

Designing a senior music – sound arts programme at Rutherford College, Auckland

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Rutherford College is a suburban co-ed secondary school in west Auckland, with about 1300 students.

Context

The music department had traditionally offered a programme strongly focused on theory, guitar and keyboard. The instruments were only available to students during class time.

As a new HOD I had some principles about music learning that I wanted to implement. I wanted the music programmes to reflect the 3 disciplines of performance, composition and musicology. These connect to the music key concepts.

I also wanted there to be other music pathways for students through a connection to the community. I wanted students to access instruments outside of just the music classes.

We know these changes have worked as the numbers of students doing senior music has more than doubled in four years.

This music - sound arts programme highlights the emphasis put on inclusiveness and culturally responsive learning environments where all students are able to experience success.

How does this programme fit into the three year progression in this arts subject?

The programme is linked across the three levels of the curriculum.

In year 11, the programme is the same for all students and all students sit the same NCEA assessment standards. This programme is seen as building on junior programmes and setting a base for the demands of the level 7 and 8 courses.

In year 12, more choice is offered and the standards are packaged according to student strengths. If the student is performance orientated he/she will follow a performance programme and within that do some compulsory achievement standards. We also offer the standard focused on the New Zealand music industry, (AS91278) for those students interested in New Zealand music.

The year 13 programme is an individualised programme. The thrust is to offer personalised learning for students that focuses on their strengths in the disciplines of performance or composition or musicology. Exceptional students at this level can opt to be entered for all standards across all three disciplines.

We offer our students opportunities to be assessed in standards not often offered by other schools, that is, Analyse a substantial music work. New Zealand music composers are highlighted in the "contexts" standard (AS91423:Examine the influence of context on a substantial music work) as a way for students to understand the local composition environment in-depth, for example, we use Helen Fisher's *Pounamu* which features solo flute and choir in three different variations: using Māori *koauau*, orchestral flute and Japanese shakuhachi.

How does this programme contribute to raising student achievement?

As the programme is tailored to meet different student needs, all students' capabilities and interests are catered for. For example we offer a performance-oriented course for year 13 students who may not have taken NCEA music. This means that students who perform for cultural groups such as kapa haka, in school for talent quests or at the ASB Polyfest are able to gain credits for music-making activities.

This pathway has been provided so that year 13 students who need another university accredited subject are able to use music credits to gain 14 plus credits for university entrance. This allows them to get up to 14 credits and opens opportunities for them in music that did not exist in the past.

During the first two weeks of the school year we discuss with each of the year 12 and 13 students where they want to go with their music, what they want/should learn. Part of this discussion also covers aspects of key competencies such as managing self and participating and contributing.

How does the programme connect to the school's priorities?

The school initially didn't realise how important music was, its status as an academic subject, even though there was an expectation by music students to perform at public occasions. The school's motto "values every learner" so I took the school assemblies etc. as an opportunity to put music students forward as performers so they would get exposed to performance experience that many lacked. Through these performances the students have grown in confidence and in the beginning they were reluctant to get up on stage. Now they are lining up to perform!

Where does this programme lead to for students?

There are two pathways for students. There are those for whom music becomes an academic pursuit and they study contemporary or classical music at universities, and for others who enjoy the technical nature of music, it leads to careers such as sound engineering. For others music is a passion or an interest so they may play in their own bands or perform with community groups. The emphasis for these students is to continue to enjoy and play music beyond school.

Conditions for learning

How flexible are the learning opportunities?

We are flexible about meeting some students' needs. For example, some senior students have timetable clashes, so we advocate on their behalf and make recommendations with their year level dean and the other subject teacher to make it possible. With the support from the dean, the students then make the choice about what they want to achieve in for that particular period of time - it might be music versus biology. So they might only come to 2 out of 4 music classes but might still take the opportunity to sit the assessment task. This flexibility allows students to get subject endorsements that they otherwise might not have been able to achieve. It also means some students can be accelerated.

We allow some year 10 students to be assessed against some of the NCEA level 1 standards and bank them. We do this so they can spend more time extending themselves in the learning offered by other parts of the programme.

Students are also now using some music credits to get their literacy credits - and for some students this actually means they attain a level 1 or 2 NCEA qualification.

How culturally responsive is the programme?

A wide range of musical styles are used to engage all learners, as we use music as the medium in which to teach tolerance, create cultural understanding and affirm their analysis skills using the musical elements.

We also attempt to expose our students to new and different experiences. We have taken 100 students to the opera: "Marriage of Figaro". For some students not only was this their first experience of theatre but the first time they had been in downtown Auckland! We prepared them for what to expect, such as, reading a ticket to find the right door entrance; the story of the opera, the noise at the beginning as the orchestra tuned. They were great! They made the music department proud in the way they responded to the challenge of a totally new experience.

What are the assessment opportunities?

We use different approaches to assessment. For example we have created two fundraising concerts per year called "Luv Music". All senior music students are involved. The proceeds are all spent on buying new instruments.

In the first concert there is a group assessment at each of level 1, 2 and 3 NCEA.

In the second concert this can be an opportunity for solo performances to be assessed. We use two cameras to record the performances so they can be reviewed and kept as a record.

Some senior students, who have been a bit slack, perform for the junior assembly. The students get some great feedback from the juniors who can be very honest in their assessment of performance!

What evidence do you use to monitor effectiveness of the programme?

We survey students for feedback about the programme. Each student also has a learning portfolio for their own self review. This is also used for peer review. The learning portfolio includes information about NCEA standards, unpacking the NCEA standards, planning, drafting and reflecting on the final process. As a staff we constantly review the student data and discuss with students how they can improve. Our effective teacher feedback has been commented on by NZQA external moderators when reviewing our internal standards.

Content

How does the content relate to your students' world?

To connect students to the music programme I use songs that were relevant to the students world - such as from the top 40. I would use these as triggers for them to learn some basic guitar chords and then relate these back to theory - so they saw the relevance of the theory and not the theory driving the learning (and teaching).

We bring in artists to perform or work with students. We have brought in people such as Naina from Adeaze, Tama Waipara, Marcus Powell from Blindspott and Blacklist. We also use our connections to the music industry and the NZ Music Commission. We have also provided lunchtime concerts, where our network of friends has brought an international artist to perform, such as J Boog, a reggae artist from Hawaii.

How flexible is the content selection?

We offer options within courses. For example in the level 7 programme in 2012 we offered 3 options in composition standard. Students could create music based on the following contexts:

- olympic theme song that would be played to advertise NZ athletes on TV
- NZ poetry e.g. Waitakere Rain
- cartoon theme

for their compulsory composition option.

As the year 13 programme is a personalised programme the students have considerable input into content selection. For example, for the music history external standard, because there were a high percentage of Māori students in the class, I taught Music of the Tangata Whenua as one of the topics.

How does the content in this programme connect to students' learning in other subjects?

Some students take all three arts subjects offered but many just take music.

The link for many students comes through the music theatre production - as they can be involved in multiple roles. Some students are writing text for the musical - so they link this in with their English work.

