**Teaching Music to Toddlers & Young Children**

**Resources, Thoughts and More**

**Training**

If you are looking to hone musical skills and resources for young children there is a huge range of digital and practical training courses on offer. A rule of thumb before committing precious finances is to investigate whether the trainers or course creators come from

1. An early years music background.
2. A background in music education.
3. A commitment to developing musical outcomes.

Be cautious of businesses leaping on the musical band-waggon (*'Save your children through music!' 'Be part of the Mozart 'effect!', 'Music makes the brain!'*). Consider what you want for your professional self as well as what you want young children to achieve. Becoming an early years music specialist requires proper investment, time and experience.

Courses range from the excellent [MA EYM](https://www.crec.co.uk/cert-music-ed-early-childhood) and [CME](https://www.trinitycollege.com/qualifications/music/CME), to shorter courses with activities, resources and guidance (try [CPD](https://cpduk.co.uk/) or [MHC](https://www.musichousecourses.com/)). Choosing depends on available budget, informed recommendation and a desire to be a thinking, informed early years music educator. Independent trainers are also worth investigating since, in practice and passion have much to offer by way of synergising with your style of delivery. Academic sceptics may doubt online and franchise courses, however careful research with the earlier points in mind will ensure their pedagogical and qualified background authenticity.

**Synthetic instruments**

Sound quality is everything. Given our children's intrinsic musicality the promotion of plastic, poor quality instruments remains baffling. Cost should not be a barrier to collecting over time. With limited instruments other skills emerge such as solo play, turn-taking, call and response, body percussion, vocal composition and instrumental care.

Plastic and synthetic is not all bad! [Remo](https://remo.com/products/product/rhythm-club-floor-tom/) gathering drums have a durable, resonant synthetic skin and are easy to store. Children can interact with exploratory sound play, develop motor skills, play together, turn-take and engage in percussion compositions. Xylophones distributed by [LMS](https://www.lmsmusicsupplies.co.uk/drums-and-percussion/early-years/) retain their pitch and durability with beautiful synthetic wood bars and make for fabulous simple canons. Metal instruments should be steel or bronze since cheaper options (chrome) sounds dull and hopeless. Instruments such as cabasas, triangles, agogos, are pricy but provide rich sound texture.

Suggested video ex: A/ Xylophone or A/ Chimes

**Ethnic instruments**

A huge choice of ethnic and bespoke wooden instruments is now available in shops and online. Well-crafted wooden instruments resonate good sounds because they allow sound waves to breath, expand and contract, and provides harmonic synergy. [Drums for Schools](https://www.drumsforschools.com/?section=products&style=&agemin=&agemax=&s=early+years&orderby=price&post_type=product) were early adopters of nursery sized instruments back in 1997, adapting full sized djembes, maracas, rainmakers, shakers, chime bars, claves, guiros and even creating smaller beaters for young hands. Collaboration with early years specialists and a British music school [Music House](https://www.musichouseforchildren.com/shop) has resulted in a visually delightful collection of instruments notable for textural sounds that are tactile and durable. [Knock on Wood](https://www.knockonwood.co.uk/Kids-and-Early-Years) is another good supplier and worth a look. Yes, instruments do break, but a little nudge in respectful care does wonders.

Suggested photo: B/ Instruments or B/ Djembes (Courtesy Doris Heinrich) or B/ Baby Djembe

**Tuned and Blown**

Chimes are another glorious, natural instrument that creates audio colour in composition and stories. [The Wind Chime Shop](https://www.thewindchimeshop.co.uk/) provides quality, variety and imaginative flair. Wind instruments ([Ocarinas](https://www.ocarina.co.uk/), fifes, train whistles...) requires additional support and cleaning but are a valued contributor to music learning. Untuned percussion instruments are arguably the best collective of sociable instruments in which groups can explore sound-play, composition and shared musical play. Tuned instruments hold a mighty place in early years but should be used with melodic respect.

**Homemade** instruments carry integrity in personal achievement and pride of learning. Creating instruments from different materials provides collaborative multi-curriculum opportunities and opens pathways for immersing music making across the nursery.

**Teaching resources**

What can we teach our toddlers and children with or without instruments? A little mantra to remember is "less is more". Time and again I would observe two nursery music classes of 30 minutes with 15 songs and music activities piled high with resources, crammed into a highly rushed experience. Think about what you are teaching, why you are teaching (the activity/song) and who it is for. Enabling musical play is as much about child initiation as what you offer. Have a look at some brilliant ideas from Lucinda Geoghegan’s [NYCOS](https://www.nycos.co.uk/shop) books.

**Songs and rhymes**

One carefully chosen song can be a flexible gem for many age groups and many ideas. In early years awakening and learning with all the senses *together* is everything. Know your age group's multi-sensory ability, decide on your musical objective, and appreciate and challenge children's imagination and thirst for intent. Here is an example using just one song for all the age groups: [Walking in the rain](https://open.spotify.com/track/7m3cix0p2Apkb8g4nkOmle)

**Toddlers** - Carry or walk together across the space. The musical focus? Is it Beat? Or Dynamics? Perhaps it is Tempo? What about the social context? Music chimes harmoniously with all pedagogical approaches. It is interactive, playful, encourages attention, creativity, structure, accountability and emotionally connects. Your musical aim will determine *how* you move!

