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CHAPTER 10
Assessment for Self Directed Learning in Music Education

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INTRODUCTION
This chapter will explore the role of assessment in the self directed learning (SDL) of pupils, a theme that is relatively underexposed in the literature and support for school practice. It would be fair to say that self directed learning presents many challenges to current assessment practices, which are not easily adaptable to SDL, rendering the relationship highly problematic. In some seminal and pioneering research on SDL Lucy Green tacitly acknowledges this in noting:

Another central educational issue that was left untouched, at least from the research point of view, concerns assessment.....teachers found that they could apply their usual assessment methods to the project. It would be fascinating to investigate exactly how they did this, and to develop approaches that combine best practice, or that offer alternative approaches.....This could include considering approaches to assessment based on apprenticeship models of learning, as well as how to give more weight to pupil self-assessment and peer assessment.

(Green 2008: 184).


By way of pursuing a critical perspective on these issues this chapter will examine two case study examples from the UK: the Musical Futures project and the National Strategy Key Stage 3 Music Programme. Self directed learning is here taken to be an approach to music education exemplified by, but not entirely synonymous with, the Musical Futures project. Current assessment practice, especially ‘assessment for learning’, is taken to be exemplified by, but not entirely synonymous with, the National Strategy. The conclusions to the analysis while targeted at the self directed learning of pupils, probably have wider implications for music education that warrant investigation outside of this chapter.

This chapter then, aims to show why the ‘bolting on’ of current assessment practices to SDL is problematic and how the relationship can be reconceptualized. We first need to recap the ‘classic’ accounts of SDL and current assessment practices to establish the cause of the alleged dissonance.

SELF DIRECTED LEARNING
It is worth remembering that SDL was developed as a possible solution to ongoing issues of pupil alienation from school music (see Schools Council 1971; Harland et al. 2000). Music has often been reported as the most unpopular subject in the school curriculum and yet paradoxically the most important to pupils outside of school. The history of music education in the late twentieth

and early twenty-first centuries charts various attempts to ‘heal’ this alienation. For example, SDL as exemplified in Musical Futures is aimed at addressing the ownership of school music by focusing on pupils’ interests (as opposed to those of the state or individual teachers). In short, the approach privileges pupils as curriculum makers rather than curriculum consumers (see Philpott 2010). Clearly any approaches to assessment employed in such work will also need to aim at supporting all pupils having access to achievement in school music.

For the sake of brevity the classic exemplification of SDL will be taken from the work of Musical Futures and in particular the Hertfordshire Pathfinder Project (see www.musicalfutures.org and Green 2008). As part of this project Lucy Green used her work on how pop musicians learn (Green 2001) to research a
classroom pedagogy which exploits informal learning processes i.e. the processes that some popular musicians seem to employ when learning in music.

Playing music of one’s own choice, with which one identifies personally, operating both as a performer and a composer with like minded friends, and having fun doing it must be high priorities in the quest for increasing numbers of young people to benefit from a music education which makes music not merely available, but meaningful, worthwhile and participatory.

(Green 2001: 16)

The model for self directed (sometimes called informal) learning and pedagogy devised by the Musical Futures research team was based on five principles (see Green 2008: 9-10).

- Pupils work with music chosen by themselves that they enjoy and identify with;
- Pupils work in the main aurally through listening and copying;
- Pupils work with peers in groups chosen by themselves;
- Skills and knowledge are gained in a haphazard fashion with whole ‘real’ pieces at the core;
- Listening, performing and composing are integrated throughout the learning process.

Crucial to developing this approach to SDL is the role of the teacher. SDL draws upon and promotes informal learning and thus aims to begin with the musical ideas and knowledge of the pupils themselves. The role of the ‘teacher’ in the learning process is relatively non-interventionist where teachers are seen as facilitators and a resource for the pupils to draw on. The ‘new’ relationships outlined in the project (between pupil-pupil, pupil-teacher) are key to ownership of the music and personalisation of the musical learning. The expectation of the teacher is to:

- Establish ground rules for behaviour;
- Remind pupils of the ongoing task at the start of each session;
- Stand back and observe what the pupils are doing;
- Empathize with the pupils perspectives and the goals they set themselves;
- Diagnose pupils needs in relation to these perceived goals;
- Offer suggestions and models for pupils to achieve their self set goals;
- Be available for help but not for instructing in the ‘normal’ way.

