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**Equality of Opportunity: differentiating for students in a
non-setted year seven music class**

Hedydd Edge

(PGCE Music, 2016-2017)

email: hedydd.edge@cantab.net

Abstract

This case study investigates the pedagogical issue of differentiation within education, specifically looking at what can be differentiated and how a teacher might differentiate in the music classroom. This assignment attempts to reflect upon a small-scale research project designed to evaluate what steps can be taken to differentiate in a 'mixed-ability' classroom. However, the term 'mixed-ability' itself is problematic as it has been variously conceived. Additionally, within the music classroom there is the paradigm of 'musical ability'. This study was conducted with a year seven class of students of 'mixed-ability' composing programme music. The findings suggest that differentiation encompasses a variety of differences that may not be at the forefront of a teacher's mind and the element of choice became an important factor. Differentiation is beneficial to ensure that everybody can access what is being taught, but within teaching there must be a degree of flexibility to adapt for students who need additional help, or for those who need more of a challenge.

Equality of Opportunity: differentiating for students in a non-setted year seven music class

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Introduction

This research investigates the concept of differentiation in education, primarily looking at what can be differentiated and how a teacher might differentiate in the classroom. This exploration was based on a scheme of work of programme music that I taught to year seven. The assignment attempts to reflect upon a small-scale research project designed to evaluate what steps can be taken to differentiate in a 'mixed-ability' classroom. In my first placement school as a trainee teacher, differentiation in key stage 3 was mainly by outcome. However, I wondered what else a teacher could do in the music classroom to ensure that everybody can access music education.

This research was carried out in a village college (and academy) of 1039 students in Cambridgeshire. Almost all students are from a White British background and the proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The number of students supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average. Students travel from a large geographical area to the college.

In light of the literature review, my main thoughts were about what I could do in order to help students in my day-to-day teaching as I believe that all students should have a chance to be able to have a music education that is rewarding and attainable.

Literature Review

The pedagogical issue that is at the heart of this research is that of differentiation. Therefore before exploring the main body of literature that is pertinent to this research, it is important to gain some insight as to what is meant by 'differentiation'.

The term 'differentiation' has become more common since the introduction of the National Curriculum in the late 1980s and it is widely regarded as "...an essential feature of 'good practice'"

amongst many educators (Hart, 1996, p.9). A definition of differentiation can be found in *Differentiated learning: from policy to classroom* (Mills et al., 2014). The paper explores the impact of a Teaching and Learning Audit of all government schools in Queensland, Australia and coins differentiation as an everyday occurrence in teachers' practice.

“Differentiated learning in this audit referred to the ways in which teachers in their day-to-day teaching addressed the needs of all their individual students, monitored their progress, identified their specific learning needs and addressed these needs in their practice.”

(Mills et al., 2014, p.331)

Although the term 'differentiation' is being used with increasing frequency, there are still many different interpretations and facets of differentiation which must be considered in order to gain more perspective on the subject.

This literature review has been divided into six subsections. The first section considers inclusion through effective differentiation; the second explores what can be differentiated in the music classroom; the third examines the term 'ability' closely followed by the fourth and fifth sections which examine musical ability and mixed-ability; lastly as the research is based on composition, the final section is an overview of composition in the secondary school at key stage three.

Inclusion through Effective Differentiation

Another term closely associated with 'differentiation' is 'inclusion'. Gary Spruce (2002), a senior lecturer in music education at the Open University, advocates that differentiation is to provide for individual needs or educational inclusion. Similarly, Ruth Wright (2007), an associate researcher in the department of music education at Western University, Canada, argues that inclusive education is not only about addressing individual needs, but it is also about providing equality of opportunity. It is evident that inclusion is crucial as it is about knowing your students and catering for all needs within the classroom.

Inclusion is achieved through effective differentiation (Wright, 2007). Wright (2007) believes that effective differentiation happens through careful planning that is appropriate for all pupils and accessibility within the curriculum and the extended curriculum. Furthermore, Carol Ann Tomlinson (2001), an American educator at the University of Virginia whose main focus of research is differentiation, sees that effective differentiation is 'proactive'. If a teacher 'proactively' plans a lesson that has effective differentiation, then the lesson should be strong enough to address

many different needs in the classroom (Tomlinson, 2001, p.4). As highlighted by Wright and Tomlinson, one of the ways to ensure effective differentiation is through careful planning by the teacher.

What can be differentiated in the music classroom?

If effective differentiation is achieved through careful planning then a teacher needs to consider what can be planned in order for there to be inclusion in the classroom. As ‘differentiation’ is quite a broad concept, Wright (2007) has established a model of differentiation (see Figure 1) in order to aid teachers’ planning. This model suggests that teachers can differentiate by content, resource, task, outcome, and response.

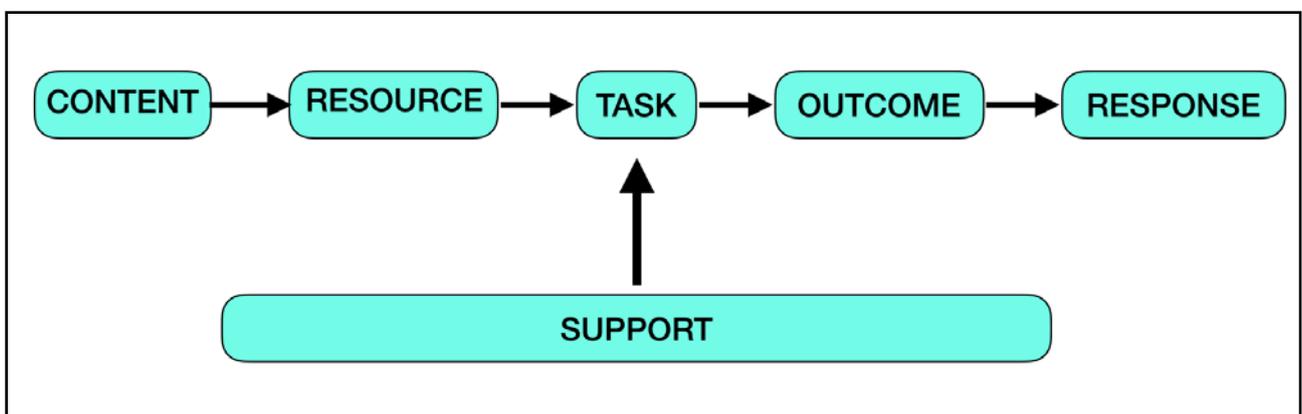


Figure 1: Wright's Model of Differentiation (redrawn from Wright, 2007, p.193)

Content

The content of a lesson is imperative as it is fundamentally the core of what students are to learn. Tomlinson (2001) posits that differentiating content can be thought of in two ways. Teachers can differentiate content by adapting what they teach and teachers can adapt how to provide students access to the content (Tomlinson, 2001). Accessibility to the content is important if teachers are to provide equal opportunities to all. By differentiating content, teachers can set appropriate learning challenges for their students. It could be suggested that providing a range of lesson content could be a suitable way of catering for everybody's needs in the classroom (Wright, 2007). With regard to music, the organisational aspect of producing a range of content for differentiation lends itself well to composition (the process of creating and writing a piece of music) and performance activities.

