

Move to the Music, Diane Thurston

On Friday the 8th of September 2017, I was asked to deliver the welcome address at the interim dissemination event for the North East and Cumbria Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment (OTLA) programme. For the rest of the event, I was able to participate as a delegate, sitting at a table with colleagues from my own organisation and from three other organisations.

During the first speaker's presentation, a song that I felt encapsulated the key message from the presentation popped into my head – I noted this down and then decided that I would select a song to capture the spirit of each speaker's presentation as I understood it. As the event progressed, I asked the people on my table to join me in identifying the right song for each speaker. I noted that the task engaged us more actively with the contributions of the speakers, forcing us to check and negotiate the message from each speaker and enriching our learning as we constructed meaning together. As the event progressed, we also started to check our song choices with delegates at other tables and with delegates and speakers at the morning and lunch break, and this reinforced the shared construction of meaning.

As the day progressed I concluded that the activity could act as a feedback mechanism to the speakers –

- How was their message being received? Was it understood?
- Had they conveyed the key messages that they intended to?
- Could the meaning constructed by us as delegates support their own learning and the development of their research ideas?
- And importantly, was the task a form of assessment for (or as) learning for us as delegates?

It certainly was fun. One of the delegates at my table thanked me at the end of the event saying she had fully enjoyed taking part in my 'game'. The task maintained high levels of engagement throughout the event for me and my co-delegates on the table, and is something I will explore for future events particularly as the organisation of meetings, events and conferences to support learning and dissemination is a large part of my current role. I think the task can address an imbalance where sometimes high 'status' speakers can be intimidating for delegates and could support contributions from delegates, or address the imbalance of greater contributions from male delegates I have noted at events. The experience has also led to some possible research questions and I will integrate similar tasks into future events. I would like to ask presenters to identify their own 'song' to capture their key messages - to give them the opportunity to reflect on the different songs selected by delegates. I am also interested in conducting some of my own research into this and have drafted some initial questions. I welcome any thoughts on this article and on the questions below:

Questions

- Is there any research on effective dissemination of (practitioner) research to support an impact on practice?
- Is there any research into how presenters solicit feedback from delegates at dissemination events?
- How do we engage delegates at dissemination events?
- How do we assess the learning of delegates at dissemination events?
- Is there scope for academic literacy which supports maximum impact for practitioners attending such events?

- There are lots of ‘top tips’ for business people in how to get the most from events and from networking and to make the most of the learning from events to benefit their learners, their own development and the learning of their colleagues– is there benefit in having something like this for education practitioners?

I have listed the songs that we selected plus a link to our choices as a Spotify playlist. Enjoy!

<https://open.spotify.com/user/prinnd/playlist/1eH1NU1K5MMTGVIzKgXBLq?si=6ow1ARFC>

<p>Welcome Address, Diane Thurston, Director of Education Services, Newcastle College and Director of Success North</p>	<p>Song to encapsulate the message: ‘I’m So Excited’, Pointer Sisters</p>
<p>I wanted to convey the achievement of the practitioners and managers who had taken time from very busy professional lives to attend the event and share their research to date. I was certainly looking forward to the event to share learning with project teams from 17 providers across the North East and Cumbria, and a really interesting programme and high calibre of speakers. The conference artist, Graham Ogilvie, had already started to fill the wall at the back of the hall with drawings capturing early discussions by delegates and speakers. The selfie I took shows a very happy room of practitioners.</p>	

<p>How did we get here?, David Prinn, ccConsultancy</p>	<p>Song to encapsulate the message: ‘The Long and Winding Road’, The Beatles</p>
	<p>David reviewed the journey that we had undertaken so far on the programme. I think someone did mention a Chris Rea song (The Road to Hell) but this was quickly out-voted by a more accurate reflection of the practitioner research experience from the Beatles and this was a unanimous choice.</p>

**The national OTLA landscape,
Paul Kessell-Holland, Education and Training
Foundation**

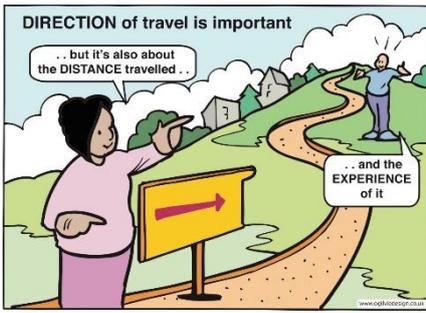
Song to encapsulate the message:
'Man in the Mirror', Michael Jackson



Paul referred to the many mirrors in the room and with humour linked this to the mirror as a support to teacher reflection and the concept of critically holding up a mirror to your practice with a focus on improvement.

**Outcomes from other OTLA programmes,
Linda Simpson, Education and Training
Foundation**

Song to encapsulate the message:
'What's Going On?', Marvin Gaye



Linda gave the delegates an overview of the research projects taking place in the other OTLA programmes in other regions but also highlighted the need for us to capture impact of our research and to consider how this could be used to influence policy makers who also need to understand what is happening on the ground – we judged that practitioners were perfectly placed to inform them!

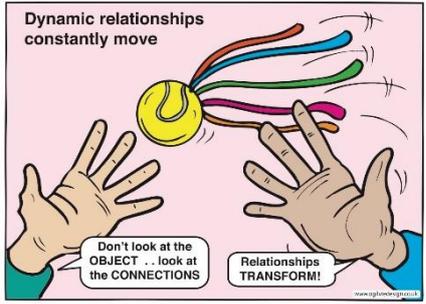
**Describing and explaining practitioner
research,
Professor Jean McNiff**

Song to encapsulate the message:
'(I've got) The Power', Snap!



