**Listen, Imagine, Compose Project -
What processes for evaluating pupil work can be adopted to give
constructive feedback and encourage peer review?
2011-12**

Location: Hamstead Hall School, Birmingham

Composer: Jackie Walduck
Class Teacher: Jenetta Hurst
Also present: BCMG Learning trainee

Hamstead Hall is a comprehensive school in Handsworth Wood, Birmingham. Its student body is representative of the cultural diversity of the city. The project class was a year 10 music option group. It was made up of predominantly male pupils, who played a range of instruments, from trombone to tabla.

As with all of the LIC project schools, one of the important features of the Hamstead Hall project was that a considerable amount of pre-project time was devoted to the planning of the sessions. The school situation, and the ways in which the pupils were used to working was a key concern of the class teacher, and this was explored in some depth before the project started. The result of this was that the composer was clearly aware of the specificity of the musical learning of the group of pupils before the first project lesson took place. A little more detail needed here

The composer wanted to work with a range of musical responses, from individuals, through small groups, to whole class work. Much of the project was delivered using a whole class modality. The way the composer chose to work was by the pupils coming up with responses to 'magic squares', the mathematical puzzle where rows and columns add up to the same number. This magic square would then be used to generate note pitches. The first set of note pitches were to be based on a prime set generated from the pitches used in 'Blue Monk', by Theolonius Monk. Need more about this

The pupils began with the composer by working on rhythm patterns in a call and response fashion. They then transferred to working on 8-beat pulse patterns using instruments. At the end of the session both composer and teacher worked together using questioning to draw out the learning which had taken place by the pupils.

One of the learning features for this project was the use of key musical terminologies. The classroom was already equipped with examples of these as part of the classroom display. Key terminologies which were to be used in the project were written up on the interactive whiteboard (IWB). These were: Melody; Chromatic Scale; Semitone; Interval; mood; major chord; minor chord; tone row. These were then discussed and played, both by the pupils and by *N* on bassoon.

From this beginning, subsequent lessons looked at generating melodic

pitches from the magic square, and using this in original compositions. This then led to pupils working conjointly as a group, and producing together a piece of music which used the generated notes as its basis. The composing process for this happened to some extent aurally, as ideas were tried and accepted or rejected within the context of the class-group. Following this some time was spent on developing the whole-class composition, with roles being developed for all of the participants.

The composer herself described the project thus:

> We worked with Year 11 BTEC students for 6 sessions. Our project focused on the meeting point between composition and improvisation through the use of 1-page scores. A whole group piece was created over 5 sessions, to model the process and help to build skills and understanding to support this style of work. The class then worked in groups of 5 or 6, without the composer, to create their own miniature 1-page score compositions.

Discussion
In reflection sessions after the lessons a number of points were discussed. Many of these have implications wider than that of this immediate project, and are worthy of consideration in music education generally, and will be introduced and discussed throughout this case study. Some of the questions raised are significant to stand alone, and so are presented here. These again are important for those working with compositional materials with young people to give some thought to.

The focus of this project was evaluation, and a not inconsiderable amount of time was spent discussing what this meant, both generally and in the context of this work. This discussion included the importance of words (as used in the *key terms* of the lesson) and language.

- How important is language in musical learning?
- Is it possible for the pupils to have tacit knowledge? (*c.f.* Polanyi, 1967)
- If so, how might those working with young people gain access to this?
- Is it important to prepare young people to be able to articulate their musical knowledge?
- If so, how is this best done?
- Is there a danger of assuming if pupils do not know the terminology, they lack the concept?

It is probably fair to say that composing in this fashion was alien to many of the pupils involved in this project. For all those involved in the project, the notion of evaluating encompassed valuing. For composer and teacher this was axiomatic. For the pupils one of the challenges proved to be in encouraging them to value their own contributions and musical ideas, and stick with them. Despite being fairly advanced musically, there was sometimes a reluctance to develop initial ideas which the pupils felt were not of the highest rank. The project team spent some time discussing why this might be. Could it be because culturally young people do not see the process of

composing? The artefact products of many popular musical cultures are privileged, sometimes to the extent that the processes by which they were reached can be categorised as lying somewhere between opaque and invisible! What this means in practice is that pupils can assume that music emerges fully-formed at the point of origin, and that little needs to be done by way of post-generative processing in order to arrive at a finished piece.

