



Let's All Go on a Holiday!

Intergenerational Music Project with children from
Burton Green Primary School and the residents of
Morrell House dementia care home



A Case Study



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to Musical Connections and its Intergenerational Programme

Musical Connections is a small, registered charity, which began in 2009 as a pilot programme of weekly participatory music-making sessions in City of York Council's elderly care homes. The project immediately achieved a positive impact and, in 2010, won an NHS award for work in the area of mental health and well-being. Since then, we have built on our strengths and experience, a cornerstone of which has been the development of our intergenerational programme which encourages children and young people to share in music-making activities with older people, particularly care home residents and sheltered housing tenants. We have strong and active partnerships with several local schools, York College and both of York's universities, and deliver around 50 intergenerational events each year.

1.2 Impetus for the project with Burton Green School and Morrell House dementia care home

Burton Green primary school is in a low-income area, where the children have limited opportunities for musical engagement, particularly with the wider community. Morrell House dementia care home is just across the road. Musical Connections has a history of running projects and events aimed at bringing the two institutions together for shared music-making, although in recent years, there have been fewer opportunities for such work. We felt it was time to reinvigorate the relationship with a new and exciting project, aimed at inspiring the children and providing them with new musical, social and emotional experiences. School staff were equally enthusiastic about the idea and, on this basis, York Music Hub provided funding which enabled us to set up the project in partnership with Charlotte Smith-Lynch, Assistant Head of Burton Green school and her Year 4 class.

1.3 Project Objectives

While care-home residents benefit hugely from intergenerational projects, the key objectives of this project focussed on the children. Specifically, it was intended that they should:

- Enjoy a high quality musical experience, focused on singing and the development of ensemble performances
- Learn to engage with older people with dementia through joint music-making, and to build connections with others from their local community
- Experience an enhanced educational experience, accumulate new life experiences and develop increased confidence

It was proposed that the project should pave the way for future collaborations and provide a template for others to use in their work. This case study aims to provide insight and information which we hope will inspire and inform future projects.

1.4 Outcomes Achieved

In a high energy and occasionally fractious class, it was notable how many – boys as well as girls - appeared to enjoy singing and expressing themselves creatively. The majority were interested in learning new songs and singing in parts, and, when given the opportunity to contribute to song-writing or to suggest songs for inclusion, there was a high level of interest and engagement. There was also an appreciation that singing together seemed to help improve relationships within the class.

'We've learnt that even though we may not always be friends, it doesn't mean we can't work together and be in harmony'

'Teamwork!'

The awareness that there would a public performance at the end of the project gave the children a sense of responsibility about needing to improve their work. It also added excitement and uniqueness to the experience which made it feel special, different and stimulating.

'I felt a bit of tension at each rehearsal – each one made me feel more excited'

'I was excited and looking forward to the real concert'

Each successive session with the residents of Morrell House saw the children becoming increasingly confident and nuanced in their interactions with them – the teacher noted an increasing awareness of the need to adapt what they did so that the residents could work with them. An initial reserve soon wore off, and it was heart-warming to see how comfortable young and old became in each other's company.



On more than one occasion, the children expressed surprise at the talents and actions of their older counterparts, and it was apparent that, just as we had hoped, the usual stereotypes about older people were overcome.

'They do things you don't expect them to!'

'They're good at joining in – they're not shy at singing and they can sing!'

'I liked it when the old man and the old girl started singing – they were better than I thought they were going to be'



There was a simplicity and ease in the way that the children accepted the older people simply as people, rather than the alien species that they are sometimes viewed as.

'They just like to join in and have company'

The children had never participated in a project like this before; they were exposed to numerous new experiences and challenges, and rose to them all. Some of them were quite clear that they felt more confident as a result.

'It's made me more confident because I know I can perform in front of lots of people'

'I feel confident I could do it again'

The following sections give more detail on how these outcomes were achieved.

2. PROJECT CONTENT

Musical Connections operates according to a philosophy of participation by all, where music is used as a platform for contact and connection between people who might not otherwise find a way to relate to each other. Although the end goal of our project was for the children to deliver a confident and enjoyable performance, we believed that their progress towards that point could be enriched by coming at it in an indirect way – not only building musical technique and ability, but providing a structure which encouraged them to enjoy music in a visceral way where age and social barriers were de-constructed and something was created that everyone could identify with and feel ownership of.

2.1 Session Framework

Our project comprised **6 workshop and rehearsal sessions, plus a final performance**, all of which took place over the Summer Term 2017. 4 sessions and the final performance were intergenerational, and 2 rehearsal sessions took place just with the children.

