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Tobin Music

ACCELERATING MUSIC LITERACY

News

News from the Midlands by Julie Hall

The last two months have been very hectic up here in the midlands; there is a huge sense of excitement as more of my Warwickshire Music service colleagues learn about the system. This week I had the pleasure of leading sessions as part of the Warwickshire Music service Leading Learning Network meetings with my colleague Kath Hardy. The LLN meetings are to help and support music coordinators in Warwickshire schools, I gave them a whirlwind one hour introduction to the Tobin Music System.

One teacher in the central area kindly remarked 'This session is worth its weight in gold!' All of the teachers, including a secondary practitioner, were very enthusiastic about the system.

The terrible weather conditions did not deter us from attending the Worcester Music conference on the 9th Feb! Richard Tobin exhibited the materials and I gave a one hour presentation. The conference was well attended and since then many of the teachers have been in touch to find out more about the associate training course. During the conference I had the pleasure of attending a workshop led by David Lawrence. David is one of Britain's leading vocal specialists whose work involves directing symphony choruses, European radio choirs and professional orchestras.

David's vocal workshop was inspirational and I was encouraged that he talked about the importance of music literacy and advised the delegates to find out about the Tobin Music system so that our young people can develop the essential skills for all types of music making. I look forward to meeting with David in the near future as he discovers more about the system.

I've started 10 week projects in three new schools this term, St Paul's Primary, Park Lane Primary and Middlemarch Foundation School. They are all year 6 classes and the 10 week sessions I provide are part of project to show how creative input improves academic achievement. This week has been week 6 and the children are very confident with rhythm, they know their note lengths and can use the rhythmic shorthand to do aural dictation work, they know the notes across the great staff, they know all of their simple time signatures and how to conduct duple, triple and quadruple time. The children absolutely adored learning about harmony this week.

Every time I introduce children, (and teachers!) to harmony through the use of hand chimes and the magic circle there are smiles everywhere and even the youngest children suddenly realise how music works; this is how composers can make beautiful sounds blend together. No matter how many times I teach these concepts I still get a tremendous buzz and sense of achievement from seeing the reaction of the class. The learners are engaged, enthusiastic and they are happy; and if the children are enjoying the lessons they are learning. Happy and musically intelligent children = happy teacher!

I have been working on a series of lesson plans and ICT materials that are proving to be very useful in the classroom and for lectures. It will also save more time for planning and preparation. I look forward to telling you more about this as I develop the materials – there is a lot of road testing to do and I have to rapidly develop my technology skills. Watch this space.....



Tobin Making More of Music by Ros Long

As I was about to write this article on the Tobin Music System, I heard that OFSTED had just published a report, based on evidence from inspections of music between September 2005 and July 2008. I was intrigued to discover what they had found. Having heard about the large amount of money that had been made available to the Wider Opportunities programme, I thought that there would be plenty of evidence for improvement, as this surely would have made a big impact on a number of schools. The study had included 37 schools, which had been involved in the Wider Opportunities Programme, out of the 84 schools inspected. However, one statement stood out on the opening page, entitled Executive Summary:



“Overall, there has been insufficient improvement over the last three years.”

It stated that provision for music was good or outstanding in around half of the schools visited. However, what was letting it down was the fact that the quality and range of provision was inconsistent.

Where the Wider Opportunities programmes were being implemented there were plenty of examples of quality work, but one of the main issues reported by OFSTED was the problem of continuity:

“For example, while the best instrumental/vocal programmes in the primary schools visited had provided outstanding benefits to pupils, teachers and their schools, not all the programmes were of sufficient duration or quality to have a lasting impact.”

OFSTED's recommendation is to look at how to develop the long-term impact of this work. The standard of these classes “were more often judged to be good or outstanding than the schools not involved in such programmes.” However, the question that comes to mind is: how does this level of specialist teaching get maintained when costs are so high needing a minimum of one specialist instrumental/ vocal teacher (but sometimes two or even more) combined with the class teacher? Also how do you ensure that this sort of provision reaches all children and is this why so many schools only received short 'experiences' of Wider Opportunities rather than long-term provision, ranging from one term to a year? A few schools chose to continue for a second year but how many schools would be able to fund such provision? This, therefore, has an implication for future progression.

