WCCEH Research Initiation Award: End of project report

Live Music Now and the Graduate School of Education – October 2019

Project participants

Exeter special schools:	6 pupils and 3 teachers from WESC Foundation 9 pupils and 4 members of staff from Southbrook School 12 pupils and 3 members of staff from Ellen Tinkham School
Graduate School of Education:	88 primary PGCE students Dr Hermione Ruck Keene, Associate Lecturer Robert Bennett, Associate Lecturer Ursula Crickmay, Graduate Research Assistant
Live Music Now:	Rachael Eliott (LMN violinist) Beatrice Newman (LMN cellist) Sophie Dunn (Director, LMN South West)

Project outline

The project aimed to establish a model for partnership working between PGCE students at Exeter University, professional musicians from Live Music Now, and children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Led by Rob, Ursula and the Live Music Now musicians, the PGCE students explored the idea of partnership working, focusing on how they as teachers would make best use of the opportunity afforded by visiting professional musicians. The PGCE cohort is divided into four, and this preparatory workshop repeated for each group. Students also explored practical musical activities and planned how they would use these in classes, with a particular focus on children with special educational needs.

To give the students practical experience of live music performance, we invited children from Southbrook, Ellen Tinkham and WESC schools to performances at St Luke's Chapel. Led by the LMN musicians and supported by the PGCE students, the performances were interactive and introduced the children to a range of musical styles and concepts. The PGCE students were able to observe pupils' reactions to the music and to discuss these afterwards.

Project outcomes

Feedback was collected through online questionnaires completed by Live Music Now musicians and staff from all three visiting schools, as well as immediate feedback collected on post-it notes from PGCE students following their sessions. The project was observed by Sophie Dunn from Live Music Now, who also collected informal observations from the University of Exeter staff. Based on this, the following outcomes were indicated:

a) PGCE students gained:
    - Direct experience of the impact of live performance on children and young people, and an understanding of how to make the most of that impact.
    - Insight into both the practical considerations and the benefits of partnership working (with a focus on music, but applicable to other disciplines).

- Practical ideas for preparing children for and following up live music performances in schools.
- A toolkit of musical activities which could be used by non-music specialist class teachers.
- Understanding of how children with special educational needs, including autism and sensory needs, might respond to live music.

b) Children with special educational needs and disabilities experienced:
   - A new environment on the university campus and at St Luke's Chapel, and a new aspect of their local community.
   - Interacting with learners from other schools.
   - An opportunity to hear live music presented in a way which was suited to their interests and needs.
   - Opportunities to join in with live music making, including conducting and using voices and percussion instruments.
   - Opportunities to respond both emotionally and cognitively to music.

c) Live Music Now musicians gained:
   - The opportunity to work in a different context, applying their experience from Live Music Now to working in a University environment.
   - Understanding of some of the pressures on teachers which might impact on musicians' visits to schools (time, workload, school finances, as well as individual confidence in music-leading).
   - A better understanding of pedagogy and lesson planning, and how they can help teachers to make the most of live music experiences.
   - Confidence in their own expertise and the value of what they are bringing into schools.

Direct feedback from students:

Very talented and interactive, gained very useful games for demonstrating dynamics, tempo etc. but also, crucially, emoitional connection with music.

Excellent and inspiring session. I think the idea of children seeing and hearing live music can have such a profound effect on them. I would hope all children would be able to have this experience.

Fantastic performance. Lots of great tips to practise in class and now feel very confident, perhaps enough to play some instruments in my placements!

The session was really engaging with the activities really grabbing my attention. I definitely want to give my classes the opportunity to listen and engage with live music.

Direct feedback from schools:

[The session] gave our pupils to enjoy new musical experiences in a non-threatening, non-judgemental setting. It gives us an opportunity to model how to sit and appreciate live music, something that is a challenge for many of our students. But there were also moments during the session where it is ok to ' whoop it up ' and just let your hair down.

[The musicians] had a really lovely non threatening approach with the children and gave them plenty of opportunities to get involved. There was a good balance between listening and appreciating and participation. The music they chose to play was a great mix of the known and unknown.

It was a great experience for our learners to go out in the community and mix with other learners from different schools.

Direct feedback from musicians:

Neither of us had worked in a university environment before so it was really interesting to have to adapt our structure. We discovered that we needn't be shy about delivering the activities [to PGCE students] just as we normally would in front of children.

We discovered how little live music the majority of people are able to access, and that our playing engaged a lot of people.

We realised how important it is for primary school children to be introduced to live music whether as a separate subject or cross-curricular, and how important our visits can be to inspire young people to get involved.