In order to build relationships between the children and Morrell's residents, we felt it was important that the work began with plenty of fun and lots of opportunities for young and old to interact together. As the project progressed, we gradually focussed more on refining our performance pieces. The timetable was therefore structured as follows:

Weeks One and Two: Burton Green children came to Morrell House for a mixture of workshop activities and some preliminary work on potential performance pieces

Week Three: Morrell residents went into school to continue the work from the first two sessions

Week Four: A more focussed rehearsal was held just with the children in school

Week Five: Morrell residents went into school for their final session with the children, and were invited to join with the children in practising their pieces

Week Six: A final rehearsal was held in school with the children

Week Seven: The final performance was given by all participating children and a handful of their older colleagues at a specially convened 'Big Sing', hosted by Vale of York Academy.

2.2 Planning Session Activities

In planning activities for the sessions, there were some key criteria to bear in mind:

- The children needed to be confident and well-rehearsed for a public performance by the end of the project
- It was essential that they enjoyed and felt ownership of what they were doing
- As part of their performance preparation, they were going to have to work in a focussed way with much older people who are living with dementia

- To work effectively and confidently, they were going to have to get to know and feel comfortable around their older colleagues.

It was therefore important to use music and activities that, regardless of age, everyone could access and enjoy. Equally, providing a supportive environment for the sharing of interests and ideas from all parties, young or old, was essential in boosting confidence, generating mutual respect and building shared ownership of the project. It should be noted that, with such an enormous age gap, it is hugely important for the session leader to be relaxed, encouraging and genuinely open-minded about the nature of the contributions made by both age groups.

A **Holiday** theme was chosen. This was an easy concept that fitted the season and everyone could relate to. It also facilitated the inclusion of world music which gave us plenty of scope in terms of the material we used and developed.

Using this theme as an underlying thread, each intergenerational session incorporated a selection of the following:

- Learning new songs together, including part-singing
- Composition
- Playing tuned percussion, in order to provide simple accompaniments to the singing
- A variety of musical genres, so as to cut across generational differences
- Sharing of personal favourites

In all of these activities, the children were encouraged to work with Morrell's residents to make suggestions for developing their performance pieces. To encourage team-building and interaction, a variety of music-based, fun activities were also included in the sessions:

- clapping/action songs and games, which involved touching hands/reflecting each other's movements
- dancing
- dressing up
- parachute and balloon games
- rhythm exercises and improvisation

While some of the children were a little reticent at first – it was clearly a new and unusual experience for them - they were soon won over by a combination of the residents' enthusiasm and their own enjoyment of the activities, which are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

2.3 Performance Pieces

2.3.1 Songs

A song that resonated for both young and old and kicked off the holiday theme nicely was **Cliff Richard's 'Summer Holiday'**. Most of the residents knew the words, while the children

had an idea of the tune. A little practice of the timing and the use of song-sheets meant that everyone was soon singing it together confidently.

Having set the scene for a holiday, we travelled to Brazil to sing **Sambalele**. The words of this simple folk song lent themselves to actions, and the chorus was in simple 2-part harmony, easily achievable, with a bit of support, for a group of Year 4s. We simplified the words so that the entire chorus was based around the word 'Sambalele'.

We then travelled to Africa to sing **The Lion Sleeps Tonight**. This replicated the Sambalele format of actions during the verses and 2-part harmony during the chorus.

These songs were much enjoyed by the children, who were clearly motivated by the idea of singing in parts

'I liked Sambalele – it had a catchy chorus and I liked us singing it in 2 parts'

'I liked that we were in harmony for the chorus'

2.3.2 Tuned Percussion

To introduce tuned percussion, we stayed in Africa to sing **Nanuma** and then travelled on to the Torres Strait Islands between Australia and New Guinea to sing **Bella Mama** (the sheet music for both of these is freely available on the internet). These songs were easy rounds, both of which fitted with a repeating 2-chord accompaniment - we used C major and D minor, which worked well for both younger and older voices. We split the group into two intergenerational 'chord teams' and distributed individual hand-held chime bars, hand-chimes and hand bells so that one team had the notes C, E and G and the other had D, F and A. Each team was instructed to play the instruments for a count of 2, and to take it in turns to do this for the duration of each song.

We taught the tune of each song and then put the chords to it. Once that was working well, we encouraged the group to sing each song as a round. Singing in two parts and playing percussion in a structured way proved quite challenging for some, requiring a lot of concentration and focus, which was not always evident amongst either the children or the adults! However, everyone enjoyed having a go and, with a little practice and encouragement, the children soon got the hang of it and were pleased with the result.

