Lack of training – and confidence – has often limited practitioners’ understanding of the range of musical experiences that young children should enjoy in early years settings. Brand new guidance, called Musical Development Matters, aims to help professionals, and parents, to see the musical attributes of young children and offers ideas on how to nurture children’s musical development. In so doing, it is hoped the document will raise the profile of music in early childhood and open up opportunities for children to enjoy their innate musicality.

The guidance has been made possible by a west London project, Tri-Music Together, and the enthusiasm and involvement of the early childhood music community (see box overleaf). Piloted in various early years settings in London, Birmingham and Warwickshire (see box on page 26), the document is now free to download from Early Education at www.early-education.org.uk/musical-development-matters (though hard copies can also be bought from Early Education).

Free online supporting material is also available on the Youth Music website (see Further information).

Helen Moylett, early years consultant and co-author of the non-statutory guidance Development Matters, says, ‘Musical Development Matters is a wonderful resource for all early years practitioners who know music is really important but maybe are not quite sure what their role is. The four aspects of engaging in music are explained clearly and there are lots of practical suggestions for promoting musicality and enjoying a huge range of musical experiences confidently with young children.’

**FORMAT AND CONTENT**

As the name suggests, Musical Development Matters is presented in the style of

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Music deserves greater prominence in the early years in order to allow children to draw upon their inborn musicality.
Development Matters, as the format is familiar and popular with practitioners.

Aspects
In the document, musical development is split into four aspects:
- Hearing and Listening
- Vocalising and Singing
- Moving and Dancing
- Exploring and Playing.

Age ranges
Musical Development Matters follows the same six age ranges as Development Matters. As with the original guidance, practitioners need to bear in mind that: ‘Children develop at their own rates, and in their own ways. The development statements and their order should not be taken as necessary steps for individual children. They should not be used as checklists.’

Themes
Developmental information and advice on how to create and support enabling musical environments fall under three themes:
- A Unique Child – Observing what a child is learning
- Positive Relationships – What adults could do
- Enabling Environments – What adults could provide.

Principles
Musical Development Matters is underpinned by the same principles as the EYFS and so is committed to inclusive practice and meeting the needs of the Unique Child – as reflected, for example, in the recommendations:
- Use songs and rhymes from all cultures and find out what songs, rhymes and music babies hear at home.

Musical Development Matters: How it came about
Musical Development Matters has emerged out of the Tri-borough Music Hub, the lead organisation for music education across three London Boroughs – Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington & Chelsea, and Westminster.

In 2015, the hub established the Tri-borough Early Years Music Consortium, and in 2016 it created the Tri-Music Together (TMT) project, funded by Youth Music.

The aim of TMT – initiated by the head of the Tri-borough Music Hub – was to develop early years music provision across the three boroughs through a workforce development programme consisting of targeted support and continuing professional development.

An aspect of the project was to create resources to support early childhood music – and a legacy. As an associate of Early Education and the TMT EYFS strategic lead, I was able to create this guidance with their support and that of Youth Music. This has enabled the TMT legacy to spread not just across the three boroughs in west London but further afield.

The hub's consortium partners are:
- Chickenshed Kensington and Chelsea, www.chickenshed.org.uk/kensington-chelsea
- Creative Futures, www.creativefuturesuk.com
- Inspire-works, www.inspire-works.co.uk
- LBHF Children’s Centres
- RBKC Children’s Centres
- Royal Albert Hall, www.royalalberthall.com
- Royal College of Music, www.rcm.ac.uk
- Sound Connections, www.sound-connections.org.uk
- The Voices Foundation, www.voices.org.uk/about-us
- Tri-borough School Standards (Local Authority Children’s Services)
- WCC Children’s Centres
- Wigmore Hall, https://wigmore-hall.org.uk
Be aware and value that children may use a varied range of tones in their home language and within their singing and vocal play.

Characteristics of Effective Learning
The document and its supporting material also incorporate the Characteristics of Effective Learning (CoEL), as it is useful to apply them to children's music learning and musical development. A free resource on the CoEL in music is available on the Youth Music website (see Further information).

WHAT REALLY MATTERS?
Before dipping into Musical Development Matters, practitioners should first reflect on what purpose music serves in early childhood – and, indeed, in all our lives.

