

FIRST ACCESS CASE STUDY: Hit It! drumming by Skype



"I've had nothing but a positive experience. The two tutors have been fantastic, and the children love it. They get really excited about the sessions and are always keen to get to sit at the front of the class."
– Jess Geary, class teacher.

How did it come about?

Class teacher Jess Geary describes herself as “not musical at all – I can’t read music or sing in tune!”, so she was a little uncertain when asked if her class would pilot a new whole class drumming programme via Skype. “I’m the class teacher for the oldest class, and it was felt that my class would benefit the most. To be honest, I was a bit skeptical: I couldn’t imagine how children could be taught instruments by Skype.”

Innovative ways to access live First Access music teaching via digital technology was at the heart of discussions between Wiltshire Music Centre and Wiltshire Music Connect, who approached David Garcia to deliver the programme, along with tutor, Matt Thorpe. David remembers: “When we met for the first planning session we talked about all the things we couldn’t do before we decided what we were going to do!”

What is different from traditional First Access?

It was clear from the start that this wasn’t going to be simply a whole class drumming programme transferred to a screen. “There were lots of things that we’d normally do that wouldn’t work if you weren’t in the room,” says David. Some of the hand gestures the tutors use had to be exaggerated (eg those used to ask pupils to start, stop or listen, play louder or quieter). And for counting in, tutors used a whistle rather than their voices.

The lessons also required a lot more from both students and teachers. Because there was no adult in the room, the teacher needed to be present throughout; and pupils had to concentrate more on the tutors and on listening to each other. “You can’t always see if you have everyone’s attention,” says David.

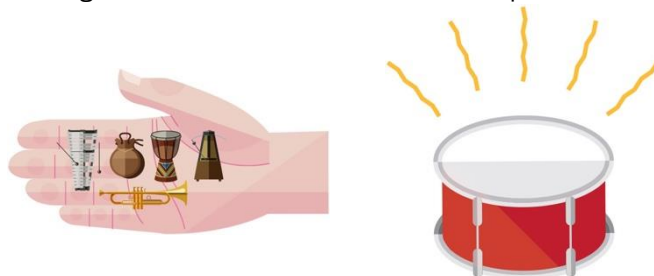


How did it work?

The technical kit to record and broadcast the sessions was bought by Wiltshire Music Centre thanks to support from Arts Council England. The programme began with a trial term: a co-ordinator and a technician from Wiltshire Music Centre visited the school to discuss its participation and check that it had the correct technology “We didn’t have to do much extra stuff at all, it went ahead quite quickly and smoothly,” says Jess.

“Because I wasn’t sure it would work, I drilled the children into understanding when you pick up your drum you don’t play it until you’re told to, and I came up with signals for when they should stop. It just so happened that the tutors used the same signals!”

The main programme comprised weekly half-hour sessions: one week these would be live via Skype, with David and Matt being filmed at Wiltshire Music Centre, and the children in their classroom at school; the following week, the lesson would be taught via a film that David and Matt had pre-recorded.



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First Access programme: Hit It! First Access drumming by Skype

Start date/timescale: Summer term 2016/one year and one term (10-week programmes also available)

Name of school: St Nicholas VC Primary

Number of pupils: 88

Number of staff: 7 teachers, 8 teaching assistants

Previous First Access: Recorder, visiting teacher; then school teacher who left

Other music activities: Daily class singing, weekly singing assembly, after school guitar lessons, biannual school production, music used across curriculum

Number & age of pupils receiving this programme: 32, mixed year 4/5/6 class

Number having first experience of learning an instrument: 0 (most have done recorders)

Resources provided: Microphone and webcam; Djembe drums; live Skype lessons alternated with pre-recorded video lessons; warm-up videos; technical support; end of term visit from tutors

Cost: Once rolled out, the model has the potential to be cheaper for schools as the number of users increase. It could cost as little as £5 per session, plus drum hire at £45 a term

* continuation is the percentage of young people taking lessons following a First Access programme



What have you learned?

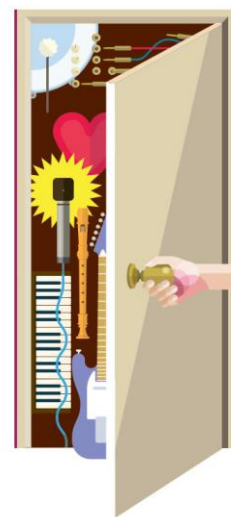
Online teaching works: "I've learned that it works! And drumming worked particularly well remotely – because you don't have to worry about things like where children's fingers are on strings." – Jess.

