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BMPF 7003: Working and Learning:
An introduction to Work-based Higher Education

Assessment Component One – a written assignment

Critically evaluate a range of concepts theories and models that you have recently studied, explaining their relevance to your workplace practice and procedures, and develop a strategy for applying what you have learned to improve your practice and performance.

Children's Voices: Using The Voice as a Learning Tool in Primary School General Music Education Classes.

The aim of this study is to identify resources or strategies that contribute to efficient and effective vocal use in children's musical development. As a general music teacher with thirteen years of experience in primary schools in Malta, I have become increasingly aware of our pupils' reluctance to sing. Since the school where I teach, is a co-ed school, I chose to focus this research on children's voices in general with no distinction between genders, especially since all our pupils are under the age of ten. This decision was taken because physiological changes that impact boys' voices do not take place until late puberty (Harries et al. 1997). In fact, the discrepancy between boys' and girls' vocal performance quality has been attributed to other factors which are mostly cultural (Welch et al. 1997, and Wilder, 1985). Similarly, language proficiency can also be contributory to children's singing accuracy (Mang, 2006).

As vocal use is just a component of the general music syllabus, which itself forms part of the wider National Curriculum Framework (NCF) (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012), this research takes a funneling approach (Walker & Solvason, 2014, p.61) that starts with an understanding of the broader theory of learning within which all teaching should take place and narrows down to specialized approaches in the delivery of the vocal component. As such, this research belongs to an interpretive paradigm based on critical theory (Cohen et al, 2007, p.26-27).

The NCF (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012, p.39) upholds a philosophy that effective teaching and learning is embedded in a constructivist approach that embraces cognitivism and social-constructivism. This has several implications on what could be taught in music class and how. A constructivist approach implies a student-centered approach (Scott, 2012, p.31) where the role of the teacher is to act as 'facilitator' for children to construct their own knowledge rather than to impart the knowledge the teacher already possesses (Isbell, 2011, p.21). Such an approach could lead to nourishing the roots of 'individualism' (Bowers, 2005, p.54) as learners are led to believe that they are

constructing their own 'ideas, meanings, and identity'. It could be therefore argued that in its endeavor to make the learner owner and director of learning, constructivist theory disregards the value of the traditional and the passing of knowledge from one generation to the next. However, as the NCF is enshrined in the Education Act (1991, amended in 2006), it is the teacher's responsibility to see that it is followed and implemented. The teacher needs to mitigate such critique and identify ways to respect individual learning patterns and encourage co-operative learning (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012, p.50). In fact changing one's perspective of the matter, enables one to identify how the traditional baggage passed on to children, can actually provide them with material from which they can then construct their own learning (Turner, 1999). Actually, this provides an opportunity for students to make meaning from their past experiences (Scott, 2008). Simultaneously, music lessons provide an opportunity to nurture sensitive citizens with a social-political conscience that can actively participate in a democratic society (Delorenzo, 2003). Furthermore, placing the child at the center of learning should not prove to be difficult in a music class, as active child involvement in the music-making process is essential to effective instruction and musicianship (Shehan, 1986, p.28).

While the application of constructivism to music education knows its roots to the last two decades of the twentieth century (Shively, 2015), constructivist theory in its wider sense was fathered by early twentieth century theorists including Vygotsky, Dewey and Piaget and more recently influenced by Bruner (Isbell, 2011, p.21). Common to all and also deeper in the roots of educational theorists including Rousseau and Pestalozzi is the central role of the child in the learning process (Turner, 1999, p.30), with the key to such an approach being 'play'. While 'play' is the essential tool for the child to learn, 'flexibility' is vital for the teacher (Isbell, 2011, p.21), who remains in charge to identify the best teachable moments. This follows from Vygotsky's view of the teacher's role as one of 'mediator' who takes the child from concrete experience to an understanding of that experience (Round and McPhail, 2019, p.5). Through such approaches, the teacher is then expected to provide energetic and exciting experiences that lead the children to develop creative and imaginative qualities through the learning of skills and values which

are also transferable to other areas of learning (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012, p.36-37).