Practitioners tend to view music largely in terms of how it can support areas of learning and development within the EYFS – for example, to support speech and language development. While this is valid, it is also hoped that MDM will help practitioners to recognise, understand and value children's innate musicality and music-making.

I have written the guidance not to ensure that children are doing what they ought to be doing, but to offer examples and possibilities of what children often do naturally and how educators can then nurture this.

I often say to practitioners, 'Put your music goggles on when you go into your setting!' By viewing what is happening in their settings from a music perspective, practitioners can start to see that young children create music in many and varied ways – for example, they will often be:

- vocalising within their water play
- playing rhythmically with bricks as they build
- creating sound effects to accompany their play with vehicles and animals
- singing short phrases in their role play.

Settings are, in fact, full of rich and spontaneous music-making! So, offering young children opportunities to enjoy and explore music should be seen not just as a 'learning experience'. Rather it should be viewed as a way of nurturing children's innate musicality and helping to deliver on children's right to cultural, artistic and creative experiences – and a broad and balanced education. All children should have the right to quality musical experiences from birth.

I wholeheartedly agree that music-making can aid learning – and I have first-hand experience of this. However, music education at primary and secondary level is not offered solely to support other areas of learning and development – and nor should this be the case in the early years.

Nancy Stewart, early years consultant and co-author of Development Matters, notes, 'Whether we consider ourselves to be musical or not, we all engage in music as part of being human – and we can enrich children's experiences by building on this. This guidance will help focus attention on the range and depth of musical interactions throughout the day.'

Key ways to support children's musicality
Observing and building on children's natural musicality is a beauty and a challenge – music can be noisy and affect other areas of the setting. So, it is important to plan carefully for music-making. The key ways to nurture and support this natural musicality are:

- start with what children can do
- tune into their music-making
- seek out and value their musical preferences
- play musically with them
- value their music-making by documenting it and sharing it with them, their parents and carers
- offer children a wide range of musical experiences, drawing on the four aspects in Musical Development Matters.

CURRENT CONTEXT
When considering how to use Musical Development Matters in their planning, it is worth practitioners viewing the guidance in the context of current practice, policy and training.

Training and experiences
Music components within early childhood qualifications and courses are minimal
or non-existent, as are CPD opportunities in early childhood music education, resulting in a lack of knowledge and understanding within the workforce.

With a lack of knowledge comes a lack of confidence, which may also have its roots in unhappy childhood experiences of music. Various practitioners have talked to me about:
- being asked to mime and not sing while performing in a school choir
- being told that they were not musical because they had failed to play, for example, a triangle at the correct moment within a piece of music.

What is important to bear in mind here is that both examples relate to an adult-led model of practice and are geared towards performance. Music is much more than this. Musical experiences should not solely be adult-led and/or focused on performance; they can also be spontaneous, child-led and enjoyed alone or with others.

Music specialists
It can be tempting for settings to hand over responsibilities for children’s musical experiences to specialists – particularly if their programmes come with promises of aiding infant brain development. However, there are various points to consider here.

As for practitioners, training and CPD opportunities for musicians wanting to specialise in early childhood music are minimal, so creating a void – practitioners lacking an understanding of music, and musicians lacking an understanding of child development.

The field of early childhood music is also unregulated. As a result, some music programmes have been created and are delivered by people with little or no knowledge of early childhood and – specifically – early childhood musical development. Often adult-led and not tailored to the needs of individual children, these sessions tend to be ‘watered-down’ versions of programmes suitable for older children.

