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PGCE Year 1

**“Observation of an Experienced Teacher”**

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## **Observation of an experienced Teacher**

As part of my PGCE assessment I was required to observe an experienced teacher. The teacher I arranged to observe was a music technology lecturer from the Media department at Middlesbrough College.

### **The nature of the course**

The session I observed was part of a "Discovery day" for students from local schools aged 15 to 16. In total around 20 students were present, representing two different schools. The session was intended as an opportunity for the students to experience the college environment and learn a little about some of the software and techniques used to create music. This session was similar to those that the lecturer delivered on a weekly basis as part of the HND in Music Technology. The session was scheduled to last for 1 hour and was entitled "Chinese whispers".

### **Strategies being used**

The session began with the lecturer introducing the students to the software they would be using. The software was called "Cubase" and allowed for music to be created from a series of short samples and loops. The software is

used extensively within both the music and media industry. Many of the students present already had some experience of working with the software.

The lecturer continued the introduction by playing some examples of a piece of film that had had some music added that had been created by the HND students. The samples he selected were loud and included striking imagery. This was undoubtedly intended to wake the students up and attract their attention. The examples were displayed on the large interactive whiteboard at the front of the class with the students arranged in semi circle in front of the board.

Following the introduction the lecturer then proceeded to demonstrate the basic techniques to the students. Once again good use was made of the interactive whiteboard. However rather than simply letting the students watch he selected one student to assist him by following his instructions on the computer whilst the others watched. The first student was shown how to add a basic drum loop sound channel. The lecturer then asked another student to add a second sound channel as he talked him through the process. In total six students volunteered to add a channel whilst the others watched and offered assistance. By the end of the demonstration the music consisted of six separate channels that combined to create an effective piece. This process of repetition was a very effective way in which to demonstrate the processes whilst it also remained interesting as the students were adding to the music

rather than just replicating it. Throughout the introduction the lecturer used both direct and indirect questioning whenever the student was unsure what to do next.

Once the lecturer felt that the majority of the group understood the techniques he gave them the task of producing their own original composition using the computers in the room. Each student was allocated a computer, a set of headphones and a handout detailing the techniques they had just covered. They were then given 10 minutes to individually work on the software to compose a piece of music. At this stage the lecturer also made the students aware of the HND student he has asked to join them, who would provide assistance if needed. The lecturer also mentioned that at the end of the session the group would come together for a "big playback".

After the 10 minutes the lecturer then instructed each student to swap places with the student on their left. Each student would then continue working on the other student's piece of work. They were asked to refine the composition and add additional channels. Once again they were allocated 10 minutes.

Once the 10 minutes had passed the students then returned to their original computers and were allocated a further 10 minutes in which they could make

final amendments and prepare the track to be forwarded to the lecturer's computer.

Throughout the stages those students who were experienced with the software were encouraged to use a range of different samples to create a more complex composition. This catered for differentiation.

The three stage process was intended to mimic the music industry. The student initially acted as the composer. Then they acted as producer on the other student's piece. Following this they returned to their composition and adopted the role of sound engineer. This process and its purpose were communicated to the students.

A benefit of the three stage process was that it encouraged the students to move around. Inactivity is a common problem when using computers. Any task that encourages movement and interaction helps to break up the monotony and increases motivation. It also presented the students with an opportunity to assess others work and receive feedback on their composition.

At the end of the third stage the group were gathered back together to summarise the session. Students were asked to volunteer their compositions to be played. Most were eager and as the first few were played the rest of the

students seemed happy to volunteer their work. By the end of the summary every student had had their work played. The lecturer made positive comments throughout and offered some constructive feedback. The majority of the final compositions were extremely impressive and I would say that the session was a huge success and the students obviously enjoyed their time.

### **Communications used**

Throughout the session the lecturer delivered the instructions in a very clear, well paced manner. His delivery was informal and helped to relax the students. At times humour was used. This helped to elevate the mood and increase the students' interest. The lecturer also made good use of the interactive whiteboard to demonstrate the techniques. The use of repetition and questioning helped to ensure that each student understood the processes being covered. The lecturer also made good use of a handout to provide further details and clarification of the processes. At times the lecturer also used music to enliven the session. This coupled with the use of a time limit helped to motivate the students and ensured that the session remained interesting. The lecturer was quite obviously very experienced in delivering this type of session.

