The single most important factor influencing learning education essay

Broadfoot (1996, p. 21) describes assessment as ' the most powerful tool in education' and as a ' source of leverage to bring about change'. In this assignment I will attempt to draw together my own experiences of using assessment as a teaching tool, both summative and formative, and how music has been ' the most assessed of disciplines, both in the school context and beyond' (Phillpott 2007) FIND REFERENCE or use online source?!!!! With relevance to Q11 I shall explain my understanding of the assessment requirements for GCSE and AS level music and how I have used these to inform my own practice and involvement with assessment for learning, specifically as a day to day classroom tool.

It is necessary that pupil's achievements are recorded and monitored in some way, not only to provide the student with essential hard evidence of their strengths for use in higher education, the workplace and beyond, but to provide a means to appraise the effectiveness of a school and its staff. OFSTED inspectors will appraise a schools record keeping and assessment protocols and will need to scrutinize records of student results. The school league tables printed in the national press focus on exam results in order to ' rate' a schools success against the national average although these published results do not illustrate a schools success measured against other influences such as socio-economic factors or turbulence for example.

What does key stage 3 national curriculum assessment consist of?

At the end of key stage 3, normally when pupils are in year 9, schools have to report teacher assessment outcomes to parents/carers.

The requirement for all pupils to sit tests in English, mathematics and science at the end of key stage 3 was removed in October 2008. Teacher assessment of pupils remains a statutory requirement. At the end of key stage 3, teachers summarise their judgements for each eligible pupil, taking into account the pupil's progress and performance throughout the key stage. They need to determine:

a level for each attainment target in English, mathematics, science and modern foreign languages

an overall subject level in each of the core and non-core subjects.

Teachers should base their judgements on the level descriptions in the national curriculum.

GET THIS IN SOMEHOW!! RELATE TO FFT/RAISE ONLINE, ETC

Q13 requires trainee teachers to know how to use local and national statistical information to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching. At Guthlaxton College, the pastoral assessment of pupils uses a summative model described as an ATL (attitude to learning). This compares aspirational target grades taken from scores at key stage 3 and analysed via the Fischer family trust data analysis project which produces estimates of likely attainment. These FFT estimates are calculated individually for each pupil and, from these, school and local authority performance projections may be calculated. These figures are estimates only in that they make predictions for future attainment if pupils work and make progress that is in line with that of similar pupils in previous years. The ATL score looks at current

progression against the FFT estimate for that pupil and is useful in providing on-going data evidence, alongside teacher assessment, coursework grades, test results and attendance in providing a picture of the student across all of their subject areas. Student progression, with further relevance to standard Q13, can be assessed in this way and attainment levels can be raised by identifying strength and areas for further development or support.

Effective schools continuously monitor progress and evaluate themselves by scrutinising pupil progress and grades, identifying influences which prove to hamper or accelerate achievement and progression. The school should pay close attention to the impact that any intervention or support has had and how it has affected the learning of the pupils. In my own practice I have used summative data, ATL scores and FFT projections to discuss pupil progress with parents during student review sessions. I have also been able to identify areas for improvement in my own teaching methods by using test and mock exam scores to create a picture of student achievement levels.

At key stage 4, GCSE results can be used by the school to identify areas of weakness or areas which require support and intervention by looking at patterns which may emerge from scrutiny of these summative results. This information can be fed back to subject leaders who may then be able to identify areas for future development. Therefore, summative assessment can be used as a driving force for school improvement. Educational decisions regarding pupil performance, for example the streaming I observed in my second school placement at key stage 3, must be based on effective use of the evidence gathered. Over a relatively short space of time a child's

performance may evolve. Careful and regular use of summative data can help a teacher or school make effective teaching decisions.

www. fischertrust. org

Broadfoot, P. (1996) Assessment and Learning: Power or Partnership? In Goldstein, H and Lewis, T (eds.) Assessment: Problems, Developments and Statistical Issues. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons

The National Strategies illustrates that it is important for schools to use summative assessment data in a contextual way. For example learner achievement should be viewed against the national average, against relevant influences such as turbulence and KS3 and 4 splits (Leicestershire) and socio-economic factors such as EAL. Also, subject specific achievement differences may emerge. The strategies continue to illustrate that only 'useful' data should be collected for the purpose of providing sound evidence for improvement. Relevant data may be used by schools to set targets and to identify successful practice so that it may be repeated or used as good exemplar teaching. When targets are established the school can then take steps towards support provision, training, intervention and further development (dcsf 2010)

nationalstrategies. standards. dcsf. gov. uk

Music as a discipline is fraught with grey areas which present challenges when trying to perform a final assessment of a performance or a composition, etc. In a school setting, when faced with the challenge of evaluating work which on some levels will always be interpreted subjectively,

a teacher needs to have ' an assessment model that has legitimacy in a whole-education context (Spruce 1996) Spruce, G (1996) Teaching music, ' Assessment in the arts: issues in objectivity', London, Routledge. In my own practice for example I have used the carefully worded marking criteria given by the exam board as a template for appraisal and I have also used our college guidelines regarding learning objectives to assess what I have asked pupils to do and hopefully learn.

However, it is the ongoing interaction between student and teacher which brings about most development in a young musician. The nature of learning a musical instrument requires that we move in small, guided steps and, to make any ' musical' progress at all the learner must become self-reflective about their own skills and understanding. Traditional instrumental grades, although valuable in providing a signpost to a student's general ability only deal with performance but do not provide any information about the journey which brought the student to this point. They do not take into consideration the musical growth, learning and understanding which has taken place prior to the final test (Faultley 2010). Fautley Martin – Assessment in Music Education, Oxford Music Education, 2010. The ' folk' view of assessment, that it happens after teaching has occurred, as in the model demonstrated by traditional musical instrument grades, separates assessment from teaching itself. This model of ' summative' assessment makes the performance at the appointed hour of assessment the priority rather than the learning which has occurred.

There are two types of assessment commonly referred to in education, summative and formative and there has been much debate over which one

is more beneficial in education. In practice it seems that one, formative, is a teaching method which can lead to improvement and success in the other, summative form of assessment. Summative assessment is the summing up of a performance or an overall assessment that usually occurs at the end of a module or a period of work. The term ' formative assessment', on the other hand, is an ongoing process shared by the pupil and the teacher and is often referred to as ' assessment for learning' because the constructive, reflective nature of the assessment is used an educational tool in itself, essential to guide both pupil and teacher alike for identifying areas for improvement and development.

Summative assessment, tests, exams, grades, etc. summarise student progress at a specified point in the educational career, but formative assessment, questioning, peer and self-assessment, teacher feedback, etc. are all intended to develop and improve the process of learning itself. The ' results' of formative assessment are not used to provide a final grade or judgement of a pupils knowledge or abilities but to guide learning. AfL, used well in the classroom encourages deep thinking and reflection rather than simple recall of information through questioning, self-assessment, peer assessment and teacher feedback. As a student teacher, I have often been asked by mentors, " How do you know if they are learning?" My initial attempts at teaching classroom music were characterised by the delivery of facts and instructions but without the utilizing the powerful opportunities for formative assessment such as open questioning or peer assessment for example. Dylan Wiliam in an interview for teacher TV is quoted as saying that the basic premise for AfL is the question " Did the children learn what I

just taught? If not, why not?" This seemingly simple question requires discipline on the part of the teacher to be answered openly and constructively and the 10 principles of AFL (assessment reform group 2002) gives a broad overview of how this might be achieved.

Depending on situation, subject, behaviour issues, etc. it might be very difficult to put AFL into practice as it is intended. Indeed, Black and Wiliam (1998) write that formative assessment is a powerful tool if communicated correctly. As a trainee teacher, my second school placement in a very ' turbulent' school presented me with such behavioural difficulties in the classroom that I found it difficult to attempt some of the AFL techniques I had been trying to hone with my perfectly behaved GCSE students elsewhere. Day to day strategies for AFL such as questioning, self-and peer assessment and feedback were not in place in a way I was familiar with and seemed tokenistic. The pupils were not familiar with the methods and so the style was not as effective as it should have been had they been introduced to AFL via a whole school approach. There is a definite need for a school to adopt a consistent culture of assessment for learning for it to work successfully within the music classroom. The temptation may be to ' enhance' a lesson using a few token AfL techniques such as peer assessment, etc. just to get through an observation or OFSTED inspection. However, the idealism and spirit behind assessment for learning seems to be that the pupil becomes more responsible for shaping their own learning through the constant use of self and peer assessment, receiving feedback and dealing with challenging, thought provoking questions. The AfL ideas should be the basis for the teaching rather than empty, ritualistic