One of the findings from this project is that valuing is a crucial early part of the evaluation process. At its worse (although not seen in this project) is the continual rejection of musical ideas as being not good enough. In this project both composer and teacher went to great pains to ensure that pupils ideas were valued. The magic square generation system proved to be most useful with regard to the idea of valuing, as the results which were generated by it could be considered to be at one stage removed from the personal, so if results were not immediately felt to be of use, then the system was the culprit, rather than the individual. This has ramifications beyond the project, and one of the areas that seems worthy of further consideration relates to this issue of starting points for composing.

- What range of starting points are there for composing?
- What do they look like?
- Can they set out for teachers, composers, and those working with young musicians?
- Are some more effective than others?
- Is there progression in ways of thinking about composing starting points?

Another of the areas of discussion was a consideration as to whether there are different emphases between *doing* and *learning*. This discussion arose as the teacher had concerns for the latter, whereas it was posited that the composer was situating herself with the former. This was an interesting and important dialogue, and, in a number of ways goes to the heart of many of the discussions concerning music education (especially at Key Stages 3 and 4) at the moment.

- What do we want the pupils to learn?
- What do we want the pupils to do?
- What do the pupils need to have learned *before* they are able to do what we want them to do?

This set of questions can be taken further, and be used to question the very roles which composer and teacher adopt in projects of this nature. This is particularly relevant as the teacher is involved in long-term contact with the pupils concerned, and needs to have a view with regards to both learning, and progression. This view can be bounded by all sorts of external factors, which may only have limited impact on those not directly involved with day-to-day teaching and learning in the classroom. For example, a common concern of teachers is to do with the structure of a lesson, and with how this will be viewed by Ofsted. This leads to concerns such as "…demonstrating exceptional progress in learning in your lesson" (Beere, 2010 p.8). This can

mean writing learning outcomes on the board, planning for differentiation, personalising learning, and being aware of whole-school learning initiatives focussing on developing learning or behaviour. The teacher is also likely to be highly aware of the requirements of the National Curriculum, and of examination syllabi. For KS4 classes, such as this one, the requirements of the sorts of composing which can be entered for the final examination will also be of concern, as will the nature of group-work, individual contributions, and coursework requirements generally.

Both composer and teacher bring 'baggage' with them to projects of this nature. In this project, thanks to the time available for preparation, it was possible to explore some of these issues. Although it did not happen in this project, both composer and teacher talked about how their roles could fall into typical stereotypes of composer 'doing' music, and the teacher 'doing' behaviour management. The teacher can feel that the composer is the expert, and the composer can feel that their role is to achieve an end product, come what may. Discussions in this project which centred on learning meant that in the classroom interactions each person had a valuable, and valued role to play.

One of the ways in which the division of labour was discussed at some length was the role of questioning. In a project on evaluation, questioning soon took ascendancy as being a central focus. A lot of discussion took place in reflection sessions concerning the nature of questioning, what its role was, how it could be used to develop learning, and that questioning for recall or knowledge were low-level examples of the potential that good questioning could elicit. This is an area where the teacher will often (and possibly unknowingly) have considerable expertise. The role of questioning in raising learning, in other words AfL proper, has a significant part to play, and it is worth spending some time with those working with young people to develop this facility, so some form of CPD for composers and performing musicians working with young people would be useful. Maybe this is a role the new music hubs could take on as part of their responsibilities?

Evaluation
Evaluation can take many forms. One common problem in music education is when pupils try to explain something about music, but lack the words. The phrase "show me, don't tell me" is one that many teachers have employed in order to try to address this deficiency. In a project focussing on evaluation this issue came to the fore very early on. The question 'what is evaluation?' clearly needs to be addressed before we can decide what effective evaluation might entail.

