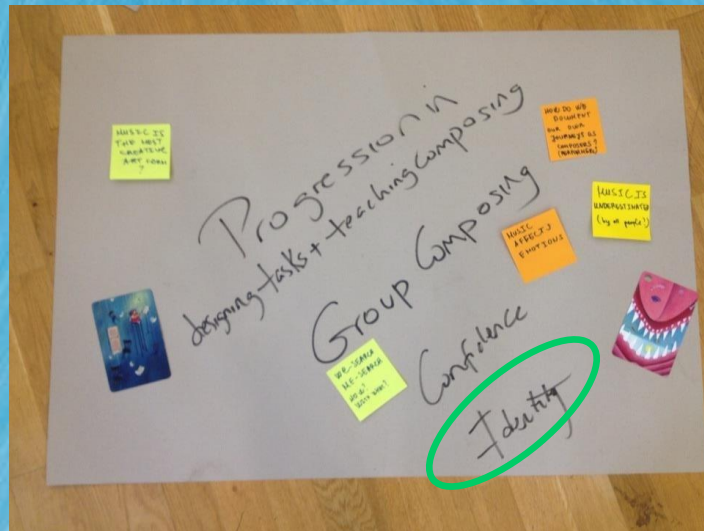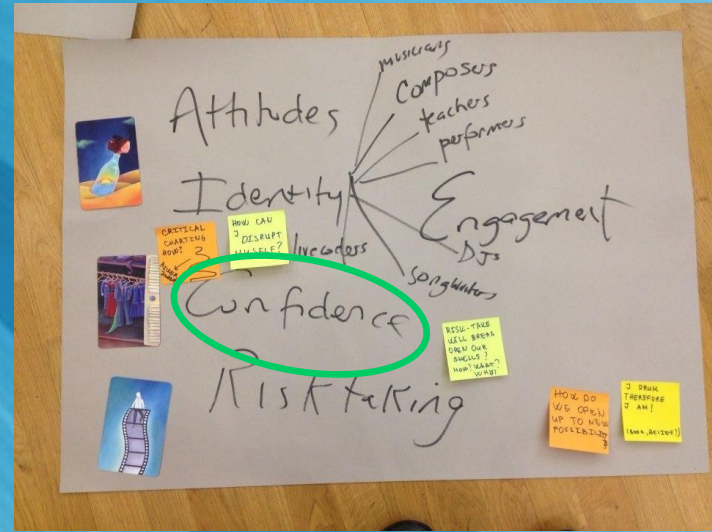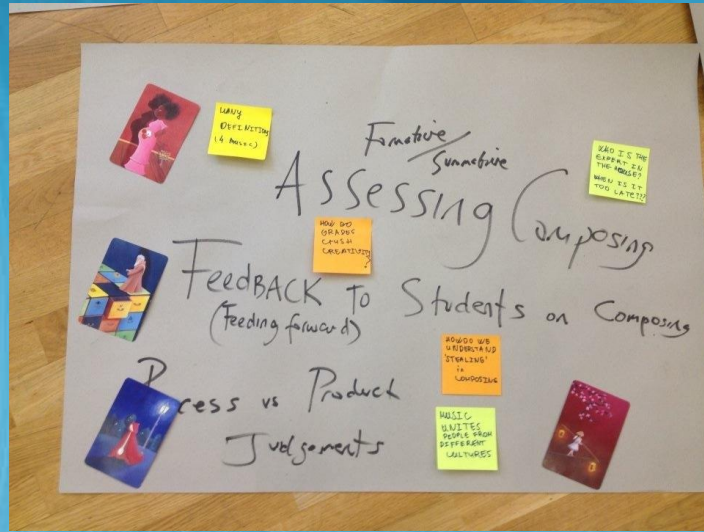# LIC Action Research

Fran Robertson

Imagining pupil experience in composing & thoughts from a teacher's perspective

LIC Action Research

*"When pupils are **composing**, what can help to **break down barriers** such as a **lack of confidence**, an '**I can't**' approach and **lack of routes into musical ideas**?"*

Target Group: 2 year 8 classes, 1 year 9 class

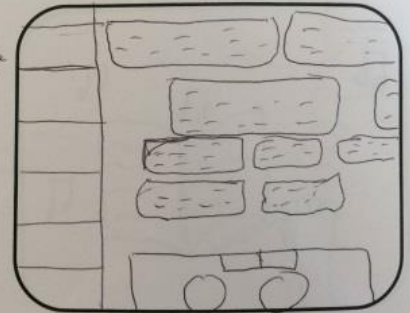# Pupil questionnaire responses

Composers...

