

# **Social and emotional learning through evaluation processes in the keyboard laboratory.**

By Michael Griffin, M.Ed

Since Howard Gardner put forward his theory of multiple intelligence, there has been an increase in research by people such as Daniel Goleman in the essential value of *emotional intelligence*, also known as *EQ* (emotional quotient). It is increasingly being acknowledged that EQ may be the most significant and important domain of intelligence in the overall success of our lives, and consequently many schools around the world are including EQ as a core subject in their curricula.

One of the greatest benefits in the integration of music in learning environments is through this enhancement of emotional intelligence.

“The 21<sup>st</sup> Century worker requires new competencies based around emotional intelligence. Technical skills are not enough, life skills are required” (Microsoft Education Paper, 2003).

*Music and Keyboard in the Classroom* provides numerous opportunities for the integration of good EQ practice. For example:

- Students learn how to work independently
- Students are required to work in pairs and small groups
- Students take on teaching roles with other students
- Students assess themselves and others and learn to make judgements
- Students explore their emotional responses to the music studied.
- Students write learning reflections in their music book

I ask my students to sign their work when *they* think they have it right (as below):

This piece has been played successfully.

**Student signature**.....

**Teacher signature**.....

**Date**.....

You might find that some students are reticent to sign it until you check it. But students must learn how to assess their own level of musicianship and by self-assessment they gain confidence in their increasing competence. Hence regular opportunities are provided for students to reflect on their musicianship (and that of their peers), and become knowledgeable and independent judges of musical excellence. The process of comparing their own judgements with those of the teacher will move them closer to this goal of trusting their own judgement.

When the student has signed her work, the teacher should then listen to the exercise. Let me stress again, some students will want you to hear them play before they sign. Don't fall for this! They need to harvest the courage to *try* and make their own evaluation. If judged as successful, it can be signed by the teacher and dated. If it is not satisfactory, the best way to reveal this to the student is through a discovery method. Telling the student what is wrong with their playing without giving them an opportunity to discover it for them selves deprives them of a real learning opportunity. Creative questioning is a technique which leads to a discovery of the problem. For example, I remember one exercise where a student played two bars identically when one was slightly different. Our exchange went something like this, starting off (as always) with a positive remark.

T     *Good! I like the way you played it so fluently, and it was almost note perfect!* (Genuine remark, comment on *what* was good about it, not just "that was good")

S *Almost? What was wrong with it?*

T pauses and smile, allowing student to ponder and start the exploration, sometimes this alone will be enough, but if more prompting is needed:

T *Are these two bars the same?*

S *Yes. No!!*

The student has discovered the error.

Another technique I use is asking the student to think thoughts out aloud in solving a problem. This encourages the meta-cognitive process and quickly gets to the source of misconceptions. (I use this more often in solving theoretical problems such as in determining harmonic choices).

When I first started teaching this classroom keyboard method, students used to put their hand up for my attention on completing an exercise, wanting me to immediately check their work. They did not want to continue until I had done so. Whilst they showed a good deal of enthusiasm in doing this, I could not get around quick enough to satisfy demand, and students would cease working until I had signed their present effort. Hence I instigated some changes to improve this situation.

1. Students no longer summons the teacher for evaluation.

Once they have signed an exercise, the student is to move on to the next exercise. They do not require my signature to move on. I tell them to trust their own judgement and they will be seen to in good time. This might sound tough, but it's important because some students unwittingly dominate teacher time, and we have a duty to observe each member of the class. Hence, I can now get around to all students at my discretion. This also saves student time in waiting for the teacher to sign work, and puts the responsibility on the student to make decisions regarding their progress. It's also illuminating for

the teacher to discover student learning perceptions. However, students are still allowed to ask questions as distinct from seeking teacher evaluation.

2. I am not the only 'teacher' in the classroom.

### ***Student Teachers***

Students who play an exercise particularly well may be granted 'teacher' status for that exercise. This allows them to browse the class and assess others. In my classes, this has been very successful. All students understand the following:

- Student 'teachers' are to be respected and treated like normal teachers. Students who don't respect this process will not get an opportunity to become 'teachers'.
- Student 'teachers' may have their rights revoked if they are too lenient (or too harsh) in signing student work

Students love this part of the course and I have been delighted with how seriously they undertake it. This creates opportunities for higher level learning, and for me to observe their interactions closely. I aim to give every student the opportunity to be a student 'teacher and thus create opportunities for all students to develop student leadership and responsibility.

