



The Music Lab: How can music-making practices in Music Education Hubs in England incorporate youth voice?

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Key objective

This action research project examines how Youth Voice can be embedded in music-making practices within classical music education, with a view to opening up classical music to participation from a wider range of groups in society.

Background and rationale

Sound Connections is a sector support organisation working with Music Education Hubs and other music education providers across England. In the past five years, we have supported around 25 organisations delivering classical music education by providing Youth Voice training, delivering youth consultations, setting up young producers groups and diversifying boards to include young trustees. By 'Youth Voice' we mean listening to young people, valuing what they say and acting upon it; empowering young people to shape, lead and produce their own activities; and enabling young people to be involved at a governance level of organisations and be part of decision making.

Through Sound Connections' research and evaluation we have learnt that there is a need for more understanding about Youth Voice within musical practice, from thinking about how ensembles and projects are conceptualised, to the skills and methods music educators need to work with young people in a more democratic way. Indeed, the challenges that Hubs are facing around devising and implementing Youth Voice into the pedagogies, instruments, repertoire and practices of classical music are perhaps not surprising given that this model goes against the standard practices in classical music education. As Anna Bull has found in her research into young people in classical music ensembles, the 'pedagogy of correction' that is central to classical music education has little space for Youth Voice (2019).

Therefore, this project aims to build on Sound Connections' ongoing work with Hubs in scaffolding Youth Voice into organisational structures in order to ask how Youth Voice might be incorporated into Hubs' *musical* activities, by setting up a 'Music Lab'. This project aims to work in dialogue with existing practices of classical music in order to support pupils to identify where Youth Voice already exists within their musical practices. It brings in a musical facilitator and youth worker to explore new possibilities to contribute to the social and creative renewal of this tradition.

Project plan

This project involves a series of workshops with Lewisham Music Education Hub that aim to explore and generate new practices for Youth Voice in classical music education. This is an action research project, which means that the research lead Dr Anna Bull will contribute to the project design and document the project in order to feed into the toolkit that will be created from the project.



Timeline and activities (please note timeline may change due to Covid-19)

September 2020	Planning meeting with the Hub leadership
Nov 2020	Recruit young people to be involved, from those who are currently taking 1:1 lessons or small groups lessons with the hub, of any level of musical ability. Two groups will be recruited, one from ages 9-14 and another from ages 15-18 (10 young people in each group). Obtain parent/carer approval for the research. Hub staff will also be invited to be involved if they wish.
Oct-Dec 2020	Project team planning meetings
Jan 2021	Part one: Introductory workshops (two workshops with ten pupils in each, as above). See detailed description below.
Feb 2021	Building on what happens in the initial workshop, the project team, musical facilitator and youth worker will come together to devise the three musical workshops
Feb-March 2021	Part two: The Music Lab. Musical workshops over three sessions with each of the two groups led by the musical facilitator and youth worker (see detailed description below)
March 2021	Part three: Closing workshop and reflections (see detailed description below)
April-May 2021	The project team (Jenn Raven, Lawrence Becko, Anna Bull, Liz Coomb) will devise a toolkit, in discussion with the Hub, for dissemination to hubs nationally, to support developing youth voice in classical music education.

Overview of activities

Part one: Initial workshops. These workshops (two workshops with around ten young people in each) will introduce young people to principles of Youth Voice and explore why this is important for democratic participation and inclusion. The main activity of the workshop will be young people analysing their current musical practice to identify where Youth Voice already exists, and exploring in what ways their music making could further incorporate Youth Voice.

Part two: The Music Lab. Over three sessions the musical facilitator together with a youth worker will carry out workshops with groups of young people and their teachers to set up musical projects or activities that address the points that were identified within young people’s musical practice as being supportive of Youth Voice.

Part three: Closing workshop and reflections. A closing workshop with each of the two groups will return to the question of where Youth Voice could or does exist within young people’s musical practices, and reflect on what has or hasn’t worked as part of this process.