Draw a picture of a composer in the box below:
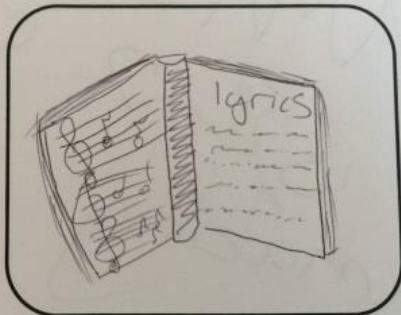

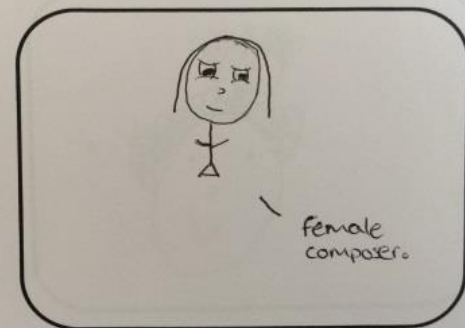Draw a picture of a composer in the box below:

editing Software

Draw a picture of a composer in the box below:

lyrics

Draw a picture of a composer in the box below:

Draw a picture of a composer in the box below:

female composer.

Food for thought

Discussion points:

-Do we always put creative work into context, or fully explain certain creative activities -are pupils aware of why they have been asked to do something?

- How can questioning be used to effectively support pupil compositions without telling them what to/they could do?

- How can we provide more opportunities for collaborative creative activities - where there are both composers and performers in a group?

''When pupils are composing, what can help to break down barriers such as a lack of confidence, an 'I can't' approach and lack of routes into musical ideas?''

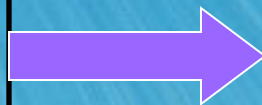# Making the journey:

"*We're*

..Thinking about it

..Talking about it..

..I /we can't"

→

"Were...

Trying out ideas, playing, discarding, improvising, recording, listening, changing sounds, experimenting, sharing, developing.."

"When pupils are composing, what can help to break down barriers such as a lack of confidence, an 'I can't' approach and lack of routes into musical ideas?"

Focus group points

❖ Clear ideas about how composing is a valuable experience: 'it expresses feelings', 'you can use different mediums', 'self expression'.

❖ Agreement that anyone can be musical, and can therefore compose: 'if you can speak, if you can talk, move, you are a composer', 'composition is simply making, and not just in music, anywhere'

❖ Lack of confidence in doing and showing… 'pressure of others' judgment', 'leaving the 'comfort zone' ',

❖The 'status' of composition - preconceptions, putting it on a pedestal/unreachable'

❖'Coming up with ideas are hard, and then knowing that they're any good'

❖ Social factors that can cause issues when working creatively in a group, but even more pronounced 'in the performing arts, when you feel more exposed'

"When pupils are composing, what can help to break down barriers such as a lack of confidence, an 'I can't' approach and lack of routes into musical ideas?"

My aims: The pupils...

❖ get to **explore** different ways of creating, combining and developing new musical ideas

❖ have full **ownership** of it - I am merely a facilitator

❖ feel **confident to express** a musical idea, an opinion, ask a question, give feedback, or contribute in any other way

❖are working towards a **shared goal**

❖ **enjoy** what they are doing and feel excited about it

❖develop confidence in their abilities as **composers and musicians**

"When pupils are composing, what can help to break down barriers such as a lack of confidence, an 'I can't' approach and lack of routes into musical ideas?"

A change in practice..

The main thing I felt it was important to change was the freedom in which I set my outcomes – for each lesson and for the project overall. The focus needed to be on the process and the skills the students were developing.
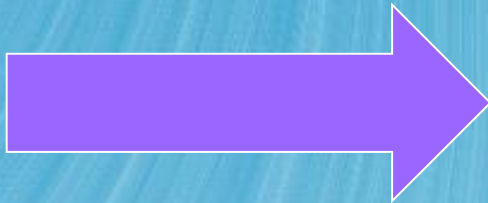
Whole class composition

Skill-building exercises:

Rhythm challenges   **Phase shifting**

Round-the-circle team games

Riff building   **Improvisation exercises**

Use of signals   **Break / sections**

Scales / pitch sets / chord sequences

Singing / Scatting / Beatboxing

Vocal harmonies   **Students leading**

Week by week…

Increased challenge

Break out spaces, returning to whole group
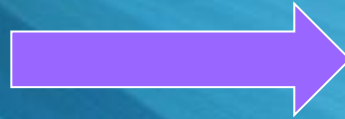
Risk – taking, giving opportunities

Playing > discussing
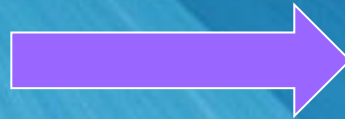
Students directing each other
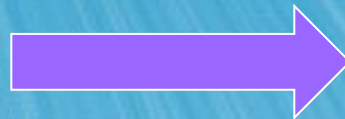
Moving forwards

Task setting → **Engineering opportunities**

Building confidence → **Developing competence**

Skill development → **Application**

KEEP CALM AND SCRAP ON THE LESSON PLAN

"When pupils are composing, what can help to break down barriers such as a lack of confidence, an 'I can't' approach and lack of routes into musical ideas?"

A point about assessment

Although confidence isn't quantifiable, the quality of time spent in the classroom was reflected in the quality of the music-making. Student confidence was seen to improve when I took away all criteria and focussed on:
- Pupil choice
- DIRT (dedicated improvement and reflection time)
- Targeted verbal feedback.
(There was also more time for practical music making)

Pupil questionnaire responses

Confidence...

How confident would you say you are when you are composing?

Not very confident at all.

How confident would you say you are when you are composing?

80%

How confident would you say

4/5

How confident

7/10

How confident would you say

I in the middly

How confident would you say you are when you are composing?

Out of 10 about a 7

ideas How confident would you say you are when you are composing?

6 out of 10.

How confident would you say you are when you are composing

not really confident.

Students who felt confident communicated their response as a number. Those who didn't, used words. This helps to explain how use of summative assessment / numbered scales can very easily dash a students' confidence and render a creative process unproductive

"When pupils are composing, what can help to break down barriers such as a lack of confidence, an 'I can't' approach and lack of routes into musical ideas?"

Taking a step back:
Curriculum planning – creating opportunities

Spiral Curriculum
Context
Content   Skills

- Small compositional activities
- Developing awareness of different compositional processes
- Developing creativity and collaboration as a habit
- Students are encouraged to experiment and share
- Leading onto larger more defined compositional projects

Key things for my practice:

- **Skills based learning. A focus on depth over breadth. Nothing is compartmentalised. Pupils have increased awareness of the musical (and transferrable) skills they are developing. The aim is that techniques are:**

Introduced

Explored

Mastered

Within different musical contexts and settings

Assessment of progress is then centred around musical activitiy and practical responses to tasks set that are clearly linked somehow to the development of one or more of the main musical skills.

Performance/Ensemble Skill - Composition - Improvisation - Singing - Listening

Improving listening skills as a tool to building confidence in pupils as composers:

'What can you hear'?

Responses divided into 3 categories

Musical comments / descriptors (e.g 'unison')

Emotions evoked / atmosphere created (e.g frightening / earthy)

References (e.g wild wild west)

Pupils have the opportunity to respond in a non-judgemental, objective manner and the focus is kept on the original question - what can you hear. This in turn can feed into a variety of compositional activities where students either start or develop a piece of music with a wider perspective of what they are aiming for, how they may reach it and why certain sounds may be more or less appropriate.

What do you hear?

large range | Wind | jazz
repetition | Waterfall | Scriabin
cliff Octaves
decrescendo | Curiosity - felt like a question
strong entry | power
Chromatic | Confident
Motific | epiphany | realisation
melodic

What do you hear?

skippy rhythm | lot of energy | ? Chorus
| | ? introduction
unison | momentum | like the Beatles
Combination of timbres | memorable
| character | Wild West
contrast | earthy | Red Indian music
"shee" | natural
aha!
articulation

riff
pulse
motif.

The 'Happiest School on Earth'!

"We've drastically reduced the amount of written feedback, and yet feedback overall has risen because teachers are giving it orally and encouraging pupils to think about how well they are getting on and what's next"

"I had never seen so much marking before I came to England. Ontario schools give teachers the **professional autonomy** to decide when written marking is appropriate and when it would be better to use **oral or peer-to-peer feedback**," - Headteacher.

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