



I'm a teacher, get  
me OUTSIDE here!



Creative STAR<sup>★</sup>  
Learning Ltd

# BISH! BOSH! BANG!

## Experiencing Music Outside



**50+ Ideas, Suggestions and Experiences**  
**by**  
**Juliet Robertson and Alec Miller**

**COVID 19 UPDATE :** This document was created prior to COVID-19 pandemic. The fast-changing changes to local and national guidance means that you will need to double check at your own setting, local and national level what is okay and not okay to do or have outside. Much of what is suggested can be easily adapted with a little bit of creativity and imagination. Also many things can be mitigated by handwashing before and after an activity outside.

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# 1. Introduction

Within Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) establishments it is expected that settings will provide a balance of provision between the indoor and outdoor spaces. Yet often it is challenging for practitioners within the constraints of their work to come up with a sufficient range of ideas and ways of doing this, with regard to musical opportunities.



Outside there is space and height to experiment with scale and far more stimuli than indoors. There is room to move and use the whole body. We can make the most of the outdoor space for experiences which couldn't happen inside. In the natural world, we can tune in to the sounds, rhythms and tunes provided by the movement and noise created by plants, animals and the landscape. Think of the waves crashing on the shore, or the movement of pebbles being pulled back into the ocean by waves and then re-deposited time and time again on a rocky shore. There is a timelessness to natural soundscapes. It is food for our souls.

Taking music outdoors does not necessarily mean physically taking xylophones, glockenspiels, drums and various other instruments outside. This is one approach, yet one of the benefits of being outside is applying the musical concepts in a different environment and appreciating the process of doing so.

It is intended that being outside in an open space will provide children with different sensory experiences. Often music sounds and feels different when explored outside. It may encourage collaborative thinking and working in a new dimension, away from the constraints of classroom walls. The potential of focusing on music outside is considerable and can allow for child-led activities, participation and creativeness at a level that suits each child.

The aims of this handout include:

- Raising practitioners' levels of confidence and skills to undertake musical activities particularly outdoors with a focus on beat, pitch and rhythm.
- Demonstrating that an outdoor space can be an ideal context for a range of musical activities, particularly through the development and use of a sound garden.
- Developing a deeper awareness of the value of music in children's learning and overall well-being.
- Providing ideas, experiences and strategies that can be put into action straight away.

Children have a right to high quality learning and play experiences outside. This means providing musical opportunities outside as well as indoors, especially for those children who prefer to be outside.



## Idea 1.1 Consider your underlying principles and ensure these support the development of a child's inherent musicality outside

- Every child and every adult is musical. It is part of being human. Our job is to value and support music to ensure children have equity of opportunity to develop a love of music and confidence to express themselves through music.
- Music is an important part of our history and culture. Nursery rhymes, playground songs, folk songs, musical instruments all reflect our history and culture and have their own narrative.
- Music and song are ways of passing knowledge through the generations. It is an opportunity for intergenerational sharing and celebrations. It can provide children from other countries to maintain a vital link with their traditions and roots.
- Music connects us to the land. Pick up two stones and start tapping them slowly. Explore different rhythms. Our ancestors have been exploring music, song and dance for millennia. It is our inheritance and a way of celebrating the creative capacities of humans everywhere to find musicality in our lives through our interactions with the world.
- Music is not an isolated activity that is the job of a visiting specialist. We must ensure that we are:
  - Learning and developing a repertoire of songs and rhymes.
  - Providing children with access to listening to and enjoying a range of musical genres
  - Using songs as a non-standard unit of time and as part of our routines and interactions with children. The rules and patterns within musical structures can help children learn how patterns work, preparing them for exploring numeracy and maths concepts which involve seeking patterns, rules and connections.
  - Developing rhyme, analogy and phonological awareness through musical experiences with young children. This is an essential part of a broad foundation of literacy experiences.
  - Perceiving sound and music making as a form of communication, that can help children express themselves in ways that language alone cannot. It provides an additional way for children to communicate, with or without words.
  - Adding sounds and music into our story telling as part of the props we use.





## Idea 1.2: Begin and end with the children in mind

As much as possible start from the children's interests and what they already know. This is how we make music meaningful and relevant. It can happen in many ways, for example:

- Babies and their parents often experiment with sounds, noises and musical patterns in their speech. It is an important part of their interactions. It helps develop a sense of belonging, especially as repertoires of favourite songs, games, rhymes and sounds develop. These can be linked to movement through dancing, action rhymes and even in daily routines, such as singing when using a vacuum cleaner.
- A child is experimenting with the sound an item or feature makes when used in different ways. As adults we can be ready to support as needed – modelling care, using musical vocabulary, wondering aloud how to explore different skills such as finding a different pattern or rhythm of sounds.
- A child is singing or dancing. We can support children to select more music. We can join in the dancing, copying a child's moves and being ready to sing aloud when appropriate to do so.
- There has been a visit to a musical event. This can be a springboard into exploring different instruments, mixing music, performing, etc.
- A child is passionate about a particular interest such as dinosaurs which can then be used as a context for musical activities. We can model simple repeating patterns such as 'stomp, stomp, roar!' We can replace the words with sounds. These can be drawn as symbols on a piece of paper. We can make these sounds louder or quieter, softer or harder and so on.
- A child enjoys recording and listening to music or sounds. This could be their own or others' creations.

There are opportunities all year round for children to experience music outside. These can be linked to:

- Seasonal activities.
- Local and national cultural and religious celebrations.
- Community or whole school events including specific arts development projects.
- The children's interests
- The experiences children have at home which can be extended and built upon in your setting.



*The placement of just one instrument can invite role play, investigations and conversation.*

### 1.3 Making the most of a visiting music teacher or specialist outside

If you have a visiting music specialist, then it's an opportunity to make the most of their skills, knowledge and expertise. As a valuable part of your ELC team, they will probably need your interest and support to develop their capacity to work outside. Possibilities include:

- Requesting that they work outside as much as inside. Listen to their needs, for example, perhaps the need for a quiet spot, or for the provision of shelter during inclement weather. Likewise encourage and support them to develop their own outdoor practice and don't abandon them to "get on with it".
- During colder weather, the nature of their input outside will involve plenty of movement. Be a role model here and participate.
- Supporting the specialist to explore the outdoor environment as a place for music making, listening and exploring sound. For example, some of the sessions, may involve them observing children and then interacting with a child to extend their learning, i.e. doing the work of a practitioner but focusing very specifically on music and sound exploration.
- Providing music outside as the children play. For example, taking a portable instrument outside and walking around playing their instrument. If a child comes up to dance, ask questions or comment, then the specialist responds to that child.
- Providing advice about further developing the quality of music provision in the outdoor space. They may have advice about the acoustics of the outdoor space, the location and appropriateness of different big instruments and so on.
- Listening to, and working with, the musical specialist, following up on their ideas and suggestions where appropriate to do so. The children need connections to be made in their learning and to have opportunities to develop the ideas gained from a session with a specialist.
- Not expecting all children to participate in a music session. Some children may not be interested or perceive it as relevant and meaningful. Some children need to be able to watch from a distance. Others may be in the process of doing some deep play which could be interrupted.
- Always ensuring one practitioner is available to support the music specialist. They can also use the opportunity to observe who is interested, how individual children respond to music. Avoid at all costs the situation where a music specialist is working with a group, and the staff are sweeping and tidying up as this happens - think about the message this sends both the children and the specialist. It is clear that their time and input is not considered a valuable part of nursery life.

It's also worth finding out if any of the staff can play an instrument, sings in a choir or has a passion for music. Make the most of their skills. For example, in one outdoor nursery, a part-time member of staff would bring his guitar and play it quietly whilst the children ate their lunch on the days he worked.

## 1.4 Linking the indoor and outdoor musical experiences

Musical explorations and activities inside can complement and extend the outdoor experiences of sound and vice versa. The main difference is that inside is where you keep resources which will not withstand the variety of weathers experienced outside.

An inside music focus could include:

- A decent range of musical instruments: percussion, tuned, multicultural, etc.
- Old instruments for closer examinations. They may also have a place at a tinkering table where children can take an old instrument apart and try putting it back together. This can be an invitation to make an instrument using junk or unwanted materials.
- Examples of real music scores, blank scores for mark making with black pens, a variety of musical paraphernalia such as cassettes, vinyl records, CDs, machines which play these, a range of music including classical, jazz, blues, folk, Scottish, multicultural in addition to current pop music and the children's favourites.
- Sufficient space to dance and move to music.
- Containers, objects and homemade instruments which don't lend themselves to the outdoors.