- What is evaluation?
- Does it take place only using words?
- Does it take place in a way which is separate from words?
- What is musical evaluation?
- What is musical evaluation undertaken in a musical fashion?

One of the early manifestations of this was with regard to discussions of

timbre. Pupils found it very difficult to put into words want they meant. Some resorted to using words for colours "I want it to sound redder".

- Do we lack words for timbre?
- Does this make talking about music, especially timbre, problematic?

A common factor of the discourse of many teachers' is Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, 1956), particularly with regard to understandings of higher order thinking. Evaluation is at the top of the original taxonomy, and second in the revised version. It is clearly an instance of higher-order thinking.
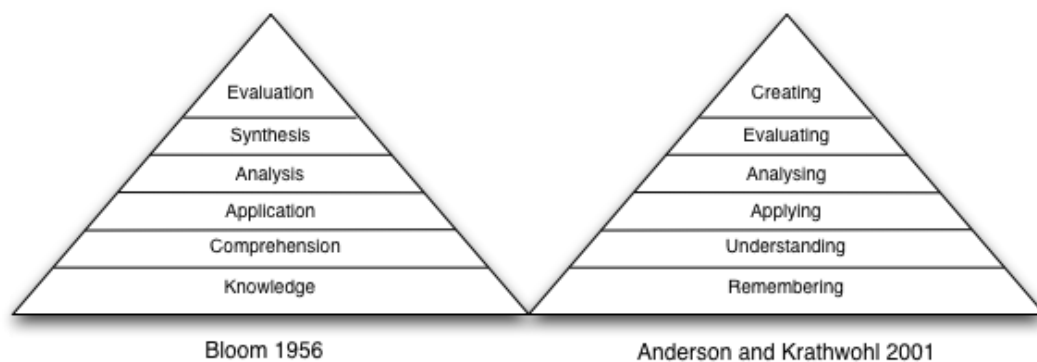
(Fautley & Savage, 2007 p.35)

This raises more questions:

- What does higher order thinking in the arts look like?
- What does higher order thinking in music look like?
- Is it apparent in an original composition made by pupils?
- Or is composing sufficient, according to the revised version, to be higher order thinking in and of itself alone?

Hanna (2007) has provided a useful commentary on music education with relation to Bloom's taxonomy, both in the original and revised versions. Here is what Hanna observes evaluation to be:

Original Bloom's Taxonomy:
- Compare and discriminate between ideas
- Assess values of theories, presentations
- Make choices based on reasoned argument
- Verify value of evidence
- Recognize subjectivity

New Bloom's with music education examples
- Evaluate music by checking for correct notes, rhythms, and other basic music elements
- Evaluate music through conceptual critique
- Evaluate music through checking and critiquing whether certain

techniques, methods, and skills were used correctly
- Critique and self- evaluation of performances, how music is personally perceived   (Hanna, 2007)

For the purposes of this project, this is a helpful analysis as it tells us about evaluation, and what the pupils were doing. The composer has provided a very helpful commentary on evaluation as she perceived it in this project:

> Evaluation is embedded in many workshop-style creative learning processes, and by making it visible teachers can start to help their students gain awareness and confidence in their improvising – through an awareness of their own artistic judgements.
>
> It's important for students to develop their own criteria for evaluation of their work, for these to be specific and refined, and for these to feed back into the ongoing refinement and rehearsal of their music.
>
> When we hear refinement during a creative solo or group composition task, we are witnessing progression. That refinement, its speed, and degree of detail, its degree of change (in the music being created), all depend on an ability of the composer/improviser to evaluate.
>
> Peer and teacher evaluation needs to be constructive, nuanced, sensitively handled, without shying away from reality checks and suggestions for change.
>
> Non-verbal evaluation (affirmation of an idea through playing it back, building on it, suggesting change by playing a change, re-starting a piece from one idea and letting it develop in a constructive new direction) guide in a constructive way, and allow feedback to be given without the person receiving it losing face. I think there's probably a lot more to this in the music Therapy literature – and to do with the power of music beyond language.