While an over simplified account of SDL it can be seen that this approach is an antithesis to the ‘formal’ notion that teachers set learning objectives, communicate them to the pupils, plan and deliver a set of strategies to achieve these objectives and assess (during and after) the extent to which these have been achieved.

However, it would be fair to say that despite a large and excellent output of supporting literature and materials from Musical Futures, assessment for SDL is underplayed. If anything (as we shall see) we are encouraged to use existing strategies that are common to current schooling.

ASSESSMENT

There are two broad, although highly interrelated approaches to assessment commonly abroad: assessment of learning (sometimes called summative assessment) and assessment for learning (sometimes referred to as formative assessment).

Assessment of learning (AoL)
Assessment of learning involves:

tests that are infrequent, isolated from normal teaching and learning, carried out on special occasions with formal rituals….

(Black et al. 2003: 2)
Assessment here might include an examination; a portfolio; written test; aural test; end of unit test; end of key stage levelling; a test of musical ability. Such assessment is typically teacher focused and aims to make judgements about the learning and understanding of pupils at the end of a teaching programme, course or unit of work. While it is common for us all to make judgements about music (we all know what is good or bad!), the basis upon which we make these is highly problematic in the context of pupils’ SDL. Issues here surround two related themes (a) the nature of summative assessment criteria used in, for example, the national curriculum and post 14 examination specifications, and (b) the background of teachers / music educators making the judgements in relation to these. What are the critical issues when using summative criteria in SDL and when making judgements about composition and performance?

A wide range of musics arise in the contemporary ‘formal’ music classroom and this is especially true of SDL. Making judgements about these musics (especially composition) is a challenge for music educators confronted as we are by issues of tastes, value and subjectivity. However, there are aspects of assessment criteria that while parading as objective, derive from a socio-cultural construction of what counts as ‘good’ music. For example, assessment criteria in music education are often shot through with the following features:

- the more complex the music the better e.g. the ‘more’ form it has (complexity);
- the more original the piece the better (originality);
- the more difficult a piece is the more worthy it is of higher levels of musicality (difficulty);
- the more diverse the set of influences the better (breadth);
- that there is a linear progression of development through these features to attain higher ‘levels’ (linearity).

When used to judge a wide range of musics such criteria, which appear as transcendental, are problematic. It is clear that the values of complexity, originality and breadth are not necessarily shared by all music’s and could prejudice the assessment of some types of musical achievement if summatively applied to work produced by pupils. It is but short hop to the notion that some musics are better than others and that we learn in a linear and quantifiable way. This is a subtle process and Spruce notes how this has been reinforced by the pervasive values of classical music being taken as both autonomous and universal.

The hegemony of western classical music is then rationalized by evaluating non-art music (pop) on art music’s (classical) terms: as an autonomous object, detached from its social and cultural context, valued only in terms of relationships between its musical materials. An exercise in which non art music can only come off worse. Thus the bourgeois aesthetic is confirmed as intrinsically superior and, by association, so are its consumers and creators.

(Spruce 1999: 79)

As Green suggests the implication for assessment criteria is that even when the state and teachers at grass roots level support the notion of ‘musics’ (as opposed to music) they are written to appeal to ‘the very same qualities of universality, complexity, originality, or autonomy upon which the values of classical music rested.’ (2003: 266).

The related notion of linear progress and development is also a highly questionable account of how we learn in music. As Cain (2001) has suggested, the metaphor of moving (racing?) upwards in straight line towards a predetermined point does not best describe how musicians learn in all (if any?) cultures and traditions. In relation to his experience of ‘folk’ music he notes that:

The idea of learning simple music as a preparation for learning more difficult music is alien, as is the notion of mastering scales or other technical exercises in order to play more complicated music.

