


Early Years Strategic Roundtable (EYSRT)
14th September 2012, at London Early Years Foundation





Participants: Emily Kalies (Nymaz / Yorks EY network), Sandra Taylor (Midlands Arts Centre / WMids EY network), Angela Linton (Youth Music), Joyce Connor (National Children's Bureau), Jessica Pitt (Roehampton Univ / Meryc UK), Nina Swan (SoundConnections: London EY network), Philip Flood (SoundConnections), Ruth Churchill Dower (Earlyarts), Ben Sandbrook (Facilitator), Mary Wynnefinch (London Early Years Foundation), Ruth Thompson (Nursery World), Kathryn Deane (Sound Sense)

Participants' Objectives, Challenges & Opportunities

What are we, as individual organisations, trying to achieve, what's holding us back, and what new opportunities could be explored?

Theme	Objective	Challenges
Improving Networking 	<i>Working towards network-based solutions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to get networks to work together • Difficult to network practitioners with significant diversity between them • (It can be difficult to network practitioners effectively when there are significant differentiation gaps between them, e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - levels of skill, understanding, experience - significant disparities between one locality and another and practitioners consequently operating in very different circumstances) • Difficult to reach the networking hard-to-reach, easy to reach the usual suspects • Some networks are looking towards becoming cooperatives of network members / social enterprises • Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+ etc. offer significant new potential for EY networking
	<i>Spreading effective practice</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult for the effective practice to reach the spreaders • (It can be difficult for people working to spread effective practice to find out about the effective practice that's been developed (and needs spreading!): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - excellent practitioners don't realise that their practice is worth sharing - and don't know how to share it, or whom to share it with)
	<i>Achieving comprehensive geographic / cultural coverage</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Working to ensure that networks and networking include people from geographically remote / sparse areas and that they are accessible to people from all walks of cultural life, esp ethnic minorities.) • Barriers around sparsity, rurality, cultures

<p>Increasing Quality</p> 	<p><i>Supporting the recruitment, employment and promotion of EY creative/music practitioners</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There's a lack of status of music/creative practitioners • There's a lack of recognised/respected standards • Difficult for settings to reliably recruit high quality music/creative practitioners • There's a lack of HE training for EY music/creative practice <p>(Helsinki University has a good model for this: a 4-year undergraduate music educator programme for early years, museums, cross-arts etc)</p>
	<p><i>Supporting effective commissioning by settings and services</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioners are driven by outputs, rather than outcomes
	<p><i>Working towards qualifications for the music education workforce</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Years is isolated in cultural policy (e.g. Henley Reviews) from 6-19
<p>Improving practice</p> 	<p><i>Trying to embed creative musical practice in settings</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settings/parents have limited perceptions of what musicality / creativity are • Limited languages, which are not spoken by all
	<p><i>Trying to create musically/creatively enriched environments</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Libraries, now within Bridge Orgs, can be effective locations for musical/creative practice development: sharing stories in music, dance, word etc. • Settings are focussed on targets and inspections • EYPs / parents / staff had uncreative environments when they were children • Parent lack of confidence • Practitioner lack of confidence • Start tackling lack of confidence with the 'yes you can!' approach • Cultural extension - not implantation <p>(Musical/creative activity can be about enhancing what's already there, as well as bringing in new music, artwork, repertoire, material etc. The cultural extension approach can be particularly important in places where cultural barriers exist.)</p>
	<p><i>Trying to marry research findings with practice on the ground</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New EYFS, Henley Reviews and Music Education Hubs policy don't provide supporting frameworks for EY music/creativity • Commercial franchises, where built on solid motivations and research-based effective practice, can be a successful and pragmatic approach - but this doesn't apply to all commercial franchises.
	<p><i>Developing common accepted quality standards</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers don't value qualifications

EYSRT focus areas

Focused areas for discussion at the meeting, with discussions, suggested solutions and agreed actions.



Improving networking

What's the challenge?

Discussion

Often networks are trying to use networking to reach and support precisely the people who don't find out about or get the time or make the time to come to networking events.

