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Creativity in music education: Inspiring creative mediation in pedagogic practice

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ABSTRACT *This paper explores the policy trajectories of 'creativity' (less easily measurable and frequently working outside the mainstream curriculum) and 'performativity' (easily measurable and working inside the mainstream curriculum) in relation to the overall provision of music education across the UK. The paper begins with an introduction to the broad discursive contexts within which educational policy and practice has developed in the UK. This is followed by a description of the ways in which music teachers can appropriate reforms and adapt them in practice through creative mediation¹.*

KEY WORDS: creativity, performativity, pedagogic practice

Introduction

Teachers are an integral part of change in 'an emerging knowledge-based economy wherein creativity is at a premium' (Hartley, 2003, p. 81). The ways in which teachers balance the conflicting requirements of performativity (associated with improving standards) and creativity (associated with the empowerment of teachers and learners as creative thinkers), remain an imperative and a dilemma. Teachers presently face uncertainty and ambiguity in negotiating the gap between the rhetoric of policy and the realities of practice.

Political imperatives for a 'new balance in education' (NACCCE, 1999), together with new national priorities, as well as the organization of the school curriculum and relationships between schools and other agencies, have led to attempts to mobilize art teachers and pupils in 'exciting activities which are structured differently from their mainstream lessons, [where] pupils will gain a different perspective on subjects, and their knowledge and understanding will increase' (Creative Partnerships website, 2004a). However, these activities, although enjoyable and motivating to both pupils and teachers, remain outside of the formal curriculum. They are only seen as *supporting* formal learning in ways which stimulate pupils' imagination, promote creativity and

¹ Creative mediation is a term coined by Marilyn Osborn (1996) who identified factors influencing teachers ability to 'creatively mediate' external reforms which increase the involvement and commitment of teachers in their work and which consequently enhance their level of professional confidence (p. 80).

innovation in teaching, and raise standards across the curriculum (Creative Partnerships website, 2004b).

If, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the aim is to 'give school children aged 5-18 and their teachers the opportunity to explore their creativity by working on sustained projects with creative professionals [i.e. visiting artists]' (Creative Partnerships website, 2004b), then we need research which focuses on pedagogy for creativity in the arts. We have seen an extraordinary expansion of opportunities for visiting contemporary artists in educational settings. Recent developments in education have begun to reconceptualize artists' work in schools in relation to community regeneration and social inclusion (Pringle, 2008). We now have numerous accounts of the pedagogy of artists when engaged in the arts (for example, Burnard and Swann, 2010; Galton, 2008; Pringle, 2008) along with studies which focus on the pedagogy for creativity of teachers (Craft, *et al*, 2007; Burnard and White, 2008). In contrast, what pupils deem to be significant about the experience of music learning with artists is less understood. What and how do the participating pupils learn? Does working with professional musicians lead to pedagogic change for music teachers? How do music teachers perceive these changes and assess the losses and gains in the teaching of music?

The following sections provide an introduction to the broad discursive contexts within which educational policy and practice has developed in the UK. This leads to a description of how music teachers can appropriate reforms and prevent music from becoming marginal to the mainstream curriculum through creative mediation.

The creativity discourse

Economic and political imperatives have led to appeals for creativity and to its politicization. The global educational challenge is to enable people successfully and effectively to adapt new knowledge and cope with new situations (UNESCO, 1992; Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996). Many countries have initiated educational reforms that emphasize the 'role of knowledge, technology and learning in economic performance' in a global knowledge economy (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, 1999, p. 1).

In the UK, the Robinson Report, *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education* (National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education, NACCCE, 1999) enunciated the following key recommendations: (a) The importance of creative and cultural education should be explicitly recognized and provided for, both in schools' policies and curricula and in Government policy; (b) Teachers and other professionals should be trained to use methods and materials that facilitate the development of young people's creative abilities and cultural understanding; and (c) There should be partnerships between schools and outside agencies to provide the kinds of creative and cultural education that young people need and deserve.

