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Seeing yourself as others see you: developing personal attributes in the group rehearsal

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An important part of the process that enables us to improve ourselves as musicians in group music making involves developing an awareness of our personal attributes as they are displayed in the rehearsal. In order to help students become more aware of themselves and of their band members' personal attributes as they rehearse, a peer assessment system was established. The project was piloted and developed at Barnsley College and University of Huddersfield (Barnsley Campus) with first year undergraduates on the BA Popular Music course across 2000–2008. Individuals agreed to allow their bands to identify particular personal attributes for each member that, they felt, could be improved and used as peer assessment criteria. In-depth interviews were conducted with 16 students over a 4-year period and the following areas emerged as a focus of these: self-knowledge, feedback, confidence, honesty. The study has implications for devising peer assessment systems that are responsive to individual learners and their unique needs. It also suggests the desirability of providing peer assessment activities that might foster trust among participants and, if so, supports the provision of exceptional feedback. Now in its ninth year, this system has been refined into a model.

Introduction

This is a study into group-work rehearsing of popular music students in rock bands, with a focus on their personal attributes in rehearsal. It explores how group members might develop a greater awareness of themselves, as they rehearse, through the use of students' personal attributes as peer assessment criteria. Following a brief survey of the relevant literature, this paper describes the development of a peer assessment project and participants' responses to it. A four-stage process model for peer assessment is proposed for group rehearsing, together with a consideration of the moral issues that may arise and some remaining concerns.

My interest in observing students' personal attributes, as they are displayed in rehearsal, stems from teaching on an undergraduate popular music course in 1999. This began as a BA (Hons) Popular Music Studies at Barnsley College, validated by the University of Sheffield, transferring, in 2005, to the University of Huddersfield, as BA (Hons) Popular Music. The course has a practical and vocational ethos with many learning outcomes involving group music-making experiences. Working in small groups helps to prepare students for life in the popular music 'industry' where, for example, the activities of performing, sound engineering, production and recording depend on groups of individuals working together.

The course includes a year one group performance module, *Performance Management*, which involves students rehearsing in bands and preparing for public performances. Group rehearsing is its central activity where students learn to manage and lead their band practices. The module comprises 24 teaching weeks and bands also perform at four evening gigs during the year. I have an interest in the opportunities that peer assessment activities may offer in helping to support students' learning in rehearsal. This is an interesting area to explore, as there seems to be little reported about group-based rehearsals of popular music linked with peer assessment. Although many studies describe various improvements in students' work as a consequence of participating in peer assessment (Falchikov, 2005), there is little written about peer assessment activities involving band rehearsals and how these might assist learning. Less still is reported about undergraduates' personal attributes in the context of band rehearsing although some can be found in Pulman (2004).

The ideas contained in this article are a result of an 8-year investigation (2000–2008) into peer learning arising from band rehearsals of popular music students. It investigates what individuals might learn about themselves and others through engaging in activities involving peer assessment of their personal attributes in rehearsing.

Group work, personal attributes, peer assessment and the feedback arising from these, all have relevance for Performance management. It is appropriate, therefore, to consider some of the relevant literature at this point.

Musical considerations are an important factor when determining the membership of pop/rock groups, for one based on a randomised selection of instrumentalists would be inappropriate. Whether determined by tutors or students, five- and six-piece bands are the most frequent group size in *Performance Management*, typically comprising kit, bass, keyboard, guitar(s) and vocal(s). Exley and Dennick (2004), in fact, propose that the 'optimum size' for group teaching 'is between 5 and 8 per group' (p. 2). Larger bands consisting of eight or more musicians featuring less prominent instrumental duties or backing vocals may increase the danger for participants to indulge in what Biggs (2003) describes as 'social loafing'. Perhaps groups consisting of four to six musicians are the ideal size and present the opportunity for peer learning involving band members' rehearsing attributes.

An example of how students' personal attributes can become significant for group music work appears in Bryan (2004) where, during a jazz performance activity from Middlesex University, individuals are placed in situations in which they must respond at that time and in collaborative circumstances. Preparing for their group performance assessments which are partly improvised 'in the moment' requires students to be adaptable and responsive to the ideas and contributions of others and to develop leadership and supportive qualities. Those who display the attributes of being able to 'pull others along' are assessed accordingly.

A starting point in the literature on peer assessment is that which surveys the origination of the assessment criteria itself. There is a body of opinion (Brown & Knight, 1994, for example) in favour of criteria that are generated by the students themselves since it is they, of course, who will be using such criteria when making their judgements. Student-generated peer assessment criteria make sense also, because involving students in the assessment process can help to promote a greater transparency of process. There are many arguments in favour of involving students in determining their own assessment criteria

(Habershaw *et al.*, 1993; Brown & Knight, 1994); one of these, according to Prins *et al.* (2005), arises from the potential in peer assessment for participants to 'thrive on interaction' from which students can negotiate criteria. Similarly, Boud & Falchikov (2006) emphasise the learning opportunities that are available through involving students in formulating their own peer assessment criteria.

