Differentiation & Equity in Classroom Music

ACU AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

Contact: kathleen.plastow@myacu.edu.au Ph: +61410518457 or via Linkedin or ResearchGate

1. Introduction

Some international trends in classroom music are reflected in Australia with diminishing curriculum time, declining numbers and cohorts with varied prior learning. Primary (elementary) schools in Victoria are required to provide only one strand of The Arts (Education and Training Committee, 2013) and with insufficient music training for generalist teachers and a lack of funding for specialists, music is frequently omitted. Access to ongoing, sequential music education and associated cognitive benefits (Collins, 2014) is becoming the domain of independent/private schools, limiting prospects for success for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Equity is becoming an issue, particularly on entering high school -Year 7.

Literature indicates classroom teachers are not meeting the needs of multifarious Year 7 classrooms, and subsequently "teach to the potential" (Ewing, 2010). Research into formative assessment data use (Guskey, 2003; Hattie, 2009; Wiliam, 2011) and Direct Instruction (DI) (Lowe and Belcher, 2012) show improved outcomes for students. The use of formative data and direct instruction for music literacy is being explored to sit alongside Kodaly methodology to address inequity in the first year of high school.

2. Hypothesis

Regular formative assessment, item analysis and direct instruction may complement Kodaly methodology, improving learning outcomes for Year 7 students in a climate of reduced curriculum time and varying skill levels.

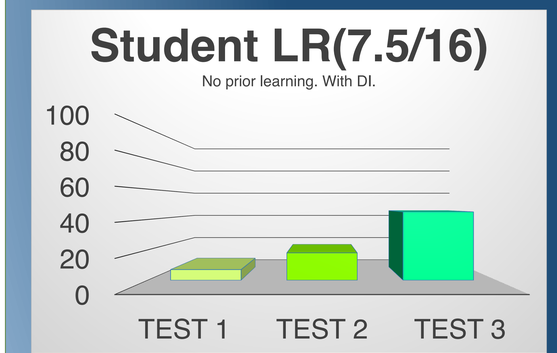
4. Results

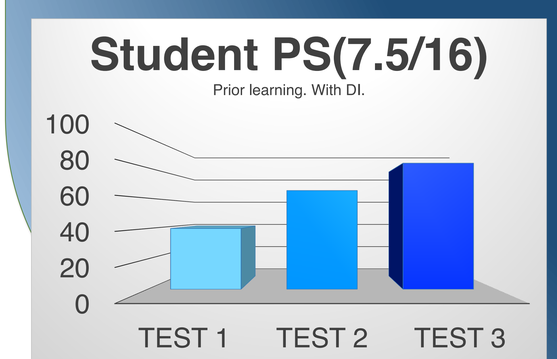
The class where data analysis and DI were undertaken made significantly more progress. Mean improvement is shown in the table below. STD in 7.5/16 indicated overall growth. STD in 7.1/16 indicated improvement in lower ranked students but limited top-end improvement.

	Mean T1	Mean T2	Mean T3	Mean Difference
7.1/16 N=19 No DI	27.21	33.47	34.82	7.61
7.5/16 N=18 With DI	21.37	29.22	33.29	11.92

3. Methods

- This informal interpretivistic study tracked music literacy skills in students in the first year of high school through formative assessment data.
- Pilot tests were developed and trialled in 2014 and 2015.
- Further trials and adaptations were made in Semester 1, 2016. In Semester 2, two male classes were scheduled for music.
- Over nine weeks, students undertook tests in the same way, however, instruction adjustments based on item analysis from 7.5/16 were applied. No adjustment was made for 7.1/16.
- Research site, a multi-campus, P-12 independent school situated in Melbourne's metropolitan area, was chosen for convenience.
- This may be a limiting factor, making findings most relevant to schools of this type.
- Participants: The researcher and timetabled music classes.
- Quantitative data measured student improvement (Mean and STD). Students completed the series of three multiple choice tests based on music literacy skills as set out by the Australian Curriculum. Item analysis for each question allowed differentiation and the provision of DI where required (extension or corrective).
- Qualitative data: student written reflections on their learning.





Credits

Education and Training Committee. (2013). *Inquiry into the extent, benefits and potential of music education in Victorian schools.* Parliamentary paper No. 277 Session 2010-2013. Parliament of Victoria. By Authority Victorian Government Printer, Melbourne.

Ewing, R. (2010). The arts and Australian education: Realising potential. *Australian Education Review,* (58), 1-57.

Collins, A. (2014). Music education and the brain. *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education, 32*(2), 4-10. doi:10.1177/8755123313502346

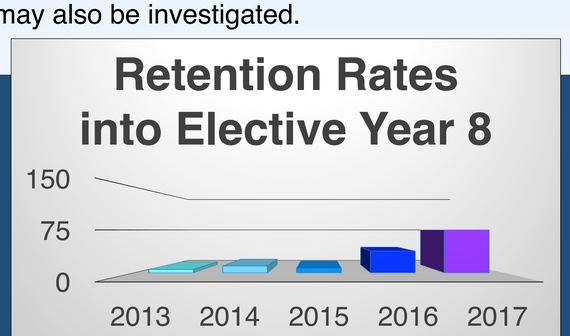
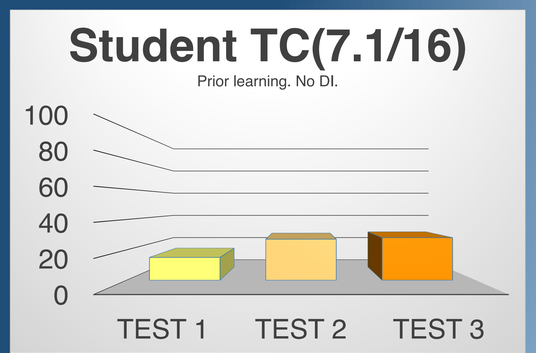
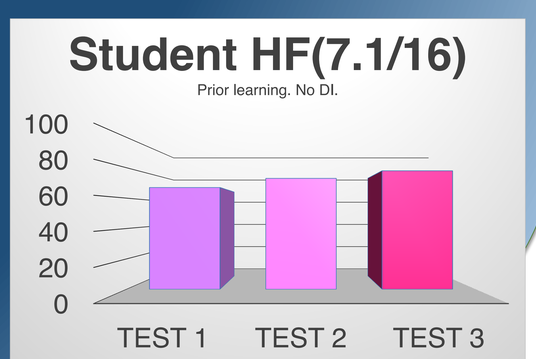
Guskey, T. R. (2003). How classroom assessments improve learning. *Educational Leadership, 60*(5), 6 - 11.

Hattie, J. A. C. (2009). *Visible learning: a synthesis of meta-analyses relating to achievement.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Lowe, G. M., & Belcher, S. (2012). Direct instruction and music literacy: one approach to augmenting the diminishing? *Australian Journal of Music Education, 2012*(1), 3-13.

Wiliam, D. (2011). What is assessment for learning? *Studies in Educational Evaluation, 37*(1), 3-14. doi:10.1016/j.stueduc.2011.03.001

5. Discussion

Students indicated higher levels of self-efficacy and self-determination through mapping their own progress, identifying areas for improvement and through concrete evidence of progress. In light of the constructivist nature of the research, students reconstructed their interpretations of their own capacity to engage with classroom music. Other outcomes include increased numbers in elective music and student enrolments in instrumental music lessons.

Further research with expanded participant numbers and research sites is soon to be undertaken. Other methods for making student learning more visible may also be investigated.