Have a look at Nicola Burke's website. She is an early years music consultant and has written Early Years Matters guidance on music with lots of practical advice and suggestions. This is a great start for developing your music provision inside. <http://www.musicforearlyyears.co.uk>



*These boomwhackers have been strung up, providing children with an opportunities to use a stick or a beater to explore sounds. An interesting next step, is to remove them and make them available for tapping on a range of surfaces outside. These can be compared with cardboard tubs, plastic pvc pipes and so on. Thus one musical experience can move on and progress.*

## 1.5 Musical instruments are tools for creative expression

It can be helpful to put musical instruments into the same category as other *tool* that is used outside. This means:

- Taking the time to introduce each instrument. Wonder aloud how to hold it, look after it, play it and put it back afterwards.
- Involve your group or individual child in thinking through what they need to do to look after an instrument.
- Helping children develop the habit of actively caring for the instruments. What prompts or reminders could help them?
- Having a place where the instruments are kept and that children know and are able to return the instruments to after using.
- Only bringing real musical instruments outside where the interest and need arises. Instead, use homemade instruments or repurposed items so if they get broken or weathered, it is less of a concern. See sections 8 and 9 in this handbook.
- Avoiding putting out musical instruments and then letting children explore and discover unsupported by an adult. Children need an adult to be interested in their music making, to observe what is happening and to help further develop their musical knowledge, skills and understanding in a responsive manner. This does not mean rushing to be with a child who picks up some beaters to play an instrument. It means observing at a distance and providing timely input, when needed.

## 1.6 Actively planning musical experiences

Music making and creative expression through music has to be actively developed by the staff team to create a music-rich environment. This *could* include:

- Developing a specific area that enables children to explore sound and music outside. See Section 9 in this booklet. This should be kept fresh and attractive.
- Integrating music into other zones or areas outside when you have observed a child or group of children that find this more appealing than a specific music area.
- Making any specifically planned music sessions include the outdoors. This may be necessary to help staff value music, raise the profile of music and embed it into nursery life. However it should not be the only emphasis for music. It should also include movement, dance and other creative forms of expression as needed.
- That our children's learning profiles include observations about their progress in music and document their musical experiences in nursery.
- Ensuring that observations of children are the foundation or basis for planning further musical experiences. These should build upon the children's needs and interests. The staff use these to support and then extend the children's learning.



*Mikey loved exploring the environment by banging sticks on the wall, dragging sticks along fences and delighting in the sounds he made. One or two staff were concerned that he may end up accidentally hurting other children as could get quite excited when doing this. As part of a shared reflection, the staff decided that the next time Mikey wanted to do this, they would show him a range of other long items that would extend his experience and provide a greater range of notes and tones.*

*At first Mikey wasn't interested. Then when one young practitioner took the crystal tubes and started playing alongside Mikey, echoing his rhythms, he was keen to have a go. Together they explored the environment with the plastic tubes, commenting upon the range of notes made and how the tone changed with the surface. Exploring sounds together became a regular feature of their time outside.*



## 2. Learning for Sustainability

*'Learning for Sustainability' is a whole-school commitment that helps the school and its wider community develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and practices needed to take decisions which are compatible with a sustainable future in a just and equitable world.'* The Learning for Sustainability Report<sup>1</sup>

### **All learners should have an entitlement to learning for sustainability**

As part of this entitlement, outdoor learning should be a regular, progressive curriculum-led experience for all learners. Children should have active curricular learning experiences that develop their understanding of the inter-relationship of environment, society, economy and inequity, of the ecological limits to development and the interdependence of ecological and human wellbeing.



### **What does this mean in the context of music provision?**

- We need to ensure music happens outside as well as in.
- Children need to experience free play opportunities which involve using instruments and features of the landscape as instruments.
- Children need time in nature, listening to sounds and silence and to discover the rhythms of the natural world.
- Children need access to making and using instruments made from natural and repurposed materials.
- We celebrate music from all cultures as an essential part of humanity. This includes songs, rhymes, instruments, clapping games and so on.
- Clear thought should be given to what instruments are purchased, where they are made and how – both in terms of fairtrade considerations and quality of product. Ethical purchasing matters. Think about the necessity of each instrument too. It is better to have one or two high quality products than a large range of cheap products which do not last.
- Adults need to model appropriate behaviour and routines which facilitate sensible use of instruments, how to care for them, care of the surroundings, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/curriculum/ACE/OnePlanetSchools/LearningforSustainabilityReport>

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### 3. Big Outdoor Musical Instruments

Big outdoor musical instruments are a lot of fun. It is possible to buy or make tuned and untuned percussion instruments. If you are buying an instrument, ask to hear a recording of the sound it makes when played. This means you can avoid purchasing instruments that have an irritating sound, unless there is a distant corner of the playground or outdoor space where they can be tucked away.



Percussion play have a range of outdoor musical instruments and have some video clips on YouTube of some of their outdoor musical instruments being played <https://www.percussionplay.com>

#### Idea 3.1: Create a bespoke musical instrument or area

There are many sculptors and artists who can make bespoke musical instruments at a similar price to playground equipment suppliers. There are several advantages to working with musicians and artists:

- Designing and inventing musical instruments makes for an interesting interdisciplinary project combining technology, engineering and music.
- Children can be actively involved in the whole process from start to finish. This enables much greater ownership.
- Children learn about how an instrument is made and can talk with the maker.
- The instruments are unique and have a special history to them.
- The materials can often be sourced locally and ethically.
- Often workshops or training is provided as part of the package.

The Junk Orchestra [www.junkorchestra.co.uk](http://www.junkorchestra.co.uk) is a great example of a sustainable approach. Saul, the owner works with schools and nurseries too, providing workshops and an aftercare service as part of the package. The above photo is one example of his recycled sound gardens. More detail can be found on this blog post: <http://bit.ly/2vJUQIF>

Bodgers are green woodworkers. They can come and set up a working lathe on-site and help create some natural wooden instruments. This can involve children and the result is instruments that blend into a natural space quite easily. Be aware that not all bodgers are musicians so the quality of the final product will be rough and ready. Do an online search for a bodger near you!

## Idea 3.2: Consider the practicalities

### Location

Consider the best location for any outdoor instrument. Near a performance space often works well because the music can enhance any outdoor performances. Some instruments work better under a canopy or in a sheltered space, depending on the acoustics. Also think about their use all year round. Materials expand and contract depending on the temperature and/or water that seeps into the wood or joints. This can affect the tone and sound produced. Sometimes right outside a classroom can be quite disruptive for a class working inside, but very handy for a music room to have an outdoor extension.

### Accessibility

Think about the accessibility of instruments for all users. For example, they may need to be installed on a hard surface to allow wheelchair access. This will help avoid grass erosion too. Remember that additional instruments can be brought outside so that a whole class or large group can work together.

### Affordance

Children view the world in terms of the play possibilities afforded by different features. Bear this in mind when buying an outdoor instrument. Is it robust enough for hard play? For example, fixed drums can be great outside, especially if they are also solid and strong enough for little children to climb on and use as open-ended structures in different types of play.

*The photo shows the drums at Cowgate Under 5's Centre which are occasionally climbed and stood on by the children.*



### Add in a sound garden with homemade musical instruments

A single outdoor instrument can look and feel very isolated. It is better to think of group performances. Even if you can only afford one large instrument, then look for opportunities to add homemade affairs nearby. Have a look at the rest of this handout for ideas.



*The big instruments at Cowgate Under 5's Centre in Edinburgh were purchased with grant funding back in 2009. Ten years on they are still going strong. Thus, investing in high quality outdoor instruments that produce an attractive sound can provide years of musical enjoyment for all.*



## 4. The Importance of Silence in the World of Sound

### Introduction

Nowadays, we are surrounded daily by a cacophony of sounds from multiple sources. This is in combination with very busy lives where children are often busy with structured activities at weekends and after time at nursery or school. Others may live in homes with siblings and other relatives where there is little time or space to be alone. Taking the time to slow down, be still, silent and listen can be a challenge for both children and adults.