In a number of debates about efforts to improve schools (Roberts, 2006), creativity is seen as having the potential to raise standards and contribute to the core goals of excellence and enjoyment (Burnard, Craft, Cremin, & Chappell, 2006; Craft, 2005, 2002, 2000). Yet creativity is more often located outside mainstream school structures in

'creative' projects where artists are contracted (bought-in) to schools to enable teachers to support, implement and enhance the development of creativity. On the one hand, teachers are caught in the bind of wanting to pass more control to students and provide more space and time to enable risk-taking and pupil agency, while simultaneously adhering to the performance agenda and its standards of measured achievement. On the other hand, the creativity agenda has promoted new support for the arts.

The commitment to educational partnerships between artists and schools involves policy initiatives embedded within a context of ongoing educational reform. Since the publication of the report of the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE, 1999), there has been a steady flow of government policies and advisory documents which refer to the importance of developing the creativity of children and young people in England. With this has come a burgeoning interest in the work of artists in schools. The 2002 policy initiative *Creative Partnerships*² (2005a, 2005b) - set up under the auspices of the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS, 2004) and the Arts Council, with funding of £150 million - has brought artists and creative practitioners into schools to enhance young people's learning through arts and cultural experiences. With over 330,000 young people and over 4,500 creative practitioners³ working in 36 areas of the country, learning with artists and contemporary arts practice is increasingly becoming part of the development of young people.

More recently, a new national agency, Creativity, Culture & Education (CCE, 2009), has been created to fund and manage cultural and creative programmes for young people. This entails the investment of a further £100 million between 2009 and 2011. One of the key policy messages has been to establish 'a new balance in education' through 'relationships between schools and other agencies' (NACCCE, 1999, p. 10). In the light of these policy initiatives (as well as CCE, 2009; NCSL, 2002; OfSTED, 2003; QCA, 2005 and *Creative Partnerships*, 2007; Hall and Thomson, 2007) close partnerships are being forged between schools, creative professionals and cultural organizations.

In the light of these commitments key questions are: How do pupils experience learning with artists? What do their experiences tell us about pedagogic practices which enhance learning?

Whilst the desirability of creativity and its application has gained increasing prominence in educational policy, calls for higher standards and increased accountability has required music teachers to think deeply about how we understand, articulate and hope to answer questions such as: What do pedagogies which enable creativity look like? When is a pedagogy innovative?

² 'Creative Partnerships' initiative is the government's flagship creative learning programme designed to develop the skills of young people across England which, from 1 April 2009, will be delivered by a new national agency called Creativity, Culture and Education (CCE).

³ 'Creative practitioners' is a term used interchangeably with 'creative professionals' and refers to artists, architects, scientists, and multimedia developers (Sefton-Green, 2008). The former terms recognise that the word 'artist' is often associated with arts specialists, whereas in the various Creative Partnership projects there are environmentalists, horticulturalists, media specialists and other partners who are not usually regarded as 'artistic' among the population at large.

The performativity discourse

There is a sharp divergence between the trajectories of the educational policies and agendas that apply to 'creativity' and those that apply to 'performativity'. Underpinning the standards of accountability and school improvement is the achievement of performance-based objectives. The development of an *audit and surveillance culture* has led school leaders to make greater demands on teachers. Performance targets, delivering better results, raising standards, benchmarks and accountability are all part of the performativity discourse. The struggle to manage change, meet targets, and develop creative teaching strategies in what has been described as an 'Ofsted-endorsed traditional pedagogy' is the cause of great tension and job stress amongst teachers (Hartley, 2003; Craft, Twining & Chappell, 2007; Twining, Broadie, Cook, Ford, Morris, Twiner, *et al.* 2006).

In the UK, the dominant model of schooling is a 'high performance' one – for the most part, students are valued in terms of the extent that their own attainments contribute to the school's organizational performance. The pressure under which both pupils and teachers seek to improve performance and raise standards are immense and can undermine the purpose, aspirations and justification of the school (Fielding, 2007).

As Andy Hargreaves (2001) has noted, the educational outcomes and standards movement, as it applies to teacher effectiveness, appears to be overreaching itself, leading to teacher shortages together with a loss of creativity and inspiration in the classroom. Descriptors like 'good', 'best' or 'effective'⁴ pedagogy, particularly in the light of national and international league tables of *educational performance*, highlight how work environments and job stress operate within the *audit and surveillance cultures* in the educational context of the UK (Goddard, *et al.*, 2006).

