EFFECTIVE SHARING OF PRACTICE

RESEARCH REPORT

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December 2010

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This report is intended to support the work of the Workforce Development Focus for Action group (WFD-F4A). Much like Youth Music's other areas of strategic focus, this group has taken steps to identify an 'ingredients list' of effective practice in the music education workforce. The work of MusicLeader in particular has proactively sought to understand what effective practice in this area might entail, and a range of milestones are attached to the programme to develop this work further. However, while we have a good sense of what good practice might look like, precisely how effective practice is best shared amongst the workforce remains to be established. As such, this report seeks answers to the following:

- What ways of sharing practices are reported to be effective?
- Who are they effective for?
- Why are they effective?

The data used to answer these questions comes from 163 final report forms submitted in 2009/10, reporting on Youth Music's work and outcomes achieved with 130,869 participants across all funded programmes. The report forms were uploaded into qualitative analysis software (NVivo 8) and analysed by the Youth Music Research and Evaluation Team. An interpretative framework was established, which was structured around: 'Delivery and Development' (what projects did); 'Entities' (who did it); and 'Outcomes' (what happened); which resulted in dominant themes emerging (where outcomes and impact were reported most strongly).

As a first step, all reports were searched for the words 'share' and 'sharing', then 'practice' and 'practitioner', and then where these words occurred together in the same paragraph. The results were then read through to identify the most explicit and relevant examples. From these reports it was possible to develop a preliminary taxonomy of themes for what worked as a means of sharing effective practices. This enabled our coded data to be further explored for more implied evidence of the effective sharing of practice. Tree nodes were re-read to identify a second round of reported evidence in this way, including the nodes for 'CPD', 'networks', 'resources', 'singing', 'story telling', training', 'youth led or involved', and 'reflexive practice'. A total of 18 sources with a total of 26 references were identified in this way. With this level of analysis complete, it was possible to identify three core ways that practice appears to be shared effectively:

- Firstly, by working in a **face-to-face**, or co-present, way.
- Secondly, through the use of **high-quality resources**.
- Thirdly, by organising knowledge and skills through **networks**.

A range of evidence relating to each of these strands is outlined in turn below, whereby each represents an answer to the first question above. The further questions - who these mechanisms are effective for (Q2), and why they are effective (Q3) – are approached for each of these strands. However, given that this detail is dependent on the kinds of questions asked in the reports, and the quality of reporting by individual projects, it is only possible to draw general inferences in a number of cases. A summary statement of the potential next steps for this enquiry is outlined in the final section.

WHAT WORKS 1: **FACE-TO-FACE**

Reported evidence suggested that scheduling regular meetings and briefings between small numbers of key partners was a basic but very effective means of sharing practice. MusicLeader North East, for example, put it clearly:

> *"There has been a noticeable increase in the sharing of good practice between partners both within and without The Sage Gateshead. We are now meeting regularly. "* [MLNE]

In other reports it was apparent that it was Youth Music's Regional Executive Officer (REO) who was instrumental to this way of working, by offering a familiar human point of contact and a consistent source of knowledge. MusicLeader West Midlands reported that "We have an excellent working relationship with our REO – we are now running joint events etc.", while MusicLeader South West gave a flavour of the kinds of ways a REO can facilitate the sharing of practices at a regional level:

> *"Since September Jo Beal and MLSW have been working closely together supporting each other's work and setting up joint meetings to meet music services, attend conferences and deliver surgeries to support applications to the Open Programmes. This has also enabled us to discuss the SW regional strategy and share information."* [MLSW]

A range of events, workshops and gatherings were also highlighted as being an effective means for sharing practice. These often brought a greater number of people together than scheduled meetings, but it was the specific kinds of social configuration they could bring about that appeared particularly valuable. For example, the Music Leader on an open programme project found it especially useful to gather as a group of peers on a residential CPD course:

> *"Personally speaking, I enjoy meeting with the other workers away from the kids! No in all honestly, we change when we are on our own and we can really start to pay attention to our personal progress. I find that I learn best when I am around my peers, this may be musical ideas, thoughts about composition, methods of communications, games to play, ways of overcoming difficulty, dealing with parents/families. We don't have secrets! Its just that sometimes you don't get the opportunity to speak openly about your practise."* [OP/1614]

Similarly, after attending a course on 'Managing Music Teams', MusicLeader London's Programme Coordinator, concurred that "this was a useful opportunity to share experiences and best practice with other people in a coordinating/ management role". She went on to point out that such training "has also supported the element of her role that involves managing the trainers that deliver workshops for ML London." [ML London]. Both accounts point to the mutual benefits gained by peers in these sessions, but also suggest that in so doing, such knowledge and skills can be passed on and shared beyond these contexts.

