teach through music

BROKEN TO UNBROKEN

Teachers enrolled in Teach Through Music (TTM) were asked to take ideas, experiences and learning from the programme – and beyond – into the classroom: to do something different and reflect on the outcomes.

In this case study Ben Reeves tackles the problem of working with young, unbroken voices and girl singers as a male teacher.

How do you engage female and unbroken voices in high-quality singing as a male teacher? Ben Reeve, Mulberry School for Girls, Tower Hamlets

Singing is an essential part of the National Curriculum but, as a male teacher, can present a real challenge when presented with a class of unbroken or girl voices.

Ben describes his school as a '98% Bangladeshi all-girl comprehensive in Tower Hamlets with VERY long lessons, reasonable GCSE uptake with good results and a 'flexi' KS3 curriculum.' He joined Teach Through Music with the goal of sharing some of his own approaches and experiencing outstanding schemes of work being developed by others with limited resources. He felt that singing at was fairly weak at his school, so he set out to identify new strategies to develop it.

> *"It is simply too difficult (for me) to sing at the required pitch to really stretch them."* – Ben Reeve

Being a proper singer

The initial phase of Ben's project involved him beginning to see himself as a real singer within the classroom. He joined a choir himself (outside of school) to improve his vocal confidence and began including lots of singing in his Y7 and Y8 classes, using vocal warm ups and incorporating singing into existing units. He saw the behaviour, confidence and enthusiasm of his pupils improve as they became more used to him singing with them.

Engaging warm-ups and songs

After sessions with his *Teach Through Music* Fellow, Ben introduced vocal warm-ups to his classes. He observed choir rehearsals and undertook online research for more ideas. The next stage was to sing through choruses of well-known current pop songs at a 'male' pitch whilst playing the 'female' pitch on the piano. He began recording the pupils as they sang and analysed the performances to improve quality and generate a useful feedback process for the classroom. He integrated singing into a number of different units of learning, using traditional African songs as part of an African drumming unit, for

example. He also began building a bank of warm-ups and songs to be used with subsequent classes and vocal groups.

Wider impact

Ben has noticed that the standard of singing this year has gone up considerably. This has been noticed and commented on around the school raising the profile of his work with the students. During a mid-June visit from Michelle Obama the pupils sang and delivered a confident performance that was recorded and broadcast on the news. Looking forward he is hoping to expand the provision of extra-curricular ensembles, with a choir being a priority that can build on the efforts being carried out in the classroom.

> *"My pupils sang to Michelle Obama when she visited in June and delivered a confident performance that was captured on the news"* – Ben Reeve

Improving teaching and learning

Ben recorded that pupils had become more confident and more enthusiastic about singing. He found that his classes, in general, became more comfortable with singing together. Although there were still some remnants of nervousness when performing in small groups to each other the children enjoyed singing as part of a wider performance and sang with confidence and enthusiasm.

> *"Behaviour during these sessions improved as they got more used to me singing with them"* – Ben Reeve

Personal reflection

Ben has completed a personal journey of development and progress that has resulted in confident student singers, a legacy of resources and a raised profile of vocal performance in his school.

> *" I certainly feel more confident singing to a class of girls, and more able to support them vocally. I'm using short vocal tasks more frequently than I ever have in lessons, and we are looking to create a vocal unit for KS3 next year."* – Ben Reeve