

Arts and early language initiatives

There are a number of early language initiatives throughout the UK where art in all of its forms is used as a way to get children talking. If you know of any more initiatives please [email us](#). Here are some that we are aware of. Please note that whilst we do our best to keep these pages updated, some of these initiatives may no longer exist. However, they are still on our webpages as examples of good practice.

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Drama/theatre and early language initiatives:

- **CTC Theatre** - theatre experiences for children and young people
- **Polka Theatre in Wimbledon**
- **Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council** - uses professional troupe
- **Rochdale's Sure Start programme** - performance art to develop communication skills

CTC theatre creates theatre experiences for children and young people, which aim to contribute to their emotional, spiritual and social development. The company tours professional theatre productions to schools and venues within Tees Valley, the North East and nationally, and promotes greater awareness of the value of theatre to children and young people through courses, events and publications. Since 1994 CTC Theatre has presented more than 2,150 performances of 35 plays to over 225,000 children of all ages, stimulating young imagination and helping to develop speaking and literacy skills.

For more information contact CTC Theatre, Arts Centre, Vane Terrace, Darlington, DL3 7AX,
Tel +44 (0) 1325 352 004, email ctc@ctctheatre.org.uk

With the growing interest in addressing the opportunities and creative challenges of producing Early Years Theatre, **Polka Theatre in Wimbledon** held a weekend showcase to view and reflect upon recent developments in creating theatre for babies and toddlers. For more information visit <http://www.polkatheatre.com/>

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC) has employed professional troupe The Splinter Theatre Group to help get its education and support for parents message across in a fun and engaging way. The Splinter Theatre Group devised a unique piece of work for Rochdale MBC to demonstrate the importance of Parenting Support at the 'A policy for the future' event in October 2005.

Rochdale's Sure Start programme is focusing on developing children's communication and language skills through performance art. The programme is implemented by M6, a professional theatre company based in Rochdale, which has created Story Tree, a language-based production with a storyteller using props, puppets and costumes. M6 worked closely with early years staff to ensure the language and style of storytelling is accessible to very young children and that they will understand the themes such as sharing, co-operating, loss and concern for the environment. The stories last approximately 20 minutes and have been designed to be performed in non-theatre spaces such as nurseries, toy libraries and community centres. The non-verbal elements of Story Tree reinforce the language, and the storyteller leaves each child a gift to remind them of the experience and to encourage them to recount the stories to their friends and family. M6 and Rochdale's Sure Start are now developing a new storytelling project incorporating more than one language which will celebrate and empower children who speak both Urdu and English.

For more information about Rochdale's Sure Start programme visit www.rochdale.gov.uk/childcare or email anne.evans@rochdale.gov.uk
For further information about M6 Theatre Company visit www.m6theatre.co.uk

Fine arts and early language initiatives:

- **Creative Partnerships Birmingham Programme**
- **Early Years and Creativity Hub in Yorkshire**
- **LEAParts** - London Education Arts Partnership

Schools involved in the **Creative Partnerships Birmingham Programme** are exploring the concepts and teaching methods behind the Reggio Emilia approach, developed in Italy, which focuses on a child-centred curriculum and uses creativity as a key tool to unlock learning and develop young people's expressive abilities.

Artist Lorna Rose is working in three Creative Partnerships schools to introduce this approach to their Reception classes, partnering with the teachers to develop their understanding of the approach and enabling them to adapt it to their own teaching methods and class requirements.

Initially, children and teachers were hesitant to participate in the creative activities, being scared of making a mess and getting into trouble - instead pupils would attempt to impress Lorna by writing their names or the alphabet. But after sustained work and development, Lorna and the teachers have shown that they are also responsive to drawings, exploring and explaining things and have found that they receive much more information this way. Teachers and artists have noted a significant increase in children's verbal and visual expression, as well as improved social skills.

