

Information Exchange



March 1994 Issue No. 40



Special Features in this Issue:-

'It's all Done with Mirrors!'
'Are You a Good Juggler?'

'UV or not UV?'
'Learning Object Permanence'

This edition's front cover 'stars' are Michelle Marsh and Adam Ockleford. 'If music be the food of love; play on' . . . these two look very much in tune in exploring the wonder of sound. Adam is the RNIB Music Adviser based at Garrow House, London.

MISSION STATEMENT

Information Exchange celebrates the journey that we *all* make along the 'journey of understanding' about the children, the young people and the adults who share our lives. It exists as a forum & support for *all* who have, along with sensory needs, other complex ones.

Information Exchange is compiled with help from 'many corners': ideas written and spoken, ideas seen, experiences shared.

Information Exchange has a buzz which is fostered when we get together. We delight in new found discoveries: sensory trinkets, soothing aromas, new concepts, issues, rag-bag ideas. We strive to help our daughters and sons, students and friends to access the quality of life they so richly deserve. It is also for all of us; parents, carers, teachers, therapists who

need to gain confidence from each other by challenging and discussing and thereby learning and growing.

Information Exchange is fully independent. The editorial team give their time willingly and voluntarily and work hard to bring out the magazine three times a year. We have readers across the globe and it is our policy to reflect this as far as we are able.

As the Information Exchange network evolves then so do the possibilities for helping each other: however, our basic remit of exchanging information in an accessible and unbiased way remains unaltered.



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Music . . . A Source of Enjoyment for All

Music is for everyone to enjoy . . . irrespective of their abilities or challenges to learning. All cultures have regarded music as intrinsically worthwhile, and from the earliest times music has enhanced the quality of life of countless millions of people. Without doubt, visually impaired children with additional disabilities should be given the same opportunities to relish that heritage as anyone else.

In fact, such children may get *more* from music than most other youngsters do. Research has shown that visually impaired children - particularly those with little or no sight from birth - are likely to develop listening skills to a higher degree than average. This ability may well be unaffected by other handicaps: indeed, some of the most musically able children I have worked with have had severe learning difficulties.

For most people, the experience of music consists largely of *listening* - to the radio, television, tapes and CD's - an activity available on equal terms to most visually impaired children with additional disabilities. Remember, though, that live music offers a more powerful stimulus than recordings can ever do. Sitting near a large band, orchestra or choir in full flow can be an electrifying experience; for some children a source of intense pleasure. If the possibility of your child disrupting others in the audience is a worry, then consider attending a rehearsal first to test reactions on both sides. Perhaps your child could meet the musicians afterwards, and get to grips with the instruments: they often have a fascinating feel and smell as well as sounding good! Aim to give your child a broad range of musical experiences, and gauge the response to each carefully. Some children will love the sound of church bells while others may prefer the organ; reggae will appeal to one group while traditional jazz captivates another; some may enjoy folk-singing while others will be entranced by the sophisticated sound of a string quartet.

Music can affect the way we feel, and different types of music are capable of arousing children or calming them down. Familiar pieces can provide reassurance - especially important in the absence of vision. A favourite tape at bed-time, for example, may offer a blind child the same sort of comfort that his sighted brother would get from glancing at well-known objects in the room as he prepares to sleep . . . the gently repeating patterns of notes soothe the ear in the same way that the sleepy eye is reassured by tracing the familiar pattern on the wallpaper.

A *music therapist* may be the most appropriately trained person to oversee your child's musical



Simon flexing the Flexatone.

development. National contacts are the *British Society for Music Therapy* (081-368 8879) and the *Association of Professional Music Therapists* (0223-880377). However, I don't subscribe to the view that purposeful musical activities with children can be undertaken only by those with letters after their name, who have had the 'magic training'. We all have music within us that we can share, and your child may well benefit from having a range of different musical influences.

