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Priory Woods School, a generic special school

Impact of The Digital Score on Middlesbrough Open Orchestra students

Background

Middlesbrough Open Orchestra is an accessible orchestra / ensemble made up of students from two special school within the Tees Valley area. The Orchestra is a partnership between Beverley School, a school for children with autism, Priory Woods School, a generic special school and Musinc which offers musical inclusion throughout Middlesbrough and is based at Middlesbrough Town Hall.

The members of the orchestra are variety of learning difficulties, disabilities and conditions and cover wide range of academic and musical abilities. Students are selected to take part in the orchestra based on their enthusiasm for music and musical engagement, their musical ability or a mixture of both. The Orchestra is in its fifth year with a mixture of students who have remained part of the orchestra for its entirety and those that have joined at various point since the orchestra's conception. A few of the students only joined the orchestra within the last term prior to the Digital Score performance.

The project was broken into two main areas; composition and performance. For some pupils, their main involvement was performance and their interaction with the completed digital score piece. For others, their involvement covered both composition and performance.

From observations over the course of the project, the following areas were felt to have been impacted as a result of the project

Creativity and imaginative development

At Priory Woods, interestingly the most advanced musical pupil struggled with the idea of the composition at first. He found the concept difficult to understand, others however enjoyed the process and this brought out other musical talents. One student because of the digital score found violin much more accessible and as a result plays the violin now on an even level to his piano studies. This was originally done with coloured cue cards but

Once Layla Curtis's films were introduced, then the majority of the group started to offer more suggestions and musical ideas. Including the most musically advanced student. He saw how he could link in some pre-existing compositions and refine them with the score to make them even better. At this stage all students became much more engaged with the project, I feel this is because they all had something to offer whether a background role developing other students ideas or by suggesting parts and techniques alongside the film. Some students struggled previously working in-group settings but became much more attached to the ensemble and became musical leaders. This also had a trickledown effect to

other musical lessons where one enthusiastic student would lead other younger groups with percussion.

It was difficult to question many of the students after this project, I received a lot of stock answers despite individual questioning I think in hindsight a better way of questioning will be developed if this project is to be done again, or a more complete baseline using sounds of intent or other such assessment models. All students had enjoyed the project and felt their musicality had developed.

Social interactions, Social coherence and collaborative working.

As the orchestra was well established and the students were used to spending their time rehearsing on a Friday afternoon, the social interaction was extended in an unexpected way as another teacher at the school saw how musical the students had become and offered to give some extra piano lessons during lunchtime. It was lovely to see how organised these 4 students became. Taking a role in their own learning and managing the space and teacher time between themselves. (Preferring to stay in the musical room at any given opportunity than take break times and miss their much-loved football lunchtime sessions)

Cognitive development

Students now are taking their own learning into their own hands, and as a result strings sessions are to be planned next year. (Somehow). One student is furthering his music with grade 4 ABRSM piano but he has lacked social skills in the past. These have improved. One student requested training in formal notation and is progressing well. Three students have taken home keyboards from school to work on over the summer holidays.

Conclusion

The digital score was a great success for Middlesbrough Open Orchestra. The students gained so much from taking part and clearly enjoyed the experience. I feel the final thought is not to limit or perceive limitations in progress to a student's musical development regardless of SEN or previous musical experience. These young musical students have gone beyond with what I would expect their limitations are. There is no glass ceiling and they continue to surprise and inspire me with their musical ideas, instrumental ability and progress.

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Priory Woods