

The 'Hearing Voices' Pilot Study, September 2006-May 2007

Hearing Voices

- an exploration of the relationship between generalist teacher and specialist visiting musician, and how to frame and develop this relationship to optimise children's existing musical potential.

in partnership between Newcastle University and The Sage Gateshead Music Education Programme [LINK](#)

http://www.thesagegateshead.org/l_and_p/index.aspx and in association with Northumbria University.

This research took the form of an exploratory case study in three early primary classrooms, with children aged 4 – 6 years. Three teachers from two local schools, Hilton Primary and Wylam First School, and two visiting musicians from the SageGateshead Music education programme, acted as participant researchers into aspects of their individual and collective music education praxis which might influence, enhance and enrich both this praxis and the resulting development of the children's musical potential, with the initial period of the project being observed and recorded by two professional researchers, Helen Taylor and Jim Clark of Northumbria University. The study was designed by FL and Sarah Kekus, who heads the SageGateshead programme, in discussion with Helen Taylor and Jim Clark.

This project constitutes an initial mapping of a field which, increasingly, emerges as a crucial site of meaning in the wider area of the re-thinking/changing/transforming of young school children's musical education. Widespread anecdotally expressed concern about this area is reflected in current research which examines areas such as generalist teachers' perceptions of their own access into, and confidence and competence in, music education, the effects of strong musical input into young children's daily lives, and the intricate and strongly debated question of the nature of musical 'talent'. This study may offer a fresh look at one aspect of this wider field, and help to construct a new understanding of the actual relationship between the music specialist, identified by generalists as pivotal in enabling children's musical education, and the generalist herself – identified by all as having the most fundamental significance in children's overall school education. Furthermore, in an open-ended, collaborative process, informed by a mutual respect and a constant *reciprocal* seeking to help the other 'partner', not only a new understanding of this relationship may be reached, but a *new kind of relationship itself* be developed, to the direct and perceivable benefit of the children.

The key research question was as follows:

In what ways might the relationship between generalist teacher and visiting specialist musician be understood, developed and enhanced in order that children's musical potential may best be realised, and to optimise their musical education?

The pilot study was based upon case studies, as observed and written up by the researchers, and, in their research diaries, by the participants (specialists and teachers) making together a 'picture' of 'how things are' and of 'what happens', in a process of co-constructing knowledge.

At the time of writing, the first phase has been completed, and the official report is imminent. Anecdotal accounts from the participants indicate a rich seam of new understanding already emerging which holds a strong potential to make significant advances in this area. The specialist musicians have recorded much new insight and their own experience of learning about children's general and musical perceptions, abilities and development by an intensive engagement with both the children and their teachers, while the teachers have confirmed their growing use of and confidence with musical activity, and the benefits to the children of this uniquely intensive and collaborative approach.

From September 2007, in an ongoing programme based upon the findings of this pilot study, and funded from the CETL based at Newcastle University, the project will be extended to a number of schools (including some or all of those already 'earmarked'), and ideas and materials developed and disseminated locally and nationally over the following two year period.

Felicity Laurence, May 28th 2007