As one narrows down to identify ways in which this is best delivered in practical terms in the classroom, the syllabus for music in primary schools is sifted and the areas related to vocal development are listed in the table below.

Table 1: Areas of the curriculum related to vocal use and development

Age Group	Syllabus Content Related To Singing/Vocal Development	Learning Outcomes and Related Achievements	Reference
Kindergarten Level 1 3-4 years old	1] I enjoy listening to multicultural music and stories.	Learning Outcome: 3) Children are socially adept. Related Achievements: Children who learn to collaborate with peers and adults with diverse backgrounds and needs.	(Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes, 2020)
	1] I respond to interactions with a repertoire of communicative acts e.g. gestures, vocalizations and other verbal means.	Learning Outcome: 4) Children who are effective communicators. Related Achievements: Children who are capable of using different forms of media for communication.	
	2] I enjoy listening to and making music.		
	4] I join in rhymes, songs, poems, and jingles.		
	1] I show progressive engagement in nursery rhymes and songs in L1 and L2.	Related Achievements: Children who are aware of different language systems, notably L1 (first language) and L2 (second language).	
	2] I recite nursery rhymes and songs in L1 and sometimes in L2.		

Age Group	Syllabus Content Related To Singing/Vocal Development	Learning Outcomes and Related Achievements	Reference
	1] I become aware of number names through action rhymes and songs	Related Achievements: Children who are versatile with the use of numbers, data handling, shapes and measurement and print in context as a means of production of knowledge and information as well as meaning making and comprehension.	
Kindergarten Level 2	1] I interpret my ideas creatively e.g. through art, music, movement, play, etc.	Learning Outcome: 2) Children who have a positive self-image Related Achievements: Children who believe in themselves fully aware of their potential and capabilities.	(Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes, 2020)
	6] I listen and respond to sounds and patterns (in speech, stories, rhymes and songs).	Learning Outcome: 4) Children who are effective communicators Related Achievements: Children who are familiar with symbols and patterns and their use	
	2] I recite a selection of songs, rhymes and stories in L1 and L2.	Related Achievements: Children who are aware of different language systems, notably L1 and L2	
	6] I can express and communicate ideas, thoughts and feelings through the expressive arts (music, drama, movement and art and design).	Learning Outcome: 5) Children who nurture positive attitudes towards learning and become engaged and confident learners Related Achievements: Children who broaden knowledge and reinforce their understanding through availability of and	

Age Group	Syllabus Content Related To Singing/Vocal Development	Learning Outcomes and Related Achievements	Reference
		access to various sources of information	
Primary Year 1 5 years old	Begin to sing nursery rhymes and unison songs: - diction - Phrasing - Pulse and rhythm - Pitch - The expressive elements	Performing	(Directorate for Learning and Assessment Programmes, 2020)
Primary Year 2 6 years old	Develop growing confidence in singing nursery rhymes and unison songs and developing control of: - diction - Phrasing - Pulse and rhythm - Pitch - The expressive elements	Performing	
Primary Years 3 & 4 7-8 years old	1] I can sing simple songs with confidence from memory and text.	Subject Focus: Using my voice	
	2] I can demonstrate knowledge of the necessity to breathe correctly in order to sing.		
	3] I can warm up my voice and understand why I need to do this.		

Age Group	Syllabus Content Related To Singing/Vocal Development	Learning Outcomes and Related Achievements	Reference
Primary Years 5 & 6 9-10 years old	1] I can sing simple songs in unison, in rounds and in two-part harmony.	Subject Focus: Using my voice	
	2] I can use phrasing to sing more complex melodic lines and thus give further meaning and shape to the song.		
	3] I can sing a number of simple songs from different countries.		
	4] I can identify my own vocal range and demonstrate knowledge of individual differences in vocal ranges.		

