

## **Identifying Musical Talent and Potential (ITP)**

### **Eight Facets of Musical Potential that can be observed within a group context**

In addition to the eight identifiable facets below, we have also found that the following overarching principles relate to working with **all** young people, regardless of setting or ability.

- 1. Context** – Having the right information for each student is important. Whilst it's not always key to know a lot about a student, having some relevant information will give you an individual scale in order to measure their progress by. What might seem like minor changes for some students could represent a significant shift for others. Use the knowledge in the room, eg teaching assistants who know the young people well.
- 2. Non-verbal** – We should consider that not all young people are able to, or confident in, communicating verbally. We should tailor our sessions with this in mind and find ways that allow young people to lead, create and express themselves both verbally and non-verbally.
- 3. Time** – These observations are based on work over one or two sessions. Clearly, for some young people, musical potential may take longer than this to reveal itself. It can often require several repetitions before seeing a response. Therefore, the longer we work with a group of young people, the greater chance we have of observing musical potential.
- 4. Noise** – As a rule, creative music making relies on there being the noise of a group of young people exploring their instruments at the same time. For some young people, they will struggle with those moments of noise. This is something that we should accept and do our best to support those young people through.

### **Enjoyment**

Is the young person smiling as they are engaging with the process? Remember that if they're not smiling this doesn't mean that they're not enjoying themselves, and likewise if they are smiling and laughing this might also be with nervousness or a disruptive playfulness. As a music leader your instinct is to respond positively to an individual who is smiling when you lead them because they're showing an empathy and a positive engagement with the process - just try not to discount other, less obvious, signs of enjoyment within a group.

### **Attentive listening**

There are many ways to observe listening that can be applied in many different contexts. Listening takes time. However, the key question is: do participants listen when you give them instructions? This is crucial to everything that follows.

One musical exercise that can help spot if young people are really listening is to ask them to listen to something played solo and then finding something that fits with this and join in. Are they able to remember what you say and respond to it? Try observing how many participants wait – and listen – before joining in.

## Absorption in the music

Is the young person moving his/her body with the music? Is s/he tapping her foot, is s/he nodding his/her head? Is the person playing by physically moving his/her body? Is the person watching what the leader (or others) are playing and focusing clearly on them, even when everything around them seems chaotic? Context is particularly important here as some young people may not be physically able to demonstrate absorption in this way.

Teaching assistants can be really helpful here as they know the children so well – use the knowledge in the room. There is a difference between opinion and useful information. This is the power of being an outsider.

## Commitment to the process

Individuals can commit to a process in a number of subtle and more obvious ways. Body language and eye-contact are two of the more obvious ones, but some of the more subtle ones can also usefully be observed - eg noting individuals who:

- make a 'mistake' and then readily work to rectify and change it. This demonstrates resilience.
- try things out which might be quite complicated, but then persevere until they are
- sorted out, and
- offer ideas towards a piece or process.

## Inclination to explore

Asking the group to instigate ideas and then observing who responds is one way to notice those who are self-confident and happy to offer creative responses in front of the group.

However not all of these responses will be confident or immediately evident, so an inclination to explore might be better observed by noting:

- How individuals play and 'play with' their instruments,
- How they might find a different way to contribute (the first to use the voice, for instance, in a group improvisation) and
- How they might - when you first offer them an instrument - take an unusual one or try out many different techniques and approaches as soon as they're given it.

## Inclination to lead

Observing those leading can be done in a number of ways. Noting those who volunteer to start a piece/process is, perhaps obvious, but it's important, as it denotes a confidence and, usually, an understanding. However, it's also important to observe those who lead more subtly, from within the group. This can be seen in those who keep their own part going while assisting others (sub-leading if you like) and those who lead changes within a piece once it has begun.

## Memory

Memory in music is a crucial ingredient but, in a one-off session, how can you observe it? One way is through using call-and-response songs and games where there is one part where the call and the response differ (e.g. in *Holeo* and *Don't Clap This One Back*). Try to immediately note who grasps these cues after they are taught and then return to them at the end to see who can remember them. If working over two sessions, then repeat the games/songs the following day/week and see who has musical recall. Again, context is extremely important here as any impediments to memory can have an impact on how the other facets are demonstrated.

## Being expressive

This is a difficult facet to unequivocally define from a group context. However, there are examples of individuals being expressive which can be observed through:

- The way they explore a new instrument when given it for the first time
- How they use their body when asked to create a body rhythm
- How they respond (verbally or physically) when asked a question about an exercise
- How readily they're able to create and play a solo, or within a group-

It's important to note that some expressions aren't easy to read and can be displayed more subtly. This is where some context around students is helpful.

## Outcomes

The initial aim of this work is to provide some approaches/tools for music leaders working in a wide variety of class and group settings, both formal and informal, as to how to identify facets of musical potential. Our hope is that, after one or two filmed sessions of structured group activities, the music leader will be able to identify some facets of musical potential in **all** of the individuals within that group. Once this musical potential has been identified there's then a need for the music leader to:

- a) act on their awareness of the musical potential and to plan and prepare how best s/he can develop that musical potential within the group context and also
- b) decide whether that music potential should additionally be nurtured outside the classroom context and to develop an approach to support this.

Of course, we also hope for additional outcomes that inevitably result from projects of this nature.