Skype for business allows for better quality audio and video: "Having Skype for business definitely made a difference." – David.

Allow some freedom in the first two sessions: "We got the excitement out of their systems and let them go a bit mad, and that helped, because after that they were more able to settle down and follow instructions." – David.

Have something to aim for: "I've pushed for something we can show parents at the end of term, the kids picked a song which we're learning for a purpose now, because we have a performance." – Jess.

Plan for differentiation in the final weeks: "You could either do two sessions if you have access to another classroom, or split the class so that one group has more challenging rhythms, and get pupils to sit together according to ability." – Jess.



What were the challenges?

Differentiated learning: "The more able children are getting to a point now where you could probably stretch them a bit more. We wouldn't have got to that point if the programme had been a term, which is great." – Jess.

Maintaining intensity levels: "It's harder to keep our intensity up during sessions and feed off the enthusiasm of pupils as you would do if you were live. We have a very good technician who will give us a thumbs up, or jig about in his seat if we're getting a little flat! We've got used to it too ... and now it almost feels like we're there with them in the room." – David

Assessment: "If you're in the room you can hear people really clearly, or get them to sit next to you. That's where having the warm-up videos helped – it means we can just observe them at the start of the session." – David.

"I think it's a really fun experience and it gives you another skill for the future. I like learning the Moana song and blending different rhythms." – Emma, Year 6.

What are the benefits and what impact has it had?

Remote teaching:

Cost: The costs to the school are reduced because every other session is a video lesson which has been pre-recorded as part of the pilot. The programme may also be cheaper/more accessible for schools on the remote edges of the county where travel costs and time may mean tutors are less willing to deliver, or they charge higher rates.

Listening and engagement, keeping in time and group work skills: "This was a surprise to me – I expected the opposite to happen – but because we weren't actually there, pupils were more reliable in listening and keeping time. Once they start playing, they can't hear us so they have to depend on each other. We've always reinforced the need to listen to us, and the person next to them, and it's worked." – David

Learning outside of formal sessions: "The video series means they can practice as many times as they like in between sessions. This really helps, and the warm up videos can be used at any part of the school day as an energiser." – David.

Drumming:

Access: "With other instruments, there may have been certain pupils who were at an advantage, but this involves everyone. We have some young people with massively different abilities, difficulties with coordination and balance – but it's an instrument everyone's able to play. We also have some students who can't usually access learning without supervision or one-to-one support, but they can do this independently of adults and join in with everyone else." – Jess.

Speed of progress: "It sounds good really quickly. They can feel they're making progress even in a half-hour session." – Jess

Year-long programme: "The fact we've done it for a year rather than a term has meant we've really seen progress." – Jess

School culture: "There's a lovely atmosphere in the school when we do it – you get really lovely reactions from other pupils, they're all curious, and look into the classroom when it's happening."

Group work skills: "It's an instrument that no-one played before, so we all started from the same point. Also, it sounds better played in a group, and so it builds good team work skills." – Jess.

Expertise: "The tutors are brilliant – they engage the children really well, and have been really responsive to feedback. We also have a lot of support from Wiltshire Music Centre, making sure it sounded and looked good." – Jess

Sustainability/teacher CPD: "It's definitely given me some ideas, the guys are incredibly talented, they make it look so easy and break it down into manageable chunks. If I was asked to teach drumming next year I'd be quite happy to do it. But because I have a mixed class and some of the students



stay with me for another two years – I couldn't progress them to the next step, I could only maintain their learning." – Jess

Summing up

Both Jess and David are convinced that this is a model that works, and is here to stay: "I was initially worried that we'd do something that was great fun but not musically rewarding or challenging," says David, "but I've been taken aback by how well it's worked."

Jess continues: "I've had nothing but a positive experience. The two tutors have been fantastic, and the children love it. They get really excited about the sessions and are always keen to get to sit at the front of the class."

Watch the promo/taster video:

<https://youtu.be/f3Q7828rySM>

Watch the BBC Radio Wiltshire video:

<http://bbc.in/2IYA4U>

For more information about participating in this project or other projects supported by Wiltshire Music Connect, please contact Martin Stewart.

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