For more information contact Rebecca Jacobs at Creative Partnerships Birmingham, Tel. 0121 224 7447 or email rebecca.jacobs@creative-partnerships.com.

In **Yorkshire the Early Years and Creativity Hub** is bringing together arts organisations initiating creative projects with babies and parents. The Hub consists of

early years specialists and practitioners, Sure Start, artists, arts managers, education officers, arts organisations, a children's librarian and Arts Council England, Yorkshire. They have two events a year, one to focus on practical training and professional development, and the other highlighting strategy and policy developments. They plan to commission research into international models of creative good practice, and hope to hold a national conference in Leeds in 2004 to share and celebrate models of creative early years work. For further information contact stephanie.simm@artscouncil.org.uk.

LEAParts (London Education Arts Partnership) has initiated three networks that cater for Early Years, Schools and Education Managers. Each network meets three or four times a year and also hosts a full day CPD seminar. The networks are managed and facilitated by LEAParts, but all developmental decisions are made collectively by the network. The Early Years Network provides artists and educators with a platform to share their experiences, promote quantifiable models of good practice and develop partnerships across disciplines within the early years sector. The overall function of the network is to celebrate the diverse range of Arts in Education activity and raise the profile of successful creativity in early years learning.

Miscellaneous arts and early language initiatives:

- **Sure Start and the Adult and Community Learning Service** - creative sessions

In 2003 **Sure Start and the Adult and Community Learning Service** funded a series of creative sessions (poetry, storytelling, ballad, printing and artwork) with parents in Chilwell, Nottinghamshire which enabled them to record their under fives' development through imaginative methods. The sessions were administered through Broxtowe College, Beeston. Mums (unfortunately, no dads turned up) took on the role play of parents and toddlers - eliciting creative material from their 'child' by as many methods as possible; spoken gesture, symbol and song. Each parent bound the final results into a book, with the front cover produced through a simple mono-printing session. For more information contact Project leader Dave Wood on davewrite2002@yahoo.com.

Music and early language initiatives:

- **Baby Bounce rhyme sessions**
- **Bright Start Babies** - interactive course for parents and babies
- **Gymboree Play & Music** – interactive classes for babies and children
- **Jo Jingles** – music and singing classes
- **Kindermusik** – music and movement programme
- **Music in the round** – music venue, also runs children sessions
- **Music is Fun** - a Portsmouth Sure Start project
- **Music One2One** - using music to foster interaction between parents and children
- **MusicStart** - making music and singing part of everyday life
- **Music Start Pack** - packs from Youth Music for parents

- **Music Together** – music and movement programme for parents and children
- **Park View Primary School, Huyton in Knowsley** - promoting language development through music
- **Piccolo** – musical activity group for pre-school children
- **Rhythm and Rhyme** - introducing children to the joys of music
- **Shropshire's top ten nursery rhymes**
- **Sing and play, every day** - a special nursery rhyme tape and CD
- **Sound Beginnings** – concerts for babies and toddlers
- **Staffordshire Lullaby Project** - a CD for newborn babies called 'Babies Love to Lullaby'
- **Sure Start Broadway/Margravine** – CD and book for children
- **Tot Stars** - baby and toddler song and rhyme group
- **Tune in** - Music Cluster Programmes from Youth Music
- **Play and Rhyme** - teaching the importance of play and rhyme
- **Talk To Your Baby Quick tips**: Sharing songs and rhymes
- **The Music House for Children** – specialist music classes for nursery schools

South Tyneside Libraries/Sure Start run **Baby Bounce** rhyme sessions in nine locations. The purpose of these sessions is to encourage parents and carers to communicate with their babies in both verbal and non-verbal ways, using rhymes as a way in. Parents can borrow a special chest of baby books on a "no worry" loan.

Torquay Central Library has launched **Bright Star Babies**, a highly interactive parent/carer and baby course with singing and book sharing at the heart of every session. The library has designed a CD of simple songs designed for families to share with their babies.