In common practice with educational institutions traditional thinking, it can be deduced from the above table that music in the early years is valued particularly for its social and recreational value (O'Brien, 1971, p.34). As one takes a holistic view of the values upheld in the NCF (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012) and the specific learning outcomes from the teaching of singing, it is evident that this serves for various roles including 'physically developing children's voices, nurturing their conceptual understanding of musical features, developing their music literacy, and expanding the repertoire of songs of their cultural heritages (Klinger et al. 1998, p.24). As the children grow older, music garners further value and one can identify how the voice is used as a 'conduit' for musical learning to take place (Garner, 2009, p.47). This can be achieved through a 'conceptual approach' (O'Brien, 1971) which gives scope to the musical activities as it provides the cognitive development required by children to increase their aesthetic awareness. From a learning theory perspective, this is achieved through the

collection of music materials that are indigenous to the local community (Brooks-Baham, 1983, p.52).

While the literature discussed already answers why it is necessary for children to develop their musical knowledge, particularly through singing, and the Syllabi and Learning Outcomes Framework identifies what should be taught, the following part of this research will be dedicated to identifying how it will be best to achieve this.

Although it is common practice for music teachers to teach a new song one week and assess the children's retention of the song the week after (Klinger et al. 1998, p.32), the level of musical commitment children envelop is directly related to the level of importance their culture gives to nourishing a sophisticated musical development irrespective of the musical disposition children are genetically born with (Scott, 1989). This suggests that there are at least three factors contributing to children's musical development, namely, the teacher's chosen teaching method, the child's natural talent and disposition and the culture they are born into. Contributing to the latter is parents' available time, which as it becomes less and less abundant, gets replaced with TV and parents feeling less confident to contribute to their children's musical development (Scott, 1989). The quality of the music the children are exposed to is also influential as the children have become inundated with popular recordings of poor musical value as opposed to simple folk songs or folk-like songs with simple accompaniments and accurate pitch that provide good models for children to imitate (Kenney, 1989, p.34). Regrettably, children in childcare centers may be missing from certain personal musical interaction such as being rocked and sung to (Ibid.). This leads one to understand how children are being deprived of the necessary cultural and musical baggage from which they can then construct their own learning as discussed at the beginning of this study. This is exacerbated by the reduced time children have with elder members as 'fractured families' and 'vocational mobility' segregate senior members of families from the youngest ones (Wilder, 1985, p.34). Such a cultural situation requires that the music teacher who is officially entrusted with doing the job, identifies ways to make up for these failures of society.

In order to gather authentic and culturally relevant music material, Brooks-Baham (1983, p.54) proposes a model (reproduced below) which despite the technology suggested being now dated, the methodology can still be applied to contemporary contexts.