We often do not realise the valuable contribution and place that silence and stillness play in our overall wellbeing, and when exploring the world of sound, this is an ideal opportunity to help children experience and feel comfortable in silence as well. A useful source of ideas and tips on how to have this balance is through Maggie Dent's website: [www.maggiedent.com](http://www.maggiedent.com)

Try some of the following activities which allow children to calm down and tune in to the world around them:



### Idea 4.1: What's that noise?

- What sounds can be heard and can children work out what is making the sound?
- When a child is sitting still somewhere, just being or listening, take a photo unobtrusively and record the sounds around. Later on, share the photo and sound recording with the group.
- Use this as a springboard into listening for other sounds outside. Challenge the children to sit down, close their eyes and listen. Every time a sound is heard they can put up one finger. Model this process beforehand so that children understand what is expected of them. This may take several attempts as sometimes it is very exciting to hear different sounds.

An emergency shelter or story tent can also help as the visual stimuli are reduced. Put it over the group and sit there with the eyes closed.

### Idea 4.2 Read *The Other Way to Listen* by Byrd Baylor

This book is not about listening to audible sounds such as songbirds or waves. It considers sounds such as rocks murmuring and hills singing. It suggests that active listening takes a lot of practice and can be hard to achieve. It is important not to hurry the process. Although the illustrations are definitely on the alternative side, children do listen to this book and buy into the message. It helps them think about listening and being in nature in a different way. This is best read outside in a natural setting.

### **Idea 4.3 Make time to relax**

Create a relaxing outdoor environment. What would this look like? What would children and staff be doing, saying and hearing? Where can children discover a really calm place to be outside? Think about a range of places:

- A nook or cranny you can hide in
- A bush to crawl under
- A tree to climb into and become part of
- A view from a hill or elevated space
- A place where you can just watch the world go by
- A space where you can comfortably lie down

Be up for modelling how to be calm and relaxed - this can even include closing your eyes. Afterwards have shared conversations about what you can see, hear, smell and feel in these relaxing places. With the feelings, encourage children to notice where they are in their body. Do they move through their body in a particular direction or at a specific speed? Is there a change in your body temperature when this happens?

### **Idea 4.4 Watch the world go by**

Find a place to sit with a view. Sit there for several minutes just watching the world go by. It can be a good opportunity to have snack too. Chat with your group about what they find particularly fascinating:

- Is it clouds racing by?
- Is it birds flying about?
- What about the wind moving through the trees?
- How about watching waves?
- Gazing into a fire?

Is it the sights, smells or sounds which hook you in the most?

### **Idea 4.5 Magic sounds**

A magic spot is a self-chosen space outside, usually in a natural setting that appeals to a child. It's a place to be quiet and calm. Sometimes drawing in the space can help too. Afterwards, talk with the child about the sort of things that they think, feel, see and hear in this space. This can be drawn too.

### **Idea 4.6 Owl ears**

Get your children to pretend they are scooping up water using their hands as pretend cups.

Ask them to tip out the water and then put the "cups" behind their ears and listen. Cupped ears collect sound like satellite dishes on the side of your head. This is how owls, rabbits and deer hear.

### **Idea 4.7 Whispers**

Find a quiet space to sit outside – what is the wind whispering to you? What do woods whisper to people passing? What are waves whispering to the beach when they fall on the shore? Can we whisper? This can take practice to perfect.

## 5. Creating Sounds

### Idea 5.1 Sound making possibilities

Think about how sounds are created. This happens when objects or instruments are used in several ways such as:

- Tapping, flicking or banging a surface
- Shaking an object
- Scraping slowly or quickly along or over a surface
- Plucking or pulling such as the wire on a fence
- Pressing or pushing such as doorbells
- Blowing through, in or across something such as putting a blade of grass between our thumbs or creating a dandelion trumpet <https://youtu.be/Ckr2NpVwnaY>
- Snapping something such as our fingers or maybe the sound of breaking a stick

The above happen from an early age. Rattles are commonly given to babies as the movement required to shake a rattle is an essential part of their physical development. Children enjoy making the connection between holding a stick and banging it on a surface that produces a sound.

These actions are how almost all instruments are played. Thus, exploring these actions with children when playing outside helps them explore their environment in a musical way. Practitioners and other children can help the vocabulary to express the sounds made is an important aspect of music.

In addition, encourage children to think about and experiment with:

- Using our voices in different ways: as well as singing and speaking, what other sounds can we make? Can we communicate through different objects such as hoses or even a tin can and string?
- Using digital technology to capture, amplify, swirl or mix sounds that we can hear outside.



## Idea 5.2 Exploring the elements of music

Ouvry<sup>2</sup> (2003, p23) refers to the elements of music as the building blocks. They are about how sounds are made. When interacting with children, practitioners could draw children's attention to these elements and provide provocations that invite children to engage, explore and extend their learning.

### **Loud and quiet sounds – the dynamic of music**

This is about understanding the concept of volume. Children may often associate this with the remote controls for TV or when listening to music. It takes more control on the part of a child to produce a quiet sound. Many children enjoy the freedom outside to be louder – whether this is to make louder noises or shout.

### **Fast and slow sounds – the pace or tempo of music**

Little children develop the concept of fast and slow often through their own movements. If you put on a sad, slow piece of music such as Beethoven's *String Quartet No. 14 in C# minor, Op. 131*, then children respond accordingly. If you play fast music such as the *Flight of the Bumblebee* by Rimsky-Korsakov. Then you will see them react with rapid, excited gestures and actions. Give children space to move around outside if you play these.

### **High and low sounds – the pitch of the music**

Children will have heard a range of pitches. For example, you may adopt a particular pitch, such as a deep gruff voice when being a Gruffalo and have a much higher and squeakier voice when being the little mouse. You can draw children's attention to high and low sounds in the environment. Some children, for example will be able to distinguish the different sounds of vehicles by the high or low pitch made when they drive by. Some will even be able to identify the precise car, lorry, motorbike or tractor this way, without needing to see the vehicle.

### **Hard and soft sounds – the timbre of music**

This is the quality of the sound produced. Children are familiar with hard and soft surfaces if they have had opportunities to crawl or walk barefoot over a variety of surfaces. Children need access to a range of beaters made from different materials and encouraged to experiment with the sounds made. For example:

- Will a hard beater such as a wooden stick will make a hard sound when it comes into contact with a hard surface?
- Does changing the beater to metal spoon, change the quality of the sound produced?
- What happens when a soft beater such as a felted one hits a hard surface?
- Is it possible it make a sound when a soft beater comes into contact with a soft surface?

### **Thick and thin sounds – the texture of the music**

This is the description for solo performances such as singing a song. It becomes more textured when a choir sings. Likewise, a solo violin player is very different and the music becomes increasingly more textured when a duet, chamber quartet and an orchestra plays. DJ's that specialise in mixing music understand texture and its impact on the enjoyment of music. They layer sounds very effectively.

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<sup>2</sup> Ouvry, M (2003) *Sounds Like Playing*, London: Early Education

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### **Pulse and beat**

This is the steady pattern that underpins any piece of music and is commonly clapped or counted, e.g. 1,2,3,1,2,3, etc.

### **Rhythm**

The rhythm is about the notes or syllables and clapping or beating these. Some are short notes and others are longer. The musical notation is how we read the rhythm as well as other aspects of music.

### **Pattern**

Within music, as with poetry, there are repeating patterns of music. The chorus in a song is an example of a repeating pattern.

## **Idea 5.3: Begin with body sounds**

When we think about how sounds are created, then this helps us see the potential in everyday objects. Ask children to do each of the above actions to their own body. Can they hear the sounds inside themselves? For example try scraping the one thumb nail with the other. Put them close to your ear to hear the sound.

Sing the song “If you’re happy and you know it” and make up different sound actions. Encourage children to add their own suggestions.

Children have begun the art of blowing when they are able to make raspberry sounds. Many nursery aged children pride themselves on having learned to whistle.

## **Idea 5.4: Explore your outdoor space**

Take the time to explore your outdoor space for sounds that can be made by flicking, tapping, plucking, snapping, etc. using the list in Idea. Often you will find novel sounds that you may not have considered. Using Book Creator, or a similar app that can record sounds and photos, can be a useful way of capturing and building up the musical and sound possibilities that exist within your space.

## **Idea 5.5: Echo that sound**

Practice copying the sounds you hear outside. Cats, dogs, gulls, sheep, cows, frogs, bees, mosquitoes, cars, etc. It can be a lot of fun.