Assessment criteria tend to be articulated in a written format only, which may not always be sufficient in conveying subtle meanings, especially for musical activities. Rust *et al.* (2003) describe the 'tacit' nature of much assessment criteria and acquiring an understanding of these is a real problem because of the difficulty of transferring such knowledge to others. Socialisation, Rust suggests, can help the transfer of 'tacit' knowledge (p. 161) between individuals. Might the kind of social interaction that occurs in a band rehearsal be an ideal setting for such a transfer to take place?

Orsmond *et al.* (2002) report that, by formulating the criteria themselves, students acquire a kind of special understanding and

... they may have developed a sense of 'ownership' which related to both the *meaning* of the criteria and the *worth* of the criteria in terms of marks to be awarded. Students may feel that because they constructed the criteria they are arbiters of the quality of the criteria expression and/or of the subject matter the criteria expresses (p. 320).

Ballantyne *et al.* (2002), remind us that not only are establishing clear peer assessment criteria important, but equally so is training students in their use of them. An overview of the training programme given to *Performance Management* students appears later. Norton (2004), however, questions the appropriateness of employing explicit criteria because of the danger of inflexibility, which could limit students to focus on the purely visible. Indeed by adopting explicit and detailed criteria, Norton argues that this can have a 'deleterious effect' on the peer assessment process. She suggests that we should replace the term 'assessment criteria' with 'learning criteria' in order that the focus is not just on the purely visible, but includes wider demonstrations of learning that are more centred on the individual. If so, then for peer assessment of group rehearsing, establishing 'learning criteria' could, perhaps involve individuals' personal attributes.

A valuable contribution to the literature on peer assessment in music is *Peer Learning in Music* (Hunter & Russ, 2000). Described in this project is a music history group activity at Ulster University, which used a mix of personalities as a source for determining the groups. Such settings can emphasise interpersonal qualities and students can learn much about themselves, and about the personal attributes of others, as they are displayed in the group.

Daniel (2004) describes a peer assessment procedure in a music performance context where, following the development of assessment criteria, students were required to identify weaknesses and strengths as a part of the written assessment; 'weaknesses' later re-titled as 'areas requiring the most attention' (p. 96). This interesting approach, however, seems not to have been pursued and attracted little further comment in the paper.

Finally, Blom and Poole (2004), in their use of peer assessment for solo performance, believe that students learn to evaluate critically the performing of others which can prepare them for the roles of assessor and critic. They suggest also, that students develop the capacity to be trusted and to evaluate their own learning.

The provision of regular and ongoing feedback is an essential part of the process that enables students to improve or revise their work. This is explored by Drew (2001) in her study about how students perceive the link between assessment feedback and learning which, for Topping *et al.* (2000), also involves students being able to receive 'rich and detailed qualitative feedback information about strengths and weaknesses' (p. 150). It is important that the feedback arising from peer assessment supports learning which, for Performance management, enables students to make improvements to their rehearsing. If so, what can we say about the kinds of learning experiences that may arise from band rehearsals?

Glaserfield (1995) and Schwandt (1994), argue that we learn and acquire knowledge through engaging in activities or processes and that

... knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by mind ... [and] ... human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct or make it. (Schwandt, 1994: 125).

If so, then knowledge may arise from the complexities of the interaction between band members during both group rehearsing and peer assessment activities; it is a view that would chime with social constructivist theories of learning (Vygotsky, 1976; Bruner, 1986; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In short, band members 'learn by doing' through their engagement in the social setting that is characteristic of group music making; this activity can embrace students' social learning experiences as well as acquiring knowledge in the domain of popular music. It is the former of these that is the focus of this article.

Project outline

Returning to my involvement in *Performance Management*, I was interested in exploring how peer assessment might be used to encourage students to acquire greater social awareness and knowledge about themselves and about each other during their band rehearsals. I thought that a peer assessment system, which focused on their personal attributes, could help develop this awareness. Individuals' personal attributes, particularly those relating to their teamwork competencies, have relevance surely to a productive group rehearsal. If so, then perhaps two kinds of personal attribute might be developed: those relating to the band as a whole, and those relating to each individual in the band. The following sections explain the context, preparation and methodology of the project.

Rehearsing and performing

The majority of students entering the popular music degree programme during each year matriculate with non-traditional qualifications, typically a National Diploma in Popular Music. The proportion of mature undergraduates is about one third with many having substantial semi-professional gigging experience. There is usually a gender imbalance, typical on popular music courses, with males comprising about three-quarters of the total in each cohort. Instrumental expertise among individual male students, in order of frequency, is typically: guitarists, electric bassists, vocalists, keyboard players and drummers. The majority of females are vocalists. Most students are also proficient on other instruments:

many guitarists play bass and drums; many vocalists play guitar or keyboard. Irrespective of what is considered as their 'first' instrument, about half of the students also make a contribution as lead or backing vocalists.

There are four medium sized band rooms and bands are usually assigned 2 hours of rehearsal time per week. These are supervised by me and sometimes also by another tutor. Bands also book additional rehearsals in their own time. As a tutor, I work with each band in turn from room to room on developing their song material and providing feedback on their rehearsing and performing. This pattern of rehearsing and performing can be described as a *cycle* of activities and I use the term *rehearsing and performing cycle* to describe the typical organisation of these activities. Each cycle usually comprises the following: introduction and explanation of the assignment brief; preparation or training activities; establishment of assessment criteria; deciding band membership; rehearsing; peer assessment of rehearsing; public performance; assessment of the performance; feedback (of rehearsing and performance).