The term *performativity* may be related to a performance (Moore, 2004, p. 104) where, for example, a play or piece of music is publicly shown and shared. Literature on solo musical performances and musical identity (Davidson, 2002) introduces the *performance* 'mask' theory, where a projected self is presented to the world. This 'mask' emerges from beliefs and backgrounds, but is also influenced by external factors which trigger behaviours and responses deemed appropriate to individuals.

On the one hand, then, there is conflict between the self-defined 'public' image (for example, good teachers might engage, entertain or show off in a number of different ways as part of the performance of teaching) and the more private and 'vulnerable' aspects of an individual (for example, a teacher might experience disillusionment, disempowerment, self-doubt and extreme professional pressure). On the other hand, a *performance-oriented* teacher has the opportunity to choose the level of risk and difficulty in teaching particular lessons and may sometimes decide to work in

⁴ Alexander (1984) provides arguments for how each of these bears on the teacher's planning and action and defines good classroom practice as not merely a technical matter; it requires the reconciliation of empirical, pragmatic, political, conceptual and ethical imperatives, and in any given context this resolution may not be straightforward.

performance mode in order to develop a sense of themselves as being 'performers' (Woods, 1990, 1995; Woods & Jeffrey, 1996; Jeffrey & Woods, 2003; White, 2006).

Francois Lyotard (1984), the French philosopher, uses '*performativity*' to represent political and bureaucratic mechanisms of control. Performativity can refer to the drive to achieve goals in increasingly efficient ways, which helps to understand performativity within both the arts and education.

In contrast, performativity epitomizes what Judyth Sachs (2005) calls an 'audit society' where 'surveillance and inspection go hand in hand. Regulation, enforcement and sanctions are required to ensure its compliance. Of its professionals it requires self-ordering, based not on individual or moral judgement, but rather upon meeting externally applied edicts and commands' (p. 2).

The emerging thesis is that music needs to be repositioned inside the mainstream of schooling. A new professionalism is needed (Sachs, 2005; Schome, 2007). The music teaching profession is staring tragedy in the face: many music teachers are retiring early because of stress, burnout or disillusionment with the impact of years of mandated reform and marginalisation of their lives and work. Added to the climate of naming and shaming - particularly in the UK (Furlong, et al., 2000) - music teaching is perceived as unattractive to newcomers and this gives rise to a teacher recruitment problem. As a result more and more schools rely, increasingly, on the casual labour of visiting artists or professional musicians in partnership with music teachers.

Having explored some of the elements of policy discourses in the UK, I now turn to the way in which music teachers can balance these issues. It reaches into the core of who the teacher is and what the teacher values (Lingard, et al., 2003). It includes the teacher's thinking about how to perform the work of teaching and handle constraints. It also encompasses the way in which teachers - and schools - embrace a school's musical culture (that is, if a school is regarded as a 'learning organization', ever ready for continued changes, self-renewal and self-improvement.)

Appropriating new pedagogical spaces for creativity in music education

The term *performativity* may be related to a performance (Moore, 2004, p. 104) where, for example, a play or piece of music is publicly shown and shared. Literature on solo musical performances and musical identity (Davidson, 2002) introduces the *performance* 'mask' theory, where a projected self is presented to the world. This 'mask' emerges from beliefs and backgrounds but is also influenced by external factors which trigger behaviours and responses deemed appropriate to individuals.

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Having explored some of the elements of policy discourses in the UK, I now turn to an empirical study which highlights the conflicting agendas of creativity and performativity, as experienced in a school where partnerships with visiting artists enabled risk-taking and pupil agency, as well as support for teachers in raising standards. However, as the project was located outside the mainstream curriculum, despite improving achievement and promoting creativity, it contributed to the further marginalisation of the arts - particularly music, - with the mainstream curriculum and teachers left largely unaffected by the initial set of funded arts activities.

