

Assessing Musical Learning and Progression

at Key Stage 3

Module 4

Module 4

In this module music teachers will consider some meaningful and manageable ways of recording and reporting on pupils' musical learning and progression at Key Stage 3.

Recording and reporting on pupils' musical learning and progression at Key Stage 3

In Module 1 we considered how you might establish milestones against which you can assess your pupils. The next issue is how you can record and report on your pupils' musical learning and progression.

Many schools have whole school assessment policies. These policies can be useful in that consistency in assessment across subject areas can promote equality of subjects and can allow all parties (teachers, pupils, parents / carers and external agencies) to easily understand and compare pupils' achievement and progress in all subjects. However, many whole school assessment policies fit subjects where pupil progression can be assessed in terms of objective and quantitative data. Music and other arts subjects are concerned with pupils' creative and aesthetic development and this means that subjective, qualitative judgements are important. These qualitative judgements can sometimes be difficult to fit within a whole school assessment policy.

If your school does have a whole school assessment policy then there are two ways forward. Firstly, you can persuade your senior leaders to allow you to devise and use an assessment model that is different from that used in other subjects but which allows you to assess aspects of pupils' musical progression that you regard as truly valuable. Secondly, you can adopt the whole school policy as freely as possible and, again, try and ensure that you are assessing aspects of pupils' musical progression that you regard as truly valuable.

CASE STUDY

Despite not having to assess using levels, the senior leaders of a large, wide ability school have decided that all teachers in all subjects have to report on pupil progress three times a year and that numerical levels 1 to 8 (plus exceptional performance) will still be used, but that departments do not have to report pupil progress in terms of subdivisions of levels.

The Music Department has written its own milestones (see Module 1). The three members of the department have decided on how the milestones that they have carefully devised relate, in broad terms, to the old level descriptors. For instance, the milestone descriptor of an Emerging singer is a pupil who 'can use their voice in an ensemble with rhythmic accuracy and some sense of pitch' and this clearly aligns with the old Level 4 descriptor. The milestone descriptor of a Developing singer is a pupil who 'can maintain a vocal part within an ensemble with rhythmic accuracy and reasonable intonation' and this aligns with the Level 5 descriptor. The milestone descriptor of a Secure singer is a pupil who 'can maintain a vocal part within an ensemble with secure intonation and can sing short solos' and this can be seen to match the Level 6 descriptor.

These teachers are devising musically appropriate criteria (milestones) that are relevant to their pupils and are then making a 'best fit' judgement to give the numerical value that the school demands. The teachers have devised a variety of musical milestones, assessing a wide range of aspects of pupils' musical progression.

The members of this Music Department have been adamant that pupil progression is not linear and it has been agreed with senior leaders that, whilst pupil progression has to be evident over a whole academic year, it must remain possible for pupils to achieve a lower 'level' at a point in a year.

Remember that milestones can be written to suit your pupils at particular points in Key Stage 3 and new milestones can be introduced as pupils move through the Key Stage.

It is obvious that pupils' musical progression, like progression in life in general, is not always linear. There are so many reasons why pupils might achieve a lower 'level' in a unit of work than in a previous unit. This might be as simple as a pupil being motivated by a unit of work centred on the use of GarageBand and then being demotivated by a unit of work centred on singing. As Gary Spruce observes, 'The linear model presumes predictable and common stages of development and ignores children's social and cultural backgrounds which so affect their perception of what music is and *means* to them.' (Spruce, 2001)

One of the most important things to consider when deciding how you will record and report your pupils' musical progression is to ensure that you can provide a wide range of evidence of your pupils' musical achievements at any point. This evidence must be musical, i.e. audio or video recordings of pupils' work. As long ago as 2003, Ofsted stated that:

'Effective day-to-day assessment in music makes good use of relevant ways of collecting assessment information, so as to capture important evidence about different aspects of pupils' progress and achievement. These include:

- audio and video recordings of work in progress
- audio and video recordings of completed work
- pupil evaluations of units of work
- computer disks containing pupils' work

(Ofsted, 2003)

Available at:

<https://www.learntogether.org.uk/resources/Documents/Ofsted%20Good%20Assessment%20Practice%20in%20Music.pdf>

The ease of collecting evidence digitally has developed exponentially since Ofsted 2003.

It is absolutely essential for you to be able to provide and use evidence of pupil work in progress as well as of completed work.

TASK 1

Look at your current KS3 assessment processes.

How could you collect more evidence of pupils' work in progress? Make a list of possibilities.

e.g. Buy a new, fully portable digital recorder in order to be able to record short examples of pupils' work when they are in groups outside of the classroom.

Encourage pupils to make recordings of their own work in progress.

By regularly recording pupil work in progress you will not only have tangible evidence of pupil progression but will also be able to use recordings of work in progress with pupils in order for them to be able to reflect on their own progress through aural evaluation. This approach was promoted by Ofsted in 2009:

'Audio recording tended to be used only at the end of a unit of work rather than as a means of continuing assessment. However, teachers used regular assessment effectively in the best lessons. In one of the schools visited, a music teacher was quickly able to provide extensive examples of students' work, recorded and filed in the school's music database. Work was recorded as a natural part of lessons and students used it to see what they had improved and what they needed to improve further. The school also used the resource for departmental meetings to develop greater understanding of standards and expectations.'
(Ofsted, 2009)

Available at: <http://www.Ofsted.gov.uk/resources/making-more-of-music-evaluation-of-music-schools-2005-08>

For instance, as pupils do not all work at the same pace, if you observe that a group has met the success criteria for their work before the final lesson, then it could be useful to make a summative recording of their work at this point, and then challenge them by setting a further, achievable musical goal for them.