(Cain 2001: 112)

He suggests that the ‘theme park’ might be a more authentic metaphor for musical progress where pupils explore the attractions and some ‘choose to go on the same ride over and over again’. Given the
haphazard learning and progress noted in the Musical Futures pathfinder research this is an important counter to the linearity embedded in summative assessment criteria.

A case study example of these issues can be found in the assessment materials written to support the Musical Futures project (www.musicalfutures.org/assessment) where the achievements of self directed learning are mapped onto the National Curriculum level criteria to show compatibility. These criteria outline quantitative shifts in the musicality of pupils and assumptions about linearity and breadth abound. For example, at level 4 ‘pupils are able to improvise phrases as part of the overall structure; while at level 5 they are able to improvise solos as part of the overall structure of the piece’. By level 8 an example is given of a composition that not only ‘uses the traditional conventions of a ballad, but also challenges those conventions’ (p. 22-23). The ‘assessment toolkit for informal learning’ developed by the project also maps to the National Curriculum levels and perpetuates the notion that ‘more of’ and complexity is a valid measure of musical achievement. At level 4 pupils ‘explore the relationship between sounds and how music reflects different intentions’ while at level 7 they can ‘discriminate and explore musical conventions in and influences on, selected styles and traditions’. Furthermore, a sheet showing difficulty levels for performance suggests that at the ‘easy’ level the pupil can ‘play 2-3 note melodies...with simple pulse rhythms’ while at the difficult level they can ‘play...a wide melodic range....and the melody moves independently of other parts’. Finally, a sheet that is a model for the summative assessment of composition suggests that at level 4 pupils can compose ‘simple musical ideas’ and that at level 7 they can ‘compose in different styles’.

Such examples serve to show that for the assessment of self directed learning the default is a ‘bolt on’ which perpetuates some of the very assumptions which the Musical Futures project aims to challenge i.e. the pervasive ideology of classical music. They also illustrate the relative immaturity of assessment strategies in relation to SDL compared with other aspects of this approach.

It is understandable that the Musical Futures project would want to be seen as compatible with the National Curriculum and yet by sanctioning such criteria it espouses the very values that it aims to address which have the potential to be prejudicial to music exhibiting other characteristics e.g. music of simple structure, with simple melody, few harmonic shifts and yet composed and performed with sensitivity and musicality. Music with aesthetic values which champion repetition and simplicity of texture and form can be great music. Given that SDL is by definition often haphazard and that it promotes the quality of music making above any quantitative measure of difficulty or breadth, it is questionable whether such criteria, derived from the dominant ideology of western ‘art’ music, are appropriate for self directed learning (or indeed any musical learning). By way of summary the position here is captured by Swanwick’s assertion that:

> Complexity by itself is no virtue. Performing wide range of complex music without understanding would definitely not count as a high level of achievement. And it is certainly possible to perform, compose and enjoy a high quality musical experience without any great complexity.

(Swanwick 1999: 78)

Summative criteria based on the assumptions and values of western art music impinge upon social justice for pupils. Assessment criteria and the practices of AoL have perpetuated the alienation from school music noted earlier. For example, some authors (see Lamont and Maton 2008; 2010) suggest that pupils perceive post 14 music courses to have an ‘elite’ content based on possessing specialist knowledge against which they are reluctant to be judged. The playing of certain types of instruments (usually learned outside of the classroom) and certain types of musical backgrounds are more likely to predispose a pupil to success here. In short, those who have benefitted from an aesthetic which is consonant with the assessment criteria are most likely to choose and succeed in these courses to the exclusion of others who may have ongoing ambitions in relation to other musical traditions (see Philpott 2001). Furthermore, there is some evidence to suggest that those who play a ‘classical’ instrument are more likely to opt for music at post 14 (see Bray 2000). Although there is a need for up to date research on this theme it is clear that low uptake at GCSE continues to be an issue for music (compared to say those who choose art; see Evans in the volume) and thus there are few reasons to suggest that things are currently any different.
Given that one of the main aims of SDL is to heal the paradox of pupil attitudes to (school) music, embracing criteria which perpetuate this alienation is a serious threat to the outcomes of projects such as *Musical Futures*. The criteria of summative assessment are not ‘owned’ by pupils, derive from a tradition that has taken on transcendental significance and espouse values that are not fit for purpose of assessing all musics (if indeed any music). These values have little to say to the assessment of SDL driven as they are by privileging qualities that have a spurious universality.

