Multidisciplinary Approach to MELT use from Grade 5 to Year 12

Exploring Applications of The RSD Pentagon in Middle and High School Classrooms

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Abstract

"When students are engaged in class, they learn more." [1]

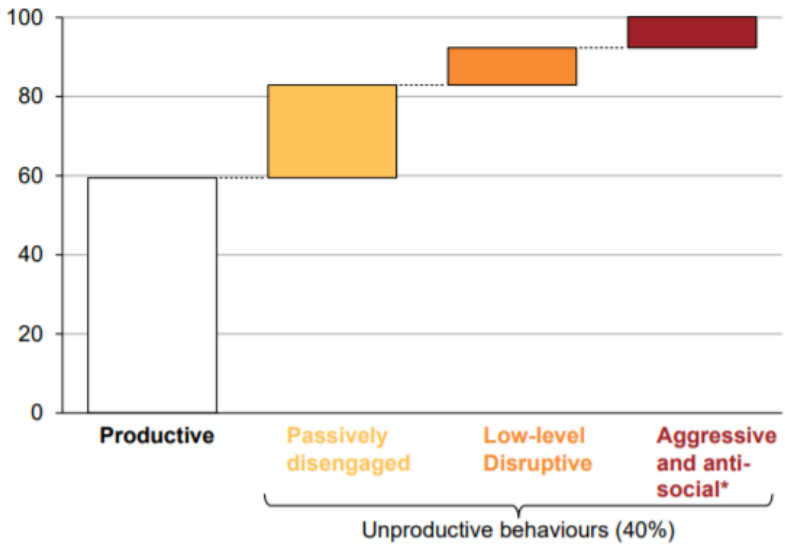
A 2009 study found that about 40 per cent of school students displayed unproductive behaviours regularly, with over half of these students ***"compliant but disengaged*** *– they were inattentive or lacked motivation."* [2] *A 2014 South Australian study similarly reported "widespread problems with a lack of engagement."* [3] *Overcoming student disengagement is complicated.* What *is taught and the* way *it is taught are crucial.* [4] *The Australian Curriculum provides the* what*, but the teachers are left to their own devices to provide the* way *in which to teach the curriculum.*

This author believes that using the facets of the RSD pentagon provides sufficient guidance to develop meaningful and engaging lessons for both the teacher and students, which, by reengaging the passively disengaged students, could translate to a 20% increase in student engagement in lessons.

A Brief Word on Statistics

The statistics used here are drawn from the Grattan Institute Report No. 2017-01, February 2017[5], which references multiple studies and papers. The position that this paper argues, that using the facets of the RSD pentagon in lesson and unit design could translate to a 20% increase in student engagement, is specifically targeting the 'passively disengaged', which, according to the Grattan Institute, make up approximately 20% of students.

Having classroom teaching experience at a prestigious college in Adelaide and now teaching in a remote Australian school, this author is convinced of both the unique and universal challenges of classroom dynamics, but is also convinced that incorporating the facets from the Models of Engaged Learning and Teaching (MELT) learning design produces engaging lessons and engaged students. Because of the unique schooling environment that these lessons occurred in, offering any conclusive statistics on pedagogical effectiveness could be misleading, or not reflective of a 'typical' classroom. For this reason, these statistics are not included in this paper.



% of students. Source: Goss, P. et al (2017) Engaging Students: Creating classrooms that improve learning

This paper is in three parts. The first section is devoted to the use of the facets of MELT within one or two lessons, a rather sequenced approach, drawing on examples from the Music classroom. The second section focuses on MELT's application in the Philosophy classroom, again over 1-2 lessons. The third section explores one possible application of the MELT facets across a whole unit of work, all with the aim of demonstrating the adaptability of the facets in creating engaging and meaningful lessons across year levels.

This author views the MELT facets rather like jigsaw puzzle pieces, with no right or wrong answer as to its construction. Each facet is interchangeable with each other, and the order of the facets is fluid, changing constantly depending on the material, situation and students. In this author's experience, using the facets in a non-traditional sequence results in deeper and richer learning for both the teacher and students.

Lesson Plan #1

Play Simon & Garfunkel's *The Sound of Silence*

Find & Generate

Listen to the song, write down your thoughts, impressions and what you hear.

Organise & Manage

What thoughts can we group together?

Play Disturbed's version of *The Sound of Silence*

Analyse & Synthesise

Which version do you like better? Why?

Communicate & Apply

Apply these thoughts to other songs. Are there other songs that evoke a similar feeling?

Evaluate & Reflect

What have we learned?

What has been the purpose of today's lesson?

