

Exploring Instruments (Full Text)

Approaching a new musical instrument with an attitude of open curiosity and an enthusiasm to try, can be the first step in a lifetime of music making. For a child, having the opportunity to explore musical instruments with an adult who will model and positively reinforce this curiosity and enthusiasm and who can encourage them to reach further, keep going and to keep exploring is invaluable.

The potential outcomes from exploring instruments are wide ranging and include:

- 1) Developing a sense of playfulness
- 2) Providing an opportunity to have fun
- 3) Distracting away from discomfort and a refocusing on pleasure, curiosity and creativity. Exploring musically is a means of self-expression through creative activity without making any mess!
- 4) Connecting with, or get to know someone. It's a lovely way to spend time with someone, tune in to then and show understanding without the need for words.
- 5) Changing a child's mood or how they are feeling
- 6) Building self-confidence and self esteem
- 7) Exploring instruments can give a child the chance to make choices and have control over their environment and what is happening to them

Choosing, Sourcing and Buying Accessible instruments for use in Healthcare:

The impact of exploring instruments will depend on the variety and quality of instruments that you have available. Please see the section on Sourcing Accessible Instruments to ensure that you have the best, most suitable instruments for exploration in your instrument kit.

Prepare for use in practice.

When facilitating the exploration of an instrument it is important that you already have an idea of the potential of the instrument, how it is played and how to develop an exploration. Even though you may facilitate it's use by modelling an explorative approach, it's important that you know where you are leading the child. If using a tuned instrument, work out how to play a melody in advance of using it with a patient, but don't necessarily start your facilitation with this. Have it ready in case the child leads you to a point where this would be useful to model.

Know the key of any tuned percussion instruments. This doesn't mean learning lots of music theory but just being aware that the instrument won't always sound nice when played along with recorded music or instruments in other keys. The notes may clash.

With untuned percussion instruments, challenge yourself to develop technique on these, so that you can facilitate this in a child if they want to. This kind of preparation is an ongoing process. Having some technique on percussion instruments can act to spark the interest in children and young people who may initially dismissively think.... 'oh that's just a shaker...'

Familiarise yourself with any recorded resources you may use in the session. Get familiar with any melodies – learn to play one if you're feeling confident! Get familiar with any starts or stops in the accompaniment. Make sure the instruments you are going to be using sound nice with the recorded accompaniment.

Within practice:

Set yourself an intention as to how you want to present the instrument. Consciously differentiate between 'I'm going to demonstrate / show / teach' and 'I want to invite the child to explore / become curious about / find out about by doing'

Introduce the instrument. You may need words for this or simply getting the instrument out of the box and placing it down within reach of the child may be enough to instigate exploration.

Demonstrate the bare minimum. If the child is reluctant to engage with the instrument a simple demonstration of picking up a beater and striking the instrument once may be enough. Playing a random selection of notes may be required, with the beater then being offered to the child. Avoid playing known tunes or implying that there may be an expectation to play something 'correctly'.

Give time for exploration. The child may be straight in to exploring the instrument or they may be reluctant. Start a game of follower the leader by inviting the child to copy you. Swap roles and copy them.

Be aware of responses. At all times be tuned into the child's facial expression. Be conscious of eye contact and what it (or the lack of it) is telling you. Read signs of discomfort and ill ease / engagement and enthusiasm. Balance a strong confident offer of music making with a sensitivity to the child's reaction. Always be ready to present the child with the two options of 'would you like to keep going or is it time to stop?' rather than just presenting one option, which to the child may suggest your preference eg 'Shall we keep going?' read as 'I want you to keep going.'

Follow the child. Some children may be more than happy exploring, creating, interacting and responding and this can become very expressive incorporating elements of playful social interaction. Others may want to know all about how it works and be able to achieve something like learning a tune on the instrument. The interaction could be a mixture of both Your preparation before the session will determine how far you can go in either direction.

Extension activities.

Introducing accompaniment. Once the child is comfortable and confident exploring the instrument themselves you may want to enhance the sounds by accompanying them on a different instrument. If so, knowing the key of the instrument they are playing becomes very important. Follow the child's lead in terms of rhythm and tempo. Try gently introducing changes to these and see if they notice or respond. Eye contact can be very useful to instigate this sort of interaction.

Accompaniment may also be introduced through the use of recorded resources. Both you and the child can play along to the resource exploring the instrument in an improvisatory way. Use the recording to inspire how you play; maybe copy the rhythm of sung words; try and stop at the same time as the music stops. Try to play *with* the accompaniment rather than just at the *same time* as the accompaniment.

Know when it is time to stop. Be aware that a child might continue to explore an instrument beyond the point at which they have lost interest in it if they think they are meeting your expectation. Always be ready to ask!

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Links to:

Video resource ideas:

Instrument demonstration videos

The instrument demonstration videos we currently have show mainly how to play the instrument in terms of technique. Is it worth filming some videos that show a more explorative approach? I guess the HAPI drum videos do this? Could we illustrate modes / moods of play that could result in specific outcomes / transforming moods patient states – being sympathetic to where the patient is at - How you might play with the instruments to create the outcomes listed above.

Do we need a video that demonstrates using backing tracks to scaffold instrumental interactions?