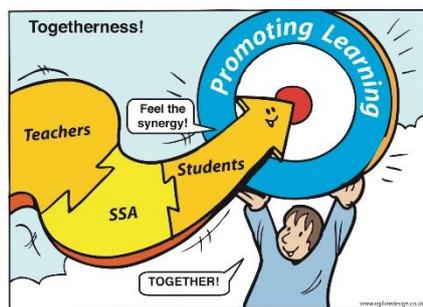
Jean gave the delegates a powerful message and the team found it very easy to suggest songs to encapsulate this. Contenders included Radiohead, Stop Whispering (..Start Shouting.) The one we opted for reflected the message that practitioners needed to speak for themselves and ensure that they were heard. Although researchers on Schön's high hard ground producing texts in the still dominant written form had been seen as the knowledge creators

and owners, we felt that this imbalance was something we were motivated to address, and publication of our practitioner learning was one of the routes to achieve this. The song selection task can be seen as a tool to give us a collective voice, to make us the creators of knowledge from this event and to speak back to the prestige presenters on the 'top table' rather than be passive consumers of their research.



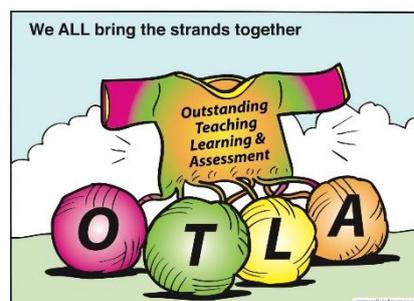
Our philosophy / professional standards,
Claire Collins, ccConsultancy

Song to encapsulate the message:
'We are Family', Sister Sledge



There was some debate about the right song to sum up the messages from Claire's presentation. One suggestion was "Why?" by Annie Lennox as this reflected the impact of the OTLA research projects and participants' ability to articulate their approach to their practice, but this was out-voted by the Sister Sledge number. This was partly because the song also captured the team's feeling that the

delegates at the event represented the breadth of the sector (as Claire highlighted, including learning support assistants, vocational tutors, maths and English tutors, managers from all settings in our sector), the standards were ours, and that everyone in the OTLA projects were also aiming to represent our own sector.



Managing the messiness,
Dr Andy Convery, ccConsultancy

Songs to encapsulate the message:
'The Scientist', Coldplay and
'Take me to Church', Hozier



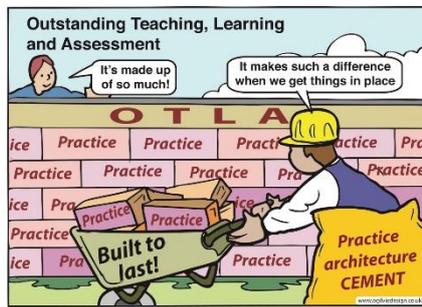
This was the only presentation where the team were split over which song to capture the presentation. Both have been inserted above as this in itself is interesting and reflects the post-modernist concept of how individuals create meaning and the text belongs to the receiver not the producer.

was easy. No one ever said it would be this hard. Oh take me back to the start".

Our discussion on Andy's presentation included the usefulness of taking this opportunity to assess where we were with our OTLA research, and it was useful to reflect on our starting points and what we had set out to achieve; where we were now and how this had developed. The Hozier track reflects Andy in the role of priest giving us absolution to take risks and to get it wrong - sometimes!



Enablers and constraints / building sustainable OTLA, Dr David Powell, University of Huddersfield	Song to encapsulate the message: 'All around the World', by Lisa Stansfield
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David referred to the wall as a metaphor of the elements in a setting which shape our practice (after Kemmis) and the song 'Another Brick in the Wall' by Pink Floyd. Partly we rejected the song for our purposes due to the uninspiring and out-dated (as we judged) presentation of teacher-student relationships, approach to education in our sector, and of the value of education in general ('we don't need no education') and contradicted the role of social justice as a clear dimension of our work which David referred to.

David also highlighted the need to map the sector and the limited research which had been conducted to date in and on our sector. For this reason, we opted for the Lisa Stansfield number, as the lyrics suggest a fruitless search to find 'my baby' and we judged there would be a similar search in the research literature to find our experience.

What can we do to help (CPD / coaching)? Claire Collins and David Prinn, ccConsultancy	Song to encapsulate the message: 'He Ain't Heavy, He's my Brother', The Hollies
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Clear message we felt was that support was on offer. Also noted other support in the region – the NE Regional Specialist Lead for maths and English based at Newcastle College, and Professional Exchange for the NE team who were attending the event.

Assessment for Learning EPGs, Ian Grayling, CETT Academy	Song to encapsulate the message: 'Black or White', Michael Jackson
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Ian presented the dominant paradigms around assessment and presented a robust challenge to these including a game of Blankety Blank – the theme tune to this 1980s show was rejected, among other reasons, on the grounds of maintaining levels of quality in the song choices!

The team opted for a second Michael Jackson track as they felt that assessment was an area where there may be many options for practice and where judgements on the right approach, the design of assessments, the autonomy of learners among other areas were context and learner dependent – so far from black and white.

Closing points

Our activity did not continue throughout the market place and this was the result of all of the team being fully engaged in interacting with other project teams, presenting and learning about all of the findings to date from the OTLA practitioner research projects. I welcome song suggestions from all delegates to represent your projects!

With thanks to the colleagues who took part in this task and to the key contributors to the song choices above, who included: Petrina Lynn and Kathryn Semple (NE Professional Exchange); Lianne Abraham, Kate Harries and Lisa Fernandes, (Newcastle College); Barbara Zealley and Jo Byrne (OTLA NE&C team).