mechanisms or novelty add-ons. The Assessment reform group states that " Assessment for learning should be recognised as central to classroom practice" and should involve both teachers and learners alike in the process of reflection on the classroom activity and decisions regarding progression towards learning goals and objectives.

AFL is also an important tool for the teacher to assess their own methods and ask " Did they learn what I just taught them?" If the teaching practice is ineffective then it must be adjusted and improved and AFL should become part of the effective planning of teaching and learning (Assessment reform group, 2002).

" The assessment judgments of teachers do matter, they are essential to the successful development of every child in learning music, and, as a number of recent initiatives observe, every child matters." (Faultley 2010)

The Assessment Reform Group (2002, p. 2) define assessment for learning as ' the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there.' Assessment Reform Group. (2002) Research-based principles to guide classroom practice. London: Assessment Reform Group

" The single most important factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach him accordingly" (Ausubel et al, 1978)

Ausubel, D. P, Novak, J and Hanesian, H (1978) Educational psychology: A cognitive view, 2nd edition, Holt Rinehart and Winston.

Many different researchers such as, Casbon and Spackman, (2005), The Assessment Reform Group (2002) and Black, et al, (2002) have identified different strategies that underpin successful assessment for learning. This assignment will focus on four that I have put into practice myself while teaching music and can comment upon from personal experience: setting goals and the sharing of assessment criteria, questioning, peer and self-assessment and teacher feedback. I will use these four strategies as a guide to describe exactly what assessment for learning is and how it relates to musical Education.

Casbon, C and Spackman, L. (2005) Assessment for Learning in Physical Education. Leeds: Coachwise

Black, P, Harrison, C, Lee, C, Marshall, B and Wiliam, D. (2002) Working Inside the Black Box; Assessment for Learning in the Classroom. London: nferNelson

SETTING GOALS/SHARING CRITERIA

By setting goals and sharing criteria the classroom teacher can aim to ensure pupils know what they should have achieved by the end of the lesson (School Curriculum Assessment Authority, SCAA, 1997). Pupils should know

what they are trying to achieve. Without this information they cannot evaluate their own success at the end of the lesson (Weeden et al, 2002).

Before setting goals, the teacher needs to find out what the pupils have learned previously and what level they are at in order to make the goals achievable and a source of motivation (James, 2000 and SCAA, 1997). Q11 refers to developing an understanding of assessment requirements for public examinations and I have used these a starting point for designing many of my units of work as the AQA GCSE syllabus lists clear marking criteria. Indeed it was a useful exercise for me to ' translate' these criteria into easily digestible, pupil-friendly language.

Questioning, the second strategy, is a vital part of assessment for learning and one which as an inexperienced teacher I have had to seek much advice from colleagues. Weeden et al. (2002) report that a lot of teachers use questions which require only the recall of information in order to provide an answer.

Weeden, P, Winter, J and Broadfoot, P. (2002) Assessment: What's in it for the school? London: RoutledgeFalmer

As Stobart and Gipps (1997) point out, a pupil cannot demonstrate understanding simply by regurgitating facts or pieces of information. Assessment for learning is concerned with process and not the product and therefore questions need to enable knowledge and understanding (Casbon and Spackman, 2005) via the implementation and demonstration of higher order thinking. According to Blooms taxonomy, the recall of knowledge is classified as a lower order skill. By adjusting the complexity of a question

and the requirements for an answer, a teacher can encourage higher order skills and thinking. For example, in my music lessons for KS3, I had to begin a topic on notation by introducing simple facts such as note values and pitch. The next questioning strategy I used, involving simple sums using notes instead of numbers, was designed to encourage the students to demonstrate their comprehension of note-lengths. Black, et al. (2002) describes teachers as not only presenters of information but leaders of exploration. The skills I am aiming to develop in my own practice require being able to create probing, explorative questions which cause a pupil to apply and analyze even simple knowledge and facts.

