3. For example, the primary benefit for organised musical activities related to children's social interaction and social development with communication being secondary to this and fun/enjoyment being less significant than for spontaneous musical activities.

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There was no association made between organised musical activities and spirituality or humanity as was the case for spontaneous activities reported above.

> All aspects of the EYFS can be supported through music sessions e.g. music from other cultures, counting through song, moving to music (survey participant 22, parent).

From interviews, all participants reported that their child either currently attended organised musical activities outside the home or they were considering enrolling their child for them in the future. Typical costs reported by parents ranged from £1.00 per session for parent and toddler groups to £5.00 per session for specialist music groups and parents travelled a range of distances from one mile to ten miles. The perceived benefits for children and parents in attending musical activities outside the home were reported as socialisation benefits and children's confidence reported by two parents and children's music education by another two. The remaining participant stated that she and her child had gained a repertoire of songs and rhymes that they could practice at home and stressed that many parents attending musical activities with their child had little prior knowledge of rhymes and songs to engage in with their child. In this sense, organised musical activities provided an important social and relationship function for families. However, one participant expressed concern about qualifications and knowledge held by professionals who organised music groups. She was unsure whether they had sufficient knowledge of child development or whether there were any safeguarding procedures that were required. One participant expressed her concern over the quality of music provision within her child's early years setting, echoing concerns from Young (2007) about the quality of musical activities offered to young children in formal settings.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper has reported on the findings from an online survey and semi-structured interviews with parents, grandparents and foster carers of children aged birth to five residing in England and is the first study to address the musical activities of young children across the age range of the EYFS (DfE, 2014) in the home in the England. The narrow socio-cultural sample of self-selected responses to the survey is a limitation. However, 120 participants responded to

the online survey which provided a sufficiently large sample for this study. Interviews provided the opportunity to explore aspects of children's musical activities in the home in more depth. For example, parents own musical backgrounds, contextual information such as musical spaces and places and a more in depth exploration of parents, grandparents and foster carers' understanding of the benefits of children's participation in musical activities was possible. However, it would have been beneficial to interview a more significant sample. Using social media to promote surveys and invite participants is problematic and can result in a narrow self-selected sample. Further research could explore how to interest a wider range of participants.

The first questions that this study aimed to address were:

- What are the views, perceptions and reported practices of interested stakeholders (parents) in young children's musical activities?
- What are the perceived benefits of and barriers to young children's musical activities in the home?

From the survey, twenty participants reported that they had a musical background or that the family was musical and two of these were interviewed. There were no significant differences in the frequency or type of musical activity that were reported or perceptions of the benefits of musical activities reported by this group of participants which contrasts which the findings from de Vries (2009) that parents' own musical backgrounds influenced their confidence and motivation to encourage musical activities in the home. One interesting aspect that emerged was that participants were very aware of and interested in their children's musical worlds. They described children's musical experiences in elaborate detail recognising the role of musicality in the rhythms, patterns and practices of daily life. Music is something that is available all the time, anywhere for everyone.

In contrast to previous studies (for example de Vries, 2009) young children in this study were participating in musical activities daily in most cases and in almost all cases at least weekly. The range of musical activities was extremely varied and adults were joining in with children's musical activities. All participants, including Grandparents were joining in with young children's musical activities enjoyed and anticipated visits from their grandchildren stressing the intergenerational benefits of shared musical activities identified by de Vries (2012). Given the associations between the frequency of shared musical activities and children's later prosocial skills, vocabulary, numeracy and attentional and emotional regulation identified by Williams *et al.,* (2015), this is an important finding. The role of technology in children's musical activities is an interesting finding and is consistent with Young's (2008) findings. This study quantifies this role and demonstrates the level of influence and hybridisation.

Participants in this study appeared to recognise the value and importance of children's spontaneous musical activities and to encourage it, describing the benefit for children's holistic development and the role of music in attachment and bonding. Although participants acknowledged the perceived transfer effects, there was also recognition of children's creative competencies (Young, 2007), enjoyment of music and spontaneity.

However, in common with de Vries's study, participants also appear to have identified benefits for children in attending organised, structured musical activities both within the home, but more substantially outside the home. In interviews it appeared that this was related to children's musical development and building parents' and children's confidence to participate. It was interesting that only one parent in interview expressed concern about the nature and quality of professional qualifications needed to organise musical activities for

young children and parents as this was a matter of concern raised by Young (2007) and one participant from survey in this study.

- The third and final question that this study sought to address was hat further research into early years musicality can be identified from this study?

The high number of organised, structured activities that children participate in outside the home is an area worthy of further investigation to ensure that experiences offered to young children do not serve to formalise their innate musicality thereby 'disturbing the earliest forms of intuitive musical stimulation by rationally guided artificial manipulations and formal educational interventions' Papousek (1996: 108). In addition a wider socio-economic and socio-cultural sample of participants would be beneficial to explore the way that the benefits and promotion/facilitation of musical activities in the home for very young children differs across different family practices and interactions. The role of technology in young children's musical worlds could be explored further.

Adopting a bio-psycho-social approach to the study suggests that the characteristics within the microsystem of home that influence young children's musical participation in the home relate to adult confidence in their own musicality and ability or interest/motivation to participate with their child, perceptions about the requirement for instruments to be available for musical activity and any cost or availability factors that relate to this. More research into these aspects would be beneficial. A similar study exploring the perceptions of early years practitioners in this regard would be interesting and useful.

The study also calls into question the policy rationale for prioritising communication and literacy over creative, spontaneous activities that appear to be valued by caregivers and have the potential to promote communicative intersubjectivity between adults and children.

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