Finally, there is some evidence to suggest that the backgrounds of music teachers also works to reinforce the ideological issues arising from AoL outlined above. As Green has noted:

> The majority of school music teachers in the UK and most other countries have classical backgrounds.

(Black et al. 2003: 2)

Assessment for learning (AfL) is an altogether more promising strategy for SDL:

> Assessment activities which fall into this category are in one sense the most natural and can be recognized in the account of the teacher’s role in SDL noted previously. Assessment for learning is about the ongoing dialogue about music between pupils and teachers (and pupils and pupils) and will include questioning; feedback; target setting; sharing criteria; self assessment; peer assessment.

Self directed learning in its purest form is initiated by pupils who set their own objectives for learning. In AfL the objectives for the learning experience are fundamental to an interventionist approach and usually assume that objectives are set by the teacher. It is here that the critical issues surrounding the ‘bolting on’ of AfL to SDL can be found. Box 10.1 provides an analysis of these issues.

AfL is also known as ‘formative assessment’ and it is a common expectation that teachers ‘form’ the learning of their pupils. This is problematic, for teachers acting formatively through interventions that are not consonant with the interests of the pupils can perpetuate alienation from ‘school music’.
interventions always throw up issues of ownership and ownership underpins the fundamental philosophy of SDL.

Musical Futures have published a pamphlet that provides a comparative analysis of the project and the NSKSMP (http://www.musicalfutures.org.uk/resource/27233) by means of illustrating compatibility. As with the National Curriculum comparison noted earlier it is understandable why the project would want to be politically acceptable to the wider educational community. However, this comparison is not only selective but also compromises the radical implications of SDL; the differences in underpinning philosophies are there for all to see (see Box 10.2). This comparison is further evidence that SDL is in need of research into how assessment can, in Fautley’s words, ‘be reconfigured afresh’ and not ‘bolted on’ to current orthodoxies.

Problematising the assessment strategies of AoL and AfL does not mean they have no role to play SDL, and we now turn to what an assessment for self directed learning framework might look like.

TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK OF ASSESSMENT FOR SELF DIRECTED LEARNING (AFSDL)

The issues problematised above are unlikely to find much resonance with the meta-theories of writers such as Swanwick (see 1988). For Swanwick the notion that ‘to teach is to assess’ underpins an interventionist philosophy of learning based on music teachers establishing and planning a productive tension between musical encounters and musical instruction. The Piagetian model of musical development he proposes is, he maintains, an invariant feature of the musical mind and is thus universal and cross cultural. His model of musical development, in the form of a celebrated spiral, plots qualitative shifts in the nature of musical engagement and as such can form the basis of both AoL and AfL. It must be said that this theory is both intellectually and practically attractive to music teachers. If it can be shown that the model of musical development / engagement has universal validity then issues of a musical assessment are solved (see Philpott 2009).

However attractive this may be it is not so certain that the model is not shot through with the tacit assumptions noted earlier. Efforts to illustrate how the model is compatible with statutory assessment criteria (see Swanwick 1994) has done little to dispel this impression.

There was something about translating from the qualitative to the quantitative that neutered the underlying principles....In mimicking...level descriptions Swanwick also seemed to firm up a sense of one-dimensional linearity in the spiral.

(Philpott, 2009:69-70)

In the context of SDL, which champions plurality and ownership, Swanwick’s model of development and associated assessment criteria does not transcend the issues that surround assessment interventions in self directed learning. For example, whose chooses the encounters and on what basis does planned instruction take place in self directed learning?

Fautley has noted the need for a new approach to assessment for ‘informal’ learning where:

..a shift has occurred, from teacher to learner, and from teaching to learning...and so assessment has to reflect this. What this means is a shift in approach from assessing how much of a programme of study learners have absorbed, to how much progress they have made on their own terms...with pupil progress being self referentially evaluated against their attainment.

