Oral report: Personal Project: Example 2

The goal of my personal project is to create an original melody displaying the transformation of pop music through American history. The medley will be composed of the number one American pop songs from 1955 to 2012, and I will perform and publish it on Youtube. I will also include an mp3 version of my medley and a copy of its chords and lyrics for viewers to download. As a young adult, I feel like many of my peers love music but do not explore more than what is current. I am guilty of this as well, thus for my personal project I wanted to explore music's past and discover what our current music evolved from. I aimed to expose music from past generations to the current generation and bring back reminiscent memories to those whose generation has passed.

Rationale
My personal project goal initially stemmed from my passion for music. I started playing the piano at a very young age and recently gained the confidence to sing in front of an audience. I truly enjoy every aspect of music. I chose to focus on pop music because, as well as enjoying it, society has the most influence upon it. Pop music is defined as music created deliberately with the aim of appealing to a wide audience, namely teenagers, thus creating commercial success. I personally feel that pop music is very successful with my generation because it presents ideas that are relatable to its audience. As a teenager, I think that a relatable message in a pop song is very important to its success no matter what the generation is, and I was curious to see how music changed as generations passed. My knowledge on the history of music is also minimal, so I thought this project would be a great opportunity to become more educated on artists of different decades and become more aware of the predecessors to today's music. I also love sharing new music discoveries with others, and I would be able to share music with a diverse audience by creating my medley.

Global Context
I have chosen to focus on the global context of an inquiry into personal and cultural expression. My project specifically deals with the ways in which we discover and express feelings, culture, and values and the ways in which we reflect on, extend and enjoy our creativity. Music is about emotion and reflects culture and values at the time it is created. My project will express a wide variety of values in Western culture because it covers a wide time span. Especially with my focus on pop music, my medley will provide an insight into what has been popular in society and how this has changed throughout generations. As I create my medley I will be extending my creativity and incorporate the creativity of past music artists. At the end of my personal project I will be reflecting on my creativity and throughout the entire project I will be enjoying my creativity, especially after I have created my project.

Selection of Sources and Application of Information
I had five basic stages during my personal project: looking for inspiration, collecting number one songs, creating the medley, performing the medley and editing the video. I used a different source to help me complete each stage.

Looking for Inspiration
I watched a lot of Youtube videos for inspiration. I have yet to find a video which is the same as my project, however there are many videos where people have created medleys and then performed them in one take. My
actual inspiration for this project was a video featuring a guitarist from the Chicago Music Exchange performing 100 Rock n’ Roll guitar riffs in one take. I was in awe of how he fit so much history into the space of 12 minutes, and I thought it would be interesting to attempt a similar project involving history. After this I watched Youtube star F.G.’s “32 songs in 8 minutes” and many other inspiring videos. I also gave out a short survey to my classmates asking which musical artists they believed were influential. This gave me a better idea of my generation’s view of pop music. These all served as inspirations for me to strive to create a unique medley.

**Collecting Number One Songs**

I used a book to collect the total weeks the songs each spent at number one. I also used the official Billboard site and a site made by B.B., a man interested in pop society, to collect my number one songs. I crosschecked my information between these two sites.

Originally I was only going to use the book; however I realized that the song which spent the most weeks as number one was not necessarily the number one of the year. This is because Billboard uses specific criteria when naming the number one hit each year, such as performance on other charts for example: adult contemporary, radio play and etc. In fact, there were three songs that never made it to the number one spot on the weekly Hot 100 chart but were considered the top songs of the year. I compiled all of the number one songs into a table with the artist name and number of weeks spent at number one. I then used this chart to select songs for my medley.

**Creating My Medley**

I used lyrics websites, guitar tablature websites and each hit song to compose my medley. The tab websites provided me with chords for almost every song in my medley. The main tabs source I used was tabsultimate-guitar.com. Because all the chords on the sites are provided by people who want to contribute, they are inaccurate.

I thus had to come up with a few chord progressions on my own or try to find small sections of songs offered in online sheet music previews. In general, I found that Youtube tutorials were the most reliable source, but unfortunately they were also the most time-consuming to learn from. My medley consisted of two drafts, the second an edit so my medley would be shorter.

**Performing my Medley**

I filmed this medley using an HD camcorder and scrolling video made on Final Cut Pro. This scrolling movie included the lyrics and chords of my medley. This was how I followed, displaying my medley score without manually scrolling through a document. I also used an audio recorder which I then laid over my video.

**Video Editing**

I used Final Cut Pro to edit my footage and uploaded it via Youtube.com to share my creation. I used the Final Cut Pro website to help me change the export settings of my video so that I could upload it to Youtube more efficiently.

