THE ELEMENTS
A Colourscape music workshop project for Nursery children

The Elements – Concept:

During 2003 Colourscape Music Festival ran Nursery Music workshops in four areas of the UK - Bromley, Liverpool, York and Lambeth - funded by Youth Music, National Lottery, local councils and Education Action Zones.

This pack is designed to help continue the project with ideas for Nursery staff to make music developing young children's natural imaginations and curiosity.

We aimed to create a performance around these four simple ideas – Earth, Air, Fire and Water. This fitted the original plan of four nurseries and five days – one on each subject, and a final one to prepare the performance. The subject matter seemed to fit nicely with using voices and electronics to create soundscapes, and percussion instruments for rhythm and natural sounds. We made instruments from simple materials to create the sounds for each section and to give the children pride in playing instruments that they had made themselves.

The ancient theme of "The Elements" contained natural sounds that the children identified and will hopefully stick in their memories. It is an excellent structural scheme for the adults to grasp in the performance. We decided that the performance was to be on a verse/chorus type scheme – verses of the element sounds, and a simple rhythmic chorus involving movement that all the children could perform together.

Fulfilling the Nursery's Educational Criteria

The "Elements" project fulfils the Foundation Stage "Stepping Stones" curricula in every area from: learning the workings of all instrument types by building them, through use of voice and movement, use of music of different cultures, percussion, electronic media, learning how to shape sound to create structures and emotions.

The skills learnt and developed with Nursery staff teach children musical skills such as ensemble and listening through games; how to build simple instruments; how to structure musical performance through programmatic ideas; new singing techniques and forms drawing from non-Western idioms; use of simple electronic instruments to enhance new musical sounds and allowing the children to experience their own sounds.

Making simple instruments for Nursery children

Four instruments were made during the Elements project and could be repeated for future Nursery classes with the help of parents.

Instrument One – Shakers

This is the simplest instrument to make and is very well-known. We found the best was to ask the parents and children to collect old yoghurt pots or plastic coffee cups. Ask them to bring in a selection of dried beans. Lots of different sizes are interesting – mung beans, chickpeas, pearl barley, rice, dried peas.

Gather the children round and ask them what instruments we could make and show them the beans. Put some beans in a cup and hold another cup firmly over the top. Ask them whether they think the small beans will make a different sound from the big beans. Will it be – higher? lighter? deeper? quieter? louder? Try shaking it and see if they are right.

Then with the help of parents get the children to hold a cup and fill it with beans of their choice. Put another cup over the top and tape the two together with sticky tape (wide insulating tape of different colours is nice to identify them)

Lastly play the shakers. Make loud sounds. Make soft sounds like rain or wind. Let them experiment.

Instrument Two – panpipes

Materials: 22mm plastic pipe from plumbers merchants (best is to find a child with a plumber for a parent to give waste pieces); plasticene; coloured insulating tape; rough sandpaper; junior hacksaws.

Get into four groups each led by an adult.
Group One hacksaws pieces of plastic pipe. Get the children to hold the pipe steady with their hands well away from the hacksaw so they are contributing. They can indicate the sizes of pipe they want – long, medium or short.
Group Two sandpapers the rough-cut edges of the pipes until they are totally smooth. Feel against your lips to make sure that they feel smooth.
Group Three pushes plasticene into one end of the pipes to make them totally closed. Use a stick in the open end to pack the plasticene down from the inside. It can be a good idea to also tape over the end so that the children cannot pick pieces of plasticene out or push them in. If there is a small gap where air can escape the panpipes will not work.
Group Four chooses different sizes of pipes and tapes them together to make a set. A set of three pipes is probably enough for young children to play. Make sure that the blowing ends are flush with each other.

Then try out the pipes – show them how to hold the pipe just under their bottom lip and blow **across** the pipe – experiment with sounds. Talk about what they sound like.

Instrument Three – scrapers/claves

You need to buy some pieces of bamboo. Jacobs, Young and Westbury are suppliers (01444 412411). Four metre lengths of two-inch diameter, parallel bamboo come in bundles of ten. It is quite reasonable in price and they deliver. It is wonderful material for building instruments. As well as the simple claves and scrapers you can make xylophones and panpipes.

To make the scrapers you will need junior hacksaws and some coarse files (triangular or square section will do).