'The instruments made the songs sound better'

'And it was all in the right time. I think, if you couldn't see us and just heard us you'd think it was a professional performance!'

2.3.3 Composition

Once again, the holiday theme was an excellent source of ideas for this exercise. To keep things simple, we had worked out the chords and tune for our song, 'Let's All Go On a Holiday' in advance and, during the sessions, simply asked the children and the older people

to come up with some lyrics that expressed what they felt about going on holiday. To reinforce the relationship between the two generations, the children were encouraged to include a verse about what they had enjoyed during the times they had spent with their older friends. The lyrics were written out on flip chart paper, and willing helpers held them up for the group to follow.



2.3.4 Personal Favourites

To encourage a sense of ownership of the project, the children were invited to share some of their favourite songs with the residents. Preferences were, unsurprisingly, many and varied, but one song that had strong resonance for the entire class was Ariana Grande's **One Last Time**, which she re-released as a charity single following the bombing at the Manchester Arena.

'I liked One Last Time because everyone knew it and everybody liked it'

Another popular song, suggested by a student volunteer who played guitar accompaniment for both this and One Last Time, was **You Gotta Friend in Me**. The familiarity and sentiments of this song appeared to have a unifying influence on the class, which the children seemed to recognise and enjoy.

'I liked us having our arms round each other for You Gotta Friend in me'

Both of these songs were actually fairly challenging for the children to sing – they knew parts of them but not others – and the timing was occasionally complicated. However, the guitar accompaniment, as well as the involvement of a student who clearly enjoyed

practising the songs with the children, seemed to produce a calming and productive atmosphere during the times they sang them.



2.4 Workshop Activities

To kick off each intergenerational session and in between working on the performance pieces, we used a variety of workshop activities. To facilitate the activities, our standard arrangement was a large semi-circle of chairs occupied by the older people with a space in the middle for the children to sit on the floor or move around between the adults:

- Our very first session began with **Buddy Holly's 'That'll Be the Day When You say Goodbye'**, to reflect the fact that everyone in the room was supposed to be going on holiday. The children were encouraged to do actions inspired by 'Heads, shoulders, knees and toes', tapping each 8 times, then 4 times, then twice, then once. In the spaces between these actions, they were asked to wave at the residents, who were encouraged to wave back to the children
- A large **parachute** was used in various ways. The children were asked to distribute themselves around the room in any available spaces between the residents, so that both younger and older people who wanted to were able to hold onto the edge of the parachute and take part in the following:
 - As the residents sang **My Bonnie Lies over the ocean'**, the children and residents raised or lowered the parachute on any word beginning with 'B'

- They pulled the parachute up to their chins, and imagined they were all tucked up in bed on the overnight ferry. They then swayed to the **Everly Brothers' 'All I Have to Do is Dream'**
- We went to India and created a slice of Bollywood excitement by throwing balloons on top of the parachute (the older people find balls too heavy), and raising the parachute up and down to a Bollywood backing track: **Ye Raatain**
- We travelled through a storm and came out the other side to a beautiful rainbow – the parachute was removed, and children and residents batted the balloons back and forth to **Israel Kamakawiwo'ole's 'Somewhere over the Rainbow'**
- **Dancing** was very popular with both young and old:
 - we enjoyed circle dancing in Jamaica to **Bob Marley's 'One Love'**
 - we did mirroring of each other's movements in China (**Laure Shang: Bridge in Dreams** - this could also be in France as this is a copy of '**A la claire fontaine**')
 - we made up dance moves in intergenerational teams, using a song suggested by the children – **Clean Bandit's 'Symphony'**



- We created a **rhythm** piece by layering the sounds and actions of the favourite jungle animals of different intergenerational teams. This had started off as a potential performance piece, but everyone enjoyed playing around with the ideas so much that we left it as something to improvise and enjoy in between the harder work of performance practice.



3. Staffing

Designing and delivering a project of this type requires support from a number of key personnel

- As Musical Connections had been awarded a grant specifically to deliver this project, it made sense for the musician leading the project to assume the role of **project manager**
- For the project manager to do her job effectively, it was essential that the school provided a **project champion**. In this instance, it was Charlotte Smith-Lynch, the class teacher and Burton Green's Assistant Head. A proposed project outline was presented to Charlotte, who added her own ideas, and a timetable for the sessions was agreed.
- To ensure that the intergenerational aspect of the work was conducted effectively and appropriately, we needed the support of **the care-home's manager and staff**. Such support was essential to ensure the safety and comfort of the children within the care-home environment, and to facilitate visits to the school by the care-home residents.