Resource

This method of differentiation takes into account the variety of needs in the classroom. Closely linked with differentiation by content, differentiation by resource increases students' chances of being able to access the required content (Tomlinson, 2001). For example, a student who struggles with writing may find that using a computer is a constructive way of being able to complete the work set. A teacher must also take into account any physical disability that a student may have and ensure that the student is fully equipped to access the learning. In short, resources are paramount when faced with barriers to learning.

In relation to music, it has been said that "...it is important that resources need to be appropriate for the musical style being engaged with so as to ensure, as far as is possible, that pupils experience the music 'authentically'." (Wright, 2001, p.199). Having a multitude of resources is not feasible in many schools, however, wherever possible, it is essential that students have resources that enable them to have an authentic and worthwhile musical experience.

Task

According to Spruce (2002), differentiation by task is to set various learning activities that are designed to cater for a range of students and the tasks should be set at the edge of each student's knowledge in order for them to be able to progress. Therefore, teachers should plan tasks that challenge students but at their own level. In terms of music, it is possible to differentiate composition by adapting the brief, model or structure. The content is the same but how a student acquires the content varies in order to meet the student's needs.

Looking specifically at differentiated composing, John Witchell (2001), a music education advisor for Hertfordshire County Council, holds that a composition task can be differentiated in four ways. First, the composition task can be broken down into manageable sections with a specific focus, for example, looking at a specific musical device. Second, it is important that the teacher or somebody in the classroom can model the concept or technique. Third, the teacher should look at the weighting between whole-class, group, paired and individual learning and should consider how might groups be selected. Fourth, the composition task should be carefully timed and students need know what is expected of them.

It has been suggested that when carrying out group work, it could be advantageous to have an element of individualised work. In whatever form the task is being differentiated, it is worth bearing in mind that every task should be of musical value and therefore worth learning (Wright, 2007).

Outcome

Put simply, differentiation by outcome is the setting of a common task that allows each pupil to accomplish a task at their own level (Wright, 2007). Therefore, there will be very different outcomes from the same task set. However, there is the risk that students could potentially underachieve as the task can be quite open-ended. To avoid this, it is sensible to have some sort of foundation for students to work from and to have clear expectations to avoid students from underachieving.

Support and Response

The various degrees of support available to an individual is a form of differentiation. Some students may only need minimal guidance whereas others may require more support. It is undeniable the active role that an adult has in assisting a student's learning. Some teachers help students through the process of 'scaffolding'. 'Scaffolding' is similar to Lev Vygotsky's 'Zone of Proximal Development' (1978) where a task is broken down and steps are taken to give the student less freedom and more support in the initial stages of acquiring difficult knowledge (Bruner, 1978). Teachers can also provide scaffolding by utilising teaching assistants effectively and getting more knowledgeable students to help those who need support. Yet, it is crucial that the 'more knowledgeable students' are challenged and are not just resigned to being used help for the other students. It is true that getting students to take on the role of the teacher can enhance a student's learning, however, it is important that this does not happen all the time.

After exploring the many ways in which a teacher can differentiate based on Wright's model (2007, p.193), it is apparent that knowing your students and planning appropriately to meet the needs of every individual is at the core of differentiated learning. Differentiation can occur at different levels in terms of the system designed by a school, the differentiation that happens at a class level, but also the recognition that students bring various knowledges, skills, interests and values to the classroom (Mills et al., 2014). If teachers are aware of these differences in their teaching then they are more

likely to be equipped with the right information to effectively support their students in their learning.

Ability

Before examining the meaning of 'mixed-ability', it is important to look at what is actually meant by 'ability' and how it has been variously conceived. Hart believes that the concept of 'ability' is a feature of current educational practice that is in dire need of 'reform' (Hart, 1998). There is a danger with differentiation that educators merely pigeon-hole students based on their 'ability' and teachers have been encouraged to formulate plans to teach differentially by deciphering what they expect the 'most able', 'average' and 'least able' will learn (Hart, 1998). Despite the useful organisational aspect of categorising students by 'ability', ability must not be confused with attainment. Ability is a person's means to do something whereas attainment is something that someone has done or achieved. A possible consequence of categorising students in this manner may be that some students will feel resigned to limited achievement and that could make educators pessimistic about what the student can achieve, but also what the learner themselves can achieve (Hart, 1998). Therefore it is important not to limit students. Students must be constantly challenged because when a student's learning is judged by their ability, their sense of identity may be affected (Hart, Dixon, Drummond & McIntyre, 2004).

Musical Ability

In terms of music, there is the notion that a person is 'musical' or 'not musical'. Janet Mills (2005), a former music teacher and OFSTED advisor, hypothesises that it is unhelpful to use the adjective 'musical' to describe students as people who think of themselves as 'not musical' tend to doubt their potential as musicians. People perceive that they have musical ability or not, based on the experiences they have had. However, Mills (2005) also calls attention to the fact that students can only "...demonstrate musical behaviour if they have been given the necessary materials, and have learnt or been taught to use them." (p.114). It must be acknowledged that some students are perceived to be 'more able' because they have, for example, taken up an instrument. As Professor of music from the Institute of Education Susan Hallam (2001) stresses, a student brings to every new learning situation prior musical experiences. Some students may have been exposed to a very rich musical environment and some may come from homes with little or no music (Hallam, 2001).

Music is a subject where the range of prior experience, I would argue, is much more varied than some other subjects.

This is not to deny that musically gifted pupils do exist, however, music is a subject where people believe that somebody must have some special innate ability to succeed (Murphy, 2002). Hart et al. (2005) adds that the belief that ability is a genetic inheritance has been majorly influential in education in England over the past century. If this is the case, music would be reserved for a select few and would not be a part of the National Curriculum. It could be suggested that without state education, students' abilities and achievements could be determined by families' genes and their home environment.

Another way in which educators have attempted to measure 'ability' is by use of IQ tests. It is arguable that these tests are useful to get an overview of a student's 'ability', however, educators must remain cautious with IQ tests as they only test a narrow band on the spectrum of human activity (Hart, 1998). An alternative perspective on musical ability is that of Howard Gardner's (1983) Theory of Multiple Intelligences. Gardner, a developmental psychologist, understands that there are at least seven ways ('intelligences') in which people understand the world. Gardner posits that musical behaviour can be thought of as an autonomous form of intelligence in itself. Hart (1998) refutes this claim and believes that Gardner further illustrates the consequence of the use of fixed, differential ability and that it facilitates schools into believing that they do not have a significant part in the development of intelligence. Although Gardner recognises there are many cognitive abilities such as visual-spatial and logical-mathematical to name a few, he is of the assumption that there are weak links between them. It can be argued that Gardner's theory does not have sufficient empirical data to support his theories, however, he does provide another outlook on musical ability.

Mixed-Ability

"Consensus on what constitutes ability has consistently eluded social scientists and educationists. Because of this, one of the first stumbling blocks in discussing mixed ability teaching concerns what precisely it is that is being mixed."

(Reid, Clunies-Ross, Goacher & Vile, 1981, pp.2-3).

In every class there will be a range of needs, learning styles and preferences. Even classes that have been set are 'mixed-ability' to a certain degree. There are many factors of what could be meant by a 'mixed-ability' classroom and this is precisely what is stated in the quote above. Students will differ

in terms of motivation, prior learning experience, language, gender, specific learning difficulties and interests. What is definite is that no class is comparable to another. Mixed-ability or not, every class will come with its own challenges and needs that require due care and attention. A mixed-ability class could therefore be defined as a class which has not been streamed, banded or setted (Reid, Clunies-Ross, Goacher & Vile, 1981).