I also created a survey distributed with my video, asking about its impact on the audience’s knowledge about pop music.

**Developing criteria**

When I was creating my criteria at the beginning of the school year, I pictured them as a simple list of what I would need to accomplish in order for my project to be successful. I put myself in the shoes of my future Youtube audience and imagined what the casual viewer, the musician viewer, the curious viewer and the scrutinizer would all think. I wanted my end product to satisfy all these people, but most importantly myself. My final criteria became
the blueprint of my product and with them I could evaluate if I reached my original goal, and if not, how I had either failed to reach my goal or how my goal changed.

The Process
My criteria were only finalized after I knew exactly what I wanted to create. My first, second and third drafts of my personal project proposal, which included my tentative criteria, were quite vague. My first draft was a project idea to upload covers of songs onto Youtube, whereas my second draft was my pop medley idea. Once I began researching last December, I was able to specify the number of songs, the years to be spanned and other important details of my medley. After returning to school, I finalized my project proposal and wrote my final criteria.

An Appropriate Challenge
I feel that a set of criteria cannot be “rigorous” or challenging if the original project idea is not. The reason why my criteria are challenging is because they grew naturally from my project idea. Before I chose my final project idea, I asked myself three important questions:

Am I passionate about the idea?
Have I done it before?
Does it test my creativity?

For my personal project, I needed enough drive and motivation to help me reach a goal that was challenging not only because the journey was difficult, but also because it was new to me. I wanted to endeavor on a journey where I would learn more about myself and be able to make a product I was proud of.

My medley idea answered all of these questions very well. Because it was music-based, I knew I would take the time to work on it. Although I have performed playing the piano and singing, I had never attempted to create and perform a piece of this magnitude. Although the medley required extracting pieces of music, I still felt like I was composing an original piece. The idea also tested my creativity to make the medley appealing and be able to connect so many different songs into a fluid composition. All of these new challenges made my criteria very rigorous, and before I committed to them I assessed once more if they gave me an appropriate challenge. I had taken a personal passion and combined it with an idea I nor anyone I am aware of has attempted.

Achieving the Goal
In order to evaluate my product, I compared it to my criteria I created at the beginning of the project.

1. Create an original medley of hit pop songs throughout American history.
I met this criterion because I researched the hit pop songs throughout American history and included them all in my medley. These hits weren’t necessarily only successful in America, but I retrieved them from an American source. This was the most time-consuming criterion to meet and also the foundation of my entire project. The research and creation each took around two months and I think overall, the medley expresses the transformation of pop music effectively. However, I do think I should have included more riffs of some pop songs. Riffs are often what makes a song a hit, however I usually sacrificed the riff for lyrics because it would have been a misrepresentation to not include the lyrics in a song. My priority was to give an accurate portrayal of American pop music, and under the stress of finishing my medley to move on to the performance, I made this decision.
2. The hit songs will be from the Billboard Hot 100 year-end charts from 1955 to 2012.
All of the hit songs in my medley are from the Billboard’s yearly Hot 100 charts. My medley starts with the hit song from 1955 and ends with the hit song of 2012. By including the number one hit from each year, I have evenly and accurately represented pop music’s history.

3. Create a video of me performing this medley on the piano and vocals.

4. Post the video on Youtube.
This was the most rigorous of all my criteria because it stated that I must film the performance in one take. I ended up filming several full takes although none turned out perfect. Part of the challenge of this criterion was that I had to be able to move on from a mistake with confidence as I performed. As long as I had this mindset, the audience would not be as aware of my mistake. It would have been foolish to stop every time I made one small mistake because I would have never ended up with a final product. My performance is evident in the video I posted on Youtube, which was my fourth criterion.

5. Provide my "score" of lyrics and chords used with the Youtube video.
My fifth criterion was to include a “score” of my medley which included all the lyrics and chords I used. I uploaded this score onto a pdf hosting site and provided a link in the down bar of my video. This way, people could try out my medley themselves.

6. Record an mp3 version of my song and offer it as a free download.
I recorded an mp3 version of the song with an audio recorder which I offered as a free download. I used a site called ZShare which let me upload a song and then share it to anyone who would like it. The audio recorder quality was also better than my video quality so matched my audio recording with my video and then deleted the original video audio.

7. Video should be edited well and good quality.
a. Display the song name and artist when each is performed in the video.
Although editing was not the focus of my project, I still felt that it was important to create criteria stating that I needed to put some effort into polishing the video before posting it on Youtube. As I performed the songs, the song name and artist were displayed. I used a camcorder that had HD quality and filmed at an angle where most of the piano and I could be seen.

