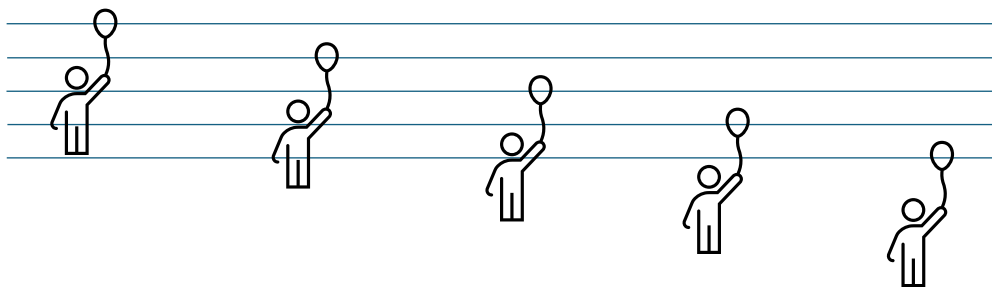




Early Years Music Progression™

A developmental framework for musical learning
in the early years



Frances Turnbull

Developed originally in 2013

Why this progression exists

Every child arrives with musical instinct: a response to rhythm, repetition, gesture, pattern, sound, and silence. In early years settings, that musicality is often visible long before it is formally named.

In practice, one thing became clear again and again: children were often ready to participate musically before adults felt ready to lead. They responded through movement, attention, repetition, play, and voice. Even very young children showed recognisable stages of musical engagement and a natural desire to revisit what felt meaningful.

Many adults, however, carried a different story about music — uncertainty, limited training, or the sense that music belonged to specialists. Practitioners were already using song, rhyme, pulse, gesture, and shared experience in powerful ways, but often without a language for describing the musical development taking place.

This progression was created for that space between children's innate musicality and adult confidence. Its purpose is to help musical development become more visible and more supportable, without reducing it to a script.

It is a progression rather than a scheme or a curriculum because early years music is not best understood as a sequence of fixed lessons. It is relational, embodied, playful, and responsive. Different children, settings, and practitioners will bring it to life differently — and that difference matters.

“The Musicaliti Early Years Music Progression was developed to offer clarity without prescription.”

Origins & legitimacy

This progression was designed in 2013, not as a formal publication, but as a way of making sense of what was being seen and heard in real early years practice.

It developed through teaching, close observation, and sustained work with educators. Over time, patterns became increasingly clear: children's musical responses were not random, and practitioners were often already supporting development intuitively, even when they did not yet have a shared language for describing it.

The progression was shaped in lived contexts rather than abstract theory alone - through songs, movement, listening, repetition, participation, and reflection across many settings.

Although it was not previously presented as a standalone framework, it has informed my work implicitly for many years: in publications, articles, songs, and training contexts where musical development needed to be recognised, supported, and communicated with greater precision.

“Although the progression has informed my work for over a decade, this document marks its first explicit articulation.”

Its purpose now is not to claim novelty, but to name clearly what has long been present within the practice.

Core principles

1. Musical development is embodied before it is cognitive.

Children often understand music first through movement, repetition, gesture, and felt experience, long before they can explain what they know.

2. Voice precedes instrument.

The singing voice is the most immediate musical resource in early childhood: personal, accessible, and already present within the child's everyday life.

3. Play precedes performance.

Musical understanding grows most naturally through exploration, imitation, repetition, and shared enjoyment rather than through pressure to produce polished outcomes.

4. Confidence grows through participation, not correction.

Children and adults both become more musical when they are invited in, supported gently, and given time to join in without fear of getting it wrong.

5. Musicality is relational.

In the early years, music lives between people — in attention, turn-taking, response, and shared presence — not only in individual skill.

The progression overview

This progression is intended as a clear map of musical development in the early years. It names what children are often exploring at different points in time, while leaving room for personality, pace, culture, and context.