Having explored the meaning of differentiation and ability in depth, it is certain that both are complex issues in education theory. OFSTED (2017) say that teachers should ensure that all students have opportunities to fulfil their potential, whatever their ability. What is undeniable is that whatever definition is given to these terms, they should be based on the unwillingness to set limits on the potential of a student. Additionally, every student has a right to a music education that is designed to be inclusive of whatever needs they may have. Opportunities for a worthwhile music education should be available to everybody.

Composing in the Secondary School: Key Stage 3

Composition was a radical new feature in the revision of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in England and Wales in 1987. It has increasingly become more of a dominant fixture in music education. The National Curriculum for England of today states that for composition, pupils in Key Stage 3 should be taught to:

“...improvise and compose; and extend and develop musical ideas by drawing on a range of musical structures, styles, genres and traditions.”

(Department for Education, 2013)

Guidance on how to teach composition has been minimal and many teachers have been forced to “...learn on the job.” (Odam, 2002, p.123). George Odam (2002), a retired Professor of Music at Bath Spa University, believes that the crux of the matter lies within the difficulty of having learning techniques that need to cater for everybody in a mixed-ability environment with limited resources.

Odam (2002) has identified a few problems at Key Stage 3 with regard to composition, one of them being that group work is dominating curriculum time. When small group work is used, Odam suggests that it is important to consider tasks carefully and to prepare them in detail. If planned in detail, group work can be controlled and monitored closely with great compositional outcomes. Odam believes that paired work aids collaborative work more positively and that keyboard work should never involve more than two pupils at the same time to one keyboard. Although Odam sees

the benefits of small group work, he stresses that there must be clear planning for individual work during year seven. This is important as composition is very personal and students have had different levels of experience coming in to year seven.

Another aspect of teaching that Odam (2002) believes is good practice is a strong modelling process where some pupils can get involved, but the teacher has the central role of demonstrator. This makes the composition process more realistic and attainable if students see their peers modelling in the classroom. Additionally, Odam believes that good practice requires good support materials for students including extension material for "...the more able or experienced pupils." (p.129). Mills (2005) affirms that students' progress as composers should not be confined to a strict brief. It is a good idea just to have a starting point for composition e.g. a simple ostinato (a continually repeated phrase or rhythm), but not to restrict pupils from developing their compositions as this can limit students' creativity.

In light of the literature review, this study aims to explore the following research questions:

- RQ1: How can a teacher plan to support individuals in a 'mixed-ability' class?
- RQ2: How do students respond to differentiation?
- RQ3: What impact does differentiation have on progress and outcome?

Methodology

A Case Study

A case study is a research strategy based on an enquiry around a particular teaching and/or learning phenomenon within a certain context. Martyn Denscombe (2010), Professor of Social Research at De Montfort University, asserts that "The starting point and arguably the defining characteristic of the case study approach is its *focus on just one instance of the thing that is to be investigated*" (p.52). Furthermore, Denscombe also maintains that there may be more insights to be gained by focusing on an individual case that may have wider implications, more so than of a research strategy that tries to cover many instances. As such, a case study was considered to be the most appropriate approach for this study as this approach is suitable for investigating an issue in depth.

Also, the case study approach was the best choice as this is a small-scale study that was time limited.

This case study is coming from an interpretivist paradigm. Classroom based research often adopts this stance as interpretive researchers aim to interpret their results and detail the meaning to people. Michael Crotty (1998) states that interpretivism looks for “...culturally derived and historically situated interpretation of the social life-world.” (p.67). The study of this research is subjective and as my epistemological stance is that of social constructivist, I am working on the premise that knowledge has been socially constructed. Therefore, I am not claiming any phenomenological ‘truths’ about education, rather I am discussing and exploring how what I have seen may have been constructed by teachers, students, policy agents or curriculum theorists.

Participants

The class that I selected to carry out this research was a year seven class of 29 students (seventeen male and twelve female) in a village college in Cambridgeshire. I felt that year seven was the most appropriate class to choose as these students have had a varied experience of music education at their respective primary schools and many students probably have not composed before. However, for Key Stage 3, the arts subjects (Music, Art, Dance, and Drama) are all on rotation. As a result of this timetabling, students get a block of around twelve hours of music lessons, twice a year.

Six participants were selected from the class (4 males and 2 females). The selection was based on student data; specifically looking at any learning needs that were recorded and the level that they had achieved in their previous assessment (a performance of ‘Lean on Me’ on the keyboard). Also, I observed the class in a two hour music lesson before starting the research. I particularly looked at the students’ behaviour in the class and I decided to choose a range of students who showed some interesting and contrasting behaviour (see Table 1). Of course, it is worth noting that the behaviour observed was from a two hour time frame only and there are many variables that can effect a person’s behaviour; this only gives a snapshot of the participants of this research.

Overview of Participants			
	Behaviour shown during an observation (2 hours).	Prior attainment in Music - Playing 'Lean on Me' on the keyboard	Learning Needs and Student Data
Fred	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very enthusiastic Engaged and keen to participate in discussion and answer questions 	Level 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plays drums and guitar. Important to have extension tasks ready for Fred. Excellent Effort in Music Excellent Behaviour in Music Excellent Homework in Music Excellent Organisation in Music
Evie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participates in class discussion and answers questions quite often Likes to work independently 	Level 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excellent Effort in Music Excellent Behaviour in Music Good Homework in Music Excellent Organisation in Music
Kieran	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quite quiet in class Seemed to be struggling with tasks 	Level 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kieran has literacy difficulties as well as slow processing speeds and a poor working memory Good Effort in Music Good Behaviour in Music Good Homework in Music Good Organisation in Music
Anthony	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very articulate when he speaks Struggles with concentration and working independently (i.e. without a teacher) 	Level 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plays the drums Excellent Effort in Music Excellent Behaviour in Music Good Homework in Music Excellent Organisation in Music
Rachel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quite quiet Gets on with the work Contributes occasionally to class discussion 	Level 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plays the drums Excellent Effort in Music Excellent Behaviour in Music Good Homework in Music Excellent Organisation in Music
Tobias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gets distracted easily and gets off task When concentrating, he demonstrates good knowledge and answers well. 	Level 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good Effort in Music Good Behaviour in Music Excellent Homework in Music Excellent Organisation in Music

Table 1: Overview of Participants

Ethics

This study conforms to the BERA ethical guidelines for educational research (BERA, 2011). Permission was granted by the school to undertake this study and the school's professional tutor signed the Faculty of Education's (University of Cambridge) own ethics form. The research class were informed about the study before it began and the whole class volunteered to take part. Participants were also made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Six participants were chosen and for the sake of anonymity, pseudonyms have been used throughout. The six participants' pseudonyms are Fred, Evie, Kieran, Anthony, Rachel and Tobias. The data collection methods chosen for this study were fit for purpose and participants were informed about the methods and their use. Although this case study's focus is on the six participants chosen, all members of the class were taught equally.

Procedure

Table 2 shows the timeline of the lessons, the content, and the forms of data that were collected in each lesson.