Suggested solutions

- Use network members as advocates, contacting and promoting the network to their friends and colleagues.
- Try to reach those whom the 'hard to network' listen to. For example, if you're trying to bring settings staff into a network, try communicating with the Authority EY rep about the network and its benefits to participants.
- Use case studies and stories from network participants, reporting on the impacts and benefits they've had from the network. e.g. video case studies of groups doing something creative and effective together



Quality and qualifications

What's the challenge?

(See Increasing Quality in the table above)

Discussions

- How do you make high quality practice stick?
Having trainers and practitioner awarding bodies involved in practitioner networks?
Creating a need; creating demand; making it mandatory. (See action below on Facebook group.)
- Consequences of no EY in the QME for practitioner progression.
The Qualified Music Educator qualification, currently in development, looks at practice with 5-19-year-olds - i.e. not at Early Years practice. Beyond this being a missed opportunity in itself, it also proposes an EY-specific problem for practitioner progression:
 - the L3 Creative Practitioner qual covers 0-19
 - the L4 QME covers 5-19
 - EY is therefore missed out for practitioners wanting to progression beyond the Creative practitioner qual in creative arts/music.

Suggested solutions

- Developing a creative curriculum for the setting itself (not the practitioners or the practice). This could be developed alongside ACE and CCSkills, with reference to the Creative and Cultural Practitioner Qualification (level 3) and the Qualified Music Educator qualification (level 4). As a well-built curriculum, it could be used as a tool to give to providers of EY qualifications (incl generic EY qualification) to enable them to incorporate creativity into their qualifications.
- Quality in the setting might be assured by a commitment to the following elements of quality for practice:
 - understanding EY child development
 - artistic and social pedagogy
 - understanding qualities of different settings
 - dealing with creative settings creatively
 - understanding the creative process and how to facilitate it: reflecting on the experiential process as it's happening; action learning; experiential assessment (n.b. similar to the Earlyarts Kitemark and the L3 qualification for creative practitioners)
- Earlyarts are currently developing a kitemark for early years creative practice that is aimed at validating the provider organisation, not its practice. It is currently being piloted with various providers.
The process is essentially:
 - a provider seeks kitemark validation
 - a validator panel member visits the provider and assesses against criteria
 - if successful the provider is kitemark-validated
 - this brings promotion opportunities from Earlyarts
- We should lobby CCSkills and ACE to make a special case for EY in qualifications
- Qualification providers need to be brought together to help them develop stronger creative component in their EY qualifications
- We need to try to communicate to parents about the importance of quality holistic learning - not just academic achievement



Communications and language

What's the challenge?

Quite a lot of the things that we want people to understand, around musical practice and creative practice, are difficult for us to articulate, the more embedded we become in that practice. For example, "music" induced panic amongst some settings staff!

This is compounded by the fact that the many stakeholder groups around the EY setting (Musicians, EYProfessionals, health visitors, parents, journalists, policy makers) all have quite different jargon and verbiage for talking their subjects and business.

Discussions

- This is a key challenge for us as new communication channels open up
- In particular, social media give us new potential opportunities in creative/musical EY

practice, to communicate directly or indirectly with parents and practitioners on a large and targeted scale. Traditionally, influencing practice has been principally a case of influencing policy, creating resources, sharing practice, and creating training. But now we have more direct potential to reach practitioners/parents

As an example, Nursery World have far larger audiences in the online communities than they do in magazine print runs. And, broadly speaking, they reach practitioners, young people and parents on Facebook; but decision-makers on LinkedIn.

- To take advantage of this social media potential, we'll need to ensure that we can communicate in the right languages.

Suggested solutions

- Nursery World articles
- Amusing video of different EY stakeholders saying effectively the same thing but in their own jargon
- YouTube/Vimeo channel for EY Creative/Musical practice where a broad range of organisations could share their video materials
- Start with the EYFS' language: that is a basic common currency
- Focus on the child at the centre: that is a second basis common starting point for all stakeholders.
- Keep it personal: collect stories from settings/practitioners/parents/artists and persuade people to write guest blogs