The issue of long-term impact could so easily be addressed by the use of the Tobin Music System in schools. The system does not require expensive set up costs as experienced by the Wider Opportunities programmes, therefore it becomes not only an economic solution but also provides a very effective way of ensuring consistent, high quality provision of music. The cost benefit would be the training of the music subject leaders and class teachers i.e. not reliant on specialist teaching; the class teacher providing consistency of teaching music with a clear sense of progression as they would in other curriculum areas.

In schools that didn't have the Wider Opportunity provision there were less examples of good or outstanding teaching. However, where these quality examples were observed, there were still often issues with subject knowledge and focus. This then impacted on musical progression. This was found to be particularly true in the primary school in years 5 and 6.

“...the survey found out that increased activity was not necessarily leading to improved provision.”

This indicates that, while there are plenty of opportunities for music provided in some schools, there is a lack of progression.

Again, through the use of the Tobin Music System, clear progression being a key element, children would be able to continue developing their musical ability throughout their primary education, moving then onto secondary schools with a high level of understanding and ability.

So what is it about Tobin that is so unique and special?

“It is an ingenious system, which has been designed, trialled and perfected over many years to empower all teachers to deliver high quality classroom music lessons for little expertise.” (Julie Hall, Lead Tobin Licentiate Teacher)

The Tobin Music System has a multisensory approach, which allows even foundation stage children to read and write music with a true understanding. Children of all ages love learning music this way because the lessons are appealing and promote confidence. It also means that advanced concepts can be taught and developed from an early age. The beauty of the system means that schools do not have to rely on teachers being instrumentalists and the whole system can be delivered with the use of classroom instruments by class teachers, not just specialists.

OFSTED found that the characteristics of good and outstanding instrumental/ vocal programmes showed that:

“Learners enjoy their musical experiences and make good progress as a result of high expectations for all every child can make, and benefit from, music. Enjoyment and success start from the earliest stages of musical learning.”

This is true of the Tobin Music System. High expectations, enjoyment and quality progression are key elements of this system. If only OFSTED had managed to observe this in action during their inspections, one questions how their findings might have been more positive.

The inspectors also found that "rhythmic and melodic skills are developed effectively" in the examples of good or outstanding programmes. The Tobin Music System not only provides this, but in addition, skills of understanding harmony are achieved too. This is made possible by the use of colour, being one of the main features of the system, but one that is often misunderstood. Many people, when first seeing the use of colour, simply think that is purely an aid to read notation. It is much more. Fun stories and pictures reinforce the pattern of the colours enabling the children to learn all the notes across the Great Staff quickly and are soon composing with primary chords that have been created from the 'magic circle' of notes. Children can make sense of music theory and see the relevance when learning to play an instrument. Composition is also introduced early on in the system and is taught in a logical and structured way.

One of the possible stumbling blocks, for the Tobin Music System, could be the way that notation has been poorly introduced into schools in the past. The current OFSTED report demonstrates that this is still a problem:

"The inappropriate use of musical notation...was a frequent barrier to progress. In the weakest lessons seen, pupils were expected to use notation before they had sufficiently linked the musical symbol and the sound."

"A heavy emphasis on notation on a staff also prevented some pupils making as much progress as they might have done: they could not interpret the notation quickly enough and so were left behind."

Unfortunately, examples like this have made the use of notation something to be avoided by many teachers and advisors. When the Tobin Music System is adopted this would quickly dispel these thoughts. We would see children become literate in music, have confidence in using notation, improvisation and composition.

Music taught through the Tobin Music System is also much more than just teaching reading and playing via notation. It helps to develop their musical intelligence. In order to develop this, suggestions made by OFSTED include the following: pupils need to learn from demonstration and modelling, experience playing and exploring sounds, have a careful use of musical vocabulary, and develop the ability to internalise sounds; all elements used in Tobin.

There are so many more points that I could pick out from the OFSTED report on music in which the use of the Tobin Music System would address many of the issues they found. In this article I have just looked at some of the key elements. Should more schools adopt the use of this method to deliver their own music, they will find that they can answer many of the recommendations of the report.

New Associates!