Within a school context, it may be wise to stress the educational content of musical activities, since every child up to the age of 14 is entitled to music in the National Curriculum, which is sufficiently broad to offer something for everybody. For instance, here are examples of recommended programmes of study from Key Stage 1. Children should:

explore and use a range of sound sources including their voices, bodies, sounds from the environment and instruments, tuned and untuned.

communicate simple musical ideas.

We will now consider the early stages of musical development, and see how these can be addressed. The very first thing is for children to gain an idea, at some level, that sounds exist. Therefore, let them experience a variety of

sounds - everyday sounds, musical sounds, electronic sounds - some loud, some soft, some gentle, some harsh, some long and some short. As you work with your child, be imaginative but systematic. Try making the sounds come from different directions, and experiment with moving sources of sound. Investigate a range of music: everything from classical to heavy metal! It is particularly important to work in a quiet area with minimal distractions, and to be aware of time of day, the place, the adult who is leading the interaction, and other similar factors, since any or all of these may affect the way your child responds. How are you to know, in the absence of language, that a child has some awareness of sound and music? Because of an observable response: a vocalisation, an emotional reaction, a movement, a change of movement, or 'stopping'. Above all, you are looking for positive reactions - pointers to the future.

Apart from sharing pleasurable experiences with your child, the aim is to find out just how to take the next step, which is to gain an appreciation of cause and effect - "I can influence things by what I do". That is, how can children make the sound or the music that they like, happen by dint of their own efforts? One way is to guide them repeatedly in the movement necessary to bang the drum, shake the shaker or jangle the bells, in the hope that eventually they will realise what is happening and perform the required actions for themselves. Bear in mind that the only way a blind child can get a picture of the movements made by others is through physical contact: feeling what they do, or allowing themselves to be guided by someone else. Another possibility is to use technology such as the 'Soundbeam', which can convert any movement, no matter how slight (the rise and fall of the chest as a child breathes may be enough), into any sound that can be produced on a keyboard. Vocalisations can be encouraged through using a microphone and amplifier, and many children really enjoy the special effects you can add, such as reverberation.

Music can be used to promote other areas of development - to inform the whole throughout the curriculum. It is not something to be done in a separate room for half an hour on Friday mornings! Try to get everyone involved throughout the day, at home and at school. Here are some examples of what could be done.

Use music as a motivation to do other things. "You can play the keyboard if you can get yourself there", for example (encouraging independent mobility). Favourite tapes can be used as rewards too, as part of a negotiated structure of activities throughout the day.

A wide range of movements can be fostered through playing instruments and other sound-

making devices (pots and pans, chains, crinkly paper, etc.).

"The harder I hit the saucepan with the spoon, the louder it sounds".

"The more frequently I push my breath out, the louder my voice sounds".

Many different musical instruments are now available - not just drums and shakers! There are rainsticks (long hollow tubes filled with seeds), cabassas (rings of metal beads wrapped round cylinders), kalimbas (African thumb pianos), chatterboxes (which vibrate noisily when struck), bird whistles, Indian bells, gongs from Bali, zithers . . . Think of the range of movements that these demand: banging and tapping, twisting and turning, shaking and balancing, blowing and sucking, plucking and rubbing; using one hand or both hands together, co-ordinating hand and mouth. Borrow the instruments from a toy-library, or make your own - involving your child as much as possible.

The Soundbeam can be particularly beneficial in this area since it facilitates progression: by gradually lengthening the beam, ever larger movements are required to get the same sound. Other technology is also available to give children with limited movement access to playing instruments. TtH, for example, produce a range of instruments (triangle, drum, tambourine and cymbal) that function electromechanically and can be operated with any type of switch. This means that *any* body movement can be used to play them. For some children, commercially available music technology may be the answer. Take Anthony, for example, whose physical disability prevented him from playing the conventional drum kit, but who was able to realise his ambition through using a drum synthesizer. Tricia, with brittle bones, wanted to fill a hall with the sound of a grand piano, and was empowered to do so by using an electronic keyboard that could be played with the lightest of touches.