(Fautley 2010: 202)

Fautley goes on to recommend ‘privileging formative assessment’, although as we have seen this is not necessarily a fresh reconfiguration. This is a complex task and what follows below aims to provide a framework for considering assessment for SDL based on the work of Folkestad.
Throughout this chapter there has been an explicit tension between formal learning (initiated by teachers) and informal learning (initiated by pupils). Indeed, one of the problems to be overcome in developing an assessment for self directed learning is to unpack the myth that SDL is synonymous with ‘informal’ learning. Folkestad (2005; 2006) has recognized that the relationship between the formal and the informal is immensely complex and yet subject to popular and simplistic assumptions. For example, both formal and informal learning can take place in any physical space and is not limited to the school – home / community dichotomy.

...it is far too simplified, and actually false, to say that formal learning only occurs in institutional settings and that informal learning only occurs outside of school...what are described as formal and informal learning styles are aspects of the phenomenon of learning regardless of where it takes place.

(Folkestad 2005: 283)

From Folkestad (2006) we will see that many of the problems surrounding the discourse of SDL are related to its common characterisation as being informal learning. Following an analysis of the research literature he maintains that an understanding of the relationship between the formal and informal is crucial to understanding all musical learning. He proposes the following distinction:

Formal leaning can be characterized as the intentional predetermined sequencing of learning activities by ‘a person who take on the task of organising and leading the learning activity’ (Folkestad 2006: 141). Teaching is always part of the formal moment whoever does it.

Informal learning can be characterized as being ‘not sequenced beforehand’ and occurs during ‘self chosen and voluntary activity’.

(Folkestad 2006: 141).

For Folkestad the crucial issue here is of the intentionality of the learner. Formal learning is found when the minds of pupils and teachers are directed towards learning how to play music. Informal learning is found when minds are directed towards playing and making music. Furthermore, ‘what characterizes in most learning situations is the instant switch between these learning styles and the dialectic interaction between them’ (2006: 142). We can characterize this switch as ‘flipping’, for example, when a band improvises over a riff but then stops while one member teaches the others how to play a chord. Most musicians of all types will have experienced ‘flipping’ although the ‘formal’ moment is often so prioritized in music education that this experience often needs to be ‘excavated’ (see Finney and Philpott 2010). And so for Folkestad, the relationship of formal to informal is not a dichotomy but a continuum ‘and that in most learning situations, both of these aspects of learning are in various degrees present and interacting...’ (2006: 143). In line with the continuum of formal and informal learning we can suggest that assessment in music can operate on a parallel and matching continuum.

However, as far as an AfSDL is concerned the crucial ingredient to be added to this analysis of the relationship between formal and informal learning is ownership i.e. what Folkestad terms as decisions about ‘what to do as well as how, where and when?’ (p. 142).

Issues of alienation from formal learning, pedagogy and assessment have hinged on the ownership of school music. The SDL of Musial Futures was designed to heal this wound in the UK. The point to be made here is that formal learning (how to play) is most likely to be accepted when it is perceived to be needed by the pupils themselves arising out of their interests (focused on playing and making music) and thus owned by them. By the same token assessment strategies that arise out of such ownership are more likely to support an unalienated musical learning for pupils. Teaching and most forms of assessment are always part of the formal moment of learning but need to be owned by the pupils if they are to support SDL. Figure 10.1 below aims to model what we have suggested thus far.
The formal – informal continuum of musical learning is characterized by constant ‘flipping’ between the orientations of a focus on how to play and a focus on making and playing music. Teaching (even self teaching) is always in the formal moment as are most assessment strategies to be found in current orthodoxies. Teaching and assessment can exist in an un-alienated relationship with the informal moment if there is ownership. What does ownership mean in an assessment for self directed?