**2 years -** the musical focus could be phrase patterns, achieved by walking in and out of space markers (puddle patches, grass patches) to the beat. Pause at the end of each phrase. Encourage listening, then responding to an ocean drum or Shekere for splash sounds.

**3 years** - stand in a circle holding hands. Two children walk around the outside to the song, then choose another to take their place, reversing the circle. What musical and social context will you explore? This activity can lead to all sorts of similar challenges!

**4/5 years** - play the glockenspiel, djembes and ocean drum in groups divided into singing, the melody, harmonies and descriptive sounds. Lengthen the song with compositional play - the possibilities are endless.

**Supporting Materials**

With topics based songs and rhymes a maximum of two relevant resources (more if the focus is on instruments or soundscapes) will provide pathways to compositional opportunities. *'Walking in the rain'* could include *s*pace markers (fake grass, gym bollards), bungylastic (circular fabric covered elastic string) for circle games and musical stories.

Other staple resources includes pop-up puppets, fabric (scarves/silk, ribbons, lycra, chiffon), bubbles, outdoor materials (leaves, synthetic grass patches, paper flowers), visual/flash cards, musical magnet boards, paper plates, bean bags... Remember that resources are only a prop to ignite children's imagination and allow musical learning to flourish. With careful planning a few relevant materials will keep your bag light and enable musical play and learning simultaneously. Good examples of songs and activities are available in the index.

Suggested pic C/ Pop-up puppet or C/ Moving multi-sensory or C/ Moving

**Musical Objectives**

Behind every good music educator is training and practical experience. What of your musical objectives? What do you want to teach? Singing? Moving to the beat? Listening and appraisal? Music history? Turn-taking? Composition? There are two main approaches to teaching music:

1. Immersing musical learning throughout the day
2. Structured time-fixed music lesson

Focusing on one music discipline (such as singing) reduces socio-educational opportunities. Music has multiple learning strands including physical (playing, moving to music), sound (vocal, singing, language), listening (analysing, appraisal, genres), composition (creative, characteristics, harmony), Beginning/End (welcome/farewell), tactile (instruments, resources). Try [Sky Music](http://www.skymusichub.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Schemes-of-Work-Early-Years-1.pdf) for lesson plan ideas. [Lesson template](https://www.musichouseforchildren.com/_files/ugd/2db6b0_350799f5942c4ed3a3f663e82d79193f.pdf) is another good module based framework in which to insert activities.

**Technology for Tots**

Our young emerging digital generation will be streets ahead of most educators by the time they are in primary school. In the realms of affordability there are some great products such as [Ankuka](https://ankuka.com/products/ankuka-bluetooth-karaoke-microphone-3-in-1-multi-function-handheld-wireless-karaoke-machine-for-kids-portable-mic-speaker-home-party-singing-compatible-with-iphone-android-pc-black) to support child-initiated musicmaking. Language delayed children respond incredibly well to mic vocalising.

D/ ipad singing

Apps are another huge technological resource used skilfully by pre-schoolers. Techno-phobia helps no-one! I recently observed a 5 year old create a video complete with sound, visuals and vocals in a matter of minutes. Educators must embrace digital music and its galaxy of offerings such as [Educational App](https://www.educationalappstore.com/). Consider *why* and *how* your chosen digital content supports musical learning. Immerse it in performance, composition, playing (instruments) along, and adopt as part of your resources toolkit.

A Bluetooth speaker is worth its weight in gold. Use your skills as a music educator to determine a musical objective rather than the speaker. Background music may be calming, but not necessarily the children's choice and could end up being audio wallpaper and at the very worst, ignored.

Whiteboards - they are a fixture in our nursery schools so use them! Immerse musical objectives through these digital wall visuals, not least, to encourage alternatives to branded YouTube song-reels. Flash cards for notation, topics, animals depicting musical terms such as tempo, dynamics and so on will look fabulous on the screen and give your music teaching new dimensions as well as freeing up your hands and lightening your backpack. Just think of musical outcomes you can achieve with audio/visual stories, real instruments, your children's voices, and the pause button.

As with all educational training, resources and musical ideas the most significant ingredient is YOU. A genuine love for the 0 - 5 years, and a passion for investing in, honing and sharing your skills will nurture musical outcomes at every level.

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**Additional Resources**

[Music Mark](https://www.musicmark.org.uk/resources/resource-category/eyfs/)

[NYCOS](http://www.nycos.co.uk/)

[Music Express](http://www.nycos.co.uk/)

[Voices](http://www.voices.org.uk/)

[Sing Up](http://www.singup.org/)

[Sky Picture Cards](http://www.skymusichub.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Schemes-of-Work-Early-Years-picture-cards.pdf)

[Music in the round](http://www.musicintheround.co.uk/user_content/files/resource_pack.pdf)

Pictures to use.