

How a Year-long program in the UK might look

Introduction

The one-year programs running in the UK as part of the “Wider Opportunities in Music” or “KS2 Whole Class Music” programs have delivered core music skills (based around the UK’s National Curriculum in Music) through the medium of learning an instrument in a whole class environment.

When this initiative was announced, no specific guidance was given other than a few pilot schemes.

Each area was free to develop schemes of work and naturally a wide variety of approaches and ethos emerged.

In the ten or twelve years that this work has been going on a consensus has now emerged via sharing, pedagogical development and evaluation by various bodies. This consensus does not equate to a detailed, step-by-step process but more to a set of working practices that bind the program together while leaving management and teachers to deliver their projects in ways that suit their strengths, the wider context of their district and the specific context of each class.

So what would one expect to see in such a project?

Here are some key common features:

- A strong emphasis on singing linked to learning both core music skills and the instrument.
- Taking advantage of working in large groups.
- Holistic musical experiences involving performing, improvising and composing.
- Deep learning from simple materials.
- Child centered learning (from the UK Government’s “Every Child Matters” agenda.)
- Musical skill development that can be measured and progressed for every child.
- Each session is led by a music educator with the classroom teacher working alongside.

Let’s remember that these sessions are for every child in the class not simply for volunteers.

The age group was usually either 6-7, 7-8 or 8-9 (1st, 2nd or 3rd grade), although some brass projects ran in year 6, which is 9-10 (4th grade).

pBone | education

- An awareness of and progression towards an acceptable embouchure formation
- Naming of pitch notes
- Naming of durations
- A good understanding of pulse and a demonstrable ability to keep the beat
- Play, under control, five pitches on the trombone
- Play one beat, two beat and four beat notes (with or without notation)
- Understand what improvisation and composition are
- Undertake simple improvising and composing tasks

The last half to third of the scheme will focus on more trombone playing, singing will become more of a learning re-enforcement for trombone technique and music to be performed.

A major challenge throughout this next stage is the increasing need for differentiation both of task and outcome for each learner.

Using musical materials in a less formal manner, working with riffs, grooves, improvised patterns, improvised solos and chords woven into more traditional arrangements not only gives creative freedom to children but also allows for a certain level of self selection of difficulty and challenge within any piece of music work.

More emphasis on performance and building each pupil's confidence to work in a musical language alongside a self reflective relationship with the instrument will be seen as the year draws to a close.

Towards the end of the year, more performing opportunities will be provided. The chance to explore music of differing genres and the use of music brought-created by the pupils will also feature.

Pupils will be made aware of the potential to continue exploring both the instrument they have learned in the project and others both in and outside of school.

Needless to say, a large celebratory concert usually completes the year's work. In this performance each child should be able to demonstrate the skills they have developed and the informal style of some of the pieces will allow for the teacher to differentiate tasks to incorporate this easily.

Quotes from the UK about the “Wider Opportunities in Music” program

Wider Opportunities grew out of the Government's pledge that “over time, every primary school child that wants to, should have the opportunity of learning a musical instrument”.

David Blunkett, UK Secretary of State for Education, Department for Education and Skills, schools White Paper, September 2001

“The main aim of this programme is to create opportunities, over time, for every KS2 pupil to receive a sustained period of tuition on a musical instrument or to receive specialist vocal tuition. The learning experience will allow every child to have first hand experience of live music, group singing, ensemble playing, performance and composing.

The programme in schools should look to 'normalise' instrumental and vocal learning – so that every child considers him or herself to be a musician. It should provide opportunities for classroom teachers and music specialists to learn from one another by jointly planning and delivering enhanced musical experiences.

It should continue work to bridge the gap between music learning which takes place within and beyond the school and introduce young people to the widest possible range of musical instruments, traditions and styles. Finally, it should complement and enhance the school's overall provision for music; including the National Curriculum, extra-curricular activities and the extended schools programme.”

UK Government Department for Education and Skills 2007

“Wider Opportunities gives children the chance to learn music in curriculum time through playing a musical instrument. It is valuable for the complete experience it gives the child; all will develop a greater understanding of what is involved in music-making. They learn that it can be fun, that it requires time and effort, discipline and team-work, and that, as well as being rewarding in itself, it can give pleasure to others. They gain a real insight into the world of music, working with a professional musician, and for some this may be the start of a life-long hobby. . Some schools offer extension classes beyond the initial year while in all there will be children who wish to continue with music lessons. This may be on the wider opportunities instrument or on another or through vocal work.”

Hertfordshire Music Service

“Wider Opportunities (WO) has successfully introduced music to children; 96% of primary schools surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that WO has provided instrumental education to those children who would otherwise not receive it.”

From Wow its Music Next – A research project by The Engine Room, (UAL) September 2009

“Teaching and learning improve, and standards are higher, where successful new partnerships have been formed between school-based staff, Music Service tutors and professional musicians; some of the best quality is when all three work together to co-teach large numbers of pupils.”

From Main Findings 'Tuning In' – UK Government's Office for standards in Education (Ofsted) Evaluation report

“The Wider Opportunities policy is leading to the significant transformation of music education for all pupils in KS2.”

UK Government's Office for standards in Education, Primary Music report 2005

Ofsted judged 67% of Wider Opportunities sessions to be 'good or outstanding' – as compared with 43% of conventional Key Stage 2 music sessions.