CONTENTS

ASSIGNMENT: Identify ONE teaching and learning issue, with a curriculum focus, which has been of significance to you in you induction year. Discuss this issue drawing upon the relevant academic and professional literature and your induction experiences to support your discussion. (5000 words)

INTRODUCTION

This essay is an exploration into the relevance of MidYIS tests as a predictor for results at GCSE Music. A comparison will be made between two sets of skills: those assessed by the MidYIS test – taken by most children in England at the beginning of year 9 – and those which, according to exam boards and experienced music educators, are tested at GCSE. Certain fundamental skills required for success at GCSE Music cannot be tested in the MidYIS tests, and I would suggest that a combination of MidYIS-type testing, musical intelligence assessment and some measure of the amount and quality of musical experience gained before embarking on the GCSE course would serve as a much more relevant indicator of likely success, and a more appropriate baseline from which to measure value added. However, the term 'success' needs defining – many pupils who are excellent musicians even before they reach year 9 may not obtain the highest marks at GCSE, and this begs the question, what exactly does GCSE music test, the musicality of a pupil (which will be discussed with reference to Howard Gardner's theories of multiple intelligence) or a pupil's ability to 'jump through the hoops' required to do well in this type of exam? Schools continually have their statistics compared, and the practice of comparing 'value added' through the means of a baseline test, is undoubtedly fairer than simply comparing final results. However, if, as I will argue, the baseline test is largely meaningless, music departments should not be put in the difficult position of having to justify any statistical 'evidence' of underachievement.

WHAT DOES THE MIDYIS TEST DO?

The MidYIS test is split into four sections: "vocabulary and word fluency", "mathematical speed and knowledge", skills consisting of "proof reading" and "perceptual speed and accuracy", and non-verbal skills consisting of "cross sections",

"block counting" and "pictures". Through some example questions taken from the MidYIS website[1] (see Appendix I) I will try to determine the skills assessed that may be relevant to GCSE music.

The vocabulary and mathematical sections are about basic knowledge. Obviously those pupils who have a wide knowledge of everyday language will be more likely to understand all the words on a question paper, and be able to answer expressively. In relation to music the fact that a child has a wide vocabulary may suggest that he or she easily absorbs new words and would have little difficulty learning specialist musical terminology. An aptitude for mathematics or a good knowledge of mathematical processes may be an indicator of general intelligence, but I can identify little in these questions which could relate directly to GCSE music.

The 'Skills' section begins with a proof-reading passage. CEM's newsletter on the subject says:

> In the Proof Reading section, pupils are asked to spot mistakes in a passage of text. In this day and age, we often rely on computers to check our grammar and spelling. The mistakes the pupils are looking for are of the type that cannot be picked up by a spell check on the computer. Spelling mistakes and misuse of words like 'there' and 'their', 'vain' and 'vane'. Writing essays is a good way of assessing a pupil's skills in English. Obviously, in such a short test, we are unable to ask pupils to do this, nor would we be able to handle the marking of an essay. The Proof Reading sub-test measures effectively this highly important skill that anyone producing a piece of writing has to develop[2].

As CEM points out, accuracy in writing is useful in any exam in which writing takes place, but again, nothing specifically relates to musicality.

The 2 minute Perceptual Speed and Accuracy test "asks pupils to look for matches between a sequence of symbols, and a number of possible choices"[3].

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[1] http://cem.dur.ac.uk/MidYIS/ (accessed on 22 May 2002)

[2] http://cem.dur.ac.uk/MidYIS/documents/newsletter6.doc (accessed on 23 May 2002, published January 2000)

[3] http://cem.dur.ac.uk/MidYIS/Psa.htm (accessed on 22 May 2002)

Although most pupils could get all of these right, the test assesses how quickly they can pick out the correct match.

CEM writes:

> The Proof-Reading and PSA sections are tests for the modern world and are designed to measure fluency and speed. They relay on a pupil's scanning and skimming skills. These are desirable skills in examination situations.[4]

It could perhaps be argued that this section is the most significant so far, as it relates to the speed with which a child can identify and sort symbols; useful for reading music and linking what is read to particular movements on an instrument.

One would have thought that being musical is essentially non-verbal, even if some sections of the GCSE exam require written answers, but the non-verbal skills section of the MidYIS test is inevitably to do with visual, rather than auditory skills. Although it is generally recognised that sensitivity for pitch and rhythm is a type of spatial awareness, it is awareness of differences in frequencies and points in time, rather than an ability to visualise physical shapes, as in these tests. For the sake of illustrating this point, I have included example questions from the "cross section", "block counting" and "pictures" sub-tests, all taken from the MidYIS website[5].

The MidYIS prediction does not predict each subject by giving different weightings to each of its sub-tests. In response to a query about this, Professor Carol Fitz-Gibbon wrote:

> When we have GCSE results in August 2000, we will be doing a special study to see whether we need to use different combinations of the MidYIS sub-test to give predictions for each GCSE result. However, the expected outcome of this is that the total score, using all the sub-tests will provide the best prediction. This is what we would expect from theory and we have found this to be borne out in practice. For example, the best predictor of French at A level is not French at GCSE, but the average GCSE grade that

[4] http://cem.dur.ac.uk/MidYIS/documents/newsletter6.doc (accessed on 23 May 2002, published January 2000)

[5] http://cem.dur.ac.uk/MidYIS (accessed on 25 May)

students achieve"[6].