Procedure		
Date and length of lesson	Content	Forms of data collection
Lesson 1 - 2 hours 02/03/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students listened to various movements from Camille Saint-Saens <i>Carnival of the Animals</i> and analysed the pieces in terms of how an animal might be depicted in a piece of programme music. Specifically thinking about articulation, tempo, and pitch, students were to start drafting and composing their piece depicting a graceful swan in pairs. A scaffolded sheet was given and explained to the students as a suggestion of how they might compose their piece. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questionnaire Lesson plan and Evaluation Mentor feedback Sheet
Lesson 2 - 1 hours 06/03/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initially, students were going to compose their second section in this lesson. However, I felt that the students needed more time refining their first section and to recap the main points of the previous lesson. Therefore, I adapted the timeline of the project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lesson plan and evaluation.
Lesson 3 - 2 hours 07/03/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In this lesson students recapped their first section and started composing their second section. The second section involved creating a contrasting mood to that of the first section; students were to compose a storm scene (Teaching Assistant attends the first hour to support Kieran) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audio recording of the students' compositions. Lesson plan and evaluation.
Lesson 4 - 2 hours 16/03/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following the departmental assessment criteria for Year seven, one of the requirements to obtain a high level was to compose three sections. Consequently, I planned for the students to have the option of writing a third section which could be, for example, the first section with variation and development. We explored how we might develop and vary a composition as a class.. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lesson plan and evaluation. Mentor feedback sheet Audio recording of students' compositions. Interview

Table 2: Procedure – timeline of lessons, content and forms of data

The research was carried out over four lessons totalling in seven hours of contact time (three lessons that were two hours long and a single one hour lesson) in which the class focused on

programme music. Initially, I wanted the students in pairs to choose an animal and think about its characteristics and what musical implications that may have. After analysing and thinking about their chosen animal, students were to compose in their pairs a piece that reflected their animal. However, the music department had some reservations about this as they were worried that giving the students free choice of animal may lead to unsuccessful compositions and misbehaviour. Consequently, we mutually decided that the students would compose a piece about a graceful swan, who then gets caught in a storm.

Methods

Research data was collected by using various methods which helped to gain a clearer picture of the research and to gather facts and evidence about the subject matter (Denscombe, 2010). It was important to collect numerous forms of data as triangulation can give a researcher added confidence in their data and findings (ibid.). Triangulation is the practice of looking at something from more than one perspective which could entail the use of different methods and different sources of data. The advantages of triangulation are that it gives a researcher a means of validation and can give the researcher a fuller picture in their research (ibid.). Table 3 presents all the data collection methods used in this project.

Y = Yes Blank = Not used	Data Collection Methods					
Research Questions	Lesson Plans and Evaluations	Pupil interviews	Mentor feedback sheet	Pupil questionnaires	Audio recording of students' compositions	Student Data
RQ1: How can a teacher plan to support individuals in a 'mixed-ability' class?	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y
RQ2: How do students respond to differentiation?	Y	Y	Y		Y	
RQ3: What impact does differentiation have on progress and outcome?	Y	Y	Y		Y	

Table 3: Data Collection Methods

Lesson Plans and Evaluations

The purpose of a lesson plan is to pinpoint the information and skills a student needs to acquire in order to make progress. Lesson plans include the activities planned for students in order for them to

learn the learning objective. Lesson plans also helps a teacher with the structure and timings of a lesson. Evaluations gives an opportunity for the teacher to reflect on what went well in the lesson and elements that could be improved. Lesson plans and evaluations were created for each lesson taught in this case study.

Interview

After completing the scheme of work, a group interview was carried out by myself with the six participants. I decided to interview the participants as a group as an interview is an artificial situation and the audio recorder can inhibit some informants (Denscombe, 2010). An advantage of having the students interviewed as a group was that they had the opportunity to be more relaxed as the students were with their peers and not alone. The benefits of having a face-to-face interview with the participants are that there are more insights to be gained and much more information can be acquired. Questions were asked about enjoyment, learning, manageability, progression and the students' own preferences. The school hall was used to conduct the interview as it has round tables and was a place that was familiar to the students.

Mentor Feedback Sheet

Mentor feedback sheets were completed by my mentor for the first lesson and fourth lesson of the series. The feedback given by my mentor looks at my teaching practice as a whole. Its purpose is for me to gain feedback in order to reflect and improve my practice. In my lessons, my mentor was focusing specifically on my behaviour management strategies and my learning objective being conveyed clearly to the students.

Pupil Questionnaire

A questionnaire was given to students (see Figure 2 later) at the very beginning of the project in order to gain further insights on how students felt they managed in terms of understanding, following instructions, manageability of the project, and progression with regards to their previous music project. The questionnaires were created in order to gain insight as to whether there is any scope to improve differentiation in the students' musical learning. I thought it would be useful to link the questions/statements to their previous music project, otherwise I felt the questions/statements might have been quite vague. Yet, a drawback to this may be as it is only

linked with the previous project, it cannot give a full picture of their feelings towards their understanding and capabilities in music lessons. The questionnaire consisted of four questions/statements which followed the Likert scale. All had a scale of 1-7, 1 being 'not at all true', and 7 being 'very true'. It has been said that a scale without a central point can force students to make a decision one way or another. (MacBeath, Demetriou, Rudduck & Myers, 2003). However, if a student truly feels indifferent about the question being posed to them, then the student has the option to select the central point. In spite of this, questionnaires are not completely reliable as a form of data validation as the structure of the questionnaire is imposed on the student, therefore students cannot give detailed answers. Denscombe (2010) warns that questionnaires also may not reflect the students' true feelings.

Audio recording of compositions

Two audio recordings were made during the project. One audio recording was made in the third lesson in order to give the students feedback and also to give them a chance of playing their composition with the teacher and the recorder. A second recording was made in the fourth, and final lesson, in order to assess the students and give them a level. Although there was the end of unit assessment, formative assessments occurred throughout the project by, for example, giving instant feedback during lesson time.

Student Data

Before starting the scheme of work with year seven, I had the opportunity to access student data. The school has a very good intranet containing information about all students in the school. I was allowed to view students' levels from their previous music assessment and their levels in other subjects. This gave me an idea of what students had already achieved in the short amount of time they had been at the school. However, it is worth noting that the levels that students received are based on one project alone and some students' strengths may be in other aspects of music. Also, the intranet has a profile of each student and is able to show if a student has a particular learning need. Student data was very helpful in the initial stages in terms of planning the scheme of work and planning individual lessons to ensure that the lessons were accessible for everyone.

Data Presentation

Interview

Interviews were conducted at the very end of the project where the six participants had a chance to reflect on what they had done in this unit of work. The programme music unit was the second unit of work they had done this year in music and it was their first time composing their own piece. Fred and Tobias particularly enjoyed composing. However, Fred said “I like making my own piece. Not necessarily to a structure...”. When Kieran was asked whether he liked anything about the unit, he answered honestly and said “No, not really that much.”.

I wanted to know which method that the students found most effective for obtaining information. During the project, I presented information in various ways. I told and modelled what the task was and gave each student a step-by-step guide on how they could start their composition which was scaffolded. Additionally, students had a checklist to keep track of what they needed to do. Rachel felt great satisfaction with the checklist because “...you could tick things off and know that you have done them”. It was an effective way for Rachel to track her progress and had the element of feeling like she achieved her goal. Anthony liked the checklist, but he also liked having the teacher speaking to him individually “...so you have an idea on exactly what you’re doing.”. Anthony very much likes the teacher to be by his side, which can be difficult when there are other students who need attention too. All six participants agreed that formative feedback helped them to improve, however, Tobias felt that it was worrying sometimes as “...you’re worried that you haven’t got it right or perfect.”. Evie added that “...you go all funny”. This slight unease with showcasing their work to the teacher may be due to the fact that I was still a new teacher to them having only been in the school for under three months. Yet, Tobias said that he was worried that he would make a mistake. Fred preferred it when the teacher gave him time to let him progress with his work and said “once you’ve done the piece you show them that it’s good.”.