MusicLeader North West reported that by bringing managers and practitioners together on the same event was also an effective way of sharing practice. As they suggest, bringing together people with different perspectives on the same issue was a productive, problem-solving approach to sharing practice that improved decision making:

> *"The DNA advisor's day was really useful in discussing these challenges and ensuring that the*

process/procedures and experience communicated is fit for purpose with a more developed practitioner. It is also useful and valuable to facilitate a conversation between MusicLeader Directors and the deliverers of our services, across the UK. The sharing of perspectives can lead to better-informed decision-making." [MLNW]

Again, this instance makes clear that there is also an element of peer-to-peer mentoring happening, and the transferring of knowledge and skills between staff with various degrees of experience in these gatherings is particularly effective. For MusicLeader East Midlands, the mentoring of practitioners at different stages of their career is also a key element of events that secures the effective sharing of practice. However, for them it was the informality of these events that was especially pertinent:

"It has been very interesting to see the value that the majority of our members place on networking at training courses and events. Successful informal networking provides opportunities to discuss issues and share ideas." [MLEM]

They go on to report on a particular example of successful networking and support amongst their network members:

"During the event, music leaders had an opportunity to chat and network and in doing so, an experienced music leader identified that another attendee who was at the time, at the beginning of his music leading career would benefit from shadowing and observing some of his music leading sessions. The shadowing opportunity was taken up by the new music leader who was very grateful of the opportunity. This experience sharing and peer support may not have occurred without the MLEM event. Following this, MLEM recognises and attempts to nurture any informal networking that takes place at MLEM courses and events as it is proven to encourage a supportive environment amongst ML members." [MLEM]

REPORTED EVIDENCE SUGGESTED THAT SCHEDULING REGULAR MEETINGS AND BRIEFINGS BETWEEN SMALL NUMBERS OF KEY PARTNERS WAS A BASIC BUT VERY EFFECTIVE MEANS OF SHARING PRACTICE.

WHAT WORKS 2: **RESOURCES**

A second core element in the effective sharing of practice was through the use of resources. For example, one Open Programme identified that current signposting resources were lacking, and so they produced an up to date signposting sheet for all participants and parents. The ability for such resources to cascade learning and opportunity, if not directly practice itself, was clear:

"This has also been shared with partner organisations and will now be used as a basis for other bodies such as Kernow Voice and SingUp to use, share and keep updated. The project itself alerted many to the resources of the partner organisations (e.g. PMZ, CYMAZ, Cornwall Music Service) The young people also connected with other locally based music leaders who were acting as assistants/ trainees on this project and who were similarly 'plugged in' to other music making activities." [OP/1739]

High-quality resources were often developed as the result of successful events, demonstrating that these elements often interlink in productive ways. MusicLeader South West, for example, reported that:

"MLSW set up a national day, along with other regions and regional DNA Advisors, to ensure that the DNA service was fit for purpose and to share good practice. An up dated pack will be produced as a result." [MLSW]

Similarly, the National Youth Choir of Great Britain reported that:

"The Singing Teachers' Conference day was held at Mill Hill School on Sunday the 21st June and was attended by the majority of NYCGBs singing teachers. Following this day, a policy document has been formed and is now available to all our singing teachers and also will inform our consultation with the British Voices association with whom we are planning a joint workshop for next season." [NYCGB]

Other events were explicitly hosted as a useful means of producing an effective resource for practitioners. One Open Programme project decided to produce a tailored CPD package after finding that many of the available resources were of limited use to them:

"We made the decision to create a specially tailored CPD which would directly address the needs of our leaders and trainees on the project and allow them to share experiences across the project as well as tackle any issues which may have been common to the various workshops. [...]

The day looked at some of the procedural aspects, quality assurance, evaluation, as well as methods of running workshops, ways of getting the best out of situations, how to get group and ensemble stuff together, a whole specialist section on vocal work – important as some leaders were not specifically vocalists but needed the tools to be able to deliver or help in this area confidently, plus a sharing session of different experiences and how they manage and cope with them.

There is footage of the CPD day and interviews with the participants on the DVD as well." [OP/1723]

Sometimes, as MusicLeader West Midlands point out, such events were also useful for launching and promoting new resources, thus ensuring a clear continuation of practice sharing beyond the event itself:

"The partnership event run at Symphony Hall in November 2009 was particularly successful, with over 70 participants attending. The event launched the national MusicLeader & Mencap guide and the regional resource 'George and the Whale' produced by the Birmingham Ymaz Sound Futures. With an opening speech from Richard Stilgoe the event was a blueprint for future work between MLWM and the REO." [MLWM]

In another instance, MusicLeader South West had asked practitioners to bring along existing resources to a workshop and then used these as the basis for a discussion on practice in Early Years settings. The success of this approach was marked by the fact that the attendees "have requested this element is included in their regular network meetings." [MLSW]