Music can also be used to *accompany* movement, providing an aural frame of reference for children in the absence of a visual model. Rhythm, in particular, sets the pace for action, while long sounds and short sounds, loud sounds and quiet sounds, mellow sounds and harsh sounds, each suggest different types of movement. Ideally, schools should have the services of a live musician, who can work with the physiotherapist, and offer an immediate response to the children's needs. Tapes are an alternative solution, either recorded yourself or purchased ready to use, such as the set by Marianne and Christopher Knill (LDA): 'Activity Programmes for Body Awareness, Contact and Communication', which come complete with explanatory material.

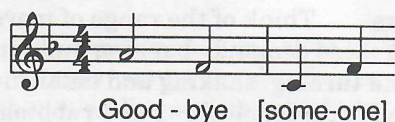
continued overleaf . . .

Visually impaired children with learning difficulties may well find understanding and using language a challenge. Some words sound like others, which makes them easy to confuse, especially in the absence of vision to provide context and reinforcement.

"Did he say 'me' or 'knee'?"

"Was it 'goodbye' or 'good boy'?"

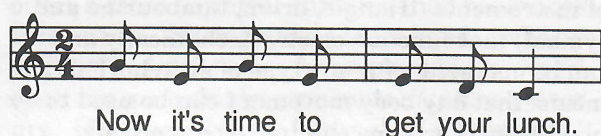
By using music to *augment* language, by giving important words or phrases distinct tunes of their own, you can make them recognisable. For example:



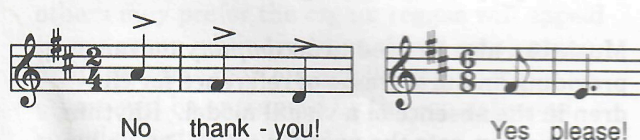
Conversely, we often say much the same thing in several different ways. For instance:

"It's time for lunch. Come and get something to eat. Aren't you hungry? They've cooked us a lovely meal in the kitchen. Come on ... food! Let's fill your tummy up! Lunch is ready now"

Because of this potential confusion, you could consider using music to *structure* language. For example, a little tune such as the following could be used consistently to show it was lunch time:



As well as helping some children's understanding of language, songs like these may help them express themselves too. For instance, children who find it difficult to produce speech-sounds accurately may make themselves understood more readily by using fragments of melody such as these:



Here, the rhythm and the shape of the tunes hold things together, even if individual vowels and consonants aren't quite as standard, and it is easier for other people to understand what is meant.

It is worth bearing in mind that music uses different parts of the brain from speech, and so some children who are unable to speak may nevertheless be able to communicate through *singing* words and phrases.

Music can be used to help children to grasp other concepts. For example, objects can be identified

and grouped through their sound producing qualities. Hence children could be encouraged to contrast the ringing, bell-like sounds of metal with the more mellow sounds made by striking things made of wood, and to be sorted accordingly.

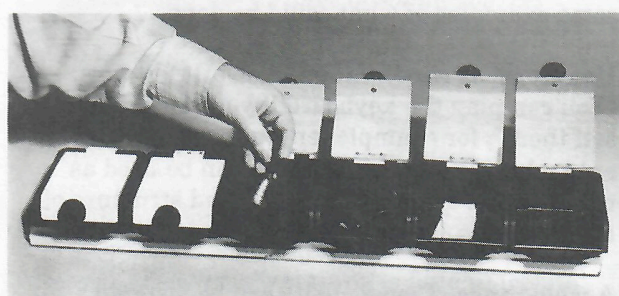
We introduce children to many concepts through speech, and in the same way that music can help structure language, so it can help convey and clarify certain concepts. Consider, for example, counting songs, action songs, body-awareness songs, sequencing songs. There is a good deal of traditional and commercially available material, or you could try making up your own - at least adapting the words of what already exists. In this way you can ensure the material will be apt and age-appropriate.

Although listening to music or playing an instrument can be a satisfying activity for children to do on their own, music is essentially a social activity, offering a secure framework through which many of the skills and disciplines of social interaction can be taught, such as:

listening to others, responding appropriately, taking turns, working together.