Blooms taxonomy – hierarchy of questioning – get it in there somewhere………

They can be used to explore pupil's prior knowledge (Black and Wiliam, 1998) and also their own points of view on a subject. Questions are also useful tools for feedback. Black, et al. (2002) explain that impromptu questions posed while the pupils are working about what they are thinking and why, encourages wider thinking and provides immediate feedback to the teacher regarding pupil understanding. Teachers also need to be aware of how the questions are being answered and that this can be influenced by the mode of questioning used.

The all-important thinking time allowed for all pupils is approved by Black, et al (2002) who prescribe a ' no hands up' policy, where all the pupils should have an answer to share with the class if they are called upon by the teacher. This approach to questioning allows more pupils to be involved and

engaged in a question and answer session. According to personality type, different students will show different levels of willingness to be involved. The more effective and valuable technique I have used in my music lessons is to present a question, allow thinking time and then assess student answers in a way which does not rely on the hands-up approach. The answers and thoughts can be retrieved via methods such as asking a student by name and then asking a peer to comment on their answer or by using the mini-whiteboard method whereby the whole class can answer a closed question simultaneously. My first attempts at this AfL method were poorly planned because of the closed nature of the questions I used and I realized later that some pupils would give me answers they felt I wanted to hear rather than engaging in a dialogue unveiling the genuine state of their learning. In this way, I conclude that the focus should always be on the pupil truly reviewing their own understanding by tackling open ended questions.

Black and Wiliam (1998) assert that a common feature of poor questioning practice is that teachers fail to allow adequate processing time when asking questions. Without reflective thinking time factored into the questioning, the only answers that can be reasonably asked are factual, knowledge based and limited in their scope for demonsrating learning through exploration and evaluation (Black and Wiliam 1998). The lesson may have a sense of pace and enthusiasm but it will only be a limited number of pupils answering the rapid, fact-based, short answer questions. Shirley Clarke (2005) advocates increased waiting time during classroom questioning by indicating the thinking time and adopting a no-hands up approach ie. " Don't answer straight away, split into pairs and take 2 minutes to consider why Mozart

changed key suddenly at bar 27." Clarke (2005) goes on to state that changing the student expectation of what classroom is and how they are to be involved in the process will result in longer, more confident responses. The variety of answers and explanations will widen and help to provoke thought and learning and the failure to respond will decrease for those who are less confident. In my second school placement I was presented with an assessment policy briefly covering the expected elements of AFL. This document stated that " skillful questioning gauges understanding" (Hamilton community college, 2010) but I would suggest that questioning in the classroom is also a means to provoke thinking when used correctly. Black et al (2003) concur with this by stating that " More effort has to be spent in framing questions that are worth asking: that is, questions which explore issue that are critical to the development of students' understanding." (Black et al, 2003)

Black, P., Harrison C., Lee, C., Marshall, B., and Wiliam D. (2003) Assessment for learning, Open university press.

Shirley Clarke (2005) writes that effective, thought provoking questioning is planned prior to the lesson and will extend student understanding beyond mere recall of facts or knowledge. Blooms taxonomy defines closed recall of fact as a lower order thinking skills but that analysis or evaluation require a higher level of thinking and involvement in order to engage with the question. Therefore, pre-designed questioning will encourage the required thoughtful, reflective dialogue needed to evoke and explore understanding (Black and Wiliam 1998) and through the implementation of sound framing

and the use of thinking time all pupils may have the opportunity to develop and express their ideas.