Being closely involved with students during their group rehearsals has, over time, enabled me to understand the importance of building trust involving, for example, the student–tutor relationship, the student–student relationship and the student–band relationship. Band rehearsing of popular music is a highly collaborative activity that involves the creativity, musical experiences and unique contributions of each band member. Individuals' contributions themselves will, in part, be communicated through the interpersonal skills and attributes of each participant. Indeed, rehearsing and teamwork skills are qualities that are highly prized in the profession.

Training

Although the peer assessment training that is given to each class has been modified over the years, it always adopts the principle of student agreement, transparency of the process and explains the rationale for using this mode of assessment. It usually requires between 2–3 hours and is divided into three sections: purpose and process of peer learning and assessment; using personal attributes as assessment criteria; and identifying students' own attributes. The training always begins with a discussion about the assignment brief and an explanation of the rationale for the activities involved in peer assessment. This is followed by a workshop session introducing the concept of personal attributes (using the terms 'attributes' and 'qualities' interchangeably) in the context of a band rehearsal.

Students then participate in an introductory activity where they identify particular personal attributes that they think might be appropriate to be used as peer assessment criteria. They describe a number of these and explain why band members should display them in their rehearsals. The class then discuss each of these rehearsal-related personal attributes in terms of their possible meanings for band rehearsing. Students, working individually, consider five or six of these attributes (or any others) that they regard, from their own experience, as being important for them. Doing this helps to develop an awareness of their particular personal attributes and to reflect on these in their rehearsing.

As discussed earlier, band rehearsing can be likened to an *in situ* collective learning experience; this experience ought to be reflected in criteria that are formulated by the band together. Consequently, students, in their bands, suggest three *mutually agreeable attributes*

that they believe are important to their band rehearsing, which may be used as peer assessment criteria. It is important to stress that these group-agreed attributes are formulated on what they, as a band, decide applies to them specifically, although qualities using a generic descriptor such as 'teamwork' or 'communication' may be equally appropriate. Similarly, and in order to give focus to their *individual* involvement in rehearsing, each student is asked to formulate three *individual attributes* that they regard as being of personal importance and suitable for use as peer assessment criteria.

To summarise, each student generates a total of six personal attributes, comprising three group-agreed and three individually formulated attributes, which they agree to be used as their assessment criteria. Six attributes is a suitable number that allows an appropriate range of qualities to be assessed, while remaining manageable within the assessment process.

In order to convey more about the nature of the meanings, symbolised by their attribute descriptors, students are asked to formulate what they consider to be the opposites. This results in a set of bipolar descriptors in which one of the poles represents the positive or desired attribute, while the other pole represents the opposite or antonym; for example, *Patience–Irritability*. A five-point Likert-type scale (one to five) is used, with one being described as poor/negative, five described as excellent/positive, and three described as average/neutral, with four and two being above or below average.

Initially, personal attributes (both group-agreed attributes and individual attributes) focus on what students consider is important to them. In order to develop an awareness of specific qualities, subsequent assignments involve individuals identifying what they consider to be their *personal strengths* and *personal weaknesses*. Inviting each student to reveal what they regard as their strengths and weaknesses requires care, respect and sensitivity. Encouraging students to be honest and willing about sharing their personal weaknesses with others, as their peer assessment criteria, needs both careful preparation and their agreement. Given that the prize of supporting and advancing learning is at its centre of the process, engaging in this potentially delicate activity can, nevertheless, be very rewarding.

The sets of personal attributes that are provided by each student are then arranged into an assessment table and distributed amongst the relevant band members. Table 1 illustrates an assessment table that is ready for each member to enter their marks.

There is an increasing focus on using students' personal weakness criteria during the rehearsing and performing cycles, where the potential for bringing about improvements might be greater. Further (as confirmed by the students), those who speak with the greatest authority in deciding which personal weakness attributes might be improved, are not necessarily the individual him/herself, but the band with whom they have rehearsed.

This activity, whereby bands formulate personal weakness attributes for each member, is made with the full agreement of the individual including written consent before any *band-determined personal weaknesses* can be formulated. Finally, and in order to increase the emphasis further on bringing about improvements to personal weaknesses, the three group-agreed attributes are either discarded completely or simply replaced by a single, tutor-imposed *general contribution to rehearsing* criterion. Table 2 illustrates a peer assessment that has been marked by a five-piece band and totalled by the tutor. (Student CA, for example, received 5/5 for his/her *Overall contribution and support of the band* from each of the four other band members, resulting in a total of 20/20. For *On time* CA received

