

SHORT INTERIM REPORT- PLAYING MUSIC TOGETHER



SOUND BEAM SENSOR

Benefits of the 'Playing Music Together' Project.

Sponsored by the Sobell Foundation

As part of the 'Playing Music Together' project a number of workshops at the following schools, day centres and colleges have taken place

The Henley College - eight one hour workshops
Newbury College –ten one hour workshops
Stepping Stones in Reading –six one hour workshops
Chiltern Gate School –eight one hour workshops.
Heritage House in Chesham- five one hour workshops planned

1.General Principles and Methodology

The sessions were all scheduled to last one hour as this was considered a reasonable length of time for people of mixed ability learning difficulties and disabilities to engage in a creative project. Allowing time for introductions, organising equipment and students for a variety of activities and supporting the support workers this meant that each group probably worked intensively for 30-40 minutes.

The Sound Beam was our main participatory instrument but the following was also introduced: the use of percussion, sampling technology, power point technology, standalone 'phrase' switches and with one group of the human voice.



AKAI SAMPLER



SOUND BEAM 5



BIG MAC PHRASE SWITCH

2.The Sessions

2.1 NEWBURY COLLEGE

Newbury College was not new as the Music Trainer contracted by Decibels had worked with the 'Connect 1,2,3' group at the college a year previously. However, many of the students were new to him and new to this Playing Music Together course.

This group (with the exception of Heritage House) of all the groups, had the most severe disabilities on the project. The Music Trainer worked with 12 students, all of whom had severe learning difficulties, some were also PMLD and four were on the Autistic Spectrum. All were aged 18 or over.

Cause and effect, team work and producing sounds with as little support as possible were the main aims of working with the Connect 1,2,3 students.

To enable an awareness of cause and effect (The Music trainer pressed a switch and it made an interesting sound) he decided to use a 'Space' theme. The students produced their own space music. It was started by watching a short 5 minute clip from forbidden planet – where the space ship makes an amazing sound as it lands. The music trainer played this at the start of the first three sessions so that staff and students could put the music we were creating into a context.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=diRx8nRk6e0>

Five students operated their sounds via switches linked up to the Sound Beam, two used a Sound Beam sensor. The students took it in turns so that everyone had an opportunity to produce interesting sounds.

All the students positively reacted to the cause and effect sounds and linked their actions to the sounds they produced. We followed this up by working at blending sounds. This required team work. Some students had to play their switches whilst others had to sit out. Turn taking was difficult for some students but they found it easier if we worked our way around the circle they were sitting in and after three weeks of doing this the process became familiar and identifiable to the students and there was a notable improvement in turn taking skills and team work.

The same approach was adopted in percussion playing – each student played their instrument in turn alternating with the whole group playing.

This is how we acquired the skills to make a basic audio recording. Individuals or pairs of students playing alternating with the whole group playing together.

To make the recording more interesting we overdubbed single switch comments such as 'blast off'. All the students managed to work the single switches in turn. We also used an Akai phrase sampler to add sounds and comments from the film 'Star Wars' – this required better manual dexterity and a basic ability to sequence so not all students had the opportunity to add something in this way.

By the end of the project at Newbury College it was felt that the students had come a considerable way in their understanding of cause and effect, the ability to work as part of a team and also their ability to listen to the sounds they were producing.

The students and staff enjoyed the sessions, it was an opportunity to learn together as much of what we did was new to the staff as well as the students. The college has invited Decibels back to run more sessions outside of the project – so the staff and course organisers have seen value to the work which was undertaken.

2.2 STEPPING STONES

Three of the seven participants which the Music Trainer worked with at Stepping Stones already had music skills. Two participants could drum in time (basic 4/4, 2/4 and 2/2 beats) and one had a good singing voice. As soon as the Music Trainer started to strum the guitar the participant who sang started to sing along with the chords so it decided to make up a song. The Music Trainer provided the group with the chords and they, as a team, made up the words. He helped them construct a memorable tune.

The Music Trainer constructed a sound beam for the less able students so that they could become actively involved. The recording was done over two full sessions and one part session. The recording process, in itself, was a new experience for the group and required the group to work as a disciplined team, listening to the other participants, the previous recording and to musical cues. At first, they did not know what they were listening for – but by the third session everyone was tuned in to the requirements of the session and

were much better at listening. Staff and participants were very pleased with the finished product and it gave both staff and participants higher expectations of what the group could do together.

2.3 HENLEY COLLEGE

This was a small mixed ability group of only three students. Two of the students were chosen for their love of music though they had no musical skills. One student loved dancing so it was a good idea to start the project with a dance rhythm sampled into the Sound Beam from a guitar.

2.4 CHILTERN GATE.

The Chiltern gate workshops were attended by twelve boys aged 8-11 many of whom were on the autistic spectrum. Two thirds were of moderate ability whilst around one third displayed more severe learning difficulties and disabilities.

They had experienced very few music activities or lessons at school so learning how to play together , as a team, was the main target of the sessions.

They had recently done a project in school on space so the space music which was devised for Newbury college was the main resource for these lesson.

The sessions required a highly structured approach and methodology which was repeated for each session without fail.

- A. A percussion warm up which involved each participant playing individually and then as a team.
- B. This was repeated when the sound beam switches were introduced.
- C. Particular emphasis was placed on students listening to each other.
- D. Finally the sound beams, themselves were introduced.

Participants were encouraged to make choices about which sound they wished to play.

The music was recorded over three sessions.

Finally, because all the students were verbal, each student was asked to put a comment over the music - to indicate the different things encountered during then journey of our Sound Beam space ship.

The pupils were very imaginative in their narrations. The project was a great success at Chiltern gate.

Both students and staff were very enthusiastic about the process and the finished recording.



Enabling disabled people to develop their creativity and unlock their talents through the use of innovative technologies

The pupils were involved in the creative process and showed a great improvement in their co-operation skills and ability to play together.

2.5 HERITAGE HOUSE (CHESHAM)

More details to be provided once the workshops have been completed

3. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Decibels is indebted to the professional expertise of Mark Turauskis of Circle of Sound for undertaking these workshops on behalf of the Decibels Playing Music Together Community Music Project.

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