

How pop music can help children learn in the classroom

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I have worked in the music industry for more than 30 years and have seen it go through a lot of changes in that time and thankfully it continues to evolve.

One area that has improved beyond recognition is education and training at further and higher education level. When I began working for record labels in the 1970s we often seemed to make it up as we went along. Today, there are a number of brilliant courses at A Level and universities around the country that prepare people to work in the music industry.

As an industry we have also been involved in a manner of education projects involving secondary schools over the years, but friends working in primary schools reported it was very hard to obtain resources relating to pop music.

This was obviously frustrating for them, because pop music is such a brilliant vehicle for engaging children in all manner of subjects. It is something that surrounds them every day and that they have vocal opinions about. Eight-year-olds are fully au fait with programmes such as the *X Factor* and are easily able to access music online.

At the same time, it became obvious that children are often not aware of how the music they love is produced. In fact some research that we were told about said that most children think music comes from a computer without any idea of how it's created. They don't realise that there are a whole host of jobs they can aspire to in the music business even if they don't have the confidence and vocal skills to be in a band. Of course, no one expects an eight-year-old to have their career path mapped out, it's extremely important for children to be children, but it is also important to raise aspirations from an early age in order to help a child develop in basic life skills.

It was from discussions with teachers about such topics that **Pop4Schools** was born. It is an online resource that takes pupils step-by-step through the process of making their own piece of music; writing their own lyrics and composing the music and then promoting it for sale.

Initially, I feared that this process may prove too complicated for primary school children so we arranged a pilot in half-a-dozen schools across England. My fears were unfounded. Instead, I was struck by the enthusiasm of pupils and teachers as they threw themselves into the programme. I saw them all working together in different ways as I managed to visit each school to see how Pop4Schools was applied in an ICT lesson, maths or literacy, art and of course music.

They wrote, rehearsed and recorded their songs and set about promoting them with gusto. One school used the funds raised through sales to help an orphanage in Africa. Another wrote a song to encourage younger people to volunteer for the lifeboat service and donated the funds to their local RNLI.

Pupils that lacked the natural confidence to sing and perform were able to take on other roles such as designing the cover and promotional posters for the single they produced. Others helped write the lyrics and the sleeve notes that accompanied the music or helped keep the finances in order. Every child in the classes that took part in the pilot was engaged, enthused, inspired and motivated. I was also able to speak with some of the children directly and heard how they were excited to be taking part in a project like this. Parents, school governors and Head Teachers told me how valuable this programme was and they wished there were more like it to engage children in learning creatively and in a way that they can relate to.

Programmes such as the *X Factor* are great entertainment that so many children and adults alike love, but it is important that children realise the music business is a much broader industry involving a lot of interesting roles that they could apply themselves to. It's not just the star spangled images we see in the media. I hope this programme gets children across the UK and throughout the world thinking about how the music they love is produced and whether it is something they would like to get involved in one day.

We keep being told that the economic future for our country lies in the creative industries. That means we need to do a better job at explaining to young people what they are, how they work and are funded and what skills they will need to work in them. At the same time, pop music is a fantastic vehicle to teach core curriculum subjects such as maths, literacy, history and art to name a few. After all, there is no harm in having a little fun along the way.