Table 1 *Assessment table prior to marking*

| Dec 2002 Band F Mark out of 5 1= poor negative 3= neutral average 5= positive excellent | PEER ASSESSMENTS | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|---|--|---|---|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| | Group-agreed attributes | | | Individual attributes (3 self selected personal weakness) x= not applicable to you | | | | | | | | |
| | Reliability (Unreliability) | Creative input (No creative input) | Commitment (Poor commitment) | Performing confidently (Nervous) | Making decisions (Letting others do the deciding) | Cooperative skills (Poor cooperation) | Performing ability (Poor performing ability) | Remembering equipment (Not remembering equipment) | Organisation skills (Lack of) | Leadership (Poor leadership) | Interpersonal skills (Poor interpersonal skills) | Punctuality (Not punctual) |
| SS | | | | x | x | x | x | | x | | x | |
| QB | | | | | | x | x | x | x | x | x | |
| LP | | | | x | x | | | x | x | x | | x |
| MJ | | | | | x | x | x | x | x | | | x |
| CR | | | | | x | x | x | x | | x | x | |

Table 2 Assessment table based on three band-determined personal weaknesses and a single group attribute that has been peer marked and totalled by the tutor

| May 2008 Band 4 Mark out of 5 1 = poor negative 3 = neutral average 5 = positive excellent | PEER ASSESSMENTS | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|----------------------------------|---|---|--|---|--------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| | Group attribute | Individual Attributes (3 band-determined personal weaknesses) x = not applicable Please assess yourself (although this is not counted, as it provides useful self-assessment). | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Overall contribution and support of the band | On time (Late for rehearsals) | Self disciplined (Unprepared) | Versatility (Not broadened experience) | Confidence (Over confident or too nervous) | Speaking out (Keeping opinions to myself) | Always ready to play (Messes about between songs) | Focused (Not on task) | Team member (Not working with band) | Let others have more input (Talking too much) | Work on dynamics (Forget about dynamics) | Work on performance (Ignore performance aspects) |
| CA | 20/20 | 12/20 | 16/20 | 17/20 | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| GL | 20/20 | x | x | 18/20 | 19/20 | 20/20 | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| ND | 19/20 | 8/20 | x | x | x | 14/20 | 17/20 | x | x | x | x | x |
| RB | 20/20 | x | x | 18/20 | x | x | x | 17/20 | 18/20 | x | x | x |
| BN | 20/20 | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | x | 17/20 | 16/20 | 18/20 |

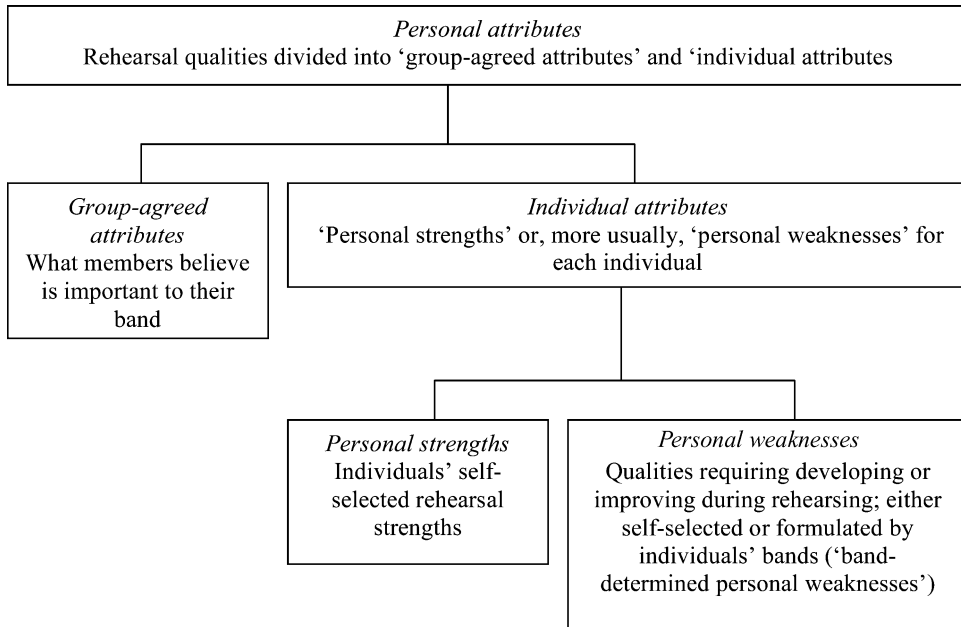


Fig. 1 Summary of 'personal attribute' terms

marks of 4/5, 3/5, 3/5, and 2/5, totalling 12/20. Overall, CA received a combined total of 65/80. Individuals also assess themselves; these marks, although not counting towards the total, are useful as a basis for self-evaluation and discussing feedback.)

Being involved in activities that focus on personal weaknesses helps individuals to develop a greater awareness of, and where to improve in, these areas. Figure 1 summarises the 'personal attribute' terms used in *Performance Management*.

Figure 1 is illustrative also of the sequence of activities through which students are introduced, when formulating various types of personal attribute criteria. This process starts with establishing group-agreed and individual attribute criteria; the latter usually having a focus on their self-selected personal weaknesses. Subsequent activities involve bands formulating personal weakness criteria for each of their members, with group attributes usually being discarded. Consequently, in this peer assessment project, supporting an awareness of individuals' personal attributes necessitates a gradual change of focus: from group-agreed attributes to individual attributes and from using personal weakness attributes that are self-selected by individuals to band-determined personal weakness attributes.