WHAT WORKS 3: **NETWORKED KNOWLEDGES**

A third core element to the effective sharing of practice was the ability to access a range of networks. By definition, this is a central feature of the MusicLeader regional networks, and one that recognises the implicit value of this element. Likewise, the role played by Youth Music's REOs is felt to be effective precisely because it brought to bear a wider network of skills and experiences to the development of individual projects. Working through partnerships, which characterise Youth Music's approach across a wide spectrum of activity, also reflects the value of a networked development of working practices in the sector. MLNW provided a basic but nonetheless valuable example:

"There have been some really exciting partnership developments which have taken place over the last six months which will come to fruition during phase 4. Including a partnership with Birmingham City Council to develop an early years network, and separately the Youth Work officer at Government Office to develop some youth work focused training." [MLWM]

Alongside the MusicLeader regional networks, the sustained investment in YMAZ host institutions also played a key role in sharing practice, in this case through their well-developed networks. For example, Music Fusion described their Early Years Network as "a platform for our region's practitioners to meet and share good practice." [Music Fusion]. Similarly, GMMAZ "continues to share learning and development across the partner network" as a core function. As they go on to explain:

"Over the last 12 months, we have hosted central training sessions for approx 12-15 partners, young leaders and deliverers, including attendees from Liverpool. These sessions have covered the statutory and creative aspects of running participatory activity, which has been of huge benefit for our partners." [GMMAZ]

As well as using networks to bring people together for training and sharing together, other forms of networks appear especially effective in supporting the distanciated development of practice where mutual co-presence is not practical. For example, MusicLeader North West have created a 'Leadership Lab' – an arts partnership looking at developing leadership skills through "a new, democratic model, reliant on technology and the impartiality of the co-ordination." [MLNW]. The lab uses 'basecamp' software to document exchanges across the network:

"The added value of this is that it archives/captures all activities related to a particular project, and, hence creates "the Manual" of how things were achieved. It would be great if the future MLUK CMS system could do this.

There has been a significant impact on MLNW, by being part of this project in terms of gaining confidence in creative commissioning, using web 2 applications and up skilling the MLNW workforce in communication strategy, emotional intelligence and advanced facilitation skills." [MLNW]

SUMMARY

This report has identified three core ways of sharing practices that are proven to be effective: face-to-face, resources and networks. In many ways these are obvious elements that already exist in many strands of Youth Music's work. However, the above discussion unpacks these elements so as to focus in on what each element does in different contexts and for whom. This has helped draw a provisional sense of why it is that they are effective means of sharing practice:

- Events and meetings are a timely means of sharing practice among copresent individuals. They seem to work through the value of personal contact among peers, between those with different types or levels of experience, and offer a consistent platform for sharing where regularly used.

- Resources have a unique ability to extend the lifespan of an event beyond a point in time. They require concrete, clear messages on best practice that can be circulated and disseminated across a range of contexts.

- Networks are about coverage over space, allowing the effective sharing of practice between otherwise distanciated individuals and groups.

What is also important to note here is that these elements are often profoundly related. As the above discussion makes clear, networks can be used to facilitate meetings or develop resources, resources can be used to both inform and capture training sessions, events can promote resources and initiate networks, thus 'networking' and being 'networked' falls into symbiotic connection.

However, much of what is contained here draws on inference, and is dependent on the structure of reports and the quality of individual reporting. As such, it is valuable primarily as a means of identifying the key themes and projects to explore further, rather than serving as a comprehensive framework for the effective sharing of practice. It should also be noted that these responses have not been anonymised precisely because an important aspect of this task is to be able to identify those programmes who demonstrate an ability to share practice effectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Further research is needed to clarify exactly why these identified elements work.

- Given that it is quite hard to explicitly identify why it is that these elements support effective sharing of practice, it is perhaps wise to consider answers to the contrary too, i.e. by identifying what does not work and why as a way into really understanding what does work and why.

- Changing or adding further questions in the final reports may help to capture relevant information on effective sharing of practice. For example, the 'Sharing good practice and achievements' section of the MusicLeader form does not specify whether this is about effective sharing or effective practice, and seems to encourage a strong preference for answering the latter among this group. The MusicLeader form also explicitly asks for information on 'Resources', though respondents often list these as outputs rather than elaborating on the precise ways they are developed and circulate.

- Having ML perspectives in the OP final reports seems a good way of capturing good practice and ways it can be shared effectively.

- There is a notable absence of CYP themselves here. While this is to be expected, given that this is a report concerned with practice and practitioners in the sector, it should not be assumed that effective sharing of practices among adults necessarily leads to improved outcomes for CYP.

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