When asked if they found the work manageable most of the students felt that it was ‘just right’, however, Kieran said that “...it was kind of hard.”. Tobias responded to Kieran by saying “But then you don’t want it too easy, but then you don’t want it too hard.”. This was a very good point made by Tobias because if the task was too easy then no progress would have really been made. Evie found that writing a composition was easier as it was something she had created and it was “...not

just copying a sheet.”. Rachel felt that she had improved her work throughout the project and liked having the composition broken down into small steps. “You weren't like, write a whole song, write a whole song, write a whole song!”. However, Kieran felt that he needed more time and was not sure if he had improved during the project.

In the interview, we discussed whether anyone had any difficulties during the composition process. A few of the students said that they did not know how to proceed sometimes, however, they felt that when the teacher intervened this helped them immensely. Interestingly, Anthony said “when the teacher came over and kind of helped me I actually got on with what I was supposed to do.”. This may imply that he was easily distracted and ‘off task’ and felt that he needed the teacher in order to progress.

The most insightful comments were made when we discussed what they would have liked to change about the project. Fred would have liked to have used more than one instrument, not just the keyboard and Tobias agreed with him instantly. Another comment was made by Rachel where she stated that she would have preferred to record her assessment without everyone else in the classroom and said that “...you are a bit embarrassed because you thought people were like listening to you and things like that.”. The students also said they would have preferred to choose their own animal and Evie felt that “if you do your own animal, then you have more ideas...” It could be said that Evie felt restricted with the animal she was given as she did not have as many musical ideas for it compared to her own animal. Tobias was rather disappointed when he discovered that he would have to compose for a swan as he thought he would be able to compose for his own animal. “I was kind of annoyed in a way because I was quite excited.”.

Questionnaire

When students were presented with the questionnaire, it was explained to them that the questionnaire has a scale of ‘1-7’ (see Figure 2 below) and they were to circle one number. I stated at the top of the questionnaire ‘Circle **one** answer’. Even though the word ‘one’ was in bold and underlined, a few students still felt the need to add their own numbers to the Likert scale. A student did cross out their initial answer, but it does indicate that students felt limited in some ways by the questionnaire.

Name:

Circle **one** answer

Think back to when you were learning 'Lean on Me'.

Learning 'Lean on Me' was manageable.	Not at all true	sometimes true			very true		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I could follow the teacher's instructions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I made good progress throughout the project.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I understood what I needed to do to achieve my goal.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Figure 2: Blank Copy of the Questionnaire

26 out of 29 students took part in the questionnaire. The students were asked four questions/statements in relation to their previous music project as I thought it would be too vague to ask about how they felt about music as a subject (see Figure 2). I went through each question/statement with the students and clarified any questions that they had. The four questions/statements were:

Q1: Learning 'Lean on Me' was manageable.

Q2: I could follow the teacher's instructions.

Q3: I made good progress throughout the project.

Q4: I understood what I needed to do to achieve my goal.

The results of the questionnaire has been converted in to four graphs, one graph for each question/statement, to give an overview of the answers students gave before starting the scheme of work on programme music.

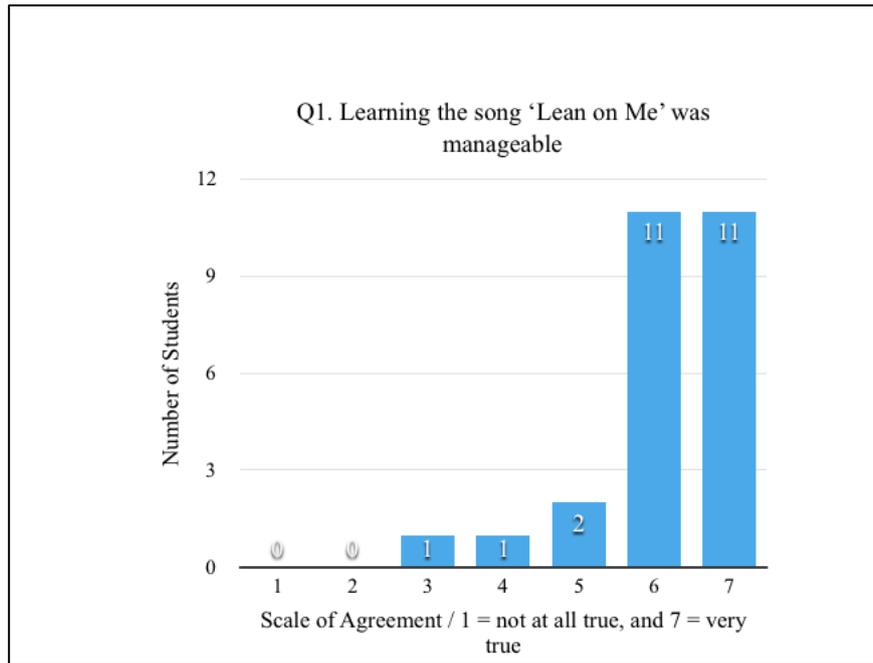


Figure 3: The results for Q1. - Learning the song ‘Lean on Me’ was manageable

It was encouraging to learn that most students (22) found the task manageable (see Figure 3), however, there were students (4) who felt that the project was ‘sometimes’ manageable. This data informed my planning and made me think of various strategies I could employ to help students feel like they could manage. This will be examined in the discussion that will follow later.

Similarly, question/statement 2 showed that most students (24) felt that they could follow the teacher’s instructions (see Figure 4). Yet again, there were a few students (4) that felt that they could only follow instructions sometimes. It is worth reiterating that there were a few students with Special Educational Needs in this year seven class, and one or two can only cope with one instruction at a time. The data informed me that I needed to think of ways to make sure that the task was conveyed clearly to the students.

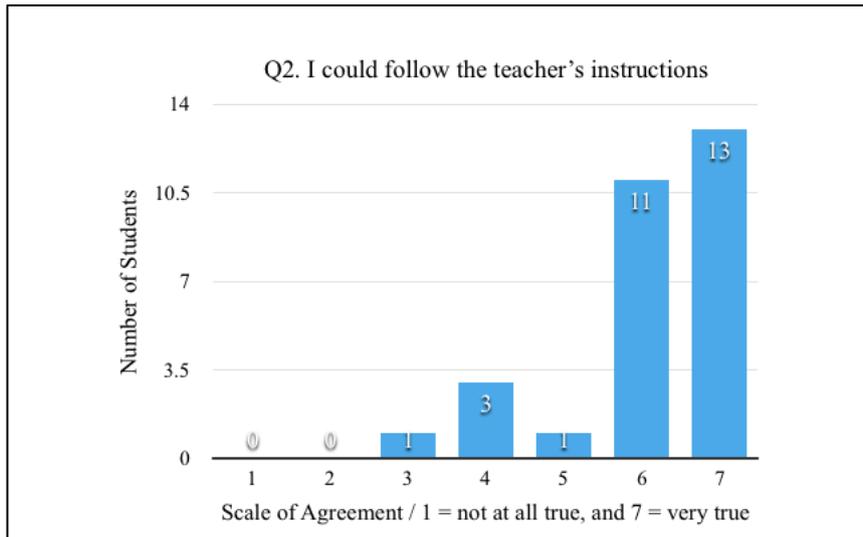


Figure 4: The results for Q.2 - I could follow the teacher's instructions

Question/statement 3 was more personal to the students as they had to judge whether or not they felt they had made 'good progress'. Although, it has to be considered that every student will have a different view of what 'good progress' is and no one student will be the same. Despite this, the majority of students (21) felt that they had made good progress (see Figure 5). A small number of students (4) stated that they 'sometimes' felt that made progress and one student felt that they made no progress whatsoever.