Partnership development

The project sought to trial a relationship between Live Music Now and the University of Exeter through which we could build a future research partnership. Live Music Now already has academic partnerships with the University of Winchester and the University of Canterbury Christchurch, and as a charity is keen that its work is informed by and informs academic research. During the course of the project planning phase we learned a number of things which will be useful in any future partnership:

- *The importance of integrating the project into the core curriculum for the PGCE students.* We realised that the time pressures of the PGCE course were such that it was vital to make the most of this opportunity and make it as applicable as possible to their learning. We reached the whole of the PGCE cohort – more than initially intended – and adapted the content so that it was accessible to all students, not just those with an interest in music. This meant that that the PGCE students were less directly involved with the visiting pupils than initially planned, but more PGCE students experienced activities which were directly relevant to their course.
- *The challenges of bringing children with disabilities onto campus for live music making*. Our initial intention was to involve school pupils in more workshop-based activities; however, we discovered that the most important factors for schools were timing, transport and accessibility. Whilst St Luke's Chapel could be made accessible through use of a ramp, teaching rooms in the campus were not wheelchair accessible, and we therefore found a solution which gave a high-quality and inclusive performance experience to the children, rather than something more classroom based.
- *The importance of a "brokering" role between Live Music Now and University of Exeter*. We found it very useful to have someone who could translate between the curriculum-focused requirements of the PGCE course and the more child and repertoire-centred approaches of the Live Music Now musicians. In this project the role was taken by Ursula Crickmay, based on her experience of working with professional musicians, schools and as an academic researcher. Other people within Live Music Now might fulfil this role, but we need to factor in the time this takes.

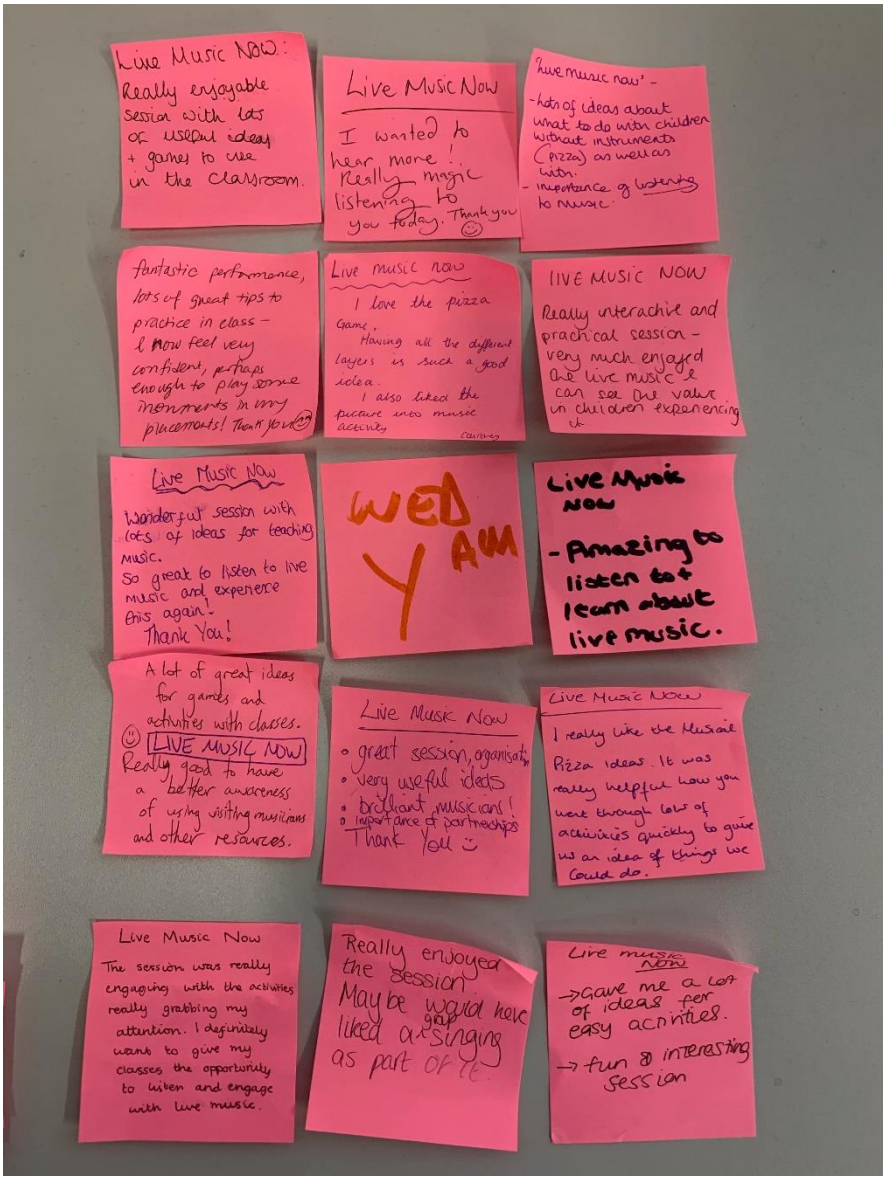
Conclusion

All parties felt that this was a valuable learning experience and something on which to build in a future partnership. A small-scale research project is going ahead, led by Hermione Ruck Keene. Following ethics permission being granted by the University of Exeter GSE Ethics committee, data were collected during the project through interviews and an online questionnaire, and are now being analysed for future publication.





Discussions on the impact of live music on children with special education needs, led by Robert Bennett, Beatrice Newman and Rachael Elliott



PGCE student feedback from one of the teaching sessions.