

Assessing Musical Learning and Progression

at Key Stage 3

Module 3

Module 3

In this module music teachers will consider a range of ways in which pupils can be more effectively engaged in musical assessment at Key Stage 3.

Involving pupils more effectively in musical assessment at Key Stage 3

When considering changes to your KS3 curriculum and the assessment of pupils' musical learning and progression it is important to consider your current assessment processes and whether these need simultaneous revisions. An important question to pose is:

How are you currently involving your pupils in assessment at KS3?

All KS3 Music teachers are well aware of the importance and impact of Assessment for Learning (AfL) and the key strategies of:

- Questioning
- Feedback to pupils
- Peer and self-assessment
- The formative use of summative assessment

If these strategies are used in the KS3 music classroom then pupils will be more fully involved in assessment than if teachers were just to award a mark, grade or level at the end of units of work. However, tokenistic use of AfL strategies or the application of an inappropriate whole school strategy can be dangerous.

CASE STUDY

A music teacher in a non-selective co-educational school is observed by her senior management team teaching a Year 8 class. She is well aware of AfL and uses questioning, verbal feedback to pupils and verbal peer and self-assessment in relation to audio recordings that she has made of pupils' work in progress during the 60 minute observed lesson. However, she is challenged at the end of the (very musical) lesson as to why she has not got written assessment evidence of the musical progress of each pupil by the end of the lesson. Providing written assessment evidence for each pupil in each lesson is a whole school strategy that is being demanded.

Responses to the senior management team might include points such as:

- Music lessons should be taught in the target language of music and this is advocated by Ofsted (2012), therefore pupils should rarely be involved in writing in their KS3 music lessons.
- The music teacher has collected excellent and tangible assessment evidence in the form of musical audio recordings and this is as valuable as written evidence in, say, Humanities subjects.
- It is more important for the pupils to know 'where they are at' than to have devoted a substantial amount of time to writing this down, and in music lessons this will mean pupils musically demonstrating what they know and understand, as well as being able to verbally articulate their next steps (part of the self-assessment process).
- How can a music teacher who is leading practical, active and musical learning provide written assessment evidence relating to as many as 32 individual pupils in a 60 minute lesson?

However, the music teacher might think about how pupils might be more fully involved in the assessment process in order to go some way towards meeting the whole school demands. For instance, some music departments have devised concise booklets which make the learning objectives / outcomes for a unit of work, and the lessons within it, clear to pupils and provide a place for pupils themselves to provide some kind of written assessment evidence in each lesson. This can alleviate the need for spending an unnecessary amount of time at the start of each lesson sharing learning objectives with pupils on a PowerPoint or whiteboard (or even worse wasting musical learning time getting pupils to copy down the learning objectives), since the learning objectives can be included in the booklet, ready to be quickly and effectively shared with pupils. The learning objectives should relate to the assessment or success criteria (or milestones) for that lesson and pupils can be involved in making their own decisions about their progress at the end of the lesson in a quick and efficient way.

TASK 1

This is a simple example of a self-assessment grid that could be introduced at the start of an introductory lesson about reggae and be completed by pupils at the end of the lesson:

Assessment criteria	Emerging	Developing	Secure
To know about the history of reggae			
To know the characteristics and feel of reggae music			
To be able to sing the verse of a reggae classic with confidence			
To be able to play chords which accompany the verse on guitar or keyboard			
What do I need to develop next lesson?			

(The music teacher will have discussed future learning before pupils fill in the grid.)

Choose one KS3 introductory lesson in any of your current units of work. Refine your assessment criteria for the lesson in relation to your learning objectives / outcomes and then devise a grid that could be used quickly and effectively by pupils at the end of the lesson.

The idea of booklets can be a pragmatic way of providing the tangible 'written' assessment evidence demanded by some schools. The strengths of this approach are that learning objectives / outcomes are made clear to pupils in an efficient way throughout each lesson and that pupils are very obviously aware of 'where they are at'. However, it is important to be clear that not all learning objectives / outcomes are suitable as assessment criteria, although they are obviously intrinsically linked. As Martin Fautley suggests:

'Using learning outcomes as assessment criteria means that the teacher can form a rapid assessment judgement concerning the achievement of a class. Thus...it is possible to decide relatively easily whether or not the class, or individual pupils within the class, have achieved...However, this does not mean that all learning outcomes are suitable as assessment criteria for all forms of classroom activity in the music lesson.' (Fautley 2010: 93-4)

Fautley suggests that it is important to assess doing, learning and understanding.

It is always important for pupils to be clear about music teachers' expectations and what constitutes assessment or success criteria for each lesson. The least effective music lessons are where pupils are sent off to work individually, in pairs or in groups for a substantial part of a lesson without being absolutely clear what they are trying to achieve and why.

It is when pupils are working in groups that teachers need to involve pupils in assessment much more fully, moving beyond sole teacher assessment. The practical reason for this is that, when pupils are working in groups, the teacher only sees snapshots of pupils' 'doing, learning and understanding' (Fautley, 2010). The teacher cannot be fully involved in assessing the process of creating a performance or composition.

TASK 2

Choose one of your current units of work that involves pupils in composing in small groups.

Devise a form of assessment that captures what your pupils have done, learnt and understood throughout the group sessions. Remember that the assessment could involve written responses, oral responses or musical responses.