Embark & Clarify

What we have talked about are the musical elements of rhythm, pitch, dynamics & expression, form & structure, texture and timbre.

Part 1: Introducing Students to the 6 Elements of Music Through Song Analysis

Find & Generate is generally most suited to be the first facet visited. **F&G** involves low cognitive ability and low creative output, which means that anyone is capable of contributing at this point.

One of the most powerful questions I have found to ask my students at this point is simply:

"Tell me about it."

In song analysis, students generally comment on instrumentation, but not on much else. **Organise & Manage** is a logical next step, as suggestions are categorised, and the students can see which categories are populated, and which need more thought. This thinking involves higher cognitive ability, which encourages the students to become more invested in the activity.

After hearing two different versions of the same song, students are asked which version they prefer, and why. The deeper the analysis, the more vocabulary and reasoning the students can use to justify their choice. A benefit of working within the MELT framework is that it provides structure to ask questions to which there is no obvious answer, or no wrong answer. The **Analyse & Synthesise** facet is most suited to facilitate this line of questioning.

At every step, students are encouraged to discuss their thoughts and observations. As such, **Communicate** is woven through the whole exercise. The **Application** facet

encourages students to think outside this activity, applying what they are discovering to other songs and experiences. This provides a sense of relatability and applies the concepts in a meaningful way.
This facet is the most tempting to omit, as it is possibly tangential to the teaching material; however, the application of the concepts to songs (or particular phenomena being explored) that the students are familiar with is the whole reason we explore these concepts in the first place! To omit this facet is to lose sight of the purpose of learning these skills.

Using this specific structure, **Evaluate & Reflect** is functioning somewhat as a precursor to **Embark & Clarify**. In the evaluation, questions such as 'What have we learned?' and 'What has been the purpose of today's lesson, and have we accomplished it?' can provide some fascinating responses. Finishing with **Embark & Clarify** directs the students to the purpose of the lesson. Finishing with **E&C** rather than beginning with it allows the lesson to take its course, following whatever direction it may, while not being limited to a particular purpose. By the end of the lesson, the students will be familiar with the concepts; **E&C** is simply providing the terminology for what they already know.

This sequence is well suited to the introduction of new concepts and diagnostic assessments, and is by no means limited to the music classroom.

Lesson Plan #2

Plato's Theory of Forms

Place a coffee cup at the front of the room

Find and Generate

(1) Write a list of things about this coffee cup. (E.g., it is blue)

(2) Did your neighbour write anything different to you?

(3) Compile a class list on the board.

(4) What are the 2 most important properties of this cup? Discuss in pairs.

(5) Individuals all to share their thoughts.

Place oversize coffee cup on table

(6) Write a list of things about this coffee cup.

Part 2: Using the Facets of MELT to Explore Plato's Theory of Forms

In Part 1, the facets were ordered **F&G**, **O&M**, **A&S**, **C&A**, **E&R** and **E&C**. In Part 2, the lesson follows a similar structure; however, **Embark & Clarify** is placed fifth, with **Evaluate & Reflect** being the sixth and final facet. Having the evaluation at the end gives room for a *teachable moment* to reinforce key themes or concepts.

This lesson outline contains much more advanced material and lines of questioning; however, it follows the same general approach to the use of MELT facets.

Once again, starting with **Find & Generate** requires low cognitive ability and low creative output. However, by question 4, students are asked to narrow their list to the two most important properties. Arguments could be made to suggest question 4 belongs in Organise & Manage, or perhaps Analyse & Synthesise. This question fits here in the flow of the lesson; however, this shows how each facet can influence other facets, and that there is not one correct order for the facets – often they jump around and are visited more than once.

The more the facets intertwine, the more effective the learning. The headings are used as a guide, but never more than that.

Organise & Manage is a great facilitator for comparing similarities and differences. The questioning could also arguably fall under **A&S**, which again demonstrates the cross-pollination of the facets, combining with the logical flow of the lesson.

The effective use of **Communicate & Apply** is a continual struggle for this author. It was defended as imperative in Part 1, but the temptation for redundancy looms again for this facet here in Part 2.

Communication is the lifeblood of MELT. Without communicating thoughts to each other through the whole exercise, there is no possibility of communal learning. As such, **Communicate** almost deserves to either be a facet on its own, or not even a facet at all, but simply assumed to happen through every facet.

"*Without opportunities to speak, problem-solve and work with others, students may quietly disengage or become restless … The more opportunities students have to respond in class, the more likely they are to learn well.*" [6]

Lesson Plan #2 cont'd.

Organise and Manage

(7) What are the similarities and differences between the coffee cups?

