

Communities of Music Education

Jo Saunders

Graham Welch

Youth Music/Institute of Education

November 2012

Executive Summary

This research has involved three providers in receipt of Youth Music Action Zone funding in England. In each case, the research has explored the ways in which music provision is conceptualised, structured and delivered. Particular attention was paid to the nature of the partnership between the providers and other organisations, and the extent to which these partnerships strengthened provision. Interviews were held with key members of staff, observations were made of music provision and the young people described their experiences.

The main findings of the research suggest that:

- The young people involved with this research tell of very different paths through the formal education system. What they have in common is a recognition that the time that they have invested in music making in the non-formal sector, through the provision of musical opportunities by the case providers, has had a positive impact on their musical lives and, in addition, impacted on elements of their lives beyond their musicality, such as that of self-confidence, team working, the ability to focus or concentrate, listening skills, working to guidelines, relating to others, forming positive work relations and making friends.
- Most of the young people involved in this research do not describe themselves as 'musicians' as an outcome of *either* the formal or non-formal music education that they have received. Nevertheless, a young person who experiences a successful concept of 'musical me' within several different contexts may be able to cultivate a wider understanding and lived experience of musicality, beyond that of the binary distinction of 'musician' and 'non-musician.'
- In the brief descriptions of these young peoples' experiences, the formal and non-formal musical provision may exist as musical pathways that run on parallel or opposing pathways, with little or no overlap. The young people included in the research have enjoyed relatively long term relationships with the non-formal sector and most continued to attend formal education settings. In these cases, the lack of joining up would appear to stem, in part, from the young person's desire to explore different conceptions of musicality within different settings, a perceived lack of suitable instruments within the formal context or a perceived mismatch between the academic (written) approach in formal settings and the practical (music making) approach in non-formal settings.
- The process of 'joining up' music education provision would appear more complicated than previously expressed. There is a need to consider the process not only from a structural perspective, enabling formal and non-formal providers to work more effectively together, but also from a pedagogical perspective, ensuring that the inherent strengths of musical provision in the non-formal sector are not diluted from the young person's perspective, thus

guaranteeing that the access to high quality musical experiences in a variety of contexts are the automatic right of every young person.

- The case music providers have drawn attention to a perceived lack of mutual understanding between partners in the formal and non-formal settings, in terms of their 'ways of working' and common understandings of terminology. Research evidence (see Section 4), that seeks to illustrate both commonalities and differences may begin to provide a common understanding and a common language that will enable meaningful conversations between partners.
- A positive pupil-teacher relationship has been associated with higher levels of identification with music at school (Lamont, 2002:54; Saunders, 2010:448) and in turn, pupil-teacher relationships have been found to be more positive where pupils feel that they are able to achieve (Spence, 2005:51). The responses in this research suggest that the young person/practitioner relationship is more complex. The young people described a relationship in which the practitioner was respectful of, and interested in, the young person's musical opinions and preferences. To build and maintain a positive relationship, the practitioner accommodates the young person as a musically 'significant other' who is able to mediate musical encounters in social contexts beyond the immediate setting of the practitioner.
- Working with partner organisations was seen as a positive process, as there were strengths in the 'different methods of delivery and ways of working.' Providers stated that there was not only a 'huge amount to learn from one another,' but that they could achieve better 'value for money' through the 'sharing of resources.' This was felt to be important as through shared resources (such as office space) partners would be able to communicate more effectively and 'find out about things by simply being there.' In addition, effective working between partners would enable the young people to gain experience of a 'variety of ways of working with music, outside the mainstream' of school music.
- Trust is needed so that partners feel that they are able to openly discuss issues, whilst time is required to revisit aspects as needed and clarify issues for all concerned (e.g. Hallam, 2010). Those case providers who reported repeatedly successful programmes with partner organisations were those who had, over an extended period of time, developed open and strong relationships.
- A key element underlying the variable success of partnership working would seem to be lack of time. Sufficient lead time must be introduced into planning stages that allows for each of the partner organisations to agree their aims and their roles well in advance of beginning the programme.
- The professional development of staff is central to the on-going success of any programme. Findings suggest that there is a need to 'define common content and teaching standards, but allow for diverse approaches and styles' (Robinson, 1998:38).
- In the best examples of music provision, the young people themselves play a role in the decision making process. Case providers describe how they consult with young people at the earliest planning stages, how steering groups of young people are formed and how the young people are trained independently to evaluate the outcomes of the provision. By so doing, the providers ensure that the young people's voice, in both a musical and advisory role, is heard.
- Evidence from the research suggests that there is an on-going need to provide engagement activities that act as 'hooks' in order for young people, particularly vulnerable young people, to re-engage with the learning process.
- Although these short term engagement activities may lead to a longer and deeper engagement with music provision, they also play a vital part in offering young people a high quality musical experience and a lifeline.
- For some young people, the patchwork of 'short term kicks' can be seen instead as a series of stepping stones across potentially stormy waters.