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by Jane Werry

INTRODUCTION

Teaching music is not like teaching other subjects. This is worth pointing out, because it means that planning music lessons is not like planning lessons in other subjects either. Music contains a rare mixture of the physical and the intellectual. Lessons need to develop fine motor skills together with confidence in performing and a whole range of concepts relating to an art form that is both highly emotional and also invisible. It is most certainly *not* a subject that involves instructions along the lines of 'sit down, open your books and do page 54'.

In this resource, a range of practical strategies for the following will be presented:

- Creating learning objectives
- Teaching musical concepts musically
- Lesson structure
- Responding to students' needs from one lesson to the next
- The place of key words in music
- Ensuring students of all abilities make progress
- Using recordings of students' work as feedback and for evidence

MAKE IT MUSICAL

A music lesson should have music in it, just as you would expect a French lesson to feature students speaking and writing in French. Ofsted have made repeated assertions to this effect, neatly summarised in Robin Hammerton's blog post on the TES website but further exemplified in Ofsted's own document *Music in schools: promoting good practice*.

Having these documents for reference can be extremely helpful for those teachers who may find themselves having lesson structure or content dictated by senior school leaders who are intent on providing 'what Ofsted want'. If an emphasis on writing, and written 'evidence' of progress, is what senior leadership ask for, then music teachers will be pleased to have Ofsted's insistence that the most important thing in a music lesson is the music itself clearly stated in black and white.

John Paynter's groundbreaking work in music education in the 1960s and 70s brought us the mantra 'sound before symbol', meaning that learning the music itself should come before learning notation, much as babies learn to speak before they learn to read. We can view this in a wider context, though, which is that musical sounds should be the starting point for all musical learning. My own mantra for musical lesson planning would be 'play first, talk later' – and writing, if it happens, even later than that.

As an example, let's imagine that we are teaching rhythm to students who have never thought about this formally. What are the concepts that we want our students to understand? That the unit of musical time is a beat, but that this may be long or short depending on the tempo. That notes are superimposed onto beats – some notes may be longer than a beat, and some beats may have several notes in them. We *could* start by looking at a table of note-values, and learn that a semibreve has four beats, and that two minims fit into one semibreve, and so on. There are two main problems with this: firstly, that the understanding being engendered is removed from the sound itself. Secondly, and as a consequence, it will probably be crashingly dull.

A much better way is to start with students joining in with physical and musical activities – perhaps tapping a foot along with the pulse of a backing track, and then performing rhythms over the top in a call and response with the teacher, before improvising their own. This can lead on seamlessly to associating these rhythms with

That musical time is measured in units of beats could be considered a **threshold concept**: a cognitive portal that opens up a new way of thinking and is vital in understanding a subject. Identifying threshold concepts can be immensely helpful in planning schemes of learning and individual lessons. David Didau writes eloquently about threshold concepts in his book *What If Everything You Knew About Education Was Wrong* (Crown House, 2015) and on his blog here.

written symbols, and they can be sight-reading simple rhythms perfectly before the word 'crotchet' has even been mentioned. Identifying note-names, and discussing the way that rhythms work, can happen later, but it is important to realise that it is not the knowing that a crotchet is called a crotchet, or being able to discuss the way that two quavers fit into one beat, that proves musical understanding.

One of the crucial points to understand if you are to be able to plan effective and musical lessons, is that much musical understanding is non-verbal. A student's ability to play, manipulate and create rhythms should be more highly prized than their ability to talk or write about it. Convincing senior leaders of this – especially if they have a preoccupation with written evidence – can be a tough job, and you may need to invite them to lessons and open up a dialogue with them about what musical progress actually looks like.

If I could summarise the best way to tackle anything new in a music lesson, it would be this:

1. Feel it/sing it/play it
2. Improvise and play around with the ideas
3. Introduce the notation – if applicable
4. Discuss it and label concepts using correct terminology

After this point you could move on to a wider composing task, or working on a performance. But the first principle of planning effective music lessons has to be **start with the music**.

Be proactive if you feel there is a chance your SLT will not 'get' the way that music lessons work. Don't wait to have a performance management observation and have them criticise the lack of written 'evidence': invite them in and explain what you're doing, how it works, and why it is good practice. Reassure them that Ofsted are in favour of a practical, musical approach by showing them the documents mentioned above.