Gymboree Play & Music offers interactive classes for babies and children from newborn to under 5. Classes feature sensory stimulation, exploration and learning through play, music and movement and are designed to build children's confidence, imagination, social skills and early language skills.

For more information phone 020 7258 1415, email info@gymboreeplayuk.com or visit www.gymboreeplayuk.com.

Jo Jingles runs music and singing classes for children aged six months to five years. The classes are designed to be fun and interactive, with an educational slant. They aim to promote confidence and independence, and to build social, communication and musical skills. For more information, visit www.jojingles.com.

Kindermusik is a music and movement programme for children newborn to seven years. There are over 6,000 educators worldwide, with over 75 licensed teachers in the UK. Courses of lessons are provided in eight to 10 week blocks for babies and 18

to 20 weeks for all other age groups. During classes the educator leads a group of parents and children through structured fun activities using music and movement, and there is a wide range of home learning materials also available. Kindermusik is designed to help develop all aspects of childhood development - social, emotional, musical, cognitive and physical skills. For more information visit www.kindermusik.co.uk.

Music in the Round, based in Sheffield, is dedicated to presenting the greatest music to the widest public in an informal atmosphere. It promotes around 150 concerts a year and runs a variety of education projects. The Music in the Community programme aims to ensure that everyone gets the opportunity to get involved in music and includes the Music Box project that takes weekly music workshops into Sheffield nurseries. For more information visit www.musicintheround.co.uk or call 0 114 281 4660.

Portsmouth Sure Start runs the **Music is Fun** project to promote the benefits of music in developing and supporting listening, communication and thinking. Mothers who have attended the Music is Fun sessions with their children have reported benefits for themselves as well as their children. These include increased self-esteem and confidence, increased mutually rewarding interactions, learning new ways of managing behaviour, seeing an improvement in their children's social skills, learning about supporting speech and language and singing songs and playing the musical games at home that they learn in the sessions. For more information contact Elizabeth Scott-Hall who runs the project on esh@music-is-fun.co.uk.

Music One2One is the name of a project based at Exeter University that is examining ways of using music, including movement, voice play and listening as well as songs and rhymes, to facilitate and foster interaction between parents and their children under-two. Trials have already been run in Banbury, Oxon, and on Exeter Sure Start, the results of which can be seen on the project website. The project offers training in ways of using music to encourage interaction and communication skills with children under two. For more information go to www.education.ex.ac.uk/music-one2one.

MusicStart is a 15-month project on the Isle of Wight designed to make music-making and singing part of everyday life for all families with children under-five. Funded by the national organisation Youth Music, and delivered by Healing Arts, the project uses music and singing to promote children's personal learning and development. It trains early years practitioners, parents and musicians to deliver music and singing in early years settings. It aims to identify links between singing and speech and language development, and develop programmes to support this.

Youth Music are developing **MusicStart Packs** to get parents doing very simple musical activities with their children, following a £50,000 investment from the DfES in January 2007. The packs will contain a selection of small hand-held musical instruments, a CD of songs and instrumental music with suggestions to help parents. Music Start was the inspiration for the scheme (see above) and the Music Start

packs are aimed at older pre-school children aged two to five. For more information visit Bongo Club's website www.bongoclub.org.uk/news
Bongo Club is the online resource for early years music-making hosted by Youth Music.

Music Together is a research-based music and movement programme for young children and their parents and carers. Music Together classes are based on the recognition that all children are musical and that they can learn to sing in tune, keep a beat and participate in musical activities with confidence once the early environment supports such learning. Central to the Music Together approach is that young children learn best from the role model of parents/carers who are actively making music. The programme brings families together by providing a rich musical environment in the classroom and by facilitating family participation in spontaneous musical activity at home within the context of daily life. For more information or to find UK training providers visit www.musictogether.com.