- The project benefited enormously from the involvement of a **student volunteer** from York St John University's music department. He provided an extra pair of hands during sessions, accompanied the children on guitar for their chosen songs, and functioned as a useful role model for the children, particularly the boys.

'I liked Wayne's guitar – it was good!'

'I liked Wayne's dab!'

Unfortunately, during the project, Charlotte was required to take on extra senior management responsibilities, which meant she was not able to get as involved in session activities as we had planned. However, she maintained continuity by ensuring that the same cover teacher attended sessions in her place. She also worked hard behind the scenes to support the project, and to make arrangements for our final performance.

4. Final Performance

To make the final performance feel extra special and to reach out to the wider community, Charlotte approached Vale of York Academy with a request for them to host it. This gave the children added incentive to become 'performance-ready', and meant that we had a slightly more 'professional' venue for the end performance. It also gave Vale of York students an opportunity to get involved in something different, and, no less importantly, offered our older participants the opportunity for a fantastic afternoon out.



The children had been promised a large audience and they were not disappointed; Vale of York's main hall was filled with almost 80 parents and older people from the wider community, many of whom were from care-homes and sheltered housing schemes which participate in the Musical Connections project. The children reacted to the experience in different ways:

'I got stage fright and felt nervous!

'I wasn't nervous, I loved it!

'I felt nervous and excited at the same time. Afterwards, I felt very happy that I had done it and didn't make any mistakes'

'I felt OK because I just thought it was the same as what we had been doing, just with more people'

Whatever the reaction, it was clear that the experience was extremely memorable and meaningful for them.

Rather than choosing a formal concert hall layout in the hall, we opted for 'cabaret style', with the audience seated around tables. This was less daunting for the children, and also allowed for the inclusion of some workshop activities in the final event. Making it less formal meant that the event was lively, inclusive and more fun than a straightforward concert would have been.



5. Evaluation

Evaluation took place in various ways throughout and at the end of the project:

- The musician evaluated each session and fed back to the school thoughts and recommendations for the next one. Charlotte and the cover teacher were asked for comments and these were incorporated into subsequent session plans
- The children were asked for feedback on an ongoing basis, so as to ensure that the work was delivered in a way that was relevant and engaging for them

- A more formal feedback session was held with the children the day after the concert
- The cover teacher was asked to complete an end-of-project evaluation form
- Charlotte provided feedback by email throughout and at the end of the project.

A key indicator for the success of the work was thought to be the level of interest in participating in another similar project in the future. Both children and staff were very clear that it was something they would very much like to do.

'I absolutely would love to be involved in more projects like this, the children have thoroughly enjoyed it and it is something we as a school would love to continue with'

6. Summary of Key Learning and Recommendations for Future Projects

Following the successful conclusion of our project, we can now look back and identify the key factors which led to its success, and which are worth bearing in mind when planning future projects of this type:

- An excellent relationship between the Musical Connections lead musician and Burton Green Assistant Head, Charlotte Smith-Lynch, who championed the project in school
- Commitment from the staff of Morrell House care-home to support the project
- An agreed, clear project plan and time-table
- A theme which resonated with both age groups, and provided plenty of relevant material
- Use of a mix of musical genres which cut through age and social barriers
- An effective selection of activities, combining technique and performance practice, with numerous opportunities for creativity and input from the children
- Lots of workshop activities, which added fun to the work, enabled the children to explore music in an intuitive way, and facilitated the development of positive relationships between the children and Morrell's residents
- Sensitive balancing of the needs of the children and the older people, with efforts made to ensure that we invited those older people who were likely to enjoy the experience and to reinforce the children and their efforts
- Involvement of a student volunteer, who provided invaluable support at weekly sessions and in providing guitar accompaniment for songs chosen by the children
- An exciting final performance in a venue outside school, and with a large audience of parents and older people drawn from care and community settings across the city.

Key elements that the children said that they would like to include in future projects were:

- Dancing
- Catchy songs
- Songs they choose, especially pop songs
- Instruments

7. A Final Word

It has been a pleasure to work with the children and staff of Burton Green school, and we look forward to many more collaborations with them in the future. We are extremely grateful to York Music Hub for providing funding for our project, and hope that others who have ambitions to undertake similar work will find this report useful.

The final word goes to the children, who wished to pass on the following advice to other children who might have the opportunity to get involved in a project such as this:

'They should just enjoy it'

'Tell them not to worry, because if they go in not wanting to do it, when they come out, they will definitely want to do it'

'It's good! Outstanding! Ecstatic!'

FIONA CHAPMAN, MUSICAL CONNECTIONS: 21st JULY 2017
www.musicalconnections.org.uk