

Sound Connections

Case study

innovate 2014: Insight on the Inside - Gawain Hewitt and Ty Chijioke

Written by Gawain Hewitt

August 2015



Artists

Gawain Hewitt is an experienced music leader who has worked in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), special educational needs and disability (SEND), and mainstream settings over the past ten years. He is an Associate Artist of Sound Connections, and is Associate National Manager: Research & Development for Drake Music, an organisation working in music, disability and technology.

Ty is a Mercury-nominated rapper with an established reputation in the UK music scene. Throughout his career Ty has run workshops as an artist. Ty has featured as a guest artist on Serious' Pass It On project in PRUs in Lewisham, Merton and Abbey Wood. Recently Ty has run a series of workshops in prisons and Young Offender Units.

Introduction

Following a series of workshops that Ty and I had co-led in PRUs, we reflected on the culture of professional musicians working as artist-tutors in challenging circumstances, and how – with training – there would be scope for development in repertoire and reflective practice. We also discussed the potential for Ty to develop towards becoming a workshop leader, strategically designing and running his own music workshops.

From this idea we talked about potential contexts, and decided to try and work with a Young Offenders Institute (YOI). A partnership was formed and agreed with Feltham YOI B Side, a prison for young men aged 18-21, and on this basis we sought funding for the project. The objective was to create a bespoke continuing professional development programme (CPD) for Ty delivered by myself on a one-to-one basis, and then tested in the planning, running and evaluation of music workshops in a specific context – in this case, Feltham YOI B Side.

Insight on the Inside

Insight on the Inside was a project with two parallel aims: to provide five high quality workshops to inmates at Feltham YOI, and to develop Ty's skills as an artist and workshop facilitator focusing on work in challenging settings.

The workshops were designed to be vocally based, and centered around the ability for spoken word and rap music to facilitate the exploration of the following key subject areas:

Musical: Rhythm, flow, structure, songwriting, awareness of self and group.

Emotional: The power of music to influence emotions.

Music sessions are run regularly by Feltham YOI themselves as part of their education programme. Led by Course Director David Smart, participants work mainly on music technology, although there is also drums, guitars and pianos available, and a good sized rehearsal and performance space with stage and lights.

A significant change in the project occurred when our partners at Feltham YOI underwent a change in education provider and were therefore not able to honour the partnership within the funded period. Together with Sound Connections, we re-wrote the project to be delivered in a PRU instead, but retaining the same focus of the

development of artist skills in a workshop environment through one-to-one CPD and supported workshop delivery.

The project itself consisted of seven project meetings and two workshops. During the meetings we covered project design, funding and session planning.

"I definitely learned that planning workshops is a weakness, that when tackled enables you to safely predict a better outcome. It's definitely made me want to start planning more deeply."

Ty

"It was very refreshing to approach a workshop from this direction, from this basis, and the outcomes really surprised me. I wouldn't have dreamed of doing a workshop in this fashion, but this taught me a lot about different ways to engage with people with different attention spans."

Ty

In addition to the exploration of the structure of project work, during the planning of the workshops Ty and I decided to build upon a practice of improvisational music creation that I had been using with four other artist-tutors during the Pass It On workshops with Serious.

Outcomes

This work had never been attempted with vocals, and so it was of genuine interest to both of us as to whether it would work. While it felt initially risky in the classroom, the session ended up being a real success, with deep and sustained musical engagement. The shape of the session focused on affirming the young person's musical choices through looping and recording spontaneously, building an instrumental composition that developed almost before the young person's ego or self awareness had caught up. This was very interesting in this setting, as it circumnavigated the 'can't' learning and social culture in a PRU, kept the appreciation and creation process in a very spontaneous space, and served to increase self-confidence as the participants realised that they had been a part of the creative process.

"What really worked as well was not showing him the video at first. So they didn't have a marker to judge themselves by. It wasn't presented to him as 'I'm a rapper', he kind of stumbled into realizing I could rap, wanted me to do more, and then eventually revealed himself."

Ty

Conclusion

There is absolutely no doubt at all in my mind that the work with Ty both set Ty on a journey towards new places as a teacher, and introduced him to the broader context of music leading and the educational world within which it exists. It did, however, highlight the specialist skills that music leaders in challenging circumstances need, and that a combination of taught sessions, mentoring, and co-leading are essential for strategic leading skills to develop to the level required by the most marginal participants in education.