The bamboo is separated by "knots". Cut the bamboo into pieces so that each piece has an open end and an end closed by a knot. Make different lengths so that there will be different sounds.

Using the hacksaw cut many grooves about 5 cms long starting at the open end. The grooves should be about 3 - 6 mm apart. Keep cutting grooves until there is a good section for scraping (maybe half of the total length of bamboo).

Then open out the grooves with the file until they are about 2-3 mm wide.

The best playing tool is a teaspoon, which the children can use to scrape across the grooves to produce many different sounds. Ask them to make different animal sounds or to make fire sounds.

They can also play the bamboo by hitting it with the teaspoon like a traditional wood block instrument. The bamboo can be split down one side using a screwdriver and mallet to make a more resonant sound when hit. Be careful not to split all the way down or you will end up with two pieces!

Easy scraper – Use short lengths of 22mm plastic pipe instead of bamboo. The material is easier to cut and file. Block off one end afterwards with plasticene to make the sound clearer. These scrapers work well but cannot double up as claves.

Instrument Four – rainstick

Materials: plastic pipe about 4 cm diameter; cocktail sticks; drill with a bit of the same diameter as the cocktail sticks (2mm) ; wide insulating tape; some thin card; beans of different sizes.

Cut the pipe into lengths of about 50 to 70 cms (longer if you like). Draw a spiral around the pipe from one end to the other with a width of about 3cms. Drill holes following the spiral as a guide. The holes should go right through the pipe and out of the other side. Space the holes every 3cms or so.

Then push cocktail sticks through the holes and right out of the other side (very fiddly!). Break off the excess pieces of stick so that they are nearly flush with the pipe. Continue until all the holes have been filled with the sticks.

Cover one end of the pipe with a thin piece of card cut to the size of the pipe. Stick it into place with the insulating tape. Pour beans into the open end of the pipe. Experiment with different sizes of beans to get the best sound. The beans should take quite a long time to run all the way down the pipe as they run around the spiraling cocktail sticks. When satisfied seal up the other end with card and tape. Cover the rain stick with paper and decorate to cover over the rough ends of the cocktail sticks and stop them from coming out.

Playing the new instruments:

Play the shakers: Firstly create simple rhythms to show them how to hold the shakers. Linking rhythms with words generally works best. Then show them how to create slower sounds. Talk about what they sound like: water; rain; air etc.

Playing the scrapers: fast and slow! – using a tea-spoon. Rhythms can be made – encourage the children to play at the speed of breathing, rather than just very fast…. Encourage them to use words eg; “Bra-----zil Bra---zil = long short, long short; Ar----gentina = long short short short”.

Playing the rainsticks: not just as rain – although keeping the sound going non-stop is quite a skill (try rotating them slowly as the beans fall through the instrument). Hold them horizontal as shakers, perhaps combining rain and shaker sounds (shhhhh – raining, shhhh – raining = long, short short)

Playing the panpipes: A surprising number of young children can produce good sounds from panpipes. Show them how to hold the pipes so they feel the edge of the pipe ***under*** their bottom lip. Then blow straight out rather than down. Many young children will try to blow actually into the pipes like a recorder. Try asking them to hold them away from their lips completely and blow into them from a distance. They can try blowing from a distance and moving the pipes side to side across the airflow. These can all be really interesting sounds to produce

atmospheric music for “Air”

Percussion workshop:

There are a number of theories at the moment about “beat competency” in early-years work, and its relevancy to brain development. The most relevant ones state that by developing the ability to perceive rhythmic structures children strengthen their spatial perception, which has a knock-on improvement in both language and mathematic development. We are very interested in the ability of young children to learn to keep time, and dedicate around half of each workshop to games that focus on that skill. Try starting with a watching “crocodile snap” game. The workshop leader holds their arms apart like a big gaping crocodile then says “snap” and claps their hands together. The children try to snap their crocodiles at the same time. Then slowly open the crocodile jaws and snap again. Try gradually speeding up then slow down so that they have to follow. Try catching them out for fun.