Piccolo is a musical activity group for pre-school children in and around Tyne and Wear focusing on singing and covering hand rhymes, lap songs, action songs, story songs, with an introduction to rhythm and percussion instruments. As well as running regular music sessions, Piccolo offers a number of different training workshops. For more information visit www.piccolomusic.co.uk.

Surround Sound

Park View Primary School, Huyton in Knowsley, transformed a derelict wooded area at the back of the nursery garden to an interactive learning area with a focus on music and language, *Nursery World* reports. Their aim was to address children's low language baseline when entering the nursery. The project was funded jointly by Creative Partnerships Merseyside and school governors. Creative Partnerships provided a musician, Mark Jones, to help them develop the project, devise the design and acquire and make musical instruments. They also received help from Adam Ladson, a landscape gardener and Urban Strawberry Lunch, a Liverpool-based group specialising in making music using junk materials.

The area is designed as a trail, which children enter under an archway, where they encounter features that relate to traditional stories and rhymes such as a Three Bears' cottage and a bridge over slate 'water', which can be used to explore the *Three Billy Goats Gruff*.

The area supports many aspects of the curriculum, but primarily:

Musical development through play

- creating sound effects using objects and found materials
- sequencing events through sound
- creating mood and emotion
- developing understanding of music concepts such as pitch, duration, structure, dynamics and tempo
- improvising/exploring with voice

Language development through play

- improvising stories and role play
- re-telling stories
- supporting phonetic development through rhythm and rhyme
- describing story settings through experience
- talking for writing development

(Nursery World, 23.10.08)

The **Rhythm and Rhyme** project in Derbyshire is designed to introduce children under the age of five to the joys of music-making and to develop their skills and abilities through musical activity. Devised in partnership with the Library service, a particular focus is the use of musical activities to promote and improve language skills. The programme also aims to build the confidence of parents and carers and encourage them to use music with their children, and to develop the confidence and abilities of childcare professionals, such as Sure Start Librarians, to use music in their work with young children. For more information about Rhythm and Rhyme contact the Derbyshire County Council, County Hall, Matlock, Derbyshire DE4 3AG, telephone (01629) 580000.

Shropshire's top ten nursery rhymes invited children under five to vote for their favourite nursery rhyme or song, as part of the 2008 National Year of Reading. 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star' came first with 'Baa Baa Black Sheep' second. A rhyme booklet has been put together and is available at all libraries in Shropshire for under-fives. The booklet will also be used in Bookstart Bounce and Rhyme sessions. For a full list of the top ten rhymes and more information visit www.shropshire.gov.uk.

Sing and play, every day is a special nursery rhyme tape and CD sung by Staffordshire school children to help babies develop early language skills. The recording was made at a slow speed to suit babies' hearing ability and includes a booklet with lyrics and suggested actions. Around 1,500 copies have been produced with the help of funding from the national Queen's Nursing Institute and will be given free to new mothers. The tape was produced by the South Western Staffordshire Primary Care Trust with advice from speech and language therapists. For more information contact health trust workers Alex Dudley on 01785226967 or Anne Hobbs on 01785 223099.

Sound Beginnings puts on concerts for babies and toddlers providing live music of the highest quality for young audiences and classes to increase parents' knowledge of the beneficial effects of music on early development. Visit www.soundbeginnings.co.uk to find out more.

Staffordshire County Council Early Years and Childcare, South Staffordshire Primary Care Trust and 'Awards and All' (National Lottery) have collaborated under the **Staffordshire Lullaby Project** to produce a CD for newborn babies entitled 'Babies Love to Lullaby.' The CD will be given to all parents of newborn babies in Stafford and South Stafford, to encourage them to sing to their babies from birth. The project, supported by a wide range of practitioners including health visitors and speech and language therapists, aims to encourage and promote secure attachment and bonding between parents and babies, as well as speech and language development. It also aspires to provide parents with a strategy for coping with a crying baby and to reduce the incidence of Shaken Baby Syndrome.

