

P.38 An evaluation of the contribution ICT can make to the music curriculum

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Aims

To find out whether music technology:

- Enables children to compose with more enthusiasm;
- Provides a context for gaining musical knowledge.

Background

As music coordinator, I have a major interest in the use of music technology. As Hartside Primary School is part of the ICT Test Bed Project, we have been provided with a wealth of technology and training to develop this area. The school has the facility of a music studio off my classroom, equipped with apple macs, keyboards and sound manipulation recorders to develop music technology with small groups of children.

The Research

My research used one of the QCA units of work prescribed for Year Four 'Dragon Scales' as its starting point. I taught this area of music to my class during whole class music sessions. The children gained knowledge of the pentatonic scale and ostinatos throughout the work. This was delivered through a range of practical activities including listening to and singing songs based on the pentatonic scale, composing and performing rhythmic ostinatos and experimenting with pentatonic melodies composed on tuned instruments. The final activity involved pupils working in mixed ability groups to compose a dragon song (lyrics and music) based on the pentatonic scale with a rhythmic ostinato to accompany. All groups performed their song to the rest of the class and other pupils were invited to comment. To evaluate the pupils' enjoyment, I asked all pupils to complete a written evaluation consisting of these questions:

- Explain what you learnt when composing the dragon music.
- Explain what you enjoyed about composing the dragon music.
- Explain what you didn't enjoy about composing the dragon music.

I analysed pupils' responses to these questions and found that:

- Most pupils had gained knowledge of the pentatonic scale and ostinatos and some pupils had developed their techniques for playing instruments.
- Most pupils enjoyed all aspects of the work they had undertaken, they included playing instruments, clapping rhythmic ostinatos and composing lyrics.
- Many children responded to the final question with comments such as "There wasn't anything I didn't enjoy." However, some children had identified an aspect of the work they didn't enjoy, often relating to dissatisfaction with their live performance of the song.

From this, I selected six children who had identified an aspect of the instrument based work they didn't enjoy to form the 'test group' for the ICT based work.

My group consisted of a male and female member from each of the three ability groups within my class (lower, middle and higher ability). I worked with this group of children in pairs according to ability group, in the music studio. Their task was based on the theme of dragons once again. Firstly pupils looked at the sequence of four dragon pictures already placed onto the timeline on the apple mac. They then created corresponding storyboards about dragons

to relate to the four sections. They designed a picture and added a sentence to explain the plot in each section. In pairs, pupils then listened to excerpts of music contained on the i-Tunes library and commented on its suitability to accompany that particular section of their story. All pairs of pupils produced a storyboard on i-Tunes which told their dragon story through pictures and music. Similarly, all pupils completed an evaluation of their work with the same questions related to the ICT work and with the addition of the question 'Which activity did you enjoy the most – the instrument based work or the ICT based work?'

Collection of Data

As I was able to work intimately with two pupils at a time, I was able to take on board oral comments they had made. To assist me in this, I also tape recorded the exercise to ensure I did not miss any valuable remarks. I also have written evaluations from each pupils, in which I was able to make comparisons about their enjoyment and learning from the instrument based work and ICT based work.

My Findings

After analysing the whole classes instrument based evaluations, it was apparent that all children are already enthusiastic about music. The learning they experienced was clear; they had gained knowledge of the pentatonic scale, ostinatos, setting lyrics to music and developing performance skills.

Does music technology enable children to compose with more enthusiasm?

All children worked enthusiastically throughout discussion work and all pupils commented that they enjoyed everything about the ICT based work within their written evaluations. All of the six pupils I worked with decided that they enjoyed the ICT based work more than the instrument based work. One of the more able pupils commented "I didn't enjoy it when it was finished because it was fun." They enjoyed having access to a wealth of quality extracts which they could use within their composition, this, in turn, fostered enthusiasm, as some pupils commented that it grabbed their attention

General enthusiasm

Pupils enjoyed the ICT work because it was 'new', 'fun' and 'different'.

Does music technology provide a context for gaining musical knowledge?

Children gained knowledge about the moods music creates, as they commented on the appropriateness of music to suit the mood of the particular section of their storyboards, e.g. this sounds sad/happy/relaxing etc. With the more able children, they were able to suggest reasons for the mood created, e.g. this excerpt sounds sad because of the violins, the harp or piano can make music sound magical, this sounds lonely because the tempo is slow.

Other learning

I found that pupils were also able to develop their ICT skills within the context of this activity. Many commented that they learnt how to listen to the music on the apple mac, how to place extracts onto the timeline and how to edit extracts. They also enjoyed creating their dragon stories and particularly enjoyed seeing the pictures of dragons alongside the music they had selected.

Conclusions

I have found that the use of music technology certainly fostered enthusiasm, as all pupils from my test group preferred the ICT based work to the instrument based work. However, I believe they may have been influenced by the novelty aspect of this activity, time will tell if this is or is not the case! I believe that pupils gained learning from both activities, although different. They gained knowledge of the pentatonic scale and rhythmic ostinatos throughout the instrument based work and they were also able to develop their performing skills. During the

ICT based work, they were able to comment on the moods of music excerpts and evaluate their suitability for sections of their storyboard. They often did this with reference to musical elements, including instrumentation and tempo.

I think that music ICT should be used to enhance the music curriculum, as there are certain skills that children would not experience if music technology was to replace 'traditional' music. I feel that musical ICT is a very useful tool to develop cross-curricular music as part of an ICT project, possibly related to animation or digital video production. It would also provide opportunities to develop literacy skills, particularly speaking and listening and it could be used as a stimulus for writing activities. I think that it has great benefits for visual learners, as one pupil from my test group commented that she found the pictures useful as a basis for composition work. It was very encouraging for the pupils to listen to their final composition, as it sounded impressive; this made pupils feel confident and proud of their achievements, and for those pupils who had expressed dissatisfaction with their final performance, the pressure was removed.