**Teacher – student relationship**

Overall the lecturer showed excellent classroom management skills. Every student was attentive and participated in the tasks. This may be due to the students in attendance, but undoubtedly the structure of the session alleviated boredom and provided plenty of tasks. The lecturer dealt with each student in a very professional yet approachable manner. Whilst the class assistant helped to ensure that students could quickly resolve problems even when the lecturer was occupied.

The use of headphones and individual nature of the tasks resulted in quiet class. All students seemed interested in the work.

Throughout the session the lecturer and class assistant gave very positive feedback. Also during demonstrations when each student had completed a technique the class were encouraged to applaud. This had an obvious positive effect on each learner.

**Learning resources**

The session was well planned and resourced. Each student was allocated a computer with the Cubase software, a set of headphones, and a copy of the session handouts. The handout was well prepared. It consisted of a simple to follow set of instructions set out in Times New Roman size 12. Bold text was

occasionally used to highlight key words. It could be argued that the handout should have been set in Comic sans size 14 font, double spaced. However the students had no problems with following the handout.

The classroom assistant proved invaluable throughout the session. Not only could he assist the students but he was also able to offer his view of the course and the College.

The introduction and summary sections of the session made good use of the interactive whiteboard. The board allowed for a student to follow the lecturer's instructions whilst the rest of the group viewed their actions. This allowed the group to offer guidance and feedback. The board also allowed the lecturer to show examples of the HND students' work.

### **Learning objectives**

The learning objectives of this session were relatively simple. The session was intended as a basic introduction to the software as well as the College's Music courses. The lecturer had planned that by the end of the session each student will have produced an original composition that could be saved to CD Rom and taken back to school.

It is possible to map the entire session to Bloom's Taxonomy.

*Knowledge* - The students were shown how to import sound samples using File > Import.

*Comprehension* – The students were then shown how they could “Copy and Paste” samples to create tracks.

*Application* – Once the tracks were selected the students were then required to arrange and structure the samples to produce a basic composition.

*Analysis* – By instructing the students to swap places the lecturer encouraged them to analyse another student’s work and make amendments. This also provided an opportunity for each student to reassess their own work.

*Synthesis* – Once the samples were in place each student was required to “Mix down” and repair their composition before finalising it.

*Evaluation* – During the summary each student’s composition was played and they were asked to explain to the class what they had created and what functions and samples they had utilised.

The session also ensured that each learning style was catered for.

*Verbal / Linguistic* – Students were encouraged to discuss their compositions.

They were asked to explain the genre, tempo and emotion of each piece.

*Logical* – The software required the use of a grid system to position the sound samples. Each bar represented a unit of time and thus the tempo of the piece.

*Visual* – The Cubase software used a visual interface that made good use of an effective layout and colour.

*Kinaesthetic* – The session required the students to move around the class swapping computers and working on each others compositions.

*Musical* – The creation of the composition required the choosing and inputting of the sound samples and loops. Advanced students were also encouraged to experiment with FX and the equaliser.

*Interpersonal* – The students were encouraged to share their experiences and discuss their problems.

*Intrapersonal* – The students were required to work independently to produce their composition. They played the role of composer and producer and had final say on their composition.

### **Sequencing and Timing**

The session was extremely well planned and time was allocated time for each task. The tight time limits helped to give a sense of urgency and encouraged the students to focus on their work. The sequence of the session was also well planned. The session featured a clear introduction, series of tasks, feedback, evaluation and summary.

**Environment and constraints**

The classroom was not ideal. The room was dark and blinds could not be opened as this would have caused viewing problems on the computer screens. The room was also quite hot and caused some drowsiness. However both of these factors were taken in to account by the lecturer. Throughout the session all students were kept actively involved. The loud music and video demonstration helped to keep interest whilst the door and some windows were left open to reduce the temperature.

The main constraint was the time. The session would have benefited from being longer. The end of the session was slightly rushed. However this was unavoidable as one of the schools had arrived 15 minutes late and they all had to leave by a set time.

**Assessment**

The session included several forms of assessment. Throughout the three task stages the lecturer and class assistant used informal observation and questioning to ensure that each student understood what they needed to do and how they could utilise the software. Following the composer stage the students were then asked to swap places. This encouraged peer review and assessment. On returning to their own composition they were then asked to evaluate their own composition and make final amendments. Finally the

session closed with the "Big Playback" in which each student presenting their composition to the group and received feedback from the other students, the lecturer and the school teachers.