CREATING LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Are learning objectives important? Everyone seems to say they are. It is of utmost importance that the teacher should know exactly what they are trying to teach, and therefore I would suggest that the learning objectives are most important for the teacher. If the teacher has thought about exactly what is to be *learnt* in a lesson or a unit, then that prevents them from 'doing' a topic just for the sake of doing it. There is no point in *doing* songs from musicals, for instance, unless something is going to be *learnt* from this – improvements to singing technique, communication in performance, singing harmonies, creating harmonies, creating accompaniments, exploring the link between music and moods/stories, and so on. Identifying the threshold concepts involved in the desired learning will be immensely helpful here.

But all this is for the teacher. Do students need to know the learning objectives? Maybe, maybe not. Sometimes they can be useful, and in some circumstances, knowing how what you're learning about now fits into a bigger picture can be very helpful to students. However, learning is a messy business and does not fit a linear model or happen in neat chunks.

As musicians, we are well aware that sustained practice is a crucial part of getting better at our craft. There is a danger that dwelling too much on neatly defined objectives will result in shallow displays that give the teacher what they want to hear.

Let us very briefly consider musical understanding: how is true musical understanding best demonstrated? The answer has to be through the music itself – through students' performances and compositions. As stated previously, much musical understanding is non-verbal. So, my best advice is not to waste time talking about what the objectives are: it will be more productive to get stuck in and make some music. I can think of no worse way to start a music lesson than getting students to write down the learning objectives.

If you must have learning objectives displayed on the board during your lesson – and in many schools it is policy to do so – then bear in mind that a shopping list of activities does not constitute a set of objectives. Neither do I think that a 'to know – to understand – to be able to...' model is a helpful way of formulating musical learning objectives.

Instead, you can display a statement that explains why you are doing what you are doing. This can clarify things for students, head off any potential 'why are we doing this?' questions, and also serves to demystify the arcane activities of the music room to any senior leaders who are doing a learning walk.

So, instead of a know/understand/be able to model, we could adopt a 'we are... in order to...' pattern. The former does not give any indication of the purpose of any particular activity – so there is a danger that there may be no purpose whatsoever. Adding a purpose could even show where the current activity fits into short- and longer-term plans. If students are practising building major and minor chords, old-style objectives might read as follows:

- To know that chords can be major and minor.
- To understand the pattern of semitones in major and minor chords.
- To be able to play major or minor chords using any note as a root.

The first two bullet points here are largely redundant: if students can play the chords correctly, then the knowledge and understanding will necessarily be there. However, if what is on the board is this:

- We are practising playing major and minor chords in order to be able to transpose our songs into the key that best fits our voices.

... then why are we doing this is also clear. You could also add a wider, threshold concept-related point such as 'and to deepen our understanding of the concept of keys in music' if you felt it necessary, but you might feel that students do not really need to be aware of this, and keep it for your scheme of learning.

LESSON STRUCTURE

In the last decade and a half, the basic three-part lesson (starter, main part, plenary), with variations (including the introduction of mini-plenaries to 'check' learning every 20 minutes or so) has become the norm. Teachers have, for the most part, accepted that this is *how* to plan a lesson without necessarily stopping to ask *why*. When I think of what it must be like for students to sit through five identically structured lessons in one day, I want to show up this lesson-planning 'ideal' as the false idol that it is.

If a three-part structure does not suit what you are doing at the time, don't do it. Our curriculum time at KS3 is too precious to waste on a section of a lesson that is not entirely necessary.

Starters

A starter – or, perhaps more appropriately, a warm-up – can be an extremely useful way to begin. The best warm-ups get students musicking straight away, and link to what they will be doing later in the lesson. They link prior and future learning, and reinforce the routines of the music room. They can be almost or entirely non-verbal. Some of the best warm-ups start with the simple instruction 'Do this', and then build skills and provide structured practice without any further words. They can even accommodate students arriving at different times, and joining in as they enter the room.

Sometimes the warm-up might not happen right at the start of the lesson. If a project is already well underway, it might be most effective to get students into their groups, and sorted with relevant equipment and so forth, before stopping them for a warm-up that reminds them of the key features they need to practise.