An example of this model could be as follows:

A group of pupils decide that they will learn and perform a song during their school lunch breaks. After doodling on instruments individually they jam together haphazardly in a broad imitation of the opening of the song. Amy has worked out the main riff and teaches the others to varying levels of approximation to the original. Dan begins to have stab at some of the vocal lines above the riff. The group cannot quite work out the chords (to their satisfaction) that accompany the riff and approach the guitar teacher to ask if he can teach them the two chords they need. They continue to jam on the song with the ‘bits’ they have both worked out and been taught by others.

In this example we can see ‘flipping’ on the continuum and ownership of the musical learning by the pupils themselves. But what of assessment? Strategies associated with AoL and AFL are legitimate practices here when arising out of the pupils’ self directed objectives, criteria for success and outcomes. In the example above summative assessment (AoL) is most likely to exist in an un-alienated relationship with the pupils if they have set and agreed these and ‘teachers’ (who ever they are) can share their perceptions of progress with pupils on this basis. In relation to AFL the guitar teacher would have made interventions based on a diagnosis of the pupils self driven needs and would have given them feedback to achieve their self declared learning outcomes. However, the strategies of self and peer assessment hold a primacy in SDL and these are most commonly integrated into the very act of making and playing music itself. These could have been found in the ongoing development of approximations to the riff as the music is played in the ‘jam’ or in a simple look that says ‘we have nailed it’.

This model provides a framework for considering the context within which AfSDL can take place. There is much potential here for action research that explores the implications of ‘flipping’ and ownership in self directed musical learning (perhaps all musical learning) for assessment. Such work is important in developing greater maturity to this fledgling aspect of music education.

CONCLUSION
We have seen how the classic strategies of AoL and AFL can militate against ownership and perpetuate the alienation that pupils have commonly felt towards school music. If these strategies are to be owned by pupils as they arise out of self directed learning, then they will need to fulfil the following conditions in the model above (Figure 10.1):

- by promoting the primacy of self directed work;
- by the use of ‘local’ criteria that arise out of the self directed objectives of pupils;
The view from the classroom

- by promoting the primacy of self and peer assessments using these criteria;
- through teacher / leader assessment interventions (AoL and AfL) using these criteria that are based on the needs of the pupils themselves;
- an acceptance by teacher / leaders that there are times when no assessment interventions are appropriate and trusting that learning will take place.

For teachers and leaders of music this points to a subtle and nuanced pedagogy, a pedagogy that promotes an un-alienated relationship with school music and in which ownership is at the centre of assessment for self directed learning. This is challenging work for teachers of all types. There will be concerns that leaving pupils to set their own objectives and to establish their own criteria for summative and formative assessments is a tall order. However, there is enough evidence in the rich engagement of pupils arising out of the Musicals Futures research, that we can trust pupils to make the most of genuine ownership of their learning when they are presented with the opportunities to do so. There will be concerns from teachers at a non interventionist approach to assessment in self directed learning; what is their role as teachers and facilitators of learning? The implications are for teachers to know when to let go, to trust the pupils and to base their interventions on the self declared needs and interests of the pupils themselves.

SDL as exemplified in projects such as Musical Futures has a huge potential to heal the wounds of alienation that have visited music education in the UK, and yet for those who engage with its principles there remains much work to be done in researching and developing AfSDL. This chapter has aimed to support this process in what is an area of relative immaturity for SDL. However, while the focus and foreground here has been specifically on an assessment for self directed learning (in order to make specific critical points) there are probably wider implications for music education that are worth investigating.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. This chapter takes a view that ‘classic’ assessment strategies can work against social justice in self directed learning in music. To what extent do you feel that statutory criteria and teachers’ interventions can inhibit the self directed outcomes of pupils’ creative and practical work?

2. Do you feel that there is a case for teachers to abandon orthodox assessment strategies in self directed learning? Is there a case for no assessment interventions in self directed work at all?

3. How can the tensions between orthodox assessment strategies and self directed learning be resolved?

4. Is an interventionist AfL incompatible with pupil ‘ownership’ of their learning?

5. Can you identify and describe ‘flipping’ in your own musical learning?

REFERENCES


**WEBSITES**

[www.musicalfutures.org](http://www.musicalfutures.org) (accessed 8 August 2011)