(8) Poll: Do we agree that both these coffee cups are 'coffee cups'?

Place regular coffee cup on table

"Imagine that this is the last coffee cup in the world"

Smash coffee cup with a hammer

Analyse and Synthesise

(9) "There are now no coffee cups left in the world. Given this scenario, what do we know about coffee cups?"

(10) "**Is our list of the properties of the coffee cup in point (1) still relevant**? Can we know what a coffee cup is, even if they don't exist?"

(11) "Can we know anything about coffee cups?" "Can we know what a coffee cup is, even if they don't exist?"

Communicate & Apply

Apply to other phenomena.

(12) What other things in life can we know about even if they aren't here physically?

E.g., Does Facebook exist? Does virtual reality exist? Can you point to *personality*?

If communal learning is taking place, where students are communicating and engaged, the answer to question 16 ("Have I taught you anything today?") should be a resounding "No!". With appropriate use of every facet, gentle guidance from the teacher and open questioning and communication from the students, a suitable solution/answer will inevitably result. Such is the strength of the MELT framework and the facets of the RSD pentagon.

Embark and Clarify

(13) What was the purpose of this lesson?

Evaluate and Reflect

(14) What is one thing that you learned today?

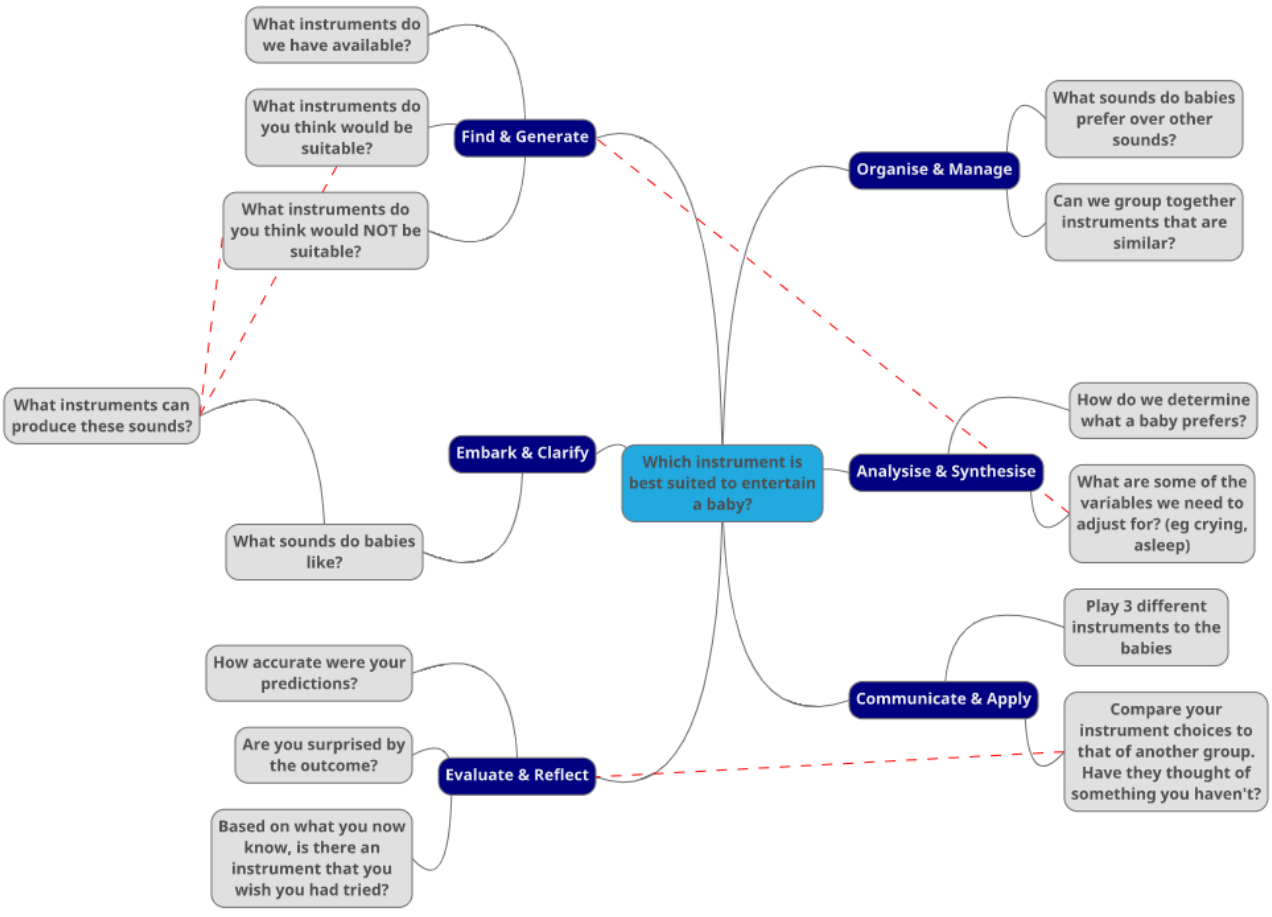
(15) How can we relate this knowledge to Plato's cave?

