

Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-Being

Why the emphasis on Sustained Shared Thinking?

The DfES funded longitudinal study “Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project” concluded that sustained shared thinking is pre-requisite for excellent early years practice. This finding will be further explored in the SEED study, led by Prof. Ted Melhuish, looking at quality of early years provision (2014-16) and will doubtless influence future policy.

What is Sustained Shared Thinking?

‘Sustained shared thinking’ occurs when two or more individuals ‘work together’ in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate an activity, extend a narrative etc. Both parties must contribute to the thinking and it must develop and extend the understanding.’ (Sylva, K., 2004)

It could be described as a “meeting of minds” and takes place when an adult successfully tunes in to a child. To achieve this, the adult needs to sensitively attune to the child’s verbal and non-verbal communication (Stern) and to put aside their own assumptions and interpretations so that they are open to “mentalising” (Fonagy) from the child’s perspective.

Sustained Shared Thinking is when we manage to find out how a child sees the world, when we show genuine interest in their views and choices, and when we create opportunities to create a shared understanding which can then be discussed, negotiated and developed upon. It is most achievable during focused group work, 1-to-1 interaction between a child and an adult and within child-initiated play where the child is creatively using their imaginative, explorative and reasoning skills.

How does Interactive Music-Making support Sustained Shared Thinking?

Interactive Music-Making techniques afford a unique opportunity to provide a creative context which promotes a child’s spontaneous initiation of activities (activities can be child-led) and for these activities to be fully considered, explored and developed by the Interactive Music-Maker and the children within the group together.

Our Interactive Music-Makers are trained to establish a secure attachment with children and to stimulate spontaneous music-making. They are able to relate to each child’s individual use of the musical instruments, the music they make and the way they interact with the group. This provides the Interactive Music-Maker with an understanding of the child’s level of cognitive, motor and social development as well as their capacity to respond at the level of their feelings (i.e. their emotional development).

Many practitioners tell us that the Interactive Music-Making sessions offer a lens through which to view the children that differs to how well they can assess children in other activities. And that, as session leaders,

they have ample opportunities to model sharing ideas and creative thinking, to offer opportunities to practice social interaction techniques and to explore cause and effect, both in simple terms and in terms of how this can positively inform children's behaviour.

The following pages illustrate how Interactive Music-Making supports the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-Being Scale.

The Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-Being Scale comprises 5 sub-scales and 14 items. The table below details these, with examples of how Interactive Music-Making fits in the right hand column:

1) Building trust, confidence and independence

"I had a very active 2 year-old who preferred to run than sit! I joined him 'running' using the beat of the music to mimic his actions ... All activities were active first and then we encouraged him to slow down with the music."

(Interactive Music-Maker, 2013)

"C.'s confidence has increased and as it was a small group he could really take the lead in some activities..."

(Interactive Music-Maker, 2014)

"The nursery children are benefitting from attention in a small group."

Nursery Manager, 2014)

Self-regulation and social development

- Influencing the music of others (conducting)
- Following instructions
- Impulse control
- Channelling energy
- Co-operative play
- Copying others
- Showing and recognising feelings
- Forming positive relationships
- Controlled movements for quieter sounds
- Care of the musical instruments

Encouraging choices and independent play

- Choosing instruments
- Choosing activities
- Creating activities
- Leading activities
- Producing different sounds
- Singing & vocalising

Planning for small group and individual interactions/ adult deployment

- Small group working
- Following instructions
- Listening to others' music-making
- Leading activities
- Influencing the music of others (conducting)
- 1-to-1 music-making with session leader within group session



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2) Social and emotional well-being

Supporting socio-emotional wellbeing

- Showing and recognising feelings
- Translating feelings into musical sound
- Self-expression (verbal & non-verbal)
- Forming positive relationships
- Unconditional positive regard of the session leader

“Ethan was anxious and mistrustful... withdrawing from the activity and putting his hands behind his back. [Through IMM] he was able to work through his anxieties to realise that he would not be made to do anything that he was unsure of or that made him anxious; that he was in a safe environment if he did feel able to join in the activity.”