In effect this acknowledges the fact that the MidYIS test is, in fact, an indicator of general intelligence, rather than an assessment of the skills needed for different subjects. But the performance and composition of music fundamentally involve the effective manipulation of sound, and the only auditory component of the MidYIS test is the fact that pupils have to listen to the questions.

MIDYIS PREDICTOR GRAPHS

Figure 1

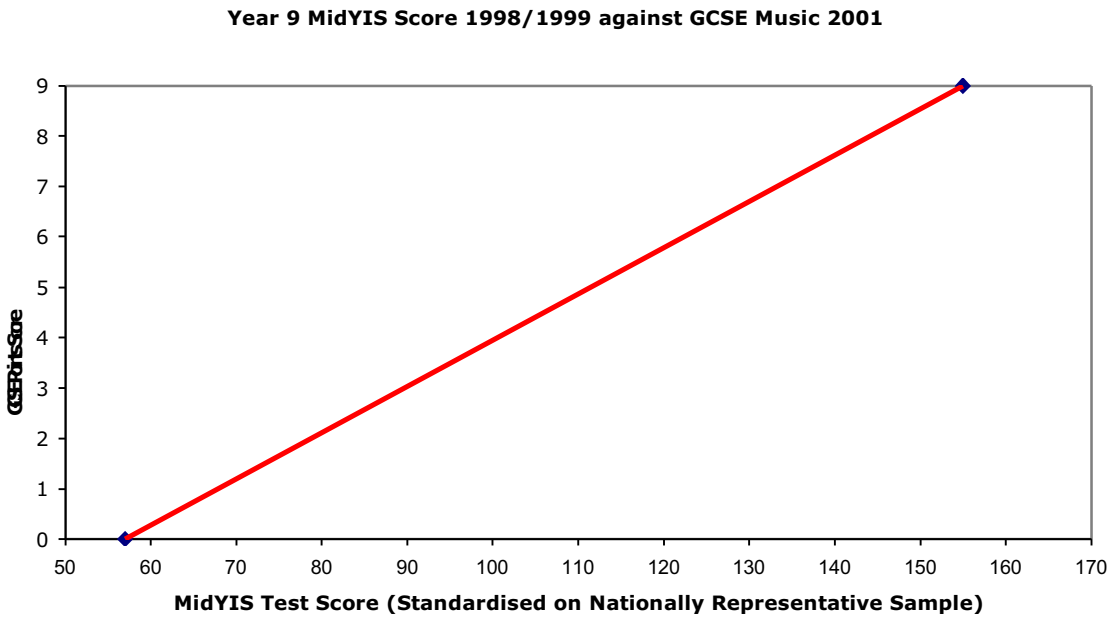
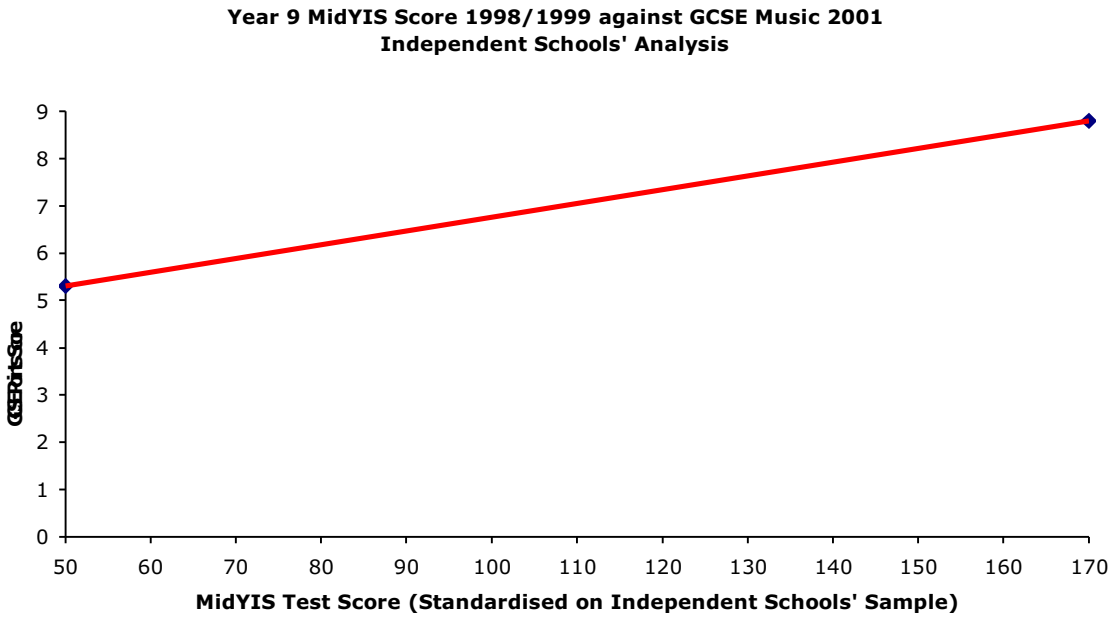