It is important to have assessment evidence of work in progress (the process) as well as evidence of the product. This is not to say that assessment of the process is more important than assessment of the product. Keith Swanwick stated that:

‘Essentially private processes are publicly manifested through the products, which may be regarded as provisional, but are always important from the point of view of human communication. Without products we have nothing to say to one another and no means of saying it.’ (Swanwick 1979: 107)

It is good practice to use a variety of modes of assessment with pupils. It would certainly not be good practice to devise a booklet system that is essentially replicated for each unit of work. In any case, a booklet demanding written responses would not be appropriate in all contexts, nor for all pupils, especially those with English as an Additional Language or with limited writing skills.

An alternative might be to get pupils to offer quite formal oral responses, in addition to the regular conversations promoted in effective Assessment for Learning practice. For instance, at the end of a unit of work pupils could offer a verbal assessment of their progress and a recording of this assessment could be kept as a tangible piece of assessment evidence. If a pupil has English as an Additional Language there might be a possibility of the pupil offering the verbal assessment in their home language, which could then be translated by a school colleague who supports pupils’ language development (e.g. a Teaching Assistant). This would allow them to offer higher order responses without the limitation of their language skills. This approach would also prepare pupils for a mode of assessment that is commonly used in BTEC assessment. It is a mode of assessment that could be developed with all pupils. As long ago as 1993 in the book *Assessing achievement in the arts* Malcolm Ross proposed that it is important for:

‘... teachers to make time to sit down with their pupils to talk upon their making and help them weigh up their achievements’ to ‘give pupils a voice, a place, in the assessment of their aesthetic activities and, at the same time, to allow the teacher’s assessment to take full account of the pupils’ subjective worlds – that world where their particular aesthetic projects are conceived and their unique aesthetic judgements are made.’ (Ross, 1993: xi)

Another very powerful approach can be for pupils to co-construct assessment or success criteria with their music teachers. (The booklets suggested earlier would need to be devised differently to do this, since in the format suggested it is the teacher who decides what constitutes success.) What might be manageable ways for pupils to co-construct assessment or success criteria?

CASE STUDY

Year 9 pupils in a mixed ability class worked in small groups on an extended unit of work over a ten week period. The outcome of the unit of work was that pupils wrote, performed and made a professional recording of a song in a style of their choice. After an introductory lesson where pupils engaged in a variety of musical ‘taster’ activities relating to song-writing the music teacher ensured that pupils were clear about what the aim of the long term project was and then she and the pupils co-constructed assessment criteria. Pupils, interestingly, were most concerned with their level of skill (e.g. ‘to be able to play a bass guitar part that contains improvised solos with accuracy and fluency’.) The teacher was able to develop pupil thinking about assessment criteria to include some more intangible, but arguably more important, criteria (e.g. ‘to communicate the authentic musical feel of a chosen style’.) It was suggested by pupils that they should refine the criteria in the third lesson and that the criteria would then remain in place until the end of the project.

TASK 3

Choose one of your current units of work, preferably one that is based around pupils being involved in more open-ended musical learning, such as composing.

Look at your current success criteria for the unit of work and individual lessons. Think how your pupils could be involved in devising assessment or success criteria and what scaffolding from you they might need to do this, especially if they have not co-constructed assessment criteria before. For instance you might give pupils some prompts about different areas for which they might construct criteria e.g. the structure of the composition.

One step further would be to involve pupils in co-constructing a curriculum and the related assessment. This could be done on a small or large scale. In the book, *Whose Music Education Is it?: The role of the student voice*, a music teacher in her first year of teaching describes how she took some small steps in involving her pupils in co-constructing a curriculum:

'I had not been told anything about my classes or what they had previously been taught...I came to the conclusion that I should consult my pupils about their music education and find out what they were inquisitive to learn about. It was important to discover what they wanted to get better at, based on their previous experience of music in school. I devised a brief questionnaire as a way of starting a dialogue:

- What is it about music in school that you like?
- What have you already learnt in music lessons?
- Which of these things would you like to get better at?
- In which ways do you learn best?
- Do you prefer to work with friends?
- List three topics you would like to learn about
- 'Tell me why' (Shervington, 2010: 47-8)

She goes on to describe how she subsequently made substantial revisions to her schemes of work. If you additionally wish to involve your pupils in co-constructing their own modes of assessment and assessment criteria it would be easy to add some additional questions along the lines of, 'How have you been assessed in your music lessons in school?' and 'How would you like to be assessed in your music lessons in school?'

If you were to consider co-constructing a curriculum with your pupils, Abigail D'Amore outlines a simple process for doing this:



(D'Amore, 2009: 30)

She suggests that the potential benefits of co-constructing a curriculum with pupils are that it:

- 'Enables students to take ownership over their music learning, as the curriculum becomes influenced by the result of asking students what they want from their music lessons
- Makes tangible connections with students' musical lives outside school and moves students' musical experiences beyond the classroom
- Achieves a balance between what students already know they want to do and new experiences
- Makes active music making something that all students are involved in
- Gives opportunities to make sustained progress in key areas, to develop new musical skills and reinforce existing skills' (D'Amore, 2009: 31)

If you were to allow your pupils to co-construct a curriculum it would be essential for them to also devise the related assessment processes.

What is most important to consider is that assessment is not something that is done to pupils but with pupils.

Bibliography

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