Then using the homemade shakers in simple rhythms whilst accompanying on a drum or other instrument. These rhythmic patterns can be connected to words or phrases, and often with movement. Try simple words that they know – Black-berr-y (slow – quick-quick); choo-choo-train (quick-quick-slow)

Each session would start with an individual activity – welcoming a soft toy – this enables both a framed beginning to the event, and sets the scene for each child to make an individual contribution. It also lets us assess the shyness levels of individuals! We then follow that with a simple song welcoming each child by name – this has the side effect of helping to learn names! ALL SING: “Hello…..(child’s name). How are you toda-ay? Are you ready to pla-ay. CHILD SHOUTS: “Yes”. ALL SING: Hello……(next child’s name). How are you…….etc.”

After the rhythm work, the final fifteen or so minutes of each session was devoted to exploring the sound world of the particular element – each time using an unusual percussion instrument alongside a number of hand-held instruments. We used a spring drum for air (sounds of breathing, windrushing, leaves rustling, birds etc); an ocean drum for water (rain sticks & shakers for rain, tambourines for streams etc); a bass drum played with a superball for earth (and played as a gathering drum, along with the home-made claves, and shakers, wooden chimes and tambourines for insects that live in the earth etc); and some newspaper gently rustled and torn for fire (and guiros/tambourines, and voices for a story about fire engines!)

Voice Work

The voice is an amazingly flexible instrument that can imitate at ease. Imitation is one of the most valuable tools when trying out new sounds and ideas. The ideas explored with the voice in our workshops are mainly to create “sound-scapes”, atmospheres or sound pictures that can bring a mood, feeling, or enhance story-telling to the group.

In exploring The Elements choose a few simple ideas to work with. Always be aware of input and ideas from the children and try to pick up and work with these. For example the element Air can be explored with wind sounds, sounds of animals that belong in the air, the effect of wind on the trees or even our own breath. Always repeat the procedures maybe adding movement to the sounds. Try to end the exercise in stillness and quiet. Ask for feed back from the children.

Whenever the voice is to be used it is good to warm up the body, the breathing and the voice. This can be done in easy and simple ways

Body warm up. Repeat each exercise three times.

1. Shake one hand, then the other
2. Shake one leg then the other.
3. Breathe in. Stretch the arms in the air and relax the arms whilst slowly exhaling
4. Massage the face and neck.
5. Open the mouth as wide as possible and then as small as possible.

Voice warm up

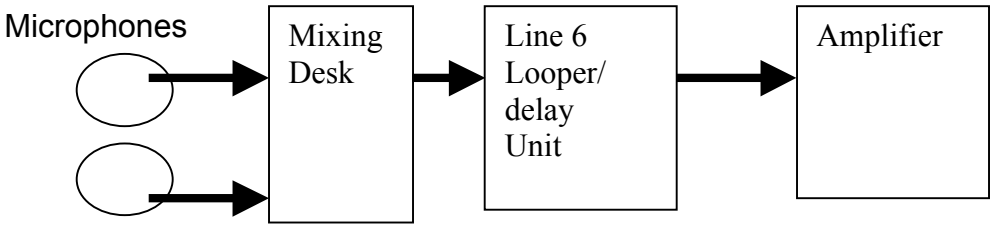
1. Hum whilst pretending to chew a big apple with eyes wide and bright
2. Gradually slide the note upwards whilst moving one arm in an upward spiral
3. Gradually slide the note downwards moving the other arm in a spiral
4. Open the mouth singing an “oo” as in “moon” sound sliding up and down with a slow improvised movement.
5. Do the same with an “Awe” as in “Saw” with another movement
6. And again with “aah” as in “Car” with another movement
7. And again with “eeh” as in “there” with another movement
8. And again with “eee” as in “tree” with another movement
9. Finally take one big breath, stretch the arms and a gently release the arms and the breath with a soft “aah”.

Using the Microphones, Mixing desk, Line Six "Looper"/delay unit and amplifier.

Introducing this equipment to Nursery school Children offers the exciting possibility of creating layers of sound that can be used as an educational tool in the group or as a performance tool.

The swiftness and flexibility of the recording on the Line Six allows the children to hear the results of their work instantaneously, enabling the group or individuals to spend some time listening to the results of their creativity.

Below is a schematic diagram of how to connect all the equipment together. Make sure that the volume on the amplifier is to zero while connecting the equipment together.



