Testing the W-how schema as a reflective tool

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- exploring the robustness of the conceptual tool developed by the ERT as a means of reflection upon two similar educational settings located in different countries.

- the two studies chosen for this exploration were based in music classrooms in Firenze, Italy and Bristol, England.

- not originally designed to be comparative studies but were chosen for this exploration because of their outward similarities
OBJECTIVES

- Primarily: to investigate the robustness of the conceptual framework as a means of reflection
- Secondary: to examine what this exploration tells us about the use of the tool as a reflective instrument
The W-HOW schema as a template

The schema allowed us to tabulate the key elements of the two educational settings.
Children’s Music Literacy with New Technologies is an educational module designed by Tempo Reale (TR)* and delivered to primary schools in a ready-to-implement format involving 6 classes into two primary schools in Florence.

Undertaken in a semi-rural primary school with Year 6 pupils (ages 10 – 11)

Music an important part of the school, but not used ICT for music before

* http://www.centrotemporele.it - Founded in 1987 by Luciano Berio the Centre is devoted to the research, the development and the use of new technologies in music, (computer music, spatialisation of sounds, real-time signal processing)
WHERE
INSTITUTIONAL (MACRO) LEVEL

- Mandatory 6 – 11
- 1 hours per week (optimistically!)
- Public schools often require external institutions for carrying out music teaching
- External organisations require "sponsors" to carry on their activities in schools
- Mandatory 5 – 14
- 1 hour per week
- Provision in the primary school is variable
- Initial training and Continuing Professional Development often inadequate
WHERE
SETTING - MICRO LEVEL

- *Children’s Literacy* is carried out in a specific environment that has been set-up in one of the schools. TR’s personnel takes much care in setting up the environment to be safe for the children and accessible for teachers and assistants. Items such as furniture and technical supplies are arranged in order to facilitate group working, discussion and collaboration.
Children’s Music Literacy courses have been running for eight years with minor modifications. The module usually begins in November and ends up in March. The 6 classes involved alternates on sessions of 1 hour each per week.

Teacher prepared a 6-week unit of work based on the year’s existing music curriculum (cyclic patterns).
The overall aim of the course is developing a profound attitude and awareness toward the world of sounds and music improving children listening capabilities and enhancing sensitivities to the auditory surround of everyday experience.

Specific activities carried out along the course are: exploration, manipulation, creation and composition of sounds and pieces of music through several techniques.

4 key areas of the curriculum:
- Performance
- composition
- appraising and listening
- applying knowledge and understanding
The Application of the conceptual tool to the two cultural contexts allowed three key themes to emerge, which were then examined in depth and further comparison made:

- Composition process and products
- The observed use of the workstation
- Meaning construction and community building
Jerome Bruner (1996) mentions the importance of ‘externalising’ processes in ‘oeuvres’ as a mean for negotiating the meaning of things and concepts as well as for constituting and keeping alive the identity of a community.

The compositional approach provides a context for the externalization of children creative thinking. It allows for the discussion under multiple perspectives and supports the learners realize that each person has one of many foci or modalities of viewing and describing a topic or a phenomenon.
Composition Process and Products

With music technology such as Cubasis, the recording of the work in progress provides a means of externalizing the ongoing composition in a way that ‘traditional’ composing does not. This externalization can take both audio and visual forms.

The whole educational experience places the students at the centre of a process of exploration, manipulation/transformation and composition of sounds finalised in a creation of a musical “product” which will be eventually discussed and shared with the whole class.
THE OBSERVED USE OF THE WORKSTATION

- Computers and digital technologies play a fundamental role in the compositional approach as they are demanded to execute a certain number of complex operations in order to allow the user to focus on the task of creating and manipulating musical elements.

- Our projects make use of two different categories of software:
  
  Originally for professional use – available commercially

  Designed and developed ‘on the purpose’ by TR

- Computer as mediator between children’s creative intentions and the operations to be accomplished - how pre-programmed is the software - does it allow pupils the necessary freedom to realise their creative intentions?
The results of the observations provide interesting reflections about the social dynamics noted during the sessions. They show differing learning strategies and modalities of meaning construction.
The interactions observed follow a peer-to-peer process structured in three moments: listening to sounds in the headphones, discussing the possibilities and giving the “solution”.
In the Bristol study pupils discussed their work between themselves as they worked:

L77 A: It's that one
L78 Yeah, your [...] stopped. Stop again.
L79 C: Press play
L81 C: This one?
L82 A: Yeah
L83 C: Sure?
L84 A: Yeah
L85 C: OK
L86 A: Press stop
CONCLUSIONS

- Following this examination, the robustness of the conceptual tool was considered in terms of three related outcomes:

1. Owing to the successful comparison of the two contexts, the tool was considered to have been **useful** as a means of **reflection**

2. The **template** allowed the data to be usefully **structured**

3. The comparison acted as a ‘**trigger**’ to make certain issues explicit that wouldn’t have been possible otherwise. As the two chosen studies were selected post-hoc, it could be confirmed that these issues had not been **identified** previously.
The usefulness of the tool as a means for reflection was considered mediated by its omission of a narrative or temporal ‘dimension’. This could be viewed as providing a barrier to the linking the identified elements into a meaningful sequence and allowing patterns to emerge. However, this omission was compensated for through much discussion which allowed the three themes to emerge. It was considered that this dimension was actually context-specific and might be quite different given contrasting circumstances.