- Who let the dogs out? Woof, woof! Woof-woof!
- Who let the bees out? Buzz, buzz! Buzz-buzz!

The more realistic you get the better. This can be rowdy!

## Idea 5.6: The sound making sorting factory

Sort objects by the sounds they make. Ask your group to each find something outside with which to make a noise and to bring it to the “Sound making sorting factory”. Set up a sorting belt along a raised bed or in a line and have hoops with labels to guide where each object must be put according to different criteria.

Don’t forget to have an awards ceremony for the noises made, e.g.:

- The silliest noise
- The noisiest noise
- The most beautiful noise

These objects need to go on special pedestals such as plates or boxes. Let the children decide which would work best.

## Idea 5.7: Make and play drums<sup>3</sup>

Drums are possibly one of the oldest instruments in the world. Every culture or society values and appreciates the tonal quality of a decent drum. They are used for celebrations but also to communicate messages across the landscape. Drums can be played with sticks or the hands. Many containers make great drumming sounds without needing any work.

- Create a taut membrane across one or both ends of pipes or animal tubes provides endless creative opportunities. You can do this by stretching sellotape across a large plastic planter. Parcel tape also works well. Duct tape is usually too thick and does not produce a very satisfying sound.
- A large balloon stretched over a container such as a tin can is good – especially if pinched and pulled. Children also enjoy prodding the rubber.
- Have drums which can be moved around the outdoor space. They can be used for communication games where children tap out a rhythm for a friend to copy who is in a different part of the outdoor space.
- Look for litter bins and other large vessels and see how these work as drums. What is the deepest sound you can find? Use chopsticks or dowels or sticks. Different beaters produce different sounds on different surfaces.

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<sup>3</sup> Alec Duncan from Child’s Play Music has videos about how to make drums. They are worth watching.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCck8dtBs7OZwgshzDFN1YpA> His work is the inspiration behind a lot of the music work I’ve explored outside and the suggestions above.

## 6. Exploring Sounds Outside

### Introduction

When sound is created, it travels in waves. These waves are reflected, absorbed or diffracted by the walls or other environmental features within the vicinity of the sound being made. Thus every place will have different acoustics, which can be explored in several ways.

It is very hard for children, even those in primary school to understand the concept of sound waves. Try and find opportunities for children to see and hear the vibration of objects can help. For example:

- When the ignition on a car is turned on, the car vibrates and we can hear the sound of the engine too. If you open the bonnet, you can see different parts of the car vibrating.
- When you pluck some types of fence wire, you can see it vibrate and hear the corresponding noise.
- Use a tuning fork to create a sound, then lower it into a bowl of water – the vibrations create ripples.

### Idea 6.1 Sing the same song in different places outside

Listen to what sound comes back. For example, try:

- In the corner of a built up area
- In the middle of a playing field
- Into a litter bin or other large container
- Under a shelter
- Inside

Where does it sound best? Do all songs sound best when sung in that place? Record each version and compare them. Is it possible to work out where the group is, when singing each version?

Discuss how it feels to sing in different places and how the acoustics change. Also encourage the children to “think” the song and not sing it out aloud. You can also practice mouthing the words. This technique is used by choir masters.



The same activity can be repeated using sticks or tapping rhythms with other instruments. This repetition helps children to play with the rhythms, tones and sounds of language and how it links with the landscape, thereby creating a soundscape.

### Idea 6.2 In the footsteps of sound

- What sounds do your footsteps make as you walk around different parts of your outdoor space?
- Does this change at different times of the year or if you wear different shoes?
- Which footwear produces the best sounds?
- Can you hear any sounds if you walk barefoot?

### Idea 6.3: Hide and seek sounds

This activity helps children exercise control over the volume of sound and learn the concept of loud and soft.

- You need a teddy bear or other item and two instruments – these could be simply two sticks to make a loud sound and two stones to make a quiet sound.
- Hide a chosen item – a teddy bear, perhaps – in an area in the playground.
- One child who does not know where it is, has to be guided towards it by the others in the group. Loud sounds such as banging the sticks means the child is getting closer to the teddy. A quiet sound meaning the child is far away.
- The group sounds could be vocal, instrumental or involve using the body, e.g. foot stomping or clapping of hands.

### Idea 6.4 Samplebot your sounds

Samplebot is a mixing app which allows you to record up to 12 different sounds. Once this happens, the app enables you to turn the recordings into a mixing deck and the children can explore the sounds in a different way. As children learn how to use the app, they can have fun recording specific themes or rhythms. For example:

- Do sticks make different sounds?
- Can you tap dance on different surfaces?
- Is there a noisy bird that could be recorded? The app has a simple editing feature.
- Compare the outdoor space sounds to those in a woodland or on a beach or in a town.

For more ideas and a simple user guide, have a look at this video: <https://youtu.be/WsyBH6HPX2w> The app also takes you through the features. The app has huge potential. It's worth finding out if any of your parents or children with older siblings enjoy mixing and recording. They may also help create some fantastic compositions.

### Idea 6.5: A musical ball

If children enjoy playing with balls, then put out a variety of shapes and sizes into the outdoor space. After children have played and explored the balls in their own way, have a review:

- Which ball sounds best when bounced?
- Are there any silent balls?
- Is it possible to make the noisiest ball sound quieter?
- In what ways can we do this?
- How much control do we have over the sound and volume of a bouncing ball?

These discussions are also a way into using Samplebot (Idea 6.4) to record the sounds made and use them creatively.



## Idea 6.6: The Keeper of the Sound

- This is a variation on the traditional game of sardines.
- One child is chosen to be the *Keeper of the Sound*. He or she goes and hides somewhere in the outdoor space and begins making the agreed sound, such as tapping two stones together.
- The rest of the children have to start looking for the *Keeper of the Sound*. Once they see this child, they must sit or lie down quietly beside them until everyone has found the *Keeper of the Sound*.

## Idea 6.7: A song for every place

Look around your outdoor space. What features can you see? Write them down. Now search for songs and rhymes which could be sung beside these features, e.g.:

- Window – *How much is that doggy in the window?*
- Hill or mound – *Jack and Jill, The Grand Old Duke of York*
- Any step up in height – *I'm the king of the castle and you're the dirty rascal*
- Drainpipe – *Incy Wincy Spider*

Build up a collection of place-specific songs and rhymes. Encourage children and their parents to contribute place-specific songs too. Have them in a pocket-sized set for using outside.

## Idea 6.8: A noisy story rope trail

This approach works well as a means of setting up a trailing going beyond the outdoor space in the school grounds. Or it can lead children from the indoors to outside. So, it is useful for transitions.

You need a long piece of rope. Alternatively raid the gym cupboard for skipping ropes. Other alternatives include:

- Sticks – slower going but provides a different dimension
- Trails made of other substances, e.g. breadcrumbs or birdseed. This can be particularly exciting over long distances.
- Hoops – this can be for very simple beginning, middle and end trails.
- Rope ladders
- Whilst chalk can be used to create a storyline, any mistakes are apparent. If a rope is used then an untraceable change can be made. The rope can be laid flat on the ground, in straight lines, circles, attached up high (handy for children in wheelchairs or who have difficulty working at ground level). They can also lead to a specific destination.

Along the rope at various intervals are objects which can be used to make different sounds. As the children walk along, you can tell a story out aloud and the children add in the noises to accompany the story. If an adult models this process with a small group of children then the children will soon be able to create and tell

## 7. Discovering sounds when out and about

### Introduction

Sometimes the outdoor space is just too small. There are a myriad of sounds waiting to be discovered beyond the fence. Begin in the school grounds but then look at local places and spaces. Both natural and man-made features have lots to offer. Here are some suggestions to get you started...

### Idea 7.1: Special songs

Songs and rhymes can be sung whilst on walks which can add to the fun and routine of going to the world beyond the outdoor area. They can also help children learn routines and help them in transitions to cope.

Develop special songs for different activities associated with being out and about. These can be adaptations of known songs.

- Find or invent a song which helps children get in their outdoor clothes.
- Sing songs for different sorts of weather: *It's raining again; The Sun has got his hat on.*
- Have a special song for leaving the building.
- Have a “Welcome to the Woods” song that is sung upon arrival in the woods.

### Idea 7.2: Collect sounds

Go for a walk and just focus on the sounds. When the noises are heard, let children record them in some way. Use talking tins, microphones and mobile digital recording apps and play back devices.