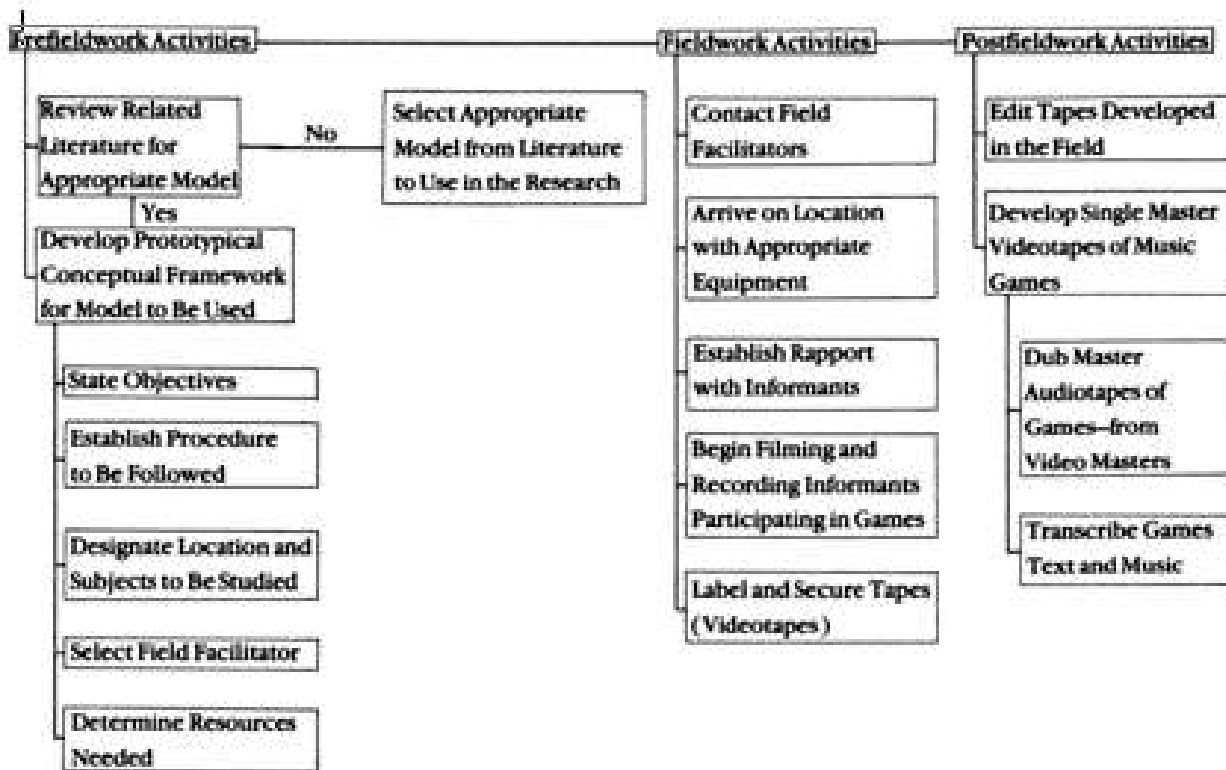


Figure 1: Model for collecting music movement examples - a composite (reproduced from Brooks-Baham (1983, p.54)

This model makes direct reference to collecting evidence from the field where children during their playtime engage in singing and music games. Based on my experience within primary schools, I question the effectiveness of such a method as through my own observations I could hypothesize that children are no longer engaging in singing or music games during their free time because the balance has been tilted by the technological developments and societal changes discussed already. Interestingly, Campbell (2005) identified how children reflect their cultures in musical play and they also learn their culture through musical play. Without stereotyping nationalities, Campbell gives various examples of how children of various nationalities bring out predominant traits of their cultures such as the Anglo system of queueing and taking turns, illustrated through the chant of 'one potato, two potato' to determine who goes first, or the community spirit of

African cultures musically expressed through call-and-response songs. While one can argue that the fact that such rhymes, chants and songs have withstood the test of time, thus proving their validity, one cannot help question their relevance to today's children. To stick to the same example of turn-taking, the obvious go-to solution to select children taking turns in a game in a kindergarten classroom is unlikely to be a chant, but a virtual wheel-of-fortune on a smart board where all children have a chance at being randomly selected. Such use of technology is held in high esteem and the teachers incorporating it in their teaching may look progressive but it has eliminated the need for children to engage in musical play.

Yet, the music teacher needs to overcome this obstacle as well and find ways to choose appropriate content and ways to teach it. Shehan (1986), analyzed a number of learning theories of music education which can be summarized in the following table:

Table 2: Theories of music education and their main underlying concepts

METHOD	CONCEPT
Dalcroze	Instinct before intellectual analysis
Orff	Experiential music learning through play that leads to creative improvisation
Suzuki	Rote-before-note
Kodaly	A structured approach starting with rhythm training and moving on to singing and instrumental lessons
Gordon	Sound-before-sight with a focus on audiation

However, Shehan (1986, p.31) concluded that the best method is the one that allows best for children to develop their 'sensitivity to respond intelligently to music', and this is probably best achieved through the teacher's ability to elicit elements from different schools of thought and methodologies that best suit the children being taught. Besides the differences in methodologies and approaches, a number of characteristics of appropriate songs for children have been identified. These include having a pitch range of a perfect fifth (D above middle C to A a fifth higher), 16 beat length, ABAC form, simple

antecedent-consequent structure, no minor second intervals (Klinger et al. 1998, p.28), a descending sol-mi pattern, then moving to sol-mi-la and mi-re-do (Garner, 2009).