Research process and analysis procedures

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 students across four cohorts of students during 2002–2006, in order to gather their responses to using personal attributes as peer assessment criteria, as a part of doctoral research (Pulman, 2008). Lincoln and Guba

(1985), Denzin and Lincoln (1994), Miles and Huberman (1984, 1994) together with the surveys of Cresswell (1998) and Cohen *et al.* (2000) are among the key texts that tease out the characteristics of, and implications for, data analysis involving studies conducted in natural settings such as this. It is typical in naturalistic enquiries that data suggest the theory rather than vice versa, that data analysis becomes an 'inductive process for illuminating social processes' (Miles & Huberman, 1984: 20), that theory emerges rather than being pre-ordinate, and that a priori theory is replaced by grounded theory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 39–43; Cohen *et al.*, 2000: 137–138).

Grounded theory methods involving semi-structured interviews (Charmaz, 2000, 2006) were adapted to analyse these data; these included open coding, axial coding and selective coding procedures. In coding and interpreting the data, care was taken not to add inferences to the narratives, since the aim was to capture the respondents' interpretation of their peer assessment experiences. The interview data were analysed, initially, using an open coding procedure where students' responses were placed into conceptual subcategories. Connections were then developed between the conceptual subcategories to form core categories, a process similar to axial coding.

The basis upon which subcategories were identified was derived from the number of interviewees whose responses were represented by that category, together with the number of open-coded responses attributed to it. I decided that where similar open-coded responses arose from at least three of the 16 interviewees, and these also attracted several comments during their interviews, this constituted grounds for a conceptual subcategory (described as a 'weak' strength of expression). The data suggested two other measurement boundaries: one that contained the majority of subcategories, which comprised similar responses from between four and seven interviewees ('moderate' strength of expression); the other containing the subcategories comprising similar responses from between eight and 16 interviewees ('strong' strength of expression). Table 3 lists each of the subcategories and the strength of response arising from the interviews.

The relationships between each of these categories were integrated to form a central focus; a grounded theory procedure known as *selective coding*. There were four substantive categories that emerged as this focus for the interview responses: self-knowledge, feedback, confidence and honesty.

Self-knowledge arose from interviewees' increasing awareness of themselves as a consequence of thinking about personal attribute criteria in peer assessment activities:

Individual attributes developed/improved: 'Using peer assessment encouraged my commitment'. (SH)

Problems affecting development of personal attributes: 'Contribution to ideas or leadership difficult if there is a dominant member'. (HS)

Awareness of personal attributes during rehearsals: 'It made me look a lot more at myself' (YL); 'Subconsciously, I was always thinking about the two things I needed to improve on'. (TP)

Band members should choose individuals' personal weakness attributes: 'Band members should choose, because they are more honest at identifying your weaknesses'. (SA)

Students received two kinds of feedback: *band-determined personal weakness* attributes that band members formulated for them and the *marks* that their band awarded. Receiving

Table 3 Summary of interview analysis by subcategories and strength of response given by interviewees

| Subcategories and strength of response | Focus |
|---|------------------------------|
| Individual attributes developed/improved (moderate) | Self knowledge/ awareness |
| Group-agreed attributes developed/improved (moderate) | |
| Problems affecting development of personal attributes (moderate) | |
| Awareness of personal attributes in rehearsals (moderate) | |
| Band members should choose individuals' personal weakness attributes (moderate) | |
| Perceptions of self-weaknesses not always agree with what others perceive (weak) | |
| Revealed people's thoughts about us (moderate) | Feedback |
| Helped us to see what we were doing (moderate) | |
| Revealed our weaknesses/helped us to understand how to improve (moderate) | |
| Taught us to try harder (moderate) | |
| Need more constructive criticism (moderate) | |
| Marks should count towards grades (moderate) | Confidence |
| Peer assessment helps to develop confidence (strong) | |
| Friendship marking was a problem (weak) | Honesty |
| Prefer to mark in private (strong) | |
| Private marking is more honest (moderate) | |
| Prefer to mark together as a group (weak) | |
| Honest feedback sought from everyone, including friends (strong) | |
| Marking should be conducted before the performance (moderate) | |
| Marking before/after the performance did not influence the peer assessment (strong) | |
| Marking was accurate /fair (strong) | |

feedback about band-determined personal weaknesses was, for some, a revelatory, profound and maturing experience; such feedback can help one to see oneself as others see you. Students often responded to this kind of feedback in two ways; one being a 'self realisation' or 'epiphany' moment; the other being characterised by a motivational response. Being able to respond appropriately to such feedback, when receiving the list of band-determined personal weaknesses, or in receiving the marks for these, also attracted comments:

Revealed people's thoughts about us: 'An exceptional way of getting feedback'. (EJ)

Revealed our weaknesses/helped us to understand how to improve: 'You have to listen and respect someone willing and brave enough to tell you your faults'. (NL)

Helped us to see what we were doing: 'It lets people know what they think of you as well as what you think of yourself'. (OD)

Taught us to try harder: 'I made a conscious effort to work on my attributes'. (EN)