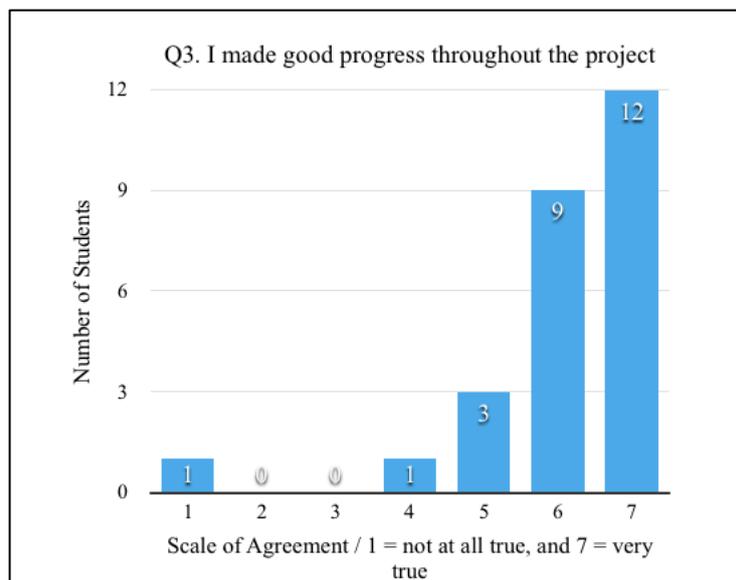


Figure 5: The results for Q3. - I made good progress throughout the project

The final question/statement that was presented to the students has the most varied outcome compared to the other questions/statements on the questionnaire (see Figure 6). Students were asked whether they understood what they needed to do in order to achieve their goal. Although the majority of students (20) felt that they knew what to do in order to improve, a few (4) students felt that they ‘sometimes’ knew what to do. Furthermore, two students felt that they did not really know what to do in order to achieve their goal. This highlighted to me that I needed to consider what could be done to help students’ understanding of what they needed to do to improve their work.

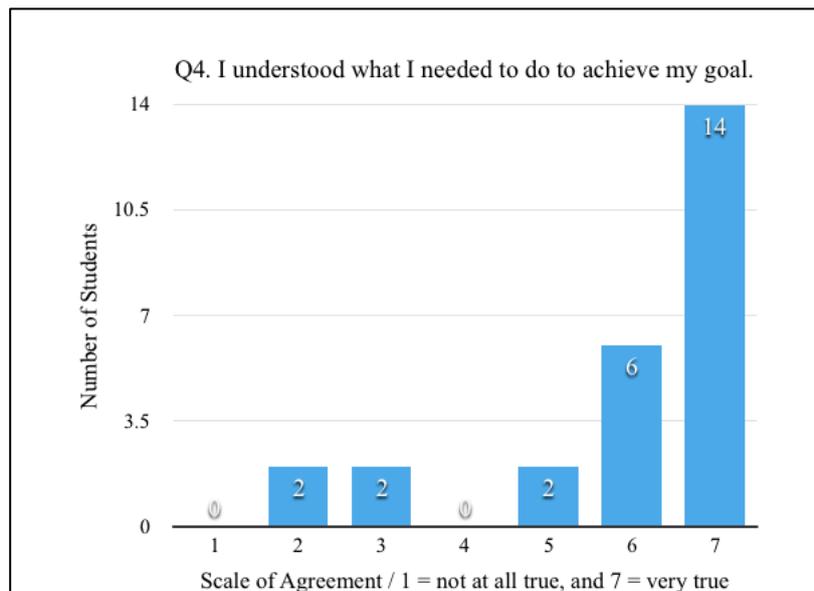


Figure 6: The results for Q4. - I understood what I needed to do to achieve my goal

The results of the six participants’ questionnaires were also fairly mixed (see Figure 7). Fred answered ‘very true’ for all questions/statements, except for question/statement 4 in which he chose to circle the number ‘5’. Fred felt that he did not always understand what he had to do to improve. Similarly, Evie answered ‘very true’ for everything apart from question/statement 3. Evie felt that she ‘sometimes’ made good progress, however since getting to know Evie, she likes to aim high and she is also very critical of herself and her work. In hindsight, maybe I should not have included the word ‘good’ in question/statement 3, and just put the word ‘progress’ as some students may have felt they made progress but that it was not good enough. Kieran’s answers were quite low on the Likert scale. Generally, it seems Kieran found ‘Lean on Me’ a challenge and did not feel that he made ‘good progress’. Anthony, Rachel, and Tobias all gave the answers ‘6’ and ‘7’ for their questions/statements in the questionnaire.