<p>0-1 year</p> <p>Beginnings</p> <p>sound, listening, movement, comfort, and response</p>	<p>1-2 years</p> <p>Joining in</p> <p>repetition, gesture, pulse, and shared musical play</p>	<p>2-3 years</p> <p>Responding</p> <p>copying actions, simple singing, and musical memory</p>
<p>3-4 years</p> <p>Beginnings</p> <p>Voice, movement, turn-taking, and growing control</p>	<p>4-5 years</p> <p>Remembering</p> <p>phrases, patterns, games, and more independent joining in</p>	<p>5-6 years</p> <p>Extending</p> <p>musical choices, roles, confidence, and playful leadership</p>

What the child is exploring: how to listen, join in, repeat, remember, coordinate, and express.

What the adult's role is: noticing carefully, modelling gently, repeating with patience, and making participation feel safe and natural.

What this offers: a language for recognising musical growth without turning it into a rigid programme.

The progression in practice

The overview below keeps the progression readable. It describes typical areas of exploration and the kind of adult support that helps musicality grow.

Stage / age	The child is exploring	The adult's role
Beginnings 0-1 year	Voice, rhythm, gaze, movement, anticipation, and the experience of being musically held.	Offer warmth, repetition, steady pulse, and simple songs that can be felt as well as heard.
Joining in 1-2 years	Actions, body percussion, familiar refrains, and the pleasure of musical imitation.	Model clearly, repeat often, and make room for children to join in physically before expecting words.
Responding 2-3 years	Copying, simple song fragments, pulse, turn-taking, and early musical memory.	Keep activities playful and structured; notice attempts, echo responses, and build confidence through familiarity.
Coordinating 3-4 years	Singing and moving together, following patterns, circle and line work, and greater control.	Guide participation with clarity and consistency, while allowing enough freedom for experimentation.
Remembering 4-5 years	Longer phrases, musical games, partner work, simple instrumental control, and more independent joining in.	Support recall, scaffold the next step, and protect the atmosphere of play so challenge still feels joyful.
Extending 5-6 years	Musical choices, character, pattern recognition, ensemble awareness, and a growing sense of leadership.	Invite initiative, offer thoughtful structure, and help children participate with assurance rather than pressure.

The progression does not ask adults to move children through a fixed sequence. It helps them recognise what is emerging and respond musically.

What this progression is and is not

This progression is intended to support thoughtful early years music practice. It offers orientation rather than instruction, and language rather than prescription.

It is

A developmental guide.
A way of noticing how musical experience often unfolds in the early years, without forcing children into fixed steps.

A reflective tool.
A prompt for thinking about what a child may be exploring, and how the adult might respond with sensitivity.

A support for practitioner confidence.
A framework that helps adults feel steadier in their musical choices, even when their training is varied.

It is not

A scheme of work.
It does not tell practitioners exactly what to teach, when to teach it, or how every session should be structured.

A checklist.
It is not designed to reduce musical development to items to be ticked off or completed in sequence.

An assessment framework.
Its purpose is not to measure children against targets or turn musical experience into data.

A replacement for professional judgement.
It sits alongside observation, relationship, context, and practitioner wisdom; it does not override them.

This page is here to protect the spirit of the work as much as its use.

How practitioners already use it

In practice, this progression is often used quietly: as a way of noticing what children are exploring, and of helping adults respond with greater musical confidence.

Planning support.

It can help shape a session with more steadiness, suggesting songs, games, and experiences that feel developmentally fitting without becoming rigid.

Reflective practice.

It offers language for looking back on a session: what drew children in, what they repeated, and where musical engagement began to deepen.

Confidence-building.

For practitioners with varied musical backgrounds, it provides a gentle structure that can make musical choices feel less uncertain.

Song and activity selection.

It can guide choices in repertoire, movement, listening, and instrument work by pointing towards the kind of exploration a child may be ready for.

Understanding children's musical behaviour.

It helps adults read repetition, movement, vocal play, imitation, and participation as meaningful parts of musical development.

Its value often lies in helping adults see more clearly what may already be happening.

Relationship to existing Musicaliti resources

The progression does not sit apart from the wider Musicaliti body of work. It can be seen across resources that have long been used to support musical play, observation, and practitioner reflection.

YouTube videos as visual examples.

The videos offer lived illustrations of the progression in action: children listening, joining in, moving, repeating, watching, and responding within real musical experiences.