Congratulations to the following teachers for passing their exam! They were trained by Julie and Chris Hall in Tamworth.

Ros Long Sharman's Cross Primary School, Solihull
Sarah Spare Highclare School, Sutton Coldfield
Rosey Spurr Teacher in West Yorkshire
Kathy Drew Nansen Primary School, Birmingham

Rosemary Spurr of Haworth, West Yorkshire writes,

I am really pleased that I have passed the Tobin examination. Now I am busy learning the parts of the Tobin system that I was not so confident with. I am grateful to Candida Tobin for her tireless work to pass this system on and I intend to do my best to encourage the use of this system in schools. I am also indebted to a colleague Mrs. Gillian Rheece-Jones who introduced me to the idea of Tobin music - as soon as I began to find out about Tobin music I knew it was what I wanted to learn and to teach. The training given to me by Jules and Chris was clear and structured and they gave us good guidance. The company on the course was great as well. It is good to work and play with like-minded people. I have really enjoyed this course and I would recommend it to anyone who is interested in teaching music.



Tobin Music training in Belfast

We have been contacted by a very enthusiastic lady in Belfast who would like to take the Associate teacher course. Thelma is prepared to come over to England to take the training but is also looking to run a 5 day course in Belfast during summer 2009, dates and venue to be confirmed. Julie and Chris Hall would be providing the training.

If there are teachers in the Belfast area who would like more information please contact Thelma directly:

Tel: 07809 872550

Email: thelma.worthington@me.com

OUTSTANDING PUPIL

Jacob, now six, has successfully achieved his Preparatory Test examination with the Associated Board, here in Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk. He has been taught the 'cello as part of the Tobin Music Literacy Scheme.

'Tiny steps to Music' was Jacob's first encounter with the Tobin System and he became so fascinated by the music shorthand that it remains a strong element in his lessons.

With the aid of stickers, his 'cello fingerboard displays the Tobin Pitch Colours. Jacob takes delight in commenting on the patterns that emerge from these colours: tetrachords, tones, semi-tones and octaves.

The 'Tiny Tunes' (Pentatonic songs adapted for the 'cello) at the end of 'Tiny Steps' provided Jacob with a painless method of note-reading. His favourite activity is still to play the ostinato bars while directing his teacher to play "Muddy Boots".

It has been very rewarding to see Jacob taking part in a 50 piece orchestra made up of musicians of all ages and abilities, playing carols, and not hesitating over reading his score and being completely aware of the importance of note lengths thanks to the work covered by the Tobin System. - Barry Metcalfe



TOBIN TEACHER TRAINING

We are pleased to announce that although training courses have had to come to halt in Sawbridgeworth, we are now able to offer training courses in Saffron Walden as well as Tamworth. Please book as soon as possible to ensure a place.

Tamworth, Staffordshire

To book contact Julie Hall tel: 01827 282949

Email: JulesDuceHall@aol.com

MODULE 1	Sunday	1st March	Full Day	£80
MODULE 2	Sunday	15th March	Full Day	£80
TASTER COURSE	Saturday	21st March	Half Day Course	£30
MODULE 1	Sunday	29th March	Full Day	£80
MODULE 2	Sunday	26th April	Full Day	£80
PIANO TEACHER COURSE	Sunday	3rd May	Full Day	£90
				Including books
MODULE 3	Sunday	17th May	Full Day	£80
MODULE 4	Sunday	7th June	Full Day	£80
MODULE 5	Sunday	21st June	Full Day	£80
ASSOCIATE EXAM	Saturday	4th July	1.00pm	£30

Saffron Walden, Essex

To book contact Maggi Griffiths tel: 01799 500899 Email: maggigriffiths@hotmail.com

MODULE 1	Saturday	4th April	Full Day	£80
MODULE 2	Sunday	5th April	Full Day	£80
MODULE 3	Sunday	10th May	Full Day	£80
MODULE 4	Sunday	14th June	Full Day	£80
MODULE 5	Sunday	28th June	Full Day	£80
ASSOCIATE EXAM	Sunday	5th July	1.00pm	£30

NEWS CONTRIBUTIONS

We would love to hear about your news and any outstanding pupils. Please send all contributions, of no more than 200 words, to newsletter@tobinmusic.co.uk

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