Need more constructive criticism: 'People need to emphasise constructive criticism. . . [rather than a] . . . stab in the back' (WK); 'you have got to be able to take constructive criticism for others to decide your attributes' (EJ); 'It is hard to work with people who cannot accept criticism'. (OM)

Marks should count towards grades: 'Students take it more seriously'. (TP)

Students also reported significant changes in confidence levels; some responses suggested that improvements in students' confidence arose from their engagement with the process:

Peer assessment helped to develop our confidence: 'I've always been the one to kind of take a back seat and kind of just sit and do whatever I'm told to do, if you know what I mean. So, because they put me in the position of, you know, deciding this, that and other, I've learned to be more assertive' (DS); 'It made me look a lot more at myself and looking at their confidence like, with mine' (YL); 'You definitely notice people who are confident . . . put their ideas forward more than people who tend to maybe not have had as much experience of playing with people; they like to sit back a little bit'. (OM)

The comments involving honesty suggested two concerns: one arising from issues of trust and the other from band members' interactions with each other. Many thought that peer assessment marking should be conducted in secret, rather than marks being agreed collaboratively by band members, declaring private marking to be more honest. A number of students favoured using personal weaknesses that were only determined by the band because they thought this was more honest than personal weaknesses that individuals had self-selected for themselves. There were a number of other issues also, concerning students' apprehension about providing face-to-face feedback, and, how they felt about assessing friends and strangers.

Honest feedback sought from everyone, including friends: '. . . [there are] . . . difficulties in telling the truth face-to-face, so written feedback is good' (SA, DS); 'written feedback avoids confrontations' (HA, SA); 'it's tough assessing your friends' (OD); 'I try to be honest with my friends' (HA, MR); 'some give friends better marks' (OD); 'am more critical with strangers'. (OD)

Four-stage model

During the 8 years of *Performance Management*, a new process model of peer learning based upon the use of personal attributes as assessment criteria has developed. It has been a gradual process arising out of the rehearsing and performing cycles and informed also by the interviews. The fundamentals of the model, illustrated in Fig. 2, are a sequence of activities, comprising four stages. These encourage students (and the tutor) to experience, share and develop awareness and knowledge about themselves and about other band members during rehearsing, through engaging in a number of peer assessment activities.

The tutor's role is important in facilitating experiences through which learning and knowledge creation may develop. This includes providing activities for students to: develop

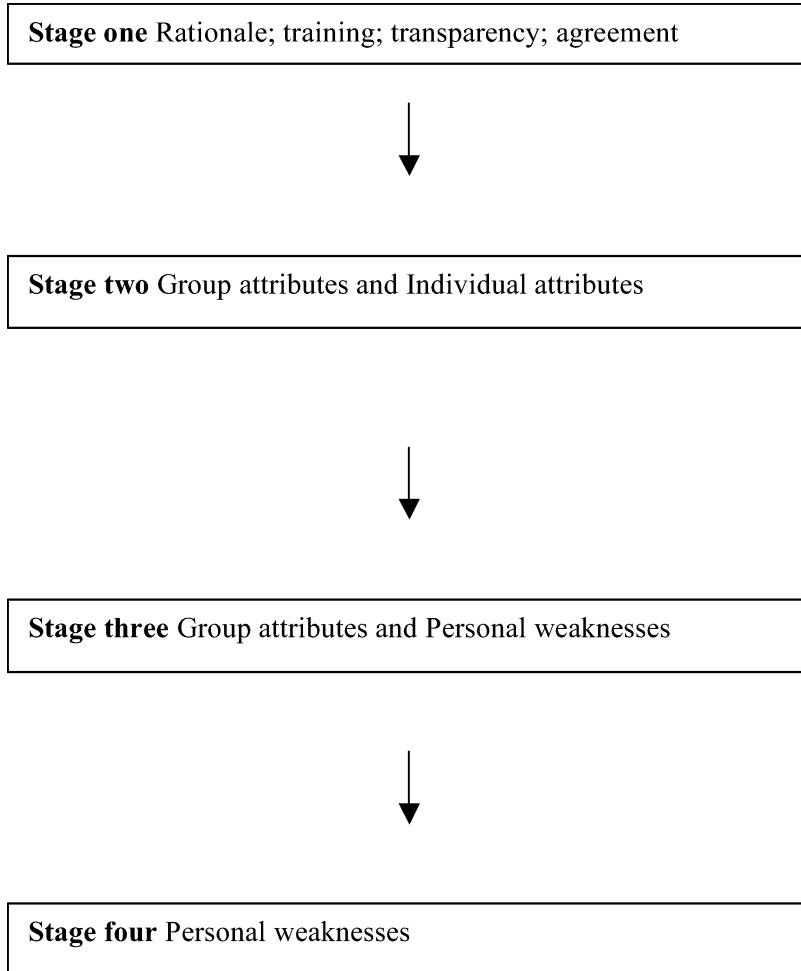


Fig. 2 Stages of the process model

an awareness of their own personal weaknesses; reveal these personal weaknesses to their band members; agree to these being used as peer assessment criteria; decide as a band the personal weakness criteria for each band member; peer assess other band members' personal weaknesses; reflect on and respond to feedback.