Sure Start Broadway/Margravine in west London have produced *Broadway Tales*, a CD and book of songs and stories made with writer and storyteller Sandra Agard and musician Jon Owen. For more information contact Sure Start Broadway/Margravine at 49 Brook Green, London, W6 7BJ.

Tot Stars is the name for a baby and toddler song and rhyme group at Sure Start Cauldwell, in Bedford. Amongst their other projects promoting speech and language are 'You and Me' (a parent/child interaction language group focusing on songs, play and book sharing that can be duplicated at home); Play-Talk bags; and training for pre-school workers about speech and language issues.

Tune in, the Music Cluster Programmes from Youth Music, are being expanded in 2007 to include up to nine locations following a successful pilot. Each Cluster will comprise a number of early years settings working with a music organisation and other local partners, with guidance from the Association of British Orchestras and Youth Music. During the project, early years children will experience music played by professional musicians and explore musical instruments themselves. For more information visit www.youthmusic.org.uk.

(Extracted from Nursery World, 30.11.06)

Play and Rhyme is Sure Start's project in Abbey Bucknall, Shelton Cobridge and Longton South. It gives families of young children an opportunity to learn about the importance of play and rhyme from an early age, to help develop confidence in learning in a fun and friendly way. Membership to the Toy Library is included, and there is support from speech and language therapists. Each participating child receives a free CD/tape of local children singing nursery rhymes and telling stories.

The Music House for Children in Shepherds Bush, London, organises specialist music classes for nursery schools. Sessions include singing, action songs and percussion instruments. Call 020 8222 6933 or visit www.musichouseforchildren.co.uk.

Museums and early language initiatives:

- **Communication friendly museums** – a booklet
- **Talking to the Animals** – a partnership museum project

Communication friendly museums

During 2006-08, four museum services – The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery in Stoke-on-Trent, Peterborough Museum & Art Gallery, Worcester Museum & Art Gallery and The New Art Gallery Walsall - took part in a partnership project, funded by NESTA. What makes this project significant is that its central aim was to investigate how collections and their interpretation can be used to nurture communication between babies, young children and their parents. Working with partners, the project came about in direct response to the communication needs in these towns.

One of the results of the project was a booklet that can be downloaded with ideas for creating your own communication friendly space in a museum environment.

Visit www.stokemuseums.org.uk/learning/nesta for more information or to download the booklet.

Talking to the Animals is a partnership project, funded by NESTA which investigates how museum collections can facilitate communication between under-fives and their families. Two of the gallery displays have been changed to make it easier for families with under-fives to talk about the exhibits. The project's key aim is to develop displays that encourage families to communicate confidently and to interact with the museum's artefacts. Four museums are involved: The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery in Stoke-On-Trent, Peterborough Museum & Art Gallery, The New Art Gallery Walsall and Worcester Museum & Art Gallery. The museums are supported by Stoke Speaks Out.

In the natural history gallery visitors can take a closer look at the stuffed animals and try a range of fun activities like the special animal puzzle, dressing up clothes and bird sounds. Children can hide inside the big tree and read their favourite animal stories or track the trails to see the animals in their homes. There are also Treasure Baskets available on request from the Visitor Desk. These are a collection of specially selected natural objects and everyday items for babies to play with.

It is hoped that the project will give parents, carers and grandparents the tools needed to communicate about the collections with under-fives. The project also aims to make less confident visitors feel more comfortable in a museum environment and to overcome barriers to help make museums a more friendly and welcoming place for families with young children, especially those that may not usually visit.

Nursery rhymes exhibition

The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery also brought a selection of traditional nursery rhymes to life with all sorts of intriguing things from the Museum's collections. Visitors could find out about the reasons behind the rhymes with lots of hands-on activities, such as going inside the crooked house and meeting the crooked cat and mouse. Children were also able to dress as a fine lady and ride a hobby horse or colour a soldier for the 'Grand Old Duke of York' display.

