

## **In Praise of Music Teachers: Teaching music from the inside out**

I've been asked to talk about assessment in music education.

This follows on from Martin Fautley's presentation on assessment last year. This is something of a leitmotiv in music education today; which is troublesome (to me at least).

A preoccupation with assessment really does demonstrate to me that the educational cart is well in front of the educational horse.

There are two important sayings about assessment that I always mention to our students here:

1. The pig doesn't get fatter the more you weigh it;
2. Not everything that matters can be measured, and not everything that is measured matters

This is not new.

Freud, in his *Civilization and Its Discontents*, first published in 1929:

*It is impossible to escape the impression that people commonly use false standards of measurement — that they seek power, success and wealth for themselves and admire them in others, and that they underestimate what is of true value in life.*

More recently, John Hayes, CEO of American Express, in his book on leadership wrote that:

*We tend to overvalue the things we can measure and undervalue the things we cannot.*

However, it is not only the GMMH constituency that has this preoccupation. Around 10 years ago, Martin and I wrote two books – one on creativity and one on assessment. Here they are.

SLIDE

They have both sold well. However, one has sold 8 times more copies than the other. Can you guess which one I'm going to retire on the profits from?

Regardless, I've called my talk 'In Praise of Music Teachers' after one of the music teachers who taught me at my local sixth form college – Joan Parry. In the 1980s, Woking Sixth College became something of a centre for those of us wanting to study music. Miss Parry, as we knew her, taught us many things but the most important, in my opinion, was about the nature and power of music itself.

The Music Department was located in a wing on the right hand side of the main entrance hall; the rest of the college was to the left. There were many occasions when Miss Parry used to arrive in the music classroom obviously flustered and stressed about some college business. On arrival, she'd leaf through the extensive collection of records and put on her the record player her favourite music. On listening to a few bars, her physical and mental disposition changed dramatically, the stress and angst would fade and she would commence the lessons. One of her favourite pieces of music was this:

*Play excerpt from Rachmaninov's Second Symphony, 3<sup>rd</sup> movement.*

Whilst there are doubtless many key pieces of learning within this extract – the power of a good orchestrator, lessons about effective instrumentation, the use of appoggiaturas (and, perhaps Mr Gove would approve, how to spell that word), Romanticism; the key thing I remember Miss Parry teaching us was the power of music to enrich the mind and relax the soul. She didn't need to assess that. She lived that lesson in front of us.

Anyway, returning to assessment and Martin's presentation at this esteemed event last year.

I first met Martin when he was studying for his doctorate at Cambridge. I was head of music at a secondary school in Suffolk. A research group was convened by a mutual friend and newly appointed academic, Pam Burnard, and local teachers, like myself, were invited to attend a series of seminars and discussions. Martin and I formed a friendship and we have enjoyed working together on many projects over the years. Martin's doctoral research explored the compositional process and how teachers could understand this better and develop, as Martin put, 'loci of assessment opportunities' throughout which an assessment strategy could be implemented.

Martin has thought long and hard about these things. If you want to know how to develop an approach to assessment in music education with or without levels, I strongly recommend that you purchase his more recent book on assessment.

SLIDE

It is full of wise advice and good examples drawn from years of careful thought, observation of classrooms, and analysis of key ideas from the academic literature on assessment.

I also remember Martin highlighting the excellent work done by the ISM in producing their assessment and progression frameworks for Key Stages 1 to 3. There is so much of value in these materials that are freely available on the ISM website. If you are not familiar with these please take a moment to register on their site and download them.

As an aside, please can I also highlight an important piece of research being done by Alison Daubney and Duncan Mackrill, with the support of the ISM and Music Mark.

SLIDE

They have launched an online survey to gather a longitudinal view of secondary school music provision in order to investigate and document any changes within the curriculum across Key Stages 3 and 4 (time, accessibility and models of delivery), staffing levels and uptake of music within and beyond the curriculum.

Anecdotally, numerous factors appear to impact upon music education across secondary schools; the survey aims to document changes and provide more substantive evidence and reasons for them. Ally and Duncan know from a pilot study that they carried out last year that there are a range of changes – positive, neutral and negative, so they are trying to map these and also consider reasons for possible changes.

Please could you respond to this questionnaire so that they can present a more complete picture of music education over the past five years and projecting into the 2016-17 academic year.

The link can be found at:

<https://sussex.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/music2012-2016>

This is on my blog today: [www.jsavage.org.uk](http://www.jsavage.org.uk)

Returning to assessment, Trinity Laban have done some good work recently in promoting a new range of approaches for assessment in music. Here's an excerpt from a recent video within which music teachers talk about how they are going to make changes to their processes of assessment within their music teaching:

<https://vimeo.com/148364669>

Play from 6.08 to end.

Key points that I noticed from these thoughts and recent conversations with other music teachers:

1. Make it musical. Assessment in music needs to be musical. It can and should be different. Don't feel under pressure to conform.
2. Make it relevant. To pupils and to your local context. It is not one size fits all.
3. Work with other departments who will be facing similar issues.
4. Try and see the 'drive for data' for what it is – a fairly meaningless exercise in accountability based on a flawed notion of linear progression. Learning is messy and not one-directional.
5. Focus on pupil progress their learning journey; don't be preoccupied with the destination too soon!
6. Look at pupil-led portfolio systems to help collect evidence and 'data'; technology can help with this.
7. Don't be frightened of OFSTED. They have been clear about providing a framework for schools to explore different approaches. But you might educate your senior leadership team.
8. Be confident. Take some ownership and control over what you think is right!