The model, then, offers a sequence of graduated stages of personal attribute usage, which create experiences that support students' learning about themselves and about others. It forms a pedagogy, which leads the individual from a limited awareness of one's own personal attributes, limited self-assessment and limited feedback, to experiences that develop each of these. Students progress from a position of revealing a little about themselves, through their personal attributes in group rehearsing, to one in which they

agree assessment criteria for them. It is a journey that requires careful preparation. Values of a moral kind, such as trust and honesty, are also fostered.

Stage one

Peer assessment can be stressful for students (Pope, 2005) and this may be exacerbated by the absence of careful preparation. Stage one therefore, contains preparatory activities including: the rationale for the peer assessment system, explaining its potential learning benefits, reassuring students about the transparency of the process, outlining principles of agreement, describing the concept of using personal attributes as assessment criteria and safeguards such as tutor moderation of marks. In addition, there are a number of training activities that involve identifying and formulating personal attributes; some of these have already been described earlier. Bands also experience a preliminary performing assignment that is tutor assessed. This enables the tutor to acquire some experiential knowledge of the students. Such knowledge can help to inform the tutor about levels of maturity, honesty and trust among the groups, when deciding on their 'readiness' to progress to the next stage. It is often necessary to re-visit the rationale at various other times during the process, emphasising once more the potential benefits in using personal attributes as assessment criteria.

Stage two

At the centre of the model lies a process for the identification of particular personal attributes, thought to be important for individuals as they rehearse in their band. Two activities are introduced to students during stage two; these involve group-agreed attributes and individual attributes. For group-agreed attributes, band members, together, formulate three group-agreed attributes based on the criterion 'important to rehearsing'. Individuals additionally formulate two self-selected personal strengths plus one self-selected personal weakness criteria, or, three self-selected personal weaknesses.

Stage two encourages students to develop an awareness of themselves and others through formulating group-agreed attributes and individual attributes. Group-agreed attributes, with their focus on what is important for the band as a whole, are less intrusive. These are a suitable starting point for the activity of identifying personal attributes. As well as involving students in the process of formulating these, group-agreed attributes symbolise shared band values and principles, which, in turn, can help to develop trust.

Individual attributes have a focus on the specific rehearsing qualities of each band member and are introduced in order to develop self-awareness. Using peer assessment criteria that involves students' individual attributes can risk intrusion into areas that might be regarded as private and personal. It is important, therefore, that students' agreement with this be sought at the outset. Students formulate these by themselves, on the basis of identifying what they consider to be their own personal strengths and weaknesses. Rather than using the term 'personal weaknesses', tutors may instead prefer to describe these as 'qualities needing improvement or development'. Stage two offers choices: self-selecting individual attributes comprising two personal strengths and one personal weakness, or, self-selecting individual attributes comprising three personal weaknesses.

The first option, utilising two personal strengths and one personal weakness attribute, allows a more cautious and less intrusive approach towards developing students' awareness. The second option involves each band member self-selecting three personal weakness attributes; this progresses students more speedily through the stages of the model. It is for the tutor to decide, on the basis of her/his knowledge of the students' 'readiness' or maturity, which of these two options is the most appropriate.

Stage three

When sufficient student-tutor and student-student trust in the process have developed, and the tutor has also acquired sufficient experiential knowledge of the bands, then progression to stage three of the model may be considered. For stage three, bands continue to formulate three group-agreed attributes based on what they, as an entity, believe are important for their rehearsing.

It is at this stage that students are introduced to a key activity, explained earlier, in which they assign responsibility for the selection of their personal weakness attributes to the band with which they have previously rehearsed. The success of this may depend upon whether sufficient trust and honesty has developed that would give students the confidence to participate. This is for the tutor to decide, based on her/his experiential knowledge of the group.

It is natural for unease and doubt to surface at this point. Difficulties may be faced both in obtaining and receiving personal information of this sort: for bands in deciding the personal weakness attributes of others and for individuals at the receiving end. Although students receive preparation and training at stage one, the rationale may be revisited, re-emphasising transparency, agreement and the potential learning benefits for each individual.

As discussed, the socialisation process involved in rehearsing and discussing personal attributes (Rust *et al.*, 2003) is important for the transfer of students' tacit knowledge about the personal attribute criteria of band members: bands discuss and formulate band-determined personal weakness attributes together and present these, face-to-face with the individual. The overwhelming majority of students in Performance management usually accept and agree to the three personal weakness attributes that the band provides with little hesitation. Of course it is understandable that some will object to attributes that they believe are unfair. Bands, for example, might have chosen a personal weakness that an individual considers she or he is unable to improve or to develop. There is little to be gained from insisting that students will be assessed on a personal weakness attribute without their agreement; indeed, severe damage might be done to the student-band and student-tutor relationships. When an individual does object, the band is asked to revise those that are contested by the student until agreement is reached (often leading to some alteration in the wording).

Stage three provides an option (as in stage two) for tutors to delay using band-determined personal weaknesses, where tutors are unsure of the 'readiness' of their students. If there is doubt, then students can simply repeat the activity of using self-selected personal weaknesses in order for confidence and honesty in the process to develop further.

Formulating the three group-agreed attributes, a useful activity for building trust between band members, continues as before.