Teacher talk and modelling

The idea of a teacher standing at the front of a class and talking has become rather unfashionable in recent years. While I would wholeheartedly reject talking at the expense of music-making, there are going to be times when you simply have to explain something to your class, or show them how to do something. Here are some tips on how to do this as effectively as possible:

- The difference between demonstration and modelling is that when you are modelling, you explain what you are doing, breaking down the processes involved. You can ensure that potential pitfalls are flagged up in advance, and give tips on how to tackle the task.

It is very worthwhile to collect warm-up activities, and keep a record of them somewhere that you can access easily. Using Evernote or OneNote can be a brilliant way of storing warm-up activities, as you can clip things you find on the web, together with video and audio files, and you can tag each note's topic for easy searching. The Musical Futures website has a great collection of warm-ups if you need an injection of new ideas.

- If you are modelling something on an instrument – a piano or guitar, say – consider whether it could be helpful to project a close-up of your hands onto your whiteboard. It is relatively simple to link up a video camera, phone or tablet to the board via the computer or directly through the RGB socket.
- An alternative is to create a video of yourself modelling. This can be especially useful, and is well worth the time it takes. With apps such as Explain Everything, you can create videos that include text annotation as well as plain video footage. You could flip the learning so that students watch your video in advance of the lesson. A great way to manage this is to upload your video (or one from YouTube or similar) to EDpuzzle.com. This allows you to set questions at specific points during your video, and easily monitor students' individual responses – you can even tell if a student stops watching halfway through! The other advantage of creating modelling videos is that students can return to them later if they need a reminder, even between lessons.
- For 'live' classroom modelling, use students to help if at all possible. You can choose students to boost the confidence of those who lack it, or challenge the abler musicians.
- Getting students to do something vocally first can prepare them for doing something on an instrument later. If there is an option to start this way, take it. Another important preparation for instrumental work is to rehearse the necessary movements or co-ordination first, using body percussion or 'air guitar' (or air piano).

The place of key words in music lessons

Music trumps words in a truly musical music lesson. However, even if the most important thing about apples, oranges and bananas is eating them, being able to refer to them by their names is going to be useful at times. And so it is with musical terminology: we may choose to adopt a 'caught not taught' approach to it, that always starts with practical activities, but it sure is going to be helpful to be able to talk about what we are doing. If we can't, the whole process of giving and acting upon feedback is going to be extremely difficult.

There is absolutely no point in learning musical terminology in isolation. Nobody needs to know that a minim is a two-beat note unless they are going to read one and play one. Even then, knowing it is called a minim is only useful as something to refer to in rehearsal. Use threshold concepts as your guide for which musical terms you really need to reinforce.

It very much depends on the music that your students have done in their primary schools, but one of the threshold concepts that I find it necessary to reinforce constantly at KS3 is the difference between chords and notes. Part of this understanding is that notes can be sharp, flat or natural, and that chords can be major or minor (and other things). Related to this is the idea that a C minor chord is still a C minor chord no matter what order the notes are in, or which instruments or voices are producing those notes.

Remember that learning is a messy process, and that forgetting is an important part of committing something to long-term memory. Just because students can demonstrate the difference between a note and a chord today doesn't mean that they will necessarily be able to do so next week: they have it in their working memory today, but it may not transfer to long-term memory without repeated reminders. Anticipate this and plan for revisiting your threshold concepts often.

There are various ways in which you can reinforce key terms and concepts. When it is a simple case of 'this or that' (is this a note or a chord?) you can ask students to indicate using thumbs up/down what the answer is – although get them to do this on a count of three, with their eyes shut, to avoid them just following what everyone else is doing. If your question has three or more possible answers, you can give students numbered options and get them to hold up the relevant number of fingers.

Another useful tactic is to employ choral speaking: everyone reciting something together. You can approach a definition from both angles with an exchange like this:

- **Teacher:** A chord is two or more notes played together. What's a chord?
- **Class:** Two or more notes played together.
- **Teacher:** What is two or more notes played together?
- **Class:** A chord.

If your students are not already used to this approach, they will soon adapt to it being a regular part of what happens in class, and it can be a time-effective way to revisit key concepts and terminology. A good time to do it is when you are about to start a practical task. For example, one of the things I was determined that my

Year 7 students should learn is where to find the notes on a keyboard. So, whenever we get the keyboards out we recite: 'C is to the left of the two black keys. C-D-E-F-G-A-B!'. This has been extremely effective in making this particular bit of knowledge stick.