One of the findings of this project was that of making the tacit become visible. This entails endeavouring to find out what the composer was thinking, and how this thinking was communicated to the pupils. Sloboda (1985 p.102 et seq) writes of the difficulties of studying compositional processes, and so we know this can be problematic. Another different feature of this project was that this was what composers were asked to do, so not only were they working directly with music and sound, but they were undertaking metacognition, and endeavouring to explain *why* they thought/acted/spoke in the ways they did. This can be seen to be operating in this project, in that the composer reflected on how evaluation as a process could be fostered in the classroom:

> What helps students to learn to evaluate?
> - Questioning by the teacher
> - Asking themselves the same questions (developing a habit of evaluating)
> - Learning concepts by which to measure – eg

consonance/dissonance, expressive value of intervals, tightness (was the beat together?) and the language to communicate their thoughts.

- Creating their own criteria and concepts for evaluation. By doing this they would begin to carve out an artistic intent, and clarity of style.

Evaluation and Assessment
Evaluation can be conceptualised as a type of assessment. Evaluation, as we have seen, places a value on something, as does assessment. Assessment is often characterised as being undertaken with reference to criteria, in music education either written by the teacher for the project, or by an external agency, such as National Curriculum levels, or an examination board. This project has dealt with the *musical* nature of evaluation, especially the ways in which pupils in schools can do this. To this extent it could be considered to be peer-assessment, although self-assessment also plays a part in this. But what has not happened is external referencing of the valuing which has been done by the pupils with, say NC levels, or Exam board requirements. It seems sometimes that the NC levels can be ubiquitous, and act as a justification for learning in their own right. Here evaluation was undertaken for its own sake, and pupils were concerned with making musical judgments in a musical fashion.

Artists in Schools
There is much to be learnt at the interface between teachers and composers, and what this project has shown is that pre-project planning is central to developing these understandings, otherwise there can be a danger that artists in residence projects can involve 'parachuting in', doing something, then leaving. This project has been focussed very much on *learning*, and both composer and teacher were working collaboratively to ensure that this was taking place. This places it almost diametrically opposite to many artists in schools projects, where the outcome is the *raison d'etre*, here the process mattered, and any outcomes were a by-product of the process. This raises important questions about artist in residence programmes and learning in the arts:

- Does product trump process?
- Should it?

These questions clearly will depend on the nature of the projects being undertaken.

Pre-project planning
A lot of the issues associated with what would take place, how it would occur, the prior knowledge and experiences of the pupils, resourcing, and many other matters besides were addressed at pre-planning meetings. The feeling of those who participated was that was a significant feature of this project, and one which should be transferred to other projects. The extra costs involved being more than adequately recouped in terms of project efficacy.

Project Outcomes

From this project a number of issues have been identified, some of which are best expressed as provocations for future projects, others are points which it may be worthwhile for composers teachers and musicians working with young people in schools and other setting to take into consideration. These have been raised throughout this case-study, and integrated into the descriptions and discussions.

One of the key learning outcomes form this project for both teacher and composer was that having away from direct contact with pupils made a significant difference to both the thinking behind the project, and the way it was carried out. Replicating this for future projects will mean moving from 'doing' to learning is far more likely to take place.

References

Beere, J. (2010) *The perfect Ofsted lesson*, Bancyfelin, Wales, Crown House.

Bloom, B. S. (1956) *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook I: The Cognitive Domain.* , New York, David McKay Co Inc.

Fautley, M. & Savage, J. (2007) *Creativity in Secondary Education*, Exeter, Learning Matters.

Hanna, W. (2007) The New Bloom's Taxonomy: Implications for Music Education. *Arts Education Policy Review,* **108**, 4, 7-16.

Polanyi, M. (1967) *The tacit dimension*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Sloboda, J. (1985) *The Musical Mind*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.