Impact of my Product
In relation to my goal, I think that my product effectively shared different generations of music to different generations of people. This is evident from the survey results I received from my video viewers. Out of 70 responses, 89% of the responders said they felt more aware of pop music history after watching my video. Many people said that they learned about new artists from watching my video and others said it was a “trip down memory lane”. This feedback makes me genuinely happy that my product brought joyful memories to some viewers and introduced new artists. Since my product is on Youtube, I can continue to share pop music with my community even when this project is over. In particular, my product impacted me and as a result I have a much stronger sense of pop music in the past.
My global context issue for this project is an inquiry into personal and cultural expression. I explored how people demonstrated creativity through finding the hit pop songs from 1955-2012 and what feelings, culture and values they expressed as well. It gives my audience a direct comparison of these songs, making the change of music more evident. As a Youtube video, it also provides an alternative way for people to learn and listen to a wide variety of pop music because viewers can actually hear the progression of pop over the decades. Even if someone is not purposely watching my video to become more aware about pop music, they will still come out of watching it with more knowledge than they had before.

Reflection on Learning

During the course of this project, my knowledge of pop music grew significantly. In my song, I was able to see how changes in society and pop music reflected on one another. Pop music is created mainly for teenagers, thus its messages need to be relatable to that age group. As time progressed, the topics of romance and love have become more prominent in music, and technology has replaced the acoustic feel of songs. A commonality between all the songs was including a catchy riff. There were riffs from 40 years ago that I found quite appealing, showing that pop riffs are timeless and can engage any teenage generation. Successful pop songs relate to common themes for teenagers, and thus represent the essence of teenage culture at the time.

The songs I have chosen all convey emotions and values of society at that time. ‘Personal and cultural expression’ is the global context I have chosen for my project, and now that I have gained more knowledge and observations on pop music I have a deeper understanding of the context. Exercising my creativity, while developing my medley, further contributed to this. This global context helped me focus my observations about the songs and go beyond just presenting music as a form of expression, but also showing how it has evolved.

Throughout this project I have grown immensely as a learner. This is particularly evident in my process journal and the challenges I’ve faced. Over the course of these nine months I have improved at sticking to schedules and managing my time efficiently. I have become more disciplined, ignoring distractions and getting my work done. Explicitly writing out schedules for short time periods helps me to stay on task because they are expectations that are achievable at that point in the project. During the final week of the project, I made a day-by-day list of what I needed to accomplish. It helped me prioritize different tasks to be done at different times, and whenever I felt lost, the list helped me focus and use my time wisely.

The most significant lesson I learned during this project is to be prepared for any situation. Six days before my personal project was due, my computer crashed and I did not know if I would be able to get my work back. The crash resulted in a setback to my entire schedule and added significant stress. I learned that I must back-up all important work so that if I have a technological problem I can still work on my project. This applies particularly to long-term assignments where it is almost impossible to make up all the work that could possibly be lost.

During the last week of the project I also had the dilemma of collecting feedback from my survey within a very short time before the deadline. I have learned that when collecting opinions of others to use as data, I need to do so at least two to three weeks before the actual due date. This way I will have enough time to collect a sufficient amount of feedback that will make the conclusions I draw valid. For this project I was granted an extension to collect my survey results, however in the future I need to be prepared to have sufficient results before the deadline.

While completing my personal project, I also learned the importance of investigating all aspects of a project in
order to be completely prepared for difficult situations. I had many setbacks because I did not test out all of my equipment. I underestimated the technological difficulties I would face, and I did not test out volume levels when filming. I was too focused on my actual performance that I forgot about all the technical issues that could make the filming of the performance impossible anyway. If I were to do this project again, during my planning stage I would have created a list of all the equipment I would need and then describe the set up I imagined. Next to each piece of equipment I would write everything that would need to be tested to ensure smooth production. However, I did not realize during this project that I have the ability to persevere in challenging situations. I am coming out of this project with more drive and confidence that I will find a solution to any problem I face since I will have a better awareness of what proper preparation is.

This personal project has provided me the opportunity to engage in the Youtube music community. Musicians on Youtube have been a huge part of my life and I have always aspired to be one, however I could never motivate myself to actually post any of my musical performance. In this project, I had both motivation driven by passion and motivation driven by academics. This resulted in taking action on my Youtube goal. I am motivated to continue what I have started and possibly share videos of other musical performances I may do in the future. Overall, I think my personal project was successful because I overcame many challenges and truly developed as a student and individual.