This research enabled me to gain a more in-depth understanding of the pedagogical approaches expected of me as a music teacher. This led me to focus on the vocal aspects found in the official curriculum and this was condensed into a table that presents the structured nature of this area of teaching. Finally, the musical characteristics of repertoire suitable for children were identified. This now puts me in a position to explore the available resources and structure a development plan that includes the build up a collection of scaffolded material which is in line with the theories of learning promoted by the NCF (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012), the identification of methods with which to deliver this content and the plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the adopted choices over a period of time.

Assessment Component Two – Reflective Review

- a) Reflect on your recent learning experience, and the value of learning you have acquired. Assess your current competences and identify future development needs in the context of your work situation.
- b) Devise a detailed personal development plan which incorporates identified areas for development, objectives, activities to be undertaken, methods, resources review periods and timescales.

The research undertaken for this study was a personal initiative aimed at improving the quality of my teaching to positively impact the learning experience of the pupils I teach. This made it an 'experiential learning' process. (Girvan et al. 2016, p.130). Such a process is meant to help me gain a better understanding of where I currently stand in my teaching practice and at the same time identify areas of the curriculum which can be changed to enhance the teaching and learning experience (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011). Wong and Bautista (2018) identify choosing repertoire as one of the most sought after aspects of professional development and as part of this experiential learning process, I wished to build a list of suitable repertoire that is appropriate for the different age groups I teach and which could therefore facilitate the lesson planning process and ensure continuity in the music programme being taught at the school where I am employed. As a result this study follows the concept of 'procedural knowledge' (Hourigan, 2006, p.34). Being the only music teacher in the school, there is no opportunity for a collaborative approach or peer criticism to such a process.

Biasutti and Concina (2018) shed light on criteria that are generally accepted to evaluate a music teacher's self-efficacy. A reflection on these criteria facilitated the possibility of assessing where I currently stand in my teaching practice. The two main branches from which all strands flow are identified as i) knowledge of the subject and ii) its effective delivery. To address the former area, an in-depth reading of the curriculum was carried out and the areas pertaining to vocal use were extracted. These were summarized and presented as a table for ease of reference. The second part of the literature reviewed focused on identifying elements in the chosen repertoire that makes it more possible for children to achieve the required skill. Hence, the qualities of songs chosen for a suitable build-up of repertoire were listed. Endorsing a constructivist approach where children are the protagonists of the teaching and learning taking place, is a strand that Biasutti and Concina (2018) identify as part of an effective delivery. This is congruent to the practice outlined in the NCF (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012) and so it facilitates the process of following this plan to further identify ways that contribute to a more effective and efficient approach to the teaching of the required vocal component.

Similarly, Woody et al. (2018) identify personal dispositions that effective music teachers possess. While they identify a number of such characteristics, they summarize that the best characteristic of all is the one that best suits the children's learning needs. This implies, that it is unlikely to identify a definitive list of criteria common to all effective music teachers, as this is subject to change according to the needs of the pupils being taught, however, they still identify a number of qualities common to effective teachers despite their different working environments and students. For the purpose of this small-scale study I chose to focus on 'music-specific dispositions' (Ibid. p.113-114). Among such dispositions, embracing the 'learnability of music' (Ibid.) is essential to the successful implementation of the action plan devised through this study, because this plan will be rolled out as part of a general music education programme in a mainstream co-ed school within a mixed ability school setting, where children are not attending music lessons because of a particular disposition towards the subject but as part of their compulsory school curriculum.