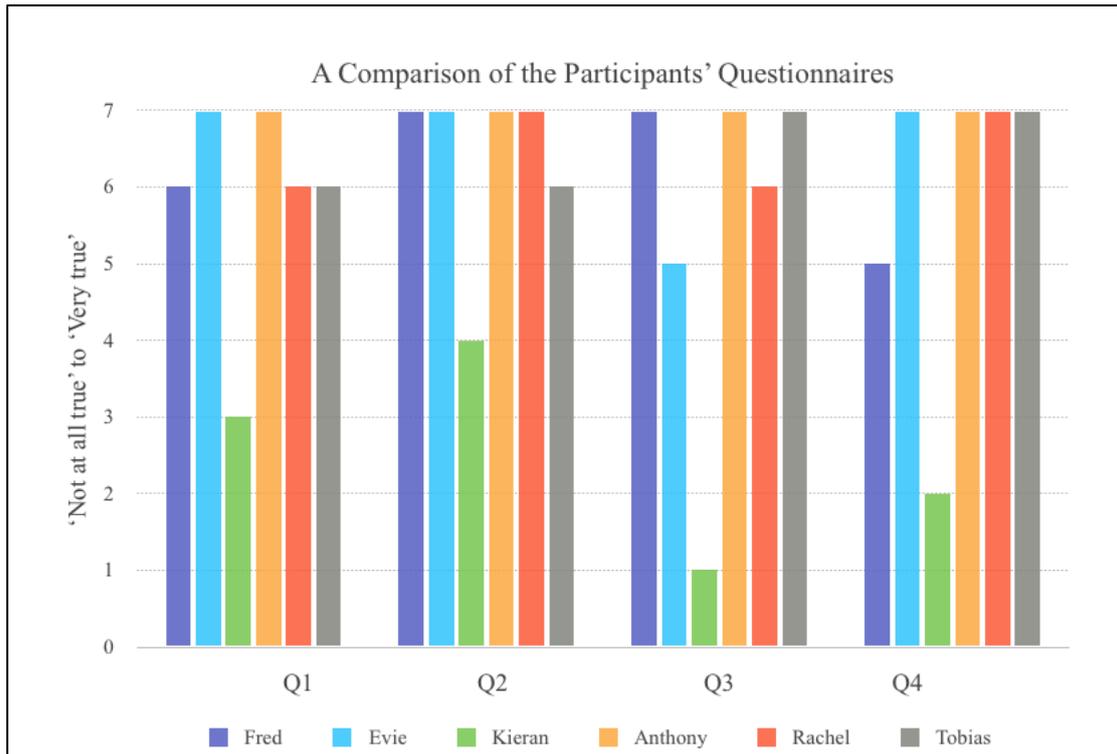


Figure 7: A Comparison of the Participants' Questionnaires

Audio recordings of compositions

Two sets of recordings were made during the project. One recording was made halfway through their composition to check and their progress and one recording was made when they had finished. When listening to the recordings of what they had done so far, it was clear that the students had good ideas but struggled to develop their ideas. The higher levels in the music department assessment grid require that the students develop their musical ideas. This finding then resulted into a 'starter' at the beginning of their final lesson discussing and creating a mind map with ideas of how they could develop their composition.

The second recording was made at the end of the last lesson and was assessed by myself and moderated by the Head of Music. Everybody managed to compose two contrasting sections and most students developed their ideas. Table 4 shows the levels the six participants had achieved in this particular composition task. The levels awarded to the students are based on the new GCSE 9-1 grades. The music department have devised an assessment model for each key stage 3 group where if a student achieves e.g. a level 6, then if they continue to work at the same rate and progress, then it is possible for them to be awarded a 6 grade in their music GCSE (if they were to choose music as

one of their GCSEs). This format has been adopted by every subject in the school and it is still under revision.

Name of Student	Composition Level
Fred	7
Evie	6
Kieran	3
Anthony	5
Rachel	5
Tobias	3

Table 4: The Composition Level that the Six Participants Achieved

This composition was composed in pairs, so it was quite difficult to know who actually came up with the ideas. Observations were made throughout the project and it was noted which student played on the high end of the keyboard and which student played at the low end of the keyboard. Yet, a teacher cannot observe everything each student does in the lesson. However, as explored in the literature review, having students compose in pairs rather than being alone also means that they can share ideas with each other. Fred, Kieran, Rachel, and Tobias had partners, however, Anthony and Evie worked alone in this project. Anthony and Evie wanted to do this as they prefer to work alone.

Lesson Plans, Evaluations and Mentor Feedback Sheets

Lesson plans and evaluations were completed for each lesson in this study and mentor feedback sheets were completed for session 1 and session 4 with the class. The data that follows (Tables 5a, 5b and 5c) have been organised by research question. Findings that are presented in the following three tables are incorporated in the discussion that follows. The general themes that I have discussed in Table 5a are the themes that I believed to be the most significant when considering how a teacher can plan to support individuals in a ‘mixed-ability’ class.

Data Presentation of Lesson Plans, Evaluations and Mentor Feedback Sheets
Research Question 1
<p>Lesson Plans and Evaluations</p> <p><i>General themes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiated worksheets planned. • Planning time to go around the classroom. • Analyse and appraise students’ work and giving targets. • Planning for different methods of notating music. • Considering where people should be sitting to improve their learning. • Considering how to overcome obstacles students may face. • Creating an extension sheet. • Listening to pupils’ concerns and suggestions. • Timeline/Deadline spurs students on to finish their work. • Recapping previous work. • Using a variety of methods to convey information. • Modelling gives students something to try and emulate.
<p>Mentor Feedback Sheet</p> <p><i>02/03/17</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘...use of board to display key words’ • ‘...clear PowerPoint and worksheet prepared.’ • Asking a show of hands when asking a closed question. ‘Hands up if you think....’ • ‘Target: Remember, quickly check understanding when students are at keyboards..’ • ‘Target: Plenary - you could involve the students more in giving feedback, allowing the the opportunity to use the learning objective vocab and show understanding.’ • ‘Target: How can you improve the structure and timing of their melodies next lesson? How many did the extension task?’ <p><i>16/03/17</i></p> <p>‘Good idea to do the mind map to clarify the learning.’</p>

Table 5a: Data Presentation of Lesson Plans, Evaluations and Mentor Feedback Sheets for RQ1

Data Presentation of Lesson Plans, Evaluations and Mentor Feedback Sheets
Research Question 2
<p>Lesson Plans and Evaluations</p> <p><i>Session 1</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fred was enthusiastic about the task• Evie was keen to contribute, but wanted to work alone.• Kieran found the task challenging, but he was able to communicate his ideas.• Anthony was distracted. <p><i>Session 2</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students like having a time scale.• Some students work better alone.• Few found getting the accompaniment and melody together quite challenging. <p><i>Session 3</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anthony holds the view that he is not creative nor that he is capable. He was surprised when I asked him to compose 3 sections. <p><i>Session 4</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fred and his partner composed a piece with 3 sections that included development of their initial ideas.• Student A works better without Student B. (Neither A or B are case study students).• As a class, we created a mind map on the different ways we can develop an idea. Students liked having choice by highlighting which techniques they were going to incorporate into their pieces. Students struggled with the idea of development at first, but once understood, students were very vocal.• Anthony is reliant on the teacher.• Kieran and his partner need a lot of support. They do not retain information very well.
<p>Mentor Feedback Sheet</p> <p><i>02/03/17</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Asking a show of hands when asking a closed question. ‘Hands up if you think....This encourages all to be involved.’ <p>Modelling had a positive impact. ‘Teacher feedback: good reinforcing the learning and setting a ‘work on’. 2nd pair - also a good choice to demonstrate good practice.</p>

Table 5b: Data Presentation of Lesson Plans, Evaluations and Mentor Feedback Sheets for RQ2

Data Presentation of Lesson Plans, Evaluations and Mentor Feedback Sheets
Research Question 3
<p>Lesson Plans and Evaluations</p> <p><i>Session 1</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students had achieved the objective but found putting the chords and melody together challenging. <p><i>Session 2</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students made progress by using language from the learning objective and understanding the meaning. • Student A made much more progress as Student B was absent. • TA with Kieran this session - much more progress was made. • All students able to record their first section. <p><i>Session 3</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fred and his partner have created a piece with a memorable melody and contrasting storm section. • Two students had difficulty keeping in time. I practiced with them tapping my hand on the table in time. This improved their performance greatly. <p><i>Session 4</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students understand what it is to develop in music. • Evie created a good variation of her first idea and was able to articulate what she had done. • Kieran and his partner managed to compose a piece. Initially, I was shocked as it had quite a tricky rhythm. I realised that they had found a setting on a keyboard that did this for them.
<p>Mentor Feedback Sheet</p> <p><i>02/03/17</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking a show of hands when asking a closed question. ‘Hands up if you think....This encourages all to be involved.’ <p><i>16/03/17</i></p> <p>‘Good use of colour to encourage decision-making <u>before</u> they go to their instruments.’</p>

Table 5c: Data Presentation of Lesson Plans, Evaluations and Mentor Feedback Sheets for RQ3

Discussion

RQ1: How can a teacher plan to support individuals in a ‘mixed-ability’ class?