If your group of children enjoy this activity then it can be extended through:

- Thinking about only the surfaces you are walking on
- The noises made by the group – the conversations and laughter.
- Noises of things which you pass or which pass you by such as gulls, cars, building works.

### Idea 7.3: Take a stick for a walk

Each child needs to find a stick. Go for a walk and listen to the different sounds they make as it is dragged over different surfaces - on the ground and vertical surfaces such as fences and railings too (but not on people's property – stick to street furniture). You could also take a metal ski or walking pole so that children compare the differences.

Have one adult observe how children use the sticks on the walk and make recordings – a video might be interesting for the children to watch as well as to hear.

- Do you encounter any unexpected sounds?
- Which sounds make you laugh the most?



## Idea 7.4: Explore echoes

Read the book *“Little Beaver and the Echo”* by Amy MacDonald or another book about echoes. Another starting point could be children discovering the echo made by speaking into a large plastic drum or through a long hose or pipe.

Use these springboards to go on an echo walk. Look for echo chambers such as:

- Underneath bridges can also be a place to find an echo.
- Bins and holes and drains are worth checking out.
- Explore guttering pipes too.

## Idea 7.6: Sound map your local area

Download a Bing map (<http://www.bing.com/maps/>) of your local area or use a large street map. With your group, discuss what sounds you think you will hear in different places. For example, what might the children hear at the local supermarket? What about at a local park?

Plan a short walk where children have time to stop, listen and record the sounds. The children will need time to practice being silent for a few seconds. This is a good challenge in itself. Mark the sounds on the map and ensure they are recorded. Using a set of talking tins or pegs works particularly well as then the journey can be displayed and children can press the replay button on each of the pegs that matches the sites marked on the map.



*Listening to birds – ducks, gulls, blackbirds and pigeons all have clear distinct sounds that can be captured using a digital device.*

## 8. Homemade musical instruments

Homemade instruments created from household junk and other free and found materials are a useful way of helping children explore sound. Section 9 provides numerous suggestions for themes linked to children's interests. An online search will quickly reveal lots of videos and advice about homemade instruments. The photo provides examples used on a recent training course to illustrate some particularly quick and simple examples:



- 1. Sticks:** These are natural beaters. The ones in the photo can double up as claves if held correctly <https://youtu.be/HaMcOwWUNWI> These have been made from green hazel wood, which means they were cut live from a hazel tree.
- 2. Tiny tyre drum:** Parcel tape is useful for creating drums with free and found resources. This has been wrapped both sides of the hollow. It works best when gripped between the knees and sticks used as beaters.
- 3. Ball in see-through tube:** This is a very simple visual rattle that can be useful for very young children to watch as well as hear and feel. You may need to seal the ends.
- 4. Guttering drum:** This one is made from masking tape covered with clear duct tape. In theory this is not a good choice of skin, but in reality this is a tough drum that has lasted years!
- 5. Coconut shells:** A good reason to eat coconuts are to get the shells afterwards – double check that no child has an allergy. These have a limited shell life but are great for clippety-clop sounds.



**6. Bottle tops in bags:** This is wonderful for a metallic shaker. I used a silicone lunch bag but a small, good quality plastic bag would work equally well. Children can hammer bottle tops flat and holes can be drilled in them to further the range of bottle top instruments. For a more refined version, have a look at this wonderful bottletop shaker that can even be cleaned in a dishwasher! <https://youtu.be/wLesWSIGVWI>

**7. Castanets:** These have been made from wood cookie tied together with an elastic band. A simple knot separates the cookies to provide the tension needed.

**8. Water canister drum:** Use a beater with an empty canister. These can be a range of sizes. It's a good use for a leaky canister that is beyond repair.

**9. Sticky shell box:** This has been made with clear sticky tape over a food container. The tiny shells stick to the tape and have to be flicked off. As this happens a lovely noise is made. This is great for children who like cause and effect.

**10. Tiny tube rattles:** Small plastic tubes – these ones were for storing vitamins can be useful for children to make their own. You may need to seal the ends with glue or tape if you wish the contents to remain inside.

**11. Plastic shaker:** This is an old plastic container with a screw top lid. It enables children to see what is making the noise which can be helpful for many children to make this connection. For more ideas, have a look at this YouTube video <https://youtu.be/E5XpQ10haH8>

**12. Elastic 'guitar':** This is a biscuit tin with three different thicknesses of elastic band. Pluck and play on both sides.

**13. Toilet tube rattles:** Seal the end of a toilet tube with masking tape. Pop in an object and seal the other end in a way that is perpendicular to the other. This creates space for the object to move. Children enjoy making these for each other to work out what is inside.



## 9. The Sound Garden: Creating a Music Space Outside

Sound gardens can be a lot more than a few pots and pans hung up on a fence. A sound garden is a creative way of ensuring that you have a focus on music making outside. As well as being valuable in its own right, music can also be regarded as an interdisciplinary glue that connects other curriculum areas together. For example, sound is explicitly mentioned within the Sciences experiences and outcomes but is an essential part of music too.

### Principles

- Involve the children, parents and the community in its planning and construction.
- Use it both in free play and for specific activities.
- Keep it well maintained and attractive.
- Change the theme of the area in line with children's interests.



### Idea 9.1: Observe how your children explore sound outside

The theory of loose parts is all about children becoming designers and creators of space. When adults develop a space, Simon Nicolson suggested that they have had all the fun<sup>4</sup>, and therefore children have been cheated of a valuable creative experience.

In order to develop a sound garden, you could observe your children playing and interacting with a range of resources and items:

- Are some items more popular than others for creating sound? If so which ones and why might this be? Reflect on what items encourage children to explore sound, which ones need modelled by an adult as a springboard to their use.
- Look at how and where your children explore sound. Is it always in a particular place such as a construction area? Or does it happen everywhere outside? Or not at all? Is it worth keeping a log for a week to note down the time, place and what happens around children's exploration of sound and music?
- Do you have a music corner inside or out? How often do children use this space?
- Is it one or two children who are drawn towards exploring sounds and making music or do all children want to experience sound and music?
- Do some children need to move to music? Which children prefer to dance or move about when playing or exploring sound?
- Do some children need to sing or shout or explore sound with their voices?
- How do staff feel about music making and sound exploration? Are they confident at modelling, extending children's interests and promoting the value of music?

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<sup>4</sup> Nicolson, S. (1971) *The Theory of Loose Parts: How Not to Cheat Children*, Landscape Architecture, p30-34

<https://media.kaboom.org/docs/documents/pdf/ip/Imagination-Playground-Theory-of-Loose-Parts-Simon-Nicholson.pdf>

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## Idea 9.2: Finding the right space to set up the sound garden

Finding a good space for music outside matters. Given the potential levels of noise, it is generally best situated away from a quiet area or a classroom. The acoustics of the area matter too. Exploring this aspect of music is worthwhile in advance of choosing a good spot.

Sound gardens may be features such as:

- **A corner.** This enables two vertical surfaces to be used.
- **A nook or cranny.** This makes for a very personal exploration and is handy if noise levels are an issue.
- **A music wall.** This is when a wall or fence is used to create a music feature. Think carefully about the type of object placed on a wall as often the sound made can be dampened or changed by the contact with the wall.
- **A musical washing line** is a useful portable approach which can be handy for settings that have to set up from scratch. It can also be integrated into a corner.
- **A tree branch** cemented or stuck into a bucket. This makes a nice display especially for small instruments, which need hung up.
- **A music tree or bush** where items are attached to these plants.



## Idea 9.3: Think about the layout of the sound garden

Pay careful attention to how the sound garden is laid out. Work with your children to find the best heights for different objects. Some resources need to be hung up. Others need to be picked and played. Your children may want a table for presenting some resources. Have a suitable storage area for different sorts of containers. This may need to be covered to provide protection from the elements.

It is less work if items can remain outside. If you are in a setting, which is prone to vandalism, then beginning with junk items can be a good start. Just have spare pieces in case any go missing and fix it promptly.

Alternatively, put all the props and attachments in a box or bag and let the children recreate the sound wall or space in their own way when you go outside. This may be a job for a group of children and part of the routine of setting up the outdoor space.

## Idea 9.4: Involve your children in creating the sound garden

- Look at the features in the environment and find out which make a sound when tapped or jumped on or pinged. These can be recorded.
- Find out what everyday items make an attractive or interesting sound.
- Look at photos of music walls and gardens on the internet.