The first stage of musical interaction is *alternation*, in which adult and child make sounds successively; next comes *imitation*, with the adult first copying the child, then vice versa. Beyond this, music can be used to structure verbal interaction through specially designed songs. These can be used on set occasions, forming part of a 'good morning' routine, for instance. Some suitable material is commercially available, such as 'Body and Voice' (Winslow Press, Oxford), a set of tapes and book containing 70 musical activities designed to develop, among other things, communication, co-operation and social skills.

Sounds and music can be represented symbolically at many different levels, offering a wide range of potential benefits to the child concerned. The first stage is to use an instrument (a little bell, for instance) as an 'Object of Reference' to represent a music session. Begin by starting each music lesson with the little bell, and subsequently use the bell to *anticipate* music sessions.



A bell meaning 'music', used as part of a tactile timetable.

(More information about symbolic communication is contained in the pamphlet 'Objects of Reference', obtainable from RNIB's National Education Centre, address below).

Another possibility is to attach a small instrument, such as a triangle, to the door of the music room. How many times do you see the words 'music room' in print (and rather less often in Braille) on the door, but with nothing there for the children for whom neither of these reading systems is appropriate - the very children who would probably benefit most from having the room identified?

A further stage is to use *textures* to represent musical sounds. Stick the same characteristic material (such as felt or sandpaper) onto the 'play' buttons of tape-recorders, synthesizers, etc., so that when the child touches that texture he or she will make sounds happen! In time, the texture can come to symbolise sound or music. Then, use different textures to represent different aspects of sound, such as 'louder' and 'softer'. Again, use standard textures with the different items of music technology with which the child has contact, so all volume controls have the same feel to them, for example.

Label music tapes using textures or small shapes, so that different pieces of music are represented by different symbols. Put these textures or shapes into a book - the child's music 'catalogue', which can be used in discussing the tape collection, in choosing pieces, and so on.

At a more advanced level, represent different notes with given textures, or using letters in Braille or Moon. Write out tunes using these characters, and help a child to play them by sticking the raised letters to the keys of a piano or keyboard, for example.

Music can be made to represent other things. (Everyday examples with which we are all familiar include the 'jingles' that are used to identify radio stations and adverts on television, not to mention the school bell!) For visually impaired children who have learning difficulties, you consider extending this principle, so that different activities, places, people and times are distinguished by having different sounds or pieces of music associated with them. A particular song may indicate that it's swimming next, for example, or that the school day has ended and it is time to go home.

Finally, look out for children with exceptional musical ability: a small but important proportion of blind children with additional handicaps (perhaps 2%) have special musical abilities - the so-called 'musical savants'. These children - and all others - deserve musical provision appropriate to their needs.

Adam Ockleford, RNIB Music Education Advisor
1.12.93

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AGE-APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES FOR QUABER

In edition 37 we printed a letter from Linda Swan who wanted to know what activities she could involve Quaber in which were age appropriate and he could do by himself. We don't know much about his abilities, but here are a few of our ideas:

- 💡 Attaching a switch to a portable cassette player for Quaber to listen to music and switch it on and off himself.
- 💡 Using a footspa with aromatic oils in it.
- 💡 Painting using water-colours.
- 💡 Working with self-hardening clay, moulding different shapes to form an 'object d'art' which could be painted when hardened.
- 💡 Stencils on terracotta. A stencil could be attached by the teacher onto a terracotta

pot leaving only the area to be painted available which Quaber could be left to paint. Putting the pot on a cake decorating wheel to turn it round when he has finished one area could help.

- 💡 Using a portable musical keyboard.
- 💡 Filling small garden pots with compost to add bulbs later.
- 💡 Using a computer with a touch screen.
- 💡 Exploring a vibrating massager.
- 💡 Wall sculptures as featured in Issue 34.
- 💡 Sound sculptures as featured in Issue 36.

Does anyone have any other ideas?