However, there are many highly professional, experienced and skilled early childhood music specialists who are working to bridge this gap through their work. Some of these specialists are:

- **Music specialists**
  - **Birmingham nursery schools**
    - Musical Development Matters was piloted in 25 of Birmingham’s 27 nursery schools. Laura Brodie, head of Allens Croft Nursery School and national leader of education for Birmingham Nursery Schools Teaching School Alliance, says, ‘Using the document has helped practitioners to see the musicality in young children and recognise the music in what they were doing already – it has illuminated their work.’
    - As well as providing practitioners with new information on the musical development of young children, Musical Development Matters, she says, has also made cross-curricular learning clearer – for example, how music links to language and physical development. The document gives practitioners a clear structure, showing how the different aspects of music develop in young children and the kind of experiences to offer and build on for each of these aspects, so enabling settings to broaden the range of activities they offer. ‘I think the document is accessible to practitioners, whatever their level,’ Ms Brodie adds.
  - **York Rise Nursery School, Camden, London**
    - Among the London settings piloting the document was York Rise Nursery School, where Becca Coles is head and Anjana Rinne is music leader.
      - Full-time team member Ms Rinne has accessed the Camden Early Years music leader course and is studying for the CME: EC Level 4 qualification (see Further information). Two other staff members have also attended Camden’s early childhood music training.
      - Ms Coles and Ms Rinne write: ‘Using Musical Development Matters has given music an importance and a place within our planning, and it has helped staff’s confidence grow in using music throughout the curriculum.
        - ‘The document is a useful and effective tool, which we have used during internal training, as it prompts staff to use different ideas and provides good guidelines on what children can achieve. All the staff like its familiar format and find it easy to use. It complements and completes other early years documents and is also helpful when sharing the importance of music in the early years with parents.
        - ‘Having a music leader using this tool, along with other trained staff, means there is now a strong focus on music in our provision. Music flows through all aspects of children’s play and areas of the curriculum, although this is a work in progress. Children engage freely in musical activities, and singing songs and musical conversations happen organically throughout the nursery.
        - ‘The greater focus on music has also had a significant impact on settling children, helping children manage their feelings and behaviour and supporting children with SEND.
        - ‘Parents are much more engaged with our music and are now talking about sharing music at home, so we are developing home resources such as musical treasure boxes.’
childhood music practitioners who can help settings to develop their practice. And what is encouraging is that the early childhood music community is developing and becoming recognised as a profession. Last year saw the launch of the Certificate for Music Educators: Early Childhood. Equivalent to a Level 4 NVQ, this qualification will hopefully help to address the current disconnect between early childhood education and music education and develop expertise within the education sector. Inviting well-qualified specialists into a setting on a regular basis can be valid and rewarding for children and practitioners. However, I feel that specialists should be used to advise on and enhance music provision, not deliver it entirely. Music, like maths or any other aspect of early learning, should be woven into daily practice and planning.

Government policy and funding

National Plan for Music Education
Early years music has been poorly served by Government policy and funding. In 2011, the Department for Education (DfE) set out in the National Plan for Music Education (NPME) its vision for schools, arts and education organisations to drive excellence in music education. Although the plan acknowledges that ‘music teaching starts in the early years’, funding is available only for children aged five and above. National policy does not include music-making for children aged from birth to four.

There are indications that the NPME will include the early years from 2020, and while this is to be welcomed, it will also bring complexities in terms of administering the funding.

Music and the early years curriculum
The Government’s ‘school readiness’ agenda has prompted many settings to focus on particular aspects of the early years curriculum such as phonics, literacy and maths, and view music only in terms of ‘learning’.

Now it has proposed a revised goal within Expressive Arts & Design (EAD) entitled ‘Performing’, so stripping this area of the curriculum of breadth and spontaneity and viewing creativity only in terms of an end product. Much of music-making and dance have been lost within the revised goals for EAD, other than a specific reference to ‘well-known nursery rhymes and songs’ – which also ignores children’s varied cultural backgrounds. There is no mention of children creating their own music and songs or exploring sound.

AND FINALLY...
I hope that Musical Development Matters is timely in terms of current Government policy and the political agenda. It demonstrates the importance of music in early childhood and how it should not be limited to such a narrow view as suggested in the draft revised Early Learning Goals.

I was very fortunate to have a rich and varied musical childhood, which gave me a passion and lifelong love for music and benefited me personally, physically, socially and emotionally. I hope that Musical Development Matters will help contribute to children enjoying a broad and balanced early childhood education, full of rich musical experiences. This is every child’s right.

Musical Development Matters will be launched on 6 September at the Royal Albert Hall. The event will bring together leaders in the fields of early childhood education, arts and music in England to hear about the outcomes of the Tri-Music Together project and to engage in conversation about the importance of music in early childhood.

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