Figure 2

[6] http://cem.dur.ac.uk/MidYIS/documents/newsletter7.doc (accessed on 23 May 2002, published Spring 2000)



Figures 1 and 2 show the line of best fit for a scatter graph of Year 9 MidYIS scores in the academic year 1998/99 against those pupils GCSE Music scores in 2001 (here an '8' at GCSE denotes an A* grade, 7 an A, 6 a B and so on). The first graph displays a seemingly obvious link. A pupil who scores less than 60 on the MidYIS test is unlikely to pass GCSE Music. Those who obtain around 120 are statistically likely to achieve a B or C grade, and there are certain pupils whose abilities will enable them to achieve far beyond what it takes to get an A* at GCSE.

On the surface this appears to make sense. However, if one considers the structure of a GCSE Music exam (approximately equal weighting given to the two practical aspects of performance and composition, and the more 'academic' listening paper), one realises a number of flaws. It has been my experience that some pupils who do not usually do well academically, and who would not score highly on the MidYIS test, may still achieve good standards in musical performance and boost their overall exam grade significantly. Equally, there are some who do not express themselves well in writing, but find a creative and free form of expression in composition. Given the right medium (for example, a mixing desk, improvisation or

conventional staff notation) such pupils may produce imaginative and effective musical works. On the other hand, even a very bright child could not pick up advanced technical instrumental skills, a range of related vocabulary and a comfortable familiarity with musical notation between the beginning of Year 9 and the GCSE course.

Turning to the second graph, which only shows statistics for independent schools, it is immediately clear that it is largely nonsensical. The use of a 'line of best fit' here is completely inappropriate, showing as it does that an extremely low -ability child, perhaps with certain educational problems, would be expected to get a C grade. The small range of grades shown by this line is obviously unrealistic. One could ignore the extreme ends of the graph – undoubtedly it makes more sense towards the middle – but how does one determine the point at which it becomes meaningful, and therefore how does one determine the significance of a department's results falling below this 'line of best fit'?

DISCUSSION OF THE USE OF MIDYIS AS AN ACCURATE, OR EVEN RELEVANT PREDICTOR FOR MUSIC GCSE.

When considering the importance that one should assign to MidYIS predicti ons, one must also consider the value, for exceptionally musical pupils who might be expected to get the best results, of doing GCSE Music. The nature of the study of music is that one may become an 'excellent' musician, in terms of composition, performance and aural perception, at a very early age. Unlike most other subjects, for very able candidates the course is not so much about learning facts and then proving how many of them they have learned; it is more to do with paring down what they know into basic facts that are recognised by the mark scheme. On speaking to various GCSE examiners I have discovered that those candidates who are evidently experienced musicians will often fail to 'see the wood for the trees', and will omit writing down crucial (but, to them, blindingly obvious) information such as which instrument is playing, in favour of going into detailed structural analysis of a piece.

As a teacher it seems almost insulting to pupils' high levels of aural perception to encourage them to 'dumb-down' their answers for a GCSE exam. It is, of course, possible to write down the fundamental facts first and then extend the answer into a more thorough analysis, but in a timed exam how can we expect 16-year-old pupils to decide which facts the exam boards consider to be fundamental? It must be the instinct of every good music educator to encourage children to be the best musicians that they can be. Yet in order for exceptional pupils to gain exceptional grades at GCSE, they must spend significant amounts of valuable lesson time being trained to know what the mark scheme expects of them. Unlike less able pupils, the exam becomes not so much a case of writing down everything they know, but filtering their broad emotional response to the structure and textures of a piece of music into a few easily-phrased salient facts.

For those children who have been honing their instrumental technique and aural awareness for many years, it seems to me that the GCSE exam is not the best medium through which to successfully express their musicality. I have established that children who are less musical will struggle to acquire the necessary skills to do well in the exam. A prediction acquired through a test of 'academic' intelligence such as the MidYIS test will inevitably become distorted because music is not just about vocabulary, mathematics and all the other skills tested; it is also about years of practice at precise physical movements, aural perception and an ability to manipulate sound into a pleasing result.

THE BENTLEY TEST

IS THERE ANY CORRELATION BETWEEN MIDYIS PREDICTIONS AND BENTLEY TEST SCORES?

WHAT ARE THE SKILLS NEEDED FOR BENTLEY AND GCSE?

WHAT IS MISSING IN THE MIDYIS AND BENTLEY THAT IS FUNDAMENTAL TO GCSE?

SUM UP HOW YOU COULD DO A RESEARCH PROJECT INTO MIDYIS' RELEVANCE TO EACH SECTION OF THE EXAM PAPER.

CONCLUDE ON WHETHER THE MIDYIS TEST IS IMPORTANT.