(16) Have I taught you anything today?

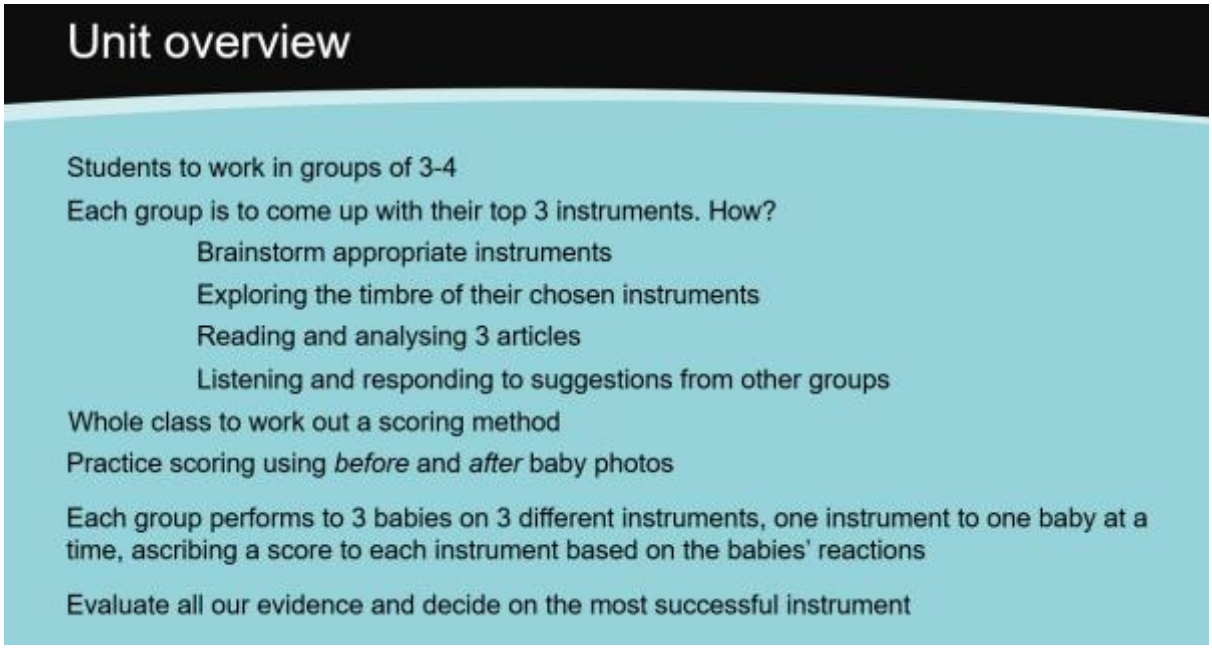
Part 3: Unit Design Using the RSD Facets

Having experienced success following the previous sequences, the next step was to move from single lessons to whole units designed around the facets. In collaboration with colleagues, the question posed to students in grades 5/6 was 'Which musical instrument is best suited to entertain a baby?'

To plan the unit, a mind map was created. With the question in the middle, surrounded by each facet, the aim was to find two to three research questions related to each facet.



Once the mind map was completed, questions were organised in a logical progression, and a unit overview was created. Aside from the usual tweaking, creating the mind map and the unit overview was accomplished in less than one hour. Deciding on the initial research question was hard; designing and implementing the lessons was easy, again because of the adaptability of the RSD facets.



Following a prescribed order of facets, as in parts 1 and 2, can be effective in structuring short lessons to be as engaging as possible. One must not fall into the temptation to simply follow the same order of facets every time, but continually shuffle them around to find alternative lines of questioning to explore subject material.

Part 3 employs a 'use then forget' approach to the RSD facets in unit design. Use the facets to inspire lines of questioning and possible unit structure, then forget about using them explicitly, and follow where the questions and answers lead.

Designing engaging lessons and units should be the goal of every teacher. The RSD facets are at the nucleus of effective and engaging units, with constant communication being the thread weaving them all together. Using the RSD facets to design lessons and units will go a long way to reengaging the *passively disengaged* students, resulting in more effective, more enjoyable and more productive lessons for all.

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