More generally, I was reflecting on the situation that we are facing in university, where there has been a similar set of issues around assessment. Here, though, we are perhaps encouraged more explicitly to innovate and think differently about the assessment process as we are not accountable to regulatory authorities in quite the same way. At least at the moment!

In my recent work I've been designing a new undergraduate degree for a charitable trust in the West Midlands. This trust represents numerous large companies working within the music industry. I have been able to not only include a range of innovative assessment outcomes, but also consider how an ongoing reflective process can underpin the whole notion of what it means to study at that level in a holistic way. This includes a focus on an individual's personal development as well as their interpersonal development. Students' abilities to work well with others in an interdisciplinary way was seen by employers as a major weakness in the current graduate workforce.

When my students ask me about assessment as part of their initial teacher education here, I often refer them back to the writings of one famous arts educator – Elliot Eisner.

SLIDE

Sadly, Elliot passed away recently but his work carries on impacting arts educators around the world through books like his *Arts and Creation of Mind*.

Starting from the famous proviso that 'not everything that matters can be measured, and not everything is measured matters', he issues a challenge for us as music educators.

Can we design assessment practices in which students can help us? Perhaps, Eisner argues, this depends on where the 'satisfaction' of engaging in the practice of assessment is located.

Students will engage in things that they find satisfying.

So, would the assessment practices we want to adopt be something that students would find intrinsically satisfying? After all, we do lots of other different things that are satisfying in and of themselves.

Or would the results of the assessment practice be something that they might find rewarding, even if the process is not? Not many of us like cleaning the kitchen but the results of a clean kitchen might be rewarding for oneself and others.

Or, perhaps, its not about the process or the outcome itself, but the reward associated with the assessment practice is where satisfaction lies. Students enjoy the grade that they are given; we enjoy the salary that we receive. Both might be stepping stones to other achievements or opportunities that we will enjoy.

Perhaps the most important shift that needs to occur, is for assessment to become something that is not done to students, but is done by and with students. It's about ownership and from that flows commitment.

I was reflecting on these things in relation to one of my daughters who is a talented young swimmer.

SLIDE

In swimming there is an ultimate 'assessment'. It happens in the context of a gala where your time for a race is measured

within hundreds of a second and publically displayed on an electronic board. It is high stakes, visible and ruthless. As Will Evans would say, second place is first loser!

However, the pedagogy associated with learning to swim well is very different. Done well, it is highly technical but coached in a sensitive way, with playfulness and subtlety. Individual progress is noted in written records, celebrated by coaches through dialogue, by asking children to demonstrate to others, through an ipsative process of reflection against individual standards and achievements, and much more besides. It is a communal activity, taught in a group, with the children supporting and encouraging each other.

Right from the outset, at least in the swimming coaching I've observed, the locus of responsibility is placed firmly on the student. Satisfaction within this is derived in numerous ways. It might be in winning a gala, but it might be in bettering your time, or feeling fitter, or having a good time with your friends, or sharing a joke with your teacher. All of these can, and often do, result in better 'performance'.

Many of these processes could have parallels within music education and I'd encourage you to talk to your colleagues who teach different sports within your school. We have much to learn together.

Ultimately, though, as Martin Fautley has taught us, assessing music musically is probably the key message. Music itself is what this should all be about. Over the last year, my company has set up a rehearsal and teaching studio in our local town and opened it for folk to come and play in with their bands. Rather than the rarified atmosphere of a university, I've been reminded about the power of music in all our lives, whether you a youngster starting out with your first drum lesson, a young person hoping to enter a



conservatoire, a kitchen fitter or a gardener who enjoys playing their mates.

A few year's ago I had a few months off work due to back problems. My physiotherapist recommended going to Pilates classes and I've done so ever since. Clearly, I'm not at the peak of physical fitness but Pilates has taught me one thing. The breath is central to all exercise. It infuses everything and facilitates movement. Being mindful of the breath is central to Pilates.

Mindful exercise is not the repetitious, unthinking drilling of the body as evidenced in so many modern gyms - the cause of so many lower back problems.

It's carefully chosen exercises, done slowly, carefully - mindfully! Pilates works the body from the inside out from the **core** of our physiology. It is about relearning and strengthening one's posture, basic movements and stability.

What a great metaphor for the music teaching.

Our pedagogy as music teachers should be underpinned by careful, mindful choices. There is a skill here that develops over time. No quick fix but the results from careful, regular engagement are highly beneficial.

It is about a focus on the core. What is the key learning that I am trying to facilitate? How can the context within which I'm teaching it help me initiate this?

The subject should always come first. Assessment techniques will follow. Ask yourself, are you allowing yourself to teach music musically? Or does assessment get in the way?

Done skilfully and conscientiously, teaching music musically will result in a quietness, stillness and security in your pedagogy evidenced in your students' abilities that will grow and flourish over time.

It will result in your mindful teaching and their mindful learning that will help you enjoy a long career and will ensure your students' learning lasts a lifetime.

Sadly, I've lost contact with Miss Parry, but I think about her and the lessons she taught me every day. That's a testimony in praise of a music teacher who taught music from the inside out.