How do we know if our pupils are actually learning?

ABRSM Conference 2018

...always play G major with the F sharp after you've carefully explained how it comes to be there.

Not exactly...?

How do we know if our pupils are actually learning?
We don’t!

Can we say at what point someone has learned something?

Maybe…but it’s not that simple...
The tale of the student teacher and his tutor simply by watching

The signs of learning may well be deceptive

- Bright eyed and bushy tailed
- Smiling, nodding and saying, ‘Yes, I’ve got it!’
- Engaged and motivated
- Performing well - in the short term
• Not bright eyed and bushy tailed
• Not smiling, nodding and saying, ‘Yes, I’ve got it!’
• Not engaged and motivated
• Not performing well
• Distracted

you can’t see learning

Mimicking / imitating

Learning or mimicry?
If we’re told something do we then know it?

If we read something, and maybe recognise the content, does that mean we know it?

The word Music comes from the Greek ‘Mousike’ by way of the Latin ‘Musica’ meaning Muse. The word Muse representing the goddesses who inspire the creation of the arts.

What about the permanence factor?

If we read something, and maybe recognise it, does that mean we know it?

10 mins
an hour
a week
a year
10 years
Is learning to do with retention? Does it matter if we forget (or unget) stuff? Can we be said to have learned it in the first place? Is short term learning still learning? A phone number…a route home…stuff for an exam… Is most learning short term? Is learning to do with retrieval?

You can't see understanding - you can only infer it by observing the pupil apply that ‘understanding’ in a new context. We often assume understanding - and it may be mis-placed. “Buildings are high - I don’t get why you’re calling that a high note.”

Your understanding of the word ‘key’ may be quite different from mine. I think you’ve really understood that!
Define 'Entropy' in a sentence
What is the key-signature of G Major?

Define 'Entropy' in a sentence

a thermodynamic quantity representing the unavailability of a system's thermal energy for conversion into mechanical work.

What did you have for breakfast this morning?

What is the key-signature of G Major?
Define 'Entropy' in a sentence: We had to search for the answer.

What is the key-signature of G Major? We knew!

learning & knowing

Unconscious incompetence → Conscious incompetence → Conscious competence → Unconscious competence

Don't know → There's something there but we need to process → It's there!

There's nothing there → The journey into Liminal Space begins → Know

Martin M. Broadwell

Unconscious incompetence
Conscious incompetence
Conscious competence
Unconscious competence
The journey into Liminal Space begins.
Don’t know → Liminal Space → Know

shame, guilt and anxiety block on further learning

block on further learning

making learning effective
“teaching takes place in time”

“learning takes place over time”

gradually create and deepen a relationship with what we are trying to learn

have a reason to learn it
see its relevance

gradually see how it takes its place in the greater scheme of things

The journey from Liminal Space

Know
care
time

like
want to learn it
Seeing the whole picture

Sets pupils on the road to really ‘Knowing music’

What connection shall we make next?

ultimately

It’s not entirely up to us

- refine
- adapt
- re-think

Pieces or Songs

Scales
Aural
Listening
Performing
Notation
Singing
Rhythm
Intonation
Posture
Character
Theory
Sight-reading
Memory
Improvisation
Composition

What shall we do next?
How do I know which connection to make?
the connections we make need to be explicit not implied

- we need to be thorough about our explanations
- explain why we're making the connections
- make them in collaboration with pupil

Telling is not teaching but
Asking *is* teaching

Asking *is* teaching
we need to be thorough about our explanations
explain why we’re making the connections
make them in collaboration with pupil
ask questions as you go along

**Shared ownership of the teaching/learning process**

we’re not
developing the G major scale
in

**ISOLATION**

**Theoretical concepts**

Skills

Attitude

**Vocabulary**

key, key-signature, major, minor, notes, octave, patterns, pitch, intervals, pulse, range
I understand things about what a scale is... key, major & minor, notes, patterns, intervals, sound, history

**Theoretical concepts**

**Skills**

**Attitude**

Scales are helpful and I know why
I enjoy making the sounds
I like scales

I know how to play the scale

How does it make you feel if you pause on the F sharp?
How many scale patterns can you find in your pieces?
Can you feel a sense of returning home when you reach the final note?
What's similar about G major and D major?
Can you imagine the scale in your head as you're playing it?
In your scale improvisation how many ingredients can you use from your piece?
Can you play the scale with the same character as your piece?
Can you see the scale patterns in this sight reading piece?
Can you really feel the sense of going up and coming down?
How does playing the scale tongued change the character?
How is this scale going to help you play this piece?
Which finger pattern will you be using? Why?
Connections

Short term memory (liminal space) \(\rightarrow\) Long term memory (knowing)

Connections

Long term memory \(\rightarrow\) Retrieval

Connections

Learn \(\rightarrow\) Know
Help pupils form a relationship with what we want them to learn. Knowing moves in and out of liminality. Learning can be short term or long term – it doesn’t matter. Remember that learning takes time. Don’t make assumptions about what pupils might understand. Be very thorough. Decide where to go next collaboratively. Ask questions. Make explicit connections.

Some thoughts on Learning

If they are able to retrieve easily
If they are able to apply what they know in different contexts
If they are beginning to make connections between pieces, scales, aural and sight reading
If they know that they know
We can!