Appropriating a new professionalism through creative mediation

At centre stage is creativity and performativity. Both concepts are linked with the performance of pedagogy and what it means to be a 'good' or 'good enough' teacher (as described by Swanwick, 2008). Teachers' creative participation (in the context of contemporary music practices) and collaboration (in the context of working with community musicians and practising artists), draws upon an alternative model of music teachers' work - one which presents them not only with the opportunity to become creative mediators, but also, in some instances, allows them to transform themselves into policy-makers in the classroom. In this view, music teachers have the ability to mediate educational policy in the light of their own beliefs about teaching and the constraints that operate on them in the classroom. The creative mediation of pedagogic practice

can result in the construction of socially engaged collaborative learning practices (Pringle, 2008; Galton, 2008; Burnard & Swann, 2010).

We know that pedagogies which enable creativity include allowing children **choice** and **ownership** of their learning, **time** for reflection, creating a stimulating environment; an **enabling context** within which **posing questions** and **play, innovation and risk-taking, being imaginative, self-determined** and **intentional**. The pedagogies which foreground **flexibility of space and time** and engage the **imagination** are more often those in which the teachers position themselves off-centre stage, where teachers find themselves **standing back** and promoting learning through the children's self chosen activities and interests. Whilst not afraid to use direct instruction and teacher-led work where necessary, music teachers who seek to balance teacher and child-led initiatives, explicitly fostering a sense of possibility and agency in their young learners, more often create the time and space for children to explore their environment and the materials provided, encouraging both actual and mental play. The features of this distinct pedagogic practice appear to promote and foster the children's full engagement in problem solving - problem finding activities and thus support their development as young creative thinkers (see Figure 1).

Underpinning the pedagogic practices of standing back, profiling learner agency and creating time and space are the teachers' conceptions of children as young musical thinkers and creators and of learning as a process of discovery. These pedagogues often lead by following, creating flexible maps en route with the class, and enabling the children to experience a high degree of ownership of their musical learning. Creative pedagogies involve being co-participative and combine in action as the music teachers encourage the children to direct more of their learning journeys.

The literature tells a story, by no means consistent, of what we know about how teachers conceptualize musical creativity at classroom level, what teachers do in their classrooms, the nature of tasks given, and the longstanding problem of making judgments about creativity in music. The story assumes a common understanding of how, and by whom, the construct 'creativity' is defined, interpreted and made real, in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment practices in music.

Inspirational spaces are not simply rooms for teaching and performance of the arts. The whole curriculum can be approached through creativity. Bringing together more than one curriculum area into a single space can promote creativity in musical teaching and learning. Spaces that suggest creativity should signal a respectful and trusting relationship between learner and teacher in the physical setting because the required acceptance of risk, trial and error.