Plenaries

One of the mantras of the 'cult of outstanding' was 'no plenary – no outstanding'. Things have moved on since then, and in most schools there has been at least some recognition of the fact that Ofsted are really not looking for any particular style of teaching, or shape of lesson. However, there are many people in the world of education who rate plenaries as an essential part of a lesson.

What are they for, though? Why would we want to give our precious lesson time over to a plenary? What is a plenary, anyway? The dictionary definition of plenary is 'a meeting or session attended by all participants at a conference or assembly'. Something involving everyone, in other words. In lesson planning circles, though, it has come to have its own meaning – as a part of the lesson where learning is consolidated, or proved to have taken place.

There are some problems with this. Firstly, you may have been spending the whole lesson consolidating learning: if you have been practising something, then it's what you have been doing all along. Secondly, you cannot prove that learning has taken place. If we take the meaning of learning as being when something is well and truly mastered and committed to long-term memory, proving it is simply not possible to do as a one-off exercise. If you have ever crammed anything for an exam and forgotten it the next day you will know exactly what this means. All you can do in a lesson is show that something is being fairly successfully handled in working memory, and that it is there right now. Thirdly, devoting a portion of a lesson to potentially shallow activities just to try and prove that something has taken place is simply a waste of time.

You may want to finish your lesson with something that brings everyone together, particularly if they have been working in smaller groups. A final performance, or a recording of work in progress, fulfils this purpose very well. The best way you can finish a lesson is to do something that informs your planning for the next lesson. This brings us to the idea of responsive planning.

Planning that responds to the needs of the class

The best time for planning a lesson is when you have just finished teaching a class. You will know exactly where they are up to in their practice, and will be able to respond to the speed of their work and any difficulties they are having. To be in this position of knowing where they are up to, you need to maximise your opportunities to find out about their progress.

Finding out about students' progress and *demonstrating students' progress* are related but different ideas. The difference lies in who the process is for. Finding out about progress informs you as a teacher, and enables you to best serve your students. Demonstrating progress is for the benefit of someone else, and as such should be avoided at all times that it is not strictly necessary. I will return to the idea of 'evidence' later.

Exit tickets, 'progress arrows' and the like have been popular methods for demonstrating progress, and as such have been commonly used as plenaries. So, an exit ticket might consist of students writing down what they have learned today, and a progress arrow might involve students stating at the beginning and the end of an activity what they feel their understanding or mastery is, on a scale of one to ten. These methods are inherently flawed, however, perhaps more so in music than in other subjects. Firstly, they rely on students' own perceptions, which may not be accurate. Secondly, and leading on from the first point, students are likely to tell you what they think you want to hear, rendering the process meaningless. Lastly, we know that musical understanding is best demonstrated through music, so to use words instead removes the validity of the whole exercise.

The best kind of exit ticket, if you want to use this strategy, is to glean students' perspectives on what they need from you next. Do they need further explanations or examples? What problems are they having? Do they need more practice time, or are they ready to move on to new things? Getting students to write down individual

or small-group responses to these questions can be illuminating, as sometimes they will write things that they would not say in front of the class. However, you will be the best person to judge whether this will be a good tactic for your class, or whether a quick discussion will reveal the same information. Or, indeed, whether you have gathered the information from listening to their music, without the need to discuss it at all.

For these reasons, firm lesson plans cannot usefully be made more than one lesson in advance. You need to have the overall plan of a unit of work, but the content of each lesson needs to be responsive to the needs of each class as they work. Even with classes of supposedly the same level of ability, you will find that some work faster than others, or individual things may crop up that need attention.

DIFFERENTIATION: ENSURING ALL STUDENTS CAN MAKE PROGRESS

One of the great things about being a music teacher is that there are infinite possibilities for differentiation, and many of them can be things that happen on the hoof, responding to the individual needs of students as you go along. There may be things that you can plan in advance, but these will often be to do with giving students different musical parts of varying difficulties, and a far cry from the multicoloured worksheet scenario that other subjects have to contend with.

Simplifying and complicating musical parts within pretty much any musical style is so much the musician's bread and butter that I will not dwell on it here. There are two aspects of differentiation, however, that are worth highlighting.

Catering for the experienced musician

In among your mixed-ability Year 7 class you have a student who already has a distinction at grade 6, 7 or 8. It happens, and if they have demanding parents you can anticipate the emails, phone calls and parents' evening conversations that might happen, regarding what you are doing to advance their child's music education.

