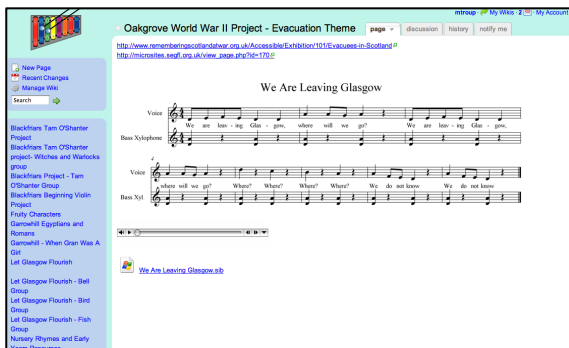


JISC RSC Scotland South & West Case Study @ RSAMD

Music Matters: Using Social Media to Develop Collaborative Documentation of Community Music Practice

Summary:



Students at RSAMD who have chosen to study Community Music have to be skilled in documenting their practice, with the ability to analyse the processes they have used to create original work, and to make this learning explicit. The Music Matters wiki has been developed to encourage staff, students and community partners to collaborate in the design of materials for performance and the documentation of work, using a range of media. As a result, they can now share their learning more widely with other colleagues within the RSAMD Community Music Community of Practice who have recognised

the value of the wiki resources as reference material which can be used for continuing professional development training.

About RSAMD:

RSAMD, which will become the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland from 1st September 2011, is the UK's first conservatoire of Music, Drama and Dance, offering specialist performance-based training to around 750 students from all over the world. The Academy collaborates with many professional and national companies, providing direct links with the performance arts industry, which means that a wide range of opportunities can be offered to undergraduate and postgraduate students. As a result, many students are engaged professionally before graduating

Elective modules in Community Music have been included in the School of Music BMus Honours Degree programme since 1998 and were introduced to the MMus Degree programme in 2010. Students who elect to specialise in Community Music have the opportunity to develop their experience and practice incrementally to an advanced level. Core studies which are integral to each elective include music in 21st century society, work-based placement practice and documentation, practice-related skills development, mentoring and peer support, arts advocacy and reflective practice.

The Challenge:

Findings from focus groups held with students in May 2009 to review their experience of learning in Community Music demonstrated that the majority encountered difficulties with completing the detailed documentation of their work-based placements and critical reflective analysis of their practice. They acknowledged that they needed more support to understand how to tackle these aspects of their work effectively to enhance their professional development.

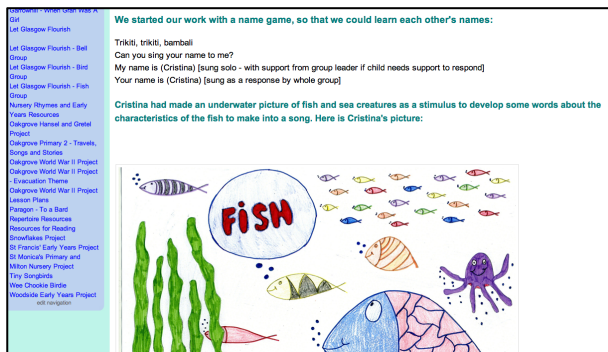
Desk based research undertaken by Mary Troup, Community Music Co-ordinator, into the principles of recording learning in groups, indicated that the approach to documentation used by Project Zero in the Making

Learning Visible research programmes¹ might be adapted for use by students. Particular challenges identified were as follows: how might learners be encouraged to collaborate to represent their work using different media and to make their emergent learning clearly visible; how might shared documentation lead to new insights, which could shape developments for the future? A further challenge faced was how best to facilitate communication and deeper learning within the RSAMD Community Music Community of Practice to enable constituent community groups to access materials developed by students and to learn from each other.

The Activity:

Learning from the work of Etienne Wenger, Nancy White and John Smith² about the potential of technology and social media to support learning within Communities of Practice, the use of a new wiki - Music Matters (<http://music-matters.wikispaces.com>) was piloted with students in the third and fourth years of their degree

programme. Following a brief induction into the use of wiki software, staff and students worked together to post materials they had created collectively with a group of young people for a team project, *Let Glasgow Flourish*. Materials contributed included edited extracts from students' placement journals documenting the development of initial themes and ideas into episodes for performance, original scores and recordings of music composed by students with the young people, pictures and photographs, summaries of musical methods employed, and evaluative evidence from



representative participants. Throughout this process, students were encouraged to engage in knowledge sharing and team reflection stimulated by their experience of co-creation of materials and collaborative documentation. They were also asked to assess the capacity of e-learning to enhance their learning capability.

The Outcomes:

The Music Matters wiki was designed to enable students to take more control of their learning and to become co-creators of knowledge, to work collaboratively, developing use of e-learning to establish more effective communication networks, and to strengthen the Community Music Community of Practice. Although initial induction to the use of the wiki was completed in class time, the main work to compile and upload materials was carried out by students in their independent study time.

It is worth noting that Mary Troup, the lecturer leading this initiative, had no prior experience of working with wiki technology and questioned how she could model good practice to her students if she was struggling to master the skills herself. She noted at the outset:

In my work to establish the Music Matters wiki... I have found myself severely challenged and frustrated in trying to use the wiki technology... and my own inherent tenacity as a learner has been seriously tested.

