Dr Ruth Herbert. email: ruth.herbert@music.ox.ac.uk

**MUSIC AND ME**

*Making connections between children's musical experiences in and outside school can bring lifetime benefits. Dr Ruth Herbert shares findings from a major research study ...*

Lola, age 11 doesn't have instrumental lessons anymore. She does sing (reluctantly) at school, but says it's not her 'sort of thing'. Lola is passionately interested in music. Her eyes shine as she tells me about it. 'Well, my mum comes from Slovakia, so she listens to folk music ... I would dance around with her when I was young. Dad listens to Rock and Goth - weird music! Sometimes I like it, sometimes I don't. He finds new songs - things I like ...he generally does the downloading. Other times I just hear about songs from my friends, and sometimes if I just switch on to VIVA. I don't go on YouTube apart for dance moves. I listen to loads of stuff...mainly for happiness and energy. Having music there - it brightens me up and makes me braver.' I ask her whether her classroom music teacher knows about all this. She shakes her head. After a pause, she stares at me curiously. 'Why?'

Why *does* valuing and sharing the ways children experience music matter?

**The Power of Music**

First, the prime way we connect with music is emotional, not intellectual. It's the way it makes us *feel* that makes us want to continue making and listening to it. Talking about past musical experiences is part of that process.

Second, music's good for us. Research shows music offers positive health and wellbeing benefits across the lifespan. There are helpful and harmful uses of music so it makes sense to encourage healthy listening habits early. Evidence suggests that if children don't develop a musical identity as a player or listener whilst at school, they're likely to lose interest and miss out.

Third, music offers a prime means of educating emotions - developing 'Emotional Intelligence.' Music education specialist Susan Hallam maintains that most music education curricula are overly focused on skills acquisition. Music provides a forum for young people to get to know and manage their emotions, understand the way other people might feel, and to explore their own self-identity.

Sharing of everyday music experiences also provides an entry point for children to think about healthy use of the internet and social media. It's happened very quickly; Facebook 2004, YouTube 2005, Twitter 2006, WhatsApp 2009, Instagram 2010. There may be watershed ages for some of these platforms (e.g. 13 for Facebook and Instagram, 16 for WhatsApp); the reality is that many children begin using them, unguided and in secret, far earlier.

**Studying the music experiences of tweens and teens**

I'm currently leading the young people and music project, a three-year nationwide research study, based at the University of Oxford, exploring ways 10 to 18 year olds engage with music. Young people from across the country have been informally interviewed, kept diaries of their music experiences, completed online questionnaires and took part in an online study of music listening. All this is helping us to build up a fascinating picture of the often hidden and strictly private musical worlds of teens and tweens.

**Private Musical Lives Outside School**

Our findings reveal music to be a significant element in the daily lives of 10 to 18 year olds, *whether or not they learn an instrument or consider themselves musical*. 80% of our sample rated daily engagement with music as 'quite important' or 'very important.' Nearly 90% owned their own music collection and over 70% shared a music collection with family. Over 70% also shared music with friends. Nearly 90% regularly used YouTube to listen to music. Over half regularly watched mainstream TV talent shows such as Britain's Got Talent and X Factor. On average 10-12 year olds had begun listening to music on mp3 players in Year 4 and on phones in Year 5 - far earlier than the 15-18 year olds in our sample, who had typically acquired mp3 players and phones on the transition to secondary school. 10-12 year olds top three preferred musical styles were chart pop, film themes and rap/hip hop.

**Top 10 uses of music**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Multitasking 86%** | **For excitement 85%** | **Stopping boredom 78%** | **Changing mood 72%** | **Help thinking 70%** |
| **When feeling down 68%** | **Escape to different world 67%** | **Inspiring musical role models 61%** | **Feeling connected 54%** | **Block out silence 52%** |

**Top 4 types of musical experience**

1. Using music to feel excited, energetic and to move to. 2. Using music to imagine stories or pictures/associations 3. Using music to cut off from thoughts or surroundings. 4. Using music to change mood.

How can this feed into classroom teaching? Here are three examples of ideas that trialled successfully with children during our research. You don't need to be a music specialist to use these! All are relevant for exploring how music is created, produced and - importantly - the power of music and ways it can communicate.

**Once more with feeling! 3 sound ideas**

* Sound Snapshots: List all the times you've heard music today. How many pieces did you know? When did you notice music most?
* Sound Design: You're designing a shop. Decide what it will sell, what it will look like and what sort of people will visit it. What music will go with your shop?
* Soundtrack: Films have soundtracks to add to the atmosphere and help tell the story. People often also use music to soundtrack their lives - walking to school, on the bus, at home. What would your soundtrack sound like?

**Final snapshot**

It's easy to make assumptions about how children we teach relate to music. Promoting positive everyday engagement with music brings benefits that last a lifetime. Nurturing that type of familiar, very personal connection with music needs more just skill acquisition. To end, Sam (9 ¾) gives us a snapshot into his musical life outside school.

***The music flows through me!***

This morning I listened to my new favourite song *212* (Clean Version) by a new rapper called Azealia Banks. Anyone reading this go and listen to it now because the rhythm is sooooooooooooooo great! Also listen to her song *1991* (Clean Version.)  The music gets under my skin and into my body and I can’t help but move even if I’m sitting at the computer! It makes me feel ecstatic because the beat and the rhythm are addictive…. When I’m listening to Azealia Banks the music flows through me and I can’t help but to express it by dancing or working the chords out on the piano. I also rap along to her music. When I rap I always try to take things in and I usually do. There is a song by her called *Bambi*. I want to learn it but she talks so fast I don’t know what she says! This does matter. I like to know what she says. I looooooooooove  rapping.

Every single morning I listen to music.  Usually on my CD player in the front room.  Always before school if there’s time.  I always dance and rap.  It’s really important.  If I don’t have time to listen to music I get angry.  If I dance before school it makes my day better.  It wakes me up, switches me on to the day and gets me in a good mood.  I listen to different tracks but usually it’s loud clubby pop dance.  I feel like I NEED to dance. …I do the same thing when I come home from school.  I have a drink and a piece of toast and then I listen to music and dance… Dancing IS my best way of concentrating on music.  Pop music.  It just is the best way for me to feel it and express it.

**Find out more**.

http://experiencingmusic.com/

ruth.herbert@music.ox.ac.uk