In fact, it was partially a result of my full embrace of the learnability of music that I chose to engage in this research. Indirectly, this places this study within the 'critical research' paradigm which primarily seeks to bring about justice and equality (Efron and Ravid, 2013, p.42-43). This was because, part of the aim of the study was to identify repertoire that makes music and vocal use accessible to all the children at school, irrespective of their social background which as identified in the first part of the literature reviewed may hinder their disposition to the subject. This philosophy also defines my identity and role as a researcher. In identifying my role as a researcher, it was also necessary to acknowledge my competences and limitations within the field. Thus, I concede that despite my commitment to furthering my education along the years, these have all been in fields that are not related to vocal pedagogy in any way. In fact the latest studies I did in this regard were as part of my Bachelor's degree in Education which I completed fourteen years ago. On the other hand, I have since then, accumulated a deep familiarity with the curriculum and school realities as I have been engaged as a full-time teacher throughout all these years. This led me to place my emphasis on finding out "what works" (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p.49) so that although there are no quantitative elements in this

study, some generalizations can still be made albeit locally because the aim of the research remains to build a suitable repertoire for primary school children that fulfills the purpose of voice development as part of the general music education programme which is in line with the official National Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012).

As this research draws data primarily from public documents such as the NCF (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012) and should lead to sourcing of repertoire from published material or publicly known repertoire, it is unlikely that it should give rise to any ethical concerns because of the way it impacts participants. However, guided by a “principled code of ethics” that acknowledges there may be “different ways of doing the same thing” (Cohen et al, 2007, p.76), this research acknowledges that given the limited resources available, the repertoire chosen may be limited to a particular culture and as a result it ends up being less favorable for children who come from minority groups.

While this study was spearheaded by my personal motivation, it proved to be very difficult to complete it with ease. One major hindrance was that in the current circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, a number of mitigation measures have been placed in schools with particular restrictions hitting the normal procedures and practices during music lessons. This led the Ministry for Education and Employment to issue revised syllabi for the current scholastic year (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2020). All these changes implied additional work and rethinking of lesson plans, so much that often this study fell on the back burner. Furthermore, the mitigation measures adopted by the school include having most students following recorded online lessons from home so it is even more difficult to try out repertoire and evaluate it in normal classroom environments. This consideration is likely to negatively impact the potential of taking this research further and materializing its benefits in the coming months. However, this still allows the study to result in “reflection-for-action” (Ghaye, 2011, p.7), where the reflection upon the learning that takes place through the study is used to bring positive change to the teaching and learning taking place. This plan for action is presented in the table below.

Learning and development aims: (Reasons for enrolling for this course)	I am pursuing my studies in this field because vocal use is an integral part of the general music education programme defined by the NCF (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012), and as a practitioner in the field, I felt the need for more in-depth study. Through this research I seek to become more knowledgeable about the characteristics of songs that are learnable for children of primary school age. This should enable me to select more appropriate repertoire which being more accessible to the children I teach increases the efficiency and efficacy of the teaching and learning process. As a result this is expected to mitigate any barriers that can hinder children's willingness to engage in singing and vocal explorations as required during their lessons.
Learning outcomes:	By the end of this research I will be able to: • Identify song sources which are accessible and available for use within the classroom. Timescale: end of December 2020 • Identify songs with the correct characteristics to be taught to primary school aged children. • Match the songs with different sections of the NCF (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012) to incorporate them in the lesson planning.

	Timescale: end of May 2020 • Prepare a scheme of work for the new scholastic year that is based on the chosen songs. Timescale: end of August 2020
This research can be extended to be:	Actualised in a school setting and reviewed upon partial implementation (after the mid-yearly assessment held around February 2021). This is subject to developments with regards to the Covid-19 pandemic and the implications it has upon the possibility to sing in class or not.
Resources needed:	Access to local and international resources (books, recorded songs, music scores)
Evaluation:	As the only music teacher at school and with no body directly heading music teaching within the sector I teach in, I rely heavily on self-evaluation. The criteria against which I will be evaluating the success of this plan can be measured only through my own experience as the teacher. Successful implementation would mean that children are being more responsive and participatory in the aspects of the curriculum that involve singing and vocal pedagogy. Other tools which can be considered include taking a quantitative approach and distributing child-friendly questionnaires for the children to complete and gain feedback on their own experience of singing during music lessons. This would provide a general overview of the impact that the implementation of this plan had. Furthermore, a sample of children can be interviewed for a more personal narrative that

	provides insight and helps make meaning of the data gathered through the questionnaire. However, at this stage, it is not envisaged that this research will be stretched to such an extent.
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