Initially many students were resistant to contribute materials, stating a preference to keep their records of work in a personal diary, or questioning the usefulness of e-learning:

There are new online documentation tasks to carry out this year, which I find a little hard to keep track of, time consuming, and not a hundred percent useful...

(Year 3 BMus Student)

¹ <http://pzweb.harvard.edu/mlv>

² Wenger, E., White, N., and Smith, J.D. (2009) *Digital Habitats: stewarding technology for communities*, Portland, OR: CPsquare

Some lacked confidence to share their work in a more public way. But as staff and students worked together to master the construction, editing and linking of wiki pages, they began to realise the far-reaching potential of this innovation to promote self-directed learning, peer learning and to serve as a teaching tool for others:

We have been learning how to combine the evidence from our records of processes and materials in a more creative way on our online wiki... That will mean we can assess our progress together and learn from each other. This will hopefully provide a reference point for future learning, both for ourselves and future students. That's an exciting prospect!

(Year 4 BMus Student)

Even at the pilot stage of development, students reported the added value of collaborative learning:

When writing my diary and referring to the wiki recently I found working online very useful: some aspects of our work that I had overlooked had been recorded; ideas from other groups were enlightening - opening my ideas to new approaches I had not thought of. Most importantly, the wiki can enable members of the group to share and communicate with each other. I think this will be very useful to the future development of the community music programme.

(Year 3 BMus Student)

Although community partners did not initially contribute materials for the wiki, they welcomed the opportunity to use it as a resource to help them to clarify the principles of an effective music programme which can be applied to different class topics within the framework of Curriculum for Excellence. They also immediately recognised the opportunity to use the development of the wiki as the basis for CPD programmes for teachers.

Impact

The intended impact of the development of the Music Matters wiki was to strengthen skilled partnership working through confident collaborative practice and development of opportunities to make learning explicit for all participants. It has resulted in significant differences in levels of student engagement in documentation tasks, increased ownership of original materials, a willingness to use a richer range of media to record work in progress, and the ability to reflect critically on artistic contributions to team work:

I wrote the music for the riddle chant, adapted it for canon, and led the group with my performance skills - setting the tempo and giving support through my playing. In the development of the tree game, I contributed the idea to change the game for the final part of performance. So I provided most of the musical material at start and provided musical continuity throughout every session in large and small groups!

(Year 3 BMus Student)

As students' documentation of practice has developed it has been possible to support particular students to prepare work for publication, using materials drawn from their wiki contributions and online journals. This in turn has enhanced their confidence as self-directed learners engaged in the discipline of action research.

After 18 months of development, the Music Matters wiki now provides an organic example of how the use of social media can promote peer learning and networking within a Community of Practice involving staff and students in primary, secondary and tertiary education and community groups drawn from a wide geographical area. The wiki is now serving as a teaching resource, enabling students and teachers to generate materials together and can be seen an exemplar of how technology can be used to enhance the teaching of music and drama:

I'm impressed with the way materials have been presented - they really tell the story of our team projects... And now I can see the potential for development. We could have a glossary page to explain musical terms and resource pages with games, songs, activities and other materials - which would serve as a reference bank for the future. We could provide explanations of how we have developed initial ideas into original activities, games or projects for other groups. This would be a wonderful resource for us in future, for new students beginning community music, and for teachers. If we all contribute, think about the amount of material we could produce...

(Year 4 BMus Student)

Lessons Learned

To evaluate learners' experience of using the wiki, a participatory action research programme was established in order to identify specific barriers to learning encountered and perceived long-term benefits. Although this is still in progress, particular lessons can already be identified.

Contribution to the wiki involves the development of a wide range of skills and can be time consuming initially. Use of a skills audit has helped students to identify both the range of skills needed and their perceived level of attainment for each skill. Some skills require dedicated class time to enable students to learn these together, while other skills can be developed more independently, with peer or tutor support as required. Students have proved resourceful in forming small informal learning groups to practice specific skills, which in turn has enhanced their team work.

The wiki makes resources immediately accessible, enabling all community partners to use the full range of materials. Ideas from one project can be used as catalyst for another. But it should not be overlooked that continuing partnerships and working relationships are important factors in encouraging community groups to use the wiki as a learning resource. Staff confidence grows from ongoing contact with specialist practitioners - enabling them to witness the creation of original work in progress and to identify and discuss the processes embedded in project practice. The documentation of these processes can then lead to the development of materials that can provide focus for further training and CPD. As Project Zero researchers have reflected:

Documentation is not only retrospective, it is also prospective. It shapes the design of future contexts for learning.³

As students recognise the value of the wiki to enhance their own learning and future practice, their motivation and commitment to contribute to it has increased to the extent that they are now significant stakeholders in its development:

The Wiki is a brilliant way of presenting our work and it's easily accessible to anyone we wish to show it to. The beauty of it is that in a few years time if we have another project we are managing we can return to the wiki and get some ideas from it. I would definitely use it in the future...

(Year 3 BMus Student)

Useful Links:

<http://www.ewenger.com>

<http://pzweb.harvard.edu/mlv>

<http://www.wikispaces.com>

If colleagues wish to access the Music Matters wiki, they should contact Mary Troup: m.troup@rsamd.ac.uk

³ http://www.pz.harvard.edu/mlv/index.cfm?content_section=4&content_page_id=7§ion_page_level=2