- Decide what sort of music feature would work best and in which place outside. Consider the impact of noise on other people nearby.
- From all of the above, the children can develop a list of items, which they feel might be good to have in a music area outside (see below).
- The list is displayed in the entrance area and parents and children are encouraged to sign up to say what they can bring in to make the wall.
- Ensure children are involved in making the music wall. Invite parents to assist too. Turn it into an occasion with music playing, instruments to try out and fun to be had by all.



*This musical space was created by children, staff, parents and even the school janitor joined in!  
Read about in this blog post: <https://creativestarlarning.co.uk/art-music-outdoors/outdoor-music-wall/>*

## Collecting resources

When collecting resources to develop a sound garden, this is an ideal opportunity to involve children in the process.

### Idea 9.5: The sound garden collection box

Get your children to make and decorate a beautiful large collection box. Then they write to their families asking for donations of sound.

- This may include unwanted instruments or parts of an instrument – we always seemed to have bits of recorders in my family when growing up. Even the bits that don't make a sound can be donated.
- Include suggestions such as whistles, unused kitchen equipment and other hidden finds in drawers, cupboards, garages and attics. Garden chimes are especially valuable.
- Remember to check the suitability of each item and whether it needs any preparatory work before the children use it.
- This could become a termly or annual call out for musical items.

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## Idea 9.6: Music raiders of the lost cupboard

If you work in a school, it is quite possible that tucked away at the back of a cupboard are old musical instruments, which are worn, unloved and rarely played. Give these instruments a new lease of life by adding them to the sound garden.

You may need some preparatory work such as removing the base of a chime bar and adding a loop of soft wire to hang up outside, etc. In the photo below, padding has been added to the fence to make the chime bars sound better.



It is also worth raiding old or abandoned project boxes. Very often science kits have interesting items, which can be added to the sound garden collection box.

## Idea 9.7: Nature's orchestra

- Natural materials are full of potential for exploring music outside.
- When out and about with your class, gather resources sustainably in line with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. This could include: cones, stones, sticks, twigs, bark, leaves, conkers, shells, seaweed, dried seed heads of flowers, seeds, nuts, feathers, hay, etc.
- Build up collections ready to use and swap about to keep your sound garden an interesting and vibrant place.
- When gardening, look for opportunities to gather material that can be added to the sound garden for seasonal variation.
- Show children how to make sounds with natural objects. For example, it is possible to create a dandelion trumpet or to blow a blade of grass [https://youtu.be/fYnW-Uj0\\_9E](https://youtu.be/fYnW-Uj0_9E)

## Idea 9.8: Build up your beaters

Have a range of beaters for children to use: sticks, wooden spoons of different sizes, metal spoons of different sizes, plastic beaters, etc.

- Think scientifically about the range of materials which can be used, e.g. different types of metal, plastic, wood, etc.
- Think mathematically about the range of shapes, sizes and weights of beaters.
- Some settings like beaters to be attached to a fence or post. Bear in mind this can limit choice for children.
- Utensils in an outdoor kitchen can be transferred or doubled up for use in the music area.

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- Always go for pairs of beaters. Children need to develop the dexterity to use both hands when playing an instrument.
- It can be an interesting situation for children to discover one day that there are no beaters. This can be an invitation to find sticks and other items to use as beaters.

### **Idea 9.9: Collect interesting noisy objects**

Begin a collection of objects, which make noises. It is amazing what is out there once you get looking:

- Collate noisy toys such as horns, squeaky toys, whistles, bells and rattles etc (have wipes on hand for cleaning wind instruments).
- Have lots of tubes and hoses of different sizes for children to talk and sing down. Tape the top of a recorder to a hose and listen to the completely different sound it makes.
- Make home-made instruments from unwanted materials to play with outside, e.g. shakers with gravel and bottles. Have fun playing guessing games and trying to work out what materials make which sounds.

### **Idea 9.10: Collect containers**

Containers are essential for exploring sound. They can be used to hide and house different objects. Try putting one resource, e.g. ten conkers, in a range of different containers for the children to hear the difference that a container makes. Think about items such as:

- Guttering pipes
- Translucent takeaway containers, crystal or transparent pipes – very useful in that children can see how the objects inside are moving and it is the movement, which creates the sound.
- Tins, such as food cans – make sure there are no sharp edges. Have different sizes for comparative investigations.
- Metal boxes such as biscuit tins. These come in different 3D shapes especially cuboids and cylinders.
- Wooden boxes are a more environmentally friendly approach to creating shakers. It's also possible to find magic puzzle boxes which require a lot of problem solving to work out how to get inside them and discover the object that is making the noise.
- Plastic and cardboard tubes of different sorts. Remember cardboard will go soggy on wet days though.

Use, 2.5l, 5l and 10l water canisters and compare the sound of these when banged with a stick. See how it sounds when you slap or tap the carriers instead. Which part of the carrier produces the best sound?

Think about the range of objects that can be put in a container. This is where you have variation:

- Metal objects such as coins
- Natural objects such as cones
- Plastic objects such as beads
- Mixed media such as buttons.

Bear in mind the ages of the children with whom you work and their ability to access the materials inside a container. Babies will need the containers to be sealed. Older children will enjoy making their own shakers.

### **Idea 9.11: Building routines around using instruments**

We need positive routines in place which develop independent and responsible use of instruments and objects:

- Treat instruments as your friends.
- If some instruments need to be kept clean then discuss with the children ways of ensuring this happens.
- For wind instruments including objects you blow into, have a box of wipes and ask children to wipe them after they have finished playing with them. Then they have time to dry before another mouth goes on them! Alternatively have a box where instruments that have been used are placed for cleaning.

### **Idea 9.12: Keeping the sound garden looking good and being well used**

Like all areas outside, the sound garden will need to be refreshed in order to make it interesting and relevant to your children. The trick here is to have lots of themes which work well with children's interests and to change the features accordingly. If you have a very small outdoor space, these suggestions can be integrated into other areas rather than trying to squish another idea into a cramped area.

Here are some themes to get you going. Encourage children to come up with more ideas for each theme...

#### **Idea 9.12.1: The mechanic's garage**

- A spanner or wrench set hung in ascending order.
- Metal wheel hubs of different sizes on the ground for children to explore.
- Oil drums or plastic bottles that have contained different garage/car products (thoroughly cleaned).
- Bicycle wheels – spin and drag a stick on the spokes.
- Have allen keys and other spanners as beaters.
- Encourage children to experiment with sounds made by adding loose objects into tyres and rolling them around.

#### **Idea 9.12.2: The builder's construction area**

- Bore pipes for scraping and tapping of different sizes as well as rolling items around inside them.
- Pipes of all sorts, especially ones which bang and chink.
- Various assorted tools hung up to clang together.
- Small planks of wood, drilled and hung up – these can be different sizes and lengths – giant wooden xylophones!
- A hammering table. Offer a range of small hammers and mallets. Remember to think about the surfaces and the sounds that result.

### **Idea 9.12.3: The plumber's musical pipes**

- PVC pipes of different lengths – drill holes in them to hang them up.
- Copper pipes of different lengths – drill holes in them to hang them up.
- Plugs and chains and little drain covers for sinks – these can be put in different types of bags and shaken.
- Bowls of water and water for pouring through pipes.
- Put sticky tape over the ends of guttering pipes to create portable flipflopophones (hit with an old flip flop or sandal or just with your hands).

### **Idea 9.12.4: The gardener's musical shed**

- Range of terracotta flower pots of different sizes.
- Tiny plastic flowers pots tied together to throw and catch or shake.
- Big plastic flower pots of different sizes (small, medium and large) for using as big drums.
- Different sorts of gravel for using in flower pots as shakers – have some which are small enough to fall through the holes at the bottom.
- Watering cans – have sticks for tapping. Fill with water to experience different sounds.
- Hang up trowels of different sizes and types for clanging.
- Kneeling mats in pairs for clapping together.

### **Idea 9.12.5: A kitchen clanging centre (Ideal for extending an outdoor kitchen)**

- Range of pots, pans and lids. Arrange with sizes in mind.
- Baking trays, muffin tins and bread tins: think about sizes.
- Metal bowls – have a set of different sizes. Hang up in nets or float on water trays.
- Oven grills and wire rack cooling trays – useful for scraping.
- Wooden spoons of different shapes and sizes – as beaters as well as to be beaten.
- Cutlery mobiles – collect different sizes and types from charity shops or put a call out to parents for spare unwanted items.
- Tin cans of different sizes – tape together or hang down in size order from trees etc. Make sure ends aren't serrated or sharp. Try and get a few large catering tins!