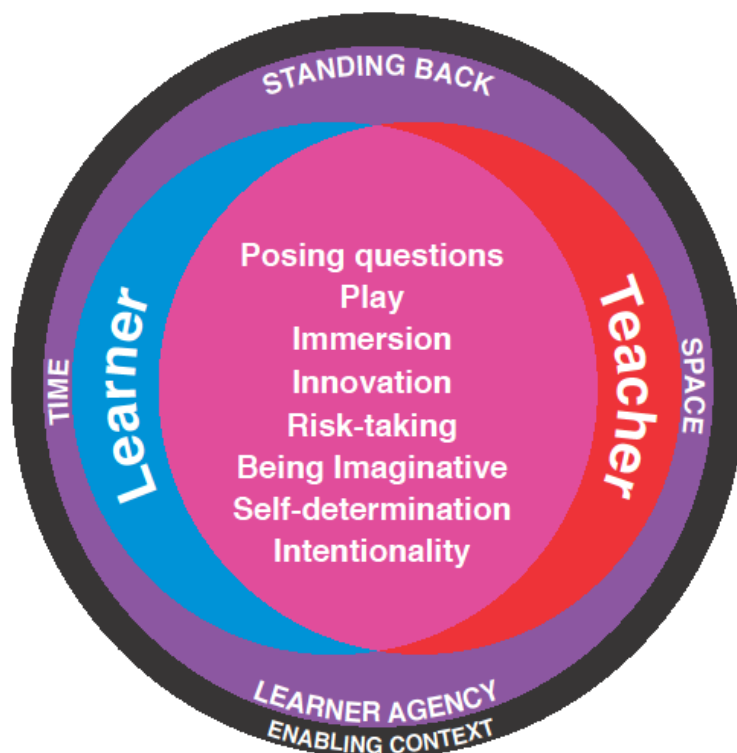


Figure 1: Characterising pedagogical spaces for creative mediation

It is important that music teachers respect the knowledge and inventiveness that young people bring with them to school that can become a resource for others, including teachers themselves.

Creative spaces are more likely to found on the edges of rooms than in the middle because these are the sites where we might find nooks and crannies, meeting corners and softer, less exposed areas for dreaming and thinking. The same might be said of the outdoor school environment, where it is often around the edges of buildings that students gather to socialise and where imagination and meaning-making flourishes in relation to the natural and built environment. The degree of time and space enabled by the timetable for talking about pedagogic practice is crucial for pedagogic innovation to flourish. Building in adequate amounts of time for reflection on practice and for supporting peer mentoring collaborations and collegiality, is essential if teachers are to search and re-search practice and submit each other to questioning their pedagogic practices.

Start simply, build progressively:

- Find easy ways in to creative musical learning. Start with the classroom environment. Set it up as an enabling context for releasing children's imagination as they engage with music.

- Be a creative advocate for music. Create a presentation or materials that you can use both within your school to convince colleagues and out of school. This will help to build a whole-school ethos around creativity in music.
- Focus on one area at a time, for example, in developing more creative learning in music, and use this to raise awareness and encourage staff to think about applications in other spaces in the school.
- Organize a 'Musical Enquiring Minds-type' project where pupils have an opportunity to negotiate the aim of the project and are instrumental in designing how it is carried out (see www.enquiringminds.org.uk)
- Set up a 'music inventors' or 'music creators' club after school
- Transform one small area in the school as a space designed for creativity in music and imagination. Make sure that the pupils have some ownership of the project.

If music educators are to successfully develop pupils' creativity in music, further attention will need to be paid to what it might mean to develop creativity in a way which progresses, for all students. The study described above sought to explore the potential for mapping progression in musical composition; it has brought to light some little considered, but very serious, problems that may be encountered when bringing empirical research methods to the study of progression in musical creativity. We need to place more reliance on empirical research to fully comprehend how children's understanding changes over time, and focus on developing theoretical explanations.

Creative mediation could act as both catalyst and response in creating a practical agenda for pedagogic change and improvements in music education. By becoming creative mediators, music teachers can take ownership and control of the innovations required to develop new forms of practice in pedagogy and assessment while, at the same time, building on what they feel to be good about their existing practice. Pedagogy could then become a means by which the teacher is able to sustain the self and retain professionalism. It would involve connection with other teachers and allow time to discuss professional issues.

Creative mediation can enable teachers to take control and make choices about how to implement change. While understanding the role of creative mediation as a catalyst for change may be rooted in all kinds of practice and research, the most important is practitioner (or teacher) and pupil research, since this is the process whereby teachers (along with their pupils) look critically, not only at their own practice (and learning), but at broader educational questions (Fischman *et al.* 2006; Burton & Bartlett, 2005). This should involve both teachers and pupils in the development of new strategies and ways of thinking in response to new experiences - of musical networks, of new forms of musical participation and of collaborative mediation.

Music needs to be repositioned at the heart of the school curriculum. We need to encourage new music pedagogies which step outside the boundaries of traditional assumptions, allowing teachers to balance creative mediation and accountability against the requirements to teach in different ways. We need a transforming

professionalism where music teachers become convinced of their own 'can-do-ness' (Hartley, 1997, p. 119) and their ability to adopt a creative response to reforms. In that realization, they can re-balance the rhetoric of performativity with creativity through their own innovations in classroom practice.

The serious challenge is not what music teachers won't do. Rather it is in using the creative and collaborative professionalism of the music teacher to implement and take control of educational changes and to respond to them in a positive way.

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