

Research Briefing N° 16

Teaching music in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4: the Musical Futures approach

This research is an evaluation of the Musical Futures project set up to discover new ways of engaging 11 to 19-year-olds with music.

Key words music; informal teaching approaches

Key findings

Music teachers reported that Musical Futures:

- emphasised popular music in the classroom;
- introduced new ideas in teaching and learning;
- produced high quality work;
- was exhilarating;
- was inclusive;
- allowed easier assessment of the work of individuals – formatively and summatively;
- developed students' listening and critical skills;
- developed instrumental skills;
- enhanced student confidence and self-esteem; and
- enhanced professional satisfaction amongst music teachers, as well as increased confidence, including teaching instrumental skills and singing.



Factors that contributed to the success of Musical Futures were:

- opportunities for autonomous learning;
- practical music making (including performance);
- group work and peer learning;
- engaging in creative tasks;
- developing listening skills through working with music students; and
- support from senior management.

Other findings:

- students participating in Musical Futures were more likely to take music at Key Stage 4. Some schools had introduced BTEC alongside or instead of GCSE music;
- participating students achieved higher results in music than the national average;

- non-music staff reported a range of positive benefits of Musical Futures across the whole school.

What we did

The 'Musical Futures' initiative, originally set up in England by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation in 2003, promulgates new and imaginative ways of engaging young people, aged 11-19, in music activities. Pilot work was commissioned to explore new approaches which might ensure that more young people participated in better quality musical experiences for longer. The project's informal approach was created and led by Professor Lucy Green (Institute of Education), derived from her earlier research on how popular musicians learn. This approach includes copying recordings by ear as pop musicians do, composing songs, and working in friendship groups.

From the pilot work it became apparent that it was important to informalise the way that music is taught, and to personalise the nature of the opportunities on offer through drawing on the real-life learning practices and processes of popular musicians, enabling students to learn alongside friends, through independent, self-directed learning. To support this, teachers acted as facilitators and models, spending time observing and assessing the needs of their pupils, offering help, support and guidance based on objectives that pupils set for themselves. The

research, undertaken between 2008 and 2011, evaluated the implementation of the initiative as it had been developed following the pilot work.

How we did it

The research was undertaken in two phases. The aim in phase 1 (undertaken in 2008) was to establish the take-up and impact of the Musical Futures approach in secondary schools across England. Questionnaires were completed by teachers who had already adopted Musical Futures, those who were planning to do so, and over 1000 pupils where Musical Futures was being implemented. The aim in phase 2 (undertaken between 2008 and 2011) was to provide an in-depth account of the processes underpinning the Musical Futures initiative.

The research was based in six key case study schools. Data were collected across the three year period using questionnaires (music teachers, other teachers and pupils), interviews (music teachers, members of the senior management team) and focus group interviews (pupils). Observations were also made of classroom practices. The longitudinal nature of the research enabled the team to map change over time.

Further information

There is a summary of the findings in Chapter 14 of the book:

Hallam, S. and Creech, A. (eds.) (2010). Music Education in the 21st Century in the United Kingdom: Achievements, analysis and aspirations. Institute of Education, University of London

[Paul Hamlyn Foundation website](#) – news article

[Musical Futures project website](#)

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