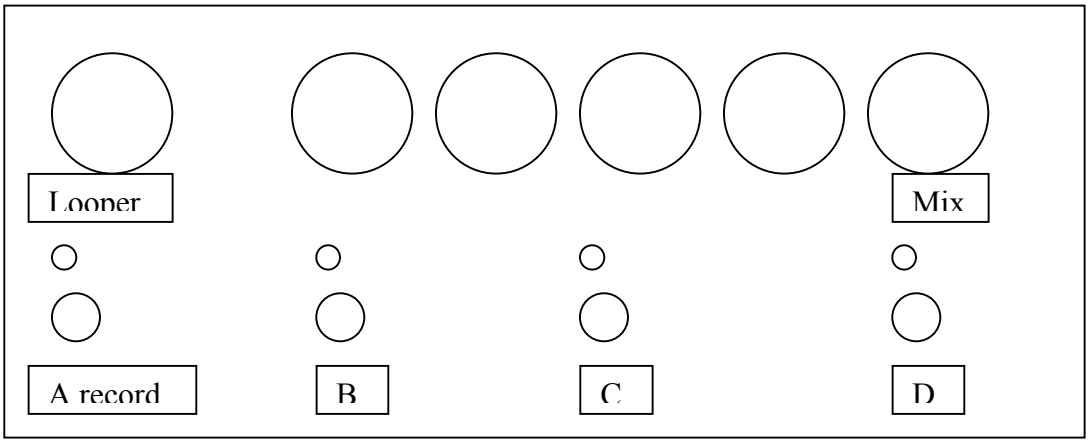
If you are using one microphone only plug it straight into the Line Six mic input.

Operation

Microphone Techniques and Use

The microphones can be used in two ways, one as a group or two for individuals. Be aware that the nearer the microphone the louder the potential sound can be. Try starting with each child saying their name or favourite colour, or something to do with the story or theme into the microphone. Allow them to get used to the sound coming from the amplifier. We recommend holding the microphone in your hand before using a microphone stand. To amplify the whole group then use the two microphones on the two stands and place the group in two close semicircles around each microphone.

Line Six Looper/Delay(echo Unit)



Here are the steps required to set up and create repeating loops on the Line Six.

1. Prime the looper. This is done before any sound is entered into the system.
   a. Volume control of microphone input (on the mixer channel) should be off.
   b. Press the “A record” Button”. The red light above will flash.
   c. When the “A record button light goes out the “B” button light will go on. An empty loop of 14 seconds has been created.

2. Start entering sounds to loop
   a. Ask the child to come to the microphone to say their name.
   b. Before they do make sure the volume control on microphone input is fully up
   c. Just after they say their name put the volume down quickly
   d. Listen back to hear if the name has been recorded and looped
   e. The reason for controlling the volume is to enable a clean recording and loop to be made.
   f. Repeat this process for all the children’s names and to create other loops.

3. Stopping/Erasing the loop
   a. To stop the loop sounding, press the “B” button. Note that the loop will still be in the memory. Pressing the “B” button will start the same loop again.
   b. The loop is erased once you prime the looper again.

4. To Balance the looped sound with the normal microphone sound turn the “Mix” Dial to the left or right as required.

5. The “D” button can reverse the sound when pressed twice quickly and can drop the sound an octave down when pressed once slowly.

6. There are also echo functions on the Line Six to be explored. Please refer to the manual for how to use these.

The Line Six and the microphones are wonderful tools for helping children to explore sounds. They hear their voices returning immediately and so get feedback on their sound creation. The loops build simple vocal sounds into a complete musical soundscape.

After exploring the sounds of their names go on to creating new sounds for the soundscape that you are working on. Build up loops of sounds to create a whole scene.

The Next Stage

Make new ideas for music performances with percussion and voice involving all the children. Create a music-theatre show for the whole school. Amaze them with the Nursery children's new microphone skills. Create new atmospheric scenes using the Line Six Delay Modeller. You can create thunderstorms with reverberation; whole scenes of jungle animals by building up loops; tell stories over the music with the microphones.

Experiment with the Line Six. You can create delays that build rhythms or faster delays to create a rippling effect. Let the children explore their own sounds returning to them from the loudspeaker.

Make some new instruments with bamboo. Try making a big xylophone by cutting different length pieces of bamboo, splitting them into two halves and threading them onto two lengths of rope. The rope can be strung between trees or two people can hold either end. Several children can play the xylophone with beaters.