Students tend to model the teacher's style of instruction. I remember one student 'teacher' using a progressive questioning technique to help her pupil discover the problem of a wrong note. It was another opportunity to encourage with a comment like:

*I like the way you're teaching, Susan; you use questioning really well rather than just giving them the answer. Anyone would have thought you were doing it for years! We need good teachers – maybe one day I could hire you as a music teacher!*

I think the last part of that comment is something we should all do more of; promote the cause of teaching and specifically music teaching. I convey to the students that teaching is an important and worthwhile occupation which brings satisfaction and a lot of enjoyment. We need to promote the status of what we do. I also ask these young 'teachers' if they enjoy helping their peers. Inevitably they love it, and many indicate that they don't get these opportunities in other classes. Again, an opportunity presents itself to encourage them to consider teaching as a profession, and perhaps a few seeds are sown. You might consider introducing some ritual to the student 'teacher' concept, for example the wearing of special teacher hats.

At the outset, we should not assume that students can evaluate or assess themselves as this requires higher order thinking skills that they may not have developed. One exercise which can assist in this is for the teacher to model different levels of playing and ask the students to evaluate them. The examples should illustrate work of high, average and low standard. Students should have a copy of the music notation to refer to, and I would recommend keeping the criteria simple and concrete. Comments on the following would be enough for students to consider because they are simple and pertinent.

- Correct notes
- Fluency
- Appropriate dynamics
- Appropriate tempo

Whilst student attitudes are not necessarily assessed, they are often required to be reported on. Another benefit with the introduction of student teachers in the classroom is that it allows more time for the teacher to observe student behaviour and attitude, and to document comments which can be used in reporting. I make time each lesson for this and write comments at the back of the student book in the designated section for this purpose. This encourages a transparent feedback process. For example:

*I am really pleased with John's acceptance of other ideas in group work...*

*The challenge for Bill is to focus on the task rather than his neighbour...He can do this by staying in the present...*

*Susan has demonstrated clear teaching skills and has helped many others*

*I am delighted to see Jill engage in her work with so much joy. This has a positive effect on other class members.*

Not everything of value can be quantified. For some things, observation is the best provider of information, and these comments provide valuable information come reporting time.

*Not everything that counts can be counted and not everything  
that can be counted counts'*

*Einstein*

As well as the teacher comment, the student has a page to reflect on her own learning. I ask students to write one reflection per lesson on a learning experience. I encourage them to relate it to the feeling of learning and to try to be positive. For example:

*I just mastered lesson 7. I'm so pleased because it's been really difficult for me.*

*There's one section in lesson 8 I just can't get. I think I need to repeat it a lot.*

*Jessie just helped me with lesson 5. It makes more sense now.*

These student-comments might seem simple, but they encourage the meta-cognitive process essential for independent learning.

Research has shown that musicians demonstrate acute self awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, extensive knowledge regarding the nature of different tasks, and what would be required to accomplish that task. Music students are encouraged to learn to learn.

What outcomes do we want? Learning outcomes are about what a student knows, understands and can do. In this course of instruction, all three are contextually related. The mastering of these keyboard exercises demonstrates keyboard skills and the development of musicianship. But what about the implicit outcomes such as group engagement, individual learning, concentration and helping others? These are related to the big ideas of education and the overarching aims. Do we want to assess and report on these, and if so, how do we assess something like group work? Here is an ideal opportunity to work this out with your students. When I presented this to my class, I got the following responses:

- listening to others
- politeness
- being positive
- making contributions
- involving others
- helping others

It was a good list and it came from the students. I told them that I was happy with their list and that I would observe them on the basis of their criteria. When opportunities arose, I would make comments on this in their student book, ready for useful comments in the school report. Working in groups is a highly complex and disciplined skill and should be encouraged and assessed. Learning in a social context is natural, and is encouraged in government curriculum documents world-wide. Students need guidance and practice in group work.

But I don't only rely on my observations alone. I seek the student's self-observations. By encouraging this we improve student motivation as they are

more likely to take ownership for their learning. This also enables better communication between student and teacher, student to student, and provides insights into student self-perception, an essential concept in intrapersonal intelligence. Autonomous learning requires accuracy in self-perception and assessment. Self-growth occurs when external and internal perceptions grow closer together.

Self-evaluation encourages self-reflection and honesty. Traditional feedback focuses on what the teacher can observe which is unknown to the student, whereas a more complete perception implies a unity of self-perception and other perception.

The simplest way of understanding the self-perception of the student in terms of progressing in the learning outcomes is to engage in conversation. If non-threatening and accepting, this will work with most students and will give useful insights to the teacher and (more importantly) the student. I invite each student to my desk once a term for a friendly 'chat'. However, there will possibly be some students uncomfortable with this situation for a range of reasons, so it is encouraged but not forced. Another method of gaining student self-perception is through a questionnaire.

Music education activities are wonderfully equipped to provide some of the most important and beneficial life-long learnings for humankind. The integration and enhancement of emotional intelligence is one of these.

*Music and Keyboard in the Classroom* is a unique general music education course for middle school students. It develops musical intelligence as well as emotional.

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