SELF ASSESSMENT

Stobart and Gipps (1997, p. 15) believe that assessment is only truly formative if the process involves the pupil, and this of course requires self-assessment, the third strategy. By allowing independent learning where pupils crucially take active responsibility for, and participation in, their own learning, self-assessment is a vital AFL tool. Black, et al. (2002) feel that this personal reflection on progress can only take place if the pupil fully understands objectives and this is backed up by Shirley Clarke (2005) who outlines a model for enabling students to identify their own success against clearly outlined learning objectives. The Assessment reform group (2002) states that AFL should develop a learners' capacity for self-assessment, so that they can become " reflective and self-managing". With well outlining learning goals the process may also avoid be destructive to a pupils confidence and can be focused mainly on areas for future improvement. For example, in my GCSE music classes I can use self-assessment to ensure that a pupil looks objectively at their own composition work with reference to the AQA marking criteria which help to provide sound success criteria for the unit of work.

By understanding what they should be learning they can assess what they need to do to reach the required goals. Self-assessment is a skill which needs to be taught and used on a regular basis but in my brief experience needs to be woven into lesson planning in order to fulfill its role.

Stobart, G., Gipps, C., Assessment: A teachers guide to the issues, Hodder Arnold H&S; 3rd Revised edition edition (4 Dec 1997)

PEER ASSESSMENT

As well as self-assessment, peer-assessment is also a powerful of learning tool. Cowie (2005) points out that often pupils are more likely to understand the feedback language used by their peers. Pupils may also appear more confident when they are around their peers and are consequently more likely to interrupt another pupil through lack of understanding, than a teacher (Black, et al, 2002). It is however, important that pupils are not encouraged to draw comparisons between themselves because that could have a negative effect on confidence and self-esteem. The Dfes guidance states that " students do not become self-evaluative overnight" and in my own practice it has taken time and commitment to self and peer assessment to move the process away from simple competition in the classroom towards more valuable collaborative learning activity. The focus for peer and self-assessment should be on the quality of the work produced and ways to improve it rather than simply ' marking' each other's work.

FEEDBACK

Teacher feedback may be described as formative when it helps students understand how to do better next time. If feedback, written on the bottom of an essay for example, simply gives a grade or mark out of ten, the student has no idea how to improve. However, if a teacher gives clear guidance for possible next steps or areas for development then this is valuable for all students, regardless of ability. It also avoids the comparison effect and focuses on personal improvement. If the emphasis is placed on the ' grade'

of a piece of work, a student with low ability can easily become demotivated. This is especially true in GCSE music where the spread of the cohort admitted to the course can range from those who have had private instrumental tuition for years to those whose only experience of practical music making will have been in the music classroom. Through careful feedback a teacher can avoid the ' maladaptive' responses (Dweck 1986) which can manifest in a music lesson as a form of ' helplessness' and the lack of persistence a learner can exhibit when faced with difficulty or a low grade. Formative feedback is diagnostic and is more important to raising achievement by giving a commentary for improvement than simply by giving a grade (Lawson 2008)

Lawson, Tony, Assessing students – reflective teaching and learning edited by Dymoke, S., Harrison, J. 2008. Sage publications limited.

Feedback, the fourth strategy, is very important in assessment for learning; it can have huge impacts on pupils learning. There are two types of feedback, normative, which refers to the giving of grades and the comparison to a statistical picture and formative which refers to giving constructive comment. Weaver (2006) points out that feedback is an effective way of alerting pupils to their strengths and weaknesses and giving information on how to ' close the gap'. Closing the gap refers to the difference between the learning outcome or goal and the pupils present state (Black and Wiliam, 1998). By using feedback and assessment information, pupils and teachers are then able to decide what should be done next.

A study by Martinez and Martinez (1992) found that normative feedback, grades and marks, etc., had a negative effect on pupils learning and this is echoed by Black and Wiliam (1998) who observed in their research an over-emphasis on marks and grading which in itself did not provide useful advice or instruction for the future.

In order for learning to take place feedback must involve constructive dialogue and comment between the teacher and the pupil. This kind of feedback can be a catalyst for discussion and further enhance learning (Maclellan, 2001). Traditionally however, the education system is grade dominated, and it would be hard to deviate from that. Pupils will always want to know their grades. Feedback can have very positive effects on both confidence and motivation, if used effectively (Weaver, 2006).