(Interactive Music-Maker, 2014)





3) Supporting and extending language and communication

With the Interactive Music-Maker's help, Alice takes the musical instrument box to each member of the group so they can choose what they want to play. When the group music-making begins, the Interactive Music-Maker notices how they children show off their sounds to each other, how they watch the ways in which others play their instruments and try these out on their own instruments.

The Interactive Music-Maker chooses Christian to take a solo, singing: "And now it's Christian's turn to play." While Christian plays, the Interactive Music-Maker notices some fidgeting. She sings gently, "We are listening to Christian. It's Christian's turn to play. Abby are you listening to Christian? It's Christian's turn to play." At the end of Christian's turn, the group play together once more alert to hear who will be chosen next.

"We had a young child who had no words, literally. By her second IMM session she was using words and she'd made significant progress (in speaking) after 4 weeks."

Interactive Music-Maker, 2013

Encouraging children to interact with others

- Small group working
- Listening to others' music-making
- Singing & vocalising together
- Watching within musical activities
- Waiting within musical activities
- Turn-taking
- Swapping places
- Copying others
- Talking about the music and actions of others

Staff actively listen to children and encourage children to listen

- Following instructions
- Listening to others' music-making
- Listening to own music-making
- Hearing different sounds
- Producing different sounds
- Singing & vocalising
- Session leaders attuning to the child and adjust their music to match the music made by the child (speed, volume and intensity)

Staff support children's language use

- Use of song
- Leaving space in songs to encourage children to supply words
- Pre-verbal (non-verbal) vocalisation
- Focused listening
- Exploring concepts within musical activities (e.g. high, low, up, down, big, small)
- Reinforcing known language
- Introducing new language





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Sensitive responsiveness

- Attuning to the child (volume, pitch and intensity)
- Flexible use of the musical instrument
- Flexible choice of activities
- Unconditional Positive Regard

“By using the technique of mirroring his actions with vocalisations and music Joshua started to demonstrate shared attention by looking, pausing, smiling and laughing. We were able to extend on this to basic turn taking and Joshua copying an adult’s vocalisations. Joshua even started to initiate the interactions with and adult and make requests for activities by starting to make the corresponding sounds and looking at an adult.”

(Interactive Music-Maker, 2015)





4) Supporting learning and critical thinking

“One child appeared anxious, he seemed to dislike the other children playing loudly. During his turn his playing style was fast but quiet and this gave the opportunity for the other children to experience a more controlled way of playing as well as providing the child with a means of expressing and sharing his feelings.”

Interactive Music-Maker, 2013

Supporting curiosity and problem solving

- Listening to others' music-making
- Trying new instruments and ways of playing
- Taking risks
- Negotiating peers (overcoming shared challenges)
- Accommodating preferences of others
- Sharing

“In ‘Old Mac Donald had a farm’ one child named all of the animals while another child made two of the animal noises.”

Interactive Music-Maker, 2013

Encouraging sustained, shared thinking during story time

- Creating musical stories
- Finding sound effects for stories
- Offering vocal sounds for animals
- Adding details to stories

“I observed a child hit a drum, look at the drum and hit it again, he then moved his body up and down in conjunction with every subsequent beat that he made on the drum. He was experiencing and practising cause and effect.”

Interactive Music-Maker, 2013

Encouraging sustained, shared thinking in investigation and exploration

- Playing different instruments
- Exploring range of sound qualities
- Exploring range of visual and tactile qualities
- Inventing new ways of playing
- Copying others' ways of playing

“The children love it when we do the Grand old Duke of York with a parachute. Because they are actually physically doing the “ups” and the “downs” the concept makes perfect sense to them and most of all we are having loads of fun.”

Interactive Music-Maker, 2013

Supporting concept development and higher order thinking

- Exploring concepts within musical activities (e.g. high, low, up, down, big, small)
- Reinforcing known language
- Introducing new language
- Asking questions
- Thinking about why things in the session have happened





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5) Assessing learning and language

Using assessment to support and extend learning and critical thinking

Assessing language development

"[Interactive Music -Making for Practice training] has enabled me to think about how the children's development is progressing and forms the basis for all of my developmental goal setting. I also know I can refer onto specialist services if need be which is great."

Interactive Music-Maker, 2015