### **Idea 9.12.6: The scientist's laboratory of musical experiments**

- Glass jars filled with different amounts of coloured water<sup>5</sup>
- Glass bottles for blowing across the tops. Fill with different levels of water.
- Bowl of water or a water tray for dipping metal objects into to hear the difference this makes to the sound and also for blowing into using hoses.
- Plastic bottles of different sizes
- Hoses of different sorts
- Plastic tubes of different lengths for blowing into bottles, etc.
- Crystal tubes of different lengths, with stoppers for both ends for filling with items.
- Wipes for wiping clean the items which go into mouths.

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<sup>5</sup> Glass is alright to use when given time and thought as to how this can happen. Think about where such items need to be put to reduce the chances of breakage and discuss with children prior to use. Model sensible behaviour and create a risk benefit assessment to outline your procedures, levels of supervision required and how you intend to manage any risks.

### Idea 9.12.7: A scraping and stroking place

If children like scraping movements such as running a stick along a railing, then set up a place where such actions can be explored:

- Have corrugated plastic attached to a wall
- Add animal tubes, rippled hoses or pipes and wooden panels with wooden cuts in them.
- Include smooth objects which make little sound when scraped or stroked.
- Include soft objects for silent scraping
- Put up lattice work so this can be scraped
- Add in combs and brushes so that the same “scrape” can be explored on different objects.

### Idea 9.12.8: May the force be with you

The Sound Garden is also a place to explore how forces are connected with sound. This is one effect of forces which is occasionally overlooked. Create collections which involve:

- **Pushing and pulling:** the plucking of different tensions and types of strings; door bells and other noises which are made when things are pushed. A lot of children’s toys involve noisy buttons. Hammering is an example of a push which creates a noise too.
- **Floating and sinking:** comparing the sounds made when an object is tapped above water, floating on water and sinking into the water.
- **Throwing and dropping:** the noise of one object landing on different surfaces. Think of all the words to describe the different sounds. With very little children, have a “plop bucket” where children can experiment with different items being dropped in the water and comparing the different sounds made.
- **Compressing and stretching:** the stretching of an animal tube; the addition of a slinky.
- **Magnets and magnetic objects:** the sounds made when magnets attract different materials.
- **Spinning objects:** the hum of different spinning tops; wheels – add water and listen for the spray.



*This is a simple area where water is used to explore sounds set up by practitioners on a recent course*



### Idea 9.12.9: A natural music area

- Create xylophones using sticks/bamboo and string
- Collect leaves and let them dry before using – keep them in a pile or old compost bin if needed.
- Have a range of sticks which can be used as claves or beaters.
- Collect gravel for use in shakers
- Have bamboo tubes hung up. Bamboo cups or pots work well too.
- Have saw cuts in logs to create long scrapers
- Have shells of different sizes – hang up to chink together or put in a net to throw or shake.
- Collect whistles – you can make from elder – ask a Forest School practitioner for advice. Build up a collection of wooden bird callers, horn whistles and clay whistles.

### Idea 9.12.10: The garden of opposites or pairs

- High and low notes of old chime bars or metallophones or xylophones put together in pairs.
- Little and large of other items, e.g. flowerpots, spoons or saucepans placed together.
- Long and short tubes, or fat and thin ones.
- Heavy and light instruments

A similar wall can be created but using pairs of items so that everything is played in twos! This can be great for co-operative play or for practice at using both hands to beat a rhythm.



*For the love of loose parts: exploring a hanging sound garden (on a washing line) on a recent course – temporary set ups mean that the musical explorations are more likely to vary day-to-day and week-on-week compared to fixed music walls. The advantage of hanging instruments is that children can move around them more easily. The sounds are also enhanced as the instruments or objects are not thudding against a wall or fence.*





### Watch out

One common error is to attach instruments to walls with cable ties. Whilst it means the instruments won't move, that is arguably missing the point that one should be moving around when playing.

This tambourine is fixed so tightly in place it cannot be played like a tambourine should. What message does this give a child?

If you fix instruments to walls then how do you progress and extend the learning that can happen here?

## Idea 9.13: A celebration of sound all year round

A Sound Garden can be linked to the seasons, festivals and celebrations. No festival or event is complete without the music, singing and celebratory noises. Here are a few ideas to get you going...

### Idea 9.13.1 Chinese New Year

- Celebrate by using only objects made in China.
- Have a bamboo theme in your sound garden. If you have any toy pandas then make sure they get an opportunity to come out and play there too.
- Think about the Feng Shui of your outdoor space and re-organise the area to make it feel more balanced.
- Have semi-tuned instruments with pentatonic notes. Play chords with two beaters for a simple Chinese sound.
- Place wind chimes in key areas of the outdoor space

### Idea 9.13.2 Valentine's Day

This is a perfect opportunity to celebrate our love of music.

- Ask the children to find their favourite sound outside. Make a recording of all the sounds we love.
- Put the object or instrument they love the most into the sound garden for everyone else to enjoy too.

### Idea 9.13.3 Harvest Sounds

This is a time to harvest the sounds of fruits, vegetables, seeds and nuts. It's a perfect opportunity to blend music into the harvesting of produce and making snack.

- Use a pair of leeks as beaters
- Scrunch lettuces
- Pop onion skins into a bag and shake them
- Use a hollowed out pumpkin as a drum

You may wish to show children a video clip of the Vegetable Orchestra <http://www.vegetableorchestra.org> as inspiration.

#### **Idea 9.13.4 St Andrew's Day**

Time to celebrate all things Scottish:

- Have semi-tuned instruments with pentatonic notes. Play with two beaters and a tum-te-tum-te rhythm for a Scottish folk sound (very roughly).
- Gaelic place names are very descriptive and have a musical quality. Listen to Gaelic songs and music before being inspired.
- Build a musical sculpture of Nessie, the Loch Ness Monster. What would Nessie's noisy body be? A bore pipe?
- Ask children and their families to donate an unwanted Scottish object. This might be a book, or a spurtle, or something made in Scotland. Create a Scottish Sound Garden from what is brought in.

#### **Idea 9.13.5 Jingle bells**

Celebrate bells at Christmas time

Attach bells to sticks or soft knicker elastic to make them easier to hold or be carried around. Why not add them to bands and wear them on your wrists or ankles.

## 10. Micro-performances

When we think of performances, often quite structured events spring to mind such as Nativity Plays. These generally involve lots of practice and children assume different roles. Micro-performances are just what the name suggests. These are short, sweet activities where children may perform for one another and be the audience as well as the participants.

Firstly, micro-performances can happen anywhere inside or out. No stage is needed. The space in which that activity happens is the performing arena. Saying that, being aware of the “performance potential” of your outdoor space is helpful, e.g.

- A step
- A wee corner in the outdoor space.
- An upturned crate
- An elevated area such as a hill or play structure or a decking.
- Space for the audience – be this one or two children or a larger crowd. Seats, stumps or milk crates provide plenty of impromptu seats.

### Idea 10.1 Performing for others

Invite parents, older children from other classes or other school staff to be participants in a performance as well as the audience. Do give advance warning, for this sort of activity and start with small numbers of parents.

Encourage the children to show and teach the adults the songs and activities once they have gained confidence and feel secure in their knowledge and skills to do so. A typical session may follow a programme like this:

- Children teaching adults or older children the songs and dance.
- Everyone joins in.
- Everyone celebrates (has snack and drink together) and children can go and play if they wish to.

### Idea 10.2 Developing performance skills

Be gentle with your children. Learning the skills of performing and being an audience take time and practice. Make sure this is always a drop-in activity, that children choose to do, otherwise they may not understand why they have to sit quietly or even want to!

- Singing and/or playing an instrument clearly and loud enough for the audience to hear.
- Being able to listen and/or watch others quietly.
- Sitting or standing still in the one place during a performance.
- Contributing to the performance at appropriate moments, e.g. learning when to clap, when to sing
- Participating in discussions about performances: encourage children to peer and self-assess, e.g.:
  - If you can't hear Fred play his triangle, can you put your hand up so he knows to make a louder sound.