Songs as listening and vocal play resources.

The songs provide material for voice, pulse, movement, imitation, and expressive play, giving adults musical starting points that can be adapted to the child and the moment.

Publications as deeper explorations.

Books and written resources extend the ideas behind the work, helping adults think more carefully about musical development, repertoire, and the conditions in which confidence grows.

Articles as reflective commentary.

Articles have often been the place where practice is named and thought about, offering language for what practitioners may already be noticing in children's musical behaviour.

These resources are not sequential lessons, but illustrations of the progression in practice.

Looking ahead

This document is not intended as a final word. It is a careful naming of work that has developed slowly over time and will continue to be clarified through practice, reflection, and dialogue with the sector.

Further articulation.

Some aspects of the progression may be expressed in greater detail in future, so that the underlying thinking becomes easier to use while remaining true to the fluid nature of early musical development.

Practitioner learning pathways.

There is scope for this work to support more focused learning for adults who want help noticing, responding, and building confidence in musical play with young children.

Deeper guidance for settings.

Over time, additional guidance may be offered for different early years contexts, always with attention to the realities of practice rather than abstract prescription.

Integrity and responsiveness.

Any future development should remain slow, considered, and responsive - shaped by what practitioners and children actually need, rather than by pressure to standardise or accelerate.

This progression will continue to evolve, as musical learning always does.

Appendix: Original progression reference overview

The table on the following page reflects the original visual mapping of the progression and is included here as a reference point within the wider framework.

It sits alongside the main document rather than replacing it. The progression itself is intended to support observation, reflection and musical response in practice, not to function as a checklist or assessment tool.

Included in this way, the table offers historical continuity while allowing the fuller articulation of the progression to remain calm, developmental and practitioner-centred.

Note

This appendix preserves the language and visual structure of the earlier reference table as originally used, while the preceding pages provide the interpretive framing for its use.

Musicaliti Early Years Music Progression

Included as a reference image from the original Musicaliti progression mapping.

Age	0-1 Year	1-2 Years	2-3 Years	3-4 Years	4-5 Years	5-6 Years	6-7 Years
Awards	Red	Orange	Yellow	Green	Blue	Purple	Violet
Language Work	Point at things	Point at body parts	Act songs characters	Act song characters	Understand clever lyrics	Acting as different characters	Perform song in character
Completing the Song	Show surprise	Continue song thru movement	Continue song vocally	Sing the last phrase	Sing the last 2 phrases	Sing the missing motif	Clap beat of missing motif
Listening Work	Eyes follow movement	Eyes follow movement	Copy actions	Copy actions	Play partner games	Play partner games	Conduct songs in 2/4
Circle Work	Sit and sway	Sit and tap knees	Hold hands and walk	Play circle games	Step forward and step back	Inner and outer circles	Dance with inner and outer circles
Instrument Work	Shaking instruments	Tapping instruments	Drum and beater	Triangle and beater	Cymbal and beater	Glockenspiel (2 notes)	Ukulele (2 strings)
Pulse Match	Clapping	Stamping	Flicking / clicking	Hopping	Skipping	Patsching (knee tap)	Variety of method
Rhythm Match	Crotchet	Crotchet	Crotchet, quaver	Crotchet, quaver	Crotchet, quaver, dotted rhythm	Crotchet, quaver, dotted rhythm	Crotchet, quaver, dotted rhythm, minim
Interval Match	Minor 3 rd (sol-mi)	Minor 3 rd (sol-mi)	Perfect 5 th (sol-doh)	Major 6 th (sol-la)	Major 3 rd (mi-doh)	Major 2 nd (re-doh)	Octave (doh-doh')
Pitch Match	Bouncing up and down	Jumping up and down	Clap and hips	Shoulders to head	Hips to toes	Knees to toes	Overhead to toes
Pitch Range	A'-A''	A'-A''	D'-B''	C'-C''	D'-D''	D'-D''	D'-D''
Number of songs per Year	3/5 songs	6/10 songs	11/20 songs	12/28 songs	16/35 songs	22/42 songs	28/50 songs
Weekly Timing	10 min	10 min	15 min	20 min	30 min x 2	45 min	45 min