Teaching in a ‘mixed-ability’ class can be a challenge as there a multiple learning needs that need to be considered. As explored in the literature review, Wright’s (2007) model explores how an

individual might prepare to differentiate in the music classroom. However, what has not been mentioned is the fact that teachers cannot prepare for every eventuality and cater fully to every students' wants. This is not to say that teachers should not bother to differentiate, but rather teachers should plan to support individuals to the best of their ability and then act on any additional needs that arise in the classroom. For example, the questionnaire alluded to which students needed additional support. Anthony scored highly on the questionnaire, however, he wanted quite a bit of support in lessons. The lesson plans, evaluations and interview show that Anthony likes being told exactly what to do and relies on a teacher's support perhaps a little too much. As I had never met this class before conducting this study, I could never have predicted that Anthony wanted so much individual attention. This highlights the difference between students' wants and students' needs. The literature review highlighted the fact that 'mixed-ability' could mean a variety of things e.g. motivation, learning difficulties and interests. A teacher needs to make judgment on what a student needs rather than what the student would like. A teacher can plan for students' needs, for example, planning extension tasks and planning for a TA when applicable, however, a teacher can consider what students wants and decide whether that it is a necessity.

Planning for individuals became easier as the study progressed as I had the opportunity to get to know the students. It became evident by evaluating my lessons and watching my lessons unfold e.g. who worked well together and where certain students should be sat to maximise their learning. Flexible planning is very important as a teacher can adjust their plan for students' needs. For example, for lesson two, I had planned for the class to compose their second section, however the data that I acquired from my evaluation, personal observations and my mentor feedback sheet showed me that the class as a whole were not quite ready to move on and could benefit with more time on the first section. Wright (2007) and Tomlinson (2001) believe that effective differentiation occurs through careful planning by the teacher. Additionally, I would argue that effective differentiation happens through careful planning and allowing a degree of flexibility within the plan.

RQ2: How do students respond to differentiation?

As mentioned in the literature review, every student is different, and therefore students responded to differentiation in a variety of ways. When observing the six participants, it was clear that differentiation would mean different things for each student. Differentiation for Fred was to ensure

that he had a partnership where both students could help each other achieve to the best of their ability and go at their own pace. In the interview, Fred said that he preferred when the teacher did not come over until he was ready. During the project, I noticed that Fred went through the steps of creating a composition very quickly and spent more time on the development and ‘perfecting’ his composition. The recording of his final composition highlighted how he had developed his initial ideas. In the interview he said that he enjoyed the composition process, but not necessarily composing to a prescribed structure. Fred would have preferred to be completely free in his composition.

When planning the project, it was recommended that they compose in pairs. However, Evie and Anthony decided that they wanted to work alone. When observing Evie, she was working hard and was concentrating on the task in hand. Interestingly, in the interview she felt that when the teacher checked her progress she said that she was worried about not playing her piece correctly, and said that she was nervous. Considering differentiation is also about creating a safe and comfortable environment for students, this element did not exactly come to fruition in this project. This finding emphasises the need to create an atmosphere of where students feel like that they can make mistakes and that it is acceptable to do so. Yet, this requires more time and the students only had music lessons for five weeks.

On the other hand, Anthony liked it when he had as much support as possible from the teacher. It was virtually impossible to give Anthony all the attention that he wanted as he constantly wanted my input. I could not neglect the other students for Anthony. He did not pay much attention to the resources that I gave him, even after encouraging him to do so as that would guide his composition. With hindsight, I would have found Anthony a partner to work with as he would have benefitted from having another person to guide him.

Kieran struggled quite a bit with this task and during the interview it seemed that he did not really like his music lessons. Regardless of the fact that he had a low level for assessment he achieved by creating a piece with two contrasting moods. His second section was the most successful part of his composition. In the lesson where Kieran and his partner worked on their second section, Kieran’s teaching assistant was present. I did help Kieran whenever I could. However, having the teaching assistant with Kieran helped him to focus and was able to give the full attention that he needed. It

was a shame that Kieran's teaching assistant was absent due to unforeseen circumstances as I believe Kieran could have improved his first section.

Reflecting on Tobias' pairing, I think Tobias would have benefitted from a different partner as they did not really work well together. Also, his partner completed some work without him in the lesson where he was absent and had more time to work on the piece. Tobias did not contribute much to the piece. Yet, in the interview, Tobias had concerns about making his piece 'perfect'. What was positive was the fact that he enjoyed composing, it was just a shame he did not have as much time as his peers. Differentiation in this case was to try a different pairing or to get him to work on his own.

As mentioned previously, Rachel responded very well to the resources created. She liked the step-by-step guide and the checklist as she felt she knew exactly what to do. Rachel also responded well to the support she received in the lesson. Scaffolding helped Rachel to understand how to progress further and the outcome of her piece was successful. The lessons that Rachel enjoyed the most were practical lessons as she could hear if "...something sounded good".

It is evident that all the participants responded differently to differentiation. This is unsurprising as they are individuals with their own personalities and interests. For example, Fred felt that he did not need as much differentiation in terms of breaking down the task. Rather, differentiation for Fred was to let him go at his own pace with his work. Yet, Anthony could have benefitted from a partner but unfortunately, I only came to realise this half way through the project.

RQ3: What impact does differentiation have on progress and outcome?

The main aim of a lesson is that students will be able to achieve the learning objective and make progress. Differentiation enables students to achieve to the best of their ability. It would be shortsighted to expect students to compose exactly the same pieces and not to let them explore, as this would limit their creativity. Having elements of choice within this project was good as students felt that their work was their own. The most effective form of differentiation on progress and outcome was formative feedback. Fred and his partner benefitted from an extension task, whereas Kieran and his partner required more scaffolding and short instructions. Evie, Tobias and Rachel liked having the resources as a guide for their work, whereas Anthony preferred teacher input. Whichever means of differentiation was implemented, students made progress. Progress and

outcomes will be different for every individual. Although every student made progress, I believe that Tobias and Anthony were capable of making more progress. Perhaps the best outcome would have been to put Tobias and Anthony together as a pair. In the future, I will consider grouping more carefully and monitor working relationships.

Conclusion

This study attempted to reflect upon differentiation in a year seven class of students of 'mixed-ability'. As this study was conducted with one class over short period of time, it is important to remember that these results are unique to this class and no generalisations can be made. However, it is clear that differentiation is complex as it encompasses a number of differences that perhaps may not be at the forefront of a teacher's mind. In terms of developing my practice, I have come to realise that although planning for differentiation is beneficial to ensure that everyone has a task that is at their level, it is crucial that there is an element of flexibility within teaching to adapt for those who need extra help, or for those who need more of a challenge. As explored in the discussion, not all students will want the same amount of support in the classroom and it is vital that the teacher makes a judgement on how much support they give to a student. I believe that another element of differentiation is giving students a choice to feel that they have some autonomy over their work. Everybody has different preferences, but if there is an element of choice, students may feel that they have ownership of their work. Admittedly, the content of every music lesson is not going to please all students. Yet, having different aspects of music such as appraising, composition, and performance help to allow students to find their preferences in music. The most important element of the findings that I think will affect my teaching in the future will be the significance of the fact that students have different personalities and interests that are reflected in the learning needs and wants. Preparing for these differences and trying to obtain as much information about a student as possible is, I believe, good practice in education and in music education specifically.

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