If you are reluctant to abandon the old model of a final assessment lesson then it is imperative to ensure that pupils continue to learn musically throughout that lesson. It is essential to avoid pupils sitting in silence as eight or more groups record a final performance!

CASE STUDY

Pupils in Year 7 in an all girls' non-selective school have been composing a 'spooky' piece of music, which they began in the week of Hallowe'en. Pupils have co-constructed the following success criteria with their music teacher:

In the spooky piece we will -

- use voices and instruments in unusual (but safe) ways to create imaginative sounds
- create appropriately spooky sounds on instruments and voices
- use a range of dynamics
- create a suitably spooky mood
- have a clear and appropriate structure

The teacher puts each of these success criteria onto a piece of laminated card. As each of the six groups perform each of the other groups is given a card and has to assess that criterion. As another group performs, each group passes on the laminated card to the next group and assesses a new criterion. This ensures that pupils are involved in learning and articulating their understanding as groups perform. Pupils' oral responses are recorded as valuable assessment evidence.

This assessment activity promotes the idea of ensuring that your pupils develop as musical critics through their involvement in assessing, whilst still allowing you to collect important summative assessment evidence.

Another way in which a final assessment lesson can be made more valuable in terms of pupil learning is to ensure that pupils' summative performances are truly celebrated. At the end of an extended unit of work think about how you might provide real performance opportunities for your pupils. They might be able to perform to another year group, in an informal presentation to their parents / carers at the end of a day or might perform in an assembly. The summative assessment evidence can be recordings of the performances.

An important point to stress is that effective recording and reporting relates to what your pupils can do. Excessive emphasis on levelling and sub-levelling over the last two decades has often led to pupils being defined and restricted by their current 'level'. For instance, you have undoubtedly heard teachers state something like, 'oh he's a Level 4 and won't be able to manage that'. Take care to ensure that you have complete portfolios of evidence of what your pupils can do and that any numerical value that you assign is only a shorthand for the musical richness contained in your pupils' portfolios. Verbal reflections by you and your pupils will be a much more rich source of evidence than any numerical value.

TASK 2

Make a list of all the things that you might wish to compile in a portfolio of musical evidence for any Key Stage 3 pupil in your school, which can be presented to any agency at any point. Whilst the majority of this evidence will be audio / video evidence, as has already been established, think about what other things might build an overall picture of a pupil's progress and achievements. (Remember to evidence everything that the pupil 'can do'.)

Audio / video recordings of each pupil learning to sing a part in an ensemble

Audio / video recordings of each pupil singing in a final ensemble performance

Recorded oral reflections from each pupil on what was achieved in the ensemble singing and what will be personal targets for the next ensemble singing activity.

Etc.

If you have gone through the steps suggested in the first four modules, you will have established milestones for your pupils, will have devised units of work that allow your pupils to achieve these milestones and have collected a wide range of musical evidence of what your pupils can do. Another important step is to consider how you are going to be able to report these achievements and your pupils' progress to a variety of agencies including the pupils themselves, parents / carers, senior managers, Ofsted etc. Think about how assessment data can be reported in a meaningful way. In 2009 Ofsted suggested that:

'Music teachers...were struggling to find workable ways to collect assessment information and to meet whole-school requirements for data, especially where these were excessive. For example, in the most extreme cases, the music department was expected to provide assessments every half term in relation to sub-divided National Curriculum levels. However, such sub-divisions did not take account of the National Curriculum guidance about progress within levels being seen in terms of increasing confidence, ownership and independence and so they ended up being based on arbitrary degrees of competence in separate and specific components of music.' (Ofsted, 2009)

Consider how the reporting mechanism that you adopt reflects your pupils' 'increasing confidence, ownership and independence' as musicians and try and devise a system that avoids over-complex atomisation. For instance, if your current assessment mechanism consists of a spreadsheet on which you highlight tiny components of pupils' musical achievements (which is exactly what is being used in some schools in Kent) then you need to think how this can be simplified in order to be useful to all parties.

TASK 3

In Module 1 Task 3 you devised a simple way of regularly reporting pupils' achievements against milestones.

You now need to decide what else you need to report on and how, within your own school context.

Arrange a meeting with another colleague who is responsible for leading another creative arts subject (e.g. Art). Discuss your school's current assessment and reporting procedures.

Decide:

1. In the existing procedures, what works well for your subjects?
2. In the existing procedures, what does not 'fit' your subjects?

Collaboratively devise a recording and reporting system that is manageable and meaningful to you, your pupils and all other agencies but also fits the majority of the demands of your school. The recording and reporting system will:

- allow you to show what your pupils can do at any point
- include your own and pupils' verbal reflections about musical progression
- include summative assessments against milestones that you regard as valuable (and these can be reflected in numerical 'shorthand' if that is demanded)

An outcome might be that you find that you wish to make a joint proposal to your senior leaders about establishing a recording and reporting system that is useful and valuable to all arts subjects within your school.

TASK NOTES

Whilst recording and reporting pupil progress is important to senior leaders and external agencies such as Ofsted, it is very important to ensure that the reporting mechanism that you adopt means that your pupils are entirely clear about the progress that they are making and their next steps at each point. As we established at the outset, assessment must have the pupils at the centre. You should ensure that whatever recording and reporting procedures you adopt they are of real value to your pupils.

Bibliography

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