- Discuss what makes a good audience/performance and focus on each aspect in turn. Remember to include discussions about what can impact on performance, such as how we're feeling and the weather.
- How can we tell if an audience likes what we are doing? Encourage children to come up with ideas, to look for evidence and review afterwards.
- Also look for non-verbal clues and behaviour during a performance.
- Provide digital or other recording equipment so children can see and/or hear themselves "perform".

### Idea 10.3: Enjoying a campfire

There are many benefits of a campfire. It provides an opportunity to develop talking, drama and music skills in a fun context. Campfires work well anytime of the year – wrap up warmer in winter and ensure hot food and drinks are available too.

Campfires also bring people together and provide homemade entertainment that is remembered for years to come. It works best if there is a competent adult who can supervise the fire, freeing up other staff to support the children and organise the event. It is great if there is someone who can play a musical instrument but not essential. The campfire leader plays a key role as both a children's advocate and a coach!

Factors to consider include:

1. **Location:** All the participants need to be able to see the leader and the people undertaking the micro-performances.
2. **Fire:** Make sure enough wood has been gathered to last the entire time.
3. **Start small:** Campfires can happen with just a small group of children who are interested and want to be part of this musical experience. They need to be familiar with the concept of a fire and know how to behave around a fire – or have sufficient adult support to ensure their own and others' safety. It's worthwhile filming parts of it so that the rest of the children can also look and consider if this is something they would like to get involved in.

A successful campfire is one in which all participants are happy they came and sad they have to leave "too soon". It's best to have the children going away wishing for just one more story or one more song. This takes a bit of experimenting to get right. Three short songs may be more than enough with a quick story thrown in. You can also add in jokes, little skits and other entertainment to build up occasion.

## Idea 10.4: An Outdoor Music Festival

You may enjoy going to music festivals and hearing live bands and having fun hanging out with friends. An increasing number of children are going to family-friendly festivals, so this can be a lovely way to celebrate the development of a sound garden or other musical activity outside. Ask families who attend festivals to share photos and talk about their experiences.

The children will have to:

- Advertise their festival, create and sell tickets to staff, families and older children.
- Decide what activities will happen. You can use some from this booklet.
- Put together a programme of events.
- Decide about food, toilet and shelter arrangements. Festivals are rarely cancelled because of the weather.
- Make the outdoor space look suitably festive. It must look special and different to usual.
- Consider zoning the area for the different events. For example:
  - A Chillout Tent where calm nature music is played.
  - A Dance Stage where everyone can dance.
  - A Dark Disco Den, complete with coloured lights and a disco ball.
  - The Live Stage for the organized programme.
  - The Stand up Stage complete with props for stand up and impromptu performances. Remember to have dressing up items here too. Soft toys and dolls can be part of the audience.
  - The Food Station where people can buy snacks and drinks.
  - Tents with different types of music playing. You may even have friends and family who are willing to bring along an instrument to play. For example, one tent could be for world music, another for jazz, another for blues, etc.

At the Live Stage, the children can present prepared performances. This can be as simple as singing a nursery rhyme or doing a group action song. Invite joint performances from parents and their children. Do not make this a major show. Listen to the children's ideas and who is happy to volunteer. Give them chances to practice in advance in front of audiences so they are not frightened on the day.

### FURTHER IDEAS...

An online search will give you many ideas for music outside, especially YouTube and Pinterest. Have a look at:

- STOMP video clips, e.g <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZ7aYQtldg>
- Child's Play Music <http://childsplaymusic.com.au>
- The Junk Orchestra <http://www.thejunkorchestra.co.uk>
- Creative STAR <https://creativestarning.co.uk/c/art-music-outdoors/>

A brilliant book to get is *Sounds Like Playing* by Marjorie Ouvry (2004). Whilst not outdoorsy, it's a friendly book that ensures child-centred music experiences. Every ELC establishment should have a copy!



# 11. Curriculum for Excellence

*The use of drama, art, music and dance allows children to experience the world in different ways. The use of expressive arts ensures diversity in the interpretation of places and natural and social events happening outside. Developing an awareness of space and its use as a stimulus for creativity and expression is another reason for taking learning outdoors. Expressive arts outside can offer opportunities for collaborative working on a larger scale.*

*Outdoor spaces and places also offer an increased variety of contexts for creating and presenting ideas. Contributing to, or creating public performances outdoors can enhance the sense of community and understanding of what it means to belong to a place”*

Education Scotland (2011) Outdoor Learning: practical, guidance, ideas and support for teachers and practitioners in Scotland. Available to download online.

## The music experiences and outcomes

- I have experienced the energy and excitement of presenting/performing for audiences and being part of an audience for other people’s presentations/performances. **EXA 0-01a**
- I have the freedom to use my voice, musical instruments and music technology to discover and enjoy playing with sound and rhythm. **EXA 0-16a**
- I enjoy singing and playing along to music of different styles and cultures. **EXA 0-17a**
- Inspired by a range of stimuli, and working on my own and/or with others, I can express and communicate my ideas, thoughts and feelings through musical activities. **EXA 0-18a**
- I can respond to music by describing my thoughts and feelings about my own and others’ work. **EXA 0-19a**

## Benchmarks

- Participates actively and uses his/her voice in singing activities from a range of styles and cultures, for example, nursery rhymes and songs with actions.
- Uses instruments such as drum, claves, chime bar to play along to a range of music styles.
- Shares thoughts and feelings about musical experiences such as live and/or recorded music, peer nursery rhyme performances, school concerts, giving reasons for likes and dislikes.
- Shares views and listens appropriately to the views of others, for example, states if the music is fast/slow or loud/quiet.

When communicating ideas and feelings through creative music activities:

- Uses voice to explore sound and rhythm, for example, hums, whispers, sings
- Chooses different musical instruments to play such as chime bar, drum or body percussion, exploring sound and rhythm, for example, by tapping, clapping.
- Uses technology to capture sound, for example, sound recorders, microphones, apps and other software.

## 12. Finally

Within this website and during any of my training sessions you will find lots of ideas and accompanying photos that contain elements of risk. It is important that you consider all the suggestions on a case-by-case basis to determine whether they are appropriate for the developmental age and learning needs of your children.

You also need to ensure that you are suitably competent and confident to ensure the routines, resources and environment are as safe as necessary. Remember to undertake a risk-benefit assessment for anything you feel needs it, be this using tools and ropes, experiencing fire, climbing trees and other experiences involving heights, moving heavy objects, working off-site, near water and so-on. Creative STAR Learning is all about enabling great outdoor practice but every educator and establishment needs to undertake this within a framework of safety.

Likewise it is important that wherever you are working you follow the land access laws of your country . Being respectful of others, leaving no trace of your presence and considering the impact of your practice on the environment are all part of your responsibilities as educators.

### About Juliet

Juliet is an educational consultant who specialises in outdoor learning and play. Previously, she was the head teacher of three schools ranging in size from 6 to 277 pupils. Juliet has worked at a national level since 2008 writing case studies, documents and doing behind the scenes work to help shape strategy and support for schools and ELC establishments. This includes heading up the team that wrote the Education Scotland document, *Outdoor Learning: A Practical Guide for Scottish Teachers and Practitioners* (2011), co-authoring *Loose Parts Play – A Toolkit* (2016 & 2019) and being part of the Scottish Government strategy group that created *A Play Strategy for Scotland* (2013). Most recently, Juliet contributed to *Out to Play* (2018), a Scottish early years document supporting practitioners to develop off-site provision in local greenspace.



Juliet is in heavy demand world-wide for her practical training. Since 2008, she has been one of the key people behind the scenes that has worked with Scottish Forestry staff to develop the SQA Forest Kindergarten award.

She is the author of two award-winning and best-selling books: *Dirty Teaching: A Beginner's Guide to Learning Outdoors* (2014) and *Messy Maths: An Outdoor, Playful Approach for Early Years* (2017). Her website, Creative STAR Learning is a source of information and support with more than one million visitors in the past four years. Juliet continues to work directly with staff and children in many ELC settings in the North-East of Scotland looking at practical ways to achieve excellent outdoor practice.

Please get in touch if you wish to know more about the training and support she offers to ELC settings and primary schools. Email: [info@creativestarlarning.co.uk](mailto:info@creativestarlarning.co.uk)

See you on the outside! - Juliet@CreativeSTAR