Stage four

This final stage changes the balance of assessment criteria in favour of band-determined personal weaknesses in order to increase students' awareness of, and motivation for, improving their weaknesses. Group-agreed attributes are replaced by a single 'contribution to rehearsing' criterion, which allows band members to provide general feedback to individuals about their commitment or support of the band. As a result, three out of the four peer assessment criteria employed are based on band-determined personal weakness; Table 2 illustrates these changes of assessment criteria at stage four.

Stage four represents the culmination of a journey through which individuals learn about themselves and about others. The process involves a carefully structured sequence of activities that are designed to develop important areas of self-knowledge over a realistic period of time; it is certainly not a 'quick fix' or 'one-off' method that might be appropriated simply in order to be able to tick the peer assessment box in a list of assessment techniques.

This process model offers a distinctive approach to peer learning through using assessment activities that support individuals in developing an awareness of their personal attributes and, through bringing about improvements in these, to their rehearsing and performing. Practitioners may recognise elements of the model that might have an application to their own group-work contexts.

It was suggested earlier that a 'tacit' knowledge or common understanding of the meanings of personal attributes could be created, rendering unnecessary the need for these to be always defined discursively by band members. The creation of a common understanding of what is meant by, for example, *confidence*, *creative input* or *tolerance*, may arise from the shared experiential context of the learners. As all the learners in each cohort were engaged with the same set of contexts and experiences during their rehearsing, it is from this sharing that an unspoken understanding of the meanings of personal attributes may develop.

A moral dimension

The process model suggests the presence of a moral dimension also, particularly involving that of trust, honesty and fairness. A peer assessment system based upon individuals' personal attributes requires not only care and sensitivity in its operation, but also to articulate a rationale that makes clear to its participants such assessments speak only about the particular learning context. This is a crucial point for, as Boud and Walker (1993) note, there is the important distinction to be made between the person who is always valued and specific activities (in this case, rehearsing), which may be subject to critical comment.

Implicit within each stage of the model is the building of trust between individuals and their bands. Stage two, for example, involves individuals placing trust in their band to provide an honest assessment of the self-selected personal attributes that they have disclosed to them; stages three and four invite individuals to trust their band members to decide the appropriate band-determined personal weaknesses for them. Indeed, a desire

for honest feedback and fair marking was strongly expressed by interviewees. Because students work together in order to develop their group-agreed attributes, this activity can be of great help towards building trust among band members. Of importance for the tutor also, is the building of trust between himself or herself and the class.

All manner of tensions may arise between band members during a rehearsal. In the *Performance Management* module, disagreements about musical taste, song choices, creative direction and individuals' reluctance to perform material in unfamiliar musical genres are typical sources of tension. The process model offers scope for individuals and bands to resolve these through the use of thoughtfully chosen personal attribute criteria. Whether they are self-selected or band-determined, knowing that their personal attributes will be peer assessed can encourage individuals to develop, for example, a greater tolerance of particular individuals. Indeed, the regularity with which personal attribute criteria such as *Flexibility* and *Openness to different genres* were either self-selected or determined by bands, suggests that the students were very aware, themselves, of the need to resolve tensions among band members in order to improve their music making.

Conclusion

The process model is founded on a number of pedagogical and paradigmatic principles. It provides, through its four stages, a graduated process of engagement in peer assessment activities that involve students developing awareness and knowledge of themselves and of others. In providing options for progressive learning it is also flexible. Using personal attributes as assessment criteria may enable each band member to develop and improve key qualities in themselves that are important towards achieving a meaningful and productive rehearsal. Careful preparation is required, as it is important to provide a supportive framework through which trust and honesty between individuals, bands and tutors may be fostered. Band-determined personal weaknesses are a key element of the model. This activity involves individuals, with their consent, allowing the band with which they have rehearsed, to decide their personal weakness assessment criteria for them. It provides each band member with distinctive feedback; such feedback can help you to see yourself as others see you, and to know yourself as others know you. Acquiring this knowledge can enable musicians to make improvements to their rehearsal contribution.

Although this process model has been in operation now for a number of years, difficulties remain. In adopting the principle of student agreement, individuals may, of course, exercise their right to opt out from various peer assessment activities. If so, then the tutor might face a situation, for example, where only four out of five band members have agreed to participate in the activity of band-determined personal weaknesses. If so, perhaps those opting out can continue to self-select their personal weaknesses.

Another problem that can surface concerns students' 'readiness' (trust, honesty, confidence or maturity, for example) to progress from one stage to the next. Although this is for the tutor to decide, based on his or her experiential knowledge of the class, 'readiness' is not, unfortunately, likely to be uniform among all members of a band, less still throughout the class as a whole. Does the tutor progress everybody to the next stage, despite having doubts about a few, or ought progression to be delayed in order to allow further time for 'readiness' to appear in all?

Although there are no easy solutions to these problems, we may, with our increasing experience of peer assessment, at least be more able to anticipate potential difficulties and prepare appropriate peer learning strategies accordingly. Developing peer assessment systems that are designed to be responsive to the unique needs of individual learners while, at the same time, being able to provide meaningful and worthwhile activities for the whole class, is a challenge and a topic that deserves further investigation.

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