Enlisting the experienced student's help in teaching others is a differentiation cop out, and should be avoided in most cases. An exception may be to ask them to explain a concept to the rest of the class, as although it is what teachers do every day, it is hard to do, and may well prove extremely challenging to a student, however bright and accomplished they are. If you do decide to pursue this, give them plenty of time to prepare and perhaps get them to show you their plans before they deliver their explanation to the class.

Most of what you are covering in school music lessons is likely to have quite a different slant to whatever these students have done in their instrumental lessons. They may never have learnt about the way that music is put together, how harmony works, or how to play chords on a guitar. It is absolutely possible that a very experienced instrumentalist who has passed a high grade has had very little exposure to making music in a non-classical setting. They may have done very little singing or improvising. All of the new experiences that you give them in class will enhance their all-round musicianship. Encourage them to branch out and try different instruments and new skills: get them out of their comfort zone.

Making invisible differentiation visible

Every music teacher makes hundreds of assessments in every lesson: every time you look at and listen to what students are doing, you assess how well they are doing it, and intervene as necessary to help them out with problems or develop them further. All of these little bits of individual provision can be invisible to the naked eye of an observer.

When you are being observed, make sure that you alert your observer to the plethora of differentiation that is going on. Even if you are not required to provide a lesson plan, you could make a list of all the different things you are doing to provide for the various needs of your students, from tactical groupings and allocation

Think carefully about the way you will store and share the recordings. Will students listen back to what they have done during the next lesson, or between lessons? Having somewhere to store them that is accessible by students is certainly a good thing, and with VLEs, class blogs, Edmodo, Showbie, Google Classroom and so on there is a plethora of ways to set this up. One of the best things to plan for is having the recordings available to students during lessons, as they work.

of musical parts to the level of assistance given. You will need to differentiate for your observer too – to what extent do they need to be told how to spot differentiation when they see it? Will a conversation suffice, or will they really need something on paper? This will depend to a degree on how well they ‘get’ the way that music lessons work.

USING RECORDINGS OF STUDENT WORK

Making frequent recordings of work in progress is extremely useful for a number of reasons:

- Students can listen back to them as a reminder of what they have done, and to decide what to do next.
- Teachers can listen back to them if they didn't get all the information they need to plan future lessons from the first listening.
- They can be used as evidence to show senior leaders and parents of what has taken place in music lessons, and the progress that has been made over time.

These points are in order of importance. If the only reasons you make recordings is for the third point, then you need to change your plans so that the recordings have a purpose for students.

While self- and peer-assessment using recordings is extremely worthwhile, recordings are most valuable to students if they run in tandem with feedback from the teacher. One of the easiest ways of doing this is to leave the recording running at the end of the performance, and simply record your verbal feedback. You may, however, prefer to devise a system of written feedback to run alongside the recordings. If this is a workable and effective system for you and your students, that is great – however, I would resist very strongly the idea that anything in a music lesson needs to be written down just to prove that it has occurred. The proof of this particular pudding is always in the music itself.

THE GOLDEN RULES OF LESSON PLANNING IN MUSIC

1. Keep it musical. Make music first, talk later, and write later still.
2. Lesson objectives are more important for the teacher than the student. Do not waste lesson time talking about them unless it will actually be helpful.
3. There should be a purpose behind everything that happens in a lesson. Do not do anything for the sake of it, or just because it is what you ‘should’ do.
4. A musical warm-up can be an extremely useful thing to include, particularly when it is linked to the activities that follow.
5. Plan for effective modelling, using students or video to help as appropriate.
6. Make sure that whatever ‘plenary’ activities you plan give you information that will inform your future planning.
7. Have confidence in the multitude of strategies that you use for differentiation, but make sure that observers are made aware of how to spot them.
8. Make frequent recordings of work in progress and use these as a feedback tool. If you can, make them available for students to listen to as they work, and consider including your verbal feedback on the recording.
9. Do not do written work, or provide written feedback, purely for the purposes of proving that learning has taken place, or that feedback has been given. Do written activities only if they suit your purposes, otherwise any proof you need should be derived from the music itself.
10